ISIS's Female Suicide Bombers, Breaking The News

The Framing of ISIS's Female Suicide Bombers in American and Middle Eastern Newspapers, a Comparison, 2013-2022

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ABSTRACT

This study focusses on the framing of ISIS's female suicide bombers in American and Middle Eastern newspapers. The way newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers influences public opinion and shapes people's perception on ISIS's female suicide bombers. It is argued that American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers similarly. ISIS's female suicide bombers are framed by both in four relevant ways. Firstly, ISIS's female suicide bombers are framed as rare additionally, it is framed as rare for ISIS to use female suicide bombers. Secondly, these women are framed as mothers and passive actors, influenced by their husbands and families. Moreover, these women are framed as victims by the American newspapers, however, Middle Eastern newspapers contradict this. Lastly, these women are framed both as having traditional roles as well as active fighting roles. Overall, this research show there is a strong presence of traditional female gender stereotypes in the framing of ISIS's suicide bombers in American and Middle Eastern newspapers. American and Middle Eastern newspapers are reinforcing gender stereotypes which is in line with what previous literature has found. Even though gender stereotypes are certainly present in Middle Eastern newspapers, they are aware of the presence of gender stereotypes. They challenge and contradict these traditional stereotypes. In order to tackle the issue of ISIS's female suicide bombers we need a thorough understanding of this phenomenon. With the newspapers reinforcing gender stereotypes, it is hard to create a thorough understanding of this phenomenon. This will hinder the prevention of female suicide attacks and the development of measures against female suicide bombers.

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1. Introduction

Recently, controversy has emerged regarding the role of women in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Reports indicate that ISIS has begun using female suicide bombers in large numbers after women had been oppressed by the organisation for a long time. The role of women within ISIS has shifted from oppression to encouragement. ISIS has called upon women to take up arms.[1] This phenomenon of women as fighters or terrorists challenges traditional gender roles, it contradicts the main gender construction of many societies.[2] Women are taking leading positions in wars and conflicts by becoming suicide bombers. While there is a growing interest in the role of females in terrorism, the focus on contemporary female suicide bombers often neglects female involvement in political conflicts throughout history. Despite the fact that women have played a role in revolutions, wars and insurgencies throughout history.[3] Female terrorists are not rare or unique, rather women have always been part of terrorist organisations.[4]

ISIS is an active terrorist organisation making this a contemporary issue. In addition, research on female involvement in terrorism has increased over the last couple of years, especially on their portrayal in the media.[5] Similarly, this thesis will look at how ISIS's female suicide bombers are framed in newspapers. Framing theory demonstrates that how something is presented influences how people process that information. Frames influence people's opinions and create meaning.[6] This thesis will research the different ways in which newspapers frame female suicide bombers from ISIS, through an analysis of how female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed in two different cultural contexts; American and Middle Eastern. The opposing ideologies and cultures of America and the Middle East make for an interesting comparison, especially since most previous literature has focussed on the portrayal of female terrorists in Western media. The way American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women may tell us more about their views, ideology and culture.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to academia and the current understanding of how female suicide bombers are framed in the media, focusing specifically on female suicide bombers from ISIS. This thesis gives insight into how these women are framed as well as how different cultural and ideological contexts frame these women differently. Since the portrayal of female suicide bombers of ISIS in the media has not been researched thoroughly, this thesis contributes to the current academic debates on the framing of female terrorists by the media. As mentioned beforehand, ISIS is a contemporary renowned organisation with significant international influence. ISIS is a notorious terrorist organisation that receives a significant amount of media attention. Therefore, it is socially and academically relevant to investigate how female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed by the media, especially since media frames influence public opinion. Overall, this thesis is beneficial for both social and academic discussions on gender, terrorism and their representation in the media.

In order to research how female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed in the American and Middle Eastern newspapers, this thesis starts off with providing a literature review on female

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[1]Aymenn Al-Tamimi, "ISIS'Female Suicide Bombers Are No Myth." *Foreign Affairs* 22 (2017).

[2]Alice Martini, "Making women terrorists into "Jihadi brides": An analysis of media narratives on women joining ISIS." *Critical Studies on Terrorism 11.3 (2018), 3*

[3] Mia Bloom, "Female suicide bombers: a global trend." *Daedalus* 136.1 (2007), 94

[4] Brigitte L Nacos, "The portrayal of female terrorists in the media: Similar framing patterns in the news coverage of women in politics and in terrorism." *Studies in conflict & terrorism* 28.5 (2005), 436

[5] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436

[6] Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing public opinion in competitive democracies." *American political science review* 101.4 (2007)

terrorism and its portrayal. This is followed by an explanation of the primary sources; American and Middle Eastern newspaper articles and the research methods of this thesis; framing theory. Next, an analysis is provided of the American and Middle Eastern newspaper articles that discuss ISIS's female suicide bombers. The findings are structured along the four most important frames: Rare or Not-So-Rare, the women are framed as rare and deviant; Family and Marital Ties, the women are framed in relation to their families and husbands; Exploring Motivation, the motivations of these women is often discussed and Changing Roles, the roles of these women are analysed frequently. In the conclusion, the main findings on the framing of ISIS's female suicide bombers in American and Middle Eastern newspapers are summarised, as well as a discussion of the implications of the different frames.

1.1 Literature Report

This literature report explores the framing of female terrorists by the media by drawing upon numerous academic articles and studies. While female terrorists have been active throughout history, these women have often been overlooked when researching terrorism. This literature report highlights that the media has framed female terrorists, more specifically those affiliated with ISIS, in line with gender stereotypes and societal expectations of women. The ways in which the media has failed to recognise the agency and intentionality of these women is discussed. As well as how the media rationalises the actions of female terrorists by looking at their family or marital ties.

  The literature is divided into five themes: Studies of Women Terrorists, Framing Theory, The Framing of Women in Conflict, The Framing of Female Terrorists in Media and The Framing of Female ISIS Members in Media. Moving from the broader topics; female terrorism studies, framing theory and the framing of women, fighter or victims, in conflict to the more specific topics; the portrayal of female terrorists in the media and the framing of female ISIS members in the media.

1.1.1 Studies of Women Terrorists

The study of terrorism has traditionally focussed on men as a result of the assumptions that women have more passive and less influential roles in terrorist organisations.[7] There is a presumption that terrorists are male as a result of gender stereotypes. As Deborah Prentice and Erica Carranza, who research gender stereotypes, describe, traditional female characteristics are gentle, gullible, love children, sensitive, shy, soft-spoken among others. Traditional male characteristics are dominant, leader, aggressive, ambitious, independent, strong and so on.[8] The fact that until recently women have been left out of terrorism studies reinforces the assumption that terrorists are usually men due to traditional gender stereotypes.[9] However, this assumption is flawed, female terrorists are not rare or misfits, women have always played important parts in terrorist organisations.[10] Throughout history, from Pakistan and India to Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq women have been members of terrorist organisations.[11] Between the years 1985 and 2010, female suicide bombers were responsible for 257 attacks. This makes up a quarter of the total amount of suicide attacks during

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[7] Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor. "Female terrorism: A review." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21.3 (2009), 499

[8] Deborah A. Prentice and Erica Carranza, "What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes." *Psychology of women quarterly* 26.4 (2002): 269-270

[9] Cyndi Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism: Gendering terrorism." *Women & Criminal Justice* 29.4-5 (2019), 182

[10] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436

[11] Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 182

this time period. Since 2002 female suicide bombers have even carried out over half of the attacks in certain countries. These women have already killed hundreds of children, women and men and the use of women in terrorist organisations continues to grow rapidly.[12] At the moment over 30% of international terrorists are women.[13] On the other hand, Anne Speckhard, who has researched female terrorists in ISIS, states that men are usually in charge in terrorist organisations, terrorism is a men's dominant field and a men's weapon. When women join terrorist organisations they are generally limited to only a certain amount of roles.[14] Nonetheless, more and more scholars have highlighted that female terrorists are an undeniable reality even though the media continues to portray these women as outliers.[15] However, despite the evidence that women have always been part of terrorist organisations, when women commit acts of terrorism people act significantly more shocked compared to when men commit acts of terrorism.[16] As said the media portrays these women as outliers, making their acts appear more shocking. Overall, as female involvement in terrorism has increased over the years, the amount of research on female terrorists has too.[17] Since female terrorists have become a regular occurrence, they have become a popular research topic.[18] Across academia some of the main research focuses of female terrorism currently are media portrayal, motivation, interviews with terrorists, group roles, recruitment, feminism and environmental enablers. The majority of research describes female terrorism rather than explains female terrorism.[19] This results in a lack of understanding of the causes and motivations of female terrorism.

Since the 1990's scholars have been discussing whether or not women are allowed to fight according to the Islam and ISIS. Since the early days of the Islam, women have been present in battles. However, the Islam has since then been split up into many different secular groups with different interpretations, making it hard to conclude whether the Islam allows women to take part in the fighting.[20] In 2015, ISIS published a manifesto which states that women should wear a veil and remain hidden. According to this manifesto men and women are not equal, their roles differ. A mother must support her husband and raise her children.[21] Indeed, female *Jihad* can be seen as women carrying out political acts by supporting their husbands, family and children. This does give these women the opportunity to gain significant influence on men.[22] Women are interested in power, just like men, however, their domain of power is limited to their domestic spheres and their families.[23] Women are allowed to wage traditional *Jihad* but only when there are no men available to

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[12] Bloom, "Bombshells", 1-2
[13] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[14] Anne Speckhard, "Female terrorists in ISIS, al Qaeda and 21rst century terrorism." Trends Research: Inside the Mind of a Jihadist 2015 (2015), 1
[15] Sara Shaban, "Teenagers, terrorism, and technopanic: How British newspapers framed female ISIS recruits as victims of social media." International Journal of Communication 14 (2020), 539
Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 182
[16] Nacos, "The portrayal" 436
[17] Jacques and Taylor, "Female terrorism", 499
[18] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[19] Jacques and Taylor, "Female terrorism", 499
[20] Katharina Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS." *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science* 29 (2016), 91
Ali, "ISIS and propaganda", 13
[21] Ali, M. "ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women." *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* 10.11 (2015). 13
[22] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 91
[23] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 91

do the job.[24] The role of women in *Jihad* is not traditionally fighting however, when it is necessary women are called upon to pick up their weapons.[25]

Another common research topic of female terrorism is motivation. Scholars have explored various motivations for women's involvement in terrorism, including personal, ideological and religious reasons.[26] Moreover, the difference between male and female motivation for terrorism is discussed. The motivation of male terrorists is often related to their dedication to a cause and their willingness to use violence. Female terrorists are often seen as victims of violence, not as perpetrators. Therefore it is important to understand how different motivations attribute different roles to genders.[27] There is no evidence that there is a difference between female and male terrorists when looking at their motivation, ideology or brutality.[28] The motivations of women are not so much different from the motivations of men to join terrorist organisations according to Bakker and De Leede who researched European female Jihadists.[29] Scholars that aim to rationalize the behaviour of female suicide terrorists, often neglect their rational, political or religious motivations and instead focus on their personal circumstances and motivations.[30] However, many Muslim women that join ISIS see it as their duty, one which they have to fulfil in the name of *Jihad.*[31] Scholars have revealed numerous motivations of female recruits and terrorists, from revenge, empowerment, victimisation and contextual explanations.[32] However, women also have ideological and religious motivations. For many women, the motivation to join terrorist organisations is the oppression of Muslims across the world.[33] Many women want to be part of a greater movement to change the world and create a new Islamic state.[34]

Despite the motivations of women, terrorist groups usually refrain from using women if the societal context in which they operate does not support this. Only when circumstances become so difficult, they will resort to women.[35] If terrorist organizations face high levels of security measures, they could turn to use women for suicide missions, since they are more likely to pass security.[36] Using women in operations is very useful and can create strategic advantages for terrorist groups. Using females as suicide bombers results in greater media attention, greater sympathy, increased fear, an increase in recruits and a higher level of perceived violence.[37] Moreover, women do not fit the stereotypical idea of a terrorist, therefore, women lack credibility as terrorists. Women are more likely to be able to pass security than men. Women bring about less suspicion, can hide more explosives or other illegal objects and they receive less strict security measures.[38] Women are trusted more at checkpoints than men because of their gender. Women are also checked less due

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[24] Ali, "ISIS and propaganda", 13

[25] Edwin Bakker, Seran De Leede, and ICCT Background Note, European female Jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2015): 8

[26] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 183

[27] Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 183

[28] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436

[29] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 5

[30] Carys Evans and Raquel da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum: An analysis of social media narratives relating to female terrorist actors." *Politics* (2021): 4

[31] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 89

[32] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 183

[33] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 4

[34] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 6

[35] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4

[36] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4

[37] Banks, "Introduction: Women", 184

[38] Banks, "Introduction: Women", 184

to modesty in many cultures.[39] Indeed, the cultural norms present in many conservative countries are against the thorough searching and touching of women, which is a benefit for these organisations and women. Another benefit for organisations is the element of surprise. Security often makes assumptions about the peacefulness of women, especially (expecting) mothers. Even the presence of a woman or child can avoid the detection of a male subject.[40] Despite the assumptions about the peacefulness of women, it is no question that the women who join ISIS celebrate and join in on the cruelty and brutality of the organisation.[41] Female terrorists are not only a common occurrence driven by numerous different motivations, being women also provides them and the terrorist organisation many benefits due to gender stereotypes. However, using women can cause societal backlash.[42]

1.1.2 Framing Theory

The theoretical lens or framework used for this thesis is framing theory. Broadly speaking, framing refers to how information is selected, organised and presented by the media. How information is selected and organised influences what stories are produced. News frames influence how their audiences and the public interpret the information and messages.[43] Framing is a process during which people develop a specific understanding of an issue or event.[44] Framing theory suggests that how something is presented, the frame, influences how people process that information, and frames create meaning. Small changes in the presentation of an event or issue can have a significant influence on people's opinions.[45] Journalists engage in a process of deciding how to describe an issue or event. They choose the words and sentences that can influence audiences and their interpretations of these issues and events.[46] Framing is more than just representation, framing influences people's perceptions and opinions. Framing can be linked to psychology and sociology, it is the assumption that how an issue is represented in the news media, has an influence on how the audience understands this issue.[47]

Framing theory is closely related to agenda-setting theory. Agenda setting states there is a significant correlation between the attention and emphasis that the media gives to certain issues and the perceived importance of these issues by the general public.[48] The media establishes the importance of an issue and transfers this perceived importance to its audience through its media coverage. The perceived importance of a subject increases the amount of coverage it receives from the media. The news media has the power to influence what is seen as important and what is on the agenda.[49] Both framing and agenda setting are macro mechanisms that can be linked to the construction of messages and ideas.[50]

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[39] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[40] Bloom, "Bombshells", 3
[41] Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[42] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[43] Aysel Morin, "Framing terror: The strategies newspapers use to frame an act as terror or crime." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93.4 (2016), 989
[44] Dennis Chong & James N. Druckman, "Framing public opinion in competitive democracies." *American political science review* 101.4 (2007), 104
[45] Chong & Druckman, "Framing public", 104
[46] Tewksbury, David, and Dietram A. Scheufele, "News framing theory and research." *Media effects. Routledge*, (2019),34
[47] Tewksbury and Scheufele, "News framing", 11
[48] Tewksbury and Scheufele, "News framing", 11
[49] Hsiang Iris Chyi and Maxwell McCombs, "Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of the Columbine school shootings." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81.1 (2004), 22
[50] Tewksbury and Scheufele, "News framing", 12

Newspaper journalists and their choice of words and sentencing will frame women in ISIS in a particular way. The way they describe and portray the occurrences and the women will influence how the general public interprets them. They have the power to frame ISIS female suicide bombers in a particular way, therefore, framing theory will be relevant for this research.

