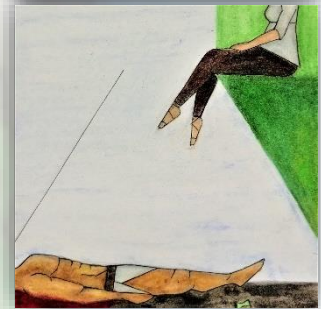


THE DAUGHTERS OF PALLAS ATHENA

A Study on the Framing of Dutch and Belgian Female Jihadist Militants in
Dutch and Belgian Newspapers from 2013 to 2019

Medusa, Medea, and Penthesilea



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The illustrations on the cover page of this thesis are part of the series I made for Practicum Artium Drawing. The four illustrations above represent Pallas Athena (as UL's logo of Minerva), Medusa, Medea and Penthesilea. The series links to this thesis and shares its name: 'The Daughters of Pallas Athena.' This title refers to Pallas Athena the goddess of peace and war, wisdom, and the arts. The perfect figurehead for what my work, thesis and militant women stand for. Medusa, Medea and Penthesilea have their own stories of peace and war which will be addressed in this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

After the Cold War, scholars in International Relations turned their attention from inter-state to intra-state conflicts and terrorism (Sylvester & Parashar in Jackson et.al., 2009). Terrorism continues to be a topical issue in society, politics and in the media. With the attacks on 9/11, the academic interest in terrorism increased exponentially, especially in jihadi terrorism¹. The increased attention on post-9/11 terrorism left the impression that the average terrorist is a male Islamic fundamentalist (De Graaf, 2012). However, female militants gained more attention too.

The interest in women in terrorism increased, as if it were a recent phenomenon and “exclusive to the 21st century” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 58). Yet women in terrorism are not a new phenomenon. Historically, up to thirty percent of international terrorists were female (Nacos, 2005). However, women’s active involvement in terrorist organizations “has grown substantially and become a matter of public attention and record across the globe” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 2). Besides the changes in the level of women’s participation in terrorism, it increased “regionally, logistically and ideologically” (Jacques & Taylor, 2009, p.499; Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal in Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p.2). Left-wing terrorist organizations have typically had higher percentages of female members than jihadist groups. However, female terrorists have been a salient part of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria² (ISIS), including many women from the West³.

This thesis will analyze the representation of Dutch and Belgian female militants linked to ISIS in six Dutch and Belgian newspapers. The period of investigation runs from the first article on female militants in 2013 until the end of 2019. I will draw a comparison between the Netherlands and Belgium and the newspapers based on archetypical frames of female militants.

During the Arab Spring in March 2011, a protest against the al-Assad regime ignited a bloody Civil war in Syria. The Syrian war is between the Ba’athist Syrian Arab Republic led by the al-Assad regime, supported by Russia and Iran, and various domestic and foreign forces opposing the Syrian

¹ Terrorism is the use of intentional and illegitimate violence for political goals. Jihadist terrorist organizations justify violence in the interpretation of an Islamic religious duty.

² Different names have been used for this organization: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State (IS) or Da’esh. This thesis will refer to this group as ISIS, as this is the most common name of this group in the Low Countries. I will be referring to ISIS even in 2013.

³ The West is a charged term. I understand that the use of terms certain terms like ‘the West’ and ‘Muslims’ can have a problematic monolithic understanding. However, they are used to ease the argumentation. I use Huntington’s ‘The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order’ divides to draw the distinction. The West consists of the United States and Canada, Western and Central Europe, Australia and Oceania and has its basis in Western Christian culture. The Islamic world is comprised of the Greater Middle East (excluding non-Muslim countries) and northern West Africa (Huntington, 1996).

government and each other. These forces include the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army, the Western financed, Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and ISIS.

In 2004, the Jordan jihadist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi connected his jihadist group Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. ISI expanded their activities to Syria with the start of the Syrian civil war and created there Jabhat al-Nusra. The al-Qaeda-backed Jabhat al-Nusra and ISI split in 2012 and ISI would go on to become ISIS. In June 2014, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed ISIS to be a Caliphate, which lasted until late 2017. In March 2019, the SDF announced the total territorial defeat of ISIS when it took control of the Syrian city of Baghouz, the last stronghold of ISIS. Consequently, Kurdish forces captured many remaining fighters and supporters.

Until 2012, foreign fighters were an isolated phenomenon. In the fall of 2012, the situation changed with extensive media and Internet attention for the Syrian conflict, and suddenly Dutch and Belgian jihadists began to travel cheaply and easily to Syria and Iraq (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Quite a few of the foreign fighters returned to their homeland in 2013 and 2014, before the proclamation of the Caliphate. Once the Caliphate was founded, returning became harder (Bakker & Grol, 2017).

Foreign fighters are unpaid, non-citizen, combatants who have no link to the conflict they join, other than their religious or ideological affinity with the insurgency (Hegghammer, 2010; Perešin, 2015). The Belgian scholars Renard and Coolsaet described the foreign fighters joining ISIS as “social-media fueled volunteers acting out anti-social frustrations while seeking a post-national caliphate in which to build new lives or a theological Armageddon – or both” (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018, p.16).

In Belgium it was recognized that jihadist sympathizers travelled to Syria, but policymakers had not expected the high number of people choosing to do so (De Koning et.al., 2014). Aside from the high number of foreign fighters Belgium has dealt with various jihadist threats and attacks domestically, for instance on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 and on the Brussels airport and metro in 2016. Belgium and the Netherlands have produced high numbers of foreign fighters compared to the size of their population. Belgium has the highest number per capita, and the Netherlands the highest percentage of female foreign fighters (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

The number of females among the jihadist foreign fighters of ISIS is considerably higher than in the past. Concrete numbers show that 100 of the 632 Belgian foreign fighters and 80 out of 300 of the Dutch foreign fighters were women (15.8 and 26.7 percent respectively) (Belga, 2016; AIVD, 2017). The Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) published a special publication on female jihadist militants in November 2017, addressing that another hundred women in the Netherlands

supported the jihad domestically (AIVD, 2017). The situation of female militants from the Netherlands is well known to the public, due to the transparency of the government. This is different in the case for the closed off Belgian governmental agencies.

The establishment of a Caliphate offered women a way to participate in roles other than fighter (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bergema & Van San, 2019). The role of women in terrorist organizations is wide-ranging. Women are not simply “pawns of militarized masculinity or victims of the terror,” but they can be collaborators, informers, recruiters, bait, and perpetrators (Sylvester & Parashar in Jackson et.al., 2009, pp.181,179). Although the women are not passive, they rarely engage in violent acts. In October 2017, after the physical fall of the Caliphate, ISIS called for women to participate in jihad and to play a significant role in carrying forth the ideology and legacy of ISIS (Cook & Vale, 2018). The evolution of the roles of women in ISIS reveals a move away from “strict cultural and gender specific norms that privileged serving the family and upholding family honor as a bride and mother, to more active and wide-ranging roles that ultimately led to that of suicide bomber” (Banks, 2019, p.185).

I refer to the women linked to ISIS as female militant: “a girl or woman who has either considered (and is registered as such by the police) or attempted to travel to ISIS territory; who facilitates or recruits others for travel or marriage to jihadists; has returned from ISIS territory; or has committed acts of violent extremism” (Gielen, 2018, p.456).

This thesis answers the following research question: How have Dutch and Belgian written news media framed female militants connected to the jihadist organization ISIS in between 2013 and 2019? And why have they framed female militants in this way?

I analyze the Dutch and Belgian women who travelled to or supported ISIS in the biggest Dutch and Belgian newspapers: De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, De Morgen, De Standaard, and Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN). I chose the period 2013 – 2019 as it covers the first articles on Dutch and Belgian female militants. By 2019, the Caliphate is gone. Many foreign fighters have either died, disappeared, convicted, returned, or are still waiting to return. We are currently in a post-ISIS era, and it is time to look back. My thesis will therefore give a good overview of the entire era of female militants linked to ISIS and the framing of newspapers.

The aim of this thesis is not to study how true the characterizations are, but to determine how these women are characterized (and why). I will do this by considering the notion of framing, and to test this I have created frames. Framing is the interpretation of a collection of assumptions and

stereotypes to help understand a situation used by i.e. media. Social constructions influence this (subconscious) framework through which we make sense of the world. I used three main frames – Medusa, Medea and Penthesilea – and seven subframes for a more specific understanding. These frames are based on archetypes of female militants. I found trends in the framing of female militants which will contribute to our understanding on the discourse of female militants. I tested the archetypes of female militants on newspaper articles. The seven subframes are:

- Medusa brainwashed
- Medusa dangerous
- Medusa mental issues
- Medea supporting mother and wife
- Medea religion
- Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation
- Penthesilea seeking husband/ romantic notion

My research will contribute to a better understanding of female militants in general and female jihadist militants. It will address the possible embedded biases in the Netherlands and Belgium towards female jihadist militants, addressing gender and religion, in which media is a reflection of society. It will better our understanding of how we treat female jihadist. This is important for threat analysis and counter terrorism measures, but also for the levels of fear and islamophobia in society. The way in which female militants are framed, will teach us more about the perception of women in terrorism and the embedded gender-stereotypes.

