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# The Role of Women in Terrorism

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TERRORISM

by

ZEYNEP BAYAR

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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**ABSTRACT**

## The Role of Women in Terrorism

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The main purpose of this paper is to understand what motivate women to join terrorist groups and why these organizations prefer to work with female terrorists. Although each woman has different reasons to involve in terrorist groups, this research demonstrates 'religious, political and personal' reasons as the major motivating factors. This study also focuses on the question of why women are the targets of terror recruiters. In order to answer these, the research analysis examines 'psychological, gender, and media' factors as major recruitment reasons of terrorist organizations. This study also analyzes the similarities and differences between female terrorists' profiles of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

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Dedicated to my niece Damla Bayar.

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## INTRODUCTION

Terrorism, which is a systematic use of violence, is still one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century. Although there is no universal agreement on the definition of terrorism, it is more broadly based on the use of violence to create fear for political, religious, or ideological reasons. The first wave of modern terrorism emerged in Russia and spread to Western Europe and the United States with anarchism and revolutionary ideas.<sup>1</sup> Thenceforward, people have been exposed to many terrorist attacks for different reasons and thousands perish due to these attacks each year. While some states conduct terror attacks against their own population or foreign targets, others sponsor terrorist groups to protect their national interests.

The purpose of most terror acts is usually assassinating someone, revenge against a community, or spreading fear over a population. For whatever reason, terrorism is one of the critical national security threats for many countries. Combating terrorism efforts permeate nearly every area of nations' budgets. According to Gordon Adams, a national security budget expert, the United States spends far more on counter-terrorism than any other country in the world. Adams estimates this budget as at least \$100 billion a year.<sup>2</sup> Although developed countries and supra-national organizations spend billions of dollars to cope with terrorism, there was a 650% increase in lethal terror attacks on people living

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<sup>1</sup> David Rapoport, "The Four Waves Of Modern Terrorism," *Attacking Terrorism*. Audrey Cronin & James M. Ludes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 46–73.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Sahadi, "The Cost of Fighting Terrorism," *CNN Money*, Nov. 16, 2015, <https://money.cnn.com/2015/11/16/news/economy/cost-of-fighting-terrorism/index.html>

in the world's biggest economies and attacks against civilians increased by 17 percent from 2015 to 2016.<sup>3</sup>

Terrorists are usually viewed as male attackers, but women also play a crucial role in violent acts. Since 1990, the role of women in terrorist groups has dramatically changed. While female terrorists used to play minor roles in these organizations, they began to take leadership roles and become involved in much bloodier attacks. It is surely beyond doubt that when a female is involved in a terror attack, she gets more attention than male terrorists because people want to know what the real underlying causes are which might have driven her to kill people. For this reason, terror organizations recruit more female terrorists than before to draw the attention of media. Bloom also verifies, “From 1985 to 2010, female bombers committed over 257 suicide attacks (representing about a quarter of the total) on behalf of many different terrorist organizations. The percentage of women since 2002 in some countries exceeds as much as fifty percent of the operatives.”<sup>4</sup>

The main purpose of this study is to understand what motivates women to join terrorist groups and why these organizations may prefer to work with female terrorists. Although each woman has different personal reasons for joining a terrorist movement, the literature on women and terrorism shows that religious, political, and personal factors are one of the major reasons that motivate women to perform deadly terror acts.

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<sup>3</sup> “The the Global Terrorism Index (GTI),” *Institutes for Economies and Peace (EIP)*, 2017, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Mia Bloom, “Bombshells: Women and Terror,” *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

This research study will also try to find answers to the question of why women are the targets of terrorist recruiters. In response to this question: Psychological war, higher kill rates, huge media attention, and giving birth to future fighters will be examined as four main causes behind the recruitment of female terrorists. Lastly, this study will seek to contribute to the literature by analyzing the similarities and differences between the role of women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

This qualitative research provides four chapters for the readers by using secondary sources such as: books, academic journals, newspaper articles and academic databases. Firstly, chapter one will mention the existing literature on women and terrorism. It will also analysis the researchers' arguments and findings on female terrorists' motivating factors. In chapter two, this study will develop a critical-historical analysis of terrorist incidents that were conducted or orchestrated by female terrorists. While elaborating the incidents it will follow David Rapoport's "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism" theory. Chapter three will examine female terrorists' motivating reasons (push factors) and terrorist organizations' recruitment strategies (pull factors). In this chapter, the study will also use Mia Bloom's "Four R:s" theory to deeply analyze female terrorists' individual motivating factors. Lastly, chapter four will compare and contrast the role of women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Terrorism has been an age-old phenomenon for many centuries, but it became a central issue for political science in the first quarter of the twentieth century. After the September 11 attacks, the amount of academic research on terrorism has risen significantly. According to Richard Jackson, the co-founder of *Critical Terrorism Studies*, scholarly papers on terrorism have increased by 300% since 9/11.<sup>5</sup> Although there has been a growing interest in studies around terrorism, the relation between terrorism and gender, which has still tended to be ignored, needs more systematically researched in the literature. For example, while many scholars mostly analyze the motivations driving women to join terrorist organizations, they fail to examine the main causes behind female terrorist recruitment in depth. On the other hand, researchers have difficulties in accessing the reliable data and information about the field of study because governments are wary of disclosing the real causes of the problem. The researchers also avoid collecting information from primary sources due to security issues. Although many researchers are not well disposed to understand the role of women in terrorism, there are some important contributors to the literature.

*Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*, one of Mia Bloom's informative books, provides a significant introduction for people who are not familiar with terrorism studies.<sup>6</sup> In her book, the author examines the reasons for female involvement in terror activities and makes a more detailed analysis of personal motivating factors.

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<sup>5</sup> Jessica Shepherd, "The Rise and Rise of Terrorism Studies," *The Guardian*, July 2, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/jul/03/highereducation.research>

<sup>6</sup> Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Bloom categorizes women terrorists' personal motivations into four reasons: revenge, redemption, relationship, and respect (this study will also elaborate these four reasons in Chapter 3). To understand these causes intimately, she interviews female terrorists who previously were involved in terrorist groups and analyzes case studies about women terrorists that live in different conflict zones: Sri Lanka, Germany, Somalia Palestine, Chechnya, Indonesia, Israel, Iraq, and Turkey. Bloom also underlines the reality that governments and media have underestimated the role of women in terror activities.

The existing literature on women and terrorism provides different perspectives on female terrorists' individual motivations. Miranda Alison<sup>7</sup>, Debra Zedalis<sup>8</sup>, Robert Pape<sup>9</sup> and Cindy Ness<sup>10</sup> are some of the researchers focus on these questions through traumatic life events, chronological order of attacks and case descriptions. Jacques and Taylor's article *Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons*, differs from these researchers' studies because the authors provide a statistical analysis that cover a wide range of geographical areas and various terrorist groups involved in the Israeli- Palestine conflict.<sup>11</sup> For their research analysis, Jacques and Taylor use primary data and examine cases of the largest regional terrorist organizations such as:

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<sup>7</sup> Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam." *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Debra D. Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers. Carlisle Barracks*. (PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terror* (NY: Random House Books, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Cindy D. Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor. "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008).

the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, LTTE, Al Qaeda, the Al-Asqa Brigade, Hamas and Fatah's Tanzim militant group. The authors analyze the biographical accounts of 30 female and 30 male suicide bombers and conclude that while female suicide terrorists are motivated by personal reasons, males prefer to join terrorist groups due to religious and nationalistic reasons. In their article, Jacques and Taylor also mention Vetter and Perlstein's earlier research on the relationship between gender equality and female involvement in terrorism. While Vetter and Perlstein think that these two variables have a positive correlation, Jacques and Taylor do not accept their assumption as a motivating factor.<sup>12</sup>

Anat Berko and Edna Erez, the authors of the *Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?* analyze Palestinian women's political violence and liberation movements by interviewing 14 Palestinian women who were imprisoned in Israeli prisons due to security offenses.<sup>13</sup> In their study, the authors who evaluate Palestinian women's social and personal involvement in terrorism argue that the Palestinian female freedom fighters have a secondary role in terrorist groups. Berko and Erez's interview study also shows that the Palestinian women were mostly involved in these terrorist activities for resisting patriarchal structure and they used "the Palestinian national struggle as a "respectable" means to express their opposition."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the women who attended the interview asserted that although they were disposed to take key roles in these activities, the Palestinian male terrorists regarded them as weaker sex and did not allow them to become involved in suicide attacks.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Gender Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no.6 (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 511.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Robert Pape, the pioneering contributor to the study of suicide terrorism, provides a statistical study on the subject of suicide bombing in his book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*.<sup>16</sup> In this study, Pape analyzes 315 suicide attacks, occurring between 1980-2003 and concludes that democracies are the most common target of suicide terrorism. Although Pape's book does not specifically focus on female suicide bombers, he draws some inferences from suicide attackers' genders. According to the author's survey results, although Al Qaeda male terrorists did not employ any female suicide attackers in their actions, the Palestinians used 6 female attackers; the Lebanese used 6; the Tamil Tigers used 23; the Chechens used 14 and the PKK used 10 female attackers.<sup>17</sup> Pape then develops a hypothesis that "Islamic fundamentalism (which frowns on female warriors in general) may actually reduce the number of suicide terrorists by discouraging certain categories of individuals from undertaking the act."<sup>18</sup>

*The Rise and Fall of Italian Terrorism*, a book about Italian terrorism by Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank in 1987, assesses the role and effect of terrorism in industrialized societies in Italian politics, by carrying out an analysis of 2,512 people involved in terrorist crimes from 1970 to 1984.<sup>19</sup> The study addresses two distinct waves of terrorism: reaction to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and the exclusion of the communist party from power in the mid-1970s. Weinberg and Eubank conclude that although terrorism damaged the body politic in Italy, it could not defeat Italian

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<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terror*. (NY: Random House Books, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank, "Italian Women Terrorists," *Terrorism* 9, no.3 (1987).

democracy because the country neutralized the terrorist organizations by building public support.<sup>20</sup>

Weinberg and Eubank also contribute to the literature by examining the biographical information of 451 women who joined the Italian terrorist groups and became involved in political violence between 1970 and 1984. In this analysis, Weinberg and Eubank argue that 244 Italian women terrorists had different occupations before joining terrorist groups. For example: 35% of women were students, 23% were clerks, secretaries, nurses or technicians, and 20% were teachers. Through this study, the authors demonstrate that most Italian women terrorists were educated, and fulfilled much the same roles, as did male terrorists.<sup>21</sup> Although the whole book does not specifically focus on the Italian female terrorists' motivating factors, Weinberg and Eubank's study give a significant knowledge about social profiles of the Italian terrorists involved in terror activities from 1970 to 1984. In addition, the study disproves the assumption that 'education is not the only solution to prevent women from terrorist organizations' as well as breaking breaks down the prejudices on 'committing terrorist attack rate are larger for less educated females.'