1.1.3 The Framing of Women in Conflict

The representation of women in conflict and war has been a topic of discussion in academics for several decades. Scholars have pointed out that the media frames women differently than men in times of conflict and war. Gender stereotypes link femininity to peace and masculinity to violence, these stereotypes shape the representation of women during conflicts.[51] During conflicts women are depicted according to gender stereotypes. Men are seen as warriors and fighters whereas women are seen as passive victims. Men fight and the vulnerable women and children flee war zones.[52] Stereotypes of victims and perpetrators are intensified during conflict and war.[53]

Western public opinion assumes a correlation between women and peace as well as a correlation between men and war. Western public opinion has long held the assumption that women are not warriors and that women do not perpetrate violence, women are not fit for combat roles.[54] Western public opinion on female terrorism is relevant since this thesis researches the differences in the framing of ISIS's females suicide bombers between American and Middle Eastern newspapers, Western public opinion may help explain these differences. Despite the Western public opinion, violent women are not victims or helpless even though they oppose gender stereotypes.[55] Violence is predominantly perceived as masculine nonetheless, this stereotype can be easily disproved when looking at violent acts committed by women.[56] When women do fight, they challenge the stereotypes of men as fighters and women as victims. Women that fight challenge the stereotype that women are not as strong as men and that women are too emotional.[57]

Since women that fight contradict gender stereotypes, these women are presented as deviant in the media. They do not live up to female standards of women as caring, motherly, fragile and sensitive.[58] Scholars agree that due to societal expectations of womanhood, many of us assume that women are not violent and therefore not inclined to violence.[59] In almost all societies women are seen as gentle, nurturers and mothers rather than violent.[60] In the Western world, women are framed and perceived as mothers, since these women are seen as mothers they are seen as unable to be killers.[61] Female fighters are portrayed using gendered images that link them

[51] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 4

[52] Dorit Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/angels of death: Media, gender, and performance in the case of the Palestinian female suicide bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32.4 (2007), 934

[53] Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel, "The veil as a means of legitimization: An analysis of the interconnectedness of gender, media and war." Journalism 6.3 (2005), 336

[54] Barbara Friedman, "Unlikely warriors: How four US news sources explained female suicide bombers." *Journalism & mass communication quarterly* 85.4 (2008): 841-859.

[55] Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, "Reduced to bad sex: Narratives of violent women from the bible to the war on terror." International Relations 22.1 (2008): 5

[56] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 3

[57] Naaman, "Brides of Palestine", 935

[58] Naaman, "Brides of Palestine", 935

[59] Meagan Auer, John Sutcliffe, and Martha Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow': Using intersectionality to uncover complex representations of female terrorism in news media." *Media, War & Conflict* 12.3 (2019): 283
Naaman, "Brides of Palestine", 935
Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 1

[60] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 1

[61] Linda Åhäll, "The writing of heroines: Motherhood and female agency in political violence." *Security Dialogue* 43.4 (2012): 291

to motherhood, sympathising with them.[62] As Katherine Brown, who studied the media's representation of Europe's first female suicide bomber, states, female suicide terrorists are often discussed in relation to their motherhood, and the media represents these women based on female stereotypes.[63] The fact that female terrorists are often framed by the media through motherhood is also discussed by Auer, Sutcliff and Lee.[64]

How women are represented during wars and conflicts is reflective of the daily marginalisation of women across the world.[65] Women are framed by the media as victims and as suffering. This portrayal aims to highlight the cruelty and evil of war. Women in conflict are often shown with children to highlight the position of women as nurturers or caregivers.[66] The framing of women in conflict, fighters or not, is greatly influenced by gender stereotypes.

1.1.4 The Framing of Female Terrorists in the Media

Over the last couple of years, female presence in terrorism has grown. Especially the number of women as suicide terrorists. As discussed before, due to the increasing number of female terrorists, female terrorism has gained academic attention. A lot of research focuses on the media's framing or portrayal of female terrorists.[67] Studies show that the media treats female terrorists in line with gender biases and societal gender stereotypes. As Auer, Sutcliff and Lee highlight, the sole fact that women are referred to as "female" terrorists highlights their gender and their abnormality.[68] The fact that is seen as necessary to include the fact that fighters or terrorists are "female" indicates how historically female terrorists have been seen as rare.[69] Media coverage of women in terrorism seems to be a mix of stereotypes, rumours and reality according to Elizabeth Gardner.[70] The media indeed sensationalises stories of female terrorists.[71]

Research shows that the media often considers women as nurturers, soft and vulnerable, not as destroyers or killers.[72] Western media portrays women according to Western stereotypes, therefore these women are portrayed as victims, not perpetrators and terrorists.[73] Female terrorists destroy widely accepted stereotypes of women and their qualities and capabilities.[74] Muslim women specifically are stereotyped by the media as victims or insignificant and passive actors, the media fails to recognize these women as independent actors, independent of men.[75] Since this thesis focusses on female ISIS suicide bombers, mostly Muslim women, the portrayal of Muslim women is relevant for this research. The political aspirations of these women are disregarded, rather their role in terrorism is attributed to the manipulation of men.[76] The media indeed often aims to make the

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[62] Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[63] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 707
[64] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 284
[65] Adhis Chetty, "Media images of women during war—vehicles of patriarchy's agenda?." *Agenda* 18.59 (2004), 32
[66] Chetty, "Media images", 39
[67] Moran Yarchi, "The effect of female suicide attacks on foreign media framing of conflicts: The case of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict." *Studies in conflict & terrorism* 37.8 (2014), 675
[68] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
[69] Miranda Alison, "Women as agents of political violence: Gendering security." *Security Dialogue* 35.4 (2004): 447-463.
[70] Elizabeth Gardner, "Is there method to the madness? Worldwide press coverage of female terrorists and journalistic attempts to rationalise their involvement." *Journalism Studies* 8.6 (2007), 921
[71] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282
[72] Bloom, "Bombshells", 4
[73] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
[74] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 2
[75] Brown, "Muriel's wedding", 707
[76] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 294

actions of these women intelligible.[77] Looking specifically at Israeli media, they portray female suicide terrorists in a much more sympathetic way than male suicide terrorists. The women are framed as weak and easily manipulated and a lot of focus is given to her personal and social life. On the contrary, the Arab media portrays female suicide terrorists as active participants of the *Jihad* and barely focus on their personal life.[78] The portrayal in Israeli and Arab media of female suicide terrorists can aid in establishing and explaining the differences between American and Middle Eastern portrayal of ISIS's female suicide bombers. On the other hand, according to Auer, Sutcliff and Lee, the British media obsesses over the personal lives and gender stereotypes of female terrorists, which disregards their political motives. This fuels the widespread assumption that violent women are exceptional and sensational.[79]

The media's focus on traditional gender stereotypes of female terrorists disregards their active roles. Women can be violent and join terrorist organisations, where they volunteer and perform deadly acts.[80] Female suicide bombers are conscious actors despite the attempts of the media to downplay their roles.[81] Rather than focusing on the active roles of female terrorists, the media focuses on their personal lives.[82] According to Issacharoff, journalists regard the role of Muslim women as housework and taking care of the children rather than taking part in terrorism.[83] This shows that female terrorists are framed differently than male terrorists by the media. Women are framed by the media based on gender stereotypes. According to Brigitte Nacos, who studied media portrayal of female terrorists, it is clear that gender stereotypes are present in the portrayal or framing of female terrorists in mass media.[84] Female terrorists do not match societal expectations worldwide therefore, they are framed significantly differently compared to male terrorists.[85] Since news frames reflect and strengthen societal standards and beliefs, terrorist groups can take advantage of female stereotypes. To prevent and tackle female terrorism, this gender bias needs to be removed. If not, terrorist organisations will be able to take advantage of gender stereotypes, as societies see women as less threatening or suspecting than men.[86]

Despite the fact that scholars have discussed the numerous motives of female terrorists, the media often frames female terrorists as victims rather than perpetrators. Women that join terrorist organisations are often stereotyped as naive victims.[87] As numerous scholars have indeed indicated, women are first and foremost assumed to be victims and a-political due to gender narratives.[88] Evans and Da Silva show the contradictory ways in which women are portrayed, violent women are portrayed in extremes, either they are seen as powerless victims or as unapologetic murderers.[89] This gendered framing of female terrorists is problematic since it reinforces stereotypes and benefits terrorist organisations. Female terrorists are often framed as victims by the

[77] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 841-842
[78] Avi Issacharoff, "The Palestinian and Israeli media on female suicide terrorists." *Female suicide bombers: Dying for equality* (2006): 43
[79] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
[80] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 2
[81] Sjoberg and Gentry, "Reduced to bad sex", 18
[82] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282
[83] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 46
[84] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[85] Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, "What's love got to do with it? Framing 'JihadJane'in the US press." *Media, War & Conflict* 5.1 (2012), 19
[86] Nacos, "The portrayal", 448
[87] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 4
[88] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 5
Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 4
Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[89] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 5

media through the use of sympathetic language. Terrorism is gendered and influenced by orientalism, the media portrays Middle Eastern female terrorists as women forced or created by their societies and circumstances out of their control. This distinguishes the women as victims of their circumstances rather than active decision-makers for their means of survival.[90] Since this thesis focusses on Middle Eastern female terrorists, this can help with explaining their framing in the newspapers. The Western media rationalizes female suicide bombers and their deviation from traditional stereotypes as victims of the patriarchal system.[91] Since female suicide bombers are not usually a Western phenomenon, it is interesting to look at how the Western media views such a phenomenon that mainly occurs in a culturally and ideologically different region. This may tell us how different cultural or ideological backgrounds influence our perception and views on female terrorists.

The focus on the motivation of these women benefits the terrorist organisation since the media will cover discrimination, struggles experienced by the group and social conditions.[92] Again, the media frames the motivation or involvement of women in terrorism differently than men. For male suicide bombers, the promise of 72 virgins in paradise is often seen as the common motive for male terrorists.[93] For women, however, there is no accepted or common motive. Newspapers, therefore, use numerous explanations ranging from the influence of men, revenge, desperation and strategic advantages.[94] Some of the frames Gardner found in news articles to explain female involvement in terrorism were religious fundamentalism, feminist pride, nationalism and revenge. Gardner conducted a content analysis on 236 news articles focusing on female terrorism. The research revealed that more than one-third of the articles included rationalisations for female involvement in terrorism. Over half of these explanations used nationalism or revenge as a cause or rationalisation for women. These frames highly outnumber religious frames, this may be linked to the higher number of women in secular extremist groups compared to religious extremist groups.[95] The media clearly aims to rationalise or explain the actions of women.[96] Motivations can either be social or personal. Social motivation includes nationalism and religion. Personal motivation is related to retribution and victimisation. According to Gardner's research, journalists mainly use personal motivation to rationalise female terrorists. 61% of explanations included revenge, escape, victimisation and redemption. Nationalism, religion and feminism were only included in 39% of explanations. Journalists mainly attribute personal motives to female terrorists.[97] However, according to Speckhard, motivation for both men and women during conflicts is usually revenge and trauma.[98] Moreover, women are more susceptible to joining a terrorist organization when they have had a trauma, were raped or had a troubled past. This leaves them vengeful and angry which results in them joining a terrorist organisation. Others join terrorist organisations for adventure, life purposes or to seek fulfilment.[99] Although research shows that women have similar reasons and motivations as men, the media's discussion of the motivation of terrorists differs significantly when focussing on female terrorists instead of male terrorists.[100]

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[90] Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[91] Katherine E. Brown, "Muriel's wedding: News media representations of Europe's first female suicide terrorist." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.6 (2011), 708
[92] Banks, "Introduction: Women, gender, and terrorism", 184
[93] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[94] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[95] Gardner, "Is there", 921-924
[96] Yarchi, "The effect", 675
[97] Gardner, "Is there", 922
[98] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 2
[99] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 7
[100] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 3

Not only are the motivations of female terrorists highly discussed in the media but Conway and McInerney, among others, have found that female terrorists receive more coverage in the media.[101] Although reality has often contradicted the belief that women are not fighters, female fighters do receive significantly more media coverage since their actions are portrayed as rare and controversial.[102] Female suicide bombers are newsworthy since they violate societal expectations on gender.[103] Since they are so newsworthy, women receive much more media attention even though more men are active in the terrorism field than women.[104] Women receive about eight times more attention from the media than men for the same sort of terrorist attack.[105] In proportion to the actual number of criminal statistics, the number of stories of violent women in the media is much higher.[106] Females who commit violent acts do not only receive more coverage but the articles are also longer compared to men.[107] The media focuses more on why women carry out terroristic acts, giving greater attention to the cause of the terrorist organisation.[108] Yarchi states that attacks carried out by women will affect how the attacks are framed in the media. Yarchi's findings suggest that the media includes more information on the society of the terrorists when the terrorists are female. Media coverage of female terrorists includes more personal information compared to men.[109] Likewise, Auer, Sutcliff and Lee reveal that rather than focusing on the active roles of female terrorists, the media focuses on the personal backgrounds of these women like gender, race, family, age, nationality and religion.[110] In the Israeli media, men are judged much more than women and women receive more favourable treatment. In the case of men, there is much less focus on their personal circumstances or social life.[111] Moreover, when discussing female terrorists in Palestine, the media focuses less on the blame of the country involved in the conflict. The media spends so much time and space discussing the female's personal information that there is no more space left to discuss blame.[112] According to Issacharoff, Arab journalists, however, do not look into the personal lives of female suicide bombers, their articles are rather straightforward and simple.[113] Overall, female terrorists receive much more media attention than men.

