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Female Terrorism:
Everyday Life and Routine

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This thesis is dedicated to

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INTRODUCTION

In a world in constant evolution in which security issues get more complex every day, terrorism is a difficult topic to tackle. When one thinks about terrorism, especially about the identity of a terrorist, the first image that comes to mind is that of a male figure, probably from the Middle East, but reality is much more complex than what people imagine. Women have historically been among the first to join terrorist movements and the very first person tried in a court of law for terrorism was, in 1878, Vera Zasulich, an anarchist for *Narodnaya Volya* (the People's Will), in Russia (Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2020). During her trial for the attempted assassination of Governor Fyodor Trepov in St. Petersburg, Zasulich proudly stated that she was not a murderer: "I am a terrorist" (Pipes, 2010).

In recent years, the landscape of critical studies on terrorism has increasingly recognized the significant role of women within extremist movements worldwide. From active combatants to strategic planners and propagandists, female terrorists have defied traditional gender stereotypes while posing unique challenges to global security efforts. But the study of female terrorism has long been plagued by misinformation and sensationalism. Public discourse and media narratives often depict female terrorists as anomalies, victims of male coercion, or figures driven solely by emotional turmoil rather than political conviction. This framing disregards the complexity of their motivations and the sociological structures that shape their actions. Additionally, traditional academic studies on terrorism have historically prioritized male perpetrators, leading to a gap in understanding the lived experiences of female militants. The lack of nuanced research contributes to policy inefficiencies and reinforces gendered stereotypes that obscure the actual roles women play in violent political movements.

To move beyond the stereotypes and disinformation, this research applies phenomenological sociology to the study of female terrorism. By focusing on the lived experiences of women engaged in terrorist activities, this study aims to understand how their everyday lives and routines contribute to their ideological commitment, radicalization, and operational roles, and examines how female terrorists construct their

social realities, how they perceive their actions within their broader political framework, and how habitual practices shape their commitment to violent causes. For the female terrorist, whose role challenges traditional gender norms and societal expectations, the routines and typifications of everyday life provide a framework to examine how such identities are constructed, negotiated, and, at times, subverted.

Rather than assuming a predefined characterization of women terrorists, this thesis asks: Who is the female terrorist? How does she experience her reality? How do routine and everyday practices reinforce or challenge her involvement in violent political movements? This research seeks to uncover how female terrorists construct their identities and how their daily experiences within militant organizations sustain their commitment to these movements.

To engage with it meaningfully, readers are invited to practice Edmund Husserl's *epoché* (bracketing), a fundamental method in phenomenological research that keeps the meanings "above" suspended in parentheses (Orsini, 2024, p. 486). This means suspending preconceived notions about female terrorists, including the assumptions that they are merely victims, emotionally unstable, or devoid of agency. By approaching the subject with a fresh perspective, the author together with the readers can attempt to see the world as they experience it, thereby gaining a more comprehensive and less biased understanding of women's role in terrorism.

While phenomenology offers a powerful lens for understanding female terrorism, it is not without its challenges. First, phenomenological approaches have been criticized for their subjective nature and the difficulty of generalizing findings. This study does not aim to provide a definitive account of all female terrorists but rather to offer insight into the structures of meaning that sustain their involvement. Second, this research faces the challenge of limited background material. The study of female terrorists through a phenomenological lens is a relatively novel field, and there is a scarcity of firsthand accounts that focus specifically on their everyday lives and routines. Most biographical and autobiographical materials available prioritize ideological justifications or key operational moments, rather than the mundane aspects of their lives that are crucial to

understanding their reality. Third, female terrorists, like their male counterparts, are individuals with unique personalities, beliefs, and life experiences. No single framework can fully account for the diversity of their motivations and behaviors. This study does not claim to offer a one-size-fits-all model but rather an exploration of recurring themes and patterns in the lived experiences of female militants. Fourth, despite its contributions, phenomenological sociology as a discipline has faced some criticisms. Its focus on micro-level interactions can lead to accusations of neglecting structural factors, such as economic inequality or political power. This thesis wants to underline that phenomenology complements, rather than replaces, macro-level analyses. By foregrounding individual experiences, it enriches our understanding of how larger structures manifest in everyday life. Finally, ethical concerns arise when studying individuals engaged in politically and morally controversial acts. This research does not seek to justify or legitimize terrorism but rather to understand it as a social phenomenon. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the aim is to explore female terrorism beyond legalistic or moralistic frameworks, instead examining the internal logic that drives these individuals' actions.

This thesis is structured into four main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of key academic perspectives on female terrorism. It examines the work of leading scholars, including Mia Bloom, Anne Speckhard, and Laura Sjoberg, who have contributed to the field by exploring the motivations, roles, and socio-political contexts of female terrorists. This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for understanding how women become involved in terrorism and the ways in which their participation challenges traditional gender narratives. The second chapter focuses on the theoretical foundations of phenomenological sociology, exploring how everyday life and routine function as mechanisms for meaning-making and identity construction. This chapter discusses concepts such as typification, taken-for-granted reality, and the dialectical nature of social structure. The third chapter presents case studies of five female terrorists, which are Edith Lagos of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Zarema Muzhkhoeva of the Chechen Black Widows, Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Muriel Degauque as Europe's first female suicide bomber, and Mara Cagol of the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades). The fourth chapter analyses their lives through a phenomenological lens,

seeking to illustrate how routine and everyday experiences shape their radicalization, commitment, and operational engagement. The concluding section reflects on the findings of the study, connecting the main themes that emerged in Chapter IV and discussing their implications for counterterrorism strategies, gender studies, and phenomenological research on political violence. It also suggests avenues for future research, particularly in expanding the study of female terrorism beyond ideological analysis to include experiential and structural dimensions.

But before understanding the complex phenomenon that is female terrorism, one has first to start with the basis, so from the question: what is terrorism? The concept of terrorism has been a largely debated issue in both the academic and the policymaking fields. Academically speaking, there is a clear need for a definition to set the research parameters, while from a policymaking point of view, if one does not know "what terrorism is", then countering it might be difficult. But the truth is that terrorism is a social science concept, and, like all such concepts, it is a social construction, thus lacking specificity in its concrete definition (Richards, 2019). This does not mean that research is meaningless or without a solution. While the absolute truth about what terrorism is might not be reachable, one can find out what is analytically distinctive about the phenomenon that can be generally agreed on, thus formulating a broad and inclusive conceptualization of it.

As stated in *Inside Terrorism* (Hoffman, 1998), terrorism is essentially a political phenomenon and revolves around the pursuit, acquisition, and use of power to bring about political change. It involves either the deployment of violence or the threat of violence's use to achieve a political goal. Despite this apartment clarity, defining terrorism remains a challenging task for policymakers and academics alike due to the evolving connotations and interpretations of the term over the past two centuries, making it difficult to arrive at a precise and universally accepted definition. As long as there is no analytical quality to the activity of terrorism, the mantra of "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter" will endure (Richards, 2014). This occurs because one classifies terrorism regarding who commits the act and not what it is they are doing.

The biggest obstacle to overcome is the fact that terrorism is more frequently used as a pejorative label rather than as an analytical concept (Richards, 2019). If one believes that terrorism is simply violence perpetrated by some *persona non grata* and that it is illegal or illegitimate violence as seen by the prevailing power holders, it is easier to understand the difficulty in defining who is a terrorist and what actions are terrorist. According to Richards, in the last 50 years, an academic consensus has formed on the essence of terrorism, which is that "terrorism and its 'shock value' entails the intent to generate a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims" (Richards, 2019, p. 16). Fear is the goal of terrorism and any conceptualization of this phenomenon should revolve around this psychological dimension. Terrorism is thus about intent and there are three levels of motivation behind a terrorist attack: the first is the wider psychological impact, the second is to exploit it for a goal, and the third is the broader political end. Then one should understand that terrorism is a particular method of political violence rather than a conceptualization that depends on who the perpetrator or the cause is. This helps overcome the terrorist/freedom fighter mantra and understand that one can adopt terrorist methods to fight for freedom as well as peaceful methods for nefarious objectives. At its core, terrorism is also inherently political; ideological or political aims drive it as it seeks to coerce, intimidate, or change the political landscape.

Another important point that needs clarification is the root causes of terrorism. Finding them is not an easy feat, since there are structural and political conditions that may affect some individuals while others might be driven by idiosyncratic or personal motives or circumstances (Bjørgo, 2011). Moreover, millions of people worldwide face many of the conditions that are claimed to give rise to this phenomenon, but only a minority actually engages in it. First of all, it is important to distinguish between two causes behind terrorism: *preconditions* and *precipitants* (Bjørgo, 2005; Bjørgo & Silke, 2019). The first provides fertile ground for the emergence of terrorism (e.g. a context with a lack of democracy), while the latter directly influences the start of the phenomenon. Such trigger events can be identified with macro, meso, and micro levels (Della Porta, 2013). Macro factors are systemic conditions at the level of the State or the society, such as a civil war. They are the political context where terrorism evolves. Meso factors, on the other hand, are developments at an intermediate level like social movements. An

example of a meso factor is the activity of a charismatic leader that mobilizes a mass. Micro levels relate to individuals and face-to-face interactions in small groups. They are characterized by symbolic and emotional relationships inside militants' networks. An interesting analysis is the one done by Alex Schmid in *Root Causes of Terrorism: Some Conceptual Notes, a Set of Indicators, and a Model* (Schmid, 2005), in which he put together a series of factors that might increase the likelihood of terrorism occurring. The root causes were influenced by the following elements: (1) lack of democracy; (2) lack of rule of law; (3) lack of good governance; (4) lack of social justice; (5) the backing of illegitimate regimes; (6) high/rising distributive inequality; (7) historical experience of violent conflict waging; (8) support for groups using terrorist means; (9) vulnerability of modern democracies; and (10) failed States/safe heavens outside State control (Schmid, 2005).

Furthermore, regarding economic causes that influence terrorism, their role is a complex one (Bjørgo & Silke, 2019). Indeed, several studies (e.g. Krueger & Maleckova, 2003) show poverty does not have a strong connection with terrorism, but plays only a limited role. It is also widely recognized that terrorists generally come from the middle to upper classes of their communities, not from the poorest outskirts. Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova's survey (Krueger & Maleckova, 2003) showed that out of 1,357 Palestinian adults in the West Bank and Gaza, support for terrorism against Israeli civilians was stronger among professionals (43.3 percent) rather than among laborers (34.6 percent). Marc Sageman in his two books *Understanding Terror Networks* (Sageman, 2004) and *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Sageman, 2008), in describing the radicalization process of a terrorist, he makes some important discoveries on the topic. Indeed, three-fourths of the individuals who made up his sample joined the Global Salafi movement as mostly wealthy young men who were expatriates. They had good intellectual skills but they were marginalized, under-employed, and excluded from the upper classes (Orsini, 2023). Sageman challenges the stereotype of terrorists being poor, desperate, and vulnerable Third-World men. He proves through his data that many terrorists are lawyers, engineers, teachers, in general, skilled workers. They came from the middle class, and they are highly educated youth coming from caring and religious families that taught them positive values. In many cases, they are fluent in three or four

languages, are technology experts, and use religion as a tool for a collective identity that brings them to a process of radicalization (Orsini, 2023).

Another important scholar who talks about the correlation between economy and terrorism is Lawrence Kuznar who, in the article *Risk Sensitivity and Terrorism* (Kuznar & Lutz, 2007), notes that poverty is not the decisive element of radicalization. The propensity to join a terrorist movement depends, according to the author, on the possibility of either curbing the deterioration of one's social status or improving it. Kuznar studies nationalist movements from Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Sri Lanka, and employs the concept of risk sensitivity to explain that the ones with the highest propensity to engage in terrorist actions are those who fear the worsening of their social condition or those who think they can improve it (Orsini, 2023). Both groups are more inclined to take risks such as joining a terrorist organization to change their situation. This helps in understanding why terrorists come from different backgrounds and why many come from the middle and upper classes.

It is also fundamental to mention that the more a State becomes repressive, the more likely it is that terrorism will emerge (Bjørgo & Silke, 2019). In the study *Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development and Social Cleavages* (Piazza, 2006) in 97 countries over 20 years, it came out that those States who became more repressive were also the ones with an increased likelihood of an outbreak of terrorist violence. Moreover, countries with restrictive democratic politics are much more likely to harbor internal terrorism. To better understand this concept it is useful to look at how many political parties are represented in the lawmaking institutions. The lower the number of parties present, the more likely is the occurrence of domestic terrorism (Piazza, 2006).

In the end, the causes of terrorism remain variegated and interconnected with the social, economic, and political background of the terrorist. Nothing exists in a vacuum. But looking at the external factors might not be enough to understand how terrorism works, that is why looking at the personal level and how a person gets radicalized is also fundamental.

Personal reasons are hard to discern. Several scholars have studied the processes of radicalization that people go through to commit terrorist acts, and one of the most interesting and complete accounts of the different theories can be found in *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model* (Orsini, 2023). Radicalization is understood as a resocialization process in which becoming a jihadist means destroying the precedent system of values and beliefs of open societies and replacing it with a strict interpretation of Sharia law. This thesis believes in the importance of ideology as a *primum movens* of radicalization and has adopted as a main theory Alessandro Orsini's DRIA model.

The DRIA model was first theorized by the author in *Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse: Le Radici Ideologiche del Terrorismo Rivoluzionario* (Orsini, 2009) and later developed in a series of articles and books that analyzed jihadi terrorists who managed, between 2004 and 2018, to carry out terror attacks in the West. According to Orsini, ideology is the "necessary, albeit inadequate, condition for accepting the idea of killing and being killed" (Orsini, 2023). The DRIA model is an acronym that stands for: Disintegration of Social Identity; Reconstruction of Social Identity through a Radical Ideology; Integration in a Revolutionary Sect; and Alienation from the Surrounding World. Radicalizing is the cost of acquiring radical beliefs, but there is a difference between cognitive radicalization and violent radicalization. Cognitive radicalization is the radicalization of ideas, and it concerns the first two stages of the DRIA model, while violent radicalization is the radicalization of behaviors and it regards the last two stages. This model aims to reconstruct the radicalization process of a particular type of terrorist, called a terrorist by vocation or vocational terrorist. This concept draws on Max Weber's distinction of people living off politics and for politics (Weber, 1946). Those who live off politics derive their material means for survival from politics, while those who live for politics dedicate their lives to satisfying their philosophical and spiritual needs (Weber, 1946, p.84). Vocational terrorists are people who sacrifice their lives to satisfy an inner need. The model is created through the analysis of the lives of 39 terrorists (with only one woman, Muriel Degauque) and it understands radicalization as a resocialization process developed across four main stages. The first one is the Disintegration of Social Identity,

which happens through a series of traumas or personal failures. These factors drive the person to question their values and thus their place in the world. As Orsini says, "Some people manifest passive behavior with low initiative; some others are proactive and willing to embrace new values opposed to the previous ones, while marginalized individuals can either fall into despair or start searching for an exit strategy" (Orsini, 2023, p. 90). To reconstruct one's social identity there needs to be a "will to want", a capacity to transform one's need for change into a behavior. This mental aptitude is also known as cognitive opening and it represents the availability to embrace a new value system. The Jihadi ideology, with its strict rules and beliefs, allows a lost person who's looking for new points of reference to reconstruct their social identity. This is the second step of the DRIA model, Reconstruction of Social Identity through a Radical Ideology. Once one embraces a radical ideology, they acquire a radical mental universe, that has seven cognitive categories that help interpret the surrounding world: a) Radical Catastrophism; b) Waiting for the End; c) Obsession with Purity; d) Identification of Evil; e) Obsession with Purification; f) Exaltation of Martyrdom or Desire to be Persecuted; and g) Purification of the Means through the End (Orsini, 2023, p. 91). These categories help justify the use of violence against the enemy, but also produce a sort of discourse that Orsini summarizes in this way:

> "The world has been plunged into an abyss of pain and misery (radical catastrophism) because of the actions of certain categories of people (identification of evil) who deserve to be exterminated (obsession with purification). Before the world ends (waiting for the end) one must isolate oneself to protect oneself from rampant moral corruption (obsession with purity) and rejoice in being persecuted, because the sacrifice of life is evidence of spiritual purity (desire to be persecuted). The end is such that it justifies the use of murder (purification of the means through the end)"[1].

The radical mental universe changes how the individual creates their social reality, dividing the world into friends and enemies, the second ones not even belonging to the human category, they just represent symbols to be attacked. The third step is Integration

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[1] Orsini, Alessandro (2023) *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 46:1, p. 91

in a Revolutionary Sect. From this stage onward the individual moves from cognitive to violent radicalization and starts to look for groups of like-minded people. They either manage to establish a direct relationship with other *mujahideens*[2] or claim to be militants even without direct contact with any members, thanks to the concept of imagined community (Anderson, 1983). This concept explains that people take part in a group (such as a terrorist one) using their imagination and without any face-to-face interaction. Alienation from the Surrounding World is the final phase and it is the one that makes the would-be terrorist comfortable with the idea of killing. To become a vocational terrorist one must experience an anthropological transformation that is fostered by social isolation. This has two functions, one manifest and the other latent. The first one forbids any relationship with the corrupted Western world, which meets the psychological need to feel morally superior. The latter consists in preventing the outside world from exercising moral authority, which might cause doubts. Alienating a person is the perfect tool for them not to doubt the ways of the group thinking and not to change their mind about the terrorist attack.

Another important aspect of understanding terrorism is evaluating its effectiveness, which depends on how one looks at the phenomenon. If it is understood as a strategy to achieve substantive political change, it cannot be considered very successful, but if it is seen as a communication strategy, it can be argued that it has had its wins (Marsden, 2019). Looking at several studies (Jones & Libicki, 2008; Weinberg, 2012), only 7 to 13 percent of groups achieve some of their stated goals, while the vast majority (43 percent) join the political process or get disrupted by the police (around 40 percent). There is a consensus among scholars that terrorism is a failing political strategy, but still, several people engage in it. Thus, starting from the assumption that terrorism adheres to a strategic and specific logic, it is necessary to specify the mechanisms through which its effects are produced. An interesting theory is that of Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter (Kydd & Walter, 2006), who argue that terrorist groups use violence to change their audience's beliefs about their ability to impose costs and commitment to their goals. As part of this, militants are believed to use five main strategies: provocation, outbidding, spoiling, intimidation, and attrition.