Moreover, in the article *Women's Involvement in Terrorism*, Weinberg and Eubank give a detailed and complex account of the history of women and terrorism.<sup>22</sup> This study differs from the authors' previous articles because here they also examine other women terrorists' profiles that lived in various countries. In this research, while Weinberg and Eubank list women's terrorist involvement in chronological order, they

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," *Gender Issues* 28, no. 2 (2011).



follow David Rapoport's "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism" theory and group the incidents into four distinct categories (anarchism, nationalism, revolution and religion). According to Weinberg and Eubank, while women mainly gain leadership roles in left wing and revolutionary bands, they only take subordinate roles in right wings groups. The authors also argue that women play peripheral roles in providing backup and support in many religious terrorist groups because female terrorists are only allowed to live in militant camps with other male terrorists if they are either married or blood-related.<sup>23</sup>

Karla J. Cunningham, a pioneer researcher in female terrorism, analyzes the main reasons that driving terrorist organizations to recruit women in her study *Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism*.<sup>24</sup> According to the author terrorist groups have recruited women much more than before because security personnel usually do not consider women as a threat and find it unnecessary to search their bodies. The author also emphasizes that terrorist organizations take advantage of working with female terrorists that are able to wear oversized clothes and strap improvised explosive devices to their stomach to give the impression of late-term pregnancy. Thus, Cunningham concludes that terrorist organizations use women's gender to gain strategic advantage against their enemy. On the other hand, Cunningham argues that female terrorists have more complex reasons than male terrorists. Some dualistic reasons such as collectivist and individualist motivations may drive women to commit terrorist actions.

*Women Gender and Terrorism*, one of the most important books, contributes to the literature by analyzing female terrorists from different perspectives. The first part of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, (2003).

the book gives information about the historical perspectives on ‘Women and Terrorism’ and begins with Farhana Qazi’s study that traces the early female warriors of Islamic cultures.<sup>25</sup> Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg also contribute to the first part of the book by not only giving information about the female terrorists’ violent attacks in jihadist groups but also analyzing other female militants’ lives outside the Islamic world.<sup>26</sup>

The second part of the book touches on the participation of women to the contemporary armed conflicts. In the first chapter, Alisa Stack, focuses on the Chechen rebellion against Russia, giving information about the Chechen women terrorists’ intents, capabilities, and characters. In her study Stack argues that the Chechen women insurgents have different stories than the media displays to the public.<sup>27</sup> Swati Parashar also contributes to second part with her study *Aatish-e-Chinar: In Kashmir, Where Women Keep Resistance Alive*. According to Parashar, women who involved in the Kashmiri nationalist movement, materially and morally supported men for the independence of Kashmir from India. Parashar also argues that these women’s profiles do not fit many women victims of terrorism because they assisted armed militants by their own will.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Farhana Qazi, “The Mujahidaat: Tracing The Early Female Warriors of Islam.” *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 29-56.

<sup>26</sup> Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, “The Gendering of Women’s Terrorism.” *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 57-80.

<sup>27</sup> Alisa Stack, “Zombies Versus Black Widows: Women as Propaganda in the Chechen Conflict.” *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 83-95.

<sup>28</sup> Swati Parashar, “Aatish-E-Chinar: In Kashmir, Where Women Keep Resistance Alive.” *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (University of Georgia Press, 2011) 96-119.

Another chapter, Caron E. Gentry shares her analysis about typical stereotypes for women joined terrorist violence and asserts that women merely involve in terrorism due to exploitation by men. The author exemplifies her arguments by analyzing, PFLP members and the first woman hijacker Leila Khaled.<sup>29</sup> *The Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam*, the last chapter of the second part, addressing the women's involvements in the Tamil Tigers. In this research, Miranda Alison mentions the double standards and gender-based conflicts in terrorist organization.<sup>30</sup>

The third part of the book examines the female terrorists and their activities in Islamic world and Al Qaeda. The first chapter of this section that begins with Jennie Stone and Katherine Pattillo's case study specifically focuses on Al Qaeda's female suicide bombers' profiles and their roles. Stone and Pattillo's research differ from other scholars' studies in showing Al Qaeda's recruiting policy for women.<sup>31</sup> In another chapter, Caron E. Gentry who analyzes the female suicide bombers from the neo-Orientalist lens argues that media displays these women as infertile or submissive wives. Thus, Western culture has difficulties describing Al Qaeda female terrorists' profiles due

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<sup>29</sup> Caron E. Gentry, "The Committed Revolutionary: Reflections on a Conversation with Leila Khaled." *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 30-120.

<sup>30</sup> Miranda Alison, "In The War Front We Never Think That We Are Women: Women, Gender, and The Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam." *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 56-131.

<sup>31</sup> Jennie Stone, and Katherine Pattillo. "Al-Qaeda's Use of Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq: A Case Study." *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 75-159.

to gender prejudice.<sup>32</sup> The third part of the book concludes with Katherine E. Brown's research the *Security and Resistance in Muslim Women's Suicide Terrorism*. The author assesses the current mainstream theories on suicide terrorism and recommends a different framework based on resistance. Brown argues that understanding Muslim women's political violence through the lens of 'resistance' sustains feminist ethics in studies and copes with the "blindness" characteristic of the mainstream in the field.<sup>33</sup> In general, the book *Women, Gender and Terrorism* provides fine assessments of women's roles in terrorism and wide-reaching survey that rebuts stereotypes of women's terror activities. It also gives informative case studies and first personal interviews, elaborating female terrorists' motivation and their personal reasons to join the terrorist groups.

To sum up, although global terrorism brought new funding to the research in this field, it is still marred by a lack of methodological complexity and an absence of primary data.<sup>34</sup> These methodological issues not only influence the field's development but also the quality of research on women and terrorism. According to Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor, the research area has potential problems with regard to the factual accuracy of interviews with female terrorists.<sup>35</sup> Also, it should be taken into consideration that social

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<sup>32</sup> Caron E. Gentry, "The Neo-Orientalist Narratives of Women's Involvement in Al-Qaeda." *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 93-176.

<sup>33</sup> Katherine E. Brown, "Blinded by The Explosion? Security and Resistance in Muslim Women's Suicide Terrorism." *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 194-226.

<sup>34</sup> John Horgan, "The Case for First-Hand Research." *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements, Failures*, ed. Andrew Silke, (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor. "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no.4 (2008).

science covers a broad range of disciplines. Researchers may experience the same problem while there are doing an interview or conducting research on any subject. Thus, this problem is not specific to women and terrorism studies.

After the establishment of new terrorist groups and changes in global terrorism, some major arguments on women's involvement in terrorism, are not completely valid anymore. For example, Pape believes that Islamic fundamentalism that frowns on female warriors may decrease the number of women suicide terrorists.<sup>36</sup> Although Pape's hypothesis was possibly valid when his book was published in 2007, the Islamic State's women terrorism activities since then disproved his argument because the organization encouraged women to take up arms. For instance, there were approximately 200 women who immigrated to Syria from Western countries to join the Islamic State in 2014. Also, their numbers in 2015 more than doubled and reached over 550 women.<sup>37</sup> This indicates that the Islamic State might differ from many jihadist groups like Taliban and Al Qaeda in assigning women a direct role like being a suicide bomber.

As a different argument, Weinberg and Eubank state that women only take subordinate roles in right wings groups and their involvement in attacks tended to be less lethal, resulting in fewer deaths and injuries than exclusively male attacks.<sup>38</sup> Overall, these three authors' research is very important at informing about the women terrorist

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<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terror*. (NY: Random House Books, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Erin M. Saltman, and Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: ISIS and The Gender Phenomenon," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," *Gender Issues* 28, no.2 (2011).

attacks and their impact on world history. But as is the case with Robert Pape's hypothesis, Weinberg and Eubank's argument is not completely valid because the Islamic State's women terrorists took key roles in terror acts.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Lindsey O'Rourke who did a quantitative analysis on kill rates of terrorists found that female terrorists have higher kill rates than males<sup>40</sup> (This study will mention O'Rourke's analysis in Chapter 3).

Researchers have different thoughts on reasons that drive women into terrorist actions. Berko and Erez think that Palestinian women were mostly involved in these terrorist activities for resisting patriarchal structure.<sup>41</sup> Jacques and Taylor who disagree with this argument assert that there is no relationship between gender equality and female involvement in terrorism. They also believe that female suicide terrorists are motivated by personal reasons rather than religious and nationalistic factors.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Karla J. Cunningham and Mia Bloom who have almost similar thoughts about the complexity of motivating factors agree on the collectivist and individualist motivations' effects on women and terrorism. In conclusion, the findings of this research, are also consistent with Cunningham and Bloom's thoughts, will demonstrate 'personal, political and religious motivations as major reasons

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<sup>39</sup> Eliza Griswold, "Firebrands." *New York Times*, January 29, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/books/review/wanted-women-the-lives-of-ayaan-hirsi-ali-and-aafia-siddiqui-by-deborah-scroggins-book-review.html>

<sup>40</sup> Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no.4 (2009).

<sup>41</sup> Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Gender Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no.6 (2007).

<sup>42</sup> Karen Jacques, and Paul Taylor. "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no.4 (2008).

## CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF WOMEN AND TERRORISM

Terror was derived from the Latin verb ‘terrere’, which meant ‘to frighten. The Romans were the first users of the term “terror cimbricus” to define the state of fear in Rome in response to the approach of the fighters of the Cibri tribe in 105 B.C.<sup>43</sup> During the French Revolution, Maximilien Robespierre who was the leader of the Jacobins (political club) also brought this fear to the people in the period of the Reign of Terror, which was ended with the fall of Robespierre on July 27, 1794.<sup>44</sup> In this period, English political philosopher Edmund Burke was the first person to use the word ‘terrorist’ in the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*. When the Reign of Terror was over, people became more familiar with the term ‘terrorism’.<sup>45</sup> Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, terrorists were usually viewed as male attackers but women also began to play crucial roles in violent acts over the following centuries.

Although there is not a certain and generally accepted scientific theory of terrorism in the literature, the term mostly refers to “the use of extreme fear to intimidate people.”<sup>46 47</sup> In addition, some governments and societies use the definition of ‘terrorism and terrorist groups much different from other nations. In the following chapters, this

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Jackson, and Samuel Justin Sinclair. *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Brett Bowden, “The Terrors of Our Times,” *Social Identities* 13, no: 4 (2007).

<sup>45</sup> Edmund Burke, , and Francis Canavan. *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Incorporated, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Paul Wilkinson, *Political Terrorism*, (New York, Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1974).

<sup>47</sup> “The Definition of Terror,” *Oxford Dictionary*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/terror>

research paper will also use terms such as: “assassin, freedom fighter, guerrilla, insurgent, revolution, liberation, and self-defense movements”. It is important to note here that these nouns and adjectives are not chosen to evoke more acceptable images for a terrorist group (non-governmental organization).

This chapter will give detailed information about the effects of women on the history of terrorism and use David C. Rapoport’s “Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” theory. Rapoport’s argument is one of the most prominent approaches in the literature on terrorist violence. He categorizes the history of modern terrorism into four distinct waves: anarchism, anti-colonialism, socialism, and religious fundamentalism.<sup>48</sup> As it is anticipated from the name of the waves, some major ideologies and religions have inspired women to become involved in violent acts. In the following sections, this research will also list the major terror incidents were conducted by female terrorists in consequence of some major ideologies and religious beliefs.

### **2.1. The First Wave of Modern Terrorism: Anarchism**

The ‘Anarchist wave’ of terrorism is known as the “Golden Age of Assassinations” and grew out of anarchists’ dissatisfaction with capitalist oppression and the power of the Bolshevik Party. In this period, terrorists targeted high-ranking officials to achieve a disproportional response from governments, because they were planning to polarize societies through the excessive force by governments. According to David

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<sup>48</sup> David Rapoport, “The Four Waves Of Modern Terrorism,” *Attacking Terrorism*, Audrey Cronin & James M. Ludes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 46–73.



Rapoport, the first wave of modern terrorism began when Vera Zasulich shot Fyodor Trepov, the governor of St Petersburg in January 1878.<sup>49</sup> As Jay Bergman states Zasulich was Marx's disciple before she espoused his ideology.<sup>50</sup> Through her anarchist attack and political thoughts, Zasulich entered history as a revolutionary martyr and a real female role model for some anarchist women like: Vera Figner and Gesia Gelfman.

The Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) was the first modern organization in history dedicated to systematic political terrorism.<sup>51</sup> The organization was found by Russian university students and targeted political leaders. Vera Figner and Gesia Gelfman were female members of Narodnaya Volya played a key role during the assassination of the Russian Emperor Alexander II in St. Petersburg on March 13, 1881. After his assassination, Figner was condemned to 25 years in prison and Gelfman was sentenced to death.<sup>52</sup> These two women anarchists were treated as heroic revolutionary icons in the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup>

Another Russian revolutionist Fanya Kaplan, was the member of Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) considered Vladimir Lenin a traitor to the revolution and tried to assassinate him on the evening of the August 30th, 1918. Kaplan succeeded in shooting

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Jay Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: A Biography*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Degaev Affair: Terror and Treason in Tsarist Russia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Elena Gapova, "Gender Equality vs. Difference and What Post-socialism Can Teach Us," *Women's Studies International Forum* 59, (2016).

<sup>53</sup> Anna Hillyar, and Jane McDermid. *Revolutionary Women in Russia, 1870–1917*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Lenin, but she fell short of her goal because he stayed alive. Although Lenin's injuries were grave, Bolshevik media played down the situation because his state of health might engender public panic and cause a coup against the regime. In the end, Lenin narrowly escaped death and Fanya Kaplan was arrested by the CHEKA (early secret police agency). During her interrogation, she made the following statement: "My name is Fanya Kaplan. Today I shot at Lenin. I did it on my own. I will not say whom I obtained my revolver. I will give no details. I had resolved to kill Lenin long ago. I consider him a traitor to the Revolution."<sup>54</sup> On September 3, 1918, the Kremlin commandant Pavel Malkov who killed Fanya Kaplan told that he had no hesitation in dispatching a 'traitor' such as Kaplan.<sup>55</sup> Through this assassination attempt, Kaplan remained one of the most famous female assassins in world history.

Emma Goldman (1869-1940), who was a Russian immigrant, made a name for herself as a leading political anarchist and writer in American history. She had revolutionary ideas like anarchism, atheism, sexual freedom, and birth control. Although Goldman did not attempt or involve herself in a terror attack, her political thoughts were considered as a threat to national security. In 1892, Alexander Berkman who was her lover attempted to assassinate industrialist Henry Clay Frick and was condemned to 22 years in prison.<sup>56</sup> In 1917, Goldman was jailed for almost 2 years for arguing against conscription in World War I. After two years, the United States government deported Goldman and Berkman along with 246 left-wing figures to Russia due to committing acts

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<sup>54</sup> Tony Brenton, *Was Revolution Inevitable? Turning Points of the Russian Revolution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 185.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

of violence. For the rest of her life, Goldman spent her remaining days as a self-described “woman without a country” and she died in Canada in 1940. Goldman who was the founder of the anarchist journal *Mother Earth*, was against to all forms of totalitarianism and her thoughts inspired new Leftists and feminists.

In brief, the first wave of modern terrorism was based on anarchism and a series of assassinations attempts on political leaders, ended with World War I. Vera Zasulich, Narodnaya Volya, Fanya Kaplan and Emma Goldman were one of the most influential women of the wave, also inspired other women to resist political authority.

## **2.2. The Second Wave of Modern Terrorism: Nationalism and Anti-Colonialism**

The second wave, which was based on self-determination and anti-colonialism, began with the Treaty of Versailles. Although the “Anarchist wave” died after World War I, terrorist groups continued their bloody attacks under a different name. In the second wave, the term ‘terrorism’ had a negative connotation, thus terrorist organizations began to identify themselves as ‘freedom fighters’ to eliminate the political liabilities of the term.<sup>57</sup>

Like in the “Anarchist wave”, women also had an active role in the “Anti-colonial wave”. Irgun, who described themselves as freedom fighters, aspired to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Geulah Cohen was one of the female members of Irgun and she was working as a radio operator. Although she was arrested by British authorities and

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<sup>57</sup> David Rapoport, “The Four Waves Of Modern Terrorism.” *Attacking Terrorism*. Audrey Cronin. & James M. Ludes, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 46-73.

sentenced to 9 years in prison for involvement in terrorist activities, she escaped from prison in Bethlehem in 1947.<sup>58</sup> In her interview with Tamara Zieve, Cohen described herself as these sentences: “Each woman glows, like the fires that they are setting alight - each one has their own story. Mine is a story of a woman who has fought all my life for my country.”<sup>59</sup>

The socialist political party National Liberation Front (FLN), was the only constitutionally legal party in Algeria, directed the Algerian war of independence against France. Algerian militants founded FLN in 1954 to mobilize the Algerian Muslims for their independence. The National Liberation Front differed from Irgun in assigning women a direct role in carrying out acts of terrorist violence. FLN acquired great fame with its women members Zohra Drif, Dajmila Bouhard, and Samia Lakhdari. On September 3, 1956, they passed the French Army checkpoints and left bombs at different places. In the resulting explosions, 3 were killed and many people wounded.<sup>60</sup> In the spring of 1957, the leader of FLN, Saïidi Yacef assigned young women to organize a bomb attack in a restaurant. After two weeks, another female FLN combatant committed a new terrorist attack in a crowded soccer stadium. In this attack, the number of killed and wounded people was two times higher than the restaurant bombings.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History*. (New York: William Morrow, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Tamara Zieve, “Meeting The Women Lighting The Independence Day Torches: Zionist Fighter Geula Cohen,” *The Jerusalem Post*, May 5, 2014, <https://www.jpost.com/National-News/Geula-Cohen-351377>

<sup>60</sup> Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank, “Women’s Involvement in Terrorism,” *Gender Issues* 28, no.2 (2011).

<sup>61</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006).

To conclude, the second wave comprised the nationalist terrorist organizations from the 1920s to mid-1960s. In this wave, self-determination and anti-colonialism were the major inspirational thoughts that drive women into terrorist actions and women freedom fighters played a crucial role in battling for their national independence.

### **2.3. The Third Wave of Modern Terrorism: Revolution**

The “New Left wave”, based on anti-Americanism, began with the Vietnam War. University students and young people, who were the main interest groups of the third wave, were opposed to the United States and the NATO allies. In addition, kidnappings and airplane hijackings were the most popular terrorist attack methods of the “New Left wave”. According to Rapoport “The first and third waves had some striking resemblances. Women in the second wave had been restricted to the role of messenger and scouts; now they became leaders and fighters once more.”<sup>62</sup>

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was one of the Palestinian organizations founded to struggle against Israel. Leila Khaled, a PFLP member, was the first woman to hijack a plane. On September 6, 1970, Khaled tried to hijack El Al Israel Airlines Flight 219, but the plane made a forced landing in London. Although she was arrested, she served no time in prison because right after Dawson’s Field hijackings, PFLP wanted Leila Khaled back from Britain and she was released.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> David Rapoport, “The Four Waves Of Modern Terrorism,” *Attacking Terrorism*. Audrey Cronin & James M. Ludes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 46–73, p.13.