Female terrorists are often fetishised in the media, which contributes to the assumption or view that there is something not correct about women who kill. Women who kill are something unique. There is an assumption that female terrorists are "crazier", "more psychopathic", "suicidal" or "depressed" compared to male terrorists. Women are demonised more for being a terrorist than men.[114] Women receive more media coverage and different narratives than men, they are portrayed differently for deviant acts. This is because women who perform deviant acts like terrorism, do not

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[101] Conway and McInerney, "What's love", 18
Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 43
Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[102] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 843
[103] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 841-842
Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 3
[104] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
[105] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
[106] Bronwyn Naylor, "Reporting violence in the British print media: Gendered stories." *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 40.2 (2001): 182
[107] Naylor, "Reporting violence", 188
[108] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 3
[109] Yarchi, "The effect", 681
[110] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282
[111] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 44
[112] Yarchi, "The effect", 681
[113] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 47
[114] Conway and McInerney, "What's love", 18

live up to society's gender biases and expectations.[115] Deviant women, terrorists, are explained by the media either through using a non-feminine narrative; deviance from stereotypical femininity or hyper-feminine narratives; emotional, passionate but irrational. Female terrorists are usually narrated and framed as an exception to the rule, an exception to femininity.[116] When women commit acts of violence the media frames them as emotional or irrational whereas men are portrayed as rational.[117] The media, describes these violent women as emotional, irrational and mad.[118]

It is widely recognised that female suicide bombers are framed differently than male suicide bombers in the media. Jaworski researched how female suicide bombers from Palestine are represented in the media. When looking at suicide bombing through gender, the biases of gender and suicide come forward. Suicide is often seen as masculine through gender biases on agency and violence. [119] This is also the case when you look at how Palestinian female suicide bombers are represented. Only men are interpreted as capable of committing suicide. Women are not taken seriously when it comes to committing suicide. When women do commit suicide, their intentions are not framed the same as when men commit suicide. Palestinian women, wives and mothers, are seen as incapable of intentionally deciding to perform a suicide bombing.[120] The media was shocked when Palestinian groups allowed women to perform suicide bombings. The public was shocked to find out that terrorism was not limited to men and that young women were performing suicide attacks. What shocked people, even more, was the fact that some of these women were mothers and bearers of life who were using bombs to take lives.[121] Overall, the framing of female suicide bombers in the media is heavily influenced by gender stereotypes.

1.1.5 The Framing of Female ISIS Members in the Media

More specifically than the framing of female terrorists in the media, the media's framing of female ISIS members has also been a topic of academic interest, with studies exploring how gender stereotypes and the neo-orientalist view on Islam influence the representation of these women in the media. Scholars have noted that Muslim women are often framed as vulnerable, passive and prey to Muslim men. However, the moment these women join a terrorist organisation, these depictions are challenged.[122] When Muslim women resort to violence like suicide bombings, this directly contradicts gender and orientalist stereotypes.[123] When comparing the portrayal of female terrorists to the portrayal of female ISIS members, it becomes clear that orientalism has a strong influence on the portrayal of female ISIS members. Joining a terrorist organisation shows a significant amount of agency and power. When the stories of these women are reported, the media focuses on their personal challenges or issues. This denies their agency and intentionality and it irrationalises them. They are framed as not credible and apolitical terrorists.[124] Friedman discussed how in the news, these women are portrayed as having no agency, they have no power, and they are not suicide bombers by their own will or desire. Women are forced by men to commit acts of

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[115] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
[116] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
[117] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 707
[118] Naylor, "Reporting violence", 189
[119] Katrina Jaworski, "The Male Preserve of Martyrdom" Representations of Palestinian female suicide bombers in Australian newsprint media. *Feminist Media Studies 10*(2) (2010), 127
[120] Katrina Jaworski, "The Male Preserve of Martyrdom" Representations of Palestinian female suicide bombers in Australian newsprint media. *Feminist Media Studies 10*(2) (2010), 127
[121] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 3
[122] Martini, "Making women", 25
[123] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 4
[124] Martini, "Making women", 25

violence.[125] It is hard to accept the agency of women in terrorism since it is in direct contradiction with societal associations of women as peaceful and motherly.[126] When discussing female agency in terrorism there is often tension due to maternal expectations, women give life rather than take lives.[127] The media fails to recognize that women make conscious decisions to kill, harm and destroy. The media denies their agency in the decisions to commit gruesome acts.[128]

Female ISIS members are often framed differently from male ISIS members in the media according to Soules. Female ISIS members are often discussed with regard to their relation to male ISIS members, referring to them as "ISIS brides''. The participation of these women in ISIS is believed to be through force, coercion or brainwashing. This strips these female ISIS members of their agency and their decision to join ISIS. Since these women are depicted solely as "brides'' rather than active members of ISIS, their important roles within the organisation are ignored. This is not a new or rare way of framing female combatants. The actions of female terrorists are often rationalised through family connections or connections with loved ones. Moreover, marital status is also used in the media to explain the motives of female terrorists.[129] The marital status of female suicide bombers is more likely to be recognized and presented compared to the marital status of male terrorists. The framing of female suicide bombers is often heavily related to marital status, family ties and gender stereotypes.[130] According to Nacos, indeed one of the main frames in which female terrorists are portrayed in the media is the Family Connection Frame.[131] Generally, female ISIS members are framed similarly to female terrorists by the media.

The media's framing of ISIS's female members is important because it impacts political phenomena and shapes public understanding. These depictions in the media are processes of knowledge production, they influence the public view. By reinforcing gender stereotypes and denying women's agency, the media limits our understanding of these women's motivations and actions. A more comprehensive understanding is necessary to fully grasp this phenomenon.[132] What is important to note is that for all of the examples discussed in this section, their research only focussed on the framing of female ISIS members in Western media. This thesis will contribute to previous research by providing the comparison between the framing of female ISIS suicide terrorists in American, Western newspapers and Middle Eastern newspapers.

1.1.6 Conclusion

The framing of female terrorists in the media is a complicated issue, shaped by gender stereotypes, societal expectations and Orientalist views. Across academia, there is a consensus that female terrorists are framed differently than male terrorists by the media. The literature report indicates how female terrorists are often depicted as victims. Rather than conscious and rational decision-makers, these women are framed as passive and irrational actors. The media has a strong tendency to focus on the personal backgrounds of these women and, the media fails to recognize the agency and intentions of these women. This results in a limited understanding of female terrorists and their motivations. Despite this, there is a lot of attention given by the media to the motivation of these women. Female terrorists are often discussed in relation to their family or marital status, these

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[125] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[126] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 4
[127] Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 287
[128] Sjoberg and Gentry, "Reduced to bad sex", 5
[129] Michael J. Soules, "Martyr or mystery? Female suicide bombers and information availability." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45.1 (2022), 62
[130] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62
[131] Nacos, "The portrayal", 438-445
[132] Martini, "Making women", 3

women are framed as mothers and wives rather than active members. Beyond the stereotypical roles such as being a mother and wife, women have important roles within terrorist organisations. The media should acknowledge the roles and agency of these women. When the media fails to do so, gender stereotypes and misconceptions will be maintained. This will obstruct efforts to address and understand female terrorism.

As has become clear in the literature report, research has previously been conducted on female terrorism and its framing in the media. Research has been done on the framing of female ISIS members, Jihadi brides as well as female Palestine terrorists however, limited research has been conducted on the framing of female suicide bombers from ISIS. Moreover, research has predominantly focussed on the portrayal of these women in Western media, this thesis will contribute to academic debates by researching how these women are framed in Middle Eastern media. The ways in which female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed in the media can have a significant impact on how people perceive and respond to female terrorism, especially from ISIS. How the media portrays these women has implications for the societal narratives and gender stereotypes of female terrorists.

1.2 Primary Sources

This thesis uses newspaper articles from America and the Middle East as the primary sources. Newspaper articles from America and the Middle East are chosen specifically since these two regions have differentiating ideologies, backgrounds and perspectives on ISIS. While ISIS is active in Iraq and Syria, in the Islamic Middle East, Christian America is fighting a war on terror within these countries and fighting terrorism and ISIS. It is interesting to look at how these two regions with different ideologies and cultural backgrounds view female suicide bombers from ISIS and how these women are framed in their media. The comparison between the two culturally and ideologically different regions contributes to the innovation and originality of this research. By conducting this comparative analysis on the framing of female suicide bombers between American and Middle Eastern newspapers, this thesis demonstrates the differences of how these female suicide bombers are framed across different cultural and ideological contexts. This creates an understanding of how cultural, ideological or political views and factors influence the framing of female suicide bombers from ISIS in the media.

This thesis focuses on newspaper articles from 2013 until 2022. In 2013 ISIS changed its name from IS, Islamic State of Iraq to ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria after having expanded to Syria. [133] This name change indicates a geographical shift and power shift within the organisation and a new era; therefore, it is chosen as the starting point. This chosen period also provides practical benefits, newspaper articles from this 10-year time period, 2013-2022, are readily available to analyse. However, when gathering relevant newspaper articles, the numerous names that ISIS has had throughout its existence; IS, ISIL are considered as well, seeing as newspapers may still be using their old, but now incorrect, name. This is done to ensure no relevant articles are disregarded. The focus is on ISIS specifically since it is one of the most established and prominent terrorist organisations. For that reason, a sufficient number of newspaper articles will be available on female suicide bombers from ISIS in both America as well as the Middle East compared to smaller terrorist organisations. Moreover, since ISIS is a renowned organisation, the way female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed has a larger impact on the general public.

Newspaper articles are selected as the primary sources since newspaper articles are relatively easily accessible and widely available. Moreover, as Joana Kosho mentions, the media

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[133] Glenn, Cameron, et al, "Timeline: The rise, spread, and fall of the Islamic State." *Wilson Center* 28 (2019).

has a significant impact on public opinion. It is widely accepted that the ideas and messages that are spread via the media significantly influence public opinion, which in turn may influence the behaviour of the public.[134] The news media is one of the main actors that influences the pictures in our heads of the world.[135] Media coverage specifically on conflicts, wars and disasters has an enormous influence on public opinion and behaviour.[136] News frames influence how their audiences and the public interpret the information and messages.[137] Since the news media and its framing has a significant influence on public opinion, this research uses newspaper articles as its primary sources. Besides, newspapers are generally considered to be authoritative and trustworthy sources of information.[138] This adds another interesting aspect to this research, the frames which are presented by the newspaper articles may be considered as the truth. Newspapers influence public opinion, the way in which they frame female ISIS suicide bombers impacts public opinion and how the public views these women. Naturally, newspapers may not always be presenting the truth, false information can be spread by newspapers. Nonetheless, this is unimportant for this particular research. It is not relevant whether the information in the articles is the actual truth, this research focuses on how the newspapers frame these women either through facts, opinions or fiction.

1.3 Research Methods

For the database, this research makes use of Nexis Uni, a database consisting of English-written newspaper articles from across the world. Nexis Uni allows its users to select specific geographical locations of publication as one of the search criteria. Since this research focuses on two geographical locations; America and the Middle East, Nexis Uni is a useful database. Rather than using specific newspaper websites directly, using Nexis Uni results in a broader range of newspapers. As Morin explains, using news stories from multiples sources allows to identify patterns of framing in the news.[139] In a database, a single search can turn up many articles from numerous sources. Paging through printed newspapers or scrolling through numerous newspapers websites for relevant articles costs significantly more time. Using databases is time efficient.[140] Rather than scrolling through numerous websites of newspapers, Nexis Uni has many articles from many sources in one place making it an efficient way to gather a diverse set of sources. This does however mean that the research is more decontextualised, information and awareness that you might have gathered while paging through the newspapers is lost when using a database. [141]

The newspaper articles will be analysed using frame analysis.[142] After the topic, medium and time frame are established, a sample is selected. For each year between 2013 and 2022, the aim is to find five American newspaper articles and five Middle Eastern newspaper articles covering female suicide bombers from ISIS. The number 5 was chosen since this would be a representative

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[134] Joana Kosho, "Media influence on public opinion attitudes toward the migration crisis." *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 5.5 (2016), 86

[135] Kosho, "Media influence", 87

[136] Kosho, "Media influence", 90

[137] Aysel Morin, "Framing terror: The strategies newspapers use to frame an act as terror or crime." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93.4 (2016), 989

[138] Joshua Greenberg, "Opinion discourse and Canadian newspapers: The case of the Chinese "boat people"." *Canadian journal of communication* 25.4 (2000), 519-520

[139] Aysel Morin, "Framing terror: The strategies newspapers use to frame an act as terror or crime." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93.4 (2016), 991

[140] Lara Putnam, "The transnational and the text-searchable: Digitized sources and the shadows they cast the transnational and the text-searchable." *The American Historical Review* 121.2 (2016), 392.

[141] Putnam, "The transnational", 392

[142] Aysel Morin, "Framing terror: The strategies newspapers use to frame an act as terror or crime." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93.4 (2016), 991

number throughout the years and geographical locations. This ensures that the number of newspaper articles is consistent throughout the years and between American and Middle Eastern newspaper articles. Framing theory or analysis is especially effective when used to analyse a small number of news stories thoroughly. Therefore, 5 articles is a good amount for this particular research.[143] To collect the relevant newspaper articles terms such as "female suicide bomber ISIS", "women suicide bomber ISIS", "female suicide terrorist ISIS" etc. are used to search and gather articles from Nexis Uni. Given the fact that ISIS has gone under multiple names, search terms also include their previous names and abbreviation such as "IS" and "ISIL". After the relevant newspaper articles are gathered, the analysis is performed on the newspaper articles. The articles are read and coded after which the frames are established. The frames emerge as the analysis is done.

The aim was to find five articles for each year and each region; however, this was not feasible. There were not 5 articles available for each year and each region through the database, meaning most articles available are used in this analysis. This would indicate that a significant amount of the available newspaper articles is used, making it representative. Instead of the intended number of 100 newspaper articles, 50 American and 50 Middle Eastern, 52 newspaper articles are used, 27 American and 25 Middle Eastern. For the research method, framing analysis, which is an in-depth analysis this number is sufficient to provide qualitative results.

Now that the sources and research methods are clear, this thesis will continue with the analysis of the newspaper articles. The next part will discuss the findings of the analysis of the newspaper articles. As mentioned beforehand the main body of this thesis will be structured along the four main themes: Rare or Not-So-Rare, Family and Marital Ties, Exploring Motivations and Changing Roles.

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[143] Margaret Linstrom and Willemien Marais, "Qualitative news frame analysis: A methodology." *Communitas* 17 (2012), 29-30

2. Rare or Not-So-Rare

Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame female suicide bombers from ISIS as rare. While American newspapers use more expressive language to discuss the abnormality of female ISIS suicide bombers, Middle Eastern newspapers incorporate more historical context into their arguments. This frame echoes the findings of Shaban who analysed British newspapers and found that female terrorists are often described as exceptional and an exception to feminine stereotypes.[144] Since female suicide bombers contradict the main gender stereotypes both in America as well as in the Middle East, they are framed as uncommon. These women are not solely framed as rare or exceptional but as Shaban argues, female terrorists are framed as deviant[145] These women deviate from what is generally seen as the norm or acceptable. The newspapers do not only discuss whether these women are rare or not, both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers mention how ISIS contradicts itself and its beliefs by using female suicide bombers. Moreover, the newspapers emphasize how the traditional duties of women within ISIS are not in line with using women as fighters or even suicide bombers, implying their rarity. Gender stereotypes are visible throughout the articles when discussing the rarity of these women.