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[2] Muslims who fight on behalf of their faith or the *ummah* (Muslim community).

The first strategy is provocation. The success of a terroristic action is largely dependent on the target's response, so by provoking a State into behaving in ways that put its citizens in danger, non-State actors can strengthen their legitimacy claims, create the conditions that make the population push for a change in policies, or even push for open rebellion or war (Merari, 1993; Marsden, 2019). Two mechanisms are relevant to interpret a repressive response: firstly, by reacting excessively, the State reveals its "true nature"; then repression creates the background conditions of disenfranchisement or socioeconomic deprivation that can inspire an uprising. When a State has to choose how to act, it is important to remember that it has been proven that undermining human rights is a counterproductive policy that leads to more terrorist attacks and the possibility of a rebellion (Marsden, 2019).

Outbidding is the phenomenon by which militant groups use violence to compete with other groups over resources. This concept has also been studied by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko in their book *Friction. How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011), in which they explain that the radicalization process is divided into three levels: individual radicalization, group radicalization, and mass radicalization. In their third mechanism of mass radicalization, linked with martyrdom culture, they explain that when a terrorist group uses suicide attacks, the other groups feel the pressure to assimilate and compete amongst each other in the outbidding phenomenon. This intensifies terrorist attacks since every group wants to show they are all equally radical and devoted to the cause (Orsini, 2023).

Spoiling relates to impeding, for example, peace negotiations through political violence. Kydd and Walter in *Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence* (Kydd & Walter, 2002) found that violence was indeed effective at disrupting peace processes. In their study, parties in a civil war managed to reach a peace agreement 6 out of 10 times without violence, but only 1 in 4 cases when terrorist attacks occurred. The authors argued that spoiling peace negotiations was a more likely outcome where mistrust between actors was high, and when there was a strong enough moderate oppositional

group in negotiation with the government that could prevent violence from more extreme actors but did not manage to do so.

With regard to intimidation, as stated before, one of the core parts of terrorism is fear. It works either through prompting the people to pressure the government to concede to terrorist demands, by enforcing compliance from the local population, or by signaling to the government the costs of not agreeing to their requests (Kydd & Walter, 2006). One of the most famous examples is what happened after the Madrid train bombings of March 2004. Three days after the attack, Spain voted for the Socialist Party, which had campaigned for the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq, while before the attack the Popular Party was ahead in the polls (Marsden, 2019). Even though there was a collection of factors that pushed for the ultimate outcome of the election, this is still a relevant example of the power of intimidation techniques used against a country about to go to the polls.

Lastly, attrition works by convincing an opponent that the adversary possesses sufficient resolve and capacity to exert substantial costs if their demands are not met (Kydd & Walter, 2006). In this way, terrorists target the will rather than the capacity of their opponents, and even though it was said before that terrorism is unable to achieve significant long-term political gains, by looking at lower-order concessions it is possible to see some benefits with the strategy of attrition (Marsden, 2019).

But if terrorism is generally a losing long-term strategy, why does it continue to be used? Three explanations seem plausible. First, militants simply do not know that their actions are unlikely to secure them any political gains. It is also suggested that leaders overestimate their chances of succeeding by inappropriately drawing analogies with guerrilla campaigns which are typically far more successful (Marsden, 2019). Moreover, if terrorism is the weapon of last resort, it might be the only option available. Lastly, political outcomes might not be the best measure to interpret what violence seeks to achieve. Indeed, vengeance, anger, support for a political outcome or party, or in general any expressive and instrumental functions of terrorism can be considered as important as the strategic ones.

CHAPTER I
Female Terrorism: Leading Scholars

This chapter presents several influential scholars whose research has shaped the current understanding of female terrorism. Their work spans diverse disciplinary perspectives, ranging from psychology and sociology to political science and security studies. Through empirical research, case studies, and theoretical frameworks, these scholars have analyzed the nuanced dynamics of women's participation in terrorism, highlighting both their agency and vulnerability that define their roles within extremist networks.

The phenomenon of female terrorism challenges simplistic narratives of gender and violence. Scholars have meticulously examined the multifaceted nature of women's involvement in extremist activities, revealing how gender intersects with ideology, identity formation, and recruitment strategies within terrorist organizations. By exploring the motivations driving women to commit acts of terror and analyzing their operational roles, researchers have contributed valuable insights into the adaptive strategies of terrorist groups.

As this field continues to evolve, ongoing research has uncovered emerging themes and debates surrounding female terrorism. Discussions include the intersectionality of gender, religion, and extremism; the impact of counterterrorism policies on women's rights; and the implications for global security and peacebuilding efforts. By critically engaging with these themes, scholars have strived to develop comprehensive strategies to effectively address the complexities of female terrorism while safeguarding human rights and promoting social justice. Since the main objective of the thesis is to understand the terrorist woman, it is fundamental to have a solid reference base to begin, and the selected scholars offer a good starting point for the research.

1.1 Mia Bloom

One cannot talk about female terrorism without starting with Mia Bloom. She is a Communication and Middle East Studies professor at Georgia State University and conducts ethnographic field research in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. She published several articles and books on terrorism and violent extremism, among which *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (Bloom, 2005), *Living Together After Ethnic Killing: Exploring the Chaim Kaufman Argument* (Bloom & Licklider, 2007) with Roy Licklider, and *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism* (Bloom & Horgan, 2019) with John Horgan. She is also a member of the United Nations Terrorism Research Network (UNCTED) and is on the radicalization expert advisory board for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Bloom holds a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University, an M.A. in Arab Studies from Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, and a B.A. from McGill University in Russian, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies.

One of her most interesting publications for this research is certainly *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Bloom, 2011). The book starts from the premise that, in the past few years, the number of female terrorists and suicide bombers has seen an enormous increase, and with it the "misinformation and misperception about what is actually going on" (Bloom, 2011, p. IX). Indeed, the author reports that journalistic accounts have presented a too simplistic and unidimensional account of the phenomenon of female violence, centered around the fact that "a man made her do it" (Bloom, 2011, p. IX). Bloom sets out to dispel this myth, stating that many women are as bloodthirsty as their male counterparts in terrorist organizations, and a simple explanation, or putting the blame for their actions on someone else, is not possible. Their motivations are linked with anger, sorrow, desire for revenge, nationalism, or religious zeal, which mix together in ways that do not allow a black-and-white approach. Thus, this book aims to clarify the various reasons why women choose terrorism and to explain the roles they take on inside the organization they enter.

To do so, each chapter contains recounts of women from some of the most important terrorist organizations, coming from Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Iraq, Ireland, and Indonesia. The case stories allow Bloom to describe more in-depth how these organizations work and make broader conclusions about the role women play in the game of terror.

One of the most interesting recounts is the one described in chapter 3, called *The "Pregnant" Bomber*, which starts with the depiction of Siobhan's attempted attack on the Belfast International Airport for the Provisional Irish Republican Army, in which she pretended to be pregnant and strapped around her body fifteen pounds of Semtex explosives. The police caught her before committing the act and she was thus convicted for fourteen years on May 21, 1990. She could have pled to a lesser charge as she was a minor, but she refused because she did not recognize the authority of the court, since it was a British one and she was an independentist.

After this initial part, the book shifts focus. It starts describing the history of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), its rise, fall, and rise again with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). In this section, Bloom underlines the differences between the original organization, made up of "fairly well-educated men who spoke for all of the people of Ireland" (Bloom, 2011, p. 76), and the new members, who came out of the ghettos, and "were from urban backgrounds and had suffered from sectarian discrimination" (Bloom, 2011, p. 76). The tense situation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, the complicity of the security forces in violent acts toward the Catholic community, the gassing of civilians, the massacre on Bloody Sunday of 1972, and the mass arrests made some believe that "the British government meant to destroy them as people" (Bloom, 2011, p. 78). This proved to be a powerful recruiting tool for the PIRA because many now thought that violence was the only answer to face this situation.

At this point, Bloom introduces another important character in this story, Mairéad Farrell. She describes episodes in her childhood that contributed to her radicalization process, such as the fact that she had to pass through military checkpoints, endure

curfews, or that she could not take the bike to go to school because Protestant children would try to pull her and the other Catholic kids off them. She was not even safe on the bus, because that was also attacked, so the bus driver had to do a four-mile detour every day to get the children to school safely.

Since she believed that her community was under siege, Mairéad joined the PIRA when she was only a teenager and was captured on active duty, while she was planting a bomb at the Conway Hotel in Dunmurry, on April 5, 1976. The explosion caused thousands of dollars worth of damage but no victims, since the organization had called a warning fifteen minutes before the attack and made sure everyone had evacuated the building before detonating the explosives. At her trial, the woman refused to recognize the authority of the court and was sentenced to fourteen years at the Armagh Prison. While incarcerated, "she refused to do any work, insisted on wearing her own clothes, and demanded her rights as a political prisoner" (Bloom, 2011, p. 80). She also became the leader of the female prisoners and the PIRA's poster woman for opposing British occupation.

Mairéad had been arrested at the worst time for Irish political prisoners. First of all, the British legal system had recently reversed the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" for Irish political prisoners. This meant that now the women were the ones who had to prove their innocence, but since most of them refused (they did not recognize the authority of the court), the conviction rate rose to 94 percent (Bloom, 2011). Secondly, in 1976, the special status for political prisoners was arbitrarily rescinded. The women without it who, like Mairéad, refused to do prison work, were locked in their cells for twenty-three hours each day and deprived of any mental and sensory stimuli. They survived, according to Bloom, through the strong friendship bonds they created with one another. During the men's blanket protests in prison, Mairéad led her companions in a similar uprising, with them refusing to wear their uniforms in hopes of challenging the government's efforts to persecute them and demanding to be treated as prisoners of war and not criminals. In addition to this demonstration of dissent, the woman led the other inmates in a thirteen-month campaign of passive resistance in which they refused to bathe

or use the prison lavatories, and when this protest did not succeed, Mairéad and two other inmates, Mary Doyle and Margaret Nugent, started a hunger strike.

After recounting the terrible conditions to which the women in Armagh Prison were subjected, especially during the strikes, Bloom describes the relationship that the feminist movement had with the women inside the PIRA. The feminists were not supportive of the others' struggles, they looked at them "with suspicion and, at times, contempt" and called them "slaves and dupes of the men" (Bloom, 2011, p. 84). Mairéad was quoted saying: "I am oppressed as a woman, and I am also oppressed as an Irish person. We can only end our oppression as women if we end the oppression of our nation as a whole. I hope I am still alive when the British are driven out. Then, the struggle begins anew" (Radikal, 1992). Her efforts for the freedom of her country were intertwined with the struggle for equality, and this was true for most women in the PIRA ranks. At the same time, most of those women did not consider themselves feminists, firstly because they distrusted the movement but also because they resented the argument that women's rights came first, before revolution or independence. Mairéad told her cellmates: "Everyone tells me I am a feminist. All I know is that I am just as good as others, and that especially means men" (Bloom, 2011, p. 85). It must also be said that, once inside the PIRA, everybody was treated equally, and this is corroborated by the recounts of several women who joined the organization's ranks.

With time, the number of PIRA women increased, but so did the arrests. As Bloom explains, there were "few women interned at Armagh Prison in 1972, more than one hundred in 1976, and more than four hundred by 1982" (Bloom, 2011, p. 87). Many of those arrested were not actually part of the organization but were forced by the police to sign confessions that were often fabricated. Those who were part of the PIRA, though, were considered to be ruthless fighters, at times even more so than their male counterparts. Critics of the time compared them to the harpies, also known as *tricotuses*, the ones that, during the French Revolution, knitted in front of the guillotine and counted their stitches by the severed heads. They did not want the men to accuse them of holding back because of their gender, so they had to fight two wars instead of one. The first one against the

enemy, England, and the second one against the men of their own side, to prove they not only could do everything they did, but they could do it better.

Starting from the 1970s, several teenage women bolstered the ranks of the organization, as many men were killed or jailed. Mairéad's involvement with the PIRA mirrored the evolution of the women inside the organization. Indeed, she started as a young girl, throwing stones at British soldiers and warning the organization that they were coming. She was first a lookout, then a weapon carrier and afterward, she graduated to active service, throwing bombs and planting them at the Conway Hotel when she was nineteen (Hoffman, 2002). Mairéad's experiences in prison not only failed to destroy her spirit and her positivity but also did not deradicalize her. Indeed, after her release, she returned to active service and started planning more missions. After the Remembrance Day bombing, that took place in 1987 in Enniskillen, during which eleven people died and sixty-three were injured, it became a priority for the British security services to prevent another attack and kill the most famous female operative in the PIRA. Mairéad was shot dead in Gibraltar on March 6, 1988, alongside two other members of the organization, Danny McCann and Sean Savage. As Bloom states, her murder remains controversial since there is "little doubt that the three Irish Republicans were unarmed" (Bloom, 2011, p. 92).

Once the recount of Mairéad's life ended, Bloom came back to Siobhan, the "pregnant bomber". She draws parallels between the two women's lives and describes her radicalization process, which was influenced by her life experiences. Mairéad was also Siobhan's mentor and later her friend, so her death was a great source of pain for the woman. As Bloom explains, "the assassination of Mairéad Farrell, the subsequent British cover-up, and a perceived pattern of discrimination and human rights abuses suffered all her life led Siobhan to board the airport bus that day to carry out her mission" (Bloom, 2011, p. 94). This passage is fundamental because it helps understand the motives behind a terrorist action.

Another important point Bloom wants to make is the transformative value that prison had for both Mairéad and Siobhan. Indeed, neither woman regretted her time there

nor talked about it in a resentful way, it "broadened their political horizons and sharpened their ability to recognize violence against women both in the family and as a form of economic exploitation" (Bloom, 2011, p. 96). Siobhan's experiences, though, differed from those of Mairéad since special status had been reinstated, so she was allowed to study, wear her clothes, and receive packages and mail. Most importantly, she was no longer considered an ordinary criminal.

After her release, Siobhan pursued a degree in political science and sociology at Queen's University in Belfast and was active in many student organizations. Later on, she worked for several benevolent organizations and ended up taking a job at the headquarters of Sinn Féin, a political party that strives to end the political partition of the island of Ireland. During an interview with Bloom, she expressed that she felt she was still working for peace and justice for her community, but in a legal way now, making sure that everyone had voting rights, raising community awareness, and helping Sinn Féin win elections. She stated that she did not feel any anger at having spent many years behind bars and repeated several times that "everybody has to forgive in order to move the peace process forward" (Bloom, 2011, p. 97).

The case story of Mairéad and Siobhan allows Bloom to explain the role women played in the PIRA. With examples of discrimination and human rights abuses from those women's lives, the book describes some radicalization factors that push them into the arms of terrorism. Bloom states that one common assumption people make is that women are inherently nonviolent, and even when they are implicated in violence, the tendency is to believe they are pawns of men, despite several cases proving their involvement going as far back as the 1960s. However, part of the challenge in understanding women's motivations to kill depends on whether they joined by coercion or by choice. As the several case studies presented in the book try to show, the distinction is not always clear-cut since coercion can go from subtle community pressure to brute force. Some live in impossible situations and in cultures that value them more when they are dead than when they are alive. They can experience multiple motivations, either simultaneously or sequentially, and might not even know themselves what has led them to act. As Bloom

explains, "reality is often a complicated mix of personal, political, and religious factors that are sparked at different times by different stimuli" (Bloom, 2011, p. 235).

In the last chapter, *The Four Rs Plus One*, Bloom describes her model, which clarifies the motivators of women's involvement with terrorist groups. She states that women, across many conflicts and in several different terrorist groups, tend to be pushed forward by one or several of the Rs: *revenge, redemption, relationship,* and *respect*. *Revenge* for the death of a close relative is the most often cited factor that pushes a woman into getting involved in a terrorist organization. *Redemption* for past sins is another strong determinant. There are reports of some recruiters' activities to push women into joining a terrorist crusade, in which they literally seduced them into a suicide operation. For a woman caught up in a romantic relationship, martyrdom can be an attractive option if the affair is illicit or considered scandalous by her family or society. To solidify her claim, Bloom cites *The Path to Paradise* (Berko, 2007), in which the Israeli criminologist Anat Berko claims that a woman's act of martyrdom washes away her sins. A particularly important R is *Relationship*. Indeed, "the best single predictor that a woman will engage in terrorist violence is her relationship with a known insurgent or jihadi" (Bloom, 2011, p. 235). The family member provides entry into the organization and vouches for the woman's reliability. In some groups, family ties are used deliberately to construct a unified network. The last R is *Respect*, even if, the author argues, is usually in conjunction with other motives. Anyways, it is a strong motivator of action because, when women engage in violence and demonstrate they are as committed to the cause as the men, they become heroes and role models. They achieve the fame and glory they could not have achieved in any other way in their lives. In fact, "it is a powerful pull factor for a young woman to want to do something great with her life, especially if the life she leads is difficult or, worse, a source of pain and fear" (Bloom, 2011, p. 236). These elements can also apply to men, even though they have more opportunities to achieve recognition in life. In the end, Bloom adds another R to the model: *Rape*. She explains that there has been an increase in women's sexual exploitation, which can be seen especially in Iraq and Chechnya, where it has been used to coerce women to participate in combat. Rape works similarly to redemption, but while women who have done something of their own free

will of which they are not proud might want to seek redemption, those who have been raped are involuntary recruits. They have no other choice.

