



# The Imaging of Violent Gender Performances

*“How do violent women serve as weapons of political violence, how are they portrayed, and how does this influence their agency?”*

Date: February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
Student's name: Nina Liza Bode  
Thesis supervisor: prof. dr. J.H. de Wilde

*Cover photo: Amazing History website, “Women During World War Two”.*

# Declaration by candidate

## DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this thesis, "*The Imaging of Violent Gender Performances*", is my own work and my own effort and that it has not been accepted anywhere else for the award of any other degree or diploma. Where sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Name: Nina Liza Bode

Signature:

Date: February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

*No 'real woman' would hijack planes or cripple middle aged men  
by shooting them in the kneecaps.<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacoby, 1992.

## Table of Contents

---

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Theoretical framework.....	9
2.1. The biological determinism and social constructivism debate.....	10
2.2. The four mindsets .....	12
2.2.1. The evil woman theory .....	13
2.2.2. Martin van Creveld .....	14
2.2.3. Beatrice de Graaf .....	17
2.2.4. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry.....	19
2.3. The three criteria .....	23
3. Tanja Nijmeijer and the FARC.....	26
3.1. The narrative .....	28
3.2. The reconstruction.....	30
3.2.1. Portrayals of Tanja Nijmeijer .....	31
3.2.2. The agency of Tanja Nijmeijer .....	36
3.3. The bias .....	39
4. Female suicide bombers.....	43
4.1. The narrative .....	45
4.1.1. Chechen female suicide bombers .....	45
4.1.2. Palestinian female suicide bombers.....	51
4.2. The reconstruction.....	56
4.2.1. Motives of terrorist organizations.....	56
4.2.2. Motives of female suicide bombers .....	60
4.3. The bias .....	62
5. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and the Rwandan genocide .....	67
5.1. The narrative .....	70
5.2. The reconstruction.....	74
5.2.1. Portrayals of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko .....	74
5.2.2. The agency of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko .....	81
5.3. The bias .....	83
6. Conclusion .....	86
6.1. The narratives .....	86
6.2. The reconstructions .....	87
6.3. The biases .....	91
6.4. Reflection on the three criteria.....	92
6.5. The four mindsets .....	93
6.6. Concluding remarks .....	95
7. Bibliography.....	97

# 1. Introduction

---

During my master I slowly became more interested in gender topics within the field of International Relations. What I noticed is that women are mainly portrayed as passive and vulnerable actors during conflict. Women are, besides children, seen as the ones who suffer the most when something bad happens. Women are apparently weaker, thus not able to defend themselves properly. Women and children are also the ones that are most felt pitied for when calamities happen. In the case of a boat that sinks and people drown, or a group of refugees that had to flee their home country, or a population that is ravaged by a civil war, all of these examples become more poignant and appalling when the victims include women and/or children. Their reputation as being vulnerable and helpless beings creates a sentiment of pity when harm is inflicted. But when one thinks about it, how many adult men have really chosen for a war, and how many of them can properly defend themselves against terror or other forms of violence. Aren't they as vulnerable as women and children are? And more importantly, aren't their lives as valuable as that of women and children?

In this research, I will take a look at the other side of the spectrum. Not women as victims, but instead women as perpetrators of political violence. Most of the views and theories that focus on how women within the field of International Relations are portrayed show women as the main powerless victims of a conflict when they become subjected to assault, rape and other forms of violence. Regardless of the justification of this discussion, my interest for women acting as the aggressor grew stronger and I was intrigued to learn about the manner in which this phenomenon occurs in the world.

With the help of my research question: 'How do violent women serve as weapons of political violence, how are they portrayed, and how does this influence their agency?' I will try to outline a more multifaceted image of women in order to create a more nuanced understanding about women and violence. As one can see, the research question consists of three separate sub questions. These sub questions will be answered for each of the four different case studies that will be dealt with in this thesis. This way, the main focal point will lie on how these female violent actors are regarded by their surroundings, while taking the existing gender stereotypes into account that are dependent on the cultural and societal context in which each case study takes place.

In order to answer the research question thoroughly I will focus on four central mindsets that shed light on the possible ways of how to look at women and political violence. These four mindsets will be introduced and laid out in the next chapter and they will return when dealing with each case study. This format will give a better insight in how these, sometimes contrasting views are built up how they are deployed in different situations.

The selection for the four case studies is based on a notion of difference for making the portrayal of violent women as diverse and comprehensive as possible. The stories of Tanja Nijmeijer, Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, Wafa Idris, and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko are respectively situated in Colombia, Chechnya, Palestine and Rwanda. Nijmeijer's account takes place within a terrorist organization situated in the jungle that has its origins in Marxism. Muzhakhoyeva's life is set in the suppressed Chechen region. Idris gave her life in the centre of Jerusalem, and Nyiramasuhuko's actions took place during the hundred days of massacre in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Irrespective of the specific forms of violent behavior these women show or have shown, they are all viewed and portrayed in certain ways. The images that are subsequently put forward in the media and other public sources are, without exception, connected to the core belief that women and violence do not match. Both concepts do not belong to each other. Such assumptions and existing gender stereotypes mutually reinforce each other. To ensure that these dynamics remain valid and intact, certain types of representation are described to emphasize the exceptionality of these deviant violent women, representations that are not found in accounts regarding violent men.

An illustration to clarify this is a recent event that brought me to the idea of exploring the combination of women and political violence in detail. It serves as a perfect example of the reason why my attention, and that of many others, is caught when women's violence is shown in the media. The unexpected September 2013 terrorist attack in the shopping mall in Nairobi stroke the world as it was shown on the news all around the world. The action in itself was horrific enough to receive much attention, but the aspect that gained most media attention after the attack, was the fact that one of the militants supposedly was a white woman. Samantha Lewthwaite is a 29 year old British woman who was immediately named 'White Widow', referring to her dangerous identity and the fact that her husband blew

himself up in the London subway near King's Cross on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2005.<sup>2</sup> Zooming in on the fact that she had lost her husband indirectly became the main reason that explained why she got involved in a violent act of terrorism. The four case studies that will be examined in this thesis show similar representations. In addition to the question how this image is established and what factors caused it, this thesis will also look at what the effects of these representations are on the agency of violent women.

Another example that discusses the phenomenon of women and violence is an article that was published in the Dutch magazine *Vrij Nederland* in May 2013. In response to the trial of Beate Zschäpe, which started in April 2014, the article describes the growing position of women within right-wing violence in Germany. Together two of her companions –who both committed suicide after they got caught- Zschäpe is accused of committing ten murders on migrants. Even though it appears that Zschäpe's radicalization process started already in her early puberty and developed at a fast pace, the media portrays her being in love with the leader of the group as the reason she got involved in the racial killings.<sup>3</sup> With the help of nicknames such as 'Nazibraut' and 'heiße Feger', the image of Zschäpe as a promiscuous and man loving woman was created.<sup>4</sup> This thesis will try to explain how and why such images come into play when a violent woman appears in the media.

It is not my aim to convince the reader that women are just as violent as men. Nor will I take a clear feminist stance against a so called male dominated society. Instead, I will make an attempt to outline a more refined and holistic image of the female participators of political violence. At the same time I will show that, instead of the measures that are taken to keep the standard female stereotype intact, the same stereotype is also sometimes exploited to perpetrate violence more effectively. Thereby I will go into detail about what part the existing stereotypes play and what the influence of these stereotypes is on the range of cases I will discuss in the following chapters.

The academic literature that falls in the range of International Relations and writes about women who have participated in violence, still shows a one-sided picture of what political violence looks like and who participates in it. Much has been written already about this topic, but a good overall analysis that gives an insight to the existing, sometimes

---

<sup>2</sup> "Profile: Samantha Lewthwaite", 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Schmitz, 2013, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Schmitz, 2013, p. 34.

conflicting views on this matter, is missing. Therefore an academic justification is just as much a motivation to perform this research as my personal interest is. This research is mainly intended to contribute to the academic debate covering the bias of perceiving women as the weaker sex who do not fit in male affairs such as violence.



## 2. Theoretical framework

---

This chapter will outline in detail the theoretical framework in which this thesis is set. Due to the use of various theories, scholars and narratives, that all differ in their approach, it is important to elaborate on how each of them are linked together in order to form a structure through which the aforementioned research question can be best answered.

This chapter will start with the description of the larger debate between biological determinism and social constructivism to which this research pertains. This part will primarily make use of the article ‘Gender Constructions: The Politics of Biological Constraints’ written by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen in 2011, and the article ‘Persona en de performance van identiteit’ written in 2012 by Mineke Bosch, in making clear what the core elements are.<sup>56</sup> The book *International Relations Theory*, written by Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi is also used to give a short oversight of the subject matter.<sup>7</sup> It is important to keep in mind that much more is and can be said about this topic. Due to the limited size of this research, there will be only a possibility to briefly touch upon the most relevant aspects of both ideologies that will suffice to serve as the foundation on which this thesis will be built.

The chapter will then continue with explaining how biological determinism and social constructivism relate to the concept of gender and how each side of the debate deals with this topic. Subsequently, I will zoom in on four different mindsets regarding women and political violence that will play a leading role throughout this research. The first mindset deals with the evil woman theory that originates from the field of criminology. The second mindset responds to the ideas of Martin van Creveld. He is an Israeli military historian who has a clear opinion about how one must perceive women within situations of conflict and violence. The third mindset that will be used in this thesis can be found in the book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen* by Beatrice de Graaf in 2012. De Graaf is a Dutch historian who portrays ten case studies of women who are called militant because they all have, in some way or another, participated in political violence. The fourth and last mindset provides an

---

<sup>5</sup> Lippert-Rasmussen, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Bosch, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Viotti and Kauppi, 1999.

insight in the literature written by the scholars Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry. They have written two books that examine women involved in political violence.

When discussing these four mindsets, this chapter will try to underscore how exactly these theories, scholars, and narratives look at, and deal with the concept of violent women within the framework of the overarching biological determinism versus the social constructivism debate. In addition, it will look at how these mindsets fit into this framework and relate to one another. The justification for the choice of literature on which the different mindsets are based may not seem self-evident. However, their links are less incongruous first appears, and their connection results in a fascinating way of looking at the topic of women and political violence.

Finally, this chapter concludes with the description of three criteria that will be applied to each case study. The first criterion clarifies what the narrative is. The second criterion comments on what the reconstruction of the motives are. And the third criterion specifies what the bias of the literature sources is. These three criteria make sure that the theoretical debate, the research question and the mindsets eventually form an integral part within a clear and fixed framework. After having elaborated on the entire theoretical framework, it becomes possible to answer the research question: 'How do violent women serve as weapons of political violence, how are they portrayed, and how does this influence their agency?'

## *2.1. The biological determinism and social constructivism debate*

In order to get a good understanding what the debate between biological determinism and social constructivism entails, let me first look at a quote from Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen who has done a good job in capturing the essence in just a few sentences. He states that: 'Genetic [or biological] determinists about gender think that gender differences are a result of biologically, hard-wired differences between the sexes (...). Radical social constructivists about gender deny that it has any biological basis.'<sup>8</sup> To put it in other words, biological determinists believe that all human attributes and behaviors are biological determined and

---

<sup>8</sup> Lippert-Rasmussen, 2011, p. 73.

cannot be modified. Biological factors thus determine how an individual, a group, or a system behaves. Social constructivists, on the other hand, believe that external aspects, like social norms and environmental factors shape behavior and other social characteristics. Certain characteristics that one can apply to race, sex, or even economic classes are, according to biological determinists, essentially connected to the genes of the individuals belonging to one of these groups, instead of being constructed through the influences of society.

When I apply this discussion to gender, I find myself on the premises of feminism. Judith Butler has become a prominent figure in feminist studies. Her most influential work is probably 'Gender Trouble' in which she deepens the understanding of gender performances, which are based on a social constructivist understanding of the world. Mineke Bosch explains Butler's work in stating: 'that the definition of men and women is not fixed. Men and women interpret or "do" their gender identity through constant repetition and imitation of inherited standards in relation to the context in which they are located.'<sup>9</sup> Gender is thus a flexible part of someone's identity that is constructed through one's own performances. Simone de Beauvoir summarized it in one, nowadays widely known, phrase: 'On ne naît pas femme, on le devient.'<sup>10</sup> These performances are influenced by one's personal experiences, including the norms and values of a society one lives in, and the other way around: agents and structures are mutually constituted.<sup>11</sup>

But not all the strands within feminism automatically belong to the side of social constructivism. Essentialist feminism, for example, ascribes certain elements as belonging to the very core of being a woman. Lisa Sharlach explains-, in her article about gender during the Rwandan genocide-, that: 'Essentialist feminists posit that men are inherently more warlike than are women. According to the essentialist argument, women, by virtue of their maternal capacity, possess a sense of interconnectedness with others and an instinct to protect life. These characteristics lead women to have an aversion to war.'<sup>12</sup> Gender differences are then biologically determined and therefore, the conception of a woman is valid for women everywhere.

---

<sup>9</sup> Bosch, 2012, p. 15, (own translation).

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Reus-Smit, 2009, p. 221.

<sup>12</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 389.

Essentialist feminist thought projected on the discourse of International Relations results in the belief that the theories of International Relations are male dominated because they are focused too much on masculine concepts such as defining security in terms of aggregating power. They argue for taking up a more feminine approach and including the empowerment of women, economic development, and concern for the global ecological commons.<sup>13</sup> Because women are nurturers and seen as more likely to be peace-oriented than men are, the inclusion of a feminine approach within International Relations would broaden and deepen the discourse. Social constructivist feminism criticizes this conviction because it assumes that there is only one signification of femininity which is too limited. They reject the notion of seeing women as a homogeneous group unaffected by race, class, culture, sexuality, and history.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis focuses on the deviances of stereotypical womanhood. Even though I see women as actors of political violence as an anomaly as well- hence my personal interest for this topic- I do believe that gender is a much more fluid and flexible concept than is often portrayed. It is therefore important not to forget that societal norms heavily influence human behavior, even more than currently accepted. Aspects that are regarded as being determined by nature may very well be determined by a societal norm. As long as there has not emerged a clear result from the debate, one must at least try to regard both the social constructivist side and the biological determinist side as potential options

## 2.2. *The four mindsets*

Let me now turn to the four different mindsets regarding women and political violence that will play a leading role throughout this research. It is clear that these four mindsets will not be the only literature that will be used in this thesis, but they will provide for a clear foundation of theories to which each case study can be compared.

---

<sup>13</sup> Viotti and Kauppi, 1999, p. 365.

<sup>14</sup> Viotti and Kauppi, 1999, p. 365.

### **2.2.1. The evil woman theory**

The Evil Woman Theory is used in the field of criminology in order to explain under which circumstances prosecutors, juries, and judges will sentence women to death.<sup>15</sup> The theory is extensively outlined by the articles of Victor L. Streib, Jenny E. Carroll, and Andrea Saphiro. Therefore, these are the sources are used to explain what the evil woman theory entails. The evil woman theory is created in an attempt to interpret the presence of certain women on death row. This theory is often measured against the chivalry theory, which accounts for the limited use of the death penalty for women. The chivalry theory focuses on the more protective attitude of men towards women which manifests itself in reluctance to sentence women to death. When one looks at the percentage of women in prison compared to the percentage of men in prison, there is more empirical evidence to be found in favor of the chivalry theory –after all, there are far less women than men in prison or on death row and women arrested for serious crimes are only half as likely as men to end up in jail<sup>16</sup>- However, the Evil Women Theory explores the circumstances of the women that actually have been sentenced to death.

The article of Victor L. Streib, written in 1990, sets out the idea of the evil woman theory as he explains that these group of women: ‘committed shockingly unladylike behavior, allowing the sentencing judges and juries to put aside any image of them as “the gentler sex”, and to treat them as “crazed monsters” deserving nothing more than extermination.’<sup>17</sup> According to Andrea Saphiro, the underlying thought of the disposal of these women has to do with perpetuating the protective, paternalistic society.<sup>18</sup> To put it differently, there is no room left to deal with these kinds of women. In addition to the fact that violent behavior is unacceptable when it is committed by a woman, Saphiro also states that: ‘it is remarkable that two-thirds of women executed since colonial times have been Black. Additionally, lesbians are also convicted and sentenced to death at disproportionately high rates.’<sup>19</sup> It is thus not only the violent behavior that excludes certain women from

---

<sup>15</sup> Carroll, 1997, p. 1420.

<sup>16</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> Streib, 2012, p. 878.

<sup>18</sup> Saphiro, 2000, p. 459.

<sup>19</sup> Saphiro, 2000, p. 459.

societal norms; race and sexual orientation are also aspects that decide whether a woman falls outside the accepted norm of the feminine woman.<sup>20</sup>

When one fits this into the larger debate described above, the evil woman theory is based on the notion that the dominant perception of women in the world reasons from the standpoint of biological determinism. A violent woman is thus seen as a deviance, because she literally goes against her nature. An important aspect of the evil woman theory is the belief that a woman is not treated as a woman anymore once she has shown violent behavior. Therefore, following the line of reasoning stated above, a woman may be given full agency for her crime and may also be punished that way because her femininity is taken away from her. This is also the main difference between the evil woman theory and Sjoberg and Gentry's monster narrative, which I will explain in the third mindset. Keeping the women's agency intact is a unique aspect of the evil woman theory compared to the other mindsets and narratives. Within the evil woman theory, the gender of the woman who committed the act is affected. She is erased from the classification of being female. This is different from the other narratives and theories outlined below, where violent women are not so much erased from the classification of being female, but rather excused through enlarging certain female deficiencies based on static gender stereotypes.

### **2.2.2. Martin van Creveld**

Martin van Creveld's line of reasoning clearly has a lot of similarities with the chivalry theory. They both reason from the idea that there exists a deep inhibition in the world against the deliberate killing or punishing of women, even women who have been convicted of heinous murders.<sup>21</sup> Van Creveld goes as far as stating in his book *The Privileged Sex* that women are given more lenient treatment especially in response to serious offenses.<sup>22</sup> He underpins this claim by expressing the thought that: '(...) the wider public is less fearful of women criminals. (...) due to their traditional roles as wives and mothers, the 'weaker' sex might not only evoke more sympathy but avoid suspicion altogether.'<sup>23</sup> Even though Martin van Creveld does not have a specific name for his line of thought, one can summarize his perception on

---

<sup>20</sup> Saphiro, 2000, p. 459.

<sup>21</sup> Carroll, 1997, p. 1419.

<sup>22</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 153.

women and violence with the term saint narrative: Even though a woman has committed a violent act, it is still not taken seriously, because it is committed by a woman. This way, one can see the evil woman theory in direct opposition to Van Creveld's ideas regarding women and violence.

When explaining the thought of Van Creveld, three of his works will be utilized. His books *The Culture of War* and *The Privileged Sex* are books in which he elaborates on women and violence throughout history. The article 'A Woman's Place: Reflections on the Origins of Violence' written in 2000, is also one of his works in which he elaborates why women will never play more than a marginal role in the field of violence.

Martin van Creveld is a well-known historian and he is specialized in military history and strategy.<sup>24</sup> He has a clear vision when it comes to women and war. Van Creveld is a good example of a scholar who is an adherent of biological determinism. This is, for example, reflected in the comment: 'Male hormones, such as testosterone, make men more inclined to aggressive, assertive and competitive behavior.'<sup>25</sup> He believes women are not supposed to be violent, that they are inherently less violent, and that they do not belong in the battlefield because women are not rightly equipped to fight or to participate in any other way, in conflict situations. Violence, he writes, is a field women can never enter.<sup>26</sup> His arguments to substantiate this claim are primarily based on the different physique women have. Women are not as strong as men are. Moreover, women have thinner skulls, lighter bone ridges, and weaker jawbones.<sup>27</sup> War, according to Van Creveld, initially came into existence as a way for men to actually protect their female dependents using physical force.<sup>28</sup> It would be unnatural then to include women in warlike situations.

If there would be a great increase of women joining violent organizations such as the army or terrorist groups, Van Creveld foresees many problems. He believes that the overall level of these organizations will be brought down because women cannot, for example, run as fast as men do, or use large and heavy arms.<sup>29</sup> Men are then forced to work extra hard to compensate for female weaknesses and vulnerability.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Van Creveld continues,

---

<sup>24</sup> Creveld van, official website.

<sup>25</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 406.

<sup>26</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 831.

<sup>27</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 832.

<sup>28</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 303.

<sup>29</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 836.

<sup>30</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 403.

mixing women with men in dangerous situations would eventually result in complaints about sexual harassment when there is the potential for physical contact between men and women such as: hand to hand combat, medical work, heart massage, mouth to mouth resuscitation, etc.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, Van Creveld mentions the representation of violent women compared to violent men. He illustrates this by writing that there is no interest in the world to watch female soldiers who look and act like men. Women cannot identify with such women and men are not frightened of them.<sup>32</sup> According to Van Creveld, it comes down to the following: violence strengthens the masculinity in men but it does not strengthen the femininity in women. War and masculinity reinforce each other in such a way that violence has become a typical male product.<sup>33</sup> Biological determinists, like Van Creveld is, say this is determined by nature. Social constructivists, on the other hand, state that this is socially constructed by society.

Even though Van Creveld is convincing when he elaborates on the various reasons that explain why women should not be part of the army or any other types of combat, he does not shed his light on the cases where women actually have been successful and active actors in political violence. He convincingly sums up reasons that make women unsuitable for violence and that it is the natural course of life that violence itself is largely a male-on-male affair.<sup>34</sup> But, women are seen in combat positions -when they join the army to defend their country or when they fight for a terrorist organization- in greater numbers than Van Creveld wants us to believe.

To give an example, Mia Bloom has investigated the growing percentage of female suicide bombers and she states in 2007 that of the seventeen groups that have started using the tactical innovation of suicide bombing, women have been operatives in more than half of them.<sup>35</sup> More details about female suicide bombers will be given in chapter four of this thesis. Van Creveld's blind spot for such significant examples, makes his plea somewhat short sighted and unconvincing. Van Creveld does not go into the occurrences of women as actors of political violence; he simply dismisses it as something harmless that is not taken

---

<sup>31</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 403.

<sup>32</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 316.

<sup>33</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 399.

<sup>34</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 405.

<sup>35</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 95.



seriously by society. Although it may be true that the minority of women get actively involved in violent conflict, many feminists agree that it is not correct that women are completely excluded from the image of violence, like Martin van Creveld does. They argue that conflict, explained within the International Relations discipline, falls into the trap of believing that the masculine experience is the human experience.<sup>36</sup> Following this line of argument, the topic of violent women can be seen as a blind spot in the field International Relations, and should be taken more seriously than has been done so far.

### 2.2.3. Beatrice de Graaf

Beatrice de Graaf is a historian who in 2012 wrote a book about dangerous women in which she portrays ten known women who have engaged in political violence. In this book she confirms that, even though women are less represented within terrorist organizations or other crime statistics, the number of female terrorists for example is rising since the 1980's.<sup>37</sup> It is a trend that cannot be ignored. Even though Beatrice de Graaf is not solely specialized in female terrorists, her book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen* contains interesting information and shows thorough research on ten women who are perceived as violent and therefore dangerous. Two of the ten women are also discussed in this thesis: the lives of both Tanja Nijmeijer and Zarema Muzhakhoyeva.

She states that she has not written the book in order to illuminate the motives for women who show violent behavior in a political context, but she tries to provide more insight regarding women as violent actors.<sup>38</sup> She focuses on how the western world deals with the fear for modern terrorism, keeping in mind that it is culturally determined how governments and societies view terrorism and terrorist acts committed by women.<sup>39</sup> De Graaf notes that terrorist organizations always aim to undermine a society or a political system and are helped by dramatic news coverage with headlines about violent women. It is then up to us and our society to let them succeed or fail in this.<sup>40</sup> Awareness about the method of this type of violence in the world seems to be her underlying message.