First, I will explore in the literature review the academic debate related to female (jihadist) militants and their framing. Then I present the theoretical framework for my thesis. This chapter introduces the three main frames: Medusa, Medea and Penthesilea and sets up the basis for the seven subframes. These frames are essential to my analysis, as they are the archetypes for the female militants and are tested in the analysis. This is followed by the methodology chapter on discourse analysis and operationalization. The methodology addresses how I analyzed the newspapers and how I made my choices regarding the cases and data selection. The next chapter is the analysis. This chapter answers the research question by supplying the results of the frame testing of the news articles. It answers the research question by reflecting on the results from the discourse analysis in each of the seven subframes. This is followed by the conclusion, where the theoretical, empirical and policy implications of my thesis are briefly addressed. The last parts of this thesis consist of the appendix, and the bibliography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on the research within the theme of the perceptions or framing of female terrorists. First, I will address the development of International Relations (IR) theories related to female militants. Then, I discuss the relationship between terrorism and media. This is following by female militants in the media and their framing. Finally, I will address the female militants of ISIS and their framing.

Non-critical IR research paints militant women out of the dominant picture of terrorism or reduces them to stereotypical roles, such as victims in need of counterterrorist protection (Jackson et.al., 2009). From the late 1980s onwards feminist scholars (Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1989; Tickner, 1992) criticized liberalism and realism, the mainstream IR theories of that time, for their masculine bias and omission of gender in their research. They started research in which gender is a social construct in the context of IR. These scholars pointed out that gender is not a fixed biological identity but created by cultural beliefs and socialization. “[C]ulture decides what it means to be male or female” (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p.139). This makes gender socially constructed. Therefore, discourse on female militants is also socially constructed. Feminist security studies (FSS) takes this notion of social construction further. FSS scholars recover the women’s experiences, recognize their gender-based exclusion from decision-making roles and investigate the women’s invisibility in international theory (Blanchard, 2003). This acknowledges the various roles and levels of agency women can have in war, conflict, and terrorism.

Since the 1980s research on female terrorism has increased. However, there is no strong theoretical basis yet. Instead the research has covered a wide range of foci and disparate events (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Vogel et.al., 2014). Jacques and Taylor examined trends in female terrorism research and found six main themes: history and overview of female terrorism; perceptions of female terrorists (media); roles of female terrorists; motivation and recruitment; environmental enablers, and other aspects (Jacques & Taylor, 2009). The theme of research on the perceptions of female terrorists in the media is the theme of the research relevant for this thesis.

News media are important “builders of realities,” and it reflects the “social mainstream” (Brown, 2011, p.708; Mautner in Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008). It is therefore important to analyze media, as it reflects society at large. News media help form the societal narrative on how to see female terrorism, and their representation reflects on the dominant terrorism discourse (Third, 2014). Media coverage on female terrorists appears to be a combination of “rumors, stereotypes and realities” (Gardner, 2007, p.921). News media convey “stereotypes that affect a broad range of public

perceptions, among them how people think about race, ethnicity, and religion” (Nacos & Torres-Reyna in Norris, et.al., 2003, p.136). The news is influenced by “deep-seated prejudices in the dominant white culture” (Nacos & Torres-Reyna in Norris, et.al., 2003, p.136).

Since the 1970s, the connection between terrorism and media has been explored by various scholars. Jenkins stated that “Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is a theater” (Jenkins, 1974, p.4). Terrorism can influence media and media can influence terrorism. Researchers have investigated the influence of terrorism on media and its effects (Schmid & Paletz, 1992), and the use of media-oriented terrorism and the psychological impact of mass communications (Weimann, 2005).

One popular theme within the research is media discourse with a gender lens (Banks, 2019). Research into the media discourse on female militants requires a look at the framing of female militants specifically by journalists. Media does not represent female militants as what they are, but as what society think they are. Media represent and influence the perception of female militants in society. The media “idolizes” and “fetishizes” female terrorists (Bloom, 2011, p.44; Conway & McInerney, 2012, p.18). An attack committed by a (Palestinian) woman received eight times more media attention than a similar attack committed by a man (Bloom, 2011).

Research on female terrorists and their representation address the difficulties in understanding female involvement in terrorist and militant organizations and explore the mythical and gendered stereotypes involved here. There is no evidence of fundamental differences – in recruitment, motivation, ideological fervor, and brutality - between male and female militants, but female militants are framed differently (Nacos, 2005). For my thesis I considered research specifically on ‘how’ these female militants are portrayed and framed in media. This type of research looks at the frames used to portray women in the media (Berkowitz, 2005; Conway & McInerney, 2012; Martini, 2018; Nacos, 2005). These studies focused predominantly on female suicide terrorism in the Middle East (2001-2005, Palestine, Iraq) and used Western framing on non-Western women (Berkowitz, 2005; Brunner, 2005; Brown, 2011).

Scholars on female militants agree that the notion that women are ‘equal to male terrorists’ is easily discarded or dismissed in the West (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.9). The female terrorist is “always precisely that—a *female* terrorist” (Third, 2014, p.37). Representations of female militants often deny women the ability to act with agency. In addition, they deny them responsibility for their own actions. This responsibility is placed onto the community or their husband, for example. This refutes the women’s status as terrorist by denying political, ideological, or religious motivations (Vogel et.al.,

2014). The common trend of this “culture of victimhood” on women is that it reduces “them to something less than themselves” and any agentive role is denied, even by scholars (Pearson in Jacoby, 2000, p. 89; Jackson et.al., 2009). It can result in the threat of female militants to be either overestimated or underestimated, which may influence counterterrorism measures (Yarchi, 2014; Laster & Erez, 2015; Mehra, 2016; De Graaf, 2012).

Part of the research on female jihadists has focused on Palestinian and Chechen female suicide bombers (eg. Berkowitz, 2005; Bloom, 2011; Brunner, 2005; Gardner, 2007; Issacharoff in Schweitzer, 2006; Patkin, 2004). One scholar who studied the representation of Palestinian female suicide bombers in the media is Patkin. Patkin argues that gender stereotyping derives from gender-based explanations of involvement in terrorism. Western media searches for an explanation for the participation of women in terrorism (Patkin, 2004). This is different from male militants, whose ideological motivation for joining and acting in a terrorist organization are taken at face value. Yarchi (2014) came to the same conclusion: Western media focuses on the personal aspects and motivations when dealing with Palestinian female suicide bombers, and not with male suicide bombers. Western media uses frames and personal motivations as a journalistic attempt to further the understanding of female suicide bombers (Yarchi, 2014). This helps the audience with a familiar narrative but ignores or hides the agency of female terrorists.

The understanding that female militants are framed according to gender stereotypes and according to personal motivations is not limited to Palestinian female suicide bombers. Gardner studied worldwide media representations of female terrorists and concluded that “journalists frequently incorporated explanatory frames when depicting female terrorists” and heavily relied on personal frames to do so (Gardner, 2007, p.922).

Scholars who have examined female Muslim militants in Western media often address the concept of Neo-Orientalism. Orientalism is a patronizing view of the West towards the East, which links inherently to imperialism and power relations (Said, 1978). Orientalism is a social construct. The West ‘makes it Oriental’ and the stereotypes and generalizations form an established body of theory and practice. The West uses the discourse of Orientalism to describe the Orient in subordinating terms. Neo-orientalism adds critical examinations of gender, sexuality, and the fusion of Muslim and Arab to Orientalism (Gentry, 2015). Neo-Orientalism is multi-faceted; it can romanticize the Orient, sexualize it, and imbue it with ‘sinister’ overtones. Scholars who analyzed female jihadists in media

determined that these women are not just othered⁴ based on their sex, but also on their 'Muslimness' (Martini, 2018).

For example, the research of Brown (2011) focused on the first European female suicide bomber, Muriel Degauque. Degauque was a Belgian convert who in 2005 committed a suicide bombing attack in Iraq. The media defined Degauque by her Muslimness, and her female sex; aimed to present her as 'Other' emphasizing her Muslim identity in gendered terms (Brown, 2011). The media put the blame of Degauque actions on her religion and gender, not on her upbringing or ideological and political commitment.

La & Pickett (2019) did research on the Western media's framing of Boko Haram female suicide bombers. They emphasized the notion that Western media handle militant women with a softer touch than non-Western media. They revealed two prominent frames: the liable agents frame, which is used mostly in local Nigerian news sources, and the vulnerable and helpless girls frame, which is found in Western sources (La & Pickett, 2019). The 'liable agent' has control over her own actions and is personally responsible. Western media acts more sympathetic and protective towards these girls and women and presents them without active agency (La & Pickett, 2019). The 'vulnerable helpless girls' are represented as being forced into roles beyond their control, they are victims of Boko Haram and are not personally responsible.

Issacharoff (2006) came to a similar conclusion in a study on Palestinian female suicide bombers. Western media focuses on the personal motivations and the restraints for women in Islamic society (Issacharoff in Schweitzer, 2006). Arab media ignores personal motivations and assumes similar agency for women as for their male counterparts. Western media frames female militants different than male militants and different than non-Western media.

Many studies on female militants have used framing theory (Berkowitz 2005; Conway & McInerney 2012; La & Pickett, 2019; Martini 2018; Nacos 2005). Nacos is one of the main scholars on framing female militants. She compared the gendered framing of legitimate and illegitimate female political actors. Nacos concluded that while the stereotyped framing of female politicians has weakened since the 1980s, this is not the case for female terrorists (Nacos, 2005). The stereotyped depiction of female militants occurs within the six presented frames: (1) the physical appearance frame, (2) the family connection frame, (3) the terrorist for the sake of love frame, (4) the women's lib or equality frame, (5) the tough-as-males or tougher-than-men, and (6) the bored, naive, out-of-touch-with-

⁴ 'Othering' is a concept that assures one's own 'normal' social identity by dissociating another (the 'other').

reality frame. Nacos' study is widely respected, tested, adapted and confirmed in empirical cases (Auer et.al., 2019; Conway & McInerney, 2012; Lavie-Dinur et.al., 2015).