It must be said that there are several differences between regions such as Northern Ireland, Chechnya, and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, so it is hard to explain a phenomenon that is terrorist women in general. In most cases, it is true that those who join a terrorist organization are not the poorest or least educated members of society. In some groups, the operatives are better educated and better off financially than the average person in their State. In such cases, sending money and resources, encouraging education, and alleviating poverty might not greatly impact the violence. Moreover, an occupation by a foreign military force does play a part in radicalizing the population, yet several people are engaged in terrorism without foreign troops on their territory. As Bloom explains, "for there to be terrorism, both motive and opportunity are necessary" (Bloom, 2011, p. 237). So, even if the presence of foreign troops might provide an opportunity (also known as targets), there needs to be individual motivators, which remain complex.

In the end, according to Bloom, women's involvement in terrorist organizations has not helped solve the gender equality issue. Even in groups in which women are 30 to 60 percent of the bombers, they rarely play a leadership role. They tend to become necessary when men are incapacitated, but they are mostly used as an expedient. As long as their lives are not valued as much as their deaths, women's participation in violence will not create new opportunities but can only hurt society. Bloom suggested as a counterstrategy to the four Rs plus one the three Ds: *delegitimize*, *deglamorize*, and *demobilize*. This strategy entails showing what involvement in terrorism is actually like and undermining its bases. The first step is to *delegitimize* violence by showing that it is not sanctioned by the Qur'an nor by the Hadiths, challenging the involvement in terrorism at the level of image and undermining its attractiveness. The next step is *deglamorizing* terrorists. According to the director of the International Center for the Study of Terrorism, John Horgan, there is no shortage of ex-terrorists who can help in this endeavor, showing what the terrorist lifestyle is really like.

Moreover, it is important to show the futility of terrorism since it rarely (if ever) obtains its goals, whereas negotiation and reconciliation have a significantly better track record. Mostly, there need to be paths for women to exit terrorist organizations. Few of the existing deradicalization programs are suited for women or children. There is a need to *demobilize* women so they no longer shoot, kill, or bomb, but since many are more radical than men and some are true believers, it can be difficult to change their minds. Bloom believes that "by eliminating the immediate source of violence from the community while simultaneously undermining its very legitimacy, we might finally break the cycle of violence" (Bloom, 2011, p. 248).

An example of this is an Indonesian organization led by the Muslim women's rights activist Lily Zakiyah Munir, which set up several Islamic schools for girls. There, the girls not only learn the Qur'an but also the positive things it says about women. Moreover, they are taught useful skills such as English, mathematics, and computer science. They are learning Islam in a way that nobody can manipulate to convince them of something, and, at the same time, they are gaining the skills they will need to be successful in the future. In this way, they can achieve greatness in life, not only in death. Some of the women described by Bloom, like Siobhan, have shown that a "peaceful transition is possible and that they can make a positive contribution to the future instead of being the shells for the bombs that they carry for men" (Bloom, 2011, p. 249).

1.2 Anne Speckhard

Anne Speckhard is a prominent psychologist and researcher specializing in the fields of terrorism, radicalization, and extremism. Her work encompasses understanding the psychological and social factors that influence individuals to join extremist groups, as well as developing strategies for counterterrorism and prevention. Speckhard holds a Ph.D. in International Psychology from the University of East London. Her doctoral research focused on the psychological motivations and processes of individuals involved in terrorism. She has interviewed over 800 terrorists, violent extremists, their family members, and supporters around the world, and, over the past five years, she has

conducted in-depth psychological interviews with 273 ISIS defectors, returnees, and prisoners, as well as 16 al-Shabaab cadres, family members, and ideologues, studying their trajectories into and out of terrorism, and their experiences inside their terrorist organizations.

She has worked with NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UN Women, the United Nations Countering Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED), the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC), the EU Commission and EU Parliament, and the U.S. Senate & House, Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, Health & Human Services, and the FBI. Speckhard is currently the director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) and has served for over 2 decades as an Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine and as an Affiliate in the Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University.

She has authored and co-authored numerous books, articles, and reports on topics related to terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism. Her publications often highlight the individual and group dynamics that contribute to terrorism, offering insights into recruitment strategies, propaganda tactics, and deradicalization efforts. Speckhard has written several books, including *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers & 'Martyrs'* (Speckhard, 2012), *Undercover Jihadi: Inside the Toronto 18 - Al Qaeda Inspired, Homegrown Terrorism in the West* (Speckhard, 2014), and *Bride of ISIS: One Young Woman's Path into Homegrown Terrorism* (Speckhard, 2015). Much of Speckhard's research involves in-depth interviews with terrorists and extremists from various ideological backgrounds. These studies provide valuable firsthand insights into the personal narratives and psychological profiles of individuals involved in violent extremism.

An important publication for this thesis is *The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists* (Speckhard, 2008). The article is based on the author's research interviews with terrorists, their families, associates, hostages, senders, and sympathizers, as well as data

from experts and other open-source materials. It begins with a recount of the phenomenon of modern-day suicide bombing, which is believed to have started with the 1983 truck bombings in Lebanon. Afterward, Speckhard describes the history of women bombers and the main organizations that started using them, providing several examples, such as Wafa Idris, a first-aid nurse who is believed to be the first Palestinian woman that executed a suicide mission.

The author explains that suicide bombing as a phenomenon originates from a synergy of four levels: personal factors and motivations, socio-political concerns, the group that engages in it, and the ideology that makes it look like a viable method for political change. Since it is a terrorism tactic, it does require an ideology, that can exist independently from religion (for example, in Marxist and non-religious groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)), but its existence is fundamental to connect the personal motivations with the group and the socio-political factors.

In the article, Speckhard states that "female suicide terrorists do not differ significantly from their male counterparts in terms of individual motivations" (Speckhard, 2008, p. 995). She underlines the fact that women do not take part in a suicide mission to further a feminist cause, since "equality in death hardly equates to equality in life" (Speckhard, 2008, p. 1018), and the same differences that exist in conservative societies are reflected in terrorist organizations, meaning that men play leadership roles while women subservient ones. She believes that the main motivator for this type of terrorism is it being a "legitimate pathway to escaping pain, enacting revenge, and expressing societal outrage over injustices, as well as receiving glory in death, and for those who are religious, gaining the rewards of martyrdom in the next life" (Speckhard, 2008, p. 1003).

Their motivations differ mainly on whether they are inside a conflict zone or outside of it. If they are in, they are moved by trauma, revenge, nationalism, and expression of community outrage, otherwise, they are influenced by feelings of alienation, marginalization, negative self-identity, and a desire to act on behalf of those inside conflict zones. Speckhard explains that neither male nor female human bombers

are psychologically abnormal or seriously pathological, even though, especially for those living in conflict zones, they might have been psychologically traumatized and, as a result, can experience dissociation, which might make enacting a suicide mission easier. That being said, she also explains that their actions have several parallels with normal depression and suicide.

Moreover, the author highlights that terrorist groups find it advantageous to use female bombers since they receive more media attention, increased sympathy for the cause, can pass security measures more easily than men, and are more disposable because they rarely are in leadership positions. She gives the example of Palestinian groups, that started using female bombers "when men could no longer pass the checkpoints" (Speckhard, 2008, p. 1017). A particularly interesting analysis that the author does is in the chapter on *Emotional Differences between Men and Women*, in which she draws from her professional psychological background to describe how gender impacts the way one processes traumas. She describes how men and women react to feelings of dissociation, shame, psychological contagion, and moral reasoning. For instance, she explains that women are generally more dissociative in response to traumatic stress than men, and boys who have been traumatized show conduct disorders and hyperactivity in reaction to trauma more often than girls. Speckhard hypothesizes that this could be due to genetic differences or occur as a result of increased societal acceptance of men who act out. She also talks about depression, suicide, and martyrdom ideology, explaining the difficulty in differentiating between "traditional suicide" and "suicide terrorism" in certain individuals (Speckhard, 2008, p. 1016).

In conclusion, the author states that the main difference between men and women when they carry out suicide terrorism is that the latter are more psychologically vulnerable to being radicalized into the extremist role of suicide bombers. This is due to the fact that they are more prone to traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, dissociative disorders, and blocked roles, and they may be more reactive to the loss of familiar and intimate relationships while seeing only one way to avenge the loss. Furthermore, women's radicalization trajectory is generally shorter and the author has found no female senders

of suicide bombers or women in high leadership positions in groups that employ this tactic.

1.3 Karla J. Cunningham

Karla J. Cunningham is an expert in the fields of terrorism, counterterrorism, and political violence, with a specific focus on gender issues. Her academic and professional background includes extensive research on the roles women play in terrorist organizations and how gender dynamics influence these groups. Cunningham's research challenges the traditional narrative that often views women solely as victims or passive supporters in conflict scenarios. She has advised government and international bodies on counterterrorism policies, ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into these strategies. Furthermore, she has published several influential papers and articles that delve into the complex roles women play in terrorist organizations. Her work often emphasizes the importance of understanding these roles to develop more effective counterterrorism strategies.

One of her most notable works is *Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism* (Cunningham, 2003), in which she examines the participation of women in terrorist activities across different regions, highlighting the varying roles and motivations of female terrorists. The paper challenges the traditional view of women as merely passive supporters of terrorism and underlines their active participation in terrorist plots. Cunningham examines the multifaceted roles women play in terrorist organizations, including combatants, recruiters, propagandists, and logistical supporters. The paper then delves into the motivations behind their participation in terrorism, which include ideological commitment, personal grievances, coercion, and a desire for revenge. The author notes that while some join terrorist groups voluntarily, others are coerced or manipulated into participating.

Moreover, the study highlights how the involvement of women in terrorism varies by region. For instance, those in the Middle East may join jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda

or ISIS, while those in South Asia might participate in separatist movements like the LTTE because of cultural, political, and social factors unique to each area. Cunningham provides detailed case studies to illustrate the involvement of women in specific terrorist organizations. These help contextualize the broader trends and highlight the diversity of female participation in terrorism.

The author, by challenging the conventional narrative that women are primarily passive supporters of terrorism, opens up a more nuanced understanding of female participation in these groups. The cross-regional perspective is crucial for understanding the global nature of female participation in terrorism. Moreover, Cunningham's exploration of the various motivations behind women's involvement in terrorist organizations provides valuable insights into the personal and ideological factors driving them to join. This helps to humanize female terrorists, showing them as complex individuals rather than mere stereotypes.

Another important work is surely *Countering Female Terrorism* (Cunningham, 2007). This article focuses on the unique challenges and strategies involved in countering female participation in terrorism, with a focus on three cases: the United States, Israel, and Russia. By providing case studies from different regions and organizations, Cunningham highlights how women's participation in terrorism is shaped by cultural, political, and social factors unique to each area. From this analysis, six counterterrorism deficiencies are identified, which are exploitation, organization, technology, denial and deception, tactical advantages, and culture and ideology. These help to explain why observers fail to anticipate the emergence and scope of female terrorism.

The author highlights that female terrorists present unique challenges for counterterrorism efforts because traditional security measures often overlook the potential threat posed by women, leading to significant security gaps. Women in terrorist organizations can exploit gender stereotypes and societal norms to avoid detection and carry out attacks. The paper goes into detail about the various roles that women play in terrorist organizations, including *operational roles* (e.g. suicide bombers, combatants), *support roles* (e.g. logistics, recruitment), and *symbolic roles* (e.g. propaganda).

Cunningham emphasizes that women's involvement is often multifaceted and context-dependent. The study also explores the diverse motivations behind female participation in terrorism, which include ideological commitment, personal grievances, social and familial pressures, and coercion. Understanding these motivations is crucial for developing targeted interventions to prevent radicalization and recruitment.

Cunningham argues for the need to develop gender-sensitive counterterrorism strategies that specifically address the roles and motivations of female terrorists. Recommendations include improving intelligence and law enforcement capabilities to identify and monitor female terrorists, developing targeted prevention and deradicalization programs, and incorporating gender perspectives into broader counterterrorism policies. The author stresses the importance of integrating gender analysis into all aspects of counterterrorism efforts. This includes recognizing the potential threat posed by female terrorists and addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women in both prevention and response strategies.

The paper is a critical and insightful examination of the overlooked roles of women in terrorism. One of the paper's primary strengths is its focus on the gender blind spots in traditional counterterrorism strategies. By emphasizing the unique challenges posed by female terrorists, Cunningham encourages a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to security.

1.4 Laura Sjoberg

Laura Sjoberg is a British Academy Global professor of Politics and International Relations at the Royal Holloway University of London and Head of the Department of Politics, International Relations, and Philosophy. Her research addresses issues of gender and security, with a particular focus on politically violent women, feminist war theorizing, sexuality in global politics, and political methodology. Her work has been published in more than 50 books and journals in political science, law, gender studies, international relations, and geography. Sjoberg has authored several articles and books, such as

Gender, War, and Conflict (Sjoberg, 2014), *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (Sjoberg, 2016), and *Gender and Civilian Victimization in War* (Sjoberg & Peet, 2019) with Jessica L. Peet. Her recent articles have explored the failure in critical security studies, the characterizations of women in and around the Islamic State, what counts as feminist work in Security Studies, gendered insecurity, and everyday counterterrorism.

A relevant publication for this research is *Gender, War, and Conflict* (Sjoberg, 2014). The book provides an in-depth analysis of the intersection between gender and conflict. The author explores how gender influences and is influenced by war, offering a comprehensive look at how traditional gender roles and norms shape and are shaped by conflict. Sjoberg begins by revisiting Cynthia Enloe's question, published in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Enloe, 1989), in which she asks, regarding the realm of international relations: "Where are the women?". Applying it to terrorism, the author documents the roles that women play in conflicts and wars around the world, such as combatants, organizers, those who provide vital support services, and those who contribute paid and unpaid labor to wartime economies.

The book poses its basis in a theoretical exploration of gender and its role in war. It discusses feminist theories and how they apply to international relations and conflict studies, citing seminal texts from the 1970s and 1980s from authors such as Betty Reardon, Jean Elshtain, and Judith Stiehm. Sjoberg provides historical examples to illustrate how gender has been intertwined with war throughout history, examining the roles of men and women in conflicts and highlighting how they have evolved over time.

The author then delves into the specific experiences of women and men in conflicts, including how women are often portrayed as victims or peacemakers, while men are seen as warriors. She explains that the gender dynamics of war and conflict cannot be understood in terms of a "traditional" gender division of labor and criticizes the mainstream Hollywood representation of the phenomenon, in movies such as Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998), which perpetuate myths of strong and violent male heroes and women who either need to be saved by the heroic male

combatants, or they must wait and weep. Sjoberg challenges these stereotypes by presenting cases where females have taken on combat roles and men have been involved in peacebuilding. The author argues that the representations of war done by the media and in much of the mainstream academic literature within international relations largely perpetuate gender stereotypes and neglect or ignore central aspects of gendered experience in times of conflict, such as male victims of sexual violence. This is the reason why, in the fourth chapter called *Why Men and Women Are Not Enough*, she claims that the study of gender must go beyond the binary concept of 'men' and 'women' and include diverse gender identities and sexualities to incorporate insights from Queer Theory and Transgender Theory.

Several detailed case studies are presented to illustrate the gendered dimensions of specific conflicts. These include conflicts in various regions and contexts, providing a broad perspective on the issue. The author also explores the role of gender in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, arguing that incorporating gender perspectives in these areas can lead to more effective and sustainable peace. The book concludes with a discussion of the implications of its findings for policy and practice. It calls for a more gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution and international relations.

The strength of *Gender, War, and Conflict* (Sjoberg, 2014) lies in its theoretical rigor and the breadth of its case studies. By integrating feminist theories with practical examples, the author effectively demonstrates the importance of considering gender in conflict analysis. One of the key contributions of the book is its challenge to conventional gender roles in the context of war. By highlighting the active roles that women can and do play in conflicts, as well as the contributions of men to peacebuilding, Sjoberg provides a more balanced and accurate portrayal of gender dynamics in war. This has important implications for policy and practice, suggesting that more inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution could lead to better outcomes.

1.5 Jessica Davis

Jessica Davis is an international expert on terrorism and its illicit financing. She is President and Principal Consultant of Insight Threat Intelligence, and also President of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies. Davis began her career in intelligence analysis with the Canadian Military, then transitioned to a policy role at Global Affairs Canada before becoming a team leader with the State's financial intelligence unit, FINTRAC. Her last role inside government institutions was as senior strategic analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where she was responsible for threat financing and managing the Indicators of Mobilization to Violence project. Davis is currently working to bring evidence-based solutions to the private and public sectors to counter illicit financing and terrorism. She is the author of *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberations Wars to Global Terrorism and the Islamic State* (Davis, 2017), and *Illicit Money: Terrorist Financing in the 21st Century* (Davis, 2021).

Her most important publication on female terrorism is surely *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberations Wars to Global Terrorism and the Islamic State* (Davis, 2017). The book explores the multifaceted roles of women in various terrorist organizations throughout contemporary history. Davis delves into the motivations, functions, and impacts of female terrorists, challenging the traditional perceptions that predominantly portray them as passive supporters rather than active participants.

The book traces the involvement of women in terrorism from early liberation movements to modern jihadist groups. Davis examines the participation of women in nationalist and separatist movements, such as the LTTE and the IRA. The author identifies a range of motivations driving women to join terrorist groups, including political, ideological, personal, and socio-economic factors. Moreover, she believes that some women are drawn to the cause due to personal grievances or a desire for revenge, while others are motivated by ideological commitment or coercion.

Women in terrorist organizations assume various roles, from combatants and recruiters to propagandists and logisticians. Davis highlights notable examples of female terrorists who have risen to prominent positions within their groups. The book also

provides detailed case studies of female terrorists in groups like Al-Qaeda, Al Shaabab, Hezbollah, ISIS, and Boko Haram, which help the author prove that women's inclusion in those terrorist organizations is largely a pragmatic choice by the group. These case studies also illustrate the diverse ways in which women contribute to the operational and strategic goals of these organizations, challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Davis then discusses these implications for security and counter-terrorism strategies.

By shedding light on the active and varied roles women play in terrorist organizations, the author goes against the conventional narrative that tends to marginalize or underestimate their involvement. Her nuanced approach to analyzing the motivations and contributions of female terrorists provides valuable insights for policymakers and security professionals. The book's strength lies in its thorough research and detailed case studies, which bring a humanizing perspective to the complex issue of women in terrorism.