<sup>63</sup> Eileen McDonald, *Shoot the Women First*. (NY: Random House, 1992).

Italy also experienced the left wing terrorism by Red Brigades (BR), was formed as a paramilitary organization in 1970. Marxist –Leninist philosophy dominated the organization’s culture and BR members sought to separate Italy from NATO and the Western alliance. Red Brigades, best known for its assassination and kidnapping actions, also kidnapped James. L. Dozier (Senior United States officer at NATO) and murdered Aldo Moro (former Italian prime minister). The Red Brigades had many women members who were involved in the organization’s bloody attacks and Margherita Cagol (Mara) was one of the co-founders of the origination. According to Robert Meade: “Mara has made an inestimable contribution of intelligence, of self-denial and of humanity to the birth and growth of workers’ autonomy and of the armed struggle for communism.”<sup>64</sup>

West Germany was confronted with ideologically driven terrorist activity from the 1970s to 1980s. The Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang was the most dangerous leftist terrorist group of the country consisting of many women terrorist. In 1968, Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, the co-founder and intellectual heads of the Red Army Faction (RAF) burned of a Frankfurt department store to show opposition to consumerism.<sup>65</sup> Meinhof and Ensslin were imprisoned in 1975-1976 and Palestinian skyjackers wanted to secure the release of the RAF leaders in exchange for the lives of the Lufthansa passengers in 1978. After the German Special Forces rescued the passengers from the terrorists, Meinhof and Ensslin committed suicide. Although

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<sup>64</sup> Robert C. Meade, *The Red Brigades: The Story of Italian Terrorism*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990) 67.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla*. (Boston MA: Little Brown, 1976).

RAF leaders sacrificed their lives following the failed skyjacking, the RAF militants continued their terror attacks until the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>66</sup>

The Weather Underground, formerly Weatherman, was a militant group of young white Americans formed in 1969. The organization arose from the anti-Vietnam War movement and intended to advance communism through violent revolution.<sup>67</sup> Bernadine Dohrn, Cathy Wilkerson, Susan Stern, Kathy Boudin, Linda Evans, and Judith Clark were the women leaders of the organization.<sup>68</sup> In 1981, the May 19th Communist Organization (M19CO) which revolutionary group formed by members of the Weather Underground robbed a Brinks Armored Car and killed a guard in Nyack, New York. The robbery attack included 9 women out of 19 'M19CO' members.<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion, the terrorist groups that operated in the third wave were against promotions of social and cultural liberation. In this wave, women's participation in political life increased and female terrorists became dominant leaders in revolutionary left communities.

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<sup>66</sup> Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," *Gender Issues* 28, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>67</sup> Laura Lambert, "Weather Underground" *Encyclopedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Weathermen>

<sup>68</sup> Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Brent L. Smith, *Terrorism in America: Pipe Bombs and Pipe Dreams*. (Albany New York: SUNY Press, 1994).

#### 2.4. The Forth Wave of Modern Terrorism: Religion

The fourth wave began with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. According to David Rapoport, the fourth wave is based on religion and Islam is at the heart of this wave. In addition, suicide bombing, carried out by a terrorist, has been the new terrorist attack method in the wave. Like male terrorists, women who have taken part in Islamic groups also conducted the most significant, deadly and profoundly international attacks since 1979. During these attacks, while women bombers target to kill other people, they also sacrifice their life without any hesitation.

The first female suicide bomber Sana'a Mehadli, was a 16-year-old girl committed a suicide attack in 1985. She targeted an Israeli military convoy in South Lebanon. After the attack, two Israeli soldiers were killed and two others injured. Before Mehadli blew herself up on behalf of Lebanon, she recorded her speech and sent a message to her family: "Mother, you taught me to love, to sacrifice and to show respect. Now, I love my country, sacrificing my life and respecting the people of the south."<sup>70</sup>

Wafa Idris, a twenty-seven-years old Palestinian woman, was the first female suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Idris was born in a refugee camp and raised for the fight for national liberation. On January 22, 2002, Idris was carrying 10kg of explosives on her body and blew herself up in a downtown-shopping district in Jerusalem. As a result of the exposition, she killed 2 Israelis and injured many civilians.<sup>71</sup> After 2002, the number of Palestinian women freedom fighters began to increase in the

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<sup>70</sup> Lebanon's Women Warriors, *Aljazeera*, April 24, 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2010/04/2010413115916795784.html>

<sup>71</sup> Dorit Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death," *Signs* 32, no. 4 (2007).



largely secular groups. According to the Israeli analyst Yoram Schweitzer, almost 70 Palestinian women were involved in the suicide bombing attacks and 10 of them lost their lives from the beginning of the Israel- Palestinian conflict to 2007.<sup>72</sup>

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a separatist militant organization fighting for an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority in northern Sri Lanka. Although the Sri Lankan government disbanded the LTTE in 2009, the organization was involved in many terror attacks from 1972 to 2009. For instance, in the early morning of 18 September 1999, the LTTE carried out their bloody attack in Gonagala village. They hacked to death 57 sleeping Sinhalese villagers and 20 of the terrorist troops were reported to be female. Furthermore, the female LTTE terrorists took important roles in the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa.<sup>73</sup> On May 21, 1991, Thenmuli Rajaratnam also known as Dhanu was waiting with others for the arrival of Rajiv Gandhi in Chennai, India. She was carrying a C-4 plastic explosive under a Hindu tunic, giving an impression of late-term pregnancy. Through this attack, Dhanu not only blew herself up but also killed Rajiv Gandhi and 16 people.<sup>74</sup>

In the Middle East, most women desire to join terror organizations not only for religious but also secular reasons. The Kurdistan Workers' Party, also known as Partiya

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<sup>72</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* *Institute for National Security Studies*, 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "From Freedom Birds to Water Buffaloes." *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*. ed. Cindy D. Ness, (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 184-200.

<sup>74</sup> Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK), which is a terrorist organization, based in Turkey and Iraq, has been involved in an armed conflict with Turkey to achieve an independent Kurdish state. After the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK women terrorists committed many suicide bombings to force the Turkish government to release Ocalan. Zeynep Kinaci who was a female member of the PKK committed the organization's first suicide attack. Kinaci graduated with a degree in psychology and was working as hospital personnel in Turkey. On June 30, 1996, Kinaci blew herself up in a military parade in Tunceli, Turkey, killing 10 soldiers and injuring 30 people. Although Zeynep Kinaci was married and pregnant at the time of the attack, she sacrificed herself for the head of the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan.<sup>75</sup> Eylem Newroz, code-named Eylem Yasa, was another PKK member who organized one of the deadliest attacks of PKK in Istanbul on June 7, 2016. She was a female member of the Turkish Freedom Hawks (a PKK offshoot), involved in a car bomb attack, martyring 6 police officers and killing 5 people.

Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist, was one of the Al Qaeda's highest-ranking female allies moved from Karachi, Pakistan to the United States in 1989 to pursue her higher education. She graduated with a degree in biology from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and received her Ph.D. degree on cognitive neuroscience from Brandeis University. When the FBI suspected Siddiqui of linking to Al Qaeda in 2002, she returned to Pakistan with her husband and children. Khalid Sheikh Muhammad (Pakistani Islamist militant was arrested in 2003) also claimed that Siddiqui was an intelligence officer and financier for Al Qaeda. After Khalid Sheikh Muhammad's

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<sup>75</sup> Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. (Brookings Institution Press, 2013). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt4cg7nk>

confession, Siddiqui was placed on the FBI terrorist list, but could not be arrested for five years.<sup>76</sup> On July 17, 2018, Ghazni police caught Siddiqui with her son on suspicion that she might be a suicide bomber.<sup>77</sup> While the US Army and FBI agents were interviewing Siddiqui, she tried to shoot the US personnel but could not succeed. During the firefight, the US soldiers shot Siddiqui twice from her abdomen and she was hospitalized for two weeks before taking to the US for trial.<sup>78</sup> In 2010, Siddiqui was sentenced to 86 years in prison for assaulting and attempting murder charges.<sup>79</sup>

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), officially as the Islamic State (IS), was founded in 1999 is different from many jihadist groups like the Taliban and Al Qaeda, in assigning women direct roles because it encourages women to take up arms. The Islamic State was one of the unique terrorist organizations, had the highest foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) in history. 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries became affiliated with the Islamic State from the establishment of the organization to the fall of the "caliphate".

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<sup>76</sup> Eliza Griswold, "Firebrands." *New York Times*, January 29, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/books/review/wanted-women-the-lives-of-ayaan-hirsi-ali-and-aafia-siddiqui-by-deborah-scroggins-book-review.html>

<sup>77</sup> Juliane von Mittelstaedt, "America's Most Wanted: The Most Dangerous Woman in the World," *Der Spiegel*, November 27, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/america-s-most-wanted-the-most-dangerous-woman-in-the-world-a-593195.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Declan Walsh, "The Mystery of Dr Aafia Siddiqui," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/24/aafia-siddiqui-al-qaida>.

<sup>79</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "Aafia Siddiqui Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 86 Years for Attempting to Murder U.S. Nationals in Afghanistan and Six Additional Crimes," September 23, 2010, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/newyork/press-releases/2010/nyfo092310.htm>

4,761 (13%) of the foreign terrorist fighters were recorded to be women. Eastern Asia had the highest proportion (70%) of recorded the Islamic State-affiliated women, followed by Eastern Europe (44%); Western Europe (42%); the Americas, Australia and New Zealand (36%) and others.<sup>80</sup>

Muriel Dagauque was the first European (Belgium) Muslim female suicide bomber, blew herself up against a U.S. military convoy south of Baghdad in 2005. After Ms. Dagauque married with a Muslim man (Issam Goris), she converted to Islam and they moved to Iraq from Syria to fight with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's terrorist network in Iraq. On November 9, 2005, Ms. Degauque committed a suicide attacked and wounded an American soldier.<sup>81</sup> Another example is that Puji Kuswati who was the members of the Islamic State was the first female suicide bomber of Indonesia. On Sunday, May 15, 2018, Kuswati and her two daughters Fadhila (12), and Famela (9), blew themselves up at Diponegoro Indonesia Church. Her husband and two sons Yusuf (18) and Alif (16) also organized a second attack in Surabaya. During the bombing attack, all family members lost their lives and 13 people killed.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, religion is the strongest inspiration of Islamic terrorist groups that came together for the purpose of supporting Muslims from its opponents. Before the

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<sup>80</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, 2018

<sup>81</sup> Craig S. Smith, "Raised Catholic in Belgium, She Died a Muslim Bomber," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/06/world/europe/raised-as-catholic-in-belgium-she-died-as-a-muslim-bomber.html>

<sup>82</sup> "Surabaya Church Attacks: Indonesian Family Of Bombers 'Had Been To Syria." *BBC*. May 14, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44101070>

Islamic State's terrorist activities, Muslim women were mostly taking secondary roles in the Jihadist movement. But, after Al Qaeda's decline and the Islamic State's expansion in the Middle East, female terrorists began to take on important roles and conduct more deadly suicide attacks.