American and Middle Eastern newspapers put a lot of emphasis on how unusual female suicide bombers are. It is often mentioned how uncommon these women are in American newspapers, "It's certainly ISIS' first female suicide bomber"[146] and in Middle Eastern newspapers "She is the first would-be female suicide bomber arrested in Indonesia"[147], "It is the first prosecution in the US of a female ISIS battalion leader".[148] By putting the focus on "being the first", the articles insinuate that there have been no women before them committing such crimes. This implies that they are unusual and deviant. They are framed as unique, first one of their kind. The newspapers mention how female suicide bombers are an exception, "The detonation of Wednesday's suicide bomb by a woman is more of an exception than the norm".[149] These deviant women are described as abnormal, "She is a deviant among deviants".[150] Since these women are unusual and do not match traditional gender norms, American and Middle Eastern newspapers emphasize how much they shock people, "It came as a shock when the first female suicide bomber was arrested in Indonesia"[151] and "Horrifying pictures are believed to show a female ISIS fighter holding a baby moments before detonating her suicide vest in Iraq".[152] By using captivating words like "deviant", "exception" and "shock" the American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as abnormal since they deviate from traditional gender norms. Likewise, as Shaban highlights, women are framed differently compared to men in the media for deviant acts. This is because women who commit deviant acts like suicide bombing, do not match the gender stereotypes and expectations of many societies.[153] As Friedman similarly concluded female suicide bombers are so newsworthy

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[144] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539

[145] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539

[146] Tiffany Ap, "What ISIS wants from women", *CNN Wire,* November 20, 2015.

[147] "Islamist Terrorists Are Now Targeting Asia's Domestic Helpers as Recruits for Suicide Missions", *Yerepouni Daily News.* December 15, 2016.

[148] "US Ex-teacher Pleads Guilty to Leading ISIS Women's Brigade", *Asharq Alawsat (English Edition),* June 8, 2022.

[149] Ap, "What ISIS wants."

[150] Simon Cottee and Mia Bloom, "The Myth of the ISIS Female Suicide Bomber", *The Atlantic,* September 8, 2017.

[151] Pinaz Kazi, "Stories of suicide bombers: They are killing humanity, what is killing them?", *International Business Times India,* July 15, 2017.

[152] "Images show female ISIS suicide bomber holding baby while pulling trigger", *AlArabiya.net.* July 9, 2017.

[153] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539

because they shatter societal gender expectations.[154] Gender stereotypes from many societies connect femininity to peace and masculinity to violence.[155] Just considering the fact that terrorists are labelled specifically as "female" shows how female terrorists are perceived as unusual and not as the norm, terrorists are supposed to be men.[156] Overall, both American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers as unusual and deviant which implies their rarity.

Nonetheless, Middle Eastern newspapers do portray a more nuanced picture, "It showed a truck carrying women with guns, driving towards the battlefield under the ISIS flag, and then another woman, heavily armed, fighting alongside men. This is a shocking break from previous practices in the terrorist group. However, it is perhaps not entirely surprising".[157] Female terrorists may not be as unusual and shocking as we might think. Overall, Middle Eastern newspapers include more historical and contemporary contexts to discuss the uncommonness of these women compared to American newspapers. Rather than solely emphasizing their rarity like the American newspapers, the Middle Eastern newspapers challenge this perception that female suicide bombers are an unusual occurrence, "The "most striking statistic this year is the increased involvement of females, including women, children, and teenage girls, in suicide attacks," the report said".[158] The Middle Eastern newspapers discuss the fact that these women are no longer an unusual occurrence, they have become more normalized, "They've become a regular presence that no longer surprises, as it did two years ago".[159] Middle Eastern newspapers emphasize that female suicide bombers are more common than thought, "Of those committing suicide attacks, 137 were women and girls - the highest number of female suicide bombers since women began participating in suicide attacks".[160] The Middle Eastern newspaper also emphasize the increase of female suicide bombers over the years, "In 2017, 137 women took part in 61 suicide attacks in six countries, compared with 77 women the previous year and 118 women in 2015, it said" [161] and "Women's participation in terrorist activities is growing ideologically, logistically and regionally throughout the world".[162] This illustrates how female suicide bombers have become increasingly common throughout the years. They are no longer as uncommon as they are perhaps framed to be. Overall, the Middle Eastern newspapers illustrate that men are still the predominant gender in terms of terrorism but that female terrorists are not surprising or rare, as female involvement in terrorism is increasing. As Mia Bloom likewise argues, even though the media often highlights how rare female suicide bombers are, between 1985 and 2010, 257 suicide attacks, a quarter of all suicide attacks, were performed by women. Female suicide bombers have murdered hundreds of men, women and children.[163] Even though newspapers often portray these women as uncommon, many scholars have highlighted that female terrorists are not a rare phenomenon but rather an indisputable fact.[164] As Nacos highlights, female terrorists are not unusual or unique. Women have always been part of terrorist organisations.[165] By

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[154] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 841-842
[155] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 4
[156] Alison, "Women as agents", 447–448
[157] Eleanor Beevor, "Why Are Women Jihadists Fighting for ISIS?", *Albawaba.com,* February 13, 2018.
[158] Yonah Jeremy Bob, "Think tank report: 2017 saw fewer suicide attacks, but increase in female bombers", *Jerusalem Post,* January 9, 2018.
[159] "What is the future of IS female?", *DT News.* February 26, 2019.
[160] Bob, "Think tank report."
Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women", *Asharq Alawsat (English).* September 23, 2014.
[161] Bob, "Think tank report."
[162] Ghada AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides' ignores that women can be terrorists too", *AlArabiya.net,* March 5, 2019.
[163] Bloom, "Bombshells", 2
[164] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[165] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436

emphasising how these women are not as unusual or rare as we might think, the Middle Eastern newspapers are tackling gender stereotypes.

Additionally, American newspaper articles put a strong emphasis on the uniqueness and abnormality of female suicide bombers using captivating and shocking language, whereas Middle Eastern newspapers provide a more nuanced view using more neutral language. American newspapers for example emphasize how unusual the women are as following, "She is a deviant among deviants"[166], whereas the Middle Eastern newspaper emphasize their uncommonness like this, "She is the first would-be female suicide bomber arrested in Indonesia".[167] Again the Middle Eastern newspapers show a more nuanced picture using more neutral language and facts compared to the American newspapers.

In line with the discussion of the uncommonness or rarity of female suicide bombers in American and Middle Eastern newspapers, American newspapers also repeatedly consider the traditional responsibilities of women within ISIS and what this means for their perceived uniqueness. According to the Jihadist view men are fighters and women are wives and mothers, "elemental code of the Jihadist worldview: namely, that men are men-which is to say, first and foremost, warriors-and women are women-which is to say, first and foremost, wives and mothers".[168] The duty of women in Jihadist societies is to provide emotional support and care for the children and future generations, "Up until now ISIS has been very clear. The role for women is cooking, cleaning and childcare. They do not have women on the front lines".[169] Traditional responsibilities were always expected from ISIS women rather than active fighting, "the idea of Islamist female fighters "does not fit with their culture, ideology and their modus operandi in the past".[170] Again these women are framed as unusual, they do not live up to traditional Jihadist expectations. By putting the emphasis on the contrasting traditional duties of women within ISIS and the duties of female suicide bombers, the American articles frame female suicide bombers from ISIS as unusual, unexpected and untraditional. Women are supposed to act like women and if they act like a man, a fighter or a warrior, they are deviant, wrong and rare. As indeed discussed by Chetty, during wars and conflicts the media frames women according to gender stereotypes. Men fight and women are passive, vulnerable victims and flee. When women do fight, they are framed as deviant. They fail to match the female stereotypes of being vulnerable, loving and caring.[171] Friedman shows that there is a strong correlation assumed in the Western world between women and peace and men and war. Western public opinion has long held the assumption that women are not warriors and that women do not perpetrate violence, women are not fit for combat roles.[172] Women are seen as caring, loving, fragile and sensitive.[173] This can also be seen this frame, according to the Jihadist view women should be loving and caring instead of fighters. When ISIS women do fight, they do not live up to these traditional gender standards and they are therefore framed as rare and abnormal by the American newspapers. This framing reinforces the belief that women have traditional tasks instead of fighting roles.

Likewise, in Middle Eastern newspapers it is also regularly discussed how the traditional Jihadist expectations of women differ from women as fighters or suicide bombers. The traditional

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166 Simon Cottee and Mia Bloom, "The Myth of the ISIS Female Suicide Bomber", *The Atlantic,* September 8, 2017.
167 "Islamist Terrorists Are Now Targeting Asia's Domestic Helpers as Recruits for Suicide Missions", *Yerepouni Daily News.* December 15, 2016.
168 Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
169 Ap, "What ISIS wants."
170 "Who Are The Women Fighting In Syria?", *Newstex Blogs,* February 14, 2014.
171 Chetty, "Media images", 39
172 Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 843
173 Naaman, "Brides of Palestine", 935

responsibilities of women within ISIS are emphasised by the Middle Eastern newspapers but at the same time they recognise the roles of women as terrorists, "Historically, the role of women in violent extremist groups, and ISIS in particular, has been domestic and focused on supporting husbands and children. Women have been used in terrorist operations or suicide bombings if the religious authorities permit it. And ISIS has allowed women to work, including as doctors, teachers, and religious police. But during its height, the group urged most women to stick to roles inside the home".[174] Even though Middle Eastern newspapers do indicate that women as suicide bombers are not a new phenomenon, the responsibilities of women are mostly limited to the traditional supporting tasks, "While the traditional Jihadists limit women's participation in Jihad to supporting militant men in activities such as nursing, teaching, and moral support, the new ideologues have begun to mention female participation in armed actions in their literature recently".[175] The newspapers describe that the responsibilities of women have shifted to fighting, "The public role of women among the extremist groups' ranks represents a novel phenomenon, however. Nearly a decade ago, the BBC reported that there had seemed to be a shift in Al Qaeda regarding the acceptance of women in armed actions".[176] Where some Middle Eastern articles frame female fighters as a new phenomenon, other articles highlight that this new phenomenon may not necessarily be lasting or permanent, "It is not yet clear whether the phenomenon is a blip or the beginning of a trend in which women play a more active role in plotting and carrying out attacks on the West".[177] Again the Middle Eastern newspapers portray a more nuanced story than the American newspapers. Where the American newspapers only emphasise how women are expected to fulfil traditional tasks which is contradicting to the tasks of female suicide bombers, Middle Eastern newspapers emphasise that throughout history women have been allowed to act as suicide bombers and fighters. Furthermore, the Middle Eastern newspapers discuss the possibility that the increase of fighting positions for women is only temporary and might not carry through. Rather than solely framing these women are rare, Middle Eastern newspapers discuss the historical and contemporary context of these female terrorists and consider multiple sides of this phenomenon. Middle Eastern newspapers offer a much more comprehensive story looking at the commonness of female fighters and suicide bombers throughout history.

American and Middle Eastern newspapers do not exclusively frame the actions of these women as rare but they also both consider how rare it is for ISIS to employ women as fighters. The usage of women in battle is against the beliefs and traditional duties of ISIS. The usage of women in ISIS is unusual, "use of female suicide bombers in battle, while not new, is exceedingly rare and demonstrates the group's desperation"[178] and "The ISIL terrorist group became so desperate for suicide bombers, they have now started to train up an all-women battalion of bombers in Syria".[179] The usage of women as fighters by ISIS shows how hopeless the group is, "ISIS has hitherto "mandated that women should be wives and mothers rather than fighters," Winter and Margolin write, but now that the group is "under pressure and facing recruitment challenges," that policy seems to have been discarded"[180] and "The group has lost essentially all its territory. Most of its male fighters have been killed, wounded or arrested".[181] Due to ISIS' losses they have turned to

[174] Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling ISIS's Comeback", *MENAFN - Business & Finance News (English),* October 4, 2022.
[175] Osmandzikovic and Holtmeier, "Female terrorism examined."
[176] Osmandzikovic and Holtmeier, "Female terrorism examined."
[177] Alissa Rubin, "Women's Emergence as Terrorists in France Points to Shift in ISIS Gender Roles", *Asharq Alawsat (English),* October 5, 2016.
[178] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
[179] "Desperate ISIL Forms"
[180] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
[181] "What is the future of IS female?"

female fighters, "As it has lost power and land over the past year and a half or so, the Islamic State has quietly shifted from insistence on a strict gender hierarchy to allowing, even celebrating, female participation in military roles".[182] Only when ISIS has become so desperate, they are willing to use female suicide bombers. Since ISIS is under such significant pressure, they are allowing women to fight, "The move to allow female combatants is born out of desperation".[183] This narrative highlights both how rare it is for ISIS to resort to women for fighting, as well as how rare it is for women from ISIS to fight. It is extraordinary that ISIS sets aside its own beliefs and traditions and uses female fighters. Since this is so contradictory to their traditions and ideology, it is framed as extremely rare that women are allowed to fight for ISIS. As highlighted by Speckhard, normally terrorist organisations indeed refrain from using women as fighters if the societal context or culture they operate in does not agree with this. However, when the situation is tough, they may resort to using women for suicide bombings even though this may cause societal uproar and backlash.[184] This can be seen in this particular case of ISIS. As stated by a Middle Eastern newspaper the usage of women breaks traditional rules and expectations, "For every rule, there is an exception, and as ISIS's territory shrank over the last few months, the group was increasingly hinting that it might find some flexibility in its usual ultra-strict codes of female behaviour".[185] The usage of female fighters is framed as an exception rather than a norm, "ISIS is fighting a losing battle, and is grasping at straws, even if that means adopting a Western value and reversing traditional gender roles, the report said".[186] ISIS is willing to let go of its traditional gender norms to keep fighting even if this causes societal uproar or backlash. The newspapers emphasise how unusual and rare it is for ISIS to resort to female fighters and female suicide bombers. This again reinforces the idea that women are not fighters or terrorists.

Overall, American and Middle Eastern newspapers both frequently emphasise the rarity and uncommonness of female suicide bombers from ISIS. Even though female suicide bombers have become increasingly more common, the newspapers still frame these women as rare and unusual. For example by stating, "The detonation of Wednesday's suicide bomb by a woman is more of an exception than the norm".[187] Similarly, Conway and McInerney discuss how female terrorists are seen by the media as something wrong or unique, there is something not right about women who kill.[188] According to Shaban, female terrorists are usually framed as an exception to the rule, an exception to femininity, newspapers often frame female terrorists as rare.[189] Not only are these women framed as rare, but it is also framed as rare for ISIS to use women in battle. According to the traditional Jihadist view, the responsibilities of women are mostly refrained to housework, making it rare for ISIS to resort to women for fighting. However, by emphasising the changing roles of women in ISIS and the increase of female terrorism over the years, Middle Eastern newspapers do challenge stereotypical views, "Women's participation in terrorist activities is growing ideologically, logistically and regionally throughout the world".[190] In conclusion, the framing of female suicide bombers from ISIS in American and Middle Eastern newspapers reveals a strong influence of gender stereotypes and traditional societal expectations of women. Women are expected to be peaceful and loving. Womanhood is restricted to being a mother and wife and fulfilling traditional

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[182] "What is the future of IS female?"
[183] "What is the future of IS female?"
[184] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[185] Beevor, "Why Are Women"
[186] Sara Rubenstein, "Has ISIS joined the feminist bandwagon?", *Jpost.com,* February 21, 2019.
[187] Ap, "What ISIS wants."
[188] Conway and McInerney, "What's love", 18
[189] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
[190] Ghada AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides' ignores that women can be terrorists too", *AlArabiya.net,* March 5, 2019.

tasks rather than fighting. The framing of these women as unusual, rare and deviant re-enforces gender stereotypes and societal expectations which reflect the idea of women as peaceful. Media coverage of women in terrorism indeed seems to be a mix of stereotypes, rumours and reality according to Gardner.[191] Likewise, Shaban states that women who perform deadly acts or deviant acts, do not live up to the gender expectations of many societies.[192] However, their actions for ISIS clearly demonstrate that these stereotypical expectations are incorrect. Both the stereotypes of gender and the rarity of these women are clearly present in American and Middle Eastern newspapers. However, the Middle Eastern newspapers do challenge these stereotypes more by providing context, facts and figures to illustrate the increase of female suicide bombers over the years.