1.6 Cindy D. Ness

Cindy D. Ness is a renowned scholar in the fields of gender, political violence, and terrorism. Her work focuses on understanding the roles women play in violent movements and the sociopolitical dynamics of terrorism. She investigates how gender influences participation in violent movements and how these roles challenge traditional gender norms. Ness's work has had a profound impact on the study of gender and political violence. Her research has gone against mainstream views of women as passive victims in conflicts, highlighting their active participation and strategic importance in violent movements.

Ness has authored several influential publications, and she is the editor of *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization* (Ness, 2008). The book explores the motivations, roles, and impacts of female terrorists and militants, offering a comprehensive analysis of their involvement in violent movements. The objective is to

examine the structuring conditions that influence a woman's decision to commit violence and to understand the level of political agency that a female terrorist has. Several of the articles present in the book are based on research where authors had direct contact with female militants or with witnesses. Some chapters worth mentioning are the one by Karla Cunningham, *The Evolving Participation of Muslim Women in Palestine, Chechnya, and the Global Jihadi Movement*, the one by Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, *Black Widows and Beyond: Understanding the Motivations and Life Trajectories of Chechen Female Terrorists*, and the one by Anat Berko and Edna Erez, *Martyrs or Murderers? Victims or Victimizers? The Voices of Would Be Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers*.

This work shows a multidisciplinary perspective, incorporating insights from sociology, political science, and gender studies. It challenges the notion that women in terrorist and militant organizations are merely passive victims or coerced participants, emphasizing their agency and highlighting the fact that many women join these groups voluntarily, driven by ideological, political, or personal motivations. Female militants often seek empowerment, adventure, or a sense of purpose, and their involvement can be seen as a form of resistance against traditional gender roles and societal constraints. Moreover, it underlines the fact that women bring unique advantages to terrorist and militant organizations, since, for instance, they can exploit societal gender norms to evade detection and carry out attacks more effectively. Female operatives are often used in high-profile suicide bombings and recruitment drives, leveraging their perceived innocence and the shock value of their participation to gain media attention and propagate their causes.

The book explores how different organizations incorporate women into their ranks and the various roles they assign to them. These roles range from combatants and suicide bombers to recruiters, propagandists, and logisticians. Organizational dynamics, such as the group's ideology, strategic needs, and cultural context, significantly influence the extent and nature of female participation. Through detailed case studies, the book provides a nuanced understanding of female participation in diverse contexts, including groups like the LTTE, Hamas, and Al-Qaeda. These case studies illustrate the varied experiences of female militants and the specific factors that drive their involvement in

different regions and organizations. Overall, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization* (Ness, 2008) is an important contribution to the study of terrorism. Ness's work enhances our understanding of the complex roles and motivations of female militants and underscores the need for gender-sensitive approaches in addressing political violence.

Another important work, especially for this research, is *In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism* (Ness, 2005), which analyzes why women are more likely to become involved with secular terrorist organizations rather than religious ones. The article begins by offering a brief history of women's involvement in modern terrorism and an analysis of the different ideological mindsets that operate to align female terrorists more with ethno-separatist groups rather than religious groups, accounting for the fact that the trend shows unmistakable signs of change. This development is accomplished, in part, through the attempts that religious terrorist groups make to legitimize the concept of martyrdom for women and girls.

The author's thesis is that secular and religious groups, even if with different world-building rhetorics, one focused on creating a more traditional world while the other more modern, share many rhetorical strategies to justify women engaging in political violence, especially the rhetoric of martyrdom. The article underlines the fact that both groups, "while sanctioning a deviation from proper gender roles, leave intact the traditional understanding of what proper gender roles in normal times should be" (Ness, 2005, p. 368). The reproduction of normative gender values is fundamental to sustaining popular support for the culture of female martyrdom. Ness explains her attention to martyrdom and female suicide bombing because "it constitutes a distinct expression of female militancy, in that females transgress gender norms, not only by taking life, but also by embracing their own death, and in the process, counter existing core symbolic structures delimiting gender while at the same time creating new ones" (Ness, 2005, p. 354).

This article uses the Sri Lankan nationalist-based Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a secular example and Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as the religious

ones. The LTTE are taken as a case study because women, in that organization, have been consciously integrated into the group's philosophy and have been key figures in carrying out its suicide missions. On the other hand, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad are used as the religious example because, since they shifted their position on women martyrs (after several Palestinian women, backed by the more secular Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, blew themselves up), they presented a unique opportunity to observe the process of legitimizing female participation.

Ness concludes that to make female suicide terrorism acceptable for a large cultural group, secular and religious terrorists redraw female suicide bombing in three ways: rationalizing it as "desperate measures for desperate times" (Ness, 2005, p. 368); historicizing it in the context of female militants who came before them; and justifying it by making the female suicide bomber as an inspiration due to her beauty, brilliance, or piety, so that "the deed and she become transcendent and any contingency associated with her being female is relegated to the background" (Ness, 2005, p. 368). Reframing this act is necessary because women who enter into armed resistance represent a challenge to the social order, and they need to be "rhetorically repackaged before they can be accepted" (Ness, 2005, p. 355).

1.7 Meredith Loken

Another important academic is Meredith Loken, known for her contributions to the fields of international relations, political violence, and gender studies. Loken is a professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she teaches and conducts research in the Department of Political Science. She focuses on understanding the dynamics of violence, particularly how gender influences conflicts. She investigates how gender norms and roles impact the participation of individuals in violent political movements and the broader implications for conflict and security studies.

She wrote several important works, such as *Rethinking Rape: The Role of Women in Wartime Violence* (Loken, 2017), in which she challenges conventional narratives

about the roles of women in wartime, emphasizing that they are not only victims but can also be perpetrators and active participants in the conflict. The article starts by explaining that many scholars and international organizations believe that the inclusion of women in terrorist organizations discourages wartime rape, thus they advocate for increased participation of women in armed groups to combat rape and other forms of civilian violence. Loken, using an original dataset of women's involvement as combatants in civil wars from 1980 to 2009, argues that their participation has actually no significant impact in constraining a group's propensity to rape. This is because organizational factors, primarily culture, drive violence in armed factions and encourage conformity without regard for individual characteristics. She explains that advocating for further militarization of women to reduce conflict-related rape may be an ineffective policy prescription.

One of her most interesting research is *Introducing the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) project, 1946–2015* (Loken & Matfess, 2023) with Hilary Matfess. The article introduces the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) Project, which is a multi-methods research project aimed at documenting and analyzing women's roles in armed fights. The dataset measures women's participation in more than 370 rebel organizations fighting in civil conflicts between 1946 and 2015 and features 22 measures. It estimates women's prevalence and presence along three dimensions: *fighting on the front line*, *performing auxiliary tasks*, and *occupying leadership positions*.

According to the authors, women most often participate in non-combat roles, such as medics, spies, weapons smugglers, planners, administrators, recruiters, mobilizers, radio or weapons operators, and guards. They also work prominently as fundraisers, recruiters, educators, and propagandists. For these reasons, many organizations, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, create women's auxiliary organizations to support front-line engagements or to advance political agendas. Loken and Matfess identify and assess three, non-mutually exclusive, categories of auxiliary support: clandestine operations, outreach to civilians, and logistical support.

Regarding front-line roles, the authors describe them as "those where participants engage in combat in support of the organization or circumstances in which women undergo weapons and military training" (Loken & Matfess, 2023, p. 490). Some rebel groups have a high presence of front-line women fighters, such as Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation in the 1990s, in which is estimated that 30 percent of fighters were women, while others have a limited or sporadic female front-line participation, as in the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, where women very rarely participate in combat.

For what concerns leadership roles, they are defined as when women "exercise direct control and provide oversight of other participants and/or exercise direct control over the strategy, policies and/or ideology of the group" (Loken & Matfess, 2023, p. 490), and are differentiated between military and non-military positions. The authors provide examples such as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, in which women held an estimated 20% of military leadership positions.

According to the dataset, women's participation in non-combat roles is verified in 59% of the organizations taken into consideration, and 53% and 45% of groups include them, respectively, in front-line and leadership roles. Loken and Matfess thus argue that "in a substantial proportion of organizations, women provide crucial infrastructure and participate in military and political decision-making" (Loken & Matfess, 2023, p. 494).

This research is innovative because it contains not only measures of front-line participation but also non-combat and leadership roles. It includes novel measures of all-female units associated with rebel groups and disaggregated measures of participation type. Moreover, it contains a broader prevalence scale than previous data collection efforts, capturing important variations in rebel groups' employment of women. Lastly, the qualitative part of the dataset provides comprehensive information about women's participation in more than 370 rebel groups.

1.8 Nimmi Gowrinathan

Nimmi Gowrinathan is a renowned scholar, writer, and activist known for her work on gender, political violence, and conflict. Her career spans academia, activism, and media, where she explores the intersections of identity, violence, and resistance. Gowrinathan holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her dissertation focused on female fighters in armed conflicts, laying the groundwork for her future research on gender and political violence. Gowrinathan investigates the experiences of women in conflict zones, particularly focusing on female combatants and the broader sociopolitical dynamics that influence their participation in violence. She is a Professor at the City College of New York, where she created *Beyond Identity: A Gendered Platform for Scholar-Activists*, a program that seeks to train immigrants and students of color in identity-driven research, political writing, and activism through the understanding of structural violence. Gowrinathan has been an analyst and policy consultant on women's political voice and participation in violence in South Asia for the International Crisis Group, UN Women, and the Asian Development Bank.

She has published numerous articles and essays in academic journals and mainstream media. She wrote for *The Female Fighter series* in the Guernica magazine, which pairs female writers with women who are fighting or have fought, in armed resistance movements worldwide to show their distinctive personalities, politics, and circumstances of participation. Her piece, *Of Monsters & Women* (Gowrinathan, 2017) is particularly notable for its in-depth exploration of the lives of female combatants and for highlighting the difficulties many scholars and analysts face in understanding "the Monster", or the female terrorist. In it, she describes the metaphorical dissection of a female recruit to extremism and the superficial analysis the experts do of what lies in her brain first and then her heart, concluding that "the Monster exists, somewhere between fantasy and fear" (Gowrinathan, 2017).

Her major publication can be considered *Radicalizing Her: Why Women Choose Violence* (Gowrinathan, 2022), in which she examines the reasons why women choose to participate in violent movements, drawing on extensive field research in conflict zones.

Gowrinathan spent nearly twenty years in conversation with female fighters in Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Pakistan, and Colombia, and through her findings she explains the personal, political, and social factors that drive them to radicalization.

She begins by challenging the conventional stereotypes that portray female militants either as passive victims, weak-willed wives, prey to Stockholm Syndrome, or inherently deviant. She argues that these simplistic views fail to capture the complex realities of women's involvement in violence, and she provides a potent alternative image, describing the female fighter as deliberate and politically self-aware, with personal agency and diverse reasons behind her actions. The book explores a range of motivations that drive women to violence, including ideological commitment, personal grievances, social and familial pressures, and a desire for empowerment or revenge. Gowrinathan illustrates their deep intertwinement with the sociopolitical contexts in which women live, including experiences of oppression, marginalization, and violence.

The book is organized into two parts, each with three sections. Part one, *Sites of Struggle*, includes chapters on the battlefield, the stage, and the streets. Part two, *The Battlefield*, is structured around three lines of defense: first, second, and third. Throughout this work, conversations with female fighters appear alongside Gowrinathan's analysis, highlighting common themes including political agency, survival, and frustration with how conflict-affected States, Western governments, and international organizations view women combatants.

A significant strength of the book is its use of personal narratives. Gowrinathan presents detailed stories of women from various conflict zones, providing a humanizing and in-depth look at their journeys toward radicalization. These narratives highlight the individuality of each woman's experience, countering the tendency to view female militants as a monolithic group. Their stories are centered in the Global South, a factor that allows the author to criticize the Western response to the female fighter, revealing the varied forces that drive women into battle and the personal and political elements of these decisions.

Gowrinathan puts forward two main arguments. Firstly, she believes that women fighters should be taken seriously as political agents rationally choosing violence. Secondly, she argues that women's motivations to fight are rooted in the layers of violence they experience. She positions State violence against women and their communities as the most encompassing form of violence, with communal and family violence as more proximate underlying layers.

Gowrinathan also examines how identity plays a crucial role in the radicalization process. She discusses factors such as ethnicity, religion, and gender and the way they intersect to shape women's experiences and decisions to engage in violence. Furthermore, the book explores how these identities are transformed through their involvement in militant movements, often leading to a redefinition of their roles and self-perceptions. The book then delves into the dynamics within militant organizations, exploring how these groups recruit, utilize, and treat female members. Gowrinathan discusses how organizations exploit gender norms to achieve their strategic goals. She also highlights the challenges women face within these groups, including issues of agency, autonomy, and exploitation. The book's intersectional perspective, considering factors such as ethnicity, religion, and gender, enriches the analysis and provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

1.9 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin

Fionnuala Ní Aoláin is a distinguished legal scholar, professor, and human rights advocate known for her expertise in international law, human rights, and counterterrorism. She has made significant contributions to the understanding of the legal and ethical dimensions of conflict, peacebuilding, and gender. Ní Aoláin received her Ph.D. in Law from the Queen's University of Belfast. Her research covers a wide range of topics within international law, including human rights, the law of armed conflict, transitional justice, and the intersections of gender and conflict. In 2017, Ní Aoláin was appointed as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism. In this role, she has been a vocal advocate for ensuring that counterterrorism measures comply with

international human rights standards and that they do not disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups.

She wrote *The Politics of Force: Conflict Management and State Violence in Northern Ireland* (Ní Aoláin, 2000), which analyzes the use of State violence and the management of conflict in Northern Ireland. Ní Aoláin provides a detailed examination of the legal and political strategies employed by the State and their impact on human rights. This book is, so far, the sole substantial study on the use of force and targeted killing done by the United Kingdom during the Northern Ireland conflict. In several cases, the State claimed that those killed were members of paramilitary or terrorist organizations and that the force was justified under domestic criminal law.

The focus of this work is the 351 deaths caused by agents of the State between 1969 and 1994. For each death, a case file was opened with thirty-five descriptive categories collected in three data sets. The first one regarded *personal information* on the victim, such as age, sex, and religious and political affiliation. The second theme summarized the *context*, so the geographical location of the killing and the circumstances (vehicle pursuit, riot, whether the victim was armed, the nature of the fatal wound). The last one related to the *nature of any legal proceedings* that followed the incident, like a coroner's inquest, a wrongful death claim, or prosecution of the State agent. An interesting finding that comes out from this analysis is that a third of the people killed by security forces in roadblock operations were uninvolved civilians. This volume is the first to rely on empirical data to justify the claim that there was a "Shoot to Kill" policy in Northern Ireland. Ní Aoláin argues that there were no effective domestic or international legal restraints on government authorities' use of deadly force.

For this research's purposes, some space must be given to her publication *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process* (Ní Aoláin, 2011). This book, co-authored with Dina Francesca Haynes and Naomi Cahn, examines the role of gender in conflict and post-conflict settings. It explores how women and men experience war differently and the implications for peacebuilding and justice, stating that women are uniquely affected by war, from being victims of sexual violence to playing crucial roles

in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. The title alludes to the fact that women's bodies are often on the frontline of military strategy and targeting, and their social networks and spaces are also frontline targets for destruction and undoing. The authors provide examples from multiple jurisdictions to indicate that the formal end of hostilities between generally male combatants often has little effect on the quality of life for women as they remain vulnerable despite paper agreements between "elite actors".

This publication argues for a more inclusive approach to post-conflict reconstruction that takes gender into account, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive policies and practices. The book also discusses legal frameworks and international norms related to women's rights in conflict and post-conflict settings. It challenges conventional narratives that portray women solely as victims of war and highlights their roles as agents of change and resilience in rebuilding societies shattered by conflict.

The authors explain that, nowadays, in several post-conflict settings such as the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Colombia, and Northern Ireland, advocates for women's rights have focused on bringing issues of sexual violence, discrimination, and exclusion into the peace-making process. They assess the extent to which bringing these problems forward and creating policies to face them has had success in improving women's lives. The result of this analysis is that there has not been considerable progress; this is in part a product of a focus on schematic policies like straightforward political incorporation rather than a broader and deeper attempt to alter the cultures and societies that are at the root of much of the violence and exclusions experienced by women.

Moreover, the book examines the efforts of transnational organizations, States, and civil society in multiple jurisdictions to place gender at the forefront of all post-conflict processes. It offers concrete analysis and practical solutions to ensure that gender acquires a central position in all aspects of peacemaking and peace enforcement.

1.10 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a prominent Palestinian feminist scholar, researcher, and activist renowned for her work in the fields of human rights, gender studies, and critical criminology. Her academic contributions focus on issues such as settler colonialism, State violence, gender-based violence, and the impact of militarization on Palestinian society. Shalhoub-Kevorkian holds a Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she specialized in criminology and human rights. She is currently a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Faculty of Law and School of Social Work and Public Policy.

Her research examines the impact of Israeli occupation and militarization on Palestinian families and communities, particularly focusing on the experiences of women and children. She explores issues such as State violence, trauma, resilience, and the ways in which these intersect with gender dynamics. Shalhoub-Kevorkian has authored numerous books, scholarly articles, and chapters in publications that critically analyze the intersections of gender, violence, and colonialism. Her work highlights the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, challenging dominant narratives and advocating for social justice.