## **CHAPTER 3: PUSH AND PULL FACTORS OF WOMEN AND TERRORISM**

What motivates women to participate in terrorist activities? Why do terrorist leaders encourage women to be part of their organizations? Why did the number of female terrorists dramatically increase over the years? This transformation leaves open various questions unanswered regarding the motivations of women in terrorist organizations. Understanding the relationships between women and violent extremism is important to decrease the number of terror incidents all over the world. Researchers have been trying to find root causes of female terrorists' extremist violence by focusing on their traumatic life events, family relationships, and ideological background. The evidence demonstrates that women join terrorist organizations for some multiple motives including religious, political, and individual reasons.

Understanding the main reasons why women are the targets of terrorist recruiters is also critical to prevention efforts. Because some women are not the victims of terrorist groups and they may take different roles depending on the groups' political and religious ideologies. For example, while some women only support these extremist groups by educating their children as a mother of next-generation fighters, others may take charge of their deadly operations. Thus, this chapter's second part will also assess the reasons why terrorist organizations recruit women for their violent actions.

### **3.1. Push Factors: Why Do Women Become Terrorists?**

The existing literature on 'women and terrorism' provides multiple and complex causes about the motivating factors that drive women to engage in political violence. While some women terrorists are inspired by revolutionary thoughts, others may find the

sense of gender equality as a worthy cause for joining a terrorist group.<sup>83</sup> Religion is also one of the strongest causes that motivate women for suicide bombing and terror acts. Through these violent acts, women terrorists aim to instill terror among their enemies and non-believers. On the other hand, rape, forced marriage and losing a loved one are some of the personal causes that drive women to participate in terror incidents. Thus, although female terrorists' motivations are various, this research will try to examine the most prevalent causes and elaborate 'religious, political, and personal motivating factors in the following sections.

### 3.1.1. Religious Motivation

Is terrorism a result of religious ideology? Do the major religions have a higher proclivity to influence acts of violence? Although scholars have different arguments on these questions, the (Hindu) Thugs, (Muslim) Assassins, and (Jewish) Zealots have been motivated by religious thoughts throughout history.<sup>84</sup> In Islamic religion, there are basically two main arguments about female participation in Jihadist groups. The first one is that the 'classical legal tradition' made it obligatory for women to travel with a husband or a male relative of the prohibited degree of marriage.<sup>85</sup> Thus, legal tests do not

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<sup>83</sup> Anat Berko, and Edna Erez, "Gender Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no.6 (2007).

<sup>84</sup> Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer: A Translation of Bihayat al-Mujtahid*, 2 vols., trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (UK: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization. Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1994).

permit women's participation in jihad.<sup>86</sup> For this reason, women may only provide medical care, take care of children and raise money for jihadists, because classical Islamic sources are explicitly opposed to arming women. The second argument makes the new phenomenon of female jihadism possible on the battlefield and in martyrdom operations. According to the Islamic legal scholar, Muhammad Khayr Haykal:

“We believe that it is incumbent upon the Islamic state to prepare training centers for women so that they can learn the use of arms and methods of fighting in them. This is because as long as it is possible that jihad could become fard ‘ayn (where the obligation of jihad is upon each and every one of the members of the Muslim community) upon the woman, it is incumbent to train her for this eventuality so that she will be prepared to fulfill this obligation.”<sup>87</sup>

While Al Qaeda kept women away from fighting on a battlefield, the Islamic State supported female jihadism and encouraged women to fight alone or with their husbands on the battlefield. For instance, Muriel Dagauque was one of the suicide bombers of the Islamic State, married to a Muslim man and converted to Islam. She emigrated with her husband from Europe to Iraq to become a martyr and blew herself up on November 9, 2005.<sup>88</sup> Like Muriel Dagauque, Sajida Mubaraark al-Rishawi and Zahro

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<sup>86</sup> Ibn al-Bukhari. *Sahih al-Bukhari*. trans Muhammad Muhsin Khan (United States: Islamic University, 1979).

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Khayr Haykal, *Al-Jihad Wa-L-Qital Fi Al-Siyasa Al-Shara'iyya English: 'Jihad and Fighting According to the Shar'ia Policy*. (Beirut: Dar al-Barayiq, Vol. II, 1993), 1024.

<sup>88</sup> Craig S. Smith, “Raised Catholic in Belgium, She Died a Muslim Bomber,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/06/world/europe/raised-as-catholic-in-belgium-she-died-as-a-muslim-bomber.html>



Holmuradova were some of the famous female suicide bombers that sacrificed their bodies to earn a place beside God. “Many jihadist suicide bombers are reassured that before the first drop of their blood touches the ground they will already be seated beside God (Allah), feel no pain, and only pleasure.”<sup>89</sup>

In brief, women’s religious motivation is as important as their other terror motivating factors and understanding female terrorist’s religious motivations is crucial for governments and counterterrorism experts.

### 3.1.2. Political Causes

As described before, the first wave of modern terrorism began when anarchist figure Vera Zasulich shot a Russian police commander in 1878. Then, it spread to Western Europe and the United States with anarchism and revolutionary ideas. Women’s political motivation also continued in the second wave of modern terrorism and 'nationalism' was one of the motivating factors that became a prominent cause for female terrorists from 1920 to 1960.<sup>90</sup> During those periods, although women were just as politicized as men, they had less chance to be engaged in political violence in non-secular terrorist groups, because women in patriarchal societies are protected by their families and their time away from home has to be approved by a male. Anat Berko and Edna Erez who did research on Palestinian female terrorists confirm this idea with a Palestinian

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<sup>89</sup> Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>90</sup> David Rapoport, “The Four Waves Of Modern Terrorism.” *Attacking Terrorism*. Audrey Cronin. & James M. Ludes (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46–73.

freedom fighter's interview. The women terrorist thinks that she did something that was viewed as manly. There were hardly any women who were doing what she had done. In addition, she was proud that she had never spent a night outside her home when participating in terrorist operations.<sup>91</sup> It is understood from her statements that although this interview took place between 2004 and 2006, women were still under the influence of patriarchy.

Conversely, Italian and German women terrorists had more opportunities to experience political mobilization in large groups because of the higher gender equality perception in their countries. For instance, during the third wave of modern terrorism, the participation of women in the political life of the Western world increased and women became dominant leaders in revolutionary left communities. According to Weinberg and Eubank's research, the Italian women who were politically motivated were educated and had prestigious occupations before joining terrorist groups.<sup>92</sup> In sum, women revolutionaries are more dedicated and pragmatic than male terrorists and their profiles do not fit the women victims of terrorism because they assist the armed militants by their own will.<sup>93 94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Gender Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no.6 (2007), 506.

<sup>92</sup> Leonard Weinberg, and William L. Eubank, *The Rise and Fall of Italian Terrorism*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>93</sup> Eileen McDonald, *Shoot the Women First* (NY: Random House, 1992).

<sup>94</sup> Swati Parashar, "Aatish-E-Chinar: In Kashmir, Where Women Keep Resistance Alive." *In Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, University of Georgia Press, 2011) 96-119.

### 3.1.3. Sociocultural and Personal Reasons:

Robert Pape, analyzes women terrorists' motivating factors from a different perspective believes that women mostly have different causes than male terrorists. He also thinks that while male terrorists want to join terrorist organizations for religious, nationalist, and revolutionary reasons, female terrorists are guided by their emotions.<sup>95</sup> Jacques and Taylor who have similar thoughts about women terrorists' personal motivation factors, argue that while researchers interview female terrorists to understand their inspirations, women usually tell different stories and give dissimilar reasons between the initial intake interviews (immediately after their arrest) and later interviews after a period of incarceration. To support this hypothesis, Jacques and Taylor compared 30 case studies and found that while male suicide terrorists are motivated by religious or nationalist ideas, women are mostly driven by personal reasons.<sup>96</sup>

Yoram Schwitzer also agrees that Palestinian female suicide bombers have mostly involved terror attacks due to a private tragedy or shame, because Schwitzer's jailhouse conversions with female terrorists show that becoming a martyr is more honorable than being alive for them.<sup>97</sup> For example, one of the Palestinian female terrorists who regretted

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<sup>95</sup> Robert. A. Pape, *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terror* (NY: Random House Books, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Karen Jacques, and Paul Taylor. "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008).

<sup>97</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* *Institute for National Security Studies*, 2006.

an unwanted marriage shares her thoughts with these words: “I would rather spend my life in an Israeli prison than trapped with a husband I did not love.”<sup>98</sup>

Rape, which is a type of sexual assault, also drives women to engage in violence. The trauma sufferer may want to become a suicide bomber to get rid of her sorrow because she finds suicidal behavior is the last resort.<sup>99</sup> According to the *Die Welt*'s news, after women were raped in Iraq, they were sent to Samira Ahmad Jassim (also known as the ‘mother’ of suicide bombers). Jassim was working for the terror organization ‘Ansar al Sunna’ and convinced rape victims to commit honor suicide. After Jassim was arrested, she was accused of trying to provoke victims and of being responsible for 28 suicide attacks.<sup>100</sup>

On the other hand, the purpose of most sexual violence during war is mostly terrorizing the population, destroying communities, achieving military successes and infecting victims with HIV.<sup>101</sup> Many people believe that rebel forces are the main perpetrators of wartime rape. As opposed to popular belief: armed state actors are far more likely than rebel groups to commit such acts. According to a PRIO study of African conflicts between 2000 and 2009, state actors have higher sexual violence rate than rebel

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<sup>98</sup> Toles Patkin, “Explosive Baggage: Female Palestinian Suicide Bombers And The Rhetoric Of Emotion,” *Women and Language* 27, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>99</sup> Mia Bloom “Bombshells: Women and Terror.” *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

<sup>100</sup> “Mother of the Female Bombers Speaks Out,” *Die Welt*, February 5, 2009, <https://www.welt.de/english-news/article3152902/Mother-of-the-Female-Suicide-Bombers-speaks-out.html>.