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[191] Elizabeth Gardner, "Is there method to the madness? Worldwide press coverage of female terrorists and journalistic attempts to rationalise their involvement." *Journalism Studies* 8.6 (2007), 921
[192] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539

3. Family and Marital Ties

American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame female terrorists in relation to their families. They are framed as mere mothers or wives rather than active members of ISIS. The motivations and actions of these women are often rationalised by both the newspapers through their connection to their husbands. Similarly, this focus on family and marital ties can also be found in the literature, Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee have highlighted how the media frames female terrorists through motherhood.[193] Motherly stereotypes are in direct contradiction with the actions of suicide bombers. Therefore, this focus on motherhood further sensationalised their stories and highlights their deviancy. Moreover, Soules mentions how marital status is often discussed in relation to female terrorists.[194] Interestingly, however, the Middle Eastern newspapers do not only mention the influence of men on these women, but they also bring up the fact that in certain cases women influence men to join terrorist organisations and commit crimes. Nevertheless, this strong emphasis on their husbands, takes the attention away from their crimes and active roles within terrorism. This way of framing female terrorists insinuates that their decisions are not theirs or rational, their own agency is denied.

It is visible throughout the American and Middle Eastern newspapers that there is a strong focus on the husbands of these women, "While her new husband, himself a foreign member of the Islamist forces, initially refused to allow her to take part in the fighting, he eventually relented".[195] The husbands of these women are often terrorists or fighters themselves which is emphasised in the articles, "Samantha Lewthwaite, whose husband blew himself up in the 2005 London bombings"[196] and "Rishawi, now 44, was arrested four days after the November 9, 2005 attacks in which her husband Ali Hussein al-Shammari and two other Iraqis blew themselves up in Amman".[197] Rather than focussing on these women and the gruesome acts of violence they have committed, the American and Middle Eastern newspapers pay a significant amount of attention to their husbands and their roles in terrorism. This frames the women as irrelevant, rather than focussing on their actions, the newspapers focus on their husbands. Similarly, Soules states that female ISIS members are indeed often mentioned in relation to their husbands or male ISIS members.[198] Rather than depicting these women as active members of terrorist organisations they are portrayed as brides. Framing these women solely as brides disregards their important and active positions in the organisations.[199] Rather than emphasising the actions and crimes of the women, their husbands are brought into the picture. The focus on their husbands moves the focus away from the crimes of these women. Interestingly, this is also highlighted in the Middle Eastern newspaper, Al Arabiya, "The media's use of terms such as "wives" and "brides" indicates weakness and subordination among these women".[200] Middle Eastern newspapers highlight the consequences of framing these women as mere wives. It disregards their active responsibilities and portrays them as lesser than men even though these women are very much active terrorists. Whereas the American newspapers only mention these women in relation to their husbands, the Middle Eastern newspapers look further at what this might mean. These women are framed and therefore perceived as mere wives rather

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[193] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 284

[194] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62

[195] "Who Are The Women"

[196] Bruce Golding, "The 'White Widow' is training female suicide bombers for ISIS", *NY Post,* September 28, 2014.

[197] "Why Does ISIS Want a Failed Female Suicide Bomber Released?", *Arutz Sheva,* January 29, 2015. Asharq Al-Awsat, "US Ex-teacher Pleads."

[198] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62

[199] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62

[200] AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides'"

than active terrorists by American and Middle Eastern newspapers, reinforcing gender stereotypes. However, at the same time, Middle Eastern newspapers do emphasise the consequences of framing these women as mere wives, exposing the influence of gender stereotypes.

Not only are the husbands of these women mentioned, the actions or motivations of these women are often explained or rationalised in relation to their husbands in American and Middle Eastern newspapers, "She was dragged along by her husbands".[201] Their husbands are portrayed as the reason why these women join ISIS and become violent, "She started talking to like-minded ISIS sympathisers and ended up talking to Nur Solihin with whom she got married by using a Telegram messaging app, after she agreed to be a suicide bomber"[202] and "the young women who joined ISIS are looking to help the group by marrying their soldiers and doing a spot of public relations on the side".[203] These men are framed as the reason these women join ISIS and commit suicide attacks, "She said her husband was one of the bombers, that they had travelled from Iraq using fake passports and he had shown her how to activate the explosives".[204] The newspapers indeed frame the radicalisation process of these women in relation to their husbands. First, they meet the men and then they volunteer as suicide bombers as in this example, "34-year-old Ika Puspitasari had returned to Indonesia to marry a man she met online in 2015, according to IPAC. Authorities say she then volunteered to carry out a bomb attack in Bali on New Year's Eve".[205] The men are framed as forcing or influencing these women into ISIS and violent roles. These women are being framed as influenced by men, their husbands. This denies their own motivations and agency. The death of their husbands is also described as one of the reasons that they commit these acts of violence, "An Egyptian woman was offered a large amount of money and the promise to 'go to your husband in heaven' if she became an ISIL suicide bomber".[206] Indeed, even revenge as a motive is often linked to the influence of men, the death or humiliation of their male relatives is what drives revenge for these women according to Friedman.[207] In all these cases but in different ways, the women are framed as being influenced by men. Brown has likewise analysed how Muriel Deguages', a Belgian female suicide bomber, radicalization was framed in the media. Indeed, her marriage to a Muslim was often discussed, he was the reason she converted. This narrative denies her agency, it insinuates that her decisions were not rational or hers.[208] Even though Muriel Deguages was a white convert, the portrayal of the radicalization of Muriel Deguage is similar to how female ISIS suicide bombers are framed throughout the American and Middle Eastern newspapers. It is commonly emphasised in both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers that female suicide bombers from ISIS are influenced by their husbands. This reinforces the stereotype of women being passive actors, influenced by men.

Interestingly, Middle Eastern newspapers also emphasise how women influence men. Women influence men to join ISIS and become fighters, "In a Twitter post, the female terrorist revealed her intentions to become a suicide bomber, pledged an oath of allegiance to al-Baghdad, and called on women to encourage their husbands and sons to join ISIS".[209] These women have the desire to marry fighters and create a true mujahedeen family, "Women insisting that their husbands

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[201] Holmes Lybrand, "Kansas woman who led all-female ISIS battalion sentenced to 20 years in prison", *CNN Wire,* November 1, 2022.
[202] Kazi, "Stories of suicide bombers"
[203] Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women"
[204] "Why Does ISIS"
[205] Julie Zaugg, "ISIS recruiters are preying on vulnerable domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore", *CNN Wire,* November 12, 2019.
[206] "Desperate ISIL Forms"
[207] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[208] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 716
[209] Shoshana Miskin, "First all-female ISIS battalion", *Arutz Sheva,* February 28, 2016.

or sons join the terrorist group. He also knew of women who did not want to marry anyone other than front-line fighters because "they wanted to be a true mujahedeen family".[210] They want their male family members to be fighters and terrorists. Men do not only influence women to become terrorists, it works both ways. These women that are generally framed as mere wives, influenced by men are much more than that, "And despite the press's tasteless fondness for the phrase "Jihadi brides," women in Jihadist movements have frequently and publicly voiced their desire to do more than marry. They want to join the fight".[211] Women in ISIS are not mere supporters, influenced by men, they are active terrorists with a desire to fight and commit acts of terrorism. Indeed, framing these women incorrectly as mere wives rather than terrorists creates the wrong image, "Journalists calling female terrorists "Jihadi brides" will most likely activate the image of a weak and helpless woman – an image that will not help in developing precise and effective strategies to counter-terrorism — as it barely reflects the actual, more complex reality we're in".[212] As discussed before, the Middle Eastern newspapers emphasise how this incorrect image of these women as mere wives has negative consequences for the perception of these women and counter-terrorism strategies. Contrary to traditional gender stereotypes, women are not passive victims influenced by men, women can be just as influential or cruel as men.

Not only do the American and Middle Eastern newspapers articles discuss the husbands of these women, but an emphasis is also frequently placed on their children as well. The women are often referred to as a mother in the newspapers and their children are mentioned regularly, "Her daughter and son, Gabriel, watched in silence in the courtroom audience as their mother was sentenced. Her six minor children have been placed in foster care"[213] and "Saudi Arabian media reported a woman, Khouloud al-Raqibi who recruited her brother and two sons to fight and carry out suicide bombings with ISIS".[214] There is quite a strong focus on female suicide bombers as mothers, "Killed herself and the baby in her arms. An older daughter also at the scene survived"[215] and "The images purport to show the woman holding a trigger in one hand, along with her handbag, while holding her baby".[216] When the children are mentioned in relation to an attack, this increases the shock factor, what is more shocking than a female terrorist committing a violent act; a female terrorist committing a violent act with her children. In the West, women are indeed often linked to motherhood and mothers are viewed as harmless, unable to be killers as argued by Åhäll.[217] This was also discovered by Brown, female suicide terrorists are often discussed in relation to their motherhood, the media represents these women on the basis of female stereotypes.[218] Almost all societies view women as mothers; gentle and nurturing instead of violent and cruel.[219] The media and public were shocked when certain groups allowed women to commit suicide bombings, however, they were mostly shocked that these women were mothers.[220] There is a consensus across scholars that due to societal expectations of femininity, many of us hold the assumption that

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[210] "What is the future of IS female?"

[211] Beevor, "Why Are Women"

[212] AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides'."

[213] Lybrand, "Kansas woman"

[214] Nidaa Abou Ali, "ISIS Recruitment between Western, Arab Women", *Asharq Alawsat (English).* October 11, 2016.

[215] Mia Jankowicz, "A female suicide bomber activated her explosive belt while holding her baby, killing both, Tunisian government says", *The Business Insider.* April 2, 2021.

[216] "Images show female"

[217] Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 291

[218] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 707

[219] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 1

[220] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 3

women are nonviolent and not inclined to terrorism.[221] According to maternal expectations, women create lives rather than take lives.[222] By placing the emphasis on their children, the newspapers are framing these women as mothers in accordance to gender stereotypes and increasing the shock factor.

According to Shaban, female terrorists are indeed portrayed in the media through gendered biases that link them to motherhood. Shaban however states that this gender-biased portrayal sympathises with the women.[223] However, many articles appear to be critical rather than sympathising. Rather than taking care of their children and loving them, these women are fighting alongside their children, using them in suicide attacks or leaving them to their own, "ISIS women are fighting with their children right beside them".[224] The newspapers use the children of these women to emphasise their evilness and cruelty, "For years she was a mother of 10 young children, keeping a good, Muslim home. Now she's a rebel commander with a gun, fighting, she says, for her honour and her religion. Her children battle at her side".[225] Now that these women have turned to fighting, they are no longer good mothers, keeping a good Muslim home. There is a strong emphasis on their children and their roles as mothers which highlights traditional gender roles and stereotypes. However, rather than using these gender stereotypes to sympathise with these women, the American and Middle Eastern newspapers use these stereotypes to criticize and accentuate the cruelness of these women.

However, Middle Eastern newspapers do also show another more sympathetic side to the story, women are fulfilling these operations to provide for their families, "The ISIL recruiter also told Farah that the terrorist group would "take care of her family after her death and will give the large sum of money before the implementation of the operation"".[226] Women may be persuaded by the idea that their family and children will be taken care of after they have successfully committed a suicide attack. Likewise, Åhäll discusses how motherhood is indeed sometimes used as an explanation for why women kill or commit acts of violence. Women have strong maternal and biological passions therefore, when it comes to protecting their children, they become frightful killers.[227] Like the American newspapers, the Middle Eastern newspapers use motherhood to sensationalise their stories and criticize these women. However, the Middle Eastern newspapers also discuss that women might fight to protect their children and their future. This is a more sympathetic framing of these women, but nonetheless influenced by gender stereotypes.

In American and Middle Eastern newspapers, these women are not solely mentioned in relation to their husbands and children but also their other family members. They are mentioned in relation to their fathers, "Her father is Muslim, but not radicalised"[228] and their brothers, "She is the sister of a former emir (leader) and her brothers are martyrs".[229] Another male relative they are mentioned alongside are their male cousins, "The only person who seems to value Hasna is the cousin with whom she reconnects over Facebook after the news reports that he's joined ISIS in

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221 Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 291
222 Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 287
223 Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
224 Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
225 "Who Are The Women"
226 "Desperate ISIL Forms"
227 Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 292
228 Terresa Monroe-Hamilton, "Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber 'The Cowgirl' Blows Herself Up in Police Gunfight", *Right Wing News.* November 20, 2015.
229 "Why Does ISIS"

Syria".[230] Again, the role of these men in the radicalization of the women is discussed, "For these women, joining such a group is much easier when they have relatives who have pledged allegiance to ISIS".[231] In all these cases above it seems as if the articles aim to establish a link between the women and their cruel actions. As if their father, brothers and cousins can explain why she did what she did. Even though most articles focus on male relatives, there are mentions of female relatives like mothers and sisters, "Although Hasna's family life is a violent one — her abusive mother's illness. But when the siblings are separated by the authorities and placed with different foster families, the separation deprives Hasna of the only real home she's ever had".[232] In these cases as well, their family relatives are used to rationalise the behaviour of these women. Her chaotic life and her abusive mother left her without a home, which can be perceived as a reason for her actions. Their family members are not discussed in a positive light, but rather as the reason these women join terrorist organisations. Rather than depicting these women as conscious rational actors, they are framed once again as influenced by their families. According to Nacos, one of the main ways female terrorists are framed in the media is through the family connection frame.[233] Yarchi also states that the media includes more personal information, like family relations when it comes to female terrorists compared to men.[234] Auer, Sutcliff and Lee reveal that rather than focusing on the active roles of female terrorists, the media focuses on their personal backgrounds like family, gender, race, age, nationality and religion.[235] Soules also mentioned that female terrorists are often framed in relation to their family ties.[236] Both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers indeed emphasise their family ties, more specifically, they frame these women as being influenced by their families. Again, reinforcing gender stereotypes that see women as passive, insignificant actors or victims.