An important book by Shalhoub-Kevorkian is *Militarization and Violence against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case Study* (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). It explores the impact of militarization on Palestinian women's lives and critically examines how Israeli military occupation shapes patterns of violence against them. This work goes in contrast with a classic Western media depiction of women in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian Territories as silenced, defeated, powerless, or terrorists, and portrays them as fighters, political prisoners, activists, mothers, educators, and especially frontliners, "for they always incur the first wave of violence as well as the final one" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009, p. 4). Palestinian women's reactions to the complexity of occupation, war, and victimization are recounted in terms of the strategies they develop to survive what Shalhoub-Kevorkian describes as "the ordeal". The author depicts women whose lives are ruined by checkpoints, the Separation Wall, daily humiliations, displacement, unemployment, violence, and death, and she asks: "How can

I ensure that everyone will remember" the suffering of the "colonized, raced, classed and sexualized"? (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009, p. 208).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian analyzes stories gathered from women in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem during fieldwork completed between 1999 and 2007. She combines a feminist genealogist approach with research methods that include in-depth interviews, observations, clinical examinations, and focus groups. The book explores various forms of violence experienced by Palestinian women, including *direct violence* perpetrated by military forces, *structural violence* embedded in policies of occupation, and *cultural violence* manifested in societal norms and practices. Shalhoub-Kevorkian critically analyzes how these forms of violence intersect to create a pervasive environment of insecurity and trauma for Palestinian women and their communities. Central themes in the book include the role of militarization in shaping gendered experiences of violence, the resilience and resistance strategies employed by those women, and the implications for human rights and justice in conflict zones. Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that militarization not only exacerbates vulnerabilities and challenges faced by Palestinian women but also serves as a mechanism of control and domination over the Palestinian population. Her research is meticulously detailed and empathetic, giving voice to the stories and struggles of Palestinian women who navigate daily life amidst pervasive violence and oppression.

Through the usage of personal recounts, Shalhoub-Kevorkian illustrates how women are transformed into physical and theoretical weapons. She highlights how they are both oversexualized and desexualized by the Palestinian community and the Israeli occupation forces to meet their needs of maintaining a form of hegemonic masculinity. The author describes how women's bodies are used as shelter and shield by their male counterparts, to avoid emasculation. Shalhoub-Kevorkian uses several examples of personal recounts to get her point across, like the story of Nawal, who cannot work to support her family because her father does not want the community to feel sorry for him, or Manal, who is forbidden from crying over her demolished home so her husband does not have to give into his own painful emotions, or Faizeh, who endures humiliation at a checkpoint from both Israeli soldiers and young Palestinian men, or May, who is asked

by her father to buy his cigarettes so that he is not humiliated by the Israeli forces when he leaves the house. These examples solidify the author's claim that women's bodies remain contested sites, used by both the occupiers and their community. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's advocacy for social justice and human rights is evident throughout the book. She calls for international accountability, solidarity with Palestinian women, and policy interventions that prioritize the protection and empowerment of marginalized communities in conflict zones.

CHAPTER II

Phenomenological Sociology:
Everyday Life and Routine

This chapter delves into the phenomenological dimensions of everyday life and routines, exploring their temporal and spatial structures, their role in constructing identity and agency, and their function as both enablers and constraints of social life. By examining how language, typifications, and institutional frameworks sustain routines, this work seeks to shed light on the nuanced processes through which individuals and societies co-create the fabric of everyday existence, underlining the significance of the ordinary as a site of meaning-making.

Since the objective of this thesis is to understand female terrorists, there needs to be a study of their daily lives, which offers valuable insights into their motivations, behaviors, social contexts, and the broader processes that lead them to engage in acts of political violence. The best way to do so is through one of the main contemporary sociological theories, phenomenological sociology, focusing on the concepts of everyday life and routine, which provide the context and structure through which individuals make sense of their world and engage with social reality.

Before looking at the lives of female terrorists through phenomenological lenses, a solid theoretical background is needed. Phenomenological sociology seeks to understand the subjective processes through which people construct and interpret social reality. Since the structure of society is not held up from above but from below, and is based on interactions, this social science is a perfect tool for understanding it. Indeed, even if the human mind is able to perceive different orders of reality, there is only one "paramount reality", which is that of daily life, based on face-to-face relationships. What is important is what is close.

2.1 Everyday life

To understand the importance of everyday life in phenomenological sociology, a good place to start is *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Schutz, 1967) and *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This last book poses its basis on two fundamental concepts: reality and knowledge. As explained by Alessandro Orsini in *Sociological Theory: From Comte to Postcolonialism*, "reality is everything that happens around us, and we cannot eliminate it with an act of the will; knowledge is the certainty that reality exists" (Orsini, 2024, p. 496). According to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the human mind perceives different spheres of reality, and everyday life is regarded as the "paramount reality", a realm that dominates other spheres of experience like dreams, imagination, or theoretical thought, because it is made of pragmatic needs imposed by face-to-face encounters (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). While people can visit other realities, for example by watching a movie, they are always brought back to everyday life (once the movie ends).

Alfred Schutz, from which Berger and Luckmann derived much inspiration, emphasizes that "everyday life" is the domain of practical engagement, where individuals confront and solve immediate problems. This realm is characterized by its immediacy, practicality, and shared nature (Schutz, 1967). An example of the paramount nature of everyday life is the routine act of shopping for groceries. When a shopper selects items, engages with the cashier, and follows societal norms, they rely on shared understandings that make the experience coherent and predictable. Everyday life is not merely a backdrop but the active stage where human beings continuously negotiate meaning and purpose through their interactions and behaviors. This is based on the idea that "more than rational, the ordinary man [and woman] is reasonable" (Orsini, 2024, p. 490), and they use this reasonableness to solve the practical problems of everyday life.

In the second chapter of *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann refer to Émile Durkheim's objectivism. In his book *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim, 1893), the sociologist discusses how societal structures and norms evolve and take on an independent existence, shaping individual behavior. In essence, Durkheim's

treatment of social facts as external, coercive, and collectively created paved the way for Berger and Luckmann's concept of objectification. They argue that the reality of everyday life appears as "objectified", meaning that people perceive it as external, pre-existing, and independent of their subjective experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This objectification is reinforced through habitual actions and interactions that make social structures appear natural and inevitable. For instance, the objectification of workplace hierarchies allows people to navigate their roles within organizations without questioning the legitimacy of authority structures. Objectification extends to material culture as well. Everyday items like a clock or a smartphone are imbued with specific meanings and functions that transcend their materiality, thus shaping how individuals experience time or communicate. "The temporal structure of everyday life stands before human beings as a factuality with which they must deal and synchronize their projects" (Orsini, 2024, p. 497). This process demonstrates how objects in everyday life are not merely tools but also cultural symbols that guide interaction.

Objectification has significant implications for how individuals relate to the social world. It involves the transformation of subjective human activities into entities that seem to possess an existence independent of the people who created them. For example, economic systems, legal frameworks, and cultural norms appear to operate as external forces, even though they are human-made constructs. This detachment from their origins can lead individuals to perceive these institutions as immutable or "natural".

Furthermore, objectification fosters predictability and order in social interactions. By codifying and institutionalizing certain practices, societies enable individuals to navigate complex social environments with greater ease. However, this process also has a constraining effect. Once objectified, social structures and institutions can become rigid and resistant to change, limiting individual agency and creativity.

2.1.1 Time and Space in Everyday Life

Everyday life is structured by time and space, which provide the framework for human activity. Schutz, in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Schutz, 1967), offers detailed insights into the temporal and spatial dimensions, emphasizing their roles in shaping human experience and interaction.

Time in everyday life is experienced as sequential and linear (Schutz, 1967). This linearity allows individuals to organize actions and expectations within the framework of past, present, and future. Temporal rhythms are established through routines and schedules that bring coherence to daily life. These temporal patterns are not arbitrary but are socially constructed and culturally reinforced (Schutz, 1967). The synchronization of individual activities with societal rhythms, such as a shared understanding of the workweek or public holidays, further underscores the interdependence of personal and collective temporalities.

Moreover, Schutz highlights that "inner time" is a subjective experience, in which individuals perceive time differently depending on their focus and engagement. For instance, moments of intense concentration may make time seem to pass quickly, while periods of waiting or boredom can stretch it. This interplay between objective and subjective time underscores the multifaceted nature of the temporal experience in everyday life (Schutz, 1967). According to Schutz, the concept of time is also socially constructed, since cultural norms dictate how individuals value notions such as punctuality, leisure, or productivity.

Regarding spatial contexts, they shape the behaviors and interactions that occur within them. Physical spaces, such as homes, workplaces, or public areas, carry implicit norms and expectations that guide human activity (Schutz, 1967). These places are typified by their intended purposes, influencing the way individuals act and interact within them. Schutz also emphasizes the symbolic nature of space, that transcends physicality. A classroom, for example, is more than a physical location, it is a site of learning, structured by social expectations of respect and willingness to listen and learn. This symbolic dimension of space reinforces its role in shaping everyday experiences.

Moreover, Schutz explores the relationship between space and proximity in social interactions. Proximity, or the physical closeness of individuals, affects the intimacy and immediacy of communication. Face-to-face conversations are enriched by nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions, which are less accessible in mediated or distant interactions. This spatial dynamic highlights the importance of physical environments in facilitating or constraining social exchanges (Schutz, 1967).

2.1.2 Typifications and Taken-for-Granted Nature

Typifications are generalized mental templates that individuals use to navigate the complexities of social interactions. Schutz explains that they simplify human behavior, enabling individuals to act predictably in familiar situations. These mental shortcuts are crucial in making sense of the social world without requiring constant analysis of every interaction. Schutz's basic idea is Weberian since he believes that empirical reality is pure chaos, which people must order by resorting to typologies (Orsini, 2024). For the sociologist, to classify is to simplify. Typifications also guide behavior in different contexts. For instance, when entering a library, individuals typify the space as one requiring quietness and intellectual engagement, thus shaping their conduct accordingly. In Berger and Luckmann's sociology, "social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 32). Typifications allow people to seamlessly integrate into social settings by adhering to expected norms and behaviors.

Everyday life is also characterized by practical engagement, which is a focus on tasks, goals, and immediate concerns. This pragmatic orientation shapes interactions and decision-making processes. Schutz notes that individuals navigate this realm using "recipes for action" (Schutz, 1944, p. 501), which are predefined guidelines that streamline behavior in familiar contexts. Practical engagement ensures efficiency, allowing individuals to prioritize efforts toward achieving tangible outcomes.

Another defining feature of everyday life is its taken-for-granted quality. Individuals engage with their surroundings and social roles without consciously

questioning them. This is what Schutz describes as "natural attitude", in his own words "the world of everyday life in which one has direct experience of one's fellow men [and women], the world in which I assume that you are seeing the same table I am seeing" (Schutz, 1967, p. 105). It allows people to focus on immediate tasks and goals rather than reflecting on the underlying structures that enable their actions. For example, individuals rarely question the mechanics of language when speaking, they just rely on it as a tool for communication.

This taken-for-grantedness is both a strength and a limitation. While it enables efficiency and cohesion, it can also obscure systemic inequalities or entrenched power dynamics. For instance, workplace routines may perpetuate gender hierarchies or wage disparities that remain unchallenged due to their normalization in everyday life. Moreover, the taken-for-granted nature of everyday life, while fundamental for its stability, also renders it resistant to change. Social movements often seek to disrupt this natural attitude by challenging normalized practices, such as racial segregation or gender discrimination, revealing the constructed nature of these norms and advocating for new routines.

Phenomenological sociologists view everyday life as a primary site for the construction of meaning. Through interactions and experiences, individuals interpret their surroundings and assign significance to their actions. Schutz describes this process as drawing on a "stock of knowledge at hand" (Schutz, 1967, p. 78), a collection of past experiences and cultural understandings that inform present actions. For example, a family dinner may hold different meanings for its participants, shaped by individual perspectives and collective histories.

2.1.3 Interconnection with Identity and Agency

Everyday life is a critical site for the construction of individual and collective identities. Through daily practices, people express their values, preferences, and affiliations. For instance, choices related to clothing, food, or leisure activities reflect personal identity while simultaneously aligning individuals with broader cultural or social groups.

Agency within everyday life manifests in the ability to modify or resist routines. While many aspects of everyday life are shaped by external structures, individuals retain the capacity to reinterpret or challenge these influences. For example, a person might choose to boycott a product due to ethical concerns, thereby asserting their values within the routine act of shopping. Agency also plays a role in the creative reinterpretation of everyday practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through acts of customization or improvisation, people personalize routines, making them more meaningful or enjoyable. This highlights the dynamic interplay between structure and agency in shaping the lived experience of everyday life. Collective agency emerges in everyday life through shared practices that foster solidarity and social change. Grassroots initiatives, such as community gardening or neighborhood clean-ups, show how everyday actions can transform spaces and relationships, challenging the status quo while fostering a sense of shared purpose.

Everyday life is also structured by social roles and norms that guide behavior and interaction. These roles, such as parent, employee, lover, or friend, come with expectations that individuals internalize and enact in their daily lives. Berger and Luckmann emphasize that these roles are institutionalized through routines and interactions, making them appear natural and inevitable. For example, the role of a student is defined by norms such as attending classes, completing assignments, and respecting teachers. These expectations shape the student's daily activities and interactions within the educational institution.

2.1.4 The Dialectical Nature of Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann introduce a dialectical process of social reality construction that rests on three interconnected processes: externalization, objectification, and internalization, which explain how individuals and societies produce, maintain, and experience everyday life as an objective reality.

The process begins with externalization, which Berger and Luckmann describe as an "anthropological necessity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 70). It is the creative act through which individuals project their inner thoughts, intentions, and actions into the external world. By transforming subjective experiences into tangible forms or practices, people shape their environment and create shared meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Externalization is thus the starting point of social reality, expressing human creativity and establishing the groundwork for shared experiences.

As externalized actions are repeated over time, they become habitualized, becoming routines. In the words of Berger and Luckmann: "All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer as that pattern" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 70-71). Habitualization simplifies life by reducing the need for conscious deliberation, thus making behavior predictable and stable. Daily rituals evolve into ingrained practices, fostering consistency and a sense of normalcy. This stage is essential for creating the patterns that underpin social interactions, providing individuals with a stable framework for navigating their world.

As habitualized actions are shared and transmitted across groups and generations, they are formalized into enduring structures through institutionalization. Institutions arise when routines acquire regulatory and normative power, defining roles, rules, and expectations that govern behavior. In the authors' words: "Only at this point does it become possible to speak of a social world at all, in the sense of a comprehensive and given reality confronting the individual in a manner analogous to the reality of the natural world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 77). Furthermore, institutions imply historicity and control (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 72). Reciprocal typifications of actions cannot be

created instantaneously, they are built up in the course of a shared history, of which institutions are the final product. "It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 72). Moreover, institutions control human behavior by setting up "predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 72). This controlling character is inherent in institutionalization as such, before or apart from any form of sanctioning that can be specifically set up to support an institution.

Berger and Luckmann conceive loneliness as a "nightmare" for the human mind (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 119), thus they evaluate institutionalization as an essential good, a "shield against terror" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 119). The authors' reasonings are based on Durkheim's *anomie*[3], a state of social disintegration, which is discussed most prominently in his book *Suicide: a Study in Sociology* (Durkheim, 1897). In his work, the author examines how this concept, which he describes as a condition of normlessness, contributes to higher rates of suicide and crime. Berger and Luckmann, taking inspiration from *anomie*, explain that people are not capable of attributing meaning to their existence with their own will, so, to avoid the horrors of a meaningless life, they must necessarily rely on institutions. In this sense, the concept of institutions becomes a fundamental tool to alleviate fear, and the "nightmare" that the authors describe is the condition in which people cannot figure out the meaning of their existence.

Once institutionalized, these social constructs acquire an independent existence through objectification. At this stage, the constructs take on the appearance of being objective and external to the individuals who created them. They are perceived as "natural" features of the world, detached from their human origins. Objectification stabilizes social structures, making them seem permanent and universal, though they are ultimately human-made. The relationship between the producer (the person) and their product (the social world) is a dialectical one, in which the individual, not isolated but collectively, and the social world interact reciprocally, making externalization and

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[3] Durkheim identifies *anomie* as a situation that arises during periods of significant social or economic upheaval, where traditional norms and values are weakened, leaving individuals without clear guidance or support from the social structure.

objectivation as moments in a continuing logical process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 78).

To solidify their acceptance, social structures undergo legitimation, which provides cognitive or moral justifications for their existence. This is a necessary development because, as institutionalization happens across generations, the new ones pose the issue of compliance since "it is more likely that one will deviate from programs set up for one by others than from programs that one has helped establish oneself" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 80). Thus, institutions must "claim authority over the individual" and their priority must be "consistently maintained over individual temptations at redefinition", by teaching children how to behave and keeping adults in line (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 80). These justifications can take various forms, from traditions and religious beliefs to legal codes and scientific theories. This process gives people an understanding of why things are the way they are and operates at multiple levels, ensuring not only widespread compliance but also a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. At the simplest level, legitimation can take the form of traditions; practices that have "always been done this way" carry a sense of authority through continuity. At a more complex level, it involves codified systems such as laws or religious doctrines that formalize and rationalize social structures. Legitimation is also faced with the necessity to control the chaos that derives from the fact that "all social reality is precarious" and under constant threat of *anomie* terror, which "is actualized whenever the legitimations that obscure the precariousness are threatened or collapse" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 121). This is why legitimation is such an important passage in the construction of social reality.

Finally, the external social world gets brought into one's consciousness through internalization, the process by which individuals absorb and accept these social structures as part of their reality. Through this concept, people come to see social constructs as natural and self-evident, ensuring the perpetuation of the social order. Internalization occurs primarily through socialization, where people learn the norms, values, and expectations of their society. Primary socialization occurs during childhood when individuals first learn to navigate their social environment through interactions with parents, teachers, and peers, transforming them into members of society. Secondary

socialization takes place later in life, with already-socialized individuals as they enter new social contexts, where they acquire additional norms and roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). The former is more important than the latter because it provides the background for all subsequent socializations that the person will encounter throughout their life. Internalization can only occur thanks to the child's identification with the people who are emotionally important to them, which Berger and Luckmann call "significant others", a term taken from George Herbert Mead's theory of the ontogenesis of the self (Mead, 1934). Primary socialization can be said to be complete when Mead's generalized other[4] crystallizes in the child's consciousness. This is a process that involves more than purely cognitive learning because it happens under "circumstances that are highly charged emotionally" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 151). As the authors underline, without such emotional attachment to the significant others the learning process would be much more difficult, if not impossible. The child needs to identify with the significant others for internalization to happen because "the self is a reflected entity", which requires a variety of emotional ways to happen and solidify (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 151). This is not a one-sided, mechanistic process, but entails a dialectic between "identification by others and self-identification, between objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 152). The child cannot choose the people who are important to them since parents and has to make do with what they get, but their presence is fundamental because during this process "the individual not only takes on the roles and attitudes of others but in the same process takes on their world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 152).