<sup>101</sup> “Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War,” *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml>

groups and pro-government militias.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, although some human rights and media organizations have been trying to point out this issue, there are few cross-mission analyses and single case studies in the existing literature about ‘sexual exploitation and abuse’. As an example, Russian soldiers raped young Chechen women to ethnically cleanse certain areas during the Chechen War. According to Doctors Without Borders’ estimation, 85 percent of Chechen women were raped by soldiers and police officers during the Chechen War.<sup>103</sup> The journalist Svetlana Makunina, also claims that Chechen women who were drugged and raped did not have any choices except being a suicide bomber. Because many Chechen women were filmed and photographed while they were being raped. The soldiers blackmailed those women into not informing the public about this issue. As a consequence of the blackmailing martyrdom was a blessing for many of Chechen women.<sup>104</sup>

Wartime sexual violence indicates a broader category and it is an umbrella term that indicates: rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and forced pregnancy. Moreover, “armed groups” is a broad term used to describe armed actors such as: state militaries, insurgents and rebels. Thus when researchers review the literature to find the causes of wartime sexual violence, they should carefully focus on the terms not to make wrong inferences. For example, the

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<sup>102</sup> Dara Kay Cohen, Amelia Hoover Green, and Elizabeth Jean Wood, “Wartime Sexual Violence: Misconceptions, Implications, and Ways Forward,” *United States Institute of Peace*, March 12, 2013, <http://www.tinyurl.com/ny5kda7>

<sup>103</sup> Mia Bloom, “Bombshells: Women and Terror.” *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

<sup>104</sup> Viv Groskop, “Women At Heart Of The Terror Cells,” *The Guardian*, September 4, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/05/russia.chechnya1>

sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of civilians by international peacekeepers, a form of post-conflict, defined by The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations as: “Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another, whereas sexual abuse is ‘the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.’”<sup>105</sup>

As an example of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of civilians by international peacekeepers: Thenmuli Rajaratnam also known as Dhanu, was a member of LTTE who took an important role in the assassination of Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. On May 21, 1991, Dhanu blew herself up with a C-4 plastic explosive and killed Rajiv Gandhi and 16 people. Allegations emerged that Dhanu was raped by Indian soldiers during the Sri Lankan Civil War, thus she blamed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi for sending the Indian Peace Keeping Forces to Sri Lanka.<sup>106</sup>

Mia Bloom categorizes women terrorists’ personal motivations into four reasons: revenge, redemption, relationship, and respect.<sup>107</sup> Bloom argues that revenge is a desire to inflict retribution that drives women to be involved in terror acts. When women are raped, lose their family members or a loved one, they become involved in terror acts and desire revenge. Female terrorists also try to redeem themselves by committing acts of

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<sup>105</sup> “Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War,” *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgsexualviolence.shtml>

<sup>106</sup> Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

self-sacrifice. Martyrdom, which is one of the most preferable assentation, wipes their slate clean. Some women hide shameful secrets and look upon being a suicide bomber as an honorable action.

Relationships are also an essential factor that motivates women to join terrorist organizations. Relatives and family members, who play key roles in the recruitment process, may serve as a bridge between women and the terror organization. According to Sidney Jones, although some women act freely in marrying male terrorists, others are forced by their family members.<sup>108</sup> Through this relationship, they form tight bonds of family connections, enhance the network of the organization and also prevent defection.

Getting respect from the community is also an important factor that motivates women to engage in terrorism. In some countries, society favors men over women. Female terrorists who were born in these countries may choose death over life because they want to make their voice heard and if they commit a suicide attack, the society may show its respect through giving their name to a street or park. Moreover, women bombers also wish to be called a hero and may become a role model for the next generation of young bombers.<sup>109</sup> Some scholars also put emphasis on gender inequality that inspires female terrorist to join a terrorist group to get respect from society. In many patriarchal societies, people expect women to stay at home and take care of their children. Thus, female terrorists attempt to attain equal status by participating in terror organizations.

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<sup>108</sup> Sidney Jones, "Inherited Jihadism, Like Father, Like Son," *International Crisis Group*, July 4, 2007, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/inherited-jihadism-father-son>

<sup>109</sup> Philip G. Zimbardo, "A Situationist Perspective On The Psychology Of Evil: Understanding How Good People Are Transformed Into Perpetrators," *The Social Psychology Of Good And Evil*, ed. Arthur Miller (New York: Guilford, 2004) 21-50.

In conclusion, while terrorism studies have examined female terrorists for a couple for decades, women have engaged in terrorist activities more than a century. Nationalist and revolutionary ideas are one of the motivating factors have inspired women to participate in liberation movements by involving in a terrorist group. Since 1968, women began to join in all kinds of terrorist organizations, from Marxist groups in Europe to nationalist movements in the Middle East.<sup>110</sup> In addition to this, religion is still one of the strongest motivating factors that hearten women to work in terrorist training camps or to become a suicide bomber. These women desire to sacrifice their body for Islam because if they kill in the name of Islam, they would go to heaven regardless of their sins. Women's individual problems may also motivate them to involve terrorism actions. Rape, losing a loved one, forced marriage, family problems and resisting patriarchal structure are one of the major motives but different trauma may also impact on their decisions. In brief, push factors are mostly a complicated mix of political, religious and individual reasons that inspire women in different societies and regions.

### **3.2. Pull Factors: Why Do Terrorist Organizations Recruit Women?**

In this section, this research paper will provide some strategic reasons that motivate terrorist organizations to recruit women. Psychological war, higher kill rates, huge media attention and giving birth to future fighters will be analyzed as the main strategic reasons.

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<sup>110</sup> Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).



### 3.2.1 Psychological War:

Terror organizations mostly recruit women for psychological warfare that involves the planned use of propaganda and other psychological operations and undermines the morale of an enemy or opponent. One of the former female members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) states that when an enemy comes across a female terrorist, they become more irritable because losing against women lead to demotivation.<sup>111</sup> Al Qaeda also gained a strategic advantage by receiving support from women. For example, Al Qaeda's female terrorists who were actively working through Internet trying to persuade men to join the global Jihad. By these communication tactics, some men are ashamed of their masculinity and lean towards joining these organizations.<sup>112</sup>

### 3.2.2. Higher Kill Rates:

In conservative societies, male security guards usually do not search or touch women because of cultural norms. For this reason, terrorist groups prefer to work with women to carry out their attacks in the most efficient and unobtrusive manner possible. Islamic female terrorists intentionally wear immodest clothing to draw the security guards' attention to help male terrorists passing through checkpoints. Some female terrorists also wear oversized clothes and strap improvised explosive devices to their stomach, which gives the impression of late-term pregnancy. By this tactic, security personnel do not suspect pregnant women at the checkpoints.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror." *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

Lindsey O'Rourke, who analyzed suicide attacks between 1981 and 2008 also found that female terrorists have more advantages than men when they commit a suicide attack. For instance, the average number of victims resulting from an attack conducted by a man acting alone is 5.3, while the number of attacks committed by a woman is 8.4.<sup>113</sup> Female terrorists, who can more easily access public places, are better than male terrorists when the target is difficult to penetrate. Lastly, when terror organizations target civilians, they mostly prefer women because security personnel do not consider women as a threat.

### **3.2.3. Huge Media Attention:**

In many conservative societies, women are mostly seen as nurturing and caring figures of the population. Thus, when a female is involved in a terror attack, she gets more attention than male terrorists because people want to know what the real underlying causes are that might have driven her to kill people. Also, through huge media attention, terror organizations make an overwhelming impression on society. For this reason, they recruit female terrorists to draw the attention of the media.

### **3.2.4. Giving Birth to Future Fighters:**

Some terrorist leaders believe that the success of jihad also depends on women because they raise children that would be potential recruits of the terror groups. Usama Bin Laden expressed gratitude to women as: "You have spurred on and exhorted [men to

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<sup>113</sup> Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009).

join jihad], and you have raised all the men who fought in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Chechnya, and you are the ones who produced the squadron of heroic [men who carried out] the raids in New York and Washington.”<sup>114</sup>

Umayma al-Zawahiri, the wife of Ayman al-Zawahiri, also encouraged her “Muslim sisters,” to bring up their children on the love of jihad in God’s path, “to goad their brothers, husbands, and sons to defend Muslims’ territories and properties...to assist (male) jihadist with prayers and money.”<sup>115</sup> If women are not satisfied with this childcare mission, the organization’s leaders may allow women to raise money for jihadists, to establish a network among mosques and to print publications for the organization.

In conclusion, terrorist organizations recruit women for various reasons to continue the organization’s existence and to make their attacks more effective. While women play an important role in supporting and maintaining the organization, they have also significant tactical advantages in terror incidents because their attacks are more deadly than the attacks carried out by male terrorists.

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<sup>114</sup> Osama Ibn Ladin, “Bayan min Usama b. Ladin wa-Tanzim al-Qa’ida ila al-Umma al-Islamiyya,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*. October 21, 2002, <http://www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=7839>.