Other scholars to address specific frames on female militants are Sjoberg and Gentry. Sjoberg and Gentry emphasize the importance of analyzing female terrorists through a gendered lens, as this contribute to understanding the rest of the field. Their book *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (2007) sets out to prove that stories about women's political violence: (1) deny women choice, rational thought, and agency on subordinate women; (2) categorize women's actions according to three paradigms/frames—mother, monster, and whore; and (3) 'other' violent women in order to maintain myths and centuries-old stereotypes of women's fragility, purity, and gender subordination (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Gentry and Sjoberg argue that female militants are placed in one of three frames: the nurturing mother, the mad monster, and the (a)sexualized whore. These three frames resonate with the frames of maternalism, pathology, and sexuality and can be connected to the six frames of Nacos (Auer et.al., 2019).

There has not been much research on the Western media's framing of the militant women of ISIS. However, the women of ISIS have been studied by various scholars in general terms. Bakker and De Leede (2015) and Bakker and Grol (2017) studied female militants from the Netherlands. They concluded that there is not one typical profile of foreign fighter or jihadists. Nor is there a particular profile of female militants. They can be young, old, well educated, and rich, or not, they can come from a Muslim background or be converted. Nor are their motivations necessarily different from male militants (Bakker & De Leede, 2015). Women who travelled can be naïve and "may have partly been attracted by romantic ideas of finding a soul mate, but like the male jihadists, they also see themselves as part of a grand movement that will completely change the world" (Bakker & De Leede, 2015, p.6). Women have stories of 'follow and flight' and of 'seduce and recruit' (Bakker & Grol, 2017).

Two scholars have done specific research on the framing of the (Western) women of ISIS: Sjoberg (2018) and Martini (2019). Sjoberg analyzed reporting in two newspapers from the USA and the UK during 2015 on women linked to ISIS. Sjoberg determined three types of reporting on these women "accounts of manipulated and agency-less women who were members of IS without having legitimately chosen to join; accounts of helpless female victims; and accounts of brave and honorable women battling IS" (Sjoberg, 2018, p.300). Women fighting for ISIS are framed different than women fighting against ISIS. The stories of the female ISIS militants "fit well with the mother, monster, and whore narratives—effectively removing choice from female perpetrators, instead treating them as

victims of both IS and flaws in their own femininity” (Sjoberg, 2018, p.299). The women joining ISIS have their agency minimized or are treated as victims of manipulation. ISIS is presented as a group of barbarians and “uncivilized,” who have manipulated women “away from civilization to their barbarian causes” (Sjoberg, 2018, p.302). Women fighting against ISIS are framed by the media in ways that “emphasize women’s agency, their resourcefulness, their bravery, and their defiance of inherited expectations of women’s limitations in conflict,” it is accepted that these women are needed to fight even in a male domain (Sjoberg, 2018, p.303).

Martini focused on how UK newspapers have represented women joining ISIS as “Jihadi Brides” (Martini, 2018, p.458). Throughout, women were assigned a (pre)determined gender role within the organization (Martini, 2018). They have no agency and their sole role is as wife of a combatant. They are represented as vulnerable and passive even if this clashed with their own political and agentic narrative (Martini, 2018). Martini observed that Western women joining ISIS are usually described from a Neo-Orientalist perspective. Western female jihadists, are “‘good women’ living among ‘good men’ (and in their ‘side of the world’) willingly join the ‘bad men’” (Martini, 2018, p.460). Western female ISIS militants donned in burqa or niqāb are depicted as victims of “not only of ISIS but also of ‘Islamic patriarchy’” (Martini, 2018, p.467). Thus, the women are Western, but the moment they join ISIS they are othered with Neo-Orientalist rhetoric.

The research of Sjoberg and Martini is in line with my own research, as I too will look into the framing of female militants by newspapers. However, the time frame, countries, and the frames I use are different. I will explore relative salience of each frame and the difference between the countries, between the newspapers and the changes over time. I will test frames to newspaper articles on female militants linked to ISIS. I will focus specifically on the Netherlands and Belgium, two small countries with a high number of female foreign fighters. I will address all female ISIS affiliates, including women who have not left the Netherlands or Belgium but who are connected to ISIS. In addition, my research will benefit from having a wider timeframe, ranging from the first mentioning of female militants with ISIS in 2013 until 2019. This wider period includes some of the aftermath of ISIS and therefore provides a more complete overview of changing attitudes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical framework addresses the main lens through which my analysis is conducted. Essential to my framework are the frames. Frames are intertwined with gender stereotypes, which I will first introduce. Then I will introduce the three deductive main frames, from which I have derived the seven subframes. The subframes were created after preliminary analysis and helped operationalize the frames. I will introduce the subframes in the methodology.

Gender stereotypes in the media are linked to the stereotypes in society. Both gender and stereotypes are socially constructed concepts and differ in this respect from the biologically determined concept of sex. One powerful gender stereotype is that women are peaceful. Women's bodies are able to create life; therefore, women taking a life is claimed to be 'unnatural.' In Elshtain's book *Women and War* she notes that women are understood as Beautiful Souls: "a collective being embodying values and virtues at odds with war's destructiveness, representing home and hearth and the humble verities of everyday life" (Elshtain, 1995, p. xiii). Women are to be pure, innocent, and nonviolent. In this stereotype women are depicted as "naturally nurturing, emotionally sensitive and domesticated," with "gentleness and passivity," "innocence and fragility;" they are "the backbone of the family structure, the defender of faith, and the giver of life". Literature "rejoices in the docility of female flesh, its yielding form, its penetrability" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.7; Colvin in Melzer, 2015, p.25; Sjoberg & Gentry in Agara, 2015, p.117; Sjoberg et.al., in Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p.4; Pearson, 1997, n.p.).

This gender stereotype of women as peaceful, war-resistant, conservative, virtuous, innocent and pure beings is often accompanied by Elshtain's developed gender stereotype of men as Just Warriors, brave male fighters who will defend women. Violence is implicit to this construction of the male: "the chest-beating ape evolved into the soldier, the rapist. Men are propelled into conquest by a surge of testosterone, and build their blocks of power on the strength of their physique" (Pearson, 1997, n.p.). Thus, belief in gender stereotypes make it impossible for normal women to engage in terrorism.

Women who engage in terrorist activities commit a double crime or transgression: the act itself and the breakage of social gender norms (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; MacDonald, 1994). Western societies 'need to' view violent women as 'mad or bad.' Otherwise, we "would need new discourses to understand that both men and women can be violent" (Gilbert, 2002, p.1274). The stereotypes on female militancy have proven to be persistent. It is as if the West has a "cultural commitment to the nonviolent nature of women" (Jacoby, 2000, p. 87-88). Even in contemporary society women are "generally measured as deviant according to attitudes that derive largely from classical Greece,

Rome, and medieval Europe, be they of pagan mythology or Judeo-Christian theology” (Alvanou in Schweitzer, 2006, pp.95-6). One example of a gender stereotype from antiquity are the “Spartan mothers and civic cheerleaders, urging men to behave like men, praising the heroes and condemning the cowardly. Women are also official mourners” (Elshtain, 1995, p.121).

In Western history there are scattered stories of the so-called ‘Ferocious Few’ – “women who reversed cultural expectations by donning warrior’s garb and doing battle” (Elshtain, 1995, p.8). Joan of Arc is one example. The existence of the Ferocious Few in real life and in myth “seems not to have put much of a dent in the overall edifice of the way war figures in the structure of male and female experience and reactions” (Elshtain, 1995, p.8). Violent women are “captured in storeyed fantasies which deny women’s agency and reify gender stereotypes and subordination” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, pp.4-5).

Frames

The discourse of gender stereotypes can often be traced back to classical Greece. This is the case with archetypes of women who deviate from gender stereotypes, and who have become ‘the other.’ From the archetypes of these deviant women I derived the frames for militant women.

Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) distinguished three main archetypes of the frames of militant and deviant women. Militant women are framed as “‘mothers’, women who are fulfilling their biological destinies; as ‘monsters’, women who are pathologically damaged and are therefore drawn to violence; or as ‘whores’, women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependence and depravity” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.12). The three main frames of this thesis are based on these three frames. In the next part of this chapter I will extend on the three main frames. The first frame is Medusa the pathological Monster, the second frame is the maternal Medea, and the last frame is the Amazon warrior Penthesilea.

Medusa

The first frame is Medusa. This frame focuses on the assumed pathology of female militants. It is a way to explain female terrorism as a result of mental illness or instability. Terrorism has the “special ability to bias our perceptions of the perpetrator’s psychology” (Silke, 1998, p.51). We succumb to the myth that terrorists are mad. Journalists use a ‘psychological autopsy’ looking at the personal and family history, figuring out what and when ‘it’ went wrong (Auer et.al., 2019). In this frame the female militant is considered insane or “mentally inept” (Talbot, 2000, p.165). Therefore, she does not have rational behavior, ideological motivation or culpability for her actions.

The historical roots of the Medusa frame come from the Greek myth of Medusa. In the myth, Medusa was a beautiful maiden who was raped by the god Poseidon in one of the goddess Athena's temples. Athena punished Medusa by turning her into a monstrous Gorgon with snake hair whose gaze would petrify anyone who looked at her. Eventually the hero Perseus would seek Medusa and behead her.