Externalization, habitualization, institutionalization, objectification, legitimation, and internalization do not occur in isolation but interact in a cyclical and dynamic manner. Externalization begins the cycle by projecting human subjectivity outward. Habitualization then transforms these actions into stable routines, which institutionalization formalizes into enduring frameworks. Objectification and legitimation

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[4] Mead's concept of the generalized other refers to the internalized set of societal expectations, norms, and values that individuals use to guide their behavior in social interactions. It represents an abstract perspective that allows a person to understand how they are perceived by society as a whole, rather than just by specific individuals. Through socialization, individuals learn to adopt the viewpoints of the broader community, which helps shape their sense of self and their ability to function within a structured social world.

solidify these structures, while internalization ensures their continuity within individuals. This dialectical and cyclical dynamic underscores the co-constructed and ever-evolving nature of social reality, highlighting how everyday life is not a passive experience but an active construction. Each person contributes to its ongoing maintenance and transformation and, in turn, gets shaped by it.

Society must be thus understood as an incessant dialectical process comprising externalization, objectification, and internalization, which should not be conceived as phases of chronological succession since they simultaneously characterize society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 149). However, when applied to the individual, they acquire a temporal dimension, since people are subjects to the passage of time which shapes their interactions and behaviors. Furthermore, human beings are "not born a member of society" but rather, they are born "with a predisposition towards sociality" and are inducted into participating in this societal dialectic through a temporal sequence (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 149). Their entry into society starts with internalization, which happens through socialization, that is the "comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). Berger and Luckmann summarize their theory of reality as a social construction in this way: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 79).

2.2 Routine

Routines are integral to the organization of human life, acting as a foundation for individual behavior, social interaction, and institutional stability. In phenomenological sociology, they are not merely repetitive actions but structured patterns deeply embedded in society, shaping and being shaped by cultural, historical, and situational contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A routine can be defined as a recurring pattern of behavior that members of society and groups perform with minimal conscious thought. By establishing predictability, routines reduce cognitive effort and allow people to focus on novel or complex tasks, anchoring them within their social worlds and contributing to a

sense of stability and normalcy, making them an essential part of the human experience (Schutz, 1945). They emerge from habitual actions and are reinforced by their utility, efficiency, and cultural acceptance. Schutz describes routines as a sort of recipe for action, pre-established guidelines that the members of society rely upon to navigate their social environments (Schutz, 1944, p. 501).

Routines are an essential feature of the *lebenswelt* (lifeworld)[5], a term introduced by Edmund Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1936) and later adapted by Schutz to describe the everyday, taken-for-granted world in which people operate. These routines allow the members of society to navigate social reality by reducing the cognitive load required for every interaction. Schutz posits that routines are sustained through "typifications", the mental categories that help interpret and respond to social contexts predictably (Schutz, 1944). However, they are not purely mechanical. Berger and Luckmann argue that while routines create a sense of stability and order, they also emerge from a dialectical process of externalization, objectification, and internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This means that people actively shape routines through creative actions, even as these routines constrain them.

One key characteristic of routines is their predictability (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 74). Indeed, they provide a structured framework for action, reducing uncertainty in everyday life, and, by automating repetitive actions, they conserve cognitive resources, enabling people to focus on novel or complex tasks. At the heart of routines lies also habitualization, the process by which repeated actions become ingrained and automatic. Habitualization reduces the cognitive load required for decision-making, as individuals no longer need to deliberate over each action (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 70-71).

Language plays a crucial role in maintaining and transmitting routines. As a system of shared symbols and meanings, language allows people to communicate

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[5] Husserl's concept of the "lifeworld" refers to the sphere of everyday life, consisting of pre-reflective, intuitive experiences and common-sense understandings that individuals take for granted. It is the foundation for all human activities and serves as the intuitive and practical grounding of human existence before any scientific or theoretical interpretations

expectations and reinforce patterns of behavior. Berger and Luckmann emphasize that language bridges the temporal and spatial dimensions of social life, enabling routines to persist across generations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This linguistic reinforcement underlines the deep interconnection between communication and the perpetuation of social structures.

Moreover, routines are inherently temporal, structuring time into predictable sequences that provide coherence to daily life. Schutz emphasizes that routines help members of society manage the passage of time by creating rhythms and cycles that align with societal expectations (Schutz, 1944). Additionally, they are not merely linear but can adapt to cyclical and seasonal patterns. Routines are also spatially situated, unfolding within specific physical and social environments. Their spatial dimension underscores a reliance on environmental cues, which signal appropriate actions within particular contexts.

2.2.1 Functions of Routine

Routines provide psychological comfort by offering predictability and reducing uncertainty. Garfinkel, in his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Garfinkel, 1967), highlights that routines ensure social order by making actions intelligible and reliable for others. This stability fosters emotional security, trust, and cooperation within groups and institutions by anchoring members of society in familiar patterns. Routines also contribute to mental health by minimizing decision fatigue. By automating repetitive decisions, they allow to conserve mental energy, which can be redirected toward creative or complex tasks.

Another important role is that of facilitating social interaction and coordination (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 274). Shared routines, such as workplace schedules or family rituals, create common reference points that align individual actions with collective goals. These shared practices ensure that the members of society can work together effectively and harmoniously. Beyond immediate groups, routines also enable large-scale coordination.

National or cultural routines, such as observing public holidays or participating in elections, unite people under shared practices, reinforcing a sense of collective identity.

Berger and Luckmann emphasize the role of routines in the institutionalization of social life. Repeated actions become habitual, and over time, they are codified into social roles and norms. Institutions rely on these routines to maintain stability and efficiency (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 78). For example, healthcare systems depend on routines like triage protocols and patient care procedures to ensure consistent and reliable outcomes. Institutional routines also serve a symbolic function, signaling legitimacy and continuity.

Furthermore, routines are useful to foster resilience by helping members of society and groups adapt to changing circumstances. During crises, maintaining familiar routines can provide a sense of normalcy and continuity, enabling people to cope more effectively with stress and uncertainty. Routines' capacity for adaptation ensures that they remain relevant and effective, even in rapidly evolving environments (Schutz, 1944, p. 501). This adaptability highlights the dynamic interplay between routine and innovation, where established patterns serve as a foundation for creative problem-solving.

2.2.2 Creativity and Resistance

While routines are often associated with rigidity, they also provide a framework for creativity and innovation. Familiarity with established patterns enables members of society to identify inefficiencies or introduce novel elements without disrupting the overall structure (Schutz, 1944, p. 501). For example, researchers adhere to standardized methodologies while challenging assumptions to generate new knowledge. The creative aspect of routines lies in their adaptability. Schutz emphasizes that people, guided by their "natural attitude", employ them to solve practical problems in their lifeworld. This problem-solving often requires innovation within the constraints of existing routines. For instance, when faced with unexpected challenges, the members of society reinterpret their typifications, adjusting their behavior to maintain social order.

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology highlights the implicit creativity in maintaining social norms. Through what he calls the "documentary method of interpretation" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 76), members of society construct a coherent reality by interpreting ambiguous actions in a way that aligns with established routines. This method refers to the practice of treating observed behaviors, interactions, and events as instances or *documents* of an underlying pattern or order (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 35). Individuals assume that their experiences are connected to a larger structure and interpret new situations based on this perceived coherence. Garfinkel describes the process of interpretation as a dynamic and ongoing activity in which individuals actively construct meaning by recognizing patterns in their interactions. When encountering a social situation, people perceive it as part of a broader structure and relate it to their past experiences, allowing them to anticipate and make sense of future occurrences (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 39). This recognition of regularities is essential in shaping how individuals understand and respond to social life. Through the process of typification, individuals categorize behaviors and interactions into generalized patterns based on their socialization and prior knowledge. These typifications serve as interpretive frameworks that guide perception and action, reinforcing the assumption that social reality is structured and coherent (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 42). Interpretation is not limited to static observations but it involves a retrospective-prospective approach in which past actions are reevaluated in light of present experiences, and present actions are shaped by historical understandings (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 44). This process allows individuals to continuously adjust their perceptions and expectations, ensuring that their interpretations remain coherent with their evolving experiences. The documentary method is inherently reflexive, meaning that the act of interpretation itself contributes to shaping social reality. Individuals engage in a continuous cycle of constructing, confirming, and refining their assumptions through interaction (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 47). This reflexivity highlights the fluidity of social structures, as meanings are not fixed but are instead negotiated and reaffirmed in everyday interactions. Through this method, Garfinkel demonstrates that order emerges from individuals' interpretive work, which reveals that social structures are not fixed but are continuously produced through interaction (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 57), and because interpretations evolve, social reality is dynamic rather than static (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 62). This process underscores how people

continuously recreate social order through their everyday interactions, revealing the inherent creativity in the mundane.

Routines can also be sites of resistance, where members of society or groups challenge established norms and practices. Resistance occurs when the taken-for-granted nature of the lifeworld is challenged. Social movements often seek to disrupt entrenched routines to highlight systemic issues and advocate for change. For instance, strikes disrupt workplace routines to draw attention to labor grievances and demand fair treatment. Schutz's phenomenological paradox[6] captures this dynamic: while routines provide stability, they can also become oppressive when people feel constrained by their predictability and perceived inevitability (Schutz, 1962, p. 228). Garfinkel explores this resistance through "breaching experiments", which intentionally disrupt routines to expose the underlying structures of social reality (Garfinkel, 1967). These disruptions reveal how deeply routines are embedded in the lifeworld and the extent to which people resist or adapt to such changes.

The interplay between creativity and resistance is a dialectical process that shapes the evolution of routines. On the one hand, people innovate within routines to address new challenges or achieve personal goals. On the other hand, resistance emerges when these innovations conflict with established norms or when members of society seek to subvert oppressive routines. This tension drives the dynamic transformation of social reality.

2.2.3 The Role of Language in Sustaining Routine

Language[7] is an essential element in the maintenance and navigation of routines, serving as a powerful tool for constructing, reinforcing, and negotiating social order (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). From the perspective of phenomenological sociology, it not

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[6] According to Schutz, phenomenological sociology acknowledges a paradox: it seeks to deconstruct taken-for-granted realities while recognizing their practical necessity for everyday functioning because they help keep fear and anxiety at bay.

[7] For a more in-depth analysis, look at Luckmann, Thomas A. (1975) *Sociology of Language*. Bobbs-Merrill.

only facilitates communication but also embeds typifications and shared meanings into the lifeworld, ensuring stability and predictability in social interactions. Language is indeed fundamental in the lifeworld, acting as a medium through which individuals interpret their experiences and share meanings with others. Husserl's concept of intersubjectivity[8] highlights how shared understandings are established and maintained through language, forming the basis of social cohesion (Husserl, 1936). Language is fundamental for understanding one another, it ensures that one can relate to the other by expressing their subjective experiences and connecting them with other people's interpretations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 51). Through these shared understandings, routines take shape and persist as part of the lifeworld. Because of linguistic interactions, social actors establish and sustain the frameworks that underpin routine activities. In the words of Berger and Luckmann, "everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen [and women]" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 51).

Language functions as a critical mechanism for sustaining routines by embedding shared meanings into everyday practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 53). Routines often involve multiple participants who must align their actions to achieve a shared goal, and language enables this coordination by conveying intentions, clarifying roles, and signaling transitions. Because of its ability to transcend the "here and now", it connects "different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 54). When routines are disrupted, language acts as a tool for restoring order. It also contributes to the institutionalization of routines by embedding normative expectations into linguistic expressions, conferring legitimacy, and reinforcing their persistence over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 82).

Berger and Luckmann emphasize the constitutive power of language in creating and sustaining social reality, defining it as the "most important content and the most important instrument of socialization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 153). Through externalization, individuals articulate their subjective experiences via language, which are then objectified into shared social meanings. Over time, these meanings are internalized

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[8] the idea that all humans can relate to one another's experiences just because they live in the same world.

by individuals, shaping their perceptions and actions within routines. Language is thus a tool to objectify the world, "transforming the *panta rhei* of experience into a cohesive order" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 173).

By embedding shared meanings into routine practices, language ensures the stability and progression of social interactions. This predictability reduces uncertainty, enabling individuals to function effectively within complex social systems. While language stabilizes routines, it also allows for adaptability (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The introduction of new terms or the redefinition of existing ones can modify routines to meet evolving needs. Language is integral to the sustenance of routines within phenomenological sociology, acting as a medium for typification, coordination, and the reinforcement of shared meanings. Its role extends beyond mere communication, shaping the construction, maintenance, and adaptation of social practices.

2.2.4 Breaching the Routine

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology shifts the focus from large-scale institutional processes to the micro-level practices through which members of society create and sustain social order. He wants to understand the "immortality of ordinary society" (Garfinkel, 2002), arguing that routines are not just passive habits but active accomplishments achieved through ongoing efforts to make actions understandable and accountable to others. His breaching experiments are a cornerstone of ethnomethodology. By deliberately disrupting established norms, Garfinkel sheds light on the tacit rules and shared assumptions that underpin social order.

Breaching experiments are deliberate violations of social norms designed to expose the underlying mechanisms of social order (Garfinkel, 1967). Garfinkel aims to challenge what Schutz called the "natural attitude" (Schutz, 1962, p. 44), the unreflective acceptance of social reality as self-evident. By disrupting the flow of everyday life, these experiments reveal the fragility and constructed nature of social norms. For instance, asking nonsensical questions in a formal setting or acting unpredictably in everyday situations reveals how much people rely on routines to maintain social coherence. These

disruptions often result in confusion or frustration, underscoring the critical role of routines in upholding social norms (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 38).

Garfinkel explains his theory through the commonly known "lodger" experiment, in which he asked his students to behave abnormally at home, treating family members as though they were strangers. In four-fifths of the cases, this de-familiarization made parents aggressive toward their children, calling them selfish, bad, crazy, stupid, and rude (Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 47-48). The discomfort, confusion, and aggressiveness elicited by these breaches underscored the unspoken expectations that govern familial interactions, illustrating how deeply ingrained these expectations are and how much effort people exert to maintain them.

Garfinkel's breaching experiments rest on several key methodological principles that reveal the processes sustaining social order. The first one is the disruption of routine, the intentional breaking of norms that highlights the assumptions that usually go unnoticed in everyday interactions. These breaches make the implicit explicit, bringing background expectations into focus. Then Garfinkel observes reactions, which range from confusion to anger, and uses them as data for understanding the emotional and cognitive investments in maintaining social norms. Another important principle is reflexivity. Reflexivity is the continuous adjustment of actions based on context and feedback, "it is not a choice but a characteristic inherent in every human activity" (Orsini, 2024, p. 518). When members of society attempt to restore normalcy, they reveal the constructed nature of social interactions. These efforts demonstrate that maintaining social order is an active, ongoing process. Garfinkel also uses indexicality, the idea that the meaning of actions depends on their context. In routine activities, people rely on contextual cues to interpret behaviors correctly and someone's actions are analyzed based on shared situational understandings, which become evident when these understandings are disrupted. Lastly, the sociologist emphasizes the concept of accountability, the implicit expectation that members of society will act in ways that are understandable and justifiable to others (Orsini, 2024). Accountability is what makes routines durable and resilient, as people continuously reinforce them through their actions and interpretations.

The findings from breaching experiments provide critical insights into the nature of social order and its maintenance. First of all, they prove the fragility of norms which, while robust in their everyday operation, are easily destabilized. The intensity of people's reactions to breaches reflects their foundational role in sustaining social life (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 283). Furthermore, Garfinkel's work reveals the importance of "background expectancies", which Schutz called the "attitude of daily life", the tacit agreements that enable coordination, rarely articulated but vital for social cohesion (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 36). These experiments also highlight the active role people play in creating and maintaining social norms. This agency becomes particularly evident in the reflexive strategies employed to repair breaches. By exposing the constructed nature of social norms, breaching experiments challenge their "reification"[9], the extreme level of objectification in which norms are perceived as fixed and natural. This awareness opens possibilities for questioning and reshaping social practices.

Garfinkel's experiments demonstrate Schutz's typifications in action, showing how people rely on shared categories to make sense of breaches. They also contribute to clarifying Berger and Luckmann's dialectical model by revealing how norms are both constructed and enforced in real time. Furthermore, the focus on reflexivity aligns with Husserl's notion of the lifeworld as an intersubjective reality continually shaped by its participants.

2.3 Interplay Between Everyday Life and Routine

Everyday life and routine are deeply intertwined, with the former providing context for the latter, while routines structure everyday life by creating predictability and order (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 80). This mutual reinforcement ensures that members of society can act with confidence in a world that might otherwise be chaotic, and this cyclical relationship creates a feedback loop where everyday life feeds into routines, which in turn structure the experiences and interactions that define everyday life.

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[9] Berger and Luckmann explain that reification is the "apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products - such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will". Reifcation implies that man is unaware that he is the architect of society: "The reifed world is, by defnition, a dehumanized world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 106).

The interplay between everyday life and routine significantly contributes to the construction of social reality. Schutz, Berger, and Luckmann emphasize that repeated interactions and habitual practices transform individual actions into collective norms and institutions (Schutz, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Over time, these routines gain legitimacy, becoming embedded in the fabric of society. Routines help members of society cope with uncertainties and the awareness of life's fragility by creating a sense of order and purpose (Garfinkel, 1967).