In conclusion, both American and Middle Eastern newspapers place significant focus on the husbands of female terrorists. These men are framed as the reason why these women join ISIS and commit gruesome acts, "She was dragged along by her husbands".[237] Soules states that female ISIS members are often mentioned in relation to male ISIS members and that the actions of female terrorists are indeed often explained through family connections.[238] However, as highlighted in the Middle Eastern newspapers, the media's focus on terms like "wife" and "bride" indicates weakness and inferiority. This portrayal, which frames women solely as wives disregards their active roles and agency. This narrative insinuates that their decisions are not rational or their own, but rather influenced by men. This incorrect image of these women as mere wives is influenced by gender stereotypes and has significant influence on the perception of these women and anti-terrorism strategies. Interestingly, Middle Eastern newspapers do highlight how women also influence men to join ISIS, "Women insisting that their husbands or sons join the terrorist group".[239] Again, Middle Eastern newspapers provide a more nuanced perspective and challenge stereotypical views. It is crucial to recognize these women for what they are, active members of ISIS. Their responsibilities, actions and motivations go beyond the influence of men. Moreover, American and Middle Eastern

[230] David Ehrlich, "You Resemble Me' Review: Dina Amer's Debut Unpacks the Story of 'Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber", *indieWIRE.* November 2, 2022.
[231] Ali, "ISIS Recruitment"
[232] Ehrlich, "'You Resemble Me' Review"
[233] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[234] Yarchi, "The effect", 675
[235] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282
[236] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62
[237] Holmes Lybrand, "Kansas woman who led all-female ISIS battalion sentenced to 20 years in prison", *CNN Wire,* November 1, 2022.
[238] Soules, "Martyr or mystery", 62
[239] "What is the future of IS female?"

newspapers link the influence of other family members to the radicalisation of these women as well, "For these women, joining such a group is much easier when they have relatives who have pledged allegiance to ISIS".[240] Again, failing to recognise these women as active actors but instead attributing their actions to their families. Besides, there is a strong emphasise on the children of the female suicide terrorists, "For years she was a mother of 10 young children, keeping a good, Muslim home. Now she's a rebel commander with a gun, fighting, she says, for her honour and her religion. Her children battle at her side".[241] Likewise, Brown explains that female suicide terrorists are often discussed in relation to their motherhood.[242] Female suicide terrorists contradict gender stereotypes and motherly characteristics. This contradiction between gender stereotypes and motherhood further emphasises how shocking, abnormal and wicked these women are. The motherhood of these women is used to further criticise their actions, what mother would do such a thing? Overall, family plays a significant role in the framing of female suicide bombers in the American and Middle Eastern newspapers. This shows how ISIS's female suicide bombers are framed in accordance with gender stereotypes. Women are mere wives and mothers, influenced by men.

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[240] Ali, "ISIS Recruitment"
[241] "Who Are The Women"
[242] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 707

4. Exploring Motivations

While the American newspapers frame these women as brainwashed victims, Middle Eastern newspapers frame them as active, conscious terrorists. Both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers, however, aim to provide motivations and rationalise the actions of the female suicide bombers. Likewise, Friedman argues that the media indeed often aims to make the actions of these women intelligible.[243] Throughout both American and Middle Eastern newspapers, the behaviour of these women is rationalised through religious, personal and emotional motivations. The newspaers emphasise numerous motivations and triggers, trauma, unstable living situations, influence of men, revenge and strategic advantages. Scholars have indeed found that there are multiple ways in which the media portrays the motivations of female terrorists.[244] Despite the fact that female suicide bombers are sensationalized by both American and Middle Eastern newspapers in their own ways, framing them as dangerous, evil and shocking, female motivations do not significantly differ from male terrorists. Especially the American newspapers' framing of the motivations of these women reinforces gender stereotypes and denies their agency since they are framed as victims, brainwashed and influenced by men.

The motivations of ISIS's female suicide bombers are commonly analysed throughout American and Middle Eastern newspaper articles. There is a lot of emphasise on the radicalization process, "the most perverse criminal thing about the radicalization is that young, broken people who are looking for a place in society and a purpose in life are being manipulated into committing perverse political actions"[245] and "Security officials say they are concerned, and they are seeking to understand whether women are beginning to step up because so many men are under surveillance or in detention, or whether recruiters from terror groups are urging women on, in part, as a way to shame more men into taking action".[246] Articles analyse the process of radicalization, "For the handful of women who become radicalised, the process usually begins with a traumatic event".[247] The articles seem to be looking for the motivation or trigger for these women, "The tipping point usually comes after the women forge personal relationships with militants online who become their "boyfriends," she says"[248] or "What could lead a young medical student to leave her home in Britain to join the "Islamic State" or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Syria? And who were the evil figures who convinced her to proudly brandish a severed head in the presence of two young children?".[249] Some specific motives looked at by the newspapers includes the influence of men, "Bint Osama, for instance, says she was influenced by the sermons of US–Yemeni cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki".[250] As well as revenge, "For other women, their willingness to participate is driven by revenge, need or both".[251] Some of the many motivations that were found in the newspaper articles are trauma, unstable living situations, work or people and intimate relationships. As Friedman likewise explains, the promise of 72 virgins in the afterlife is generally seen as the common motive for male terrorists in American media. Nevertheless, there is no commonly accepted motive for female terrorists in the American media, resulting in a long list of motivations discussed by the

[243] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 841-842
[244] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[245] Elsa Keslassy, "Dina Amer Deconstructs Terrorism in Venice Days' Bold Feature Debut 'You Resemble Me'", *Variety,* September 8, 2021.
[246] Alissa Rubin, "Women's Emergence"
[247] Zaugg, "ISIS recruiters are preying"
[248] Zaugg, "ISIS recruiters are preying"
[249] Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women"
[250] Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women"
[251] "What is the future of IS female?"

media.[252] This is similar to what was found in the analysis, American and Middle Eastern newspapers indeed use numerous explanations to explain the involvement of women in terrorism ranging from the influence of men to revenge and strategic advantages. Both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers commonly raise questions regarding the radicalization process of these women and discuss a multitude of motivations.

A popular way to rationalize women's involvement in terrorism and suicide attacks by American newspapers is to frame them as brainwashed, "brainwashed young girls and trained them to kill".[253] These female suicide bombers are framed as victims, forced and brainwashed, "it's now feared that more civilian women - in Libya at least - are being brainwashed, forced or cajoled into killing themselves for IS terrorists as fighting intensifies".[254] These women are not framed as perpetrators of violent criminals but rather as hopeless victims, forced into violence. Indeed, Bakker and De Leede found that women who join terrorist organisations are often framed or stereotyped as naive victims.[255] They become suicide bombers and murderers because they are brainwashed, not because they are evil. According to Banks, female terrorists are indeed seen as victims rather than perpetrators.[256] Often political aspirations of women are disregarded, instead, their roles in terrorism are attributed to the influence of men.[257] As numerous scholars have indicated, women are first and foremost assumed to be victims due to gender narratives.[258] Nonetheless, research indicates that the motivations of women are not much different from the motivations of men to join terrorist organisations.[259] This frame, in which American newspapers frame these women as victims is clearly in line with gender stereotypes and previous literature. The framing of these women as victims has a significant impact on public opinion and behaviour which may limit anti-terrorism strategies.

Middle Eastern articles do not fall for the arguments of these women being brainwashed or forced. They see and frame these women as evil, murderous killers, "Foremost among them are women, who claim they were "brainwashed" and pose as victims "trapped" in Iraq and Syria. Those who joined ISIS did so to murder and kill, to rape and genocide, to colonize and conquer".[260] Middle Eastern newspapers do not interpret these women as brainwashed victims but rather as active violent terrorists, "To pretend that ISIS "widows" played no role or were innocent victims replicates the chauvinist world view of ISIS and pretends that women are not equal to men in their choices".[261] These women are not described as different from men but rather they are the same as male terrorists, "Women who journey to join organisations like ISIS are perpetrators alongside men".[262] They are not less evil or less dangerous as men, "These women were every bit as cruel, sometimes more so than the men".[263] The Middle Eastern media emphasise how these women are not just brides, they are terrorists, "Referring to the women amongst them as "Jihadi brides". This

[252] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[253] Lybrand, "Kansas woman"
[254] Pamela Geller, "Female Muslim bomber uses three children as decoy to blow herself up", *Atlas Shrugs.* December 3, 2016.
[255] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 4
[256] Banks, "Introduction: Women", 183
[257] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, Framing the 'White Widow', 294
[258] Evans and da Silva, "# ShamimaBegum", 5
[259] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 5
[260] Seth J. Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows' and the myth of the innocent women jihadists", *Jpost.com,* December 17, 2017.
[261] Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows'"
[262] Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows'"
[263] Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows'"
Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women"

characterization is not only false - like men, women are perfectly capable of being terrorists".[264] By failing to acknowledge them for what they are, their roles are being downplayed by the media, "Calling female militants "Jihadi brides" downplays the role of women in terrorism".[265] Women are not only capable of being terrorists, they might even be more successful terrorists than men, "The perception that women can only be victims of terrorism or violence is indeed problematic, female suicide attacks are more lethal on average than those conducted by men".[266] Middle Eastern newspapers clearly portray a message that these women are not victims, they are not brainwashed or coerced but rather that they are deliberate cruel terrorists.[267] Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as active, conscious terrorists. In contrast to the American framing of these women as victims, Middle Eastern newspapers do not frame these women in accordance to gender stereotypes but frame them as what they are, terrorists. This framing is beneficial in creating a correct understanding of the issue which is then transferred to the public opinion and behaviour.

What is particularly interesting is that the Middle Eastern articles mention how the West falls for this stereotype of these women being brainwashed, "It is firstly worth confronting some of the widespread assumptions about female Jihadists. Despite the tendency in European countries to give female former Jihadists more lenient sentences on the assumption that they must have been "brainwashed," most women who join these movements know what they're doing, and make their wishes clear".[268] The Middle Eastern newspapers highlight how Jihadi brides are framed as passive actors by the western media, "Women are largely viewed as passive supporters of extremist groups, oftentimes broadly characterised as "Jihadi brides" by Western media and policymakers".[269] The Middle Eastern newspapers are aware of this Western assumption or stereotype that female terrorists are innocent victims instead of intentional terrorists. According to Shaban, the Western media indeed frames women in line with gender stereotypes resulting in the portrayal of these women as victims instead of terrorists. Through the use of sympathetic language female terrorists are framed as victims by the Western media. The Western media frames terrorists as victims of brainwashing or force rather than international decision-makers.[270] Moreover, Muslim women specifically, are framed as victims or insignificant actors in the Western media.[271] As Speckhard highlights, violent women are indeed portrayed in extremes. They are either framed as poor, powerless victims or they are framed as unapologetic brutal murderers.[272] Both these extremes can be found in the newspapers. As just described American newspapers frame these women as victims, whereas the Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as active terrorists and killers.

Despite their different views on the victimhood of these women, both American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as evil. The female suicide bombers are framed as evil, dangerous and shocking in the newspapers, "She was attracted to death and destruction"[273] and "Dian said she was prepared to kill and main "for the sake of Allah".[274] Many catchy phrases and shocking statements are used in the articles to amplify their evilness like "the monstrous figure of

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[264] AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides'"
[265] AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides'."
[266] Osmandzikovic and Holtmeier, "Female terrorism examined."
[267] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 43
[268] Beevor, "Why Are Women"
[269] Osmandzikovic and Holtmeier, "Female terrorism examined."
[270] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539-540
[271] Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[272] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 2
[273] Lybrand, "Kansas woman"
[274] "Islamist Terrorists"

the deadly, black-cloaked, female suicide bomber"[275], "lust for power"[276], "dark desires."[277] as well as "shocking and sensational twist in the ISIS horror show".[278] Throughout the articles it is emphasised how crazy, violent, disgusting, savage and dangerous these women are, "killing herself and as many other innocent people as possible"[279], "She was by then a violent extremist who pledged her support for ISIS".[280] They emphasise the cruel actions of these women, "She was probably smiling for the camera behind her niqab (full face veil), this young medical student from Britain who calls herself "Bint Osama" on her Twitter profile, as she carried in her hand a severed head".[281] The women are described to be crazier than men, "Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men".[282] Conway and McInerny also found that female terrorists are seen as something wrong, the media fetishized female terrorist. They are "crazier" or "more psychopathic" compared to male terrorists. Women are demonised more than men for being a terrorist.[283] Likewise, Naylor found that the British media uses emotions, irrationality and madness to explain the rationale of violent women.[284] Additionally, as Auer, Sutcliff and Lee describe, the media sensationalises stories of female terrorists.[285] Indeed in line with previous literature, the American and Middle Eastern newspapers place a lot of emphasis on how shocking and cruel the actions of the women are, framing these women as evil.

   Another motivation that is often discussed in American and Middle Eastern articles is religion, "her increasingly violent interpretations of the faith"[286] and "women are often more ideologically motivated as ISIS recruits than their male counterparts".[287] Women fight for ISIS and become suicide bombers out of religious reasons, "women who are willing to violate the very principles of Sharia to build a Sharia state for the future"[288] and "The chaste mujahed woman journeying to her Lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for her religion and for the honour of her sisters".[289] As Bakker has found, the oppression of Muslims all over the globe is a motivation for Muslim women to join terrorist organisations. These women are driven by ideological and religious motives.[290] Many of the women desire to be part of a greater movement. They want to change the world and create a new Islamic State.[291] Women have violent interpretations of their faith or want to fight for their faith even if it requires violent actions and violates the Sharia. Women use faith to justify their fighting and actions. As Kneip explains, many Muslim women that join ISIS, recognize it as their duty to join ISIS and fulfil their *Jihad*.[292] Ideology indeed appears to be a common motivation discussed by the American and Middle Eastern newspapers for women to join ISIS and pick up arms. These women are framed as being motivated by religion.

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275 Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
276 Lybrand, "Kansas woman"
277 Lybrand, "Kansas woman"
278 Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
279 Geller, "'I WANT TO KILL A LOT'"
280 Geller, "'I WANT TO KILL A LOT'".
281 Diana Moukalled, "Opinion: ISIS's Western Women"
282 Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
283 Conway and McInerney, "What's love", 18
284 Naylor, "Reporting violence", 189
285 Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282
286 Geller, "'I WANT TO KILL A LOT'"
287 Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows'"
288 "Who Are The Women"
289 "What is the future of IS female?"
290 Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 5
291 Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 6
292 Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 89

Another motivation highlighted by the American newspapers is emotional motivation. These women do not fight for ISIS for religious reasons or because they are brainwashed or evil but because they aim to help those who need it, "There are emotional elements as well. Ongoing media reports of the suffering of children or of other women, raped by Assad's forces, inspire rage as much as they do a longing to give help to those in need".[293] Some of these women may be driven by a desire to help those in need. This is a very different motivation than the other motives that are discussed in the American newspapers. While most of the other motivations discussed are portrayed rather negative, this appears to be a motivation that is discussed sympathetically by the American newspapers. The women are framed as savers or heroes. This portrayal is similar to how Middle Eastern newspapers framed female suicide bombers fighting for the future of their children, they are fighting to improve the world either for their children or those in need. Indeed, Shaban discusses how female terrorists are framed on the basis of female stereotypes which portray the women as loving and caring which sympathises with the women.[294] It is clear that in this particular case, gender stereotypes attribute to the positive portrayal of the women. As said by Åhäll, gender stereotypes attribute strong maternal and biological passions to women. Women are fearless killers when it comes to protecting their children.[295] Women are seen as loving, caring and having a strong passion to protect their children and the innocent according to gender stereotypes. This can clearly be seen in this portrayal, the American newspapers emphasise how these women are not just selfish terrorists or killers, they are fighting to protect the innocent. Rather than criticizing the women for their actions, they are praising them, framing them in a positive light.