The frame of the Gorgon Medusa represents the significant threat of female militants. The Gorgon is unimaginable, incomprehensible and without rational or agency. One of the main scholars behind the Gorgon narrative is the non-feminist scholar Cooper (1979). He was inspired by the women of the RAF and found that female terrorists "have consistently proved themselves more ferocious and more intractable in these acts than their male counterparts [...] Experience has shown that woman as terrorist must be dealt with after the fashion of the Gorgon if those responding would survive" (Cooper in Adler & Simon, 1979, pp.151-2). These women have lost touch with reality and have obsessive and pathological qualities. The 'monster' is pathologically damaged and therefore drawn to violence. According to Cooper, some female terrorists have a "cold rage" about them "that even the most alienated of men seem quite incapable of emulating" (Cooper in Adler & Simon, 1979, p.151). Therefore, these women represented as extra dangerous and more committed.

There is another side to the Medusa frame: the lost Medusa. Before Medusa turned into a Gorgon, she was an innocent maiden like Helen of Troy. Helen was an example of the Beautiful Soul trope, both innocent of war, and the genesis of it; both victim and cause (Sjoberg in Evans et.al., 2014). Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world and married to King Menelaus of Sparta. Her abduction by Paris caused the Trojan War. Helen is innocent, a victim, and needs our protection. Helen is and will remain one of 'our lost daughters.' Female militants can never Helens, and jihadist female militants are Medusas. Medusa too was a 'lost daughter.' However, Medusa like the jihadist female militants are foreigners or supporters of a foreign entity. Therefore, Western media represents these women as 'others,' and by representing them as 'others' they do not fall under the protection which society gives to 'our' people. Medusa is not 'ours' to protect.

Medea

The second frame is Medea. Her violence is described as a "need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men" or as "motherhood gone awry" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.13). Maternalism is the notion that "due to women's biological ability to be mothers, their participation in politics is driven by their emotional desire" (Auer et.al., 2019, p.284). Actions are often attributed to the influence from husbands, boyfriends, and other 'male folk.' She does not make her own decisions but follows her husband. This reifies "the doctrine of domination by men instead

of attributing their actions to similar motives and factors as those of the men or even to other individual choices” (Agara, 2015, p.118). In addition, her violence is characterized by a “manipulation of her will to serve the political goals of her husband” (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p.70). There are two aspects to the Medea frame. There is the nurturing mother, a supporter; and the vengeful mother, acting out of revenge and disappointment in her personal life (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). In both cases she is driven by a maternal instinct.

The duality of this frame can be found in the myth of Medea. Medea was a sorcerer from Colchis. The myth depicts her as extremely devoted to her lover Jason. She helped Jason obtain the Golden Fleece and get the throne, for which Medea betrayed her own family. She did everything for Jason. Jason took Medea to Greece, but left Medea for another woman. Out of revenge for leaving her, Medea killed their two sons. Medea is both committed and a vengeful wife and mother. Her violence is driven by emotion, both her support and her revenge.

Penthesilea

The last frame is that of Penthesilea. In this frame militant women are driven by their “sexual dependence and depravity” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.12). Female hormones are the cause for the lost agency and deviation from the gender norms. This frame “highly sexualized and/or infantilized” female militants (Melzer, 2015, p.21). It has two sides. Deviant women are either driven by their “desperation wrought from the inability to please men” or they are “men’s sexual pawns and possessions” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p.13). Either these women are emancipated whores or childish romantics.

The frame of Penthesilea links to the paradoxical interpretation that women’s participation in terrorism is on the one hand “women’s newfound empowerment” and on the other “an indication of ongoing gender oppression” (Berko & Erez, 2007, p.493). Women can experience that joining a terrorist organization as a personal liberation in which they are equal to men. This means that women can join a terrorist organization as a notion of liberation and emancipation, even in jihadist organizations (Third, 2014; Talbot, 2000). Jihadist organizations are not known for their female friendliness, it therefore seems strange that women join these types of organizations for liberation and emancipation, yet it happens. These frames have derived from the myth of Penthesilea and the other Amazon women.

Penthesilea was an Amazonian queen, daughter of the war god Ares. The Amazons were a tribe of warrior women who were very skilled fighters and horseback riders and not afraid of war. They did

not marry, mated randomly and as such displayed 'promiscuous behavior' (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). The Amazons lived on a separate island and they could be naïve towards the outside world. Penthesilea's sister Hippolyte had a golden girdle given by her father. The hero Theseus wanted this girdle. Hippolyte admired this handsome, strong man and voluntarily and blinded by love relinquished her girdle. However, this had repercussions, but Hippolyte was too naïve towards them, and would die by the hands of her own sister. Penthesilea fought for Troy in the Trojan War to atone for accidentally killing her sister Hippolyte. During the war Penthesilea was killed by Achilles. Penthesilea was emancipated and she was committed like any man. Penthesilea can therefore be a woman striving for gender equality or one who has already obtained this.

METHODOLOGY

I decided to use framing and discourse analysis as the methodology to answer my research question. Social constructivism is the basis for framing and discourse analysis. I consider that media content is a “socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality,” in which we “make ‘Jihadi Brides’ what (we say) they are” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.251; Martini, 2018, p.461). My theoretical framework presents the frames used to analyze newspaper articles. Therefore, framing and discourse analysis are the appropriate methodology for the aim of this thesis.

Discourse analysis studies “how an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception bring an object into being” (Lindekilde in Della Portae, 2014, p.200). It addresses “the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001, 352). Discourse considers the interrelatedness of texts. Therefore, it does not solely focus on the meaning of the text, but how this meaning is shaped by social reality and the hegemonic power in society. Thus, it acknowledges that media influences and is influenced by society.

Frame analysis looks at “how existing ‘objects’ or ‘topics’ are framed by different actors, bending their meaning in certain directions” (Lindekilde in Della Portae, 2014, p.200). Analysis of frames “illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as a speech, utterance, news report or novel – to that consciousness” (Entman, 1993, pp.51-2). Framing is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more *salient* in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p.52). To operationalize the discourse and frame analysis I will look at two aspects when analyzing the news articles.

The first aspect is reasoning devices. Reasoning devices are “explicit and implicit statements that deal with justifications, causes, and consequences in a temporal order” (Van Gorp, 2007, p.64). These reasoning devices come directly from the text and can be a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. Reasoning devices suggest justifications for a certain position, and they can encourage the reader to think similarly as the writer. An example of a reasoning device: “Don’t bring back ticking timebombs to the Netherlands,” in which female jihadists are compared to the imminent explosion of a bomb (“Tikkende tijdbommen” 2017, 20 November).

The second aspect is framing devices, which reinforce clusters of facts or judgements. In practical terms, framing devices are the presence or absence of metaphors, catchphrases, visual images,

lexical choices, selection of sources, graphics, stereotypes, dramatic characters, etc. (Van Gorp, 2005, p.486). The framing devices are the interpretation of the text. A frequent framing device in the articles is the term: 'jihad-bride,' separating the women from the male militants and focusing on her supporting role. Another example: "Souad is a slender girl wearing a green hijab" (Beemsterboer, 2019, 29 May). With the use of the words "slender girl" the writer implies that Souad is young, but Souad is a grown woman of 24 years.

The reasoning devices and framing devices were the guiding principles when I coded my articles. I created a Coding Scheme with the elements I looked for in the articles relevant to the aim of my research including reasoning and framing devices. This Coding Scheme is included into the Appendix.

Data Selection

I have limited my research to newspapers from the Netherland and Dutch speaking Belgium. The Belgian newspapers were Flemish, but they addressed female militants from all over Belgium. Language was one reason: Dutch is my mother tongue. Finding and understanding the nuance in texts is essential to this type of research, therefore language skills are essential. All the articles are in the same language so there was no need for assessing certain words in translated versions. In addition, the university solely supplies access to Dutch newspapers via NexisUni, and Flemish newspapers have good and complete archives on their websites, making the data accessible.

The Netherlands and Belgium are well suited for comparative research. They are similar in size as countries, use the same language, and both have many foreign fighters compared to the countries' population. Belgium has many foreign fighters in general and the Netherlands has many female militants. I found it interesting to see how two quite similar countries represent female militants differently in newspapers.

I limited my research to six newspapers, three from the Netherlands and three from Belgium (Flanders). These six are the biggest newspapers of both areas. The three Dutch newspapers are: De Telegraaf, which is a right-wing popular newspaper, and De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad, both quality press newspapers, left- and right-wing, respectively. The Belgian newspapers are: Het Laatste Nieuws, a right-wing popular newspaper, De Morgen, which is a left-wing socialist quality press newspaper, and De Standaard, a quality press right-wing Flemish-oriented newspaper. So, each newspaper has its ideological counterpart in the other country. Popular newspapers "tend not to consider social responsibility" and focus on more people-oriented subjects like crime, sports, sex and gossip (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2012, p. 2). On the other hand, elite newspapers focus on "hard

news” with background information and act as the ombudsmen of democratic values (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2012, p. 2). The difference between the newspapers elite versus popular and left-wing versus right-wing is likely to give different results based on each newspaper’s ideology.

I selected a wide array of search terms. I specifically did not want to search solely for female-specific terms, as this could exclude finding relevant articles. In addition, I was curious to see the percentage of female militant related articles compared to articles on jihadism in general: are female militants more newsworthy than male militants? I focused on articles related to Belgium and the Netherlands or to Belgian and Dutch people, this to limit the findings. The search terms I used were in Dutch (plural and singular): jihad, jihadbruid [jihad bride], jihadist, jihadreis [jihad travel], jihadreiziger [jihad traveller], jihadtoerisme [jihad tourism], militant, Muslim, moslimextremist, polderjihadist, radical, radicalizatie, strijder [fighter], Syrieganger [Foreign fighters in Syria/Iraq ‘Syria-goer’], Syriestrijder [‘Syria-fighter’], terrorist. I aimed for a broad range of search terms to find the articles; this might have left out various relevant articles. However, I am convinced that these terms supplied plenty of data for my research to be relevant and able to contribute to the field.