Language serves as a critical medium that connects everyday life and routine. In the phenomenological framework, language not only communicates meaning but also constructs and sustains the shared understandings that underpin routines (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Moreover, it provides the flexibility necessary for routines to adapt to changing contexts. Through language, individuals negotiate adjustments, introduce new elements, or reinterpret existing ones to meet evolving needs. Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality illustrates this process through the aforementioned three interconnected stages. The first one is externalization, in which members of society project their subjective experiences into the social realm using language. By naming and describing actions, they provide structure and coherence to routines. The second stage is objectification. Over time, linguistic expressions solidify into objective realities that become embedded within the social fabric. The last phase is internalization, during which people absorb these objectified meanings, integrating them into their perceptions and behaviors. Language ensures that routines are internalized as natural and self-evident aspects of everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This linguistic interplay enables routines to persist across time and space, maintaining their relevance within the lifeworld while accommodating contextual variations.

Phenomenological sociology highlights the reflexive nature of routines, where individuals both shape and are shaped by them. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology illustrates this reflexivity through accountability, the process by which individuals make their actions understandable within a shared social context. When routines are disrupted, individuals reflexively work to restore order, often drawing on language to reestablish shared understandings (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 42). Additionally, accountability enables

adaptation within routines. By framing changes or deviations as intentional and justified, individuals negotiate new patterns of behavior without undermining the routine's overall coherence.

The interplay between everyday life and routine has significant implications for the social order. First of all, while routines provide stability, they also evolve in response to changes in the lifeworld. New technologies, cultural shifts, or organizational reforms introduce variations that individuals integrate into their routines. Routines also enable coordination by aligning individual actions within shared frameworks. However, they can become sites of conflict when individuals resist or reinterpret established patterns, highlighting the dynamic nature of social order. Routines can often appear as fixed aspects of reality, the aforementioned process of "reification". Recognizing the constructed nature of routines can open possibilities for reflection and intentional change.

CHAPTER III
Portrait of a Female Terrorist

This chapter wants to paint a portrait of the female terrorist by examining key figures such as Edith Lagos of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Zarema Muzhakhoeva of the Chechen Black Widows, Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Muriel Degauque as Europe's first female suicide bomber, and Mara Cagol of the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades). The objective is to highlight the diverse pathways through which women become radicalized and participate in terrorism.

Each section starts with an analysis of the terrorist organization these women belong to, and then their life stories are told. The choice to take five women from different organizations and parts of the world was made on purpose to try to avoid overgeneralization and acknowledge the complexity of female participation in terrorism, since terrorist organizations operate within distinct ideological, cultural, and political contexts, shaping the roles that women play within them. Each case contributes unique insights into how gender, ideology, and sociopolitical conditions influence radicalization, recruitment, and operational roles. Moreover, geographical and organizational diversity ensures a more balanced perspective, highlighting variations in how women engage in violent movements.

These women came from different geopolitical and ideological contexts, yet their experiences share common threads. Each had unique motivations, with some driven by ideological zeal, others by personal grievances, or by a mix of both. Some leveraged traditional perceptions of femininity to avoid suspicion and successfully execute attacks, while others took on leadership or operational roles within their organizations, challenging conventional gender expectations. Their lives provide crucial insights into the radicalization process, the role of gender in militant movements, and the ways in which women navigate the structures of political violence.

3.1 Sendero Luminoso: Edith Lagos

Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) is a Maoist-inspired terrorist organization that emerged in Peru during the late 1970s. Officially named Partido Comunista del Perú - Sendero Luminoso, it aimed to overthrow the Peruvian government and establish a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist regime (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). Sendero Luminoso was founded in 1970 by Abimael Guzmán, a former philosophy professor at the National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho. Guzmán, known as "Presidente Gonzalo", was heavily influenced by the teachings of Mao Zedong and believed in using the armed struggle to create a communist State (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). The group rejected electoral politics and democratic socialism, advocating instead for a violent revolution led by the rural peasantry. Its aim was to dismantle existing political institutions and social hierarchies, replacing them with a rigid Maoist State. Believing that Peru's State and society were irredeemably corrupt, so much so that any nonviolent reforms were inevitably doomed to failure, and rejecting the validity of elections, Sendero's decision to take up arms coincided with the first national elections held after twelve years of military rule and prompted two decades of armed conflict and political violence in which an estimated 69,000 Peruvians were killed or disappeared, primarily by the hands of the Shining Path and the armed forces (Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, 2003).

From 1980 to the 2000s, Peru experienced two decades of political violence, beginning with the decision of Sendero Luminoso to launch a war against the State. The organization began its insurgency in 1980 by attacking polling stations during Peru's first democratic election after years of military rule. They initially focused on rural regions like Ayacucho, targeting government officials, landowners, and anyone perceived as opposing their ideology (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). Then, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s the violence peaked. The group expanded into urban areas, including the capital, Lima. Bombings, assassinations, and violent purges became common. Sendero Luminoso established a reputation for extreme brutality, often executing entire communities accused of collaboration with the government. The capture of Guzmán in September 1992 marked a turning point (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998). His arrest,

along with the capture of other key leaders, severely weakened the organization. The then-president Alberto Fujimori's counterinsurgency strategies further diminished the group's influence. Sendero Luminoso is notorious for its violent tactics, which included: mass executions of peasants, indigenous communities, and political rivals; targeting of infrastructure, such as bridges, communication lines, and energy facilities; assassination of government officials, journalists, and community leaders; use of child soldiers; and intimidation campaigns through bombings and public displays of violence (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998).

The role of women inside Sendero Luminoso was significant and marked a departure from traditional gender roles in Peruvian society. The organization, being rooted in Maoist ideology, emphasized the mobilization of both men and women for revolutionary purposes. Sendero Luminoso appealed mostly to women within Andean communities, building its ideological legitimacy by holding trials of wife-beaters, adulterers, and rapists (Kirk, 1997, p. 80). Peru's traditional Andean peasant culture is more rigid than the one prevailing in urban areas, which meant that peasant women who would stray from their husbands were severely punished but sexual harassment and adultery on the part of men was rather prevalent. According to Sendero's propaganda, where the Party established its influence, "divorce was introduced and sexual harassment was not tolerated" (Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru, 1997). Sendero Luminoso gave Peruvian women education, social justice, and opportunities to act alongside men in the People's War.

At the same time, gender issues were not truly a part of the Shining Path's platform, only their rhetoric. Guzmán, like other important thinkers such as Karl Marx, found gender insignificant in comparison to class struggle[10] but recognized the necessity of women's involvement in the Revolution. Sendero Luminoso recognized the need for

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[10] Several feminist scholars, such as Nancy Hartsock and Heidi Hartmann, have defined Marx's theory as primarily gender-blind and in need of additional theorization to understand gender relations. For a more in-depth analysis see Hartmann, Heidi (1997) 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in Nicholson, Linda (ed.), *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge; and Hartsock, Nancy (1983) *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward A Feminist Historical Materialism*. London: Longman.

women in the movement, yet it cannot be said that it offered Peruvian women emancipation or political agency (Coral Cordero, 1998).

During Peru's twenty years of violence, women participated in the conflict in several ways, enlisting in Sendero Luminoso and forming civil society organizations in both Lima and rural departments to advocate against insurgent and State-sponsored violence (Coral Cordero, 1998). Women joined the Shining Path as militants, although "their presence derived more from their own expectations and desires to enter new spaces of participation than to a *senderista* sensibility that incorporated gender interests into the Shining Path project." (Coral Cordero, 1998, p. 349). As Coral Cordero notes, there was a significant gendered division of labor within the organization, which continued to operate on deeply patriarchal lines, viewing gender equality as an incidental byproduct rather than a key objective of the revolution (Coral Cordero, 1998, p. 352). Nonetheless, there was a massive female participation in the organization. A third of those imprisoned on charges of terrorism during the war were women, and Sendero claimed at one point that women represented forty percent of its forces (Kirk, 1997, p. 63).

One of the most important women of the movement was Edith Lagos. She was born on November 27, 1962, one of the youngest siblings in an *ayacuchano*[11] family with seven children (Caro Cárdenas, 2006). Her family was *misti*, a Quechua word referring to someone who is racially coded as white, and her parents were relatively prosperous storeowners in the city of Huamanga (Kirk, 1997). "Since she began to speak", her sisters told *Gente* magazine, she stood out for her "great intelligence". She was a "mischievous and cheerful" child who, as she grew older, had "sudden states of melancholy" (Heredia, 1982). She showed a great sensitivity to the poverty that shaped many lives in Ayacucho and quickly developed leadership skills that distinguished her from her fellow students (Caro Cárdenas, 2006). As a young girl, Lagos studied with Catholic nuns, from whom she received a formal education, learning to declaim, dance, and play the piano. She was a member of the school choir and repeatedly portrayed famous saints in school performances. When she was older, her parents sent her to Lima to study law. The university was where Lagos first became involved with revolutionary leftist groups and

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[11] A person coming from the peruvian region of Ayacucho

became known as a prominent pro-*senderista* speaker, particularly in Ayacucho, where she returned after leaving the university. In one of her proselytism speeches, she urged young women to become involved with the organization. She stressed the exploitative nature of the Peruvian State, presenting her audience with a choice between becoming complicit in the exploitation of others or being exploited themselves. She said:

> "How many of us will manage to obtain a profession where we sit at a table or in an office, to order or to be ordered, to exploit or to be exploited, to serve or to be served? How many of us will assume the real role that belongs to us, that of making a homeland"[12].

For her, the only viable option was active resistance to that State by joining Sendero's revolution. In her speech, she also carefully presented the organization's work in a positive light, as the creation of a new society and a new Nation. This vision of another Peru was a key component of Sendero's appeal to young, disenfranchised university students and recent graduates in Ayacucho, many of whom were indigenous and facing both racial and economic barriers to advancement (Chávez & Pareja, 1982).

After the armed struggle began, with the attack on the ballot boxes at Chuschi in 1980, Edith's role within Sendero changed as she transitioned to life as a militant while the entire organization began to operate even more clandestinely. As an underground combatant, she went by the pseudonym of "Camarada Carla" (Caro Cárdenas, 2006). The police captured her for the first time on December 24, 1980, in Ayacucho, while she was on her way to attend a Christmas Eve party. They accused her of being involved in a confrontation with a Peruvian intelligence organization, setting the house of an election official on fire with a Molotov cocktail, and attacking the municipal building and other government offices with dynamite. Lagos denied all charges. While she was being held, her photograph was taken and released to the press. The sight of a young, light-skinned woman, imprisoned as a member of Sendero Luminoso shocked the public opinion, who found it difficult to believe she could be a revolutionary militant (Coral Cordero, 1998). "She is a tiny woman, a little girl, she has light eyes and does not seem like a *guerrillera*",

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[12] Chávez, Ernesto & Pareja, Georgina (1982) *Edith Lagos Quiso Cambiar el País Apretando el Gatillo*. La República. Translated by the author of the thesis.

proclaimed one article, while another described Lagos as "a young girl with light eyes and fine features" (Caro Cárdenas, 2006). Part of the shock came from the fact that she represented such a contrast from the narrative of female Sendero combatants that the State and the military circulated, as hyper-sexualized, vicious, and bloodthirsty. The resulting identification of Lagos as a young, innocent woman would become inextricably tied to the image of her as a martyr to a just cause after the police killed her in 1982 (Caro Cárdenas, 2006).

In prison, along with her comrade Carlota Tello, she continued proselytizing. On July 25, 1981, one of her poems, *Doloroso Grito de la Vida* (Painful Cry of Life)[13], won first place in a composition and poetry contest at the Ayacucho National Institute of Culture, to which she participated under false name.

Mis oídos han escuchado tantas cosas.	My ears have heard so many things.
Tantas cosas han visto mis ojos.	Many things my eyes have seen.
Mis ojos han lagrimeado de tanto dolor	My eyes have watered from so much pain
y es que el dolor,	and it is that the pain,
en el labio se convirtió en grito.	on the lip became a scream.
Muchos labios hablarán	Many lips will speak
del mundo, del dolor,	of the world, of the pain,
del oído, de los ojos,	of hearing, of the eyes,
de tantas cosas…!	of so many things...!
Si la vida, es la rítmica palpitación	If life is the rhythmic palpitation
de los corazones.	of hearts.
¿Por qué la mía palpita tan aprisa?	Why does mine beat so fast?
Es que el dolor golpea al corazón	It is because pain strikes the heart
tan hondamente que es necesario	so deeply that it is necessary
correr los latidos antes del dolor.	to run the heartbeats before the pain.
Vida, grito, dolor, corazón,	Life, scream, pain, heart,
tantas cosas…!	so many things...!

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[13] Cited in Gilbonio, Oscar (2019) *Hildebrando Pérez Huarancca, Edith Lagos y Jovaldo: Textos de Combate*. Agrupación Cultural Ave Fénix, Perú. Translated by the author of the thesis.

In the assault on March 3rd, 1982 that she directed against said penitentiary, she was among the 304 inmates who managed to escape, approximately 70 of whom were Senderistas (Chávez & Pareja, 1982). This attack was a major victory for Sendero, underscoring its legitimacy as a revolutionary military force and its ability to wreak havoc on the Peruvian State. It was also a symbol of the police's failure to keep order in Ayacucho and curb Sendero's advances, which foreshadowed the later transfer of the war effort to the control of the military in 1982 (Caro Cárdenas, 2006).

Lagos was one of the few women who held a leadership position in the organization, serving inside the Comité Regional Principal (Mavila León, 1992). Most people who joined Sendero Luminoso are not remembered by name today: the organization's hierarchical structure, the quasi-religious cult of personality surrounding its leader, and its emphasis on the collective rather than the personal made it difficult for most of its members to gain individual recognition or notoriety (Mavila León, 1992). Lagos is one of the few exceptions to this trend, partly because she was already a public figure before her death, but also because of the work the organization did to frame her as a martyr. Indeed, "months before she died, in the Huancayo fair, central model of so many other village fairs, wooden statuettes were sold, with her idealized image of a warrior, standing next to a tree in early sprout" (Gorriti, 1991).

Her death occurred within six months of the famous jailbreak, in September 1982. She was nineteen years old at the time. There are several recounts of her death, but the most common one is that she was killed along with another *senderista* who had been teaching her to drive in the mountains. After their vehicle stopped working, they flagged down a passing truck and attempted to seize it, but the truck was carrying a group of police officers, some of whom recognized Lagos and shot her on sight (Kirk, 1997). There are three other testimonies collected by the Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación that reference Lagos but only one is available to the public. This account dates her death to July or August of 1981 and affirms that the police killed her in the town square of Umacca after she fired her gun into the air (Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, 2003).

In any case, after Lagos's death, a funeral was held for her in her hometown, Huamanga, the capital city of Ayacucho. As many as 30.000 people are believed to have attended it including, according to the rumors, the members of the Central Committee of Sendero and Guzmán himself (Kirk, 1997). Since the funeral, army paramilitary groups have bombed Lagos's gravesite three times, and her family has rebuilt her gravestone each time. Her death at the hands of the Peruvian police triggered a tremendous wave of public grief and her funeral is considered the largest public gathering of sympathizers of the Sendero Luminoso to have taken place during the entire armed conflict (Caro Cárdenas, 2006).

Because her death occurred so early in the war, her funeral happened at a moment when the organization's public image was not as negative as it would later become (Caro Cárdenas, 2006). As a result, the widespread mourning that followed her death offered Sendero an opportunity to capitalize on the sympathetic power of her image to develop greater public support. The need to foster popular sympathy for the armed struggle would become even more important shortly after her death, when the Peruvian president, Fernando Belaúnde, declared the Department of Ayacucho to be in a state of emergency. As a result, the military took control of those areas, and violence escalated rapidly (Kirk, 1997). This made it vital for the organization to circulate narratives of itself as fighting a just and righteous war, and Sendero took full advantage of Lagos to that end. Because the war ended with the defeat of the organization and the State still standing, many sites of memory in Peru are State-sponsored, circulating a narrative of the war that highlights *senderista* atrocities and downplays State responsibility for the violence.

During the funeral, one of Lagos' sisters read a poem entitled *El Remolino Rompió la Calma* (The Whirlpool Broke the Calm), which Edith had written before she was imprisoned. The poem evokes her knowledge of her own mortality, which is not unexpected for an active revolutionary combatant. A part of this poem can be read today as it is carved into Lagos's tombstone, and it later became a famous Andean folk song composed by Martina Portocarrero and Ranulfo Fuentes called *Yerba Silvestre*.

¿Cuánto falta para que el río
aumente su caudal?
Para que tormentosamente arrase
este cruel presente.
¿Por qué te diriges al sur?
¿Qué quieres arrasar?;
la inequidad del pasado
posada allí.
No querían que subas la montaña
que veas las pampas, el camino, el río
y el remolino.
Pero la inercia quedó atrás
encendidos están tus sentimientos.
Hierba silvestre, aroma puro
te ruego acompañarme en mi camino
serás mi bálsamo en mi tragedia
serás mi aliento en mi gloria.
Serás mi amiga
cuando crezcas
sobre mi tumba.
Allí: que la montaña me cobije
que el río me conteste
la pampa arda,
el remolino vuelva, el camino descanse
¿Y la piedra?...
La piedra lápida eterna será en ella
grabado,
¡todo quedará![14]

How long before the river
increases its flow?
For it to stormily sweep away
this cruel present.
Why are you heading south?
What do you want to sweep away?
the inequity of the past
perched there.
They did not want you to climb the mountain
to see the pampas, the road, the river
and the whirlpool.
But inertia was left behind
your feelings are on fire.
Wild herb, pure aroma
I beg you to accompany me on my path
you will be my balm in my tragedy
you will be my breath in my glory.
You will be my friend
when you grow
over my grave.
There: may the mountain shelter me
may the river answer me
the pampas burn,
the whirlpool returns, the road rests.
And the stone?
The eternal tombstone will be on it
engraved,
everything will remain!

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[14] Cited in Gilbonio, Oscar (2019) *Hildebrando Pérez Huarancca, Edith Lagos y Jovaldo: Textos de Combate*. Agrupación Cultural Ave Fénix, Perú. Translated by the author of the thesis.