What has become apparent is that both American and Middle Eastern newspapers are highly interested in understanding the motives of female suicide bombers from ISIS. They discuss a wide variety of motives, ranging from religion, victimisation, evilness and emotional motives. Scholars have also discovered that there are many ways in which the media frames the motivations of female terrorists.[296] Moreover, American newspapers frame these women as victims, "it's now feared that more civilian women - in Libya at least - are being brainwashed, forced or cajoled into killing themselves for IS terrorists as fighting intensifies".[297] Shaban likewise highlights that the Western media frames female terrorists according to stereotypes, portraying these women as victims instead of perpetrators.[298] Middle Eastern newspapers however, are more critical. Rather than viewing these women as victims and falling for gender stereotypes, Middle Eastern newspapers discuss their active roles and personal motivations, "Foremost among them are women, who claim they were "brainwashed" and pose as victims "trapped" in Iraq and Syria. Those who joined ISIS did so to murder and kill, to rape and genocide, to colonize and conquer".[299] As Issacharoff indeed discusses, the Arab media frames female suicide terrorists as active participants of the *Jihad* or terrorism.[300] Interestingly, Middle Eastern newspapers even mention how the West falls for this stereotype of female terrorists as victims, "It is firstly worth confronting some of the widespread assumptions about female Jihadists. Despite the tendency in European countries to give female former Jihadists more lenient sentences on the assumption that they must have been

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[293] "Who Are The Women"
[294] Shaban, "Teenagers", 540
[295] Åhäll, "The writing of heroines", 292
[296] Friedman, "Unlikely warriors", 850
[297] Pamela Geller, "Female Muslim bomber uses three children as decoy to blow herself up", *Atlas Shrugs.* December 3, 2016.
[298] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539
[299] Seth J. Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows' and the myth of the innocent women jihadists", *Jpost.com,* December 17, 2017.
[300] Issacharoff, Avi, "The Palestinian and Israeli media on female suicide terrorists." *Female suicide bombers: Dying for equality* (2006): 43.

"brainwashed," most women who join these movements know what they're doing and make their wishes clear".[301] This may be a way for the Middle Eastern newspapers to show that they know better than the West. During the war on terror, "the West" and "the East" were given contrasting characteristics. The Western world framed the Middle East, the other, as evil, barbaric, irrational and backward. This is an orientalist depiction of the Middle East. On the other hand, the Western world framed itself as good, civilized, rational and progressive.[302] By emphasizing how they, the Middle East do not fall for the stereotype of women being victims, they show that they are not irrational or backwards but rather that America is falling behind. America is not rational and progressive when discussing female suicide bombers and their motivations. Overall, it becomes clear once again that American newspapers are highly influenced by gender stereotypes. Instead of uncovering the true motivation of these women, American newspapers give a lot of attention to their victimhood. Middle Eastern newspapers, however, are influenced much less by gender stereotypes in this particular case. They recognise the stereotypes and contradict them. Lastly, both American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as evil, emphasising their shocking actions.

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[301] Beevor, "Why Are Women"
[302] Maryam Khalid," Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23.1 (2011), 15

5. Changing Roles

Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers repeatedly discuss the roles of women in ISIS. American and Middle Eastern newspapers often frame these women as having traditional roles. Women are expected to be mothers and wives and take on the housework and support their families. Sjoberg and Caron have indeed illustrated how the media downplays the roles of female suicide bombers even though these women are very much active roles.[303] However, Middle Eastern newspapers discuss that ISIS is an organisation without limits which is willing to put these traditional expectation to the side. Furthermore, the newspapers mention how the roles of women in ISIS have changed. Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers also frame these women as having active roles. As indeed discussed by Nacos, women fulfil important roles within terrorist organisations and are essential in many cases.[304] Not only do women play important roles within ISIS, but American and Middle Eastern newspapers also mention how the usage of women provides ISIS with strategic advantages. Furthermore, the Middle Eastern newspapers bring up the fact that women are not only active members, but they are also taking up leadership positions within ISIS. Moreover, these women are often referred to as suicide bombers in the Middle Eastern newspapers. Rather than dancing around the subject, they refer to these women for what they are.

A significant frame throughout the American and Middle Eastern newspapers is the traditional roles of these women within ISIS, "Most women continue to fulfil traditional wartime roles - cooking meals, nursing the wounded"[305] and "Historically, the role of women in violent extremist groups, and ISIS in particular, has been domestic and focused on supporting husbands and children".[306] The articles emphasise the traditional female roles that women are expected to follow, "A woman's preeminent role is the "divine duty of motherhood".[307] Rather than fighting, women's roles are limited to housework, 'if the weapon of the men is the assault rifle and the explosive belt, then know that the weapon of the women is good behaviour and knowledge. The ideal woman is a shepherd in her house and is responsible for her herd".[308] Women are seen as supporters rather than active members, "You can define the role of mother, wife, recruiter, and even religious enforcer as "active," if you like, but it's primarily as a supporter that ISIS women find their calling in the global Jihad".[309] These traditional expectations and roles for women in ISIS are emphasized frequently by the American and Middle Eastern newspapers. By discussing these traditional roles, the newspapers indirectly emphasise the significant difference between the expected gender roles in ISIS and the roles of female suicide bombers. The framing of these women as having traditional roles is in line with gender stereotypes. Women are not fighters but caring and loving. As explained by Ali, according to a 2015 manifesto by ISIS, women should indeed remain hidden and wear a veil. Women are not equal to men, men and women have different roles in life. A wife and mother must support her family.[310] The main role of women in ISIS is to support the fighters, take care of the children and convince others to join the *Jihad*.[311] As Kneip indeed indicates, there is a difference between male *Jihad* and female *Jihad*. Female *Jihad* does not necessarily require women to take on

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[303] Sjoberg and Gentry, "Reduced to bad sex", 5

[304] Nacos, "The portrayal", 436

[305] "Who Are The Women"

[306] Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling ISIS's Comeback", *MENAFN - Business & Finance News (English),* October 4, 2022.

[307] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."

[308] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."

[309] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."

[310] Ali, "ISIS and propaganda", 13

[311] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 8

violent roles.[312] Female *Jihad* can be seen as women supporting their children, families and husbands.[313] The realm of their power is confined to domestic spheres, their homes and families.[314] But despite that, female *Jihad* does give women the opportunity to gain a high level of influence on men.[315] As Issacharoff discusses, journalists indeed regard housework and taking care of the children as the responsibility of women rather than taking part in terrorism.[316] This can clearly be seen in the American and Middle Eastern newspapers, they often emphasise the traditional roles of women like housework and raising children. This frames the women in accordance with gender stereotypes.

On the other hand, American and Middle Eastern articles do frame the women in ISIS as having active roles, "These days, they carry their own Kalashnikovs and know how to use them. Some are well-trained snipers"[317] and "A female suicide bomber hiding among a group of fleeing civilians claimed she was injured, and when civilians gathered to help her, she detonated herself killing two and wounding nine others".[318] The newspapers emphasise how the strict traditional roles of women in ISIS have changed, "However, ISIS has broken this stereotypical perception by assigning women to implement terrorist operations like in the Notre dame Cathedral in Paris in September. Thus, women have become active cells in extremist organisations"[319] and "While the traditional Jihadists limit women's participation in Jihad to supporting militant men in activities such as nursing, teaching, and moral support, the new ideologues have begun to mention female participation in armed actions in their literature recently".[320] More women are becoming active fighting members of ISIS, "More and more of the estimated 5,000 women known to have joined this war are on the front lines, fighting alongside men".[321] Indeed, according to Ali, when there are no men available to fight, women are permitted to wage *Jihad*.[322] Even though traditionally women's roles do not include fighting, when it is necessary, women are asked to join the fight.[323] Moreover, using women for certain roles has become important for ISIS, "Women were used largely to smuggle weapons across the border in their abayas, since they are never examined at checkpoints".[324] Women are on the frontlines fighting and smuggling weapons. Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers emphasise how the roles of women have changed from traditional roles to fighting roles. This emphasises that these women are in fact active terrorists rather than passive members with supporting roles, contradicting gender stereotypes.

Even though women have active roles within ISIS, their power and importance are often underestimated. This underestimation makes these women even more dangerous, it allows them to commit gruesome acts more easily, "They (the enemy) won't expect that a woman would do such an operation," Farah was told".[325] Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers indeed frame these women as being underestimated, for example in the following case, "Journalists saw one

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[312] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 90
[313] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 91
[314] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 91
[315] Kneip, "Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS", 91
[316] Issacharoff, The Palestinian, 46
[317] "Who Are The Women"
[318] "ISIS Cornered in West Mosul", *Asharq Alawsat (English),* July 4, 2017.
[319] Nidaa Abou Ali, "ISIS Recruitment"
[320] Osmandzikovic and Holtmeier, "Female terrorism examined."
[321] "Who Are The Women"
[322] Ali, "ISIS and propaganda", 13

[323] Bakker, De Leede, and ICCT Background Note. "European female Jihadists", 8

[324] "Who Are The Women"
[325] "Desperate ISIL Forms"

woman escorting three young children through an alleyway toward waiting Libyan forces. Fighting for a key stronghold in Libya has intensified The Libya Herald reported that the children were hungry and malnourished - which might explain why they were allowed 'safe passage'. Shortly after the children were driven away in an ambulance there was a blast as the woman detonated explosives, wounding about a dozen people".[326] Since she was a female accompanied by children, the forces did not perceive her as a threat. This can also be seen in the following example, "A photograph has emerged of a Mosul woman cradling her baby as she seemingly tries to escape the fighting that has ravaged her city. However, on further inspection, it becomes apparent the Burka clad woman is also holding a detonator. The picture was taken moments before the suicide bomber blew herself up, with her baby in her arms".[327] Since these women were underestimated by men, they were able to commit atrocious acts, "Female ISIS fighters are not just an interesting new phenomenon, they are potentially very dangerous and pose a major security threat, experts told the Times. Iraqi security forces are less suspicious of women roaming the streets, and even if they do stop them, they refuse to pat them down or check for weapons or explosives".[328] Not only are women underestimated due to their gender, but in certain societies, women can benefit from conservative rules or sharia restrictions, "An army of female suicide bombers can accomplish a good deal more than men particularly in the West where Islamic supremacists have imposed sharia restrictions on profiling and women in burkas and Muslim garb are given special rights and accommodations"[329] and "Women are also trusted more at checkpoints than men because of their gender, they are not checked as intensively as men. Women are also checked less due to modesty in many cultures".[330] In many Islamic country's men are not prepared to investigate and touch women. This benefits these women enormously in carrying out their attack, "That this made them more dangerous than the men was widely understood".[331] The gender stereotypes and conservative norms and values benefit these terrorist organisations and their strategies, "The gender stereotypes and clichés that are perpetuated influence strategic decisions by terror groups and the behaviour of female terrorists".[332]

Bloom mentions how these women are indeed underestimated on the front lines.[333] This is exactly the reason why women can be very useful in operations and provide strategic advantages. Women are not seen as terrorists; they do not fit the stereotypes. They are seen as peaceful and are underestimated. Therefore, women are much more likely to pass security without raising suspicion. Women are able to hide more explosives than men since security treats them less strictly. Moreover, Banks mentions how in conservative societies, cultural norms are against the searching and investigating of women. Being a woman aids terroristic organisations in their operations.[334] Societal expectations and gender stereotypes heavily influence how these women are seen. This strong influence of gender stereotypes on people and societies shapes how these women are perceived and dealt with as terrorists. The discussion of the underestimation of these women in American and Middle Eastern newspapers shows that they, the newspapers, are aware of this influence of gender on the perception of female suicide bombers. By discussing how these

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[326] Geller, "Female Muslim bomber"
[327] Pamela Geller, "PHOTO: Seconds from detonation: Female Muslim suicide bomber holding her BABY is pictured moments before she DETONATES", *Atlas Shrugs.* July 8, 2017.
[328] Rubenstein, "Has ISIS joined."
[329] Pamela Geller, "British Muslima Terror Leader is Training Bombshell Army", *Atlas Shrugs.* September 30, 2014.
[330] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[331] "What is the future of IS female?"
[332] AlMuhanna, "Exoticizing 'jihadi brides'."
[333] Bloom, Bombshells, 4
[334] Banks, "Introduction: Women", 184

women are often underestimated, the newspapers reveal underlying gender stereotypes to the public which may influence the public's view and future behaviour towards these women.

Moreover, Middle Eastern newspapers frame women in ISIS as leaders, "The absence of male supervision inside the camp has allowed ISIS female supporters to take the lead and mirror ISIS practices".[335] Women are being appointed as leaders of battalions, "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, chief of the Islamic State (ISIS) Jihadist group, has reportedly appointed a female Saudi to head up a new battalion in north-eastern Syria, according to a report by Al Arabiya News".[336] Due to the many defeats of ISIS in the last years which resulted in many male ISIS members detained, dead or in hiding, women have taken over their roles, "Things changed dramatically after ISIS's territorial defeat in 2019. With male members either dead, detained, or on the run, ISIS female supporters took it upon themselves to keep the group's ideology alive".[337] Women have taken up many roles including judicial roles, "Pro-ISIS women have even established their own Sharia court, modelled on ISIS's judicial system, to hold accountable those who violate the group's religious teachings. Punishments include flogging, imprisonment, torture, food deprivation, burning of tents, and murder".[338] While both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers discuss the active roles of the female terrorists in ISIS, the Middle Eastern newspapers take it a step further. Women are not only framed as active members, but they are also framed as leaders, taking power and running ISIS. The Middle Eastern newspapers acknowledge that these women are active, strong leaders taking up important roles and challenging gender stereotypes.

Middle Eastern newspapers also frame these women as suicide bombers much more than American newspapers. They directly call them suicide terrorists, "It is thought the new terrorist bride suicide squad will be trained up to carry out deadly bomb attacks as the terrorist group believe women are less likely to arouse suspicion".[339] Women have become regulars when it comes to suicide attacks, they are no longer rare, "Female ISIS fighters carried out many of the almost-daily suicide bombing at Iraqi army positions".[340] They highlight the differences between their traditional roles and their roles as suicide bombers, "While women were often sent to work in schools or hospitals, some became female suicide bombers".[341] Throughout the Middle Eastern newspapers female suicide bombers are directly mentioned. Despite the fact that all articles analysed were articles on female suicide bomber from ISIS, American newspapers do not often refer to them as suicide bombers. The Middle Eastern newspapers however are calling them what they are, rather than dancing around the subject, they frame them as suicide bombers. As mentioned by Bloom, women are underestimated on the front lines as well as by the media.[342] In order to battle female terrorism, gender stereotypes need to be tackled and a thorough understanding is needed.[343] By naming these women directly as suicide bombers, the underestimation of these women is challenged, and stereotypes are tackled. This in turn allows for a greater understanding of female suicide bombers which is beneficial to the development of terrorism prevention strategies.