I started my search from January 1st, 2011 to ensure I found the first relevant articles, but these solely appeared in 2013 and later. I set December 31, 2019 as the last day; this way I could research annual trends. I selected articles which had a sex-specific discussion of women. Articles on non-domestic female militants from the Netherlands or Belgium were excluded. This resulted in a total of 1.631 articles, 758 from Belgium and 873 from the Netherlands (De Telegraaf 257, De Volkskrant 314, NRC Handelsblad 304, De Morgen 293, De Standaard 299, Het Laatste Nieuws 166). My research has had its limitations in the findings on Belgium. The data from Belgian newspapers was not as extensive, especially from Het Laatste Nieuws, compared to the Dutch data. This made determining trends and findings more difficult than in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, these articles gave a solid inside in jihadist terrorism related discourse. I ordered the 1.631 articles by topic and by source, so that I could compare the differences between the Dutch and Belgian newspapers. 182 articles had a female militant or female militants as the main topic.

After selecting the 182 articles, I coded them. I used a qualitative discourse/framing analysis on my articles. This meant I searched for frames and in-depth text/language analysis. I first coded these articles according to my Coding Scheme. Afterwards I placed them in my Framing Matrix, in which all the frames are operationalized. The Framing Matrix is located later in this chapter. This type of research is rarely fully objective. I have tried to maximize my own transparency. According to Fairclough, “[t]here is no such thing as an ‘objective’ analysis of a text” (Fairclough, 2003, p.14). By

including my Coding Scheme (in the appendix) and Framing Matrix I hope to provide transparency in my research and make my findings replicable. Discourse analysis should result in “replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). To further contribute to this, a second person has tested my Coding Scheme and Framing Matrix to analyze five news articles, as a way to control for potential biases from my side in the analysis.

I set up my Framing Matrix by using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to my frames. I started deductive using my three main predetermined frames Medusa, Medea, and Penthesilea. In the preliminary research, I searched for elements outside of these frames, which were absent. I noticed trends within the three main frames. Based on these trends, I formulated seven subframes based on my preliminary analysis of the news articles. Each main frame has two or three subframes.

The Medusa frame has three subframes. The first subframe attempts to present Medusa as one of ‘our lost daughters,’ who has been brainwashed or indoctrinated. The second Medusa subframe relies on pathological explanations of mental illness as basis for her deviancy. The third subframe is that of monstrous female militants who are extra dangerous.

The Medea frame has two subframes. The first Medea subframe is of the supporting wife and mother who follows her husband. The second subframe is of the woman who acts according to her religious beliefs and for her (religious) community. This subframe combines the nurture towards one’s own community and the desire for revenge against the other (Western) community.

There are two Penthesilea subframes: the subframe of emancipation/ just like men; and subframe of the seeking husband/ romantic notion. The first subframe is the most agentic frame, as agency is mostly her own. The second subframe presents women as deviating from their normal lives for the sole reason of finding a husband and living in a romantic fairytale, fully dependent on their prince charming.

These seven subframes helped to better differentiate my findings, but they remain rooted in the three main frames and the academic literature on these three frames. The Frame Matrix answers various questions operationalizing each of the seven subframes: (1) How does the frame define the female militant(s)? (2) How does the writer present the female militants? (3) What are the common themes in the articles of this frame? (4) Who – aside from the writer – influences the narrative within this frame? (5) What are the key concepts related to the female militants in this frame?

Frame Matrix

Frame	Definition	Discourse	Common themes	Narrative	Key concepts
Medusa brainwashed	Women who are heavily radicalized and brainwashed. Women who used to be innocent Helens, who for reasons turned bad, a process of radicalization, which can happen to everyone.	They do not know better as she is mad and should be judged accordingly. Should be almost pitied. Needs our protection as she is one of 'our' women.	Departure to ISIS (Want to) return	Family	Radicalized, indoctrinated, blinded, Western, one of 'our' women, 'lost daughter'
Medusa dangerous	Women who are dangerous. They form a serious threat (for example in their ability to recruit others, and firm belief in the cause).	Should be 'dealt' with as a precaution.	Wanting to return		Mastermind, intelligent, manipulative, older
Medusa mental issues	Women who turned to terrorism because they have mental issues, or other problems.	Justifying actions as caused by her past, including a difficult youth.	Court cases		Unstable, victim of circumstances, justifying
Medea supporting mother and wife	Focus on the wife role, and as follower of her husband and sympathy. Focus on the homely duties, taking care of her family.	Does her female duty to support and follow; to nurture and take care.	All	Experts Themselves Family	Girlfriends, wives, mothers, dutiful, jihad bride, family
Medea religion	Firm belief in doing their religious duty, by aiding ISIS and doing (female) jihad.	Does her religious duty.	From Syria	Themselves Family	Religion, devoted Muslim, community, anti-Western, sense of discrimination
Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation	Women who are just like men. They are committed like men, should be punished by men, or joined out of a sense of emancipation.	Should be treated like men.		Experts Themselves Family	Emancipated, adopted 'western liberal gender norms,' like the male militants, sisterhood, breaking free
Penthesilea Seeking husband/ romantic notion	Women who join ISIS out of a romantic notion of life in Caliphate and the idea to get a husband. Often younger women and girls.	Needs our forgiveness as it was a childish and naïve mistake.		Themselves Family	Naïve, romantic, and young women/ girls

ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings from my research. In this analysis I address the indicators of the relative salience of each of the subframes. I focused on trends per newspaper, country, and year. The discourse on these female militants has changed over time, as has their framing. This analysis first looks into general findings, followed by the themes of the articles. I will then address the framing of the female militants.

The Netherlands had relatively more female militants travelling to Syria/Iraq than Belgium. The percentages of female foreign fighters as a share of all foreign fighters was 15.8 percent for Belgium and 26.7 percent for the Netherlands; 100 and 80 female militants for the countries respectively. The Dutch newspapers published more articles on female militants: 117 vs. 65 from Belgium. Female militants were the main topic in 11.2 percent of all the articles. For the Netherlands, 13.4 percent of all the articles had female militants as the main topic versus 8.6 percent for Belgium. Another 10 percent of all articles had female militants as a secondary topic. However, not all the 182 articles framed female militants, 140 articles framed female militants: 84 from the Netherlands, and 56 articles from Belgium. See the table underneath for the distribution of articles per newspaper. All 1.631 were analyzed on their theme, but solely 140 could be analyzed on their framing of female militants.

	# articles	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
Total	182	44	45	28	20	25	20
No frame	42	8	12	13	4	2	3
Total framed	140	36	33	15	16	23	17

Ever since the announcement that many young women from Western Europe joined the fight in Syria, a flow of publications has appeared. Belgium published its first five articles on female militants in 2013, Dutch newspapers on female militants started in 2014. Belgium was earlier than other European countries to detect and publicly announce Belgian citizens travelling to Syria/Iraq. Since the summer of 2014 when increasing numbers of women joined the established Caliphate, there has been a steady flow of news articles on female militants. There were 15 articles in 2014, 13 in 2015, and 16 in 2016. However, female militants largely remained under the radar.

In 2017 the interest in female militants in newspapers increased, with 32 publications that year and 21 in 2018. In 2019, female militants were the most popular subject surrounding the Syria-Iraq conflict and the foreign fighters. In 2019, 80 articles appeared with female militants as the main topic.

This means that 43 percent of all articles with female militants as the main topic appeared in 2019, and 57 between 2013 and 2018. In 2019, the articles focused on the female militants stuck in Kurdish camps and whether the Dutch and Belgian governments should and would aid the return of the female militants (and their children) to the Low countries.

I also investigated the articles on non-female fighters. This provided a balanced look into female militant attention compared to the rest of the articles. I address this in the next part of this chapter, which includes two tables. These tables show the distribution of all the themes of each newspaper, one for the non-female militant themes, the other for the female militant themes.

Themes on Female and Male Militants

I analyzed articles on female militants in depth. In addition, I studied the themes of all 1.631 articles. In the two following tables are all the findings per newspaper summarized. The articles with non-female militant themes focused on various themes: general articles, ISIS-children and male militants. The articles on the situation in the Netherlands and Belgium were general articles, but rarely acknowledged women even as a secondary topic. In Belgium newspapers there was more attention towards domestic jihadist threats and domestic terrorism suspects. This correlates with the higher prevalence of direct jihadists threats in Belgium itself. The articles on ISIS-children often featured the mothers of these children as a secondary topic but remained focused on the children and what the Netherlands and Belgium should do for them. These themes did not specifically focus on male or female militants, and made up 842 of the 1.631 articles, or 51.6 percent. A few interesting acknowledgements is the vast Dutch interest in jihadist-imams, compared to the Belgian interest; and the interest in recruitment of De Volkskrant.

Dutch newspapers also had vastly more interest in the general profile of militants, than the Belgian newspapers. The articles focusing on male militants fell under the themes of: general, profile, legislation and other, totaling 607 articles (De Telegraaf 103; De Volkskrant 115; NRC 102; HLN 60; De Morgen 140; De Standaard 87). This means that 37.2 percent of all articles focused specifically on male militants, compared to 11.2 percent for articles on female militants. While male militants received more than three times more media coverage than female militants, this discrepancy is actually lower than the discrepancy in actual numbers between male and female militants. However, articles on the domestic situation in the Netherlands and Belgium covered solely men, therefore the coverage of male militants is more than comparative to their actual numbers. Thus, looking at all

1.631 articles, female militants have limited coverage. However, when breaking this down, female militants do not seem to be under- or overrepresented compared to male militants.