<sup>115</sup> Nelly Lahoud, “Umaymaal-Zawahiri on Women’s Role in Jihad.” *Jihadica*. February 26, 2010. <http://www.jihadica.com/umayma-al-zawahiri-on-women%E2%80%99s-role-in-jihad/>

## CHAPTER 4: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ROLE IN AL QAEDA AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

Al Qaeda in Iraq, one of the first branches of Al Qaeda center, pioneered the establishment of the Islamic State. Since Al Qaeda's establishment, although Osama bin Laden and Al Zawahiri had a global jihadist movement against the United States and its Western alliance, the Islamic State preferred to limit its scope and focused on Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State also intentionally targeted civilians and Shiite minority. Thus two organizations broke up due to different jihadist movement in 2014.<sup>116</sup> The same year, the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rejected Al Qaeda's authority and declared a caliphate. He also claimed a military authority over all Muslims worldwide.<sup>117</sup>

The Islamic State's new argument on women also changed the point of view on the role of women in jihadist groups. For instance, when Al Qaeda prohibited women from fighting on a battlefield, the Islamic State encouraged them to participate in jihad and become martyrs. In this chapter, the study will examine the role of women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic State individually. It will also compare their female terrorists' profiles and motivating factors.

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<sup>116</sup> Martha Crenshaw, "Time for Peace Talks With ISIS and Al Qaeda?" *Foreign Policy*. September 19, 2018.  
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/19/time-for-peace-talks-with-isis-and-al-qaeda/>

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.1. Al Qaeda's Women

Al-Qa'ida (Al Qaeda), is a Sunni Islamist organization, founded in 1988 by Osama Bin Laden and Muhammad Azzam in Peshawar, Pakistan. Firstly, the organization members came together for the purpose of supporting Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union in the Afghan War. After the end of the war, Al Qaeda continued its activities as a defender of the "Jihadist-Salafism" belief, relocated its headquarters to Sudan and managed the training camps from 1991 to 1996. When the Sudanese government was confronted with the international community pressures, it could not continue to harbor Al Qaeda's activities anymore, thus Al Qaeda had to move back to Afghanistan in 1996.<sup>118</sup> The same year, Osama bin Laden declared a holy war against the United States and organized different terrorist attacks to the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.<sup>119</sup>

On September 11, 2001, nineteen Al Qaeda terrorists who hijacked four American airliners crashed two of them into the twin skyscrapers of the World Trade Center in New York City. The third plane targeted the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense in Virginia and hit one side of the Pentagon building. The terrorists who hijacked the fourth plane were planning to crash the plane into the U.S. Capitol Building, but the passengers tried to prevent the attack. During the struggle, the plane crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.<sup>120</sup> The September 11 attacks were the bloodiest terrorist

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<sup>118</sup> Leah Farrall, "How Al Qaeda Works: What the Organization's Subsidiaries Say About Its Strength," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding. *Masterminds of Terror*. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2014).

attacks of Al Qaeda and killed 2,973 people, creating a tremendous impact in the world press. These four coordinated terrorist attacks differed from other terror attacks of Al Qaeda because Osama bin Laden ultimately attracted other smaller Islamist groups attention to come under Al Qaeda's control to fight against the United States and Western interest.

Al Qaeda differs from other traditional terrorist organizations in the matter of hierarchical structure because the organization is a source of inspiration for potential followers.<sup>121</sup> Al Qaeda is a masculine base terrorist organization that doesn't have female leaders, also keeps women away from violent actions. Thus, its female members have mostly supporting roles for jihadist movement. For instance, they work as a translator, social media representatives, fund-raisers, teachers or the mothers of future jihadists.

Al Qaeda's women who have been significant effects on the spread of the global jihadist movement designed a magazine website to inform female jihadist about the organization's activities. Al Khansa'a was one of the writers of the online magazine inspiring Muslim sisters by her articles. Although Al Khansa'a did not encourage women to fight on the battlefield, she advised them to keep fit and exercise to be ready for jihad. Colleen Renee LaRose (also known as Jihad Jane) was another important figure, working as an online recruiter for Al Qaeda (Ireland-based). In 2009, LaRose was arrested by the FBI, accused of convincing jihadists in Ireland to murder Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks who portrayed prophet Muhammad as a dog in his drawings.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror." *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1-2 (2011).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

Abu Musab al Zarqawi, a Jordanian- born militant was the first Al Qaeda member that encouraged women to become a suicide bomber. In 2004, Zarqawi, who formed an alliance with Al-Qaeda and created Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was out of step with Al Qaeda's mission by terrorizing Iraqi Shias. Although Zarqawi got negative reactions from Al Qaeda leaders, he continued to inspire women to fight on the battlefield. Al Qaeda in Iraq's first female suicide bomber blew herself up at a United States military recruiting center in Talafa, Iraq. The terrorist, unidentified, killed 6 and injured more than 30 people and the AQI-affiliated Malik Suicidal Brigades claimed responsibility for the suicide attack. Al Qaeda in Iraq announced this incident from its website as: "A blessed sister... carried out a heroic attack defending her faith... May God accept our sister among the martyrs."<sup>123</sup> According to Mia Bloom, Zarqawi used an alias "ghost group" for the attack because working with a woman for suicide bombing was still a taboo for Al Qaeda Central. Zarqawi also tried to give a message to men that the Iraqi woman had to take this responsibility because the organization had not enough Iraqi men for suicide attacks.<sup>124</sup>

By working with female terrorists, Zarqawi benefited from the advantage of Iraqi culture that does not allow men to search women in security gates. Security personnel also infrequently check vehicles carrying women.<sup>125</sup> In addition, a loose Islamic robe was an advantage for the suicide attacks because they were giving the impression of late-term

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<sup>123</sup> "Woman Suicide Bomber Strikes Iraq." *BBC News*, November 14, 2005. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4289168.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4289168.stm)

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> "Al-Qaeda Suspects Dressed As Women Shot Dead In Yemen," *Albawaba*, December 13, 2014, [http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A393684691/AONE?u=cuny\\_gradctr&sid=AONE&xid=bf8412c9](http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A393684691/AONE?u=cuny_gradctr&sid=AONE&xid=bf8412c9)

pregnancy to women. On the other hand, before the suicide attracts of Al Qaeda in Iraq, American and British soldiers were not suspicious of women because Osama bin Laden and Al Zawahiri clearly opposed using women for suicide attracts.<sup>126</sup>

Although AQI members recorded male suicide bombers' names, they did not share female suicide bombers' names and background information. For this reason, understanding these women's motivating causes are more difficult than other terrorist organizations' female suicide bombers. Hussein Aqeel and Damien McElroy also argue that although there is limited information about female suicide bombers, some investigations and interviews give us similar causes that have motivated them to become a female terrorist for AQI. For instance, losing a loved one, killed in the fighting drove Iraqi women to join AQI to avenge her brother or husband's death by killing his murderers. In addition to this, AQI members encouraged young girls to martyrdom saying that they will directly go to heaven and become the neighbors of the prophet Muhammad.<sup>127</sup> In addition to this, some male jihadists also inspired their wives, sisters, and daughters by showing Al Qaeda's indoctrination videos at home.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror." *Gender Issues* 28, no.1-2 (2011).

<sup>127</sup> Aqeel Hussein and Damien McElroy, "Mother of All Suicide Bombers Warns of Rise in Attacks," *Daily Telegraph*, November 15, 2008, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/3464411/Mother-of-all-suicide-bombers-warns-of-rise-in-attacks.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/3464411/Mother-of-all-suicide-bombers-warns-of-rise-in-attacks.html)

<sup>128</sup> Farhana Ali "Rising Female Bombers in Iraq, An Alarming Trend," *Counterterrorism Blog*, April 22, 2008, [http://counterterrorismblog.org/2008/04/rising\\_female\\_bombers\\_in\\_iraq.php](http://counterterrorismblog.org/2008/04/rising_female_bombers_in_iraq.php)



#### 4.2. The Emerging Role of Women in the Islamic State

Islamic State, was found by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Jordanian jihadist) in 1999. When Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Jordanian jihadist) was released from Jordan's al-Sawwaqa prison, he moved to Afghanistan and got the permission from the leadership of Al Qaeda and a \$200,000 loan to establish the jihadi group Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTWJ).<sup>129</sup> <sup>130</sup> The organization that had former names as "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) and the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL), declared the creation a caliphate and shortened its name to Islamic State (IS) in 2014.<sup>131</sup> According to Charles Lister, the Islamic State is a revolutionary actor, aiming to present itself as the protector of true and pure Sunni ideals.<sup>132</sup>

The role of women in the Islamic State is more diverse than its jihadist rival Al Qaeda Central. Although the Islamic State's women have similar supporting roles like Al Qaeda's jihadist women, Islamic States leaders empowered Muslim women to become suicide bombers for jihadist movement. There were approximately 200 women, immigrated to Syria from Western countries to join the Islamic State in 2014. Also, the

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<sup>129</sup> Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future*, (Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

<sup>130</sup> "Tracking Al Qaeda in Iraq's Zarqawi: Interview with Ex-CIA Analyst Nada Bakos," *Musings on Iraq (blog)*, June 30, 2014, <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2014/06/tracking-al-qaeda-in-iraqs-zarqawi.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Faisal Irshaid, "ISIS, IS or Daesh? One Group, Many Names," BBC, December 2, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27994277>

<sup>132</sup> Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, November 13, 2014, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/en\\_web\\_lister.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/en_web_lister.pdf)

numbers in 2015 had been more than double that reached over 550 Western women.<sup>133</sup>

These women were mostly between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, educated and active on social media. Another common feature was that the majority of these women immigrated to Syria without their parents' approval.<sup>134</sup>

The Islamic State had mostly similar reasons to work with women like other jihadist groups. Frida Ghitis states that the Islamic State preferred to work with women because their attacks have more propaganda value than male terrorists. In addition, the jihadist group aimed to draw the attention of the media through women's terror attacks.<sup>135</sup>

The Islamic State also recruited women from various countries to prove the declaration of the Caliphate. Female terrorists' nationalities have significant importance of determining the certain roles within the Islamic State. For instance, Middle Eastern and North African women had more advantages of gaining authoritative positions than other women in the Islamic State because they had full knowledge of Arabic language and Islamic culture.<sup>136</sup>

The organization also benefited from Western women's language and communication

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<sup>133</sup> Erin M. Saltman and Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: ISIS and The Gender Phenomenon," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf).