---

<sup>36</sup> Viotti and Kauppi, 1999, p. 360.

<sup>37</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 319.

<sup>38</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 17.

In contrast to Van Creveld, De Graaf has a milder approach towards the debate between biological determinism and social constructivism. She zooms in on what the lives of ten female criminals have looked like and how these lives are portrayed in different media sources, instead of speculating whether or not their behavior is natural or constructed. It is therefore difficult to determine where to place Beatrice de Graaf. De Graaf does state very clearly that violent women are often portrayed as being more dangerous than their male colleagues.<sup>41</sup> In that sense, one can put her on the same page as the evil woman theory. But, at the same time she declares that women almost always play a marginal role within structures of violence.<sup>42</sup>

As one looks closely at the three levels of explanation concerning the radicalization process of a person she proposes in the conclusion of her book, one can tell a little bit more about her position within a larger scientific debate. She states that someone's radicalization depends on three factors: an individual psychological process, a group sociological process, and a macro sociological or cultural political process.<sup>43</sup> Taking into account that these three factors leave no room at all for potential biological processes, and primarily focus on external social aspects, one can conclude that De Graaf can be placed within the field of social constructivism.

De Graaf writes that she is aware of the usage of stereotypes when female actors of violence are portrayed. She tells the reader that violent women are sometimes represented as a hysterical widow, a depraved mother or a frustrated or naive student.<sup>44</sup> But stereotypes hide what the factual motives and backgrounds of these women are. However, when one reads about the ten women who are discussed by De Graaf, she does not abstract herself from her own findings. It seems as if she is insufficiently able to transcend her sources and fails to apply the theory about female stereotypes to the information she uses. Even though the literature she uses is very extensive, it is a pity that there is not enough room for a critical reflection towards the implemented data.

Beatrice de Graaf presents her book as an objective reproduction of the lives of ten female terrorists. However, when one looks at the chapter that describes Tanja Nijmeijer, one can see that De Graaf has a colored point of view. She describes Tanja Nijmeijer, for

---

<sup>41</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 320.

<sup>42</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 319.

<sup>43</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 321.

<sup>44</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 15.

example, as a plaything of the FARC who could not respond to the appeal of her mother and sister to return home because she was virtually caged.<sup>45</sup> Zarema Muzhakhoyeva is presented by De Graaf as a victim. Muzhakhoyeva is, like the other Chechen female suicide bombers, restricted in her freedom. She was forced to become a female suicide terrorist by the dreadful situation she was in.<sup>46</sup> Both statements are put forward as being the truth. Nevertheless, these two examples both portray these women as victims. Like both women suddenly found themselves in a situation in which they had no longer control of their actions.

This critique will be further outlined in chapters three and four of this research. When one examines all these facets, it seems that De Graaf has the tendency to downplay the free will and the dangerousness (and therefore automatically their agency) of the two female perpetrators she describes, to impede the terrorist organization in question in spreading fear. But in trying to not fall for terrorist tactics, De Graaf implicitly undermines the agency of the women she represents. It is therefore a missed opportunity for De Graaf to claim that she has portrayed these women in a neutral way, instead of taking on a more critical attitude towards her representations.

#### **2.2.4. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry**

The information introduced in the two books of the authors Sjoberg and Gentry are, in contrast, very critical towards representations of women who engage in political violence. Both have specialized in gender, conflict, media, and political mobilization. There are two books that will be used to apply their viewpoints in this research. In their first book *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, written in 2007, three theoretical narratives are explained in detail that shed light on stereotypical images that come into existence when women as active participators of violence emerge. The second book *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* is written in 2011 and approaches the topic of women and violence through a broader framework.

I will first take a look at the three narratives introduced in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*. The mother narrative demonstrates that women's violence is often attributed to

---

<sup>45</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 247.

<sup>46</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 187.

vengeance driven by maternal and domestic disappointments.<sup>47</sup> They continue by stating that: 'women who engage in proscribed violence are placed into biologically determined categorizations, depicted in maternal or domestic language.'<sup>48</sup> Thus, what are regarded as typical biological female characteristics are exaggerated or modified so that they become an explanation for women's violent behavior. When a woman is violent, it is often explained by maternal instincts that seek to avenge the death of her husband or child or to protect her loved ones from being harmed.

The second narrative, the so called monster narrative is used to describe women who are engaged in proscribed violence as pathologically damaged and therefore drawn to violence.<sup>49</sup> According to the monster narrative, women's violence is seen as the result of a mental abnormality which increases the risk of women behaving violently.<sup>50</sup> In first instance, the monster narrative shows great resemblance with the evil woman theory that also sees violent women more as monsters rather than women because they have broken the feminine gender norm. However, the difference lies in the maintaining of agency. Where the evil woman theory sees female actors of violence not as women anymore, and thus can be treated as evil creatures without deserving any sympathy or compassion, the monster narrative considers women as pathological, and therefore neither they nor their gender are accountable for their actions.<sup>51</sup> Instead of granting the violent woman in question full agency because she is, after all, not a woman anymore, her agency is taken away from her because is perceived as someone without the ability to act in a rational way.

The third narrative is the whore narrative in which violence is related to sexual depravity. This narrative describes women's sexuality as both extreme and brutal. The whore narrative can be discovered in two ways, Sjoberg and Gentry write. The first way interprets women's violence by their insatiable and uncontrollable need to have sex with men. These women are portrayed as hedonistic individuals not being able to restrain oneself from physical pleasure. The second way reveals that women's violence is inspired by their inability to perform their basic function in life, providing men with sexual pleasure.<sup>52</sup> In the second

---

<sup>47</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 47.

category one can, among others, categorize lesbians or infertile women. All the three narratives clarify that violent women are a product of faulty biology, they are singular mistakes and freak accidents.<sup>53</sup>

The book *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* comments specifically on women's involvement in contemporary conflicts of Islamic societies like Palestine, Iraq or Kashmir. It has proven to be very useful for analyzing the case study of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva and other so called black widows in Chechnya.<sup>54</sup> The book also gives a good insight in more general information regarding possible reasons for terrorist groups to include women in their network. Their premise in this book is that most scholarly and policy sources report that women who engage in terrorism do so largely for personal reasons.<sup>55</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry expound that the media portrays these women as possibly possessing personal agency –grief, trauma, etc. - but not political agency.<sup>56</sup>

Even though the gathered information gives the reader a good insight in the topic, Sjoberg and Gentry leave it unclear as to how the various terrorist organizations vary in their perception and treatment towards women. The same arguments they introduce for Al Qaeda's adoption of women in the organization are also outlined by other sources but applied to, among others, Palestinian terrorist organizations. One can read more about this topic in chapter four of this thesis. The cultural differences between Middle Eastern countries and areas would have been done more justice if Sjoberg and Gentry had chosen to implement a comparative analysis in their book. This way, not only violent gender portrayals would have received their deserved attention, but also important cultural differences would have been clarified.

In both books, Sjoberg and Gentry point out that women are unfairly excluded from representations of violent situations. When attention is paid to women as perpetrators of violent acts, they are represented in a way that removes their rationality or their sincere belief in a certain ideology. They are then left without any political agency. In *Monsters, Mothers, Whores* this process is called 'othering'. With 'othering' the stereotypical gender norm of women as violent, innocent and passive creatures is preserved, by erasing violent women from the normal feminine woman category existing within a society. The evil woman

---

<sup>53</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 19.

theory highlights the same societal process by stressing that violent women must be exterminated in order to define the outer limits of womanhood within a society.<sup>57</sup> It is beneficial that Sjoberg and Gentry put emphasis on the biased portrayal of women who engage in political violence in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*. Yet, one can argue that the three narratives they work with also cause a biased view towards the topic.

Sjoberg and Gentry let the reader believe that in every situation in which violent women are involved one of the three narratives can be discovered. However, this is not true. The saint narrative, for example, derived from Van Creveld's literature, is also an existing method of perceiving violent women, which is not mentioned in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*. Moreover, there are cases of violent women that did receive the agency they deserved. Jeanne d'Arc for example, who maintained her womanhood in the narrations about her, is still portrayed as a courageous warrior. It would have made Sjoberg and Gentry's work more complete if they would have taken up these cases as well.

Sjoberg and Gentry can be classified as social constructivists whose work is dominated by an attempt to oppose the biological determinist side that considers violent women as an unnatural and therefore unaccepted phenomenon. This is illustrated by their opinion about essentialist feminists, outlined in the introduction of *Monsters, Mothers, Whores*. There they state that many feminists harbour a belief in women's inherent superiority by denying the shortcomings in women's political behaviour. Women are thought to be better than men when it comes to controlling violent behaviour. This type of feminism benefits from maintaining that violence is a result of patriarchal society.<sup>58</sup> Women who still participate in violence are namely removed from responsibility because it is not their fault. After all, society made them violent.

Advancing on this line of reasoning to the work of Van Creveld, one can see that he has more in common with them than one would think at first. Van Creveld namely denies women's agency as well by not taking violent women seriously. He claims that women are therefore treated with more sympathy. Because the scarce agency attributed to violent women causes, what Van Creveld calls a 'privileged' situation, he believes that women should not complain about this imbalance. He states that women must consider themselves lucky with their position in the world. He is convinced that women do not belong in warfare

---

<sup>57</sup> Carroll, 1997, p. 1424.

<sup>58</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 19.

or other violent situations and stands out in proclaiming that this is a determined course of nature and therefore cannot and should not change. Sjoberg and Gentry, in contrast, think that violent women's lack of agency is a constructed concept and therefore not justified. They regard women's lack of agency not as a privilege but as a negative phenomenon existing everywhere in the world.

Beatrice de Graaf also recognizes this concept, but mentions that one cannot assume that violent women are deservedly seen as more or less dangerous. She explains her statement by saying that: 'women breaking their expected gender role is not about the insecurity that is created but about a feeling of uncertainty within society that was triggered.'<sup>59</sup> Role patterns strengthen a sense of safety and understanding in the world. When these patterns are broken or bent, a sense of incomprehension comes into existence which translates into fear. This reflection is indeed an intriguing point that one must keep in mind when reading this thesis.

### *2.3. The three criteria*

While examining the four cases, I have thought of a way to separate the story of the women who engage in political violence, the images of these women, and subsequently the position of the used literature. The separation of these three criteria gives me the opportunity to deepen the information put forward in this thesis. Moreover, it makes it possible to implement a clear guideline to which the research question can be examined. This thesis will link the above introduced research question, the different case studies and the four mindsets with the help of three criteria.

The first criterion is called the narrative and makes an observation that reviews the case studies by answering the questions: 'what happened?' and 'how did it happen?' The first criterion introduces each case to the reader as it outlines, so to say, the facts and figures of each situation without being distracted by subjective images and colored reconstructions. It does not address the way the women are described, but outlines their stories in a neutral way. The first criterion makes clear why each case study is worth to be examined.

---

<sup>59</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 325, (own translation).

The second criterion is called the reconstruction and attempts to show how the narrative is interpreted by exposing the motives underlying the narratives. This part reconstructs the actions of the actors by answering the question ‘why did it happen?’ The reconstruction reveals that violent women in question are positioned in a certain way that subsequently sheds light on what image the author proposes in his work. The underlying motives of the female perpetrators of violence are rarely reported in a neutral way following first-hand information. Thus, there is room for a colored interpretation from the observer’s side. This colored interpretation of their actions results in gendered portrayals. That is what criterion two means with the reconstruction of violent women. As I try to identify how the four cases are reconstructed, I will automatically be able to clarify how the women are portrayed and how it influences their agency. In brief, the second criterion brings to light what motives are linked to what portrayals in each case.

The third and last criterion is called the bias and takes a look at the different positions of the literature and subsequently zooms in on the question ‘what is the bias of these sources?’ The third criterion tries to unfold why the author chose this particular form of reporting in which the violent woman is positioned in a certain way. It thus goes beyond the reconstruction of criterion two and explains what purpose the portrayals of violent women serve. The third criterion touches upon the broader political context in which each case study can be placed. In every case each particular form of representation is related to a different political debate. The portrayals of the four violent women function as tactical tools in this broader context through which certain static gender stereotypes are emphasized.

The first criterion describes the accounts of each of the four female actors of political violence. Through this step, the first part of the research question is being answered, namely: ‘how do violent women serve as weapons of violence?’ The second criterion deals with the second and third sub question: ‘how are the violent women portrayed, and how does this influence their agency?’, and will be elaborated on in the chapter of each case study. The last criterion makes a connection between the literature sources and the reconstructions by relating the results of criterion two to the described mindsets and the remaining literature.

The four cases of violent women will be discussed in chapter three, four, and five. Each of the chapters is will be divided by the introduced criteria: the narrative, the reconstruction,



and the bias. The narrative focuses on the context of the violent events that take place or have taken place and the specific actions the woman involved is guilty of.

The narrative deals with the first sub question: How do violent women serve as weapons of political violence? The reconstruction is tasked with uncovering the representation of each female actor. This part shows how the media and other literature sources have interpreted the motives of the woman at stake and what portrayals have resulted from this interpretation. It subsequently takes a step further by analyzing what the influence of these portrayals is on the agency of each of the four women. It thus takes care of answering the second and third sub question: how are they portrayed and how does this influence their agency?

The bias is the last part of every chapter and targets the underlying goals of the used literature. It tries to detect what the bias of each report is and where it comes from. When one positions the sources in trying to detect what the prejudice is, one automatically touches upon a broader political context in which the sources often can be placed. This last part hopes to clarify what drives the author to choose for this particular reconstruction.

As I can conclude from the comparison of different theories, narratives and specialists, there certainly are opposing views on the way violent women are seen and consequently treated. But, no matter how contrasting the above mentioned views are on women as actors of political violence, all the authors agree on the belief that women and violence do not go well together. Social constructivists consider violent women a deviation from the prevailing societal norm. Biological determinists, on the other hand see violent women as a deviation from nature.

Somehow a woman who is violent is perceived differently than a man who acts violently. Even in today's Western modern society, female involvement in political violence is unaccepted, or at least a remarkable phenomenon. This thesis will take a closer look at this by examining four case studies. By means of these representations the above mentioned ideas, theories and narratives will be applied or criticized. This will eventually give a more profound and more holistic understanding of how today's world looks at, and deals with, violent women.

### 3. Tanja Nijmeijer and the FARC

---

Tanja Nijmeijer is a person that stands out within the topic of violent women because of her ongoing activities with the revolutionary armed forces of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). The FARC is officially considered a terrorist organization by the Government of Colombia.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the FARC can be found on the US and European lists of terrorist organizations and most academic sources concerning information about the FARC call it that.<sup>61</sup>

Nijmeijer is considered as an active and current member of the FARC. Since 2002, she has fully become part of the battle against social injustice in Colombia. First in the city of Bogotá but already after one year from when her jungle journey started she was included in the guerrilla.<sup>62</sup> Even though, when briefly reading her life story, it appears Tanja Nijmeijer has made conscious and independent choices towards the situation she is in now, the media's perception of her identity does not fully match this story. She is portrayed in certain static stereotyped ways that are related to the fact that she is a woman. This chapter will start with the first criterion: 'the narrative', by describing Tanja Nijmeijer's life and actions from different perspectives. This relates to the first sub question of the research question: How does Tanja Nijmeijer serve as a weapon of political violence.

The second part of this chapter, based on the second criterion: 'the reconstruction', deals with the second and third sub questions of the research question. In this part I will take a closer look at the discrepancy between Nijmeijer's factual violent actions on one hand, and her perceived gender identity on the other. Subsequently, possible explanations will be discussed that will shed some light on what role gender has played to influence the image of Nijmeijer. This part also includes the findings related to the question of agency. The point of departure in this will be whether Nijmeijer's actions, and the way the media portrays her, have affected or strengthened her agency in any way.

The third criterion functions as a guideline for the last part of the chapter that covers an analysis of the biases found in the used literature. The literature sources will be uncovered by zooming in on the specific positions of the authors. It reveals which

---

<sup>60</sup> Stanford University's website, "Mapping Militant Organizations".

<sup>61</sup> "Profiles: Colombia's Armed Groups", 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 228.

perceptions can be distinguished and why the authors at stake have chosen for their form of reporting.

In trying to give a complete and multisided image of the representation of Tanja Nijmeijer, both various media sources as well as academic articles will be used. In this chapter, the information obtained from De Graaf's book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen* will be considered as a guideline that will help to maintain a chronological order of Nijmeijer's life story. De Graaf's work is mostly present when outlining the first criterion, the narrative. Subsequently De Graaf's information will be supported or negated by relevant newspaper articles that are mainly found in *Trouw*, *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*. One will see that these newspaper reports mainly target on transmitting catchy headlines that appeal to the imagination of the reader.

A source that also will be analyzed in detail is the Dutch documentary made by Leo de Boer in 2010. In addition to the fact that this film contains an abundance of information about Nijmeijer's life choices, it especially brings forward a certain portrayal of Nijmeijer that is significant for how Nijmeijer is seen as a victim instead of a perpetrator. This chapter will try to find out what image of Nijmeijer this documentary aimed to put forward in the first place. Next, Jorge Enrique Botero is a Colombian journalist who interviewed Nijmeijer in 2010 and wrote a book about her. It is interesting to see that he has a completely different approach towards Nijmeijer compared to De Boer. Instead of presenting her as a lost sheep, he positions Nijmeijer as a brave and strong woman who has the courage to engage in the Colombian revolution.

The different identified images of Nijmeijer are then linked to the ideas of Van Creveld, and Sjoberg and Gentry. These academics give a deeper understanding of how Tanja Nijmeijer's case can be interpreted in terms of gender portrayals within the field of International Relations and how this reflects on her agency. Additionally, quotes from several Colombian newspapers will be used to point out the way by which Nijmeijer is presented in the home country of the FARC, focusing on other characteristics in addition to Nijmeijer's gender. I will subsequently compare them to the Dutch newspaper articles to determine whether or not there is a difference in focus. Finally, it sets forth what the reconstruction is of Nijmeijer's motives are and how one can understand the ways in which Nijmeijer is depicted.

### 3.1. *The narrative*

Tanja Nijmeijer is seen as a unique woman worth elaborating on. According to De Graaf, she is the only woman known to have climbed that high up the ladder of a wide scale terrorist organization.<sup>63</sup> Miriam Wells, the author of the article 'The Dutch Woman Who Ran Away With Colombia's FARC' confirms De Graaf's claim by quoting Jorge Enrique Botero: 'Nijmeijer's tenacity and bravery under attack impressed her superiors and she rose through the ranks, becoming assistant to even a senior commander.'<sup>64</sup> Botero is a film director who interviewed Tanja Nijmeijer when she was already situated in the jungle. Even though he is praised for this labor-intensive project of getting access to FARC's territory, his neutral position as a journalist is questioned by several sources who claim that Botero himself is affiliated with the FARC.<sup>65</sup>

Looking back at the beginning of her FARC-career, Leo de Boer's documentary outlines that it is not surprising Nijmeijer's role within the organization grew bigger. In the documentary, one of the men who introduced her to the FARC quoted Tanja Nijmeijer by saying: 'I want action, I want battle. I want to be there where the real battle is being fought'.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Nijmeijer committed several acts of violence in Bogotá, including placing a bomb in a city bus where several people got injured.<sup>67</sup> Supposedly she was also one of the perpetrators who was responsible for bombs that exploded in several supermarkets and one of those responsible for an attack on a police station in Bogotá. Nijmeijer consequently admitted these accusations in several interviews she has given, although she claims that no one ever got hurt in the attacks.<sup>68</sup> According to the Colombian ambassador situated in The Netherlands, Francisco José Lloreda, Nijmeijer's involvement in the attacks is one of the reasons why the Colombian government will not grant her amnesty anymore. 'She is a terrorist who has committed serious crimes', he declared.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 218, (own translation).

<sup>64</sup> Wells, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Alsema, 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Boer de, 2010, 20.27 minutes, (own translation).

<sup>67</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 228.

<sup>68</sup> "Tanja Nijmeijer: ik blijf de rest van mijn leven bij de FARC", 2012.

<sup>69</sup> "Tanja en haar verhaal", 2010, (own translation).

The FARC-administration saw her as a woman with great potential.<sup>70</sup> Because she is a smart girl who finished her Masters degree and speaks good English, once arriving in the jungle she soon became occupied with several administrative tasks like taking minutes during meetings of the FARC commanding officers, teaching English to the other guerrillero's, and serving as a translator for hostages. But, in the jungle, Nijmeijer was not only given supporting tasks. The United States of America, for example, has presented a request for extradition because Nijmeijer is suspected of kidnapping three Americans in 2003. The Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* reports that Nijmeijer could be sentenced to jail for up to sixty years for this accusation.<sup>71</sup>

Even though Nijmeijer admits that she found the jungle life tough in the beginning, her own statements quoted in the media in the past years have always shown a strong affinity with the FARC ideology. Nothing but idealizing words about the FARC can be found when reading her accounts. In 2010, for example, Nijmeijer was very clear about her choice to participate in the FARC organization. She wiped out every speculation about her being possibly kidnapped by the FARC by saying: 'If the army and the government still think I am kidnapped let them come here to rescue me. We will welcome them with machine guns, mines, mortars, with everything.'<sup>72</sup> Next, an article in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* revealed that generally every enemy of the FARC is executed when caught. In response, Nijmeijer adds that 'when somebody is an enemy of ours, almost always execution follows. What else should you do with your enemy? Tutor him?' She believes such actions do not have to be justified. 'The battle is justified. We are in war'.<sup>73</sup>

An analysis by Wells about the peculiar Dutch FARC girl builds on her own words. Wells states, using a quote of Botero, that Nijmeijer has a 'very unusual psyche' and often feels extreme rage, sadness or happiness, but never fear.<sup>74</sup> Another quote from Botero in Wells's article regarding Nijmeijer is that she has 'an incurable inclination toward danger and fear.'<sup>75</sup> So, when considering the above mentioned examples, an image of a fearless and dangerous person comes to mind, who is willing to sacrifice lives, in order to reach a certain

---

<sup>70</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 228. Beatrice de Graaf uses the Dutch term 'groeidiamant' to describe Tanja Nijmeijer. Due to the lack of a proper English equivalent, I have decided to translate the term as 'great potential'.

<sup>71</sup> "Tanja Nijmeijer in VS Aangeklaagd", 2010.

<sup>72</sup> "Tanja Nijmeijer wil niet gered worden", 2010, (own translation).

<sup>73</sup> Dool, van den, 2012, (own translation).

<sup>74</sup> Wells, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Wells, 2012.

goal or to serve a certain ideology. Her deeds, actions, and words tell us that she glorifies violence and she sees violence as a necessary means to let the world know where you stand.

### 3.2. *The reconstruction*

This part applies the second criterion to the case of Nijmeijer. First, it examines the different portrayals one comes across when gathering information about Nijmeijer. There are two clear images put forward by De Boer's documentary and the diaries Nijmeijer lost in 2007. These images are described, analyzed, and consequently compared with the mindsets of Sjoberg and Gentry, De Graaf, Van Creveld and several newspaper articles. Next, this part makes an observation regarding Tanja's motives for joining the FARC according to different media sources and academic literature, and then discusses how this influences her agency.