The articles with profiles of militants gave the most in-depth and background information and used framing most extensively and frequently. This concerns 254 out of the 607 articles (41.8 percent) for male militants and 78 of the 182 articles on females (42.9 percent). The share of profiles is almost the same in percentage for male and female militants.

Themes Non-Female Militants

	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
Situation NL/BE						
Muslim extremism in NL/BE	21	21	27	14	22	26
Jihad-Imam	10	13	15	3	9	6
Recruitment	1	21	5	2	6	5
Threat(level) in NL/ BE	22	22	22	12	35	21
(De)radicalization	6	18	19	11	9	18
General measures	39	53	58	32	20	70
Failing government	3	4	7	4	5	12
General						
(Attempted) Departure/ return	11	5	10	3	6	14
Arrest/ hunt (NL/BE/other)	4	7	4	6	14	8
Deceased	5	7	6	3	7	8
Camp	2	2	1	-	6	-
ISIS in general	4	8	4	-	5	-
Profile						
Profile general (males)	34	38	28	14	15	14
Profile ISIS male + ISIS returnee	9	16	12	10	17	11
Terror suspect (and returnee)	-	-	-	3	18	10
Other	1	-	1	-	1	2
ISIS-children						
ISIS-children	4	13	9	1	8	20
Legislation						
Legislation	6	8	11	-	3	4
Court case ISIS	23	19	21	12	25	6
Court case terror suspect	-	-	1	4	7	4
Court case other	4	5	3	5	16	6
Other	2	4	8	7	16	16

Themes Female Militants (including year trends)

Theme	# articles	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
General							
Departure (2013-2015)	4	-	1	-	-	2	2
Returned	8	1	4	1	1	1	-
Return attempt (Turkey)	18	8	3	4	-	1	2
Escape camp (2019)	5	-	-	-	-	3	2
Profile							
Profile general (3 2013; 3 2014)	24	6	6	3	3	5	1
Profile sympathizer	7	2	3	1	1	-	-
Profile ISIS + ISIS returnee	28	7	6	6	1	5	3
Profile camp 2017-2019	19	1	7	3	4	3	1
Legislation							
Aided return (26 2019)	34	11	4	8	1	4	6
Court sympathizer (5 2016)	7	-	-	-	6	1	-
Court returnee	22	7	8	1	3	-	3
Other							
	4	1	3	1	-	-	-

Trends Female Militants

The seven subframes help to provide a clear picture of how female militants are framed in the media. Not all articles on female militants used framing. Before addressing the findings for each subframe, I will address the overall findings and trends found in my analysis. At each frame is the table with the distribution of the subframes.

The framing has changed by giving the women more agency on the basis of her gender. However, from the first to the last article, the Supporting wife and mother frame was the most frequent and consisted frame. This frame was used by all newspapers, with all types of narratives and throughout the entire researched period. Even after 2017, when the discourse turned towards more agentive and threatening frames, was this still the most dominant frame.

The balance of frames changed. Before 2017, the frames Brainwashed Medusas and the Romantics seeking husbands were used frequently. Over time, female militants gained more agency and their potential danger was more emphasized. In 2017 changed the framing of female militants. The number of articles increased but also the types of frames changed. Various elements might have influenced the changes in frames. Two elements increased the agency of female militants:

Firstly, in October 2017, ISIS called for the active participation of women; this happened after the territory held by the Caliphate was lost. It is debatable whether “this represents a dawning of gender equity and female empowerment within IS or purely responded to tactical necessity” (Vale, 2019,

p.5). Whatever the reasoning, this changed the perception of the women of ISIS, into a more active role. In addition, the female al-Khansaa brigade became widely known.

Secondly, in November 2017, the Dutch AIVD issued a publication specifically on female militants. The report: "Jihadist women, a threat not to be underestimated" stated that the role of women should not be underestimated, and that these women are at least as committed to jihadism as men (AIVD, 2017). This contributed to the number of (Dutch) publications on the statements from the AIVD. This likely influenced the overall discourse to be less oriented at victimizing female militants and instead acknowledge their potential influence and threat. The Belgium authorities did not publish such information and are therefore unlikely to have influenced the discourse in such a matter. In addition, by 2017 there were various court cases involving female jihadists. After 2017, female militants who traveled to Syria/Iraq were treated legally the same as male foreign fighters.

However, 2017 was also the year in which internet became restricted for the female militants. They were no longer able to online recruit and spread propaganda from the Caliphate. Without the internet some women lost their narrative and ability to communicate from the Caliphate. The stories women told from the Caliphate were far from them being innocent and passive. In addition, various women recruited in the Low countries for ISIS. Until 2017, women had the ability to demonstrate their agency from the Caliphate. At the same time the framing of female militants by Dutch and Belgian newspapers was infantilizing, victimizing, and kind. In fifteen articles the woman herself was the narrative for her framing and influenced her own framing. However, these were solely the Medea subframes, and the Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation. Even in 2017 and earlier.

The framing based on gender has changed. However, they are continuously othered. Analyzing female jihadist militants showed me that these women are othered in terms of their gender and their religion. Muslim women became an "object of otherness" (Martini, 2018, p.460). These women have little agency because they are women, they have even less agency because they are Muslim women. With Muslim women, the gender discourse does not stand alone, it intersects with the discourse of Neo-Orientalism, where Muslim women are seen through a Western discourse. This notion is present in all the frames. Female militants have radicalized due to a "barbaric religion," and are often considered victims of "Islamic patriarchy" (Martini, 2018, p.467). The blame for the radicalization of female militants is placed on their gender and religion. For example: "Tatiana was a happy girl who did well in school. But once she fell for the charms of her Moroccan neighbor, the contact with her family and friends diluted. She clung to the strict rules of Islam" (Meijer, 2013). There were no issues with Tatiana, until she fell in love with a Muslim man.

In various European countries issues such as headscarves, female genital mutilation, honor crimes, and forced marriages have been put on the political agenda. And although these debates might hold validity, they are according to the discourse of cultural otherness and 'position women's bodies as central to a controversy over clashing cultures' (Roggeband & Lettinga, 2016, p.239). The process of radicalization could also be described by the changing appearances, from skinny jeans to fully veiled. Especially in the case of converts. Being veiled stands for being oppressed - and for having a lack of choice. Female militants are still othered from the non-militant women in the Belgium and the Netherlands. In the case of a woman who was raised Muslim, increased veiling was also a sign to her father of her radicalization: "When she was still in the Netherlands, I already knew that it was very wrong. About four months before her departure, I saw a woman walking in niqāb in a shopping center. "Hey Daddy," said the woman. It was Meryem. She had always worn a headscarf. But a niqāb? She left shortly after" (Groen, 2017c). Conversely, non-Islamic clothing represents a reconversion and deradicalization: "Without a headscarf, but with a hood over the head and white sneakers on her feet, Candide H. appeared in court in Bruges to account for her participation in a terrorist organization" (Maenhout, 2019).

In 2019, the focus of the articles both in the Netherlands and Belgium was on female militants in Kurdish camps, and whether the governments should aid in their return. The main difference compared to 2017 and 2018 was the increased number of publications and the topics of the articles. The narrative changed to further other the women of ISIS. The sentiment towards the female militants in Kurdish camps is that 'they are not our problem.' In articles, there is the frequent use of 'us' versus 'them.' An example from a Belgian article: female militants are not: "lost daughters that Belgium takes back home [...] They are hardened foreign fighters. We know that they are claiming the benefits of their Belgian citizenship now that they are trapped by geopolitical complications, while they hate Belgian democracy" (Verhoeven, 2019). Female militants might have willingly travelled to join ISIS, they radicalized in the Netherlands and in Belgium. By othering female militants, there is no need for the Dutch and Belgian governments or societies to acknowledge that it is also their problem.

Medusa

In this part of the analysis are the findings per frame addressed, the frames are divided into its subframes. Each frame part holds a table with the distribution of each of the subframes in the overall percentage of the presence of the subframe and the distribution by year and newspaper. The first subframe in the Medusa category is a victimizing frame, the second subframe predominantly linked

to individual cases, and the last subframe is the frame less often used in the articles, possibly because it requires proof of mental issues.

Frame	# articles	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
Medusa	56	22	10	9	8	4	3
Medusa brainwashed	24 (17.1%)	9 1 2014 2 2015 2 2017 4 2019	8 1 2014 1 2016 3 2017 1 2018 2 2019	3 2 2016 1 2017	2 1 2015 1 2019	1 1 2019	1 1 2013
Medusa dangerous	25 (17.8%)	12 5 2017 1 2018 6 2019	1 1 2019	4 1 2014 3 2019	4 2 2016 2 2019	3 1 2015 1 2016 1 2017	1 1 2016
Medusa mental issues	7 (5%)	1 1 2019	1 1 2019	2 2 2019	2 2 2017	-	1 1 2017

Brainwashed

Western women are Helens, but they are brainwashed or indoctrinated by ISIS to join them and therefore these women have become Medusas. One article notes: “Women who have fallen in the hands of recruiters are indoctrinated. You can compare this work method to a sect. All women are victims” (“Alle vrouwen zijn slachtoffer,” 2015). In this frame the process of becoming a female militant is often mentioned, as is the normal life before radicalization: “a cute girl, with a smile to remember. Red headscarf. No jihad bride, more funny, cheeky little sister. But when she walked away from home, she wore a black headscarf and a black dress over her ballerinas” (Oostveen, 2014). In articles on radicalization was this illustrated with by statements about the changing clothing: from short skirts, to a headscarf, to a burqa. Veiling as example of radicalization. The veil is seen as a cultural, religious, and racialized symbol not just for Arab womanhood, but for the Arab identity at large (Schmidt, 2014). It emphasized the othering, but also that she was once a Helen.