<sup>134</sup> Harriet Sherwood et al., "Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>

<sup>135</sup> Frida Ghitis, "ISIS Women Pose Growing Challenge To Europe," *CNN Wire*, September 13, 2016, [http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A463359076/AONE?u=cuny\\_gradctr&sid=AONE&xid=a36efa32](http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A463359076/AONE?u=cuny_gradctr&sid=AONE&xid=a36efa32).

<sup>136</sup> Amanda N. Spencer, "The Hidden Face Of Terrorism: An Analysis Of The Women In Islamic State," *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no.3 (2016).

skills regarding online recruitment and saw the female jihadists as an indispensable asset to the progression of the Islamic State. When they were recruited as a bride for the Muslim men, they might also give birth to future generations of the organization.

On the other hand, although the Islamic State recruited many women as suicide bombers, supporters or brides, they also asked women to have sex with fighters to boost their morale.<sup>137</sup> This recruitment is called, Sexual jihad (jihad al-nikah) that refers to continually and temporary marriages of Sunni women with jihadist militants.<sup>138</sup> In the organization, these women were known as “comfort women” and they were providing sex to male fighters through “jihad al-nikah.”<sup>139</sup>

Religious ideology was one of the major motivating factors that pushed women to join the Islamic State as a defender of the Muslim faith. As an example, Aqsa Mahmood, also known as Umm Layth, was a 21-year-old Scottish university student who traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State's terrorist activities. Mahmood's family and authorities believed that she met the Islamic State's recruiters through online forums and decided to dedicate her life to jihadist movement. Mahmood shared her ideas about jihad with these sentences:

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<sup>137</sup> Mary Chastain, “Women Volunteer for Sexual Jihad with Islamic State,” *Breitbart*, August 27, 2014, <https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/08/27/women-volunteer-for-sexual-jihad-with-islamic-state/>

<sup>138</sup> Christoph Reuter, “Assad's Elaborate Disinformation Campaign,” *Spiegel Online*, October 7, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/assad-regime-wages-pr-campaign-to-discredit-rebels-a-926479.htm>

<sup>139</sup> Meira Svirsky, “ISIS Issues Orders in Mosul: Give Over Girls for 'Sex Jihad,’” *The Clarion Project*, June 29, 2014, <https://clarionproject.org/isis-issues-orders-mosul-give-over-girls-sex-jihad-16/>

"If not you then your grandchildren or their grandchildren. But worry not, somewhere along the line your blood will be spilled by our cubs... this Islamic empire shall be known and feared worldwide... This is a war against Islam... either you're with them or with us, so pick a side."<sup>140</sup> Many women that joined the Islamic State were looking for a sense of identity and belonging for their lives, thus they immigrated from their countries to marry jihadists or support their brother fighters.<sup>141</sup>

### **4.3. Similarities and Differences Between the Women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic States**

In terrorism studies, there is little research on the comparison of the role of women in Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Recent comparisons also have difficulties in seeing Al Qaeda in Iraq as the part of Al Qaeda Central or the pioneer of the Islamic State. Before beginning the comparison it should be known that the research study will consider AQI as the founder of the Islamic State because its argument on female jihadism is different from Al Qaeda Central.

As mentioned in the previous sections, jihadist groups recruit women for diverse reasons. Maintaining the continuity of the organization and giving birth to the next jihadi generations were one common reason that motivated Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

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<sup>140</sup> Susan Swarbrick, "Scots "Jihadi Bride" Talks Of "Revenge" *The Herald*, July 5, 2015, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13415875.scots-jihadi-bride-talks-of-revenge-in-hate-filled-blog/>

<sup>141</sup> Harriet Sherwood et al., "Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>

They also preferred to recruit women for supporting roles (fund-raisers and teachers, social media representatives, and translator). Two jihadist groups used the Internet (websites, personal blogs, and chat rooms) as an instrument to inform women about the jihadi movement and the organizations' activities. In addition, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State's female terrorists worked as online recruiters and supported the jihadist groups by convincing men to join jihadi action. Although the two organizations had similarities, it is obvious that the Islamic State had more advantages than the Al Qaeda in benefiting from Internet communication because social media usage was more popular during the Islamic State's terror activities.

Through Internet and social media, the Islamic State got a chance to communicate with more Western women, thus the number of foreign women was higher than the total number of women in Al Qaeda. Although Al Qaeda Central and the Islamic State (also AQI) had more similarities in the recruitment of women, the Islamic State's recruitment diverged from Al Qaeda Central. For instance, while Al Qaeda was against to recruit women for suicide bombing, the Islamic State inspired them to sacrifice their body for Islam. Moreover, Al Qaeda did not recommend women to fight on the battlefield or recruited them to draw the attention of media like the Islamic State. Lastly, the Islamic State differed from Al Qaeda in assigning women for sexual jihad because Al Qaeda determined the place of women in the organization according to the Islamic legal traditions that do not allow women to have jihad al-nikah (sexual jihad).

Religion and personal motivating factors were the most common causes that inspired women to join Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Many women joined these two jihadist group to struggle or fight against the "enemies" of Islam. Their jihadist family

members and husbands also had a huge impact on their decisions. Female terrorists' religious motivation seems less complex than understanding their personal motivations because there were various factors and tragedy behind their decisions. For example, losing their family members in a jihadist movement affected women's psychology and pushed them to join the two terror organizations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Scholars and researchers are seeking an answer to questions about female terrorist motivation and the terror organizations' main purposes in recruitment. Although motivating factors are multiple and complex; religious, political, and personal reasons are the major factors that motivate women to commit terror acts. When they are motivated by revolutionary commitments, they engage in violent acts against others to protect their territory or the ideology they defend. This cause gives women a sense of empowerment and gender equality. On the other hand, some women desire to be a part of terror acts because of religious motivations. They go to conflict zones of their own free will and make great sacrifices for the promise of an afterlife that rewards their good deeds. Social, cultural, and personal reasons also drive them to commit terrorist actions. For instance, unwanted marriage, rape, loss of a loved one and sorrow motivate women to become a terrorist.

On the other hand, the literature on female suicide bombers shows that psychological war, higher kill rates, huge media attention, and giving birth to future fighters are the four major causes behind the recruitment of female terrorist. Terror organizations recruit women for psychological warfare to undermine the morale of an

enemy or opponent because when female terrorists defeat male security officers, the rout damages their prestige and also it draws the attention of media. Furthermore, in conservative societies, male security guards cannot search or touch women because of cultural norms, which provides an advantage to women terrorists, who pass easily through checkpoints. Giving the impression of late-term pregnancy also helps women suicide bombers to get around security personnel. Thus, most terror organizations prefer to work with women terrorists to perform their deadly actions efficiently.

After comparing and contrasting Al Qaeda and the Islamic State's female terrorists profiles, this research found that religion and personal motivating factors were mostly the major causes that heartened women to join Jihadist movement. Although, both Jihadist groups recruited women as fund-raisers, teachers, social media representatives, and translator, the Islamic State differed from Al Qaeda in authorizing female terrorists for suicide attacks, because Al Qaeda was completely opposed to this idea. For this reason, Al Qaeda only allowed women to make a contribution to the organization by watching their homes, raising their children and raising fund without attending their camps.

Understanding the motivation of female terrorists and terrorist organizations' main purposes of recruitment may limit the recruitment of women and demobilize women from engaging in bloody attacks like shooting, killing, and bombing. In order to analyze this subject, researchers and governments should focus on some questions like: what role does religion play in female terrorists' lives? How do political ideologies influence the thoughts of female terrorists? Which sociocultural factors motivate women to join terror organizations? Why do terrorist organizations want to work with women?

Do women terrorists have higher kill rates than male terrorists? Why do female terrorists' attacks damage the psychology of the soldiers and police? and etc. These questions cannot be only answered by political scientists and criminologists because psychological and sociological reasons also play major roles in women's involvement in terrorism. Thus, different disciplines must work together to understand the phenomenon of female suicide bombing and terrorism. Finally, governments should not leave women with few options and provide free legal representation for rape victims. Maintaining social responsibility projects about countering gender violence and gender inequality can also prevent women from involvement in violent acts.



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4-Military Intelligence Interrogator Deployed In Iraq, Conversation With The Author, August 12, 2010 (Name Withheld).

## BIOGRAPHY

Zeynep Bayar was born in 1988 in Ankara, Turkey. In 2006, she received her high school degree from Vehbi Koc Foundation High School. During her teenage years, she was always interested in politics and she tried to understand government policies. While she was in high school, she had a chance to work voluntarily in the Turkish Ministry of National Education's Democracy Program. That entire year, she was fascinated by the governmental executive actions and decided to study politics.

In 2006, she was accepted by Beykent University's International Relations program. After completing her B.A., she wanted to further expand her understanding of business and trade, because she strongly believes that international relations cannot be understood without examining the economic relations among governments, non-state actors, and multinational corporations. For this reason, she enrolled in Anglia Ruskin University's Business Administration undergraduate program and completed her second degree in the UK in 2013.

Right after graduation, she began work at the Turkish Embassy in Washington D.C. Through this experience, she realized that the power of a developed country is no longer measured by the size of its population or territory, and diplomacy plays a crucial role in the connection between states. This experience also taught her about effective intergovernmental relations and diplomacy's importance in the international arena.

In 2015, she was involved in the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) in New York. When she was working in the United Nations, she analyzed 62 funded projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote gender equality, and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes. She also contributed to the

organization by providing operational and technical support to the grantees, including negotiation of new projects, which average \$1 million, for Africa and Asia. The same year, she had academic training at the Harvard University's Government Department for three months and took two courses from Beth A. Simmons and David Rezvani. After completing her 'International Law and Human Rights' and 'International Conflict and Cooperation' courses, she wanted to apply for a master's program in order to pursue her passion for political science as a researcher.

In 2019, she was graduated from the Graduate Center, City University of New York in 2019. In this program, she focused on international relations and did research on 'counter-terrorism, wartime sexual violence, and human rights. Peter Romaniuk who is an Associate Professor of Political Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice inspired Zeynep Bayar to broaden her knowledge in terrorism and international security studies.