Over the past years, substantial attention has been given to this Dutch female guerrillero in the jungle of Colombia. This attention reached a peak when she lost her personal diaries at the moment she had to flee when her camp was attacked by government troops in 2007. Her diaries were found and published all over the world. This source has been very prominent in the reconstruction of Nijmeijer's identity and actions. Suddenly her most personal and frank opinions and emotions were out in the open. Emotions that were less politically correct or fuelled with ideology than one could have read so far. In reaction to the publication of her diaries, a documentary about Tanja Nijmeijer was broadcasted on Dutch television in 2010. In this documentary *Dichter bij Tanja* made by Leo de Boer, De Boer meets Liduine Zumpolle in 2007 and they work together for a year in an attempt to get closer to Tanja. In the documentary, Zumpolle appears as a fierce and straightforward woman who has a strong motivation for supporting the demobilization process of FARC members who have decided to quit. Even though she has never met Tanja in person, Zumpolle has a clear opinion about her. Zumpolle thinks of her as an 'emotional and unstable girl.'<sup>76</sup> Leo de Boer in his turn is impressed by her 'disarming smile.'<sup>77</sup> These comments portray Tanja Nijmeijer in a certain way.

---

<sup>76</sup> Boer de, 2010, 28.30 minutes, (own translation).

### 3.2.1. Portrayals of Tanja Nijmeijer

This part describes the portrayals put forward by De Boer's documentary. It then shifts to the portrayals that are sketched by Sjoberg and Gentry, and compares these with several newspaper articles. Moreover, the saint narrative applied to Nijmeijer will be explained.

First of all, throughout the entire documentary, there is much emphasis on Nijmeijer's physical appearance. She is depicted as pretty and vain. At a certain moment, Zumpolle shows a photo of Nijmeijer where she points out the fact that she plucks her eyebrows even though she has been living in the jungle for years already.<sup>78</sup> Another example is a fragment where De Boer and Zumpolle are watching a video recording of Nijmeijer who is at that moment translating a meeting between American hostages and some FARC officers. In this recording, the spectators stretch that Nijmeijer is the only FARC member that is wearing a tank top. The other women that are present in the video are, in contrast, dressed in long sleeved uniforms.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, speculations and stories about Nijmeijer's boyfriends and lovers also contribute to this lascivious image. All these aspects do not only underscore Nijmeijer's femininity and sexuality, but also the assumption that Nijmeijer herself is aware of these aspects and uses them to her own advantage. The impression is being created that Nijmeijer deliberately uses her looks to place herself in a privileged position. This awareness does not reflect a naïve, but rather a cunning personality.

A second, very different image of Nijmeijer that is brought forward is that of an insecure, lonely and naive girl who longs for love and has become a victim of her own stupid choices which she now regrets making. One of the diary quotes that is read out in the documentary confirms this image: 'I need someone, a love, for not having to feel so alone.'<sup>80</sup> In other words, this image lets us see that Nijmeijer actually uses sex and her sexuality to fight her ongoing loneliness. In her diaries she writes several times about her doubts regarding the internal functioning of the FARC.<sup>81</sup> The aspects that fit this picture are the importance of her family and her ordinary middle-class background. She grew up in a small village in The Netherlands where she enjoyed a Christian and safe education. At a certain

---

<sup>77</sup> Boer de, 2010, 03.45 minutes, (own translation).

<sup>78</sup> Boer de, 2010, 48.30 minutes.

<sup>79</sup> Boer de, 2010, 32.10 minutes.

<sup>80</sup> Boer de, 2010, 09.00 minutes, (own translation).

<sup>81</sup> Claus, 2007.

point, the documentary shows in detail the attempt of Nijmeijer's mother and sister to find Tanja and the family members' suffering with not knowing if Tanja is still alive or not. This makes one believe that Tanja did not know what she had gotten herself into. De Boer's choice of words contributes to this idea when he describes Nijmeijer as 'angelic'<sup>82</sup> and 'someone who is struggling with her feelings'.<sup>83</sup>

The documentary concludes with an emotional scene where Tanja's mother and sister have come all the way to Colombia -her mother even for the second time-. They have received information from the national army that tells them there is a strong suspicion that Tanja is still alive and possibly wants to escape. Zumpolle describes an escape route for Tanja through the radio. In addition, mother and sister leave behind a message for their daughter/sister that urges her to come home back to them because they miss her and they do not judge her. It gives the viewer the feeling that Tanja is a sweet girl that sooner or later will be reunited again with her family in The Netherlands if she will be able to flee.

Both the images that are put forward in the documentary are certainly not in line with the proof that is given for Nijmeijer's involvement in the above mentioned attacks on buses and supermarkets and Botero's idea of Nijmeijer's incurable inclination towards danger and fear. In other words, the documentary labels Nijmeijer as a victim who needs help. Maybe by her own fault, but a victim nevertheless. Somehow De Boer does not seem able to connect the commission of violent acts encouraged by a strong belief in the FARC ideology to this beautiful, educated Dutch woman raised in a small village. Strengthened by the heavily convinced Zumpolle, De Boer therefore chooses to conclude that Nijmeijer must be disillusioned by now and wants to be reunited with her family again.

The scenes from the documentary that focus on the idea that Nijmeijer is well aware of her striking appearance correspond with some of the narratives Sjoberg and Gentry have outlined. The first image matches the whore narrative to a great extent. The whore narrative sets out gender specific attributes of women's sexuality as culprits for women's violence.<sup>84</sup> The whore narrative focuses on the erotomania of women and describes women as sexually

---

<sup>82</sup> Boer de, 2010, 55.00 minutes, (own translation).

<sup>83</sup> Boer de, 2010, 03.45 minutes, (own translation).

<sup>84</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 188.



aberrant.<sup>85</sup> In the book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen* Beatrice de Graaf sets out a similar portrait of Nijmeijer. To begin with, the Dutch title De Graaf has chosen to name the chapter about Tanja Nijmeijer: ‘Tanja Nijmeijer, stout buurmeisje’,<sup>86</sup> which can be translated as: ‘the naughty girl next door’ or ‘the bad girl next door’.<sup>87</sup> It is a phrase that De Graaf has taken from the headline of the Dutch Newspaper *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*.<sup>88</sup> The title already involves a certain erotic portrayal. When De Graaf discusses Nijmeijer’s diaries she especially mentions the parts where Nijmeijer writes about sex and about her insecurities. ‘The sex splashes of the pages’, De Graaf begins, and continues with mentioning that Nijmeijer ‘cannot do without a man for the night’.<sup>89</sup> According to De Graaf, Tanja Nijmeijer’s sexual debauchery can be seen as a possible means to fight the loneliness and the boredom.

An important remark regarding the sexual imaging of Nijmeijer is that, even though De Graaf directly quotes from the diary resembling Nijmeijer’s true feelings, one can still assert that De Graaf has put too much emphasis on this source when portraying her. On the one hand, a diary can help to get as close to a person’s sincere emotions as possible and is thus regarded as very reliable. On the other hand, one must not forget that diaries are often very oversimplified and written in a blunt way. A diary resembles a snapshot of one’s life. It is therefore too short sighted to prioritize such a source when sketching someone’s character, like De Graaf has done.

Newspaper *Trouw* also zooms in on Nijmeijer’s sexual escapades and illustrates in an article published in September 2007 that sex is a recurring topic in Nijmeijer’s diary. *Trouw* writes that Tanja’s FARC-world consists of ‘violence, drugs and sex’.<sup>90</sup> The article carries on in saying that: ‘even though there are no condoms, sex is a welcome distraction in Nijmeijer’s encampment’.<sup>91</sup> One can read in De Graaf’s book that, internationally, Nijmeijer is even pushed forward by some newspapers as a sexy or sex-hungry rebel who enjoys all the attention.<sup>92</sup> Even though it was Zumpolle who decided to publish the diaries with the idea of showing the world that the FARC is a terrible terrorist organization that one should not join,

---

<sup>85</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 217.

<sup>87</sup> Own translation.

<sup>88</sup> “Stout Buurmeisje”, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 229, (own translation).

<sup>90</sup> Claus, 2007, (own translation).

<sup>91</sup> Claus, 2007, (own translation).

<sup>92</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 235, (own translation).

she achieved a different effect. Apparently the Dutch media was more interested in the details about Nijmeijer's personal life than in the violent actions Nijmeijer has committed.

The second image fits more with Van Creveld's literature about women in general. The aspects that are brought forward fit the saint narrative in which women are depicted as harmless creatures. Van Creveld illustrates his perspective by saying that: 'Women certainly do not fit the stereotype of a criminal. Such preconceptions might enable the criminal justice system to take their crimes less seriously (...) These attitudes are likely to receive support from the wider public, who are less fearful of female criminals. Moreover, due to their traditional roles as wives and mothers, the 'weaker sex' might not only evoke the sympathy of officials but avoid suspicion altogether.'<sup>93</sup> It is peculiar then, that such a peaceable image exists when talking about a violent member of a large-scale guerrilla organization, because Nijmeijer's violent actions are in contrast with the idea that she is an innocent pretty woman.

The way the saint narrative can be kept alive is a matter of specific focus. Even though society knows that Nijmeijer is responsible for placing bombs through which innocent civilians were killed, what society actually sees in the media in the years following the publication of her diaries is a smiling, melancholic woman who talks in a dreamy way about her school memories when she was just a little girl living in a small village.<sup>94</sup> The assumptions of several newspapers that stated that the idealistic Nijmeijer was tricked by the FARC also contribute to the saint narrative. In 2007, just after Nijmeijer's diaries were published, *de Volkskrant* headlined with the title: 'Idealism drove Tanja into the hands of the FARC'.<sup>95</sup> Another article describes that Nijmeijer is kept in the Colombian jungle against her will.<sup>96</sup> The confessions in her diary have also strengthened the saint narrative in which she wrote about her insecurities and her fear of not belonging in the jungle.<sup>97</sup>

In other words, much emphasis is placed on her female softness and her weaknesses. When it is highlighted that Nijmeijer misses her family and writes in her diary that she has doubts about her life choices, one is easily tempted to take the image of Nijmeijer as a dangerous terrorist not too seriously. The emphasis on her femininity, which is part of the

---

<sup>93</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 153.

<sup>94</sup> "Tanja en haar verhaal", 2010.

<sup>95</sup> "Idealisme Dreef Tanja in de Handen van de FARC", 2007, (own translation).

<sup>96</sup> "'Eillen' kennelijk Groningse ex-studente", 2007.

<sup>97</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 229.

first image that can be seen in the documentary, is, according to Van Creveld, also an important aspect that strengthens Nijmeijer's image as a victim instead of a violent terrorist. Based on the article of Steury and Frank: 'Gender Bias and Pretrial Release: More Pieces of the Puzzle', Van Creveld asserts that 'the more feminine a woman's behavior is at the time she is arrested or put on trial, the more lenient the treatment she can expect.'<sup>98</sup> Even though Nijmeijer is not arrested nor on trial, van Creveld's message regarding the idea that female perpetrators of violence –especially attractive feminine women- receive more sympathy and lenience than men do, is very much applicable to Nijmeijer's case, especially when one looks at the De Boer's documentary.

Let me now turn to the reconstruction of Nijmeijer's motives that are based on the proposed images described above. The sources that try to illuminate the reasons why Nijmeijer joined the FARC and why she committed acts of violence within this organization come up with the following motives for her actions. A motive that is found in several sources, including De Graaf's work, is the conviction that Nijmeijer is brainwashed by FARC propaganda, isolation and peer pressure. This means that, even though it does seem like Nijmeijer is a convinced FARC member, she is actually not, because she cannot think straight anymore. In other words, Nijmeijer is trapped by the FARC, but she is not aware of this. De Graaf, for example, calls Nijmeijer a woman who has a 'narrowed perspective'.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, De Graaf mentions Nijmeijer's beauty and appearance as one of the reasons she always felt special and therefore wanted to become something special by really making a difference.<sup>100</sup> Botero's explanation as seeing Nijmeijer as a woman who has an incurable inclination towards danger and fear explains why she has joined a violent terrorist organization like the FARC instead of a more peaceful human rights organization for example.<sup>101</sup> Zumpolle describes in the newspaper *Trouw* that Nijmeijer's reason for joining the FARC originates from a sentiment of social commitment and great naivety.<sup>102</sup> An article in *de Volkskrant* sees her idealism as the main motive for joining the FARC.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 175.

<sup>99</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 245, (own translation).

<sup>100</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 246, (own translation).

<sup>101</sup> Wells, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Claus, 2007, (own translation).

<sup>103</sup> "Idealisme Dreef Tanja in de Handen van de FARC", 2007.

It is noteworthy that one cannot find clear independent motives in the used sources that explain the choices Nijmeijer has made. The motives are interconnected in a way that they only seem to exist next to each other. Her looks, her idealism, her naïve nature, the FARC propaganda, the peer pressure, and her attraction towards fear; they are all facets that, when added up, function as a clarification that the media uses to justify the choices Nijmeijer has made. But when they are seen separately, they are not cogent enough. The focus on her physical appearance, put forward by De Graaf, as an explanation for her current situation is not convincing. It seems too simplistic to conclude that Nijmeijer wanted to make a difference because she was used to being treated like a special person as a result of how she looked. Moreover, Botero's reconstruction of Nijmeijer's life choices seems biased. It is possibly a way to give a different kind of attention to the FARC, but this will be further highlighted in the third part of this chapter. I will now explore whether these images and the motives, belonging to the reconstruction of her motives of action, influence Nijmeijer's agency.

### **3.2.2. The agency of Tanja Nijmeijer**

Sjoberg and Gentry are confident when stating that the gendered narratives applied to violent women result in women that have no agency in their choices whatsoever.<sup>104</sup> The whore narrative does that by profiling women as controlled either by their insatiable need for sex with men or by actual men.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, women have not actually chosen for violence in a rational way but were led by their deviant primal urges. The same can be done with the saint narrative by which the violent deeds are not taken into consideration, or they are downplayed when portraying the women in question.

When applying these narratives to Tanja Nijmeijer, the question arises whether she is left without agency. It is difficult to give one clear answer to this, because the imagery around Nijmeijer has not been consistent since she became part of the FARC. When she first became known in the media, it was mainly because of the publication of her diaries. In these diaries, Nijmeijer had written her inner thoughts and doubts. Also doubts about her life choices. In addition to that, she elaborates extensively on her own sexual activities and the

---

<sup>104</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 190.

<sup>105</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 190.

sexual activities in her camp. This had a lot of influence on the way the media perceived her. She was both portrayed as a pretty girl who uses her female charms to get things done and to make the best of her situation, and at the same time as a naïve, lonely small town girl who misses her family and actually wants to go back home.

Amongst other sources, De Boer's documentary helped to maintain these two representations. One can say that these images have contributed to the limitation or even absence of Nijmeijer's agency because these images made it appear as if Nijmeijer did not really have control of her situation or her actions. It negated any possible rational choice and it made Nijmeijer into a passive creature subject to her own sexual urges on one side, and the suppression by the FARC's brainwashing dominance on the other. Sjoberg and Gentry describe this process as: (...) the continued application of narratives which exclude the political from women's possible motivations to engage in proscribed violence and deny women agency in their choices.<sup>106</sup> Most of the motives that are attached to the images that are described above also have a negative impact on Nijmeijer's agency. Her rationality is weakened by the reasons journalists and scholars give for her actions. The articles that state that Nijmeijer is brainwashed, collapsed under peer pressure, or just has been very naïve, rules out the possibility that she has made a well informed decision to become a FARC member.

Only Botero sketches Nijmeijer's motives and leaves her agency intact. In a reaction to the interview he had with Nijmeijer, Botero states in *Trouw* that: 'she is part of the FARC out of her own free will'.<sup>107</sup> In an article published by the *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, he declares that Nijmeijer 'was speaking from her heart', when she stated that she was not under any pressure from the guerrilla movement.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Botero is the only one who emphasizes Nijmeijer's bravery and lack of fear, instead of her naivety and idealism.<sup>109</sup> However, one must keep into consideration that his contrasting manner of reasoning may be caused by his alleged personal affinity with the FARC. All the same, despite his somewhat dramatic way of reporting, he does credit Nijmeijer more agency than the way De Graaf and the Dutch newspapers portray her.

---

<sup>106</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 177.

<sup>107</sup> Koopman, 2011, (own translation).

<sup>108</sup> "Jorge Enrique Botero Searched for -and Found- Tanja Nijmeijer", 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Wells, 2012.

Since the peace negotiations started in 2012, one can notice a shift in the media's perception towards Nijmeijer. Since Nijmeijer has landed in Havana because of the peace negotiations, she has presented herself as a strong and self-assured woman who seems completely at ease with her FARC membership. The mystique that had evolved around her identity for many years has rapidly cleared away. A Dutch newspaper article that was published in *de Volkskrant* on June 9, 2013 exclaims that 'Tanja Nijmeijer wants to stay with the FARC forever.'<sup>110</sup> This article declares that Tanja Nijmeijer does not regret ever joining the rebel movement and that the armed struggle continues, no matter what. A different article, found in the same newspaper, shows a quote of Nijmeijer in the headline: 'Nijmeijer sees herself as an opponent of the capitalist big businesses.'<sup>111</sup> In this brief article, Nijmeijer hopes that the media attention, besides the gossip side of it, will also have a positive effect on the FARC in the sense that more people will understand the struggle against the major owners of capital.

These, more recent, public appearances show a different side of Nijmeijer; a side that allows less room for romanticized or sexualized ideas about a pretty woman alone and insecure in the jungle of Colombia missing her family. Instead, Nijmeijer's agency seems to be strengthened by these recent publications. The conscious focus on her combativeness and belief in the FARC ideology slowly erases the excuses that have existed among society for explaining why this beautiful, smart woman joined a violent rebel movement. The two presented images, found in the documentary, thus become less applicable to the current view towards Tanja Nijmeijer. It leads to a decrease of sympathy for and interest in her, but on the other hand one can also argue that there is an increase in her rationality. Since the start of the peace negotiations, one can notice a sense of acceptance of the idea that Nijmeijer's choices are politically and rationally motivated. Consequently, Dutch newspapers show less interest in the topic of Nijmeijer, and the portrait of Nijmeijer in De Boer's documentary slowly crumbles.

One can thus conclude that there is a shift happening that moves from a heavily gendered perception of Nijmeijer without any agency or freedom of choice towards an image of a committed FARC member who has rationally chosen- thus with full agency- to fight for the ideology she believes in. This dynamic and changing process functions as an

---

<sup>110</sup> "Tanja Nijmeijer wil voor altijd bij de FARC blijven", 2013, (own translation).

<sup>111</sup> "Tanja ziet zichzelf als bestrijder van het grootkapitaal", 2013, (own translation).

underpinning for the social constructivist side of the debate, because it shows that Nijmeijer is on her way to be accepted as a violent woman. This refers to the changing- or broadening- of a gender norm instead of hanging on to the inherent peaceful nature of women. Either way, the imagery around Tanja Nijmeijer is a constantly changing project. It remains a difficult task to entirely break through the different media and propaganda representations and truly fathom who Nijmeijer really is.

### 3.3. *The bias*

With the help of the third criterion, this part discloses what bias in the literature can be found when it discusses the life of Tanja Nijmeijer. One can distinguish several perspectives in relation to the used articles and media sources above: the FARC's position towards Nijmeijer, the Dutch media sources, the Colombian media sources, Botero's vision on Nijmeijer, and Nijmeijer's own statements. Because the story of Nijmeijer contains several plot changes, several of these perspectives have changed over time. This makes Nijmeijer an interesting and rather complex case when one attempts to discover the bias of the literature.

I will first investigate the FARC itself in relation to the imaging of Nijmeijer. An important aspect that must be mentioned is the relation to the ways Tanja Nijmeijer is perceived and how this consequently influences the FARC itself. According to certain sources, there is evidence that the FARC uses Nijmeijer in an attempt to change their own reputation internationally. The newspaper *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia* for example, published an article in 2010 in which they claimed that there has been an agreement within the FARC to use Nijmeijer in order to establish themselves better worldwide.<sup>112</sup> This information was found on the laptop of the FARC commanders when their camp was suddenly attacked by the government army.

It is indeed not inconceivable to imagine that Nijmeijer's imagery can facilitate the FARC in improving their reputation. After her diaries became known all over the world, De

---

<sup>112</sup> "Tanja Nijmeijer belangrijk voor imago FARC", 2010.

Graaf describes that it was the moment that the FARC found out this beautiful, smart, idealistic, sexy, Dutch, harmless female was of perfect 'propagandistic value'.<sup>113</sup> To give an illustration of how the FARC makes use of Nijmeijer: an interview with Nijmeijer is published in English on the official website of the FARC in which she opposes the claim that women are slaves of the guerrilla commanders.<sup>114</sup> Nijmeijer is not only a positive addition when looking at the international stage, Wells also points out in her article a more pragmatic factor: 'by virtue of being a woman, Nijmeijer will be a very welcome addition to the talks - lack of female participation in previous talks has been cited as a contributing reason to their failure.'<sup>115</sup> It is too soon to answer the question if Nijmeijer's womanhood actually contributes to the success of the peace negotiations. After all, at the time of writing, the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC are still in full progress.

Whatever the outcome will be, De Graaf believes that Nijmeijer definitely is a tactical weapon possessed by the FARC and that she is an important part of saving face and maintaining influence.<sup>116</sup> One can not deny that Nijmeijer's portrayals possess everything the FARC's portrayals do not possess. She is sketched as pretty, harmless, committed, and intelligent. While the FARC has to face image problems that have to do with the use of violence, extortion, forced labor, and recruiting uneducated peasants. Nijmeijer is thus a welcome tool that takes care of highlighting the more sophisticated side of the terrorist organization and hopefully puts an end to their negative image. This strategy can be understood as an exploitation of the stereotype that Nijmeijer brought along when joining the FARC. It is a good example of how certain perceptions of gender, nationality and background, can be used in one's own advantage. The FARC is aware of the existing idea within society that disputes violent women, and subsequently misuses this as some kind of metaphorical Trojan horse to cover up their violent and oppressive nature and terrorist actions.

A person who has positioned himself in a similar way as the FARC has done, is Jorge Enrique Botero. He is the only journalist discussed in this paper who did not implement a discrepancy

---

<sup>113</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 237, (own translation).

<sup>114</sup> FARC's official website, "Interview with Maritza, Viviana and Alexandra".

<sup>115</sup> Wells, 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 244.



between Nijmeijer and the FARC. Instead, he appointed different aspects of Nijmeijer's personality as most striking. It seems like he is also the only one who portrays Nijmeijer as a brave and dangerous terrorist who confirms Nijmeijer's own words that she has chosen this life out of conviction for a socialist and revolutionary improvement.<sup>117</sup> By crediting Nijmeijer with positive assets, he implicitly credits the FARC with the same assets. His bias is thus that he does not criticize the FARC. He does admit that he shows a different side of the situation, and he 'regrets that nobody is interested in this side'.<sup>118</sup> In any case, his accounts correspond to the belief that he is or has been affiliated with the FARC.

In addition to the aspect of gender that plays an important role in improving the reputation of the FARC, one must consider that Nijmeijer's Dutch nationality and her family's standard of living is also a significant factor when talking about this topic. These facets are mainly put forward by Colombian newspapers that I will discuss here. Next to the previously explained value judgments concerning gender, the same happens when one talks about nationality and income. The Netherlands is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Taking this into account, together with the fact that Nijmeijer was raised in a middle class family and obtained a master degree, the Colombian media is surprised that a woman with such skills and background joins a rural terrorist organization on the other side of the world. They give special attention to Nijmeijer's Dutch origin. The Colombian newspaper *El País*, for example, wrote an article in 2012 in which they called her 'la bella mujer nórdica': the beautiful Nordic woman.<sup>119</sup> Another Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* sets forth a picture of how Tanja Nijmeijer was perceived at first in Colombia: '(...) parecía con cara de niña dulce, y en sus escritos, como una idealista y educada joven europea (...)'.<sup>120</sup> This can be translated as: 'she appeared with the face of a sweet child, and in her writings she came across as a young educated European idealist'.<sup>121</sup> A different article, also published by *El Tiempo*, highlights the fact that Nijmeijer did not grow up in a poor family by introducing the mother of Nijmeijer as: 'Hannie, una mujer de clase media': Hannie, a middle class woman.<sup>122</sup> To put it short, all

---

<sup>117</sup> Refshauge, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Koopman, 2011, (own translation).