Veiling is used as a visual indicator of radicalization; it also happens the other way around. This frame focuses on the ‘lost daughters’ and some have tried to return. A journalist notes: “I understand why she is rarely recognized. She does not look like the girl from her Kurdish interview. Less skinny, less pale, but above all: no headscarf. ‘I finished it the day I got back to the Netherlands. I am done with the faith.’” (Rueb, 2018) The same happened in various articles on court cases of returned women. They emphasized that the woman wore jeans and no headscarf, to demonstrate that she once again was ‘one of us.’ This frame has been used predominantly in the Netherlands. It is possible that this is

due to the higher number of articles focusing on drawing up a profile of (individual) female militants; these profiles are typically heavily influenced by family and friends who contributed to the articles. The frame is used in later dates in connection to (possible) prosecution.

Dangerous

This frame emphasizes the danger of a female militant. She is not just a threat, but her gender makes for an added threat. For most newspapers, this frame was used in individual cases. However, this frame has one clear outlier: the Dutch popular-right newspaper *de Telegraaf*, with half of all articles in this frame. In November 2017, the AIVD published the report: *Jihadist women, a threat not to be underestimated*. This report gained a lot attention, and newspapers stopped automatically victimizing female militants. *De Telegraaf* mostly changed its framing. Other newspapers gave women more agency, *De Telegraaf* emphasized the danger of female militants even more, presenting them as “ticking time bombs” (“Tikkende tijdbommen,” 2017). Female militants were generalized as an extremely dangerous threat to Dutch society, which is in line with anti-Islam discourses of popular right-wing politicians.

The Belgian articles frame one female militant Fatima Aberkan as dangerous during her court case for recruiting, calling her the ‘jihadist mother’ and fearing her release: “There are serious reasons to fear that upon release, the woman will commit new terrorist crimes and evade the judicial process” (“6X Gevaarlijk,” 2016). Most articles of this frame – aside from *De Telegraaf* – used this frame on individual women, not as a generalizing frame on all female militants.

Mental Issues

By focusing on personal problems writers can ignore the political commitment of women choosing militancy. The argument here is that only because of mental issues - a difficult youth, a violent husband, or a low IQ - these women have joined a terrorist organization. Implied is often a call for the audience to feel compassion for these women. However, the focus on mental issues as the cause for women to choose militancy infantilizes their choice and irrationalizes the act committed. One article interviewed a scientist to talk about the women joining ISIS, saying: “you almost always see a past of problems that had nothing to do with origin. The women almost all come from families where there was drinking or drug problems, domestic violence or even sexual abuse” (Van Vlierden, 2017).

This frame is not often used as the dominant frame of an article. Journalists have used this frame of mental issues to create a sense of sympathy for specific women. It is not used as a structural explanation for women to become female militants. However, this frame is often used by journalists

as a secondary frame, especially the link to a difficult youth. For example: “She lived in a teenage mother house with her one-year-old daughter, born from a past relationship, the father no longer in the picture [...] When she turned eighteen, they moved in together. Ibrahim [her husband] did little in the house. He prayed and played games. And he hit her. Initially occasionally, but soon every day” (Rueb, 2018).

In some cases, a woman’s mental issues have been linked to her conversion to Islam. For example, this element is used with one female militant with a difficult youth: “Eventually she finds - through Moroccan-Dutch friends - safety in Islam and especially in the headscarf” (Rueb, 2018). This is linked to the notion that the idea of Western women willingly joining Jihadist extremist groups is considered unsettling, so there must be something pathologically wrong with these women. However, cases in which specific mental illnesses are reported are few. Articles in this frame appeared in relation to women’s return to Belgium and the Netherlands. It has been used in court cases by the female militant’s lawyers as an extenuating circumstance for being linked to ISIS.

Medea

The Medea frame has the most frequent subframe of all (22.1 percent): the supporting wife and mother. Journalists convey this frame through the frequent use of the term ‘jihad-bride.’ The Medea frames focuses on maternalism, which the supporting wife and mother are the essence of, and this subframe has been used with all types of narratives. However, in the case of female jihadists there is another crucial aspect: religion. This second subframe fits well within the Medea main frame. The focus lies on the female jihadist wishing to contribute to her religious community and to raise her children better and ‘appropriately’ in the Caliphate, something which seemed impossible in the Low Countries.

Frame	# articles	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
Medea	44	5	13	4	3	12	7
Medea supporting mother and wife	31 (22.1%)	4 1 2016 1 2017 1 2018 1 2019	10 2 2014 1 2016 2 2017 3 2018 2 2019	2 1 2018 1 2019	2 1 2016 1 2018	8 1 2013 1 2015 1 2016 2 2017 3 2019	5 1 2013 1 2016 1 2018 2 2019
Medea religion	13 (9.3%)	1 1 2019	3 1 2014 2 2019	2 1 2018 1 2019	1 1 2017	4 2 2017 1 2018 1 2019	2 1 2014 1 2018

Supporting Wife and Mother

This was the most used frame in articles on female militants. This frame is most prominent in left-wing newspapers and less so in right-wing elite and popular newspapers, both in Belgium and the Netherlands. *De Volkskrant* and *De Morgen* both had more articles in this frame than the other newspapers combined. Nevertheless, this frame is more dominant than the tables might suggest. In the articles in which women were not the primary topic, women were exclusively mentioned as the wife of a foreign fighter.

The often-used terms of Jihadi-bride or ISIS-widow strengthen this idea that female militants are merely supporting wives and mothers. It did not matter who she was or what she did, she was represented as merely the wife or mother: “They are neither fighter nor victim, but devoted wives who are primarily concerned with caring for husbands and children” (Groen & Sahadat, 2017).

Through framing female militants as wives, their actions are represented as being part of her husband’s agenda. One Dutch female militant states in an interview: “He made only one wrong choice by joining IS [and I followed]” (“De IS-vrouwen...” 2017). These women would not be where they were or do what they did if not for their husbands, as they are committed wives to their husbands, and they want to keep their family together. They chose to run their household in the Caliphate, instead of the Low countries. Due to the patriarchal structure of ISIS, most women end up in mother and wife roles, which leads to “further confusing the discourse: they become ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women at the same time” (Martini, 2018, p.461). Western women join ISIS, which is difficult to comprehend for Western audiences, but these women do this based on keeping their family together, which is easier to comprehend. This means that they still keep up with the Western ideal of a good and supporting wife and mother. It is therefore possible that this is the reason for this frame to be so popular.

Religion

This subframe builds on the traditional mother frame. Jihadism is justified in religion. For some female militants religion is also their motivation for joining ISIS. This frame focuses on contributing to the Islamic community and raising children according to Islamic values and rules, something which seemed impossible in the Low Countries.

Belgium and the Netherlands have a sizable Muslim community: according to the Eurobarometer 90.4 6.8 percent of the Belgian population is Muslim, and 0.8 percent of the Dutch population (Eurobarometer 90.4, 2018). These are the only data on religion in Belgium, as the Belgian governmental statistics agency Statbel is not allowed to research religion. However, the data

provided by Eurobarometer are conservative. The Dutch Statistics Agency CBS estimates 5 percent of the Dutch population is Muslim (Schmeets, 2016). Most Muslims in the Low Countries are first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants who tend to come from a lower stratum of society and are or feel that they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic background and/or religion (Van San, 2015). There is a sentiment among Dutch Muslims that the freedom to practice their religion is impeded; examples of this obstruction include the ban on the headscarf and the niqāb, controversies and debates surrounding ritual slaughter and the circumcision of boys (Van San, 2015, p.333).

A female militant shares in one article an anecdote from before she travelled to Syria: “One of the first times I went out with a niqāb I was told to go back to my own country (laughs). Many people cannot imagine that as a non-Arab you can also be a Muslim” (Alde’emeh, 2018). After 2011, terrorism is “seen as a problem that originates in Islam and which needs to be addressed by the ‘Muslim community’” (Meeteren & Oostendorp, 2018, p.525). All Muslims are suspects, as they are seen as “the other” and as opposed to Western values.

For various female militants, religion played a large role in their choice to join ISIS. They believed that this was fulfilling their duty of jihad and that a life in the Caliphate would allow them to live freely as Muslims. One article on two female militants states: “They present themselves as devout, Muslim women who have left for Syria because they experienced Islamophobia in the Netherlands and wanted to live by their faith” (Beemsterboer, 2019b). Another article from five years earlier quotes a text message a female militant sent to her father: “I am living in dignity and honor under the banner of Allah. Not a single unveiled woman walks down the street here. Everyone is covered and that gives us a very soothing feeling. We have left the land of the infidels behind us” (Meijer, 2014).

The religion frame on female militants has one unique aspect. In most of the cases this frame has been used when the narrative in the article were the female militants themselves, who were in the Caliphate or who supported the cause from the Low Countries. This is an important element as it is not the general narrative of journalists or other people, but of female militants themselves. In addition, this frame continues to be used by the women who remained faithful and devout Muslimas, even after the fall of the Caliphate and ISIS.

This means this frame says little about generalized societal or journalistic framing, and more about the newspapers who give way for female militants to influence their own framing. This frame is most dominant in left-wing newspapers, both in the Netherlands and in Belgium. However, not by much,

meaning that there is also in right-wing popular newspapers space for a frame dominated by the female militants' own narratives.

Penthesilea

The Penthesilea frame focuses on sexuality. Within this main frame are two subframes. The first subframe is one of emancipation and focuses on a discourse in which female militants aim to liberate themselves from gender oppression. The second subframe is the frame of seeking a husband and the romantic notions of the Caliphate. This second subframe seems to be an opposite of sorts of the first subframe, first, as it often represents female militants as naive women who want to be to be submissive wives.