In conclusion, the role of women within ISIS is a complex issue. The contradiction between traditional roles and fighting roles for women in ISIS is emphasised by American and Middle Eastern newspapers. Women in ISIS are framed to have traditional roles such as cooking, housework and

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335 Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling"
336 Miskin, "First all-female ISIS battalion"
337 Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling"
338 Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling"
339 "Desperate ISIL Forms"
340 Rubenstein, "Has ISIS joined."
341 Frantzman, "The 'ISIS widows'"
342 Bloom, Bombshells, 4
343 Nacos, "The portrayal", 448

nursing, "A woman's preeminent role is the "divine duty of motherhood"[344], as well as fighting roles like snipers and suicide bombers, "These days, they carry their own Kalashnikovs and know how to use them. Some are well-trained snipers".[345] Likewise, Issacharoff found that journalists regard the role of women to be housework rather than terrorism.[346] On the other hand, Sjoberg and Gentry highlight that female suicide bombers are conscious actors despite the underestimation of their roles by the media.[347] Both American and Middle Eastern newspapers also discuss the effects of the underestimation of women, "Women are also trusted more at checkpoints than men because of their gender, they are not checked as intensively as men. Women are also checked less due to modesty in many cultures".[348] The underestimation of these women provides ISIS with strategic advantages. Banks mentions that women do not match the stereotypical view of terrorists, therefore they lack credibility. Women are not viewed as terrorists, allowing them to easily pass security and raise less suspicion.[349] Speckhard further highlights that women also benefit from modesty in many cultures.[350] This underestimation of women as well as the focus on the traditional roles of women once again shows the influence of gender stereotypes on this issue. While American newspapers do highlight the changing roles of women in ISIS, Middle Eastern newspapers go further by framing these women as leaders. Women in ISIS do not just fulfil traditional roles or fighting roles, they are becoming leaders, "The absence of male supervision inside the camp has allowed ISIS female supporters to take the lead and mirror ISIS practices".[351] Moreover, Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as suicide bombers, "It is thought the new terrorist bride suicide squad will be trained up to carry out deadly bomb attacks as the terrorist group believe women are less likely to arouse suspicion"[352], whereas the American newspapers refrain from using this term. This is interesting since American newspapers overall use more shocking language than Middle Eastern newspapers, except in this particular case. American newspapers do not recognize and frame these women to be leaders and do not refer to them as suicide bombers. American newspapers again appear to be influenced more by gender stereotypes, failing to recognize and frame women as leaders and active terrorists.

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[344] Cottee and Bloom, "The Myth."
[345] "Who Are The Women"
[346] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 46
[347] Sjoberg and Gentry, "Reduced to bad sex", 18
[348] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[349] Banks, "Introduction: Women", 184
[350] Speckhard, "Female terrorists", 4
[351] Haid Haid, "Women Are Fueling"
[352] "Desperate ISIL Forms"

6. Conclusion

This research explored the ways in which American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers and argues that the main ways in which female suicide bombers from ISIS are framed by the American and Middle Eastern newspapers are similar. The analysis has shown that ISIS's female suicide bombers are framed in four important ways. Firstly, both frame ISIS's female suicide bombers as rare since they contradict gender expectations likewise, both discuss how rare it is for ISIS to resort to women for fighting roles. Alongside this, American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as mothers being influenced by their husbands and families. Moreover, both also show great interest in exploring the motivations of female suicide bombers, however, American newspapers frame these women as victims which Middle Eastern newspapers contradict. Lastly, American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as having both traditional roles as well as fighting roles. Overall, the American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers in a similar manner, despite some nuances. These findings extent previous research, very little research has been done on the framing of female terrorists in the Middle Eastern or Arab media. The majority of previous research has focussed on the framing of female terrorists in the Western media, with some exceptions of Israel and Palestine. This research shows that the framing of female suicide bombers, or terrorists, in Middle Eastern media is similar to what previous research has found in Western media. This suggests that similar gender stereotypes as well as similar societal and historical expectations of women and terrorists are present in the Middle East as in America or the Western world.

What has become apparent is that both the American and Middle Eastern newspapers are influenced by female gender stereotypes. In all of the four frames, it becomes clear that the newspapers frame female suicide bombers from ISIS in accordance with traditional gender stereotypes. As an example, the influence of gender stereotypes can clearly be seen when looking at the fact that both American and Middle Eastern newspapers focus extensively on the husbands and families of ISIS's female suicide bombers and their influence on the women. Moreover, these women are often discussed in relation to their motherhood to increase the shock value. Gender stereotypes see mothers as caring and loving, not as suicide bombers. These expected motherly characteristics are used to criticise the women, what mother would do such a thing? As Brown indeed concluded, female terrorists are often mentioned in relation to motherhood and on the basis of female stereotypes.[353] A relevant frame present in the newspapers is that these women are influenced by their husbands and family, taking away their agency. Men are independent and have agency, women do not. This is in line with previous research that shows that the media treats female terrorists in accordance with gender stereotypes.[354] Women are framed as passive actors, influenced by men and sometimes even as victims which can indeed be seen in the American newspapers. This is in line with what Bloom has found, the media considers women as nurturers, vulnerable and soft rather than killers or destroyers.[355] Similarly, Shaban found that the media frames women as victims instead of terrorists and perpetrators.[356] Not only are the American and Middle Eastern newspapers influenced by gender stereotypes, but more importantly, they appear to be influenced by similar female gender stereotypes. This is particularly interesting due to the opposing cultural and ideological contexts of these regions. The Middle East is a predominantly

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[353] Brown, "Muriel's wedding" 707
[354] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 283
Nacos, "The portrayal", 436
[355] Bloom, "Bombshells", 4
[356] Shaban, "Teenagers", 539

Muslim region.[357] Whereas the United States is predominantly Christian.[358] It is clear that both countries are driven by different religious ideologies. Likewise, both countries have different political systems and ideologies. Most Middle Eastern countries have authoritarian regimes.[359] Whereas the United States is a democracy with both liberal and conservative political ideology.[360] As Moghadam states, different political regimes and ideologies, influence how genders are seen.[361] So despite different political and religious ideologies, which influence the gender system, similar gender stereotypes are present in these two regions when framing female suicide bombers from ISIS.

Even though similar gender stereotypes are present in both American and Middle Eastern newspapers, the influence of gender stereotypes is stronger in the American newspapers. Middle Eastern newspapers regularly acknowledge gender stereotypes and contradict them. Where the American newspaper extensively discuss the rarity of ISIS's female suicide bombers, the Middle Eastern newspapers are more reserved in their framing of the rarity of these women. The Middle Eastern newspapers discuss female suicide bombers throughout history, the context and them becoming increasingly more common. Middle Eastern newspapers are also influenced by gender stereotypes, however, they also look at facts, whereas American articles are mostly driven by gender stereotypes. Despite the fact that like the American newspapers, the Middle Eastern newspapers frame these women as wives and mothers, they are actively trying to overcome and critique these stereotypes. Middle Eastern newspapers again provide more nuance to the story, they highlight that women also influence men to commit gruesome acts. Moreover, Middle Eastern newspapers discuss that the usage of terms such as "wives" and "brides" indicates weakness and a lack of agency. This incorrect image of women as mere wives or mothers negatively influences the perception of these women and possible counter-terrorism strategies. Furthermore, when uncovering the motives of these women, American newspapers describe them as victims. The Middle Eastern newspapers highly contradict this narrative, they even mention how the Western world indeed falls for this stereotype of women being victims. By addressing this issue, the Middle Eastern newspapers show they know better than the Americans, they do not fall for these gender stereotypes. Again, both American and Middle Eastern newspapers describe how the traditional roles of women in ISIS and their fighting roles differ. However, the Middle Eastern newspapers look further and discuss the fact that these women are not only fighting, but they are also becoming leaders within ISIS. While the influence of gender stereotypes is clear in Middle Eastern newspapers, they do recognize and address these stereotypes regularly. The Middle Eastern newspapers provide multiple and more critical views to this issue of ISIS's female suicide bombers. Rather than looking at this issue in the now and as an isolated case, the Middle Eastern newspapers look into the historical and contemporary contexts and facts. The Middle Eastern newspapers actively battle and contradict gender stereotypes. Likewise, Issacharoff has found that the Arab media indeed frames female suicide bombers as active participants in the *Jihad* rather than victims or irrational actors.[362]

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[357] Nathan J. Brown, "Shariʿa and State in the Modern Muslim Middle East." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29.3 (1997), 366

[358] Jeremy Brooke Straughn and Scott L. Feld, "America as a "Christian nation"? Understanding religious boundaries of national identity in the United States." *Sociology of Religion* 71.3 (2010), 280

[359] Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Authoritarian persistence, democratization theory and the Middle East: An overview and critique." *Democratization* 13.3 (2006): 373

[360] Edward G. Carmines and Nicholas J. D'Amico, "The new look in political ideology research." *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015), 206/214

[361] Moghadam, Valentine M. *Modernizing women: Gender and social change in the Middle East*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, 24

[362] Issacharoff, "The Palestinian", 43

Additionally, the American newspapers clearly sensationalise the stories of ISIS'S female suicide bombers much more than the Middle Eastern newspapers. The American newspapers use expressive language, captivating phrases and gruesome examples to portray their stories. Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee found something similar, the media sensationalises stories of female terrorists.[363] As Conway and McInerney indeed highlight, female terrorists are fetishized by the media, reinforcing the idea that there is something wrong about women who kill, something unique. Women are demonised more for being a terrorist than men and they are assumed to be "crazier" and "more psychopathic" than men.[364] The Middle Eastern newspapers are much more reserved with their language use. They do provide horrifying examples, but they include much more factual historical context rather than overemphasise the gruesomeness of these women. This may be explained by looking at terrorism within these two different contexts. Suicide attacks have been prominent in the Middle East for decades, but it was 9/11 that triggered Western interest in this issue. The Western world was shocked by the fact that suicide bombings are rather common in certain parts of the world.[365] After 9/11, America started the war on terror, fuelled by anger and hatred. America may have strong feelings about terrorism but, they are not familiar or used to suicide bombings, especially female suicide bombings. On the contrary, suicide bombings are relatively common in the Middle East. The American and Middle Eastern newspapers have different views on terrorism, more specifically suicide bombings. This may result in the differing attitudes towards ISIS's female suicide bombers. The strong feelings of American against terrorism in combination with the rarity of suicide bombings, might explain their expressive language which highlights the gruesomeness of these acts. At the same time, since suicide bombings are much more common in the Middle East, they have become somewhat regular. Suicide bombings are much less unique in the Middle East perhaps that is the reason their newspapers do not feel the need to sensationalise the story. Moreover, the stories of female suicide bombers hit close to home in the Middle East unlike in America. Since it is a more sensitive issue in the Middle East, the stories may be less sensationalised and expressive than in America. The different contexts of the two regions may have an influence on the framing of ISIS's female suicide bombers in the newspapers.

Interestingly, despite the use of more shocking language overall by the American newspapers, the Middle Eastern newspapers address these women directly as suicide bombers, which the American newspapers avoid. Even though all newspaper articles analysed covered female ISIS suicide bombers, American newspapers refrain from directly using the term suicide bomber. Middle Eastern newspapers on the other hand, repeatedly refer to these women as suicide bombers, which is what they are. In order to understand this phenomenon of female suicide bombers, these women need to be recognised for what they are instead of underestimated. Gender stereotypes need to be tackled to ensure proper understanding of these women and the development of anti-terrorism strategies. By directly referring to these women as suicide bombers, Middle Eastern newspapers actively battle the underestimation and stereotypes, allowing a greater understanding to be formed.

As the Middle Eastern newspapers have mentioned, the way in which newspapers frame female suicide bombers has an effect on how these women are perceived as well as how these women are dealt with. The media shape's public opinion and political agendas. The media reinforces these stereotypes of women being influenced, victims, irrational actors and having no

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[363] Auer, Sutcliffe, and Lee, "Framing the 'White Widow'", 282

[364] Conway and McInerney, "What's love", 18

[365] Adam Lankford and Nayab Hakim, "From Columbine to Palestine: A comparative analysis of rampage shooters in the United States and volunteer suicide bombers in the Middle East." *Aggression and violent behavior* 16.2 (2011), 98

agency. This causes female suicide bombers and terrorists to be underestimated once again. The underestimation of female suicide bombers limits our possible understanding of the motives and actions of these women. This is also discussed by Nacos, news frames strengthen and reflect societal beliefs and standards. To battle terrorism, gender stereotypes need to be tackled, if not, terrorist organisations can benefit and take advantage of gender stereotypes.[366] In order to tackle the problem of female suicide bombers, a comprehensive understanding is needed. With the media reinforcing gender stereotypes, it is difficult to form a bias free understanding of this issue. This may limit our ability to develop effective strategies to tackle the problem of female suicide bombers. Therefore, future research could explore the impact of the framing of ISIS's female suicide bombers in the media on the public perception of female suicide bombers and terrorists, looking at gender stereotypes in different cultural and ideological contexts.

Although this research has only used English-written Middle Eastern newspapers, which is not the local language of the Middle East, English is widely known across the world. English-written newspapers are widely available and accessible to many. Since these newspapers are in English, they have the potential to influence many people and reinforce gender stereotypes, making them a great fit for this research. The frames these newspapers portray on ISIS's female suicide bombers have a greater and wider impact. Future research could expand the scope and improve the representativeness of the study by using non-English Middle Eastern newspapers. Furthermore, a comparison between the framing of male and female suicide bombers could be conducted. This would further uncover potential gender stereotypes in the newspapers.

Despite the fact that only a limited number of newspapers articles were used, which again may influence the representativity of the research, in the database that was used there were not any more newspaper articles available from 2013 to 2022 on ISIS's female suicide bombers. Moreover, the method that is used for this research, framing analysis, is suited for a smaller number of sources. For this particular research method, the data sample is big enough to provide qualitative results. The data sample also includes 8 different American newspapers and over 10 different Middle Eastern newspapers. Future research could be done using more newspaper articles and a wider variety of newspapers to improve representativeness.

In conclusion, generally American and Middle Eastern newspapers frame ISIS's female suicide bombers similarly. Traditional gender stereotypes are visible in the framing of ISIS's female suicide bombers in both American and Middle Eastern newspapers despite differing religious, political and cultural ideologies. This may indicate that gender stereotypes are not culturally specific but rather consistent across different cultural contexts. According to Sczesny et. al., there are indeed great similarities between gender stereotypes across different cultures.[367] However, even though gender stereotypes are visible in American and Middle Eastern newspapers, the Middle Eastern newspapers appear much more aware of these gender stereotypes and attempt to tackle them. It is crucial to avoid the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in the media since this limits our understanding of female suicide bombers. In order to tackle this issue of female suicide bombers, we need to understand the phenomenon outside of gender stereotypes.

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[366] Nacos, "The portrayal", 448
[367] Sabine Sczesny, et al, "Gender stereotypes and the attribution of leadership traits: A cross-cultural comparison." *Sex roles* 51 (2004), 633

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