<sup>119</sup> "Conozca Quien Tanja Nijmeijer Holandesa Seducida Por FARC", 2012, (own translation).

<sup>120</sup> "El Lado Oscuro de Tanja, la Holandesa de las FARC", 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Own translation

<sup>122</sup> Bedoya Lima, 2010, (own translation).

the newspapers mentioned here stress in one way or another- next to Nijmeijer's gender- her nationality, her intelligence and her middle class background. As we can consider that the Colombian newspapers are situated on the same line as the Colombian government is, it is not surprising that the media zooms in on the discrepancy between the FARC and Nijmeijer, whereas the FARC is seen as the bad side and Nijmeijer as the good side.

The Dutch newspapers write with the same astonishment about Nijmeijer's FARC choice as the Colombian newspapers do. However, there is a subtle difference. Dutch newspapers also mention Nijmeijer's intellectual capacity and family background, but they are more occupied with Nijmeijer's sexual remarks and the speculations why Nijmeijer is still with the FARC. One can imagine that she joined this rebel group in the first place out of a feeling of idealism and naivety. But the question regarding her long stay in the jungle remains. De Boer answered this question by pointing at the possibility that Nijmeijer was forced to stay. He romanticized her story and focused on the diary quotes in which she expressed her loneliness and homesickness. The uncertainty that existed for periods of time about whether or not she was still alive, contributed to the unsubstantiated stories regarding her whereabouts. It was clear that, if she was indeed still alive, she probably wanted to flee, or she was held in the jungle against her will.

The silence, which was filled with adventurous stories in which Nijmeijer was kidnapped or at least brainwashed, was suddenly broken by her own voice. She was aware that her diaries had been found and that her inner thoughts had spread all over the world. These inner thoughts were full of doubts and insecurities about the FARC. It is thus not strange that her recent statements sound radical and extreme. To justify her FARC membership, she had no other choice than to completely oppose what she had entrusted to her diary. One can conclude that she wants to make clear to the world that she is serious about her voluntary FARC membership and about the cause they are fighting for. On the other hand, one can assume that her situation is too dangerous to express strong criticism towards the FARC. That is why it has been impossible so far to truly grasp the essence of her inner thoughts, feelings and rationale.

## 4. Female suicide bombers

---

When writing about women and political violence it is obvious to discuss female suicide bombers. Even though society usually thinks of men when picturing a suicide bomber, there is a trend of women occupying this role.<sup>123</sup> Because various relevant articles have been written in recent years about female suicide bombers and their impact on society, this chapter will include a wider range of texts, in addition to the authors and theories introduced in chapter two.

In this chapter the main focus lies on female suicide bombers in Palestine and in Chechnya. The female suicide bombers in other regions like Sri Lanka, Kashmir, or Iraq are not less worth discussing, but the two regions that will be discussed here contain sufficient substance, making it undue to explore deeper. Because I have decided to discuss two individual cases of female suicide bombing in one chapter, the structure of this chapter will be a little different compared to the previous and the next chapter. Guided by the first criterion, the narrative, I will first look at the case of the Chechen Zarema Muzhakhoyeva and that of the Palestinian Wafa Idris, and simultaneously include the discussion regarding their connected portrayals and the existence of their agency. Thus, the narrative deals with all three sub questions of this thesis related to the female suicide bombers.

Next, the second part is attached to the second criterion, the reconstruction, and looks at what, more general constructed, images can be found in –mainly western- media sources when they focus on the given motives of first, terrorist organizations and second, female suicide attackers. The structure of this chapter will eventually give a greater insight into the bias that the information regarding female suicide bombers contains. The broader political context connected to the positioning of female suicide bombers will be outlined in third part of this chapter with the help of the last criterion.

This chapter is based on a wide range of literature sources and includes several perspectives worth mentioning. The work of most authors used here can be regarded as western counterterrorist reports. Cindy D. Nes, Mia Bloom, Yoram Scheitzer, Brigitte L. Nacos, and Clara Beyler, can all be considered western counterterrorist academics whose quotes

---

<sup>123</sup> Marway, 2011, p 222.

frequently show up in each other's work. These scholars have in common that they research the phenomenon of female suicide bombers as a new danger. They are therefore eagerly seeking fixed features to determine which women are potential suicide bombers. Scholars like Claudia Brunner, and to a lesser degree Herjeet Marway, distinguish themselves from this principle and try to take on a more overall view towards terrorism and female suicide bombers. Claudia Brunner criticizes western counterterrorist literature by stating that it lacks self-reflection and too much focused on policymaking. The topic is therefore approached in a one-sided and careless manner, she believes. Brunner uses the term Occidentalism to describe how female suicide bombers are positioned in a particular way that strengthen polarized and hierarchical concepts about the West and its others.<sup>124</sup> This broader political framework will be discussed in detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

De Graaf and Sjoberg and Gentry also have a lot to say about female suicide bombers. Especially De Graaf writes in detail about Zarema Muzhakhoyeva's life. That is why she most useful for the first criterion: the narrative. De Graaf and Sjoberg and Gentry do not explicitly engage in the counterterrorist debate, but, regarding the Chechen female suicide bombers, they do come up with different reconstructions of the motives. Thus, both counterterrorist literature and the work of De Graaf and Sjoberg and Gentry can be linked to the reconstruction, as it outlines the interpretations of the narratives that are accompanied by various portrayals and different motives.

It has been difficult to find sources that represent the 'terrorist side' (using the counterterrorist term here out of comprehensibility). Unfortunately I have not managed to encounter any Chechen sources written in English that discussed the case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva. Some Palestine newspapers, which are included in this chapter, did report in English about Wafa Idris, but their occurrence is less than I was hoping to find. A proper opposing perspective is thus something to explore in later research.

---

<sup>124</sup> Brunner, 2007, p. 6.

## 4.1. *The narrative*

When first hearing about women who participate in suicide bombings, one can feel confused because of the contrast this phenomenon appears to contain. Suicide bombing is thought to be a method that is mostly used by Islamic fundamentalists to instill fear and generate attention. Although this may be true, secular organization have also used human bombs. Cindy D. Ness points out that in the 1980's and 1990's secular groups were the first that let women participate in terrorist attacks.<sup>125</sup> Religious groups only started with the acceptance of women after the year 2000, with the Chechen female militant Hawa Barayev being the first to blow herself up in the name of Allah.<sup>126</sup>

This research will try to explain how female suicide bombers are perceived. Can these women be seen as emancipated freedom fighters who earn respect by sacrificing their lives, or is it the other way around? This research will try to show that the focus on female suicide bombers in an interesting mix that justly deserves attention because it touches upon different issues that create new insights into the field of International Relations.

Female suicide terrorism began in 1985 when the eighteen year old Sana'a Meheidli blew herself up for the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP).<sup>127</sup> She drove a car filled with explosives into military vehicles that belonged to the Israeli Defense Force in South Lebanon. Besides her own life, she took those of one to five Israeli soldiers. Two other soldiers were injured. After this attack, the SSNP later claimed the responsibility of eleven more suicide attacks, from which five involved women.<sup>128</sup> Research on the use of suicide bombers concludes that, within the period from 1985 until 2006, there were over 220 female suicide bombers, which represents approximately 15% of all the suicide attacks in that time span.<sup>129</sup>

### 4.1.1. **Chechen female suicide bombers**

Chechnya is an autonomous republic of the Russian federation and has, since the eighteenth century, had a history of intense struggle for independency against Russian

---

<sup>125</sup> Ness, 2005, p. 353.

<sup>126</sup> Ness, 2005, p. 360.

<sup>127</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>128</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 223.

<sup>129</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 222.

domination. In her book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen* De Graaf gives a clear description of the Chechen situation and explains that, even though the war was theoretically ended by the Russian government in 2002, to this day the conflict continues. Chechnya is situated in the northern Caucasus region. The people of Chechnya, consisting of many clans and ethnic groups, feel connected with each other due to their shared religion; a combination of Sufism, a mystical movement within the Islam, and ancestral rituals.<sup>130</sup>

The so called Black Widows of Chechnya have been active since June 2000, when the first Chechen female blew herself up by driving a truck with explosives into the temporary headquarters of the Russian Special Forces.<sup>131</sup> The term Black Widow refers to the interpretation of the motives of the Chechen women. It was based on the idea that many of these women were acting out of a feeling of revenge for the deaths of their husbands, sons, or brothers.<sup>132</sup> However, I have not found extensive research about this assumption.

Then, there is some confusion concerning the inventors of the term. Schweitzer for example, states that the Chechen female suicide bombers were named Black Widows by the Russian and international press.<sup>133</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry however, claim that the term Black Widow is explicitly used to discredit Russia because they are the ones who are responsible for the deaths of these Chechen husbands, sons, and brothers. To put it in other words: Sjoberg and Gentry state that Black Widows are forced into terrorism by Russian violence.<sup>134</sup> They write that the term Black Widows therefore entails propaganda against Russia's policy towards Chechnya. This is in line with Rosemarie Skaine's book: *Female Suicide Bombers*, in which she describes that, even though most western literature starts from a counterterrorist perspective, the Chechen-Russia conflict is the exception, and Russia is the one portrayed as inhuman, evil and cruel.<sup>135</sup> The reason Skaine gives for this statement is the western view of Russia as the antagonistic adversary during the cold war.<sup>136</sup> If the term Black Widow is in fact from western origin, this confirms Sjoberg and Gentry's view on it. However, even though the explanation of Skaine and Sjoberg and Gentry seem plausible, it does not explain why the Chechen female suicide bombers are, from the beginning, consistently called Black

---

<sup>130</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 156.

<sup>131</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 63.

<sup>132</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 63.

<sup>133</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 63.

<sup>134</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 87.

<sup>135</sup> Skaine, 2006, p. 120.

<sup>136</sup> Skaine, 2006, p. 120.

Widows by the Russian press and other Russian sources as well. Despite the confusion, this rationale remains interesting and therefore the linkages between images of female suicide bombers and a bigger political debate will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Putting the speculations about a broader international political discussion aside for a moment, the thing that can be said about the term Black Widows is that it gives a certain value judgment about the Chechen women as violent actors. By emphasizing the fact these women are widows, it automatically excludes them from the political arena. It creates an image that underlines the belief that these women are participating out of personal grief instead out of the political ideologies they may have. The article by Marway investigates this perspective on female suicide bombers and makes a distinction between 'personal agency' and 'political agency' that can be applied to the Chechen women. She states that there is a general belief that women do not make a political choice to be terrorists.<sup>137</sup> This erodes political agency for women since it solely looks at personal reasons as an explanation that goes beyond the possibility that women want to fight for their respective causes.<sup>138</sup> To be able to say something more about the influence of media imagery on the agency-debate, and to deepen the insights of women as perpetrators of political violence, the most known Chechen female suicide bomber will be discussed here: Zarema Muzhakhoyeva.

Zarema Muzhakhoyeva is a Chechen woman, born in 1980, who was sent to prison in 2003 because she made an attempt to blow herself up in front of a Russian café in the centre of Moscow. She states that she deliberately failed and was consequently arrested by the Russian police. She is one of the few captured female suicide terrorists and her case is therefore worth examining. Even though the reports about her do not agree on all the facts of her life story, the general narrative is quite consistent.

Muzhakhoyeva was an only child and her mother left when she was eight months old. Because her father left to work in Siberia, Zarema Muzhakhoyeva was raised by her grandparents. They gave her a religious but not very strict education.<sup>139</sup> As a teenager Muzhakhoyeva married and had a child. Her husband died even before she gave birth to their daughter, and this led to the decision that she and her child went to live with the

---

<sup>137</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 229.

<sup>138</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 230.

<sup>139</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 162.

husband's family. There are uncertainties about the death of her husband, but judging from De Graaf's inquiry, 'he probably died during an internal conflict with a rebel group'.<sup>140</sup> In one of the interviews she later gave to the Russian press she stated that from that moment on most of her freedom was taken away from her.<sup>141</sup>

From this point, there are different accounts of what happened. Sjoberg and Gentry describe Muzhakhoyeva running away and leaving her child behind,<sup>142</sup> but another source says that her husband's family claimed the child and sent Muzhakhoyeva back to her grandparents,<sup>143</sup> while there are also articles describing that the financial situation of her grandparents did not allow the possibility to take her daughter with her.<sup>144</sup> In an attempt to get away from the life she was leading, she tried to go to Moscow with some money she obtained from selling her nephew's jewellery. She did not succeed and subsequently became a disgrace to her own family and her family in law. She was disowned and not able to repay her debt.

When she came to live on the streets, she met a friend who introduced her to a group of Chechen rebels. These men made her an offer and said that she could repay her debt to the family if she decided to be a suicide bomber.<sup>145</sup> After accepting the proposal, Muzhakhoyeva was sent to a jihadist training camp where she had to read religious literature and pray with the other women who were situated there.<sup>146</sup> Two months after her training, she was sent to Moscow to perform the suicide act. However, on the final moment, already standing in front of the café, she changed her mind. She told a group of men sitting there that she was carrying a bomb inside her bag. They demanded her to leave and called the police. In the few minutes that followed, she was arrested. Later that day, a FSB-member, Georgy Trofimov, did get killed by Muzhakhoyeva's bomb while attempting to defuse it.<sup>147</sup> After she got caught, Muzhakhoyeva's decision to co-operate, that even led to various arrests, was of no help in her trial. Even in combination with her young age, and her lack of previous criminal record, she was still found guilty of all charges including terrorism

---

<sup>140</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 164, (own translation).

<sup>141</sup> Lagunina, 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 88.

<sup>143</sup> Lagunina, 2006.

<sup>144</sup> "The Black Widows of Chechnya", 2004.

<sup>145</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 167.

<sup>146</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 168.

<sup>147</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 172.



and sentenced to twenty years in prison for terrorist offences on demand of the jury, which did not find any mitigating circumstances in her case.<sup>148</sup>

After reading her life story one can conclude that Muzhakhoyeva is not a typical Black Widow. Even though she lost her husband, this did not happen during a battle against the Russians. Furthermore, Muzhakhoyeva has never stated anything that could be interpreted as an intention to avenge her husband's death. It is difficult to say anything more about her exact potential political or personal motivations without filling in the blanks, but one can assume that personal grief for the losses around her, backed up by strong religious belief were not part of Muzhakhoyeva's motivations.

I will now focus on the portrayals that I have found in the literature regarding Zarema Muzhakhoyeva. The literature that writes about Zarema Muzhakhoyeva gives different ways in which this case can be construed. De Graaf, for example, describes three images. The first image is derived from Russian literature and portrays Muzhakhoyeva as an evil, dangerous, lying, manipulative and sadistic terrorist. According to De Graaf, this image is mainly based on the fact that Muzhakhoyeva made different, and sometimes contrasting, statements after her arrest.<sup>149</sup> Schweitzer draws more or less the same picture and even concludes that Muzhakhoyeva was motivated by criminal concerns more than terrorist ideology because of her multiple false accounts.<sup>150</sup> The second image is that of a poor and naive girl, suppressed by Chechen men, those in control of the patriarchal society of Chechnya, who forced her into a suicide attack. The second image is also stressed by Muzhakhoyeva's lawyer with whom De Graaf had several conversations.<sup>151</sup> The fact that these conversations confirm the second image is not really surprising, looking at the importance of winning the Russian people over for the chance to get a reduced sentence. De Graaf tends to prefer a third image in thinking it is a more nuanced and honest way to identify Muzhakhoyeva. This third image explains Muzhakhoyeva's actions by stating that she is the product of the Russian oppression of the Chechen liberation struggle.<sup>152</sup> De Graaf describes that: 'the room for manoeuvre for Chechen women was limited in such a way that for a small but specific minority the choice to

---

<sup>148</sup> "The Black Widows of Chechnya", 2004.

<sup>149</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 173.

<sup>150</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 74.

<sup>151</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 339.

<sup>152</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 186.

become a suicide bomber had become realistic.<sup>153</sup> Although this image may be a more nuanced one, it still positions Muzhakhoyeva as being forced into suicide bombing by suppressive factors.

Whether she was being suppressed by the Chechen patriarchal society, like the second image proclaims, or by dominant Russian power, like the third image proclaims, it does not make a difference for the representation of Muzhakhoyeva. Image one and two engage in a pro-Russian perspective to propagate a negative image of the Chechen population. They both bypass the option to criticize the Russian policy towards Chechnya. Image three provides a more critical attitude towards the Russian foreign policy, but not so much towards women who engage in political violence. Muzhakhoyeva, who, in image two and three, is seen as a victim that actually did not want to become a suicide bomber, potentially improves her reputation for the Russian justice system. But what De Graaf is not aware of, is that both images also take away the political agency from Muzhakhoyeva's action. She is delicately excluded from the political arena by being denied any ideological incentive.

Sjoberg and Gentry also elaborately write about the Chechen female suicide bombers and they are more conscious of the removal of Muzhakhoyeva's agency than De Graaf is. Their research has resulted in different images of the Chechen female suicide bombers. Image one which they call Zombies, and image two which they call Black Widows.<sup>154</sup> The term Black Widows is already discussed above. The Zombie image of Sjoberg and Gentry shows great similarity with De Graaf's second image, in which the Chechen female suicide bombers are portrayed as passive victims who had no other choice than to become a suicide bomber because of cruel Chechen men and weak intellect.<sup>155</sup> The Zombie image is explained by the belief that these women are suppressed by the situation they live in. This means that the patriarchal system within Chechen society has a negative outcome on Chechen women, and they consequently choose the life of a martyr. The content of the Black Widow image is already described and also shows some resemblance to De Graaf's second image. These women are weak and powerless. The images differ when one looks at the idea that black widows are, according to Sjoberg and Gentry, forced into terrorism specifically by Russian

---

<sup>153</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 186, (own translation).

<sup>154</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 86.

<sup>155</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 87.

violence and the dire circumstances within Chechen society resulting from Russian policies towards Chechnya.

I will now look at the agency of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva. Whereas Gentry and Sjoberg bring forward two images that position the Chechen women as powerless victims without agency, the first image that De Graaf introduces- and that also can be found in Schweitzer's report- underlines the perception of Zarema as an evil and contrived violent perpetrator. Even though Sjoberg and Gentry depict Zarema Muzhakhoyeva as an example for their typical Zombie image without agency,<sup>156</sup> De Graaf, on the other hand, draws a picture –the first image- in which Muzhakhoyeva has agency, but is based on the Russian presentation of a bad and evil woman whom cannot be trusted. After all, she tried to trick the Russian society.

De Graaf's first image exhibits a clear similarity with the Evil Woman Theory in which, to continue in the words of Victor Streib, a woman has committed shockingly unladylike behaviour, allowing the sentencing judges and juries to put aside any image of her as the gentler sex and to treat her as a crazed monster.<sup>157</sup> In this regard the evil woman theory applies to Muzhakhoyeva, especially when one looks at the long, disproportionate sentence she has been given. It can be concluded that De Graaf's images and subsequently the images presented by Sjoberg and Gentry strengthen a deeper understanding of the position of the Chechen female suicide bombers in a larger constructivist debate. It is valuable to keep all four of them in mind when looking at this subject matter.

#### **4.1.2. Palestinian female suicide bombers**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a very protracted and complex war. Due to the limited scope of this thesis there is no other option than to outline only a brief context in which the Palestinian female suicide bombings have been taking place. A Palestinian female suicide bomber is referred to as shahidat.<sup>158</sup> The phenomenon of shahidat only came into existence during the height of the second intifada, also called the al-Aqsa intifada. With the

---

<sup>156</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 88.

<sup>157</sup> Streib, 2012, p. 878.

<sup>158</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 13.

word intifada the Palestinians mean their uprising against Israeli occupation. The second intifada started in the year 2000 and lasted until the year 2005.

The website of Palestine Facts<sup>159</sup> outlines that the second intifada emerged after a visit in October 28, 2000, of the former prime minister of Israel Ariel Sharon and a few hundred Israeli soldiers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the holiest place within Judaism. The al-Aqsa Mosque is situated in the same area and is considered the third holiest place in Islam. This visit became the pretext for instigating large scale demonstrations, the start of the al-Aqsa intifada.<sup>160</sup> According to several sources, including the Palestinian Human Rights Monitor, the second intifada was characterized by a tremendous increase of violence within the Palestinian society, including suicide attacks.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to the first intifada -that took place in the years between 1987 and 1993- where women could only participate in the liberation struggle by giving birth to male fighters, the second intifada presented itself as an uprising where women slowly received more liberty to become much more active, among others, as human bombs.<sup>162</sup>

Wafa Idris was a 26 year old Palestinian woman who blew herself up on January 27, 2002, with the help of a 10 kilogram bomb with nails packed in her rucksack. She was the first female suicide bomber who blew herself up in the Israel Palestinian conflict and caused a huge range of different reactions. This is the reason that her case is chosen to be discussed in this thesis. She was an aid worker for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society from the Al-Amári refugee camp near Ramallah.<sup>163</sup> The odd detail to the story is that there are several sources which claim that Wafa Idris did not have the intention to blow herself up. Bloom copied the statement of *Agence France Presse* which stated that she was actually 'on her way to delivering the bomb to someone else when she got stuck in a revolving door, accidentally detonating the explosives'.<sup>164</sup> *The New York Times* mentioned the possibility that Idris only wanted to plant the bomb and escape.<sup>165</sup> Also the *BBC News* questions the

---

<sup>159</sup> Palestine Facts website, "Start of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000".

<sup>160</sup> Palestine Facts website, "Start of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000".

<sup>161</sup> Palestinian Human Rights Monitor's website, "One Year Al-Aqsa Intifada Fact Sheets and Figures".

<sup>162</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>163</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 97.

<sup>164</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 97.

<sup>165</sup> Bennet, 2002b.

real intentions of Wafa Idris.<sup>166</sup> The reason for these speculations was the lack of a farewell video which, by author Claudia Brunner, is said to be one of the central ingredients of a successful operation to communicate the news immediately afterwards.<sup>167</sup> She killed one Israeli citizen and wounded between 50 and 140 bystanders<sup>168</sup> The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades took responsibility for the attack a few days later. They are part of Arafat's secular Fatah group.<sup>169</sup>

I will now examine how Wafa Idris is portrayed. In spite of the doubts revolving around Wafa Idris deliberately detonating the bomb, Bloom states that her act transformed her into a cult heroine throughout the Arab world nevertheless.<sup>170</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry agree on this and quote the London based Arab newspaper Al-Quds that published the text soon after Idris' suicide attack: 'The martyr's death of Wafa restored honour to the national role of the Palestinian woman, who has carried out the most remarkable exploits in the long struggle for national freedom. (...) She stands at the side of the men in the struggle for freedom.'<sup>171</sup>

Other Arab periodicals showed similar responses. Marway's article quotes, for example, how the newspaper *Al Arabi* reacted after Wafa Idris her death: 'A nation that has in it a woman like Wafa Idris will never be defeated, will never be humiliated.'<sup>172</sup> *The Guardian* describes Wafa Idris as role model for many other Palestinian women who followed Idris' example in the months after her death. According to this newspaper, it even became a trend that shifted the entire profile of suicide bombers.<sup>173</sup> Both Bloom and Ness clarify this and mention that the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade supposedly even set up a special unit to train female suicide bombers and named it after Wafa Idris.<sup>174</sup>

In addition to the positive, heroic words concerning Wafa Idris, the aspect that also stands out is the emphasis on her beauty and her intellect. The newspaper *Arab News* defined Idris as: 'A 28-year-old, educated, good looking, Palestinian paramedic who blew

---

<sup>166</sup> "Female Bomber's Mother Speaks Out", 2002.