Frame	# articles	De Telegraaf	De Volkskrant	NRC	HLN	De Morgen	De Standaard
Penthesilea	40	9	10	2	5	7	7
Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation	22 (15.7%)	3 1 2017 2 2019	7 1 2014 1 2017 2 2018 3 2019	-	3 1 2015 1 2017 1 2019	4 1 2013 1 2014 1 2015 1 2019	5 1 2015 4 2019
Penthesilea Seeking husband/ romantic notion	18 (12.9%)	6 1 2014 1 2015 3 2017 1 2019	3 2 2014 1 2019	2 1 2014 1 2015	2 1 2017 1 2019	3 1 2013 1 2014 1 2015	2 1 2018 1 2019

Emancipation/ Just like Men

Joining ISIS has also been seen as an adventure and liberation. This has been an argument often used for male foreign fighters. Accordingly, for female militants "it is not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape" (Khan in Martini, 2018, p.469). It could be an escape from their life in the Netherlands or Belgium or as a form of emancipation and liberation. The frame acknowledges the agency of these women.

For women themselves donning a hijab or joining ISIS could feel as a liberation or even emancipation. An interview with a Belgian terrorist expert states: "Someone from a European security service told me, 'ISIS is damn good at gender mainstreaming.' [...] ISIS finally gave those women recognition" (Peeters, 2019b). This frame emphasizes the gender liberation aspect, it represents the women as struggling for gender equality. These women are just as committed to the cause as men and they are motivated for the same reasons as men. This frame holds women to have the highest level of agency,

compared to the other frames. This is counter to the Neo-Orientalist belief that Islam represses women.

Journalists often use this frame, especially in the Netherlands. Most articles applying this frame come from the left-elite newspaper *De Volkskrant*, which seems to be in line with their ideological positioning of gender equality. The AIVD rapport “Jihadist women, a threat not to be underestimated” (2017) could have influenced not solely the Medusa dangerous frame, but also this frame. The AIVD results demonstrate an “absurd form of emancipation among jihadists” (Voermans, 2017). The AIVD called for more acknowledgement of agency of female militants, and *De Volkskrant* used a more agentive frame to consider female militants as equals to male militants.

Seeking Husband/ Romantic Notion

The image of three young British schoolgirls in the airport on their way to join ISIS, the Bethnal Green trio, is one of the best-known images of Western female jihadist militants⁵. Young, single girls and women are likely the biggest mystery for the West of all those who joined ISIS. As soon as unmarried women joined ISIS they are married off, as this contributes to the nation-building aim of the organization. As a result, Western media reduces female militants’ actions to a “fervent desire to be married” (Martini, 2018, p.466). This frames female militant as erotically dysfunctional. These women were unable to find a husband and therefore joined a terrorist organization to still fulfil their biological destiny as a woman to be a wife and mother.

Part of this frame is the notion of the ‘erotomania,’ in which women are represented as sexually deviant. Therefore, these women are portrayed as irrational and driven by their hormones. This frame especially has a tendency to infantilize the female jihadists: “the little ‘jihad bride’ should not have escaped head over heels to Syria” (“Wortels jihadclub in Maastricht,” 2017). The sister of a female militant states in an interview: “Pedagogically, it is irresponsible to ridicule puppy love heartbreak [...] but it is just hormones” (Ezzerioli, 2014). Puppy love does not imply great or reasonable agency. Even experts have used this frame to describe the female militants’ motivations: “These are girls with great admiration for men who are willing to give their lives for Islam. They fall for ‘real men.’” (Vanlommel, 2015).

This frame is mostly used by journalists in the earlier years of my research. In 2014, this was the most popular frame in the Netherlands. Then, a lack of knowledge of the many cruelties committed by ISIS may have contributed at the time to accepting this discourse of romantic naivety. In later uses of this

⁵ See Appendix for the picture of the Bethnal Green trio.

frame the focus is less on young girls' romantic notions, and more on their sexual desires: "sex formed a not to be underestimated incentive [full of] brooding desire. Many Muslim women who left for Syria or Iraq between 2012 and 2015 were excited and aroused by male recruiters" ("Seks was drijfveer voor moslima," 2019). In this representation, these women were still driven by their (female) hormones.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the representation of Dutch and Belgian female militants in six Dutch and Belgian newspapers, between 2013 and 2019. The aim of this thesis was not to study how true these characterizations are, but to determine how these women are characterized. I drew a comparison between the Dutch and Belgian newspapers based on archetypical frames of female militants. I used three main frames – Medusa, Medea and Penthesilea – and seven subframes: Medusa brainwashed; dangerous; mental issues; Medea supporting mother and wife; religion; Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation; seeking husband/ romantic notion.

Belgium and the Netherlands have produced high numbers of foreign fighters compared to their size of their population. Belgium has the highest number per capita, and the Netherlands the highest percentage of female foreign fighters. The number of females among the jihadist foreign fighters of ISIS is considerably higher than in the past. The establishment of a Caliphate offered women a way to participate in roles other than fighter. Yet now the Caliphate is gone and many of its foreign fighters have either died, disappeared, returned, been convicted, or are still waiting to return. We are currently in a post-ISIS era, and it is time to look back.

The research period 2013 – 2019 of my research is much wider compared to other scholars. This period includes the coming up and some of the aftermath of ISIS. My research provided a good overview of changing frames of female militants by journalists. Therefore, my research can contribute to a better understanding of female militants in general and female jihadist militants. It addresses the possible embedded biases in Dutch and Belgian newspapers towards female jihadist militants, gender and religion, in which media is a reflection of society. It may help to better our understanding of how we represent female jihadists. This is important for threat analysis and counter terrorism measures, but also for the levels of fear and islamophobia in society.

This thesis has answered the following research question: How and why have Dutch and Belgian written news media framed female jihadist militants connected to the jihadist organization ISIS in between 2013 and 2019?

I have addressed the indicators of the relative salience of each frame and the difference between the Dutch and Belgian newspapers and the changes over time. There are various conclusions to draw from my analysis, the two most important conclusions are: firstly, the Medea supporting wife and mother is most dominant subframe. Secondly, the framing changed in 2017, although the framing has changed the othering of female militants based on their religion continues. These and other

findings contribute to a better understanding of the stereotyping and the continuous othering of female militants in newspapers and therefore in society and even in politics.

The main finding is that 2017 was a turning point in the framing of female militants. Female militants became more salient and their framing turned more agentive. Two Dutch newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant*, demonstrated that giving female militants more agentive frames does not have to mean the same: *De Telegraaf* framed female militants as dangerous and *De Volkskrant* framed the female militants as emancipated. Overall, all the subframes were used by Dutch and Belgian newspapers. However, the distribution was not equal. The subframe mental problems was rarely used. Belgian newspapers only used the dangerous subframe for individual women. The subframe religion demonstrated not the framing of the media, but the framing of the female militants themselves. The most frequently used and most dominant subframe was that of the supporting mother and wife. Following your husband and wanting to keep your family together can in Western societies not be considered too inexplicable.

When analyzing female jihadist militants in Western media it is impossible not to consider the element of religion. However, framing in relation to religion stayed in the frames of newspapers. Religion might be overrepresented in jihadist specific articles. Religion remained essential to 'other' female militants. Even when women join jihadist organizations for similar reasons as other female militants join other terrorist organizations. The othering of female militants is especially present in the discussion on whether to aid female militants to return to Belgium and the Netherlands from Iraq and Syria.

The stories of female militants have not ended and the discussion on aided return will continue. There are still (June 2020) various Dutch and Belgian women in Syria and Iraq some willingly, others stuck in Kurdish camps. This would be an interesting topic for further research, but it may still be early for that. There are various elements from this thesis which would be interesting for future research. My thesis was limited to the Netherlands and Belgium. Future research could extend on this geographically in different (Western) countries. In addition, the research of this thesis can be done again in ten years, to have the opportunity to truly look back and see if the frames have changed, but also how the women themselves look back. With enough time between and statute of limitations having passed.

One lesson to take away from my thesis is that if we want counter terrorism measures and de-radicalization programs to be effective, we need to look beyond the gender stereotypes and Neo-Orientalist tendencies when looking at female militants. Blaming religion and not considering the

contribution of the Netherlands and Belgium have had on radicalization might set a bad precedent towards the future of radicalizing youth, and towards anti-Islam/Muslim tendencies in the Low Counties.

APPENDIX

Coding Scheme

1. Outlet: De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Het Laatste Nieuws, De Morgen, De Standaard
2. Country: the Netherlands, Belgium
3. Date
4. Content type: news article, in-depth article, opinion, interview or other
5. Source/narrative: Government/officials, Family/friends, Self, Expert/scholar
6. Main theme
7. Place: The Netherlands, Syria/Iraq, returned from Syria/Iraq, Turkey
8. Focus women: specific/individual, general/group
9. Background: Family/upbringing, love life, mental issues, religion, motivation, radicalization etc.
10. Physic: appearance, looks, clothing
11. Dominant Frame:
 - a. Medusa brainwashed
 - b. Medusa dangerous
 - c. Medusa mental issues
 - d. Medea supporting mother and wife
 - e. Medea religion
 - f. Penthesilea committed like men/ emancipation
 - g. Penthesilea Seeking husband/ romantic notion
12. Framing devices

Bethnal Green Trio



Bethnal Green schoolgirls Amira Abase, Kadiza Sultana and Shamima Begum married IS fighters. (2019). [Foto]. <https://news.sky.com/story/islamic-state-brides-where-are-the-female-jihadists-now-11637068>

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