<sup>167</sup> Brunner, 2005, p. 32.

<sup>168</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 223.

<sup>169</sup> Ness, 2005, p. 365.

<sup>170</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 98.

<sup>171</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>172</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 228.

<sup>173</sup> Foden, 2003.

<sup>174</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 98.

herself in Jerusalem.<sup>175</sup> *The New York Times* even published that the Arabic world compared her with 'Joan of Arc, the Mona Lisa and virgin Mary'.<sup>176</sup> The newspaper *Al Sha'ab* also highlights the physical appearance of Idris, but does that in a different way: 'It is a woman who has shocked the enemy with her thin, meagre and weak body...'<sup>177</sup> *Al Sha'ab* means to focus on the contrast between the weak physique of a woman and the powerful mission she has accomplished with that body. Yoram Schweitzer mentions in his report that the people from Palestine call her lovingly 'flower Wafa'.<sup>178</sup>

Even more recently traces about the glorification of Wafa Idris can be found. On December 14, 2012, *The Palestinian Chronicle* described a Palestinian football tournament that was named after Wafa Idris. The newspaper criticized Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron's reaction who expressed himself negatively against this kind of honouring: 'The Arab media were lavish in their praise for Idris, the "courageous Palestinian girl", and as a result she became a heroic symbol of Palestinian womanhood in their struggle to throw off the occupation. If it's OK for Israel to name major institutions after its famous terrorists what right has Cameron to get upset when Palestinian football team similarly commemorates one of theirs?'<sup>179</sup>

Thus, putting all these different accounts together it is clear that Wafa Idris is portrayed in a particular way. Instead of sexualizing Idris' identity or portraying her as a mad monster, she is seen as a completely different character by the Islamic world. Newspapers and other sources see her as a strong, mysterious, heroic, serene and smart woman, fighting for a nationalist cause. Even though emphasis is put on her appearance, it is not done in a sexy erotic manner, like one can see in Nijmeijer's portrayals, but rather in a beautiful, sometimes angelic, way. Wafa Idris became a symbol for the Palestine oppression. The fact that Wafa Idris was a woman was consequently used by the Palestinian people to make clear that even a young innocent female paramedic suffered so much from the Israeli violence that she decided to get involved in the conflict. When looking at these sources, one can conclude that Wafa Idris was certainly not without agency. She was seen to be acting upon the belief in a higher political cause. This contrasts, for example, with the western view

---

<sup>175</sup> Adams, 2002.

<sup>176</sup> Bennet, 2002a.

<sup>177</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 98.

<sup>178</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 22.

<sup>179</sup> Littlewood, 2012.

towards Chechen suicide bombers who are believed to participate in violence only to avenge their death husbands, sons, or brothers. However, this awe-inspiring way of describing Wafa Idris, did not deny her any political agency, but instead did deprive her from her womanhood by making her into a supernatural being, stripped from all normal female aspects. This will be further explained later on in this chapter.

Let me now turn to other, western, perspectives that shine a different light on understanding the actions of Wafa Idris. In addition to setting out information about rejoicing messages that are heard from the Arabic newspapers when dealing with the Wafa Idris topic, western media sources also underscore certain elements of Wafa Idris's life that are not mentioned by most Arabic sources. The first paragraph of *The New York Times*, for example, tells the reader that Idris's husband divorced her because she could not have children.<sup>180</sup> The English Wikipedia page about Wafa Idris does the same by mentioning, already in the first sentence, that her husband divorced her.<sup>181</sup> The extensive account of Yoram Schweitzer, a report written for the Israeli Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS), concludes that Idris's motivation must have been personal because her economic situation that, due to her status as a divorced and barren woman, made the chances of building a new life for herself close to zero in the traditional and patriarchal society in which she lived.<sup>182</sup> In 2003 the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs described on their website the motives for Palestinian women to become a shahidat. They proclaimed that in each and every case these women had a large amount of personal baggage and that the personal and social motives appear to be the most dominant in explaining why these women decided to blow themselves up.<sup>183</sup>

Claudia Brunner already researched these counterterrorist responses in 2005 and came to the conclusion that many of the journalists involved searched for clues in Idris's private life to explain why she did it. Ness explains these contrasting western portrayals by claiming that they tried to suggest that each suicide bomber was chosen because in some way she failed to meet, or deviated from, societal gender expectations. Each suicide attack

---

<sup>180</sup> Bennet, 2002b.

<sup>181</sup> Wikipedia's website on Wafa Idris.

<sup>182</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 19.

<sup>183</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, "The Role of Palestinian Women in Suicide Terrorism".

was motivated by the thought of restoring the attacker's honour.<sup>184</sup> In other words, they tried to fit Wafa Idris into the picture of a desperate woman, who might have thought about committing suicide anyway.<sup>185</sup> Possible political motives for Wafa Idris's actions are completely neglected. Thus, whereas western sources completely erode Idris's agency, Islamic literature grant her an abundance of agency. According to Marway, this is even a disproportionate amount of agency.<sup>186</sup> I will examine this facet from up close in the following parts.

## 4.2. *The reconstruction*

Now that this chapter has outlined two different case studies that each relate to female suicide bombers, what can one say about the positioning and imaging of Arabic or Islamic terrorist organizations and female suicide bombers in more general terms? What do the reconstructions of the two narratives tell the reader in regard to proposed the motives of the terrorist organizations and the motives of the female suicide bombers?

In trying to answer this question, let me first turn to the motives that articles and media sources give to explain why organizations adopt women to become suicide bombers. I have found five reasons that literature sources underline when explaining why terrorist organizations deploy women. Then, I will look at three given motivations that explain why women choose to be suicide bombers. Because of the language barrier, practically all used sources below are based on western and/or counterterrorist accounts.

### 4.2.1. **Motives of terrorist organizations**

One of the most mentioned motives is a tactical one: Women are not suspected because of the stereotypical passive nature of women. The comment that the ministry of foreign affairs in Israel made in response to the rise of Palestinian female suicide bombers reflects this tactical motive: 'The terrorist organizations behind the attacks want to exploit the advantages of dispatching females to perpetrate them (...). This is under the assumption that

---

<sup>184</sup> Ness, 2005, p. 367.

<sup>185</sup> Brunner, 2005, p. 32.

<sup>186</sup> Marway, 2011, 230.



a female is thought of as soft, gentle and innocent and therefore will arouse less suspicion than a man.<sup>187</sup> The International Institute for Counter Terrorism in Israel published an article on their website in 2003 elaborating on Palestinian female suicide bombers.<sup>188</sup> They described that terrorist organizations make good use of the idea that women evoke less suspicion: 'These female terrorists attempted to westernize their appearance, adopting modern hairstyles and short skirts.'<sup>189</sup> The way Sjoberg and Gentry put it: 'This additional surprise element women brought along by participating in suicide attacks has created added value to the fearsome character of the organizations that use these women.'<sup>190</sup> This surprise element is based on the so called innocence narrative, in which all suspicion is erased completely solely because the actor is a woman. One can see the same happening in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, outlined in chapter five.

Another motive that one can come across when reading about female suicide bombers is the aspect of 'invoking shame' on men who are supposedly letting women do the job they actually should be doing. Implicitly these female suicide attackers thus serve as a means to generate more male members. The website of the Russian newspaper *Pravda* illustrates this tactical response by stating that the following sentence is used in a document meant for Chechen female suicide bombers: 'Women's courage is a disgrace to a lot of modern 'men.'<sup>191</sup> In this context the belief is brought forward that it is originally not a woman's job to sacrifice her life and therefore men should not let women do the fighting.<sup>192</sup> It should ensure the idea that men are stimulated to go in their place because they are better equipped for the job. Sjoberg and Gentry report about reasons for the usage of women by al-Qaeda in Iraq, and they describe that female suicide bombers in Iraq originated, amongst other reasons, from the necessity of sufficient suicide bomber volunteers. Thus, women bombers can be seen as recruiters. On one hand they attract women by serving as a leading example, like Wafa Idris has done. On the other hand they attract men by imposing a shaming effect on them impelling more of them to take part.<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, "The Role of Palestinian Women in Suicide Terrorism".

<sup>188</sup> International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya Israel website.

<sup>189</sup> International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya Israel website.

<sup>190</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 163.

<sup>191</sup> Sudakov, 2003.

<sup>192</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 100.

<sup>193</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 165.

A third motive originates from an ideological concept that tries to invoke the idea that danger is everywhere. Mia Bloom outlines this in her article. The enemy must think that it is a total war and that there is no barrier anymore between combatants and noncombatants. Insurgents are, so to say, all around you.<sup>194</sup> A feeling of fear and insecurity must be spread through the conviction that everyone can be a perpetrator. Bloom believes that organizations, that make use of female suicide bombings, want to express the message that they are waging a political war, not just a religious one. When (even) women are involved, the conflict must be serious and the cause must be just.<sup>195</sup> De Graaf declares that: 'the Chechen war of independence was, by deploying women as suicide bomber, suddenly upgraded to an international, psychological and propagandistic battle'.<sup>196</sup> This thus confirms the third motive within the Chechen case.

Another important motive for organizations to make use of women as human bombs is to attract more media attention. One of the reasons to detonate a human bomb in the first place is to receive international attention that consequently can be used to get a political message across. Because female suicide bombers are still seen as a remarkable and noteworthy phenomenon, there is a bigger chance that attack makes the news headlines when it is performed by a woman instead of a man. This line of reasoning is also cited by Sophie Claudet. She is a reporter who wrote an article in 2002 named 'More Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers Could Be On The Way', in which she quotes the Palestinian sociologist Liza Taraki who points out that: 'Suicide attacks are done for effect, and the more dramatic the effect, the stronger the message; thus a potential interest on the part of some groups in recruiting women.'<sup>197</sup>

The fifth and last motivation has a more practical nature. It focuses on women who are infertile or widowed, and are sometimes considered to only be of value to herself, her family or her society when she sacrifices her life for a higher cause. Mia Bloom even tells her readers that: 'the women who participate in suicide bombings are usually among the most socially vulnerable: widows and rape victims.'<sup>198</sup> The story of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, in the version written by De Graaf, contains this element as well. She was told that her suicide

---

<sup>194</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 101.

<sup>195</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 101.

<sup>196</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 160, (own translation).

<sup>197</sup> Claudet, 2002.

<sup>198</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 102.

attack would free her from shame and that her family could finally be proud of her.<sup>199</sup> Schweitzer pictures the situation of Wafa Idris in a way that committing a suicide attack was the only way of redeeming herself from the inferior status ordained by her surroundings.<sup>200</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry describe groups, who accept women as suicide attackers, as the ones presenting themselves as facilitators in regaining these women's honor. In their book *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, a process of al-Qaeda is construed in which pregnant women without a husband, and women who have been raped are taken up in the organization to be used as suicide bombers.<sup>201</sup>

All the five motives have in common that they are derived from the usage of a static stereotypical understanding of womanhood. The portrayal of women as subordinate, non-violent, a-political, peaceable creatures, result in clear advantages for the groups and organizations who benefit from the surprise element of suicide attacks committed by women. Women and violence is seen as a rare combination to which defense protocols are insufficiently adapted. The gender element within suicide bombing thus becomes just as dangerous as the actual attack.

It is difficult to order the five motivations from most relevant to least relevant. They are intertwined in such a way that they all influence each other. The five motivations are based on the assumption that women are not supposed to be violent. This widespread belief strengthens the surprise element in the attack, it invokes shame on men, it gives rise to a notion that the enemy is everywhere, it attracts more media attention because of its unusualness, and it underpins the conviction that women, who are suitable for suicide bombings, already have deficiencies and cannot be regarded as real women anyway.

Even though all the motivations seem plausible and can be found in more than one source, the last one can be regarded as a secondary motive. According to the aforementioned sources, terrorist organizations only use this argument to convince the woman involved to go along with their plan. In the case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva for example, her life is portrayed in a way that tells the reader that she was recruited because of her vulnerable and unprotected position, since she did not have a husband or any family

---

<sup>199</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 170.

<sup>200</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>201</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011, p. 187.

anymore to fall back on. But Muzhakhoyeva's background eventually did not make a difference for the preparation or outcome of the attack. It only mattered that she was an easy prey because of her unmarried status, not that the rebel group truly thought they were Muzhakhoyeva's only escape from a life of shame.

#### **4.2.2. Motives of female suicide bombers**

Besides the range of reasons that terrorist organizations have to deploy women, one can also find motivations in counterterrorist media and academic articles for women themselves to have made the choice to become a suicide bomber.

One of the reasons that is often heard is that the women in question were in some way forced by the terrorist organizations who claimed the assault, by her family, by her lover, by her husband, or by the oppressive society she lived in. Within this concept it is not relevant who explicitly or implicitly forced her to blow herself up, the important aspect is that the women did not have a choice. De Graaf meets this framework by reaffirming the image of the forced woman. In her book *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen*, she gives the following motive for Chechen women becoming suicide bombers: 'They are recruited or forced'.<sup>202</sup> These women are thus portrayed as powerless puppets used by external forces around her. Mia Bloom writes about several aspects that indicate a preconceived idea about women who become suicide attackers out of coercion. She states that women are easily recruited and exploited.<sup>203</sup> Clara Beyler is a counterterrorism analyst who writes for the *New York Sun*. In 2006 she wrote an article with the revealing name: 'Using Palestinian Women as Bombs.' In this article Beyler makes clear that the women's role is dictated by the patriarchal hierarchy that rules Palestinian society and its terrorist groups.<sup>204</sup>

A second motive that can be found in more than one source is the portrayal of female suicide bombers as women who sacrificed themselves as a means of attaining gender equality. These women are described as longing for a respected position within a liberation struggle and find a suicide attack the best way to become a key player within an organization. Mia Bloom expresses the idea that some female suicide bombers think they

---

<sup>202</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 187, (own translation).

<sup>203</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 102.

<sup>204</sup> Beyler, 2006.

can change their society's gender norms through militant involvement.<sup>205</sup> She continues with Wafa Idris's case and sets forth that through violence, women have placed themselves on the frontlines, in public, alongside men to whom they are not related.<sup>206</sup> This motivation is two fold. On one hand they are positioned as role models for other women in showing that women can do the same tasks within a conflict as men do. On the other hand these women tried to escape their own traditional inferior lifestyles. Brigitte L. Nacos adds that the basic understanding within revolutionary groups is that everyone is equal.<sup>207</sup> Thus, a woman would be better off being a terrorist compared to being a housewife. On the other part, De Graaf rejects this by arguing that women usually play a subordinate role within religious, right extremist, or left revolutionary groups.<sup>208</sup> According to her, suicide terrorism has nothing to do with emancipation.

A third and last example of a frequently found motivation for women to become a suicide attacker is to avenge the death of her husband, brother, father, or another loved one. In this case personal grief is the main motivation. The Black widows of Chechnya, including the case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, are perfect examples of women who are portrayed in the media as grieving women engaging in suicide acts to make up for the loss of their loved ones. De Graaf underlines the grieving image of Muzhakhoyeva. She describes the setting of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva's life as follows: 'Almost all of the female suicide terrorists had lost a loved one or a family member. Zarema Muzhakhoyeva had lost her child and husband, admittedly not in battle, but her loss could be traced back to the hopeless situation a lot of women in Chechnya find themselves in. Muzhakhoyeva's poverty and misery can be seen as a symbol for the situation in Chechnya.'<sup>209</sup> In this respect Bloom concludes that women usually become suicide bombers in response to a personal tragedy, and that the involvement generally stems from personal reasons instead of ideological ones.<sup>210</sup> Schweitzer's report summarizes the motivational sets of the Chechen female suicide bombers as a combination of trauma, revenge and religious ideology. He quotes another

---

<sup>205</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 96.

<sup>206</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 99.

<sup>207</sup> Nacos, 2005, p. 444.

<sup>208</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 319.

<sup>209</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 186, (own translation).

<sup>210</sup> Bloom, 2007, p. 96.

author in his chapter about the Chechen Black Widows by writing: 'desperation allows them to be deceived into being devout.'<sup>211</sup>

Even though each of the motivations is backed up by various articles, the second one is least convincing. Trying to attain gender equality by becoming a suicide bomber would imply a great personal urge for emancipation that would have manifested itself in actions before a suicide attack. Neither Zarema Muzhakhoyeva's life nor Wafa Idris's life contained an event before their attacks that could be considered an act of women's liberation. Moreover, a woman who gives her life in order to create equality between men and women is an example of self-sacrifice for a greater cause. But would that cause not be better served if she would, for example, join a feminist movement? Or if there would at least be concrete proof that female suicide bombings lead to improved opportunities for women? It is not plausible to try to stand up for women's rights by joining a political or religious movement that has no affinity at all with this topic. A woman who becomes a suicide bomber as to escape her traditional and oppressive life is a more credible theory, but this motivation must then be labeled as a personal trauma, rather than attaining gender equality.

All three motivations described here stem from counterterrorist sources. It is striking that their reports do not pose the possibility that female suicide bombers chose for this action out of an ideological conviction for a greater political or religious cause. These three motivations thus leave no room for any agency. Claudia Brunner states that counterterrorist experts position female suicide bombers deliberately without agency. Not in the first place to downplay women's rationality, but to manifest the 'other, Arabic, Islamic, non-western, third world' as an oppressive and bad society.<sup>212</sup> This line of thought will be further discussed in the third part of this chapter, the bias.

### 4.3. *The bias*

This part will view the underlying motives of the authors of the used literature sources in order to find out what the position of their report is. Like I have already stated before, the

---

<sup>211</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 71.

<sup>212</sup> Brunner, 2007, p. 964.

bias regarding the sources that surround the topic of female suicide bombers can roughly be divided in a counterterrorist and a non-counterterrorist, or Islamic, point of view. I will now elaborate on this division to give a deeper understanding of why a source chooses for a particular form of reporting.

According to author Claudia Brunner, all the aforementioned motives for terrorist organizations to deploy women and for female suicide bombers, create images that can be subsequently placed among counterterrorist accounts. She suggests that 'the essentialist conception of female suicide bombers reinforces the naturalness of suicide terrorism and of existing international power relations.'<sup>213</sup> Depicting female suicide bombers in a particular way maintains these international power relations.

Similar to the portrayals of Tanja Nijmeijer in the media that are used in a tactical manner by the FARC to influence their reputation on the international stage, there are also tactical advantages of portraying female suicide bombers in a certain way. Thus, the consequence of 'othering' violent women within international politics does not only influence the agency of these women, but in fact has broader political implications. Author Herjeet Marway calls this, in her article, a 'military advantage'.<sup>214</sup> Those who see female suicide bombers as without agency because they are 'victims' -or the way Marway calls it: 'subwomen'<sup>215</sup>- imposes a dichotomy that, according to Brunner, separates the 'barbaric, uncivilised, oriental, third world, Muslim/Arab, far away other' on one side, from the 'rational, emancipated, enlightened, first world, non-user of female suicide bombers self' on the other side.<sup>216</sup> The linked value judgement is that the 'other' is wrong and bad and the 'self' is right and good. Brunner calls this process Occidentalism.<sup>217</sup>

Counterterrorist accounts, a term under which the articles of Bloom, Schweitzer, Nacos, Beyler, Ness, Skaine, Bennett, use the image of Islamic extremists to erase the agency of female suicide bombers. The Russian accounts can be explained in a slightly different way. The case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva sets forth two Russian portrayals. The first one sees her as an evil vicious person who is granted full agency. The second portrayal sees her as a

---

<sup>213</sup> Brunner, 2007, p. 958

<sup>214</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 231.

<sup>215</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 225.

<sup>216</sup> Brunner, 2007, p. 964.

<sup>217</sup> Brunner, 2007, p. 958.

suppressed victim of the malicious Chechen society. Both portrayals are a Russian attack on the Chechen society and can be understood in the light of the current conflict between Chechnya and Russia. In the first portrayal Muzhakhoyeva is regarded as a part of Chechen society, in the second portrayal she is only a victim of it.

By defining the female suicide bombers as being forced into terrorism, striving for gender equality or trying to avenge the death of a family member, there is no space left for political motivations that could explain their actions. All women are suppressed by the Islamic, Arabic, or the orientalist culture they live in. They are seen as victims of a violent system, not wilful rational actors. Thus, even though a female suicide bombing is one of the most violent and lethal examples within the field of International Relations conducted by a woman, counterterrorist articles do not accept the full political agency of these women. Instead, biased portrayals of female suicide bombers are used to criticize the culture they live in. The passive and pacifying gender stereotype functions to strengthen the way the culture of these women is presented as misogynistic, suppressive, violent, and conservative. That is the main reason why Claudia Brunner criticizes the information Mia Bloom poses in her article. Brunner argues that even though Mia Bloom presents herself as an objective and reflective author, she is not aware of the fact that she is heavily influenced by the western counterterrorist perception towards female suicide bombers that deny these women any political agency.

Yoram Schweitzer writes in his report that he is aware of the counterterrorist versus the Arabic perception towards female suicide bombers by making the comment that 'there is an effort by both the western press and by the Arab media to use these women as tools for the purpose of their own propaganda.'<sup>218</sup> However, his own report can be charged guilty of this propaganda by portraying female suicide bombers as women without agency, driven by personal grievances and victims of their oppressive and patriarchal society. Chechen women, Schweitzer writes, are influenced by deep personal and psychological trauma and recruited through friendships and familial relations.<sup>219</sup> He thus criticises Islamic societies as well and thereby denies the female suicide attackers any political agency. The additional fact that he writes for the Israeli Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies contributes to this observation regarding his bias.

---

<sup>218</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>219</sup> Schweitzer, 2006, p. 71.



Brunner's plea seems convincing because a trend can indeed be detected in counterterrorism oriented articles that lay emphasis on the personal grievances of women or the seemingly forced way these women became involved in terrorism. However, she does not shine the same light on the Arabic accounts that deal with female suicide bombings.

Marway, on the other hand, poses a more complete image of both perspectives in her article as she describes how female suicide attackers can, mainly by the Arabic orientalist media, also be portrayed as superwomen.<sup>220</sup> Like already explained in the part about Wafa Idris, superwomen are presented as divine beings who possess supreme qualities of purity, beauty, piety and rare brilliance.<sup>221</sup> The case of Wafa Idris is a perfect example of the superwomen image. Idris's suicide act was applauded and her religious and cultural status was elevated.<sup>222</sup> Like the other superwomen preconditions, the life of Wafa Idris was romanticized and a more poetic language was used when reporting about her violent deed.<sup>223</sup> This way of portraying is also a very biased way of trying to improve the status of the self, in this case the non-western, Islamic society.

By transforming Wafa Idris into a hero, the media tries to strengthen the national struggle for freedom and at the same time convince the international stage that her self-sacrifice had a just cause. Sacrificing one's own life has something worthy, something pure and pious. The female suicide bomber is seen as a protector of her nation.<sup>224</sup> Even though this glorification within the superwomen framework might seem to have a positive effect on the agency of these women, Marway claims that this is not the case. Superwomen are eulogized to such a degree that they are, so to say, excluded from normal womanhood. Ness explains it as a transformation in which the female suicide bomber and her deed become transcendent and any contingency associated with her being female is relegated to the background.<sup>225</sup> Thus, in this case the image itself does entail political agency, but the actor is now defeminized. She is given almost mythological characteristics that drive her stories away from reality, making her fairytale-like characters. However, a more thorough and

---

<sup>220</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 227.

<sup>221</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 228.

<sup>222</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 227.

<sup>223</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 227.

<sup>224</sup> Marway, 2011, p. 228.

<sup>225</sup> Ness, 2005, p. 366.

amplified research on the Islamic sources is needed to draw more adequate conclusions about the bias that these reports contain.

Both Brunner and Marway conclude that the international tension between the western counterterrorist side and the Islamic, or Arabic, side, and the conflict between the Russian and the Chechen side, have a negative effect on the agency of female suicide bombers. They both provide the effect that keeps the traditional gender stereotype of inherently non-violent women intact and at the same time condemns the 'other', whether this is the 'western counterterrorist other', the 'Chechen other', or the 'Arabic/Islamic non-counterterrorist orientalist non-western other'.

## 5. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and the Rwandan genocide

---

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is a woman worth discussing in this thesis because of several unique aspects connected to her. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is considered to be part of the inner circle that plotted the Rwandan genocide that took place in April 1994 and lasted approximately a hundred days in which more than 800.000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed.<sup>226</sup> The way Sjoberg and Gentry put it in their book *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*: 'She is the first woman ever to be charged with genocide and using rape as a crime against humanity in an international jurisdiction.'<sup>227</sup> The trial was so extensive that the newspaper *Trouw* in 2011 comments that, added together, 'Nyiramasuhuko has spent almost two years of her life in court'.<sup>228</sup> As Professor Mark A. Drumbl describes it, on June 24 2011, 'Nyiramasuhuko was found guilty of conspiracy to commit genocide, and of genocide, of the crimes against humanity of extermination, rape, and persecution, and of the war crimes of violence to life and outrages upon personal dignity.'<sup>229</sup> She received the harshest punishment possible: life imprisonment. She was then sixty-five years old. A woman involved in violence is often treated as a noteworthy subject. However, a woman inciting rape is for many beyond comprehension. Therefore, this thesis will try to elucidate this topic by examining Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's life.

This chapter will begin with a justification of the use of literature. Again, besides using the information from Sjoberg and Gentry, and Van Creveld, many academic articles will be used to shed some light on relevant details concerning Nyiramasuhuko's violent actions. Next, the circumstances in which the Rwandan genocide was embedded, and the run-up to the outbreak of the severe violence, is briefly sketched in order to get a complete picture of the setting in which Nyiramasuhuko's actions took place. Then, the first criterion will be elaborated on: Nyiramasuhuko's narrative. This part shows exactly how Nyiramasuhuko served as a weapon of violence and, equally important, what kind of life she led before the genocide started. Subsequently, the second criterion will be looked at: the reconstruction of

---

<sup>226</sup> Weitsman, 2008, p. 572.

<sup>227</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>228</sup> "Ex-minister Rwanda hoort vonnis wegens volkerenmoord", 2011, (own translation),

<sup>229</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 103.

Nyiramasuhuko's narrative. This part explores the different ways in which Nyiramasuhuko is portrayed, both by academic articles and by eye witness accounts. But not only external sources will be analyzed. The way in which Pauline Nyiramasuhuko has tried to present herself is useful to discuss here as well. At the same time, a connection will be made between Nyiramasuhuko's representation and the influence on her agency. The conclusion of this thesis will describe the bias of the consulted scholars.

In order to make efficient use of the extensive amount of relevant literature regarding Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, this chapter will view three comprehensive articles written by Professor Mark A. Drumbl, Peter Landesman, and Carrie Sperling as a guideline through the life and consequent the trial of Nyiramasuhuko. These sources are relatively up to date and solely deal with Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and her role in the genocide. Helen Hintjens's, Olivia Bennett's and Erin Baines's work is mainly utilized when dealing with the general situation of Rwanda before the genocide. Peter Landesman has proven to provide useful information due to the fact that he has interviewed several genocide survivors and close relatives of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko. Other articles, like the holistic approach that is found in the article of Nicole Hogg, the feminist perspective of Lisa Sharlach, or the well-balanced work of Donna J. Maier and Adam Jones, are then used to underpin or counter the given information. They function mainly as facilitators that set forth a clear narrative, and as a clarification towards the different portrayals of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and her related agency. One must keep in mind that, despite the amount of sources may seem to be abundant, most of these scholars make use of the same quotes and rely on the same eye witness's accounts. This applies especially to the articles of Peter Landesman and Nicole Hogg; they can be regarded as the foundations for the other sources.

The Rwandan genocide took place in the night of April 6, 1994. The cause for this event was the sudden death of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash of which the culprits are still unknown until today. However, the tensions between the two main ethnic groups in Rwanda already existed long before the hundred days of violence started. Since the German, and later Belgian, colonial occupation, the Tutsi people were considered to be the privileged race. The author Olivia Bennett describes that the European colonizers labeled

the Tutsi minority as more beautiful, slender and tall, and more intelligent; a noble race.<sup>230</sup> This created a hierarchy which can be seen as a tactical divide and rule policy implemented by the colonial rulers. The Hutus were automatically transformed into second class citizens and the Tutsis into the ruling elite. However, Hintjens stresses that the strict hierarchical differences between the Hutus and the Tutsis were not as static as some scholars may pose. She explains that in Rwanda the official definition of a person's ethnic identity was established exclusively through the male line.<sup>231</sup> Erin Baines sets forth that wealthier Hutu men could marry Tutsi women as a means of social advancement and vice versa.<sup>232</sup>

Ethnicity in Rwanda was thus changeable. Donna J. Maier validates this statement and points out that Hutu and Tutsi often intermarried and that this gene mixture meant that mistaken physical identification often occurred.<sup>233</sup> One must keep into consideration that the existing racial differences were thus exaggerated by the former colonizers who later introduced the ethnic identity card. A tool that was used during the genocide to determine who was Tutsi and who was Hutu.

According Peter Landesman, the aspect of ethnicity plays an important role in the story of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, whose great grandfather was a Tutsi, but had been redesignated a Hutu, because he became poor.<sup>234</sup> However, Drumbl observes that: 'the ethnic aspect of Nyiramasuhuko as a defendant, whether factually plausible or not, has not galvanized public attention the way her gender has.'<sup>235</sup> Indeed, Nyiramasuhuko's Tutsi heritage is less prominent in the obtained information than the fact that she is a woman.

Even though the Tutsi population was, in the eyes of the colonizers, considered to be the ruling elite, the article of Lisa Sharlach explains that the Hutu majority took control of the country in 1959. As a consequence, many Tutsi fled to surrounding countries. When the Rwandan Patriotic Front -RPF- invaded Rwanda in 1990, the French and Belgian troops this time helped the Hutu government to drive the Tutsi insurgents out. Sharlach sets forth that the 1993 Arusha Accords established a multiparty system in Rwanda which was intended to

---

<sup>230</sup> Bennett, 1995, p. 137.

<sup>231</sup> Hintjens, 1999, p. 247.

<sup>232</sup> Baines, 2003, p. 483.

<sup>233</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>235</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 111.

be an ethnic reconciliation. But in contrast, she continues, the Hutu leaders feared their power would decrease. They began to draw up their plans for the genocide.<sup>236</sup>

### 5.1. *The narrative*

This part deals with the first criterion by examining what happened in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko. The information that can be found about the life of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko in the literature mentioned above is quite coherent and does not contain contradictions in descriptions of the narrative.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was born in 1946 in Ndora, a village in the region of Butare, which is a university town in Rwanda where the highest percentage of Tutsis lived before the genocide. She completes her study Social Work in 1964 and four years later she marries Maurice Ntahobali. Together with her husband, Nyiramasuhuko has one son and three daughters: Denise, Shalom, Clarisse and Brigitte. Shalom later came to control a local group of the Interahamwe in Butare during the genocide.

In his article, Drumbl takes notice of several reports which describe Nyiramasuhuko's husband as quiet and humble. Drumbl quotes Jean-Baptist Sebukangaga, someone who has known Nyiramasuhuko since her childhood, as he declares that 'Maurice Ntahobali was like the woman'.<sup>237</sup> It was said that Nyiramasuhuko clearly exercised the upper hand in their marriage. Some even believed that she was the one who got him his job as rector at the university.<sup>238</sup> These declarations portray Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a dominant spouse. One can call this remarkable, considering the position of women in Rwanda before the genocide. Sharlach, for example, mentions the so called 1992 Family Code that officially designates husbands as the heads of the households. It entails that a married Rwandan woman needs the consent of her husband to be able to open a bank account, to engage in commerce, or to enter in any agreement.<sup>239</sup> Hogg verifies this information by underlining the strong

---

<sup>236</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 391.

<sup>237</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 107.

<sup>238</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 107.

<sup>239</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 391.

patriarchal structure of the traditional Rwandan society and women's consequent inequality within the family in the pre-genocidal era.<sup>240</sup>

Another detail about Nyiramasuhuko's life that is also noteworthy is the fact that she obtained a law degree despite having to raise four children. Peter Landesman remarks in *The New York Times* that Nyiramasuhuko was only one of the few women in Rwanda to do so.<sup>241</sup> Landesman then quotes some family members who claim that Nyiramasuhuko was 'more ambitious and disciplined than bright'. 'If she saw someone do well, she wanted to do better.'<sup>242</sup> These statements position Nyiramasuhuko as being a driven person, standing out from other Rwandan women during that time. Drumbl writes that Nyiramasuhuko soon became politically active. She advanced within the political Hutu Party Mouvement Révolutionnaire National Pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MRND) and in 1992 she was appointed Minister of Family and Women's Development.<sup>243</sup> The confession of Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, who came into power after the sudden death of Habyarimana, states that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was one of the five persons of his inner circle that first drew up the blueprint of the genocide.<sup>244</sup> This confession is cited by the articles of both Sperling and Landesman.

When the genocide broke out in April 1994, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was sent to her hometown Butare to oversee the genocide in this resistant territory. In several sources, Butare is portrayed as an intellectual and peaceful place where the population resisted the genocide because the Hutus and Tutsis living there successfully co-existed for years without any tensions or violence. Several sources describe an incident in Butare shortly after Nyiramasuhuko arrived in Butare. On 25 April an announcement was made throughout the entire city that the Red Cross had arrived at the nearby stadium to provide food and to guarantee sanctuary.<sup>245</sup> But, instead of food and shelter, the women were taken away to be raped and the remaining refugees were killed with machine guns, grenades and machetes by the Interahamwe under the leadership of Nyiramasuhuko's son Shalom.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 72.

<sup>241</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>242</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>243</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 108.

<sup>244</sup> Sperling, 2005, p. 110.

<sup>245</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>246</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 8.

According to a witness, quoted by both Landesman and Sperling, Nyiramasuhuko directed much of these killings from the sidelines.<sup>247</sup> Donna J. Maier claims that Nyiramasuhuko instigated the militia through a megaphone by shouting: 'It is necessary to kill the Inyenzi,<sup>248</sup> including the fetus and the old.'<sup>249</sup> Another incident that is recounted in several articles outlines Nyiramasuhuko's order to burn seventy women whom the Interahamwe had locked up in a compound. The soldiers replied that they did not have gasoline to fulfill the task. In reaction, Nyiramasuhuko told them that she could help them because she had jerry cans of gasoline in her car to get the job done. The women were burned alive.<sup>250</sup>

Not only is Nyiramasuhuko found guilty of inciting the killing of Tutsis, she has also ordered the Interahamwe to rape all the women first before killing them. She demanded the Interahamwe 'to have no mercy'.<sup>251</sup> Because she was a minister, soldiers took her commands seriously and carried them out without objection.<sup>252</sup> Landesman illustrates Nyiramasuhuko's prestige when he describes the eye witness account of a Rwandan Tutsi woman who stated that soldiers, before raping and then killing Tutsi women, repeatedly said that Pauline had given them permission: 'She was the minister, so they were free to do it'.<sup>253</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry point out that Nyiramasuhuko even gave specific instructions to the Interahamwe about the different methods they should use to rape women.<sup>254</sup>

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko supervised the genocide in Butare until the RPF army ended it in July 1994. During her stay in Butare, together with her son, she set up a roadblock in front of her house where every Tutsi looking person was killed.<sup>255</sup> The other practice Nyiramasuhuko had was driving around at night in a white pick-up truck to look for shelter places where Tutsis regularly hid.<sup>256</sup> Landesman writes: 'Witnesses recalled that Pauline showed up at night in a white Toyota pickup truck, often driven by Shalom, and supervised as Interahamwe loaded the truck with women who were driven off and never seen again

---

<sup>247</sup> Sperling, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>248</sup> 'Inyenzi' literally means cockroaches, which was a term that referred to the Tutsi population in the run up and during the genocide.

<sup>249</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>250</sup> Sperling, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>251</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 92.

<sup>252</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>253</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>254</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>255</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>256</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 9.



(...). When one woman wouldn't stop crying, a survivor recalled, the minister [Nyiramasuhuko] told her to shut her up. They stabbed the pleading woman and then slit her throat.'<sup>257</sup> The belief that Nyiramasuhuko had a close connection with her son during the genocide is also highlighted in the article of Adam Jones. Nyiramasuhuko let Shalom rape women to show her affection for him. The raping of the women could be considered a gift. Jones writes: 'Pauline Nyiramasuhuko (...) kept the daughters of Bihira, a Tutsi businessman from Butare, at her house for Shalom to rape.'<sup>258</sup>

After reading about the acts of violence Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was involved in, one can see that she mainly took care of the logistics, the supervising, inciting and delegating of the killings and rapes, in which Shalom was her right hand. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and the Rwandan genocide case prove Van Creveld wrong in two ways. First of all Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is proof that a woman can be brutal and violent in a leadership position, instead of holding a supporting role, as described by Van Creveld: 'Women provide rudimentary logistic services, do the laundry, and sleep with the fighters. However, women rarely take up arms and fight.'<sup>259</sup> In a different piece written by Van Creveld, he states about women within armed forces: 'At most, women have increased their presence in supporting positions such as administration, communications, logistics, and medical services. However, even this is doubtful; given the fact that women have always acted as camp-followers.'<sup>260</sup> Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, and many other female Hutu participants along with her, thus say otherwise.

Secondly, the fact that women were the main victims of the Rwandan genocide shows that women are certainly not always privileged during wartime, like he claims in his book *The Privileged Sex*. He notes, for example, that: 'Women are likely to emerge from war, in all its forms, in much better shape than men do.'<sup>261</sup> He also highlights in *The Culture of War* that: 'Wherever we look, the much higher value that society puts on women's lives is evident. In every known society, criminal violence kills far fewer women than men -to the

---

<sup>257</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>258</sup> Jones, 2002, p. 84.

<sup>259</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 307.

<sup>260</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 843.

<sup>261</sup> Creveld van, 2013, p. 204.

point where such violence itself is largely a male-on-male affair.’<sup>262</sup> However, the claim that women have actually been the main victims of the Rwandan genocide is illustrated by Adam Jones, who quotes UN Special Reporter on Rwanda, René Degni-Sé’gui. In 1996 she stated that: ‘women may even be regarded as the main victims of the massacres, with good reason, since they were raped and massacred and subjected to other brutalities.’<sup>263</sup> Sharlach accentuates the consequences of the rapes, explaining that rape victims suffer from sexual victimization, injuries, HIV infection, illegal abortion, pregnancy and psychological problems.<sup>264</sup> These horrendous aspects make this case worth reviewing.

## *5.2. The reconstruction*

Having zoomed in on the context in which Nyiramasuhuko’s atrocities took place, I will now look at the second criterion by reviewing how she is portrayed and moreover, which images are highlighted when doing this. The portrayals of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko are outlined with the help of Sjöberg and Gentry and the evil woman theory. This part finishes with an exploration of how Nyiramasuhuko’s agency is altered.

### **5.2.1. Portrayals of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko**

This part examines the different portrayals I have found in the literature. First, I will describe how the evil woman theory is involved in the story of Nyiramasuhuko. Then, I will discuss whether or not the whore theory can be applied to her violent actions. Next, I will elaborate on the mother narrative and subsequently the innocence narrative resulting from this. This part will conclude with a discussion concerning the lack of motives posed by the literature.

It is noticeable that various sources of information describe the clothes Nyiramasuhuko wore during the genocide. She was often seen in a black uniform, wearing army boots and carrying a gun.<sup>265</sup> Together with the fact that she held an executive function, and she was

---

<sup>262</sup> Creveld van, 2008, p. 405.

<sup>263</sup> Jones, 2002, p. 75.

<sup>264</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 393.

<sup>265</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 92.

often occupied with the sexual assault of Tutsi women, one can imagine that the media or the genocide survivors would portray her as a man. However, this image is not reflected in the above mentioned articles. I have not found her directly compared to a man in the used literature. Landesman mentions some Rwandan local newspapers that described Nyiramasuhuko as a 'frenzied madwoman'.<sup>266</sup> This term shows some overlap with the monster narrative put forward by Sjoberg and Gentry. It identifies Nyiramasuhuko as wild and hysterical, or even insane, someone who lost all sense of rationality.<sup>267</sup>

However, I find the evil woman theory more suitable for Nyiramasuhuko's case. A quote from the Rwandan Lawyer Vincent Karangura that can be found in the article of Hogg, elaborates on this phenomenon by noting: 'There is a presumption that women are good by nature, that is, hospitable, welcoming, mild, and incapable of committing atrocities. So, women who really participated, that is, those who were violent or surpassed the expectations of them, and who cannot be explained away as innocent, are not understood. They are treated, not like men, not like women, but something else, like monsters.'<sup>268</sup> By declaring this, Karangura makes a connection with the evil woman theory. Especially when he states that violent females surpassed the expectations of them, it can be understood as breaking the stereotypical gender norms which made them ineligible for chivalry and sympathy of men. The evil woman theory is based on the same belief. Following this line of reasoning Nyiramasuhuko can be perceived as, using the words of Bridget Byrne, contradicting female stereotypes and can be regarded as much more deviant or unnatural than violent men.<sup>269</sup>

The breaking of the female stereotype can also be located in statements about Pauline Nyiramasuhuko in the context of her family. Landesman, for example illustrates this by citing a former neighbor of Nyiramasuhuko's family declaring that she once saw Pauline screaming at Maurice for not being more committed to the politics of the MRND.<sup>270</sup> In the same article, Nyiramasuhuko's brother in law admits that Pauline stopped visiting her mother when she became a government minister.<sup>271</sup> Together with the portrayal of

---

<sup>266</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>267</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 170.

<sup>268</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 100.

<sup>269</sup> Byrne, 1995, p. 17.

<sup>270</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>271</sup> Landesman, 2002.

Nyiramasuhuko as a dominant spouse, mentioned above, it is interesting to see that these examples contradict the typical Rwandan female stereotype of a 'good wife', who is submissive and dependent of her husband. It strengthens the idea that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is not a normal woman and never has been. According to the Rwandan standards, the image is brought forward that Nyiramasuhuko was a dominant and disobedient wife. Her behavior is labeled as deviant, which she exhibited already before the genocide started.

Let me now turn to the ideas of Sjoberg and Gentry regarding the whore theory. In addition to the monster narrative, Sjoberg and Gentry believe that the whore narrative is most applicable to the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko. The reason they give is the sexual nature of Nyiramasuhuko's crimes.<sup>272</sup> The whore narrative, they explain, sees female perpetrators as women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependence and depravity.<sup>273</sup> It is true that Nyiramasuhuko's order to rape as many Tutsi women is a prominent factor in the literature about her. However, what Sjoberg and Gentry neglect is in what degree Nyiramasuhuko's crimes subsequently reflect on her identity. Even though her crimes have been very sexually disturbing, the literature used for this chapter does not point to the representation of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a sexually disturbed person. Her deeds may be sexually depraved, but they are not necessarily viewed as inspired by sexual dependence or depravity. Thus, I disagree with Sjoberg and Gentry as I do not find the whore narrative best suitable for Nyiramasuhuko's case.

Because Nyiramasuhuko has always pleaded not guilty to all of her charges, it is difficult to find out what her exact motives were for her crimes during the genocide. There are, however, sources that outline the more general underlying motives of ordering rape during a conflict. Peter Landesman, for example, states that rape is often a way to stigmatize women because it is almost impossible for the survivors of rape to (re)marry.<sup>274</sup> Scholar Jocelyn Kelly, who has done research on the motives for the mass rapes in the DRC, declares that sexual violence is designed to strategically undermine and subject certain population groups. Rape also ensures the creation of fear, the stigmatization of women and it is used to

---

<sup>272</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p.170.

<sup>273</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>274</sup> Landesman, 2002.

break up families and communities.<sup>275</sup> Instead of being sexually perverted, it seems like Pauline is portrayed as a leader who used rape as part of a pragmatic war strategy, like many leaders in other conflict zones have done. As stated earlier, it is possible that Nyiramasuhuko personally saw her violent behavior as a way to overcompensate for her Tutsi heritage. In this light, Nyiramasuhuko's actions were based on the idea of comeuppance for the Tutsi women. In many propaganda sources, the Tutsi women were the ones presented as sexually perverse and lecherous.<sup>276</sup> But, regardless of her possible motives, Nyiramasuhuko's own sexuality plays no role in the way she is portrayed by the sources that are used for this chapter.

Sperling's article is also involved in the discussion about how Nyiramasuhuko is portrayed focusing on her gender. She comments that most press made notice of Nyiramasuhuko's appearance and the clothes she wore. During the genocide, there was an observation that she had military fatigues on. During her trial, Sperling outlines, sources communicated that her wardrobe included a green flowery dress one day, and a pressed cream-colored skirt and blouse the next day.<sup>277</sup> Thus, it is clear that there is an emphasis on Nyiramasuhuko's gender, her femininity, but not on her sexuality. This is a difference compared to the core of the whore narrative. Sjoberg and Gentry's logic to find the whore narrative best suitable for Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's case is thus not convincing.

I will now focus on the application of the mother narrative. A portrayal that is also very present in the information that deals with Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is Pauline in the capacity of a mother. Sjoberg and Gentry put much emphasis on the mother narrative when dealing with this case. But the mother portrayal is also clearly present in the work of other scholars. In Sjoberg and Gentry's book *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, there are four forms of the mother narrative distinguished.

The first form is Pauline Nyiramasuhuko being a symbolic mother to the Interahamwe.<sup>278</sup> She told them what to do, they listened to her, and she solved their

---

<sup>275</sup> Kelly, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>276</sup> Baines, 2003, p. 484.

<sup>277</sup> Sperling, 2005, p. 115.

<sup>278</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 168.

problems. Sjoberg and Gentry even mention that Nyiramasuhuko called the members of the Interahamwe her children.<sup>279</sup> However, other authors do not mention this.

The second form is her being an actual mother, the mother of Shalom who accompanied her practically always during her quest for eliminating Tutsis. Eye witness accounts state that Nyiramasuhuko let him often do the dirty work for her. In spite of Shalom actually committing the violence, Sjoberg and Gentry explain that he was not being seen as the one responsible because, after all, his mother made him do it.<sup>280</sup> The image put forward by Landesman's article also shows an image of Nyiramasuhuko being a caring and loving mother for Shalom. He cites a genocide survivor who saw Pauline Nyiramasuhuko just before the end of the genocide: '(...) she was standing upright in her uniform like a soldier, trying to see what was happening down the road. She just looked furious. She was looking everywhere for Shalom. He was her pet. She loved him so much'.<sup>281</sup>

The third form of perceiving Pauline Nyiramasuhuko in the role of a mother is the fact that she was the Minister of Family and Women's Development. Sjoberg and Gentry point out that this public position entailed a lot of responsibility. Being that high up in a government position, she could be seen as the mother of Rwanda, or the mother of all Rwandan women –hence the Minister of Family and Women's Development-. According to Sperling, Nyiramasuhuko's decision to take an active part in the genocide has labeled her the 'mother of atrocities'.<sup>282</sup> To put it in other words, Nyiramasuhuko was the mother out of which the genocide was born.

The last form of Nyiramasuhuko as a mother introduced by Sjoberg and Gentry is perhaps the most interesting one, namely the innocent mother image. The innocent mother image defines women, and especially mothers, as essentially non-violent. Sjoberg and Gentry describe this image as being a mother; one is simply incapable of committing violence.<sup>283</sup> It is put forward in various articles in which people were interviewed about Nyiramasuhuko. Let me first look at Nyiramasuhuko's close relatives. Landesman reports the conversation he had with Nyiramasuhuko's husband in which he stressed that his wife was a social worker. He continued by stating that: 'It is culturally not possible for a Rwandan

---

<sup>279</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 168.

<sup>280</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 168.

<sup>281</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>282</sup> Sperling, 2005.

<sup>283</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p. 170.

woman to make her son rape other women. It just could not have taken place.’<sup>284</sup> Landesman has also interviewed the mother of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, who gave a similar response as Nyiramasuhuko’s husband. When she was asked about the innocence of her daughter, she replied: ‘It is unimaginable that she did these things. She would not order people to rape and kill. After all, she is a mother.’<sup>285</sup> Pauline Nyiramasuhuko also portrayed herself as a peaceful and non-violent woman. In an interview with the BBC in 1994, when she was still living in a refugee camp, she fiercely denied any involvement in the genocidal killings. Maier quotes her reaction as follows: ‘I am ready to talk to the person who says I could have killed. I cannot even kill a chicken. If there is a person who says that a woman, a mother, killed then I will confront that person.’<sup>286</sup> When one looks at this innocence narrative, it appears that there is a general belief that women normally do not kill, but that being a mother is even regarded as the superlative of being a woman. Women do not kill, but mothers certainly do not kill.

This part will go a little more into details about the innocence narrative. It is interesting to see that the claimed innocence, solely based on the fact if person in question is a woman or a mother, does not only apply to Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, but to Rwandan women in general. I have showed in chapter four that the idea of the innocence narrative is used by some terrorist organizations to effectuate a surprise attack, but it is also interesting to see how the innocence narrative is used as a basis to plea not guilty. Two quotes from two imprisoned female genocide suspects that Nicole Hogg has put in her article show a similar way of thinking: ‘I am a woman, I had no power’, and ‘I am really surprised they put me in the first category. I am a woman’.<sup>287</sup> In trying to explain where this peculiarity comes from, Landesman repeats the opinion of anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom who thinks that: ‘there is a shared concept across certain cultures that women do not do this kind of thing. Society does not yet have a way to talk about it, because it violates all our concepts of what women are.’<sup>288</sup> Though Nordstrom may have a point in claiming that generally the concept of women and the concept of violence are difficult to combine with each other, it remains

---

<sup>284</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>285</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>286</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>287</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 89.

<sup>288</sup> Landesman, 2002.

unclear what cultures and what society exactly she means with this comment. The saint narrative, which can be found in the ideas of Van Creveld, brings forward a framework in which there is a lack of focus on atrocities created by women. Or it adopts a notion of taking violent crimes committed by women not too seriously. But that is different from the innocence narrative that claims that the violent acts have not taken place at all, even though the evidence is there.

I would like to conclude this part regarding Nyiramasuhuko's portrayals, with a discussion about the lack of motives that could explain why Nyiramasuhuko acted so violently during the genocide. The sources used in this chapter barely mention this part of the story. This may partly be caused by the fact that Pauline has always held on to her innocence. On the other hand, Wafa Idris has never been able to tell why she blew herself up, but that did not stop the media for speculating about her alleged motives.

One motive that appears in the article of Landesman is the fact that Nyiramasuhuko's great-grandfather was a Tutsi, who later transformed into a Hutu when he became poor.<sup>289</sup> Landesman carefully poses that this knowledge may shed some light on the question why Nyiramasuhuko so eagerly participated in the killings: maybe she was afraid that the government would find out she was actually a Tutsi. Or that she wanted to eliminate the Tutsi in her.<sup>290</sup> When one reasons from this, one can conclude that her cruel actions come down to self-hatred. However, the literature that revolves around Nyiramasuhuko does not further deepen this information. Landesman subsequently poses the possibility that Nyiramasuhuko engaged actively in the genocide out of a feeling of genuine hate towards the Tutsis, or out of opportunism.<sup>291</sup> After all, she was recently appointed as a minister and wanted to do well. However, Landesman also admits it remains unclear what exactly moved Pauline to become such a prominent figure during the genocidal killings.

The literature remains remarkably quiet regarding this facet. One can thus conclude that there is a gap within the existing imaging of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko. Researchers have written about her violent deeds, and about how she is portrayed, but there is little information that goes into the motives of why exactly she committed these atrocities. To

---

<sup>289</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>290</sup> Landesman, 2002.

<sup>291</sup> Landesman, 2002.



find out what causes this gap in the literature, further research is necessary. One way or the other, it is apparent that there is still a lack of clarity concerning how to interpret the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko in its fullest.

### **5.2.2. The agency of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko**

This part will now turn to what the impact is of the presented representations on women's agency. It will mainly zoom in on the impact of the innocence narrative on women's agency. It is important to research what the implications are of the above outlined images for the agency of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and of the Rwandan women in general.

Pauline downplays her agency by arguing that that she is a woman and a mother, thus not capable of committing the crimes she is accused of. Her close relatives and her lawyers have strengthened this perspective. Being a woman and a mother is inherently connected to non-violence. This innocence narrative thus completely denies women's agency. Professor Drumbl confirms this in the following way: 'Pauline has tried to erase her individual agency in her own conduct. It also voids the agency of women in general –an outcome that is certainly not conducive to sustaining a political context of gender equality, human rights, and women's empowerment.'<sup>292</sup> Sharlach agrees with Drumbl and demonstrates that Pauline is not the only female perpetrator of violence having used this tactic. She argues that many women killers may have used the popular perception of women as the gentler sex to their own advantage.<sup>293</sup>

The strong link between gender and innocence that is present in Rwanda possibly explains the low proportion of women in prison because of genocide related crimes.<sup>294</sup> But, not only is it a possible reason for the low percentage of females convicted for genocidal crimes. Sharlach adds that a number of African and European countries unquestioningly granted refuge to Rwandan Hutu women, unaware of the involvement of these women

---

<sup>292</sup> Drumbl, 2012, p. 127.

<sup>293</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 397.

<sup>294</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 81. Hogg notes that less than 6% of the total number of detainees convicted of genocide related crimes is woman, which is unrepresentative for total the amount of female perpetrators during the genocide.

during the genocide.<sup>295</sup> Hogg makes clear that many Rwandan women who are perpetrators of violence have actually benefited from the chivalry of men who cannot perceive women as criminals in spite of their suspected or proven criminality.<sup>296</sup> This data directly confirms Van Creveld's point of view, outlined in chapter two.

In a more indirect way, several NGO's underline the conviction of the static non-violent nature of women as well by saying that the genocide would not have taken place if more women would have been in leadership positions. The technical advisor of the Association for Solidarity between Rwandan Women, a Rwandan NGO, declared in an interview in 2001: 'I really think that if there had been more women in leadership positions, the genocide would not have occurred. Women are more sentimental.'<sup>297</sup> This is a somewhat odd assumption considering that women were part of the inner circle that plotted the genocide in the first place. But it tells this research a lot about how women are generally perceived in Rwandan society. The perception of the Association for Solidarity between Rwandan Women is not far removed from the message put forward by Pro Femmes, another Rwandan NGO and the largest women group in Rwanda. They claim that: 'Rwandan women hold the key to reconciliation, education, and the orientation of a new society.'<sup>298</sup>

When one thinks that women are incapable of killing, the same conceptual error is made as when one thinks that women are better able to reconcile a population after a conflict. Both images namely portray gender in a very narrow and inflexible manner. It is thus not only Rwanda where women are determined by their gender stereotype, the occurrence of this phenomenon, in different forms, is far more widespread. The United Nations, for example, has taken up the same static peaceful attitude towards women during conflict when one looks at Resolution 1325. UN members agree on: 'Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building (...) and the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.'<sup>299</sup> Why is it that women are assigned special tasks for peacekeeping activities? Lisa Sharlach tries to answer this question in her article with the belief 'that there

---

<sup>295</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 398.

<sup>296</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 81.

<sup>297</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 90.

<sup>298</sup> Maier, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>299</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping official website, Security Council Resolution 1325.

is a widespread assumption that women are better suited for this role because they are less warlike than men are.’<sup>300</sup> Thus, even though a reconciliation process is considered to be a more positive contribution to a society than a genocide is, both examples are based on the same fixed gender bias towards women that advances the static idea that all women are inherently and fundamentally nonviolent. This also is a form of agency erosion.

Nyiramasuhuko is thus not alone in putting forward the image of a woman as nonbelligerent creatures. The innocence narrative- that can also be found in the surprise element that certain terrorist organizations use to perform an attack, outlined in chapter four- contains some strong indications that reveal a biological determinist focus. It is based on such a firm belief in the peacefulness of women, that it must be part of the nature of a person instead of a societal norm.

However, one can conclude that Nyiramasuhuko is been given full agency when one looks at the outcome of her trial. The life long imprisonment states that she is seen as fully accountable when she committed her crimes during the genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda thus determined that she carried out the atrocities based on a rational free choice. Adam Jones puts it very clearly: ‘[The genocide] may help to account Hutu women’s conscription and (frequently) ready participation in the slaughter—a reflection, in its macabre way, of women’s greater independent agency in the Rwandan social equation.’<sup>301</sup> The next part, regarding the bias of the literature, will deepen this perspective.

### 5.3. *The bias*

The bias that is in relation with Pauline Nyiramasuhuko’s story is twofold. The first perspective that can be most clearly distinguished includes Nyiramasuhuko herself, her relatives, some Rwandan NGO’s, and other female convicts of the genocide. Not only does Nyiramasuhuko claim that she could not have committed the crimes she is accused of, she involves the entire female population in this statement. The bias in her expressions can be

---

<sup>300</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 398.

<sup>301</sup> Jones, 2002, p. 78.

explained with the idea that she wanted to be seen as an innocent woman. She did not want to go to jail and she was probably ashamed of what she had done. The big question mark lies in the fact why she also pronounced a value judgment about every single woman. This is difficult to understand and can probably not be answered in a saturated way. As the scholar Carolyn Nordstrom states in the article of Landesman: 'it happened out of a cultural conviction of regarding women, especially mothers, as inherently non-violent'.<sup>302</sup> One can thus certify that Nyiramasuhuko wanted to take advantage of this culturally embedded stereotype in an attempt to get away with her crimes.

Rwandan NGO's and other convicted females, quoted above, say similar phrases as Nyiramasuhuko says. Judging by these statements, one can conclude that there is a strong tension to entirely deny the fact that women have indeed participated in the Rwandan genocide. This is in line with researches that describe that a relative low number of females is convicted for their genocide crimes and that the people in Rwanda still have difficulty with talking openly about female participators of the genocide. Eventually, it is obvious that this way of thinking belongs to the biological determinist side of the debate, in which women are peaceful, no matter what happens. This way of imaging Pauline Nyiramasuhuko highlights the fact that Rwandan women themselves are still in need of breaking away from traditional and static gender roles in order to achieve individual recognition for their actions, both negative and positive. The first precondition that needs to be established in order to reach this goal is an appeal to all women to stop denying their own agency. However, in order to say more about this particular topic requires further examination of the Rwandan culture in relation to gendered violence.

The second perspective with a different bias is included in the sources that represent a more western perspective. These sources, like Drumbl, Sperling, Maier, Jones, and to a lesser extent Landesman, have mainly analyzed Nyiramasuhuko's trial and conviction. They have a completely different way to look at the case compared to the first perspective. The western perspective sees Nyiramasuhuko's case as proof that not only men, but everyone is able to kill and to fully participate in a conflict, including women. Their bias includes an emancipated view of gender and violence. Adam Jones, for example, concludes his article with a lesson

---

<sup>302</sup> Landesman, 2002.

that one can learn from the Rwandan genocide when looking at the aspect of gender. About women he says that ‘their degree of participation in genocide and the violence and cruelty they exhibit runs closely parallel to their male counterparts and for similar motives.’<sup>303</sup> Even though most sources agree that the minority of the perpetrators during the genocide were women, also Alison des Forges, a senior adviser to the African Division of Human Rights Watch and cited several times by Landesman, is convinced that: ‘this behavior lies just under the surface of all of us.’ Pauline Nyiramasuhuko proves that, not only to Rwanda, but to the world. This comment is in direct opposition to what the first perspective brings forward, and can be placed under the social constructivist side of the debate. It says that violent behavior is not a matter of gender, but a matter of circumstance. In other words, our behavior depends on external features instead of a person’s nature and is thus not a fixed fact.

Hogg and Sharlach are authors that can be gathered under feminist literature. Even though their starting point is different, their goal is more or less the same as the western authors described above. Sharlach sees the participation of women during the Rwandan genocide as a critique towards the strand of essentialist feminism because, among others, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko proves that women are not inherently caring, nurturing and nonviolent.<sup>304</sup> Violent behavior is thus more a case of circumstance than of gender. Through her biased view however, she overlooks the data that elaborates on how Rwandan society downplays violent women. Hogg gives a more complete analysis about women who were violent during the genocide and blames the extreme traditional notions of gendered behavior in Rwanda as an explanation for the negating attitude of many Rwandans towards women like Pauline Nyiramasuhuko.<sup>305</sup> In any event, it is apparent that these western and feminist sources have adopted the bias of a social constructivist point of view in which Nyiramasuhuko is a very suitable tool that strengthens their idea that violence is not so much linked to gender but to a constructed norm.

---

<sup>303</sup> Jones, 2002, p. 88.

<sup>304</sup> Sharlach, 1999, p. 397.

<sup>305</sup> Hogg, 2001, p. 81.

## 6. Conclusion

---

This last chapter gives a complete overview of the previous discussed data and will try to establish a clear and comprehensive answer to the research question: ‘How do violent women serve as actors of political violence, how are they portrayed, and how does this influence their agency?’ This chapter is structured in the same way as the previous chapters: each of the sub research questions will be dealt with as they are guided by the three criteria: the narrative, the reconstruction, and the bias of the literature. Thereafter, I will revise how I experienced the implemented methodology and what kind of impact the outcomes of this research have on the four mindsets.

### 6.1. *The narratives*

One of the main aspects of political violence is that it is mainly perpetrated by men. That is why Van Creveld’s books focus mainly on man to man combat, in which he consequently diagnoses women as being unfit and unable to fight properly. This research however, does not only underline that women have a place in the field of political violence, it also demonstrates that violence exists in many forms and occurs in many different narratives.

A Colombian terrorist, a member of the Chechen resistant movement, a Palestinian perpetrator of violence, and an influential instigator of the Rwandan genocide: four different stories of political violence. Tanja Nijmeijer is currently still active within the organization of the FARC, Zarema Muzhakhoyeva is serving a 20-year sentence in a Russian prison camp, which she was awarded in 2004. Wafa Idris died while blowing herself up in Jerusalem in 2002, and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was sentenced to life long imprisonment in 2011. The recent and culturally diverse character of the cases makes these women valuable examples of modern political violence.

It is known that Nijmeijer is responsible for having placed bombs in several public places. She also admits that she has fought during her stay in the jungle, but her statements remain rather vague and implicit. Regardless of the details regarding Nijmeijer’s fighting experience, one must be aware of the fact that she does possess the intellectual capacity and the determination to grow further and become an influential and a potential perilous

figure within the FARC. Zarema Muzhakhoyeva's story is probably the least violent of all. She backed out on the moment she had to push the button. Only one man got killed when he tried to disarm her bomb. But, as also stated by De Graaf, her punishment points more to a form of psychological violence that she committed: Muzhakhoyeva triggered a feeling of danger and insecurity within the Russian society.<sup>306</sup> This worked very effectively, especially because she is a woman. Wafa Idris has never been reported to be violent before her suicide act. But, the armed Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades became inspired by Idris's deed and the popularity that followed: they started to recruit and train more women. Thus, even though Wafa Idris's act claimed only one deadly victim, the result of her action set in motion a whole chain of suicide violence. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is the only example of actions speaking for themselves. Her orders to rape and then kill thousands of Tutsi women do not fall within the category of man to man combat, but it functioned as a very disruptive method during the Rwandan conflict. Nyiramasuhuko's case is also an example that undermines De Graaf's statement that women almost always occupy subordinate positions within an organization that propagates violence.<sup>307</sup> She states that female terrorists are often 'modern versions of simple cannon fodder'.<sup>308</sup> Even though De Graaf may be right to a great extent, this thesis also shows a different side. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is probably the best example of a female actor of political violence who held a leadership position, and who had the ability to tell people what to do. Her gender was not an obstacle for exercising power.

## 6.2. *The reconstructions*

The four case studies have shown that there is a different way of perceiving and reconstructing the narratives of violent women compared to the narratives of violent men. This difference is connected to the persistent and widespread belief that women and violence do not match. The gendered reconstructions create certain portrayals that are based on prevalent stereotypes. Generally speaking, authors place much more emphasis on women's personal lives and women's emotions.

---

<sup>306</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 325.

<sup>307</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 319.

<sup>308</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 10, (own translation).

The literature that is used to investigate the context of Nijmeijer, Muzhakhoyeva Idris, and Nyiramasuhuko is remarkably focused on aspects regarding their marital status, love life, family, and the place where they grew up, etc. It is as if the scholars and journalists are trying to find anomalies in these women's personal backgrounds that explain why they have become violent. Nijmeijer is put forward as a pretty and naïve girl, Muzhakhoyeva as a desperate widow, Wafa Idris as a divorced and barren woman, and Nyiramasuhuko as a dominant and disobedient wife and mother.

Next to the the similarities this thesis has uncovered, it also shows that the reconstruction of these women is layered and more complex than I thought before I started working on this topic. Different perspectives demonstrate different, sometimes even contrasting, images of each case. In order to clarify these images, I have gladly made use of the three narratives delineated by Sjöberg and Gentry: the mother narrative, the monster narrative, and the whore narrative. Furthermore, the evil woman theory appeared in the analysis of two out of the four cases.

Based on the emphasis on her appearance, Tanja Nijmeijer has the most overlap with the whore narrative, but her portrayals also fit perfectly in the saint narrative. The Russian portrayal of an evil and cunning Zarema Muzhakhoyeva shows a lot of similarities with the evil woman theory since it corresponds to the disproportional jail sentence she received. On the other hand, a more pitiful and victimized image can be discovered when one reads De Graaf's book and that of Sjöberg and Gentry. Western literature adopts the same victimized image towards Wafa Idris, while this is countered by Islamic literature that positions Idris as some kind of supernatural woman. The portrayals of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko contain aspects of the mother narrative and, to a lesser extent, the monster narrative. A portrayal that is also dominant in Nyiramasuhuko's story is the evil woman theory: her deeds were so horrendous that it transgressed any gender boundary.

The reconstruction of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is also noteworthy because it is the most incomplete narrative of all: the representations of her life lack speculation over why she committed these heinous crimes. The same is true for Tanja Nijmeijer. Despite having enough to say about Nijmeijer's motivations for joining the FARC, the media somehow leave a gap by ending their frequent reports about her after the FARC peace negotiations started in 2012. What the cases currently seem to have in common is that Nyiramasuhuko and



Nijmeijer have transformed into ordinary criminals, regardless of their gender. Apparently, the increase of their agency has decreased the interest in them.

The narratives that are not present in the books of Sjoberg and Gentry, but can be recognized in the cases discussed in this thesis, are the saint narrative and the innocence narrative. The saint narrative is the theory that Van Creveld's mindset adheres to, as he either lacks a focus on violence committed by women or he does not take it seriously. Tanja Nijmeijer is a perfect example of the saint narrative. Even though she is a serious criminal, accused by the United States for acts of terrorism, she is not feared in such a way. Van Creveld claims that all violent women are identified in such a manner.

The innocence narrative looks like the saint narrative but takes the gender stereotype a step further. Instead of downplaying violent acts committed by women, the innocence narrative completely denies violent acts committed by women. This phenomenon originates from a biological determinists way of reasoning and can be found in the way certain terrorist organizations deploy women as suicide bombers: no one even thinks of the possibility that women can be violent and they can therefore, for example, easily pass through heavily guarded territory. The innocence narrative also exists in the story of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, in which she claims to be innocent, solely based on the fact that she is a woman.

One can thus conclude that, even though the narratives of Sjoberg and Gentry are very useful, they are inadequate to cover the entire range of violent women portrayals. The evil woman theory, the saint narrative and innocence narrative are necessary additions that give a deeper insight and a more complete image of the imaging of violent gender performances. It is now important to study how these portrayals influence the agency of these women.

Sjoberg and Gentry believe that the way violent women are portrayed erodes their agency. I agree with Sjoberg and Gentry to a large extent. However, I will also show that not every gender portrayal is automatically an attack on the agency of violent women.

Until recently Dutch sources reported that Nijmeijer has been brainwashed in such a way that she is not able to make the right decision anymore. Literature in relation to Muzhakhoyeva zooms in on the fact that her husband died, that she was desperate and had nowhere else to go. Wafa Idris, in turn, was left by her husband, as she could not have children, and was therefore forced by society become a suicide bomber. Nyiramasuhuko

denies her own agency- and that of all women- by proclaiming her innocence based on the conviction that women are not able to perform acts of violence.

Indeed, one can see that these portrayals leave little room for political agency. The possibility that these women have rationally chosen for violence is not an option. On the other hand, this research has also made clear that Sjoberg and Gentry's conclusion regarding agency is too simplistic. I have already stated above that the portrayals I have encountered during this research are multifaceted and they do not all impair women's agency.

The reconstruction of Wafa Idris by other, mainly Islamic, sources depicts her as a hero who has consciously sacrificed her life for a greater political cause. When one examines this nonwestern literature, one does not detect an erosion of Idris's agency. On the contrary, Arabic sources assign Idris a great amount- maybe even an irrational amount- of political agency, in which her choice for violence is celebrated as an act of bravery. The same is true for Tanja Nijmeijer. Since she is part of the FARC delegation that negotiates with the Colombian government in Havana, one can notice a slow return of her political agency. De Graaf illustrates that the Russian government portrays Zarema Muzhakhoyeva as an evil, dangerous, lying, manipulative and sadistic terrorist.<sup>309</sup> Irrespective of whether this image is surrounded by negative connotations, it does strengthen Muzhakhoyeva's political agency. The story of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko goes against Sjoberg and Gentry's ideas about agency. All western sources that I have used claim that she rationally chose to act violently. Nyiramasuhuko's genocide crimes prove that gender portrayals can exist without denying a woman's political agency.

One can conclude from the aforementioned paragraphs that agency, just like the portrayals, is a broad and dynamic concept, interconnected to the time, place and origin of the reconstruction. The extent of agency is thus more flexible and changeable than Sjoberg and Gentry set out.

---

<sup>309</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 174, (own translation).

### 6.3. *The biases*

An important aspect that I have found in the biases is the fact that all literature makes use of female gender stereotypes as a foundation to build their bias on. Whether sources strengthen the female stereotype or whether they do their best to downplay it, the female stereotype is crucial for the form of reporting. The most interesting aspect of the existing biases in the literature is how they are used in attaining certain broader political goals.

Probably the most convincing example is the western versus the Arabic debate in the context of female suicide bombers. On both sides the portrayal of female suicide bombers is used as a tool to underpin different ideologies. The bias on the counterterrorist side is the attempt to detect a clear format of how suicide attacks are planned and performed, while reinforcing the negative stereotype of the Islamic 'other'. The bias of the Islamic side is to show the world that their reasons to take up arms must be so severe that even women have decided to interfere in the conflict. Unfortunately, the language barrier has made it very difficult to examine the Islamic side of the debate more thoroughly.

The literature about Tanja Nijmeijer is also worth mentioning as there is a constant underlying fascination present regarding the discrepancy between Nijmeijer's representation and the representation of the FARC. The discrepancy has attracted much media attention in both Colombia and the Netherlands. The FARC itself uses this contrast in reputation for tactical propaganda purposes. Only Botero is the exception as he does not see a difference between the two.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is a complex case, also when one looks at the bias of the literature written about her. One can roughly distinguish two forms of reporting. On one hand there are the western sources that follow the line of the process led by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. They treat and describe Nyiramasuhuko like any other defendant. On the other hand one can see Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's own statements, sources that represent other convicted women, Rwandan NGO's concerned with women, and close relatives of Nyiramasuhuko. They spread the message that she is innocent, and that all Rwandan women are innocent because they are not able to perpetrate such atrocities. This difference is in line with De Graaf's conclusion in which she states: 'A dangerous woman tells us at least as much about personal fears as it tells us about cultural

developments.<sup>310</sup> To explore this cultural phenomenon in more detail, further research is necessary.

In conclusion, when one looks at the similarities between the biases, one can conclude that they are often embedded in a binary western versus non-western opposition. Western sources regard Wafa Idris as a suppressed human being, while non-western sources represent her as honorable supernatural human being. Western sources see Tanja Nijmeijer as a woman who is brainwashed and exploited by the FARC, while the non-western FARC sees Nijmeijer as a determined woman who is proof that their ideology crosses borders. Western sources portray Nyiramasuhuko as a fully-fledged criminal, while many non-western Rwandan sources deny that she, or other Rwandan women, ever acted violently. The only exception is the case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, in which also a third perspective plays a great part. The third, Russian, perspective treats her as an evil creature- hence the jail sentence-, while the western literature sees her as an oppressed and forced victim. I carefully assume that the non-western Chechen side portrays Muzhakhoyeva as a respectable hero, just like the Palestinian Islamic sources represent Wafa Idris. However, further research is suitable to verify this assumption. This prevailing discrepancy that exists between these opposing views can be regarded as a phenomenon that underpins the social constructivist point of view, since it proves that views on violence depend on a- locally situated and culturally determined- norm, instead of human nature.

#### *6.4. Reflection on the three criteria*

As I reflect on the methodology used in this thesis, I would like to point out that the division between the narrative, the reconstruction and the bias was a workable way to structure the abundance of identified data and to discuss the research question piece by piece. However, the difficulty that I encountered had mainly to do with the grey areas between the three criteria. The initial idea of the narrative was to present what I think has happened in a clear and unbiased manner. Yet, the narrative in itself is already an interpreted reconstruction from which one cannot escape. Moreover, the second criterion shows overlap with the third

---

<sup>310</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p . 19, (own translation).

criterion. The reconstruction of the narrative, for example, already touches upon the bias of the literature reports when it discusses the gender portrayals. Thus, even though the three criteria have been a valuable contribution to this thesis and have provided for deeper insights presented in an orderly manner, it has not been possible to properly demarcate them and to use them as three independent benchmarks, as there were too many similarities and too much overlap.

### 6.5. *The four mindsets*

This thesis has clarified two main things: that violent women are a minority in the discourse of political violence, and that there is a distortion when violent women are portrayed. I will now review what we can conclude from this data regarding the four mindsets.

First of all, according to the evil woman theory, violent women simply must have to live with the fact that their reconstructions are distorted. Even though the evil woman theory is the only mindset that grants violent women political agency, it also tends to see violent women only within a feminine discourse that is not adequate enough for an overall perspective. The cases of Muzhakhoyeva and Nyiramasuhuko, for example, in which the evil woman theory appears, are also embedded in a political context which the evil woman theory alone cannot clarify. The punishment of Muzhakhoyeva is not only the result of the break with her gender norm, but is heavily influenced by the Russian's suppressive policy towards Chechnya. The result of Muzhakhoyeva's trial has thus been a tool to instil fear. Nyiramasuhuko's sentence, in turn, cannot be explained either by believing that she solely betrayed the expected gender role. Instead, her trial must be understood within a cultural interpretation of a cruel genocide that is determined mainly by western accounts of what has occurred. The evil women theory thus remains standing, but its competences are only of use when they are seen in a broader political and cultural discourse.

Secondly, Van Creveld's entire line of reasoning is based on the idea that the only real violence involves dangerous ground violence.<sup>311</sup> His definition of violence is limited. He even thinks firing cruise missiles 'has little to do with war at all'.<sup>312</sup> It is thus not surprising that Van Creveld believes that women are at a clear disadvantage in comparison with men when

---

<sup>311</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 841.

<sup>312</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 841.

it comes to violence.<sup>313</sup> However, if he would broaden his view of violence and accept that modern warfare nowadays contains much more than only direct man to man combat, he would automatically be less skeptical towards women and violence. I believe that the definition of violence includes inflicting harm on others in the broadest sense possible. This thesis narrows this definition down and focuses specifically on a political context. According to this interpretation of violence, women are certainly not always at a disadvantage when it comes to political violence, as the case studies have proven. They can even be at an advantage, such as the example of Muzhakhoyeva, who instilled a feeling of fear and danger, or the surprise attacks perpetrated by female suicide bombers. Thus, Van Creveld is correct in saying that the vast majority of political violence is committed by men. However, he is wrong in ignoring or downgrading the share of violence that is carried out by women. Instead of neglecting violent women, he ought to regard them as the missing piece of the puzzle that provides coherence to the entire range of political violence.

The third mindset is that of Beatrice de Graaf. In her comprehensive work *Gevaarlijke Vrouwen*, she illustrates the stories of ten violent women by trying to 'connect the inner perspective- the story according to the woman and her network- to the outer perspective- the story according to the contending organization or society-'.<sup>314</sup> However, she does not manage to separate the two completely. Her attempt to truly expose the representations of, and the views on, violent women did not succeed. That is why her book itself has actually become a confirmation of the representation that she tries to disclose. Even though her work is very valuable for field of terrorism as it gives new insights into women involved in terrorist organizations, her historical form of reporting does not do justice to the existing imaging of gender performances outlined in this research.

Mindset four deals with Sjoberg and Gentry's line of thoughts. Even though their narratives are insufficient to cover the entire discourse of women and political violence, they are on the right track to engage in the topic of gendered violence. Their form of reporting encloses the most appropriate way to approach the existence of different gender portrayals. Mineke Bosch's ideas are most in line with Sjoberg and Gentry's ways of reasoning. 'There is a wide range of different gender performances', Bosch says.<sup>315</sup> These performances have

---

<sup>313</sup> Creveld van, 2000, p. 826.

<sup>314</sup> Graaf de, 2012, p. 15, (own translation).

<sup>315</sup> Bosch, personal interview, (own translation).

much more chance of getting lost in the interpretations and reports of Van Creveld and De Graaf compared to the way Sjoberg and Gentry perceive violent gender performances.

## 6.6. *Concluding remarks*

The four case studies have shown that the discussed sources in this thesis do not give a neutral and true representation of the affairs. The sources are guilty of misrepresenting women who engage or have engaged in political violence. Van Creveld would explain this by stating that the misrepresentation is justified because, after all, violent women are the exceptions. However, sticking to biased gender stereotypes can have profound implications on an entire field. Domestic violence, for example, is also committed by women. It is less common, and it is less accepted, but it happens more than is often reported. A Dutch report, published in 2011, shows that of the 200.000 reported cases of domestic violence, 17 percent is perpetrated by women.<sup>316</sup> This is a higher number than was assumed. In other words, 34,000 women have been offenders of domestic violence in The Netherlands. Even though the male offenders clearly outnumber the female offenders, 34,000 women should not be ignored; they are an important aspect of the bigger picture of domestic violence. This illustration shows an undervaluation and an underestimation of women as offenders of domestic violence. But, more importantly, it illustrates that the risk of misrepresenting violent women can produce a distortion of an entire field, like the lack of a suitable policy with regard to male victims.

The entire framework of violent women portrayals that this thesis offered, has taught me that the imaging of violent women performances is a complex process that is reinforced by many aspects existing in the world. It is not only caused by a patriarchal world order in which women are seen as second class human beings. Nor is it simply a matter of the assumed passive nature of women. It is neither solely a question of having to broaden the world's preconditions of what defines a woman. Instead, the portrayals of violent women are, often actively, preserved and strengthened by numerous different parties who

---

<sup>316</sup> "Mannen vaker slachtoffer huiselijk geweld", 2011.

somehow benefit from these static images. Women themselves, like Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, suppress strong female abilities because the defenseless characteristics work in their personal advantage. Many terrorist organizations do the same, by using the innocence narrative as a violent surprise tactic, or rather as the ultimate justification for their political cause. Supporters of essentialist feminism prefer not to see women behave violently because it goes against the core belief of their discourse. Many media sources also use harmless, yet exotic, portrayals of women such as Tanja Nijmeijer, to publish catchy newspaper articles. The Russian government uses images of forced Chechen women to continue their repressive policy, and western counterterrorist experts employ victimized images of female suicide bombers to slander the Islamic world. The United Nations applies peaceful female stereotypes in an attempt to include more women in their organization and to help the women in need, but Van Creveld gets demoralized when he only sees a woman near a conflict area.

In conclusion, this research has shown that it will take a long time before gendered portrayals of violent women cease to exist entirely, especially because violent women remain to be the exception compared to the number of violent men. But, if scholars and journalists learn to be more aware of portrayals of violent women and their influence on women's agency, many blind spots within the field of political violence will eventually cease to exist. Hopefully this thesis is a valuable contribution to this process.



## 7. Bibliography

---

Adams, John (2002), "Why Do They Hate Us is a Politically Incorrect Answer", *Arab News*, 16 February, website: <<http://www.arabnews.com/node/218570>>, visited at 11 November 2013.

Alsema, Adriaan (2010), "Botero is FARC Mouthpiece But How is That a Problem", *Colombia Reports*, 12 November, website: <<http://colombiareports.co/botero-is-farc-mouthpiece-but-how-is-that-a-problem/>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

Amazing History website, "Women During World War Two", website: <<http://moreamazinghistory.blogspot.nl/2013/01/women-during-world-war-two.html>>, visited at 18 January 2014.

Baines, Erin K. (2003), "Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 479-493.

Bedoya Lima, Jineth (2010), "La Madre de Tanja, la Holandesa de las FARC, Estuvo en las Montañas de Colombia Buscando a su Hija", *El Tiempo*, 31 July, website: <<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7835389>>, visited at 21 November 2013.

Bennet, James (2002a), "Arab Press Glorifies Bomber as Heroine", *The New York Times*, 11 February, website: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/11/world/arab-press-glorifies-bomber-as-heroine.html?src=pm>>, visited at 11 November 2013.

Bennet, James (2002b), "Arab Woman's Path to Unlikely 'Martyrdom'", *The New York Times*, 31 January, website: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/31/world/arab-woman-s-path-to-unlikely-martyrdom.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>, visited at 11 November 2013.

Bennett, Olivia (1995), *Vrouwen in Oorlog: Ervaringen uit Liberia, Somaliland, Tigre, Uganda, Rwanda, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Kroatië, Bosnië en Libanon*, Amsterdam: Jan Mets/Novib/NCOS.

Beyler, Clara (2006), "Using Palestinian Women as Bombs", *New York Sun*, 15 November, website: <<http://www.nysun.com/opinion/using-palestinian-women-as-bombs/43574/>>, visited at 14 November 2013.

Bloom, Mia (2007), "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend", *Daedalus*, Vol. 136, No. 1, pp. 94-102.

Boer, Leo de (2010), *Dichter bij Tanja*, documentary, IKON.

Bosch, Mineke (2012), "Persona en de performance van identiteit. Parallele ontwikkelingen in de nieuwe biografische geschiedschrijving van gender en van wetenschap", *Tijdschrift voor Biografie*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 10-21.

Bosch, Mineke, personal interview at 14 October 2013.

Brunner, Claudia (2005), "Female Suicide Bombers - Male Suicide Bombing? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *Global Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 29-48.

Brunner, Claudia (2007), "Occidentalism Meets the Female Suicide Bomber: A Critical Reflection on Recent Terrorism Debates; A Review Essay", *Signs*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 957-971.

Byrne, Bridget (1995), "Gender, Conflict and Development", *Bridge Development and Gender*, Vol. 1, No. 34, pp. 1-63.

Carroll, Jenny E. (1997), "Images of Women and Capital Sentencing Among Female Offenders: Exploring the Outer Limits of the Eight Amendment and Articulated Theories of Justice", *Texas Law Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1413, pp. 1413-1453.

Clauder, Sophie (2002), "More Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers Could Be On The Way: Analysts", *Agence France Presse*, 2 February, website: <<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/637787/posts>>, visited at 14 November 2013.

Claus, Sybilla (2007), "Ik verveel me, schrijft Nijmeijer in dagboek", *Trouw*, 13 September, website: <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1328860/2007/09/13/ik-verveel-me-schrijft-Nijmeijer-in-dagboek.dhtml>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

"Conozca Quien Tanja Nijmeijer Holandesa Seducida por FARC", (2012), *El País*, 17 October, website: <<http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/judicial/noticias/conozca-quien-tanja-nijmeijer-holandesa-seducida-por-farc>>, visited at 21 November 2013.

Creveld, Martin van (2000), "A Woman's Place: Reflections on the Origins of Violence", *Social Research*, Vol. 67, No. 3, pp. 825-847.

Creveld, Martin van (2008), *Culture of War*, Gloucestershire: Presidio Press.

Creveld, Martin van (2013), *The Privileged Sex*, Mevasseret Zion: DLVC Enterprises.

Creveld, Martin van, official website: <<http://martinvancreveld.com/page6.html>>, visited at 1 October 2013.

Dool, Pim van den (2012), "Nijmeijer: Vrijwel altijd executie voor vijanden van FARC", *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 November, website: <<http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/11/17/nijmeijer-vrijwel-altijd-executie-voor-vijanden-van-farc/>>, visited at 17 October 2013.

Drumbl, Mark A. (2012), "She Makes Me Ashamed To Be a Woman': The Genocide Conviction of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, 2011", *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Accepted Paper No. 2012-32, pp. 101-145.

“‘Eillen’ kennelijk Groningse ex-studente”, (2007), *de Volkskrant*, 3 September, website: <<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/879023/2007/09/03/Eillen-rsquo-kennelijk-Groningse-ex-studente.dhtml>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

“El Lado Oscuro de Tanja, la Holandesa de las FARC”, (2012), *El Tiempo*, 11 November, website: <<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12371583>>, visited at 21 November 2013.

“Ex-minister Rwanda hoort vonnis wegens volkerenmoord”, (2011), *Trouw*, 24 June, website: <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/2456938/2011/06/24/Ex-minister-Rwanda-hoort-vonniss-wegens-volkerenmoord.dhtml>>, visited at 2 December 2013.

FARC’s official website, “Interview With Maritza, Viviana and Alexandra”, website: <<http://farc-epeace.org/index.php/point-of-view/item/97-interview-with-maritza-viviana-and-alexandra.html>>, visited at 2 February 2014.

“Female Bomber’s Mother Speaks Out”, (2002), *BBC News UK*, 30 January, website: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1791800.stm>>, visited at 11 November 2013.

Foden, Giles (2003), “Death and the Maidens”, *The Guardian*, 18 July, website: <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/18/gender.uk>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

Graaf, Beatrice de (2012), *Gevaarlijke vrouwen: Tien militante vrouwen in het vizier*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom.

Hintjens, Helen (1999), “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 241-286.

Hogg, Nicole (2001), “‘I Never Poured Blood’, Women Accused of Genocide in Rwanda”, Master Thesis, *Faculty of Law McGill University*, Montreal, pp. 1-151.

Hogg, Nicole (2010), “Women’s Participation in the Rwandan Genocide: Mothers or Monsters?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 92, No. 877, pp. 69-102.

“Idealisme dreef Tanja in de handen van de FARC”, (2007), *de Volkskrant*, 7 September, website: <<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/957305/2007/09/07/Idealisme-dreef-Tanja-in-handen-van-FARC.dhtml>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

International Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya Israel, website: <<http://www.ict.org.il/>>, visited at 14 November 2013.

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Role of Palestinian Women in Suicide Terrorism”, website: <<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2003/Pages/The%20Role%20of%20Palestinian%20Women%20in%20Suicide%20Terrorism.aspx#conclusion>>, visited at 12 November 2013.

Jacoby, Susan (1992), "Terrorism is Women's Work Too", *Washington Post*, 2 October.

Jones, Adam (2002), "Gender and Genocide in Rwanda", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 65-94.

"Jorge Enrique Botero Searched for -and Found- Tanja Nijmeijer", (2010), *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, 4 November, website: <<http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/jorge-enrique-botero-searched-and-found-tanja-nijmeijer>>, visited at 14 January 2014.

Kelly, Jocelyn (2010), "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in DRC", Special Report, *United States Institute for Peace*, Washington, pp. 1-16.

Koopman, Edwin (2011), "Nijmeijer zit wel degelijk vrijwillig bij de FARC", *Trouw*, 5 May, website: <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/archief/article/detail/1901436/2011/05/05/Nijmeijer-zit-wel-degelijk-vrijwillig-bij-de-Farc.dhtml>>, visited at 14 Januari 2014.

Lagunina, Irina (2006), "Russia: Nord-Ost Anniversary Recalls Ascent of Female Suicide Bomber", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 27 October, website: <<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1072365.html>>, visited at 4 November 2013.

Landesman, Peter (2002), "A Woman's Work", *The New York Times*, 15 September, website: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/15/magazine/a-woman-s-work.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>, visited at 3 December 2013.

Lippert-Rasmussen, Kasper (2011), "The Politics of Biological Constraints", *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 73-91.

Littlewood, Stuart (2012), "Agent' Cameron Rewards Israeli Crimes", *Palestine Chronicle*, 14 December, website: <<http://www.palestinechronicle.com/agent-cameron-rewards-israeli-crimes/>>, visited at 11 November 2013.

Maier, Donna J. (2012), "Women Leaders in the Rwandan Genocide: When Women Choose to Kill", *Universitas*, Vol. 8, 2012-2013, pp. 1-20.

"Mannen vaker slachtoffer huiselijk geweld", (2011), *NOS*, January 14, website: <<http://nos.nl/artikel/211563-mannen-vaker-slachtoffer-huiselijk-geweld.html>>, visited at 2 February 2014.

Marway, Herjeet (2011), "Scandalous Subwomen and Sublime Superwomen: Exploring Portrayals of Female Suicide Bombers' Agency", *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 221-240.

Nacos, Brigitte L. (2005), "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*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 435-451.

Ness, Cindy D. (2005), "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 353–373.

Palestine Facts, "Start of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000", website: <[http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf\\_1991to\\_now\\_alaqsa\\_start.php](http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_alaqsa_start.php)>, visited at 12 November 2013.

Palestinian Human Rights Monitor, "One Year Al-Aqsa Intifada Fact Sheets and Figures", website: <<http://www.phrmg.org/monitor2001/oct2001-collaborators.htm>>, visited at 12 November 2013.

"Profiles: Colombia's Armed Groups", (2013), *BBC News UK*, 29 August, website: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-11400950>>, visited at 19 November 2013.

"Profile: Samantha Lewthwaite", (2013), *BBC News UK*, 26 September, website: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24204517>>, visited at 3 October 2013.

Refshaug, Esteban (2012), "Tanja Nijmeijer", *Colombia Reports*, November 19, website: <<http://colombiareports.co/tanja-nijmeijer/>>, visited at 5 January 2014.

Reus-Smit, Christian (2009), "Constructivism", in: Scott Burchill, et al, *Theories of International Relations*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 213-236.

Schmitz, Jacques (2013), "De Vrouwen van NSU", *Vrij Nederland*, Vol. 74, No. 19, pp. 31-37.

Schweitzer, Yoram (2006), "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?", *Memorandum*, No. 84, pp. 7-105.

Shapiro, Andrea (2000), "Unequal Before the Law: Men, Women and the Death Penalty", *Journal of Gender, Social Policy & The Law*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 428-470.

Sharlach, Lisa (1999), "Gender and Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Agents and Objects of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 387-399.

Sjoberg, Laura and Caron E. Gentry (2007), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, London: Zed Books.

Sjoberg, Laura, and Caron E. Gentry (2011), *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

Skaine, Rosemarie (2006), *Female Suicide Bombers*, Jefferson: McFarland.

Sperling, Carrie (2005), "Mother of Atrocities: Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's Role in the Rwandan Genocide", *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 101-127.

Stanford University's website, "Mapping Militant Organizations: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army", website: <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/89>>, visited at 24 November 2013.

“Stout Buurmeisje”, (2007), *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*, 5 September.

Streib, Victor L. (2012), *Death Penalty for Female Offenders*, Ohio: Ohio Northern University Law School, (first published in 1973).

Sudakov, Dimitri (2003), “Shamil Besaev Trains Female Suicide Bombers”, *Pravda*, 15 May, website: <<http://english.pravda.ru/hotspots/conflicts/15-05-2003/2810-suicide-0/>> visited at 14 November 2013.

“Tanja Nijmeijer belangrijk voor imago FARC”, (2010), *De Twentsche Courant Tubantia*, 9 October, website: <<http://www.tubantia.nl/algemeen/buitenland/tanja-nijmeijer-belangrijk-voor-imago-farc-1.612527>>, visited at 22 October 2013.

“Tanja en haar verhaal”, (2010), *IKON*, 16 November, website: <<http://www.ikonrtv.nl/ikondocumentaire/documentaire.asp?old=2662>>, visited at 21 October 2013.

“Tanja Nijmeijer: ik blijf de rest van mijn leven bij de FARC”, (2012), *Trouw*, 11 November, website: <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4496/Buitenland/article/detail/3346331/2012/11/11/Tanja-Nijmeijer-ik-blijf-de-rest-van-mijn-leven-bij-de-Farc.dhtml>>, visited at 21 November 2013.

“Tanja Nijmeijer in VS Aangeklaagd”, (2010), *de Volkskrant*, 15 December, website: <<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1075143/2010/12/15/Tanja-Nijmeijer-in-VS-aangeklaagd.dhtml>>, visited at 20 November 2013.

“Tanja Nijmeijer wil niet gered worden”, (2010), *de Volkskrant*, 4 November, website: <[www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1045360/2010/11/04/Tanja-Nijmeijer-wil-niet-gered-worden.dhtml](http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1045360/2010/11/04/Tanja-Nijmeijer-wil-niet-gered-worden.dhtml)>, visited at 22 October 2013.

“Tanja Nijmeijer wil voor altijd bij de FARC blijven”, (2013), *de Volkskrant*, 9 June, website: <<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/article/detail/3455618/2013/06/09/Tanja-Nijmeijer-wil-voor-altijd-bij-FARC-blijven.dhtml>>, visited at 21 October 2013.

“Tanja ziet zichzelf als bestrijder van het grootkapitaal”, (2013), *de Volkskrant*, 6 January, website: <<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3372985/2013/01/06/Nijmeijer-ziet-zichzelf-als-bestrijder-grootkapitaal.dhtml>>, visited at 21 October 2013.

“The Black Widows of Chechnya”, (2004), *The Scotsman*, 17 September, website: <<http://www.scotsman.com/news/the-black-widows-of-chechnya-1-553409>>, visited at 4 November 2013.

United Nations Peacekeeping official website, Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000, website: <[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325)> (2000)>, visited at 19 December 2013.

Viotti, Paul R. and Mark V. Kauppi (2012), *International Relations Theory*, Boston: Pearson, (first published in 1999 and 2010).

Weitsman, Patricia A. (2008), "The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 561-578.

Wells, Miriam (2012), "The Dutch Woman Who Ran Away With Colombia's FARC", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 September, website: <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2012/1111/The-Dutch-woman-who-ran-away-with-Colombia-s-FARC>>, visited at 25 October 2013.

Wikipedia's website on Wafa Idris, website: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wafa\\_Idris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wafa_Idris)>, visited at 11 November 2013.