This poem reflects the tension between suffering and hope, a defining feature of Lagos's life. Her commitment to the revolutionary cause required her to reconcile the immediate pain of struggle with the imagined future of liberation. The temporal tension between suffering in the present and hope for a liberated future is central to Lagos's poetic expression. Her words capture the existential condition of a revolutionary whose life is oriented toward an uncertain but imagined future victory. The version on her tombstone is slightly different, but the meaning is the same:

Hierba Silvestre	Wild herb
Te ruego	I beg you
Acompañarme en mi camino.	Come with me in my path.
Serás mi amiga	You will be my friend
Cuando crezcas	When you grow
Sobre mi tumba.	Over my tomb.
Allí que la montaña me cobije	There, where the mountain shelters me
El camino descanse	The path rests
Y en la piedra	And in stone
Lapida eternal	Eternal gravestone
Todo quedará grabado.[15]	Everything will remain carved.

Her poems not only provide a window into her personal struggles but also serve as enduring expressions of resilience and defiance. Understanding Lagos's poetry is fundamental for appreciating the profound ways in which language and art become tools for meaning-making amid social and political upheaval.

3.2 Black Widows: Zarema Muzhakhoeva

The term "Black Widows" emerged in the early 2000s to describe Chechen female suicide bombers. These women, many of whom had suffered immense personal losses at

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[15] Cited in Gilbonio, Oscar (2019) *Hildebrando Pérez Huarancca, Edith Lagos y Jovaldo: Textos de Combate*. Agrupación Cultural Ave Fénix, Perú. Translated by the author of the thesis.

the hands of Russian forces, became a symbol of desperation and revenge. According to the research conducted by Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova in *Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists* (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006), the phenomenon of the Black Widows has been present since June 7th, 2000, when Khava Barayeva, a cousin of prominent Chechen field commander Arbi Barayev, and Luisa Magomadova carried out a suicide bombing in the village of Alkhan-Yurt in Chechnya. Driving a truck laden with explosives into a Russian Special Forces base, the two women killed two soldiers and wounded five others. This act marked the first instance of a female-led suicide bombing in Chechnya and set a precedent for future attacks involving women (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 64).

By 2005, Chechen women had participated in 22 of the 27 suicide attacks attributed to the insurgency, making up 43% of the total number of attackers (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 65). Their prominence in these operations shocked Russian society and captured international attention. The motivations of the Black Widows were complex and multifaceted, shaped largely by personal trauma and a desire for revenge. Speckhard and Akhmedova revealed that all the women in their study had experienced profound personal loss and trauma, often witnessing the violent deaths of family members at the hands of Russian forces (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 66). These experiences led to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and social isolation (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 66). Many of the women demonstrated clear signs of psychological distress before their radicalization. Of those studied, 73% exhibited depression, 92% experienced social alienation, and 31% expressed a strong desire for revenge (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 67). The pervasive impact of these traumas often catalyzed their engagement with terrorist ideologies as a way to cope with their grief and find meaning in their suffering. Family members frequently observed drastic changes in the women's personalities, noting their growing obsession with seeking vengeance (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 67).

In Chechen culture, revenge has traditionally been a deeply ingrained value, often seen as a family duty when a loved one is harmed or killed (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 68). Wahhabism, a radical interpretation of Islam introduced to Chechnya by

foreign networks, played a significant role in the radicalization of many Black Widows. Following their traumatic experiences, 73% of the women studied sought connections with Wahhabist groups (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 67). These groups offered a distorted sense of purpose, framing suicide terrorism as a path to martyrdom and spiritual redemption. The promise of reunion with loved ones in paradise and the belief that their actions would secure the salvation of their families became powerful motivators, and the adoption of religious rituals, changes in dress, and newfound devotion to jihadist teachings were common markers of their radicalization (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 69).

Contrary to early media narratives, Speckhard and Akhmedova found no evidence to support claims that the Black Widows were forced into terrorism through physical abuse or manipulation. Instead, the overwhelming majority were self-recruited, motivated by personal loss and a sense of social justice as they perceived it (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 71). Historically, Chechen women enjoyed greater emancipation than women in many other Muslim communities, often pursuing higher education and professional careers (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 72). The war, however, disrupted these opportunities, pushing some toward fundamentalist roles within terrorist organizations. Despite their active participation in suicide bombings, women within Chechen terrorist organizations remained in subordinate roles. The decision-making structures were predominantly male-dominated, with men giving orders and controlling strategic operations (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 73).

For this section, the terrorist this thesis wants to focus on is the "failed suicide bomber", Zarema Muzhakhoeva, who voluntarily surrendered to the Moscow police on July 9, 2003, instead of blowing herself and the people at the Mon Café up. She is a peculiar case in the landscape of the Black Widows and she has suffered from a biased and instrumentalized recount of her story. The analysis starts from the work of the journalist Dmitry Bykov who interviewed her and her lawyer, Natalia Yevlapova, for the Russian magazine *Ogonyok*, before and after she was sentenced to spend 20 years in jail after the investigation promised her maximum leniency for the disclosed information of the location of a terrorist base in Tolstopaltsev. The story comes from the words of the

"failed suicide bomber" herself, but her testimony has for the most part been verified by the investigation and is confirmed.

In his article, Bykov stated that he "pities Muzhakhoeva, who failed to kill anyone, and it may very well have been her first success in life" (Bykov, 2004). She was born on February 9, 1980, and when she was eight months old, her mother Madash Dzhakolayeva left her father for another man. Madash still lives in Chechnya, in the village of Asinovskaya, but she refuses to talk about her daughter and has never actually spoken to her, except for a few brief meetings at local festivals (Bykov, 2004). Zarema's father, Mussa Muzhakhoev, regularly went to the North of the country to earn money and died in 1990 in Krasnoyarsk, stabbed to death by another Chechen. All her life Zarema lived with her grandmother and grandfather. After the war began, the family moved to Ingushetia, a Republic of Russia, in the village of Troitskoye, and when the Peace of Khasavyurt was signed, they returned to Chechnya and settled in Asinovskaya. Zarema married Khasan Khashiyev at nineteen years old and moved with him to the Sleptsovskaya village in Ingushetia. Her forty-year-old husband was a metal merchant and was killed in a clash with a rival landowner when she was three months pregnant (Bykov, 2004).

On January 1, 2001, Zarema gave birth to a daughter and named her Rashana. Her husband's relatives, with whom she lived, allowed her to raise the girl until she was seven months old and then took her from her. Zarema had to return to her relatives and look for a new husband, explaining to Bykov that "these are our customs" (Bykov, 2004). Her husband's relatives did not allow her to communicate with Rashana, so, after watching a movie about a child-kidnapping, she decided to kidnap her daughter and take her to Moscow, where she knew her maternal aunt lived. There was no work in Chechnya and no money to escape, so Zarema took her grandmother's jewelry, added everything she had, and went to her husband's family, leaving a note to her relatives telling them she was fleeing with her daughter and not to look for them (Bykov, 2004). She told her husband's family she was moving away and wanted to take one last walk with Rashana and after a fight, she was allowed to do so. She went with her daughter to the market, sold the gold she had for six hundred dollars, bought Rashana some new clothes, rushed to Magas

airport, and took a ticket to Moscow with a hundred dollars overpayment. Her relatives caught up with her and returned Rashana to her husband's family, covering Zarema with shame for theft and deceit. She explained that "this is considered a disgrace in our country" (Bykov, 2004).

Zarema now had to pay off her debt to her relatives, since the gold had gone missing and the money had been spent. She knew the Ganieva family was related to the Wahhabis, so she approached Raisa Ganieva, who organized a meeting with her brother, and in March 2003 Zarema went to the mountains to join the militants (Bykov, 2004). She lived in their camp for a month, during which they offered her to stay in the camp, marry a militant, and promised to pay her relatives to atone for her theft. She refused because he did not want to stay there and, as Bykov stated, "she liked the idea of killing herself more" (Bykov, 2004).

In April 2003, the militants transported her to Mozdok for her suicide mission, where she had to blow up a bus with Russian pilots inside. There were two suicide bombers, but when they arrived at the location, Zarema was told that the second bomber had nowhere to hide, and she was taken out of the car alone (Bykov, 2004). At the interrogation after her second failure in Moscow, she said that she "did not have the guts" to blow herself up. She missed the bus and did not press the button. She explained that all she could feel was shame, her head was splitting, and her eyesight was blurred. The supervisors came and took her away.

On the 3rd of July, she was sent to Moscow with phone numbers written on her hands if the meeting with the person waiting for her there failed. It did not, and a "blond, very Russian-looking Chechen" sent her to Tolstopaltsevo, where she lived for two days with Zulikhan Elikhadzhieva and Mariam Sharipova, two suicide bombers who killed 15 people and injured 60 more in the Tushino terrorist attack of July 5 (Bykov, 2004). She said she knew nothing about their fate and only noticed that the older one, Mariam, was more convinced, while the younger one, Zulikhan, was "quite naive, a child" (Bykov, 2004). On July 9, she was put in a car and taken to Moscow, where she reached the Mon Café. She recounted that she started walking around it, hoping to be noticed. She was

wearing jeans, a beige cardigan, a baseball cap with the visor on the back, and black sunglasses. Zarema started making signs to the security guards, but they ignored her. Finally, one guard told her to leave. "I have explosives in my bag", she explained (Bykov, 2004).

The guards called the police, who arrived almost immediately. Zarema took off her bag and put it on the asphalt. The street was blocked off, the failed suicide bomber was handcuffed, her hands were tied behind her back, and she was searched. She explained that everything was in her bag, but the police officer found a thousand rubles inside her pockets and confiscated them, "probably so that they would not explode" (Bykov, 2004).

Zarema began to testify the first night she was in custody, but she gave a false version of the events. She later explained that the militants told her that, in case she was caught and was a good liar, she would have been saved by them, otherwise they "would have found her anywhere and killed her" (Bykov, 2004). After a week she "felt safe and began to tell everything as it happened" (Bykov, 2004), which allowed the investigators to locate the base in which she stayed before the failed attack. When the police raided the place, there was no one there anymore but there was an explosives warehouse that they dismantled, with six suicide belts ready for use.

Bykov asked the failed suicide bomber a few questions, which, for reasons of time and space, cannot all be translated and analyzed, so only the most relevant for this research will be taken into consideration. The journalist warned the readers that Zarema had to answer with extreme caution since she was still awaiting trial and every word could be used against her (Bykov, 2004). She also went through a mental examination, done at the Serbsky Institute, which showed "complete mental adequacy, some infantilism, and a great love of life" (Bykov, 2004).

Zarema is asked about her night dreams, to which she answers that she has a lot of nightmares, especially at first, regarding the girls she slept with at the base. She dreamt they were sick and she was away from them. Sometimes she dreamt of home and her

daughter. Bykov asks if she wishes for anything, and she says that she only wants to go home but she cannot. At the journalist's insistence, she explains that for her grandparents she is dead and, if she goes back as a failed suicide bomber, everyone in her hometown will call her shameful. When she started going around with the Wahhabis wearing the hijab people respected her, but now, if she went back "there will only be shame or they will put me on trial and make me kill people" (Bykov, 2004).

Bykov continues asking Zarema if, when she was getting prepared for the attack, anyone explained to her what it would be like. She answers:

> "They said there would not be any pain, it would be just like a mosquito bite and then you would go straight to heaven, and heaven smells like nothing on earth. Two angels will meet you. They will ask: "What did you do on earth? Maybe nothing?" and I'll answer: "Nothing, I died for Allah!" Then I will go to paradise, and all the warriors will meet me there, and I will serve the warriors who died for Allah. It is a great honor"[16].

Zarema continues to recount that the militants told her that if people prayed for her at home she could visit her daughter on Thursdays, which are considered a holy day. This is where she realized that, for the first time, she did not believe them. They were exploiting her hurt for their purposes. She said she read the Qur'an more carefully and saw that there is nothing about the smell of paradise, which the militants talked about. "No one knows anything because no one has ever been there alive, and the dead never came back", she told Bykov. She also criticized the fact that many terrorists "did not behave the right way" (Bykov, 2004). For example, the ones she met near Moscow were drinking beer.

Furthermore, Bykov asked her what she would tell the Russian population if she knew they would listen to her. Zarema answered: "I did not want to kill anyone. Our people have not seen a peaceful life, they do not know it. If they did, they wouldn't kill either" (Bykov, 2004). She also talked about what stopped her from pushing the button

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[16] Bykov, Dmitry (2004) *I Have No Luck in Death*. Magazine Ogonyok, 4. Translated by the author of the thesis.

and blowing up the Mon Café, explaining that when she came to Moscow and saw how people live there, "she realized that she would never explode" because of what the stores were like (Bykov, 2004). "I have never had such things. None of our girls had them. If they had seen what stores were like, no one would have exploded" she reiterated (Bykov, 2004).

The journalist concluded the interview by stating that there are many such stories, because there are many girls like her, "the whole of Chechnya" (Bykov, 2004), and if they continue to be dishonored, they will continue to explode, and no one can do anything about it. Zarema Muzhakhoeva was the first Chechen terrorist who "not only could not, but did not want to blow up Muscovites" (Bykov, 2004), and she voluntarily surrendered and gave testimony that helped to uncover the base in Tolstopaltsev. Bykov believed that these were important factors, which made him hopeful for her future.

Unfortunately, this hope was misplaced. Despite her full cooperation with the police, her young age, and the lack of previous criminal record, in April 2004 she was found guilty of all charges, including terrorism, and sentenced to 20 years in a prison camp on demand of the jury, which did not find any extenuating circumstances and talked about the inevitability of retribution. After the jury had given their response, Zarema yelled in court: "I did not hate you, but now I do!" and "I'll come back and blow you all up!" (Bykov & Aptekar, 2004). The journalists of the newspaper *Ogonyok* had warned Yevlapova that in such a delicate situation it would be better to choose an ordinary trial, without any jury, but both she and her client believed in Russians' ability to forgive (Bykov & Aptekar, 2004). As Bykov stated, "the jury is a mirror of society, which does not believe in the repentance of terrorists and therefore has no idea about mercy" (Bykov & Aptekar, 2004).

After the verdict, Bykov and his colleague, Pavel Aptekar, interviewed Yevlapova, who said she thought the jury believed Zarema because, "up until the last session, they had human, understanding eyes", but when they gave the verdict "all of them tried not to look at us" (Bykov & Aptekar, 2004). She explained that Zarema was having a severe nervous breakdown and she kept repeating that she did not want to kill anyone.

When asked if she would appeal the verdict, Yevlapova responded affirmatively, even if she reiterated her worries for her client. She also questioned if any terrorist would now surrender after such a verdict and what kind of cooperation the police could now expect. Yevlapova stressed the fact that young Chechen women are first "covered with shame" in Chechnya and then, even if they repent, are sentenced to the maximum terms in Russia, so "what can they hope for and how can they escape the trap?" (Bykov & Aptekar, 2004). Her appeal to the Russian Supreme Court was also rejected.

3.3 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine: Leila Khaled

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) stands as one of the most significant factions within the broader Palestinian resistance movement. Emerging from the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967, the PFLP sought to redefine the Palestinian struggle by merging Marxist-Leninist ideologies with a nationalist agenda (Irving, 2012). The movement was formally established in late 1967 following the collapse of the Arab Nationalist Movement's (ANM) earlier strategy of uniting Arab nations in a collective front against Israel (Irving, 2012, p. 27). The disastrous defeat of Arab forces in the Six-Day War revealed the weakness of relying on a pan-Arab approach, which brought several factions, including the Heroes of Return and Ahmed Jibril's Palestine Liberation Front, to join forces with the ANM's Palestinian wing under the leadership of George Habash (Irving, 2012, p. 27). Habash, a Christian Palestinian physician turned revolutionary, was instrumental in shaping the PFLP's ideological direction. His vision emphasized self-reliance and rejecting dependence on the Arab States, which he saw as complicit in the Palestinian people's continued oppression (Irving, 2012, p. 28).

From its birth, the PFLP distinguished itself from other Palestinian factions by its commitment to Marxist-Leninist principles. Drawing inspiration from global revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon, the PFLP emphasized the transformative power of armed struggle (Irving, 2012, p. 28). The organization believed that only through direct action, including armed conflict, could Palestinians reclaim their homeland and national identity (Irving, 2012, p. 28). The PFLP also aligned itself with

broader anti-imperialist movements, viewing the Palestinian struggle as part of a global fight against Western colonialism and capitalism. This internationalist perspective set it apart from factions that focused solely on national liberation. The organization quickly gained international notoriety for its high-profile militant operations, which included hijackings, bombings, and attacks designed to draw global attention to the Palestinian cause. The PFLP's influence has waned in recent decades, overshadowed by the rise of Islamist movements such as Hamas. However, its legacy endures as a symbol of the secular, leftist strand of Palestinian resistance. The group's commitment to both national liberation and social justice continues to resonate with those who seek a comprehensive and inclusive solution to the Palestinian question (Irving, 2012, p. 7).

Leila Khaled is one of the most iconic figures in Palestinian resistance history. Her life, marked by militant activism, political engagement, and unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause, exemplifies the complex intersection of nationalism, feminism, and revolution. Leila was born on April 9, 1944, in Haifa, a port city in Palestine. Her family belonged to the lower-middle class: her father, Ali Khaled, was a successful café owner, while her mother managed the household (Irving, 2012, p. 10). She was the sixth child of what would eventually be a family of twelve. The Khaled family's life was upended by the *Nakba*[17] in 1948 when Israel was established, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Four-year-old Leila's family fled Haifa after days of gunfire, seeking refuge in Tyre, Lebanon.

The traumatic events of her early childhood left a lasting impression. Khaled recalled her first encounter with death at the age of four, witnessing a bleeding corpse in the street (Irving, 2012, p. 12). She also vividly recalled hiding with a basket of dates under the stairs, an act that inadvertently saved her family's life when the car that left without them was shelled (Irving, 2012, p. 19). Her birthday, April 9, became associated

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[17] *Nakba*, meaning catastrophe in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians during and after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. During the Nakba, an estimated 750,000 Palestinians (over half of the pre-war population) were forcibly expelled or fled from their homes due to violence, massacres, and fear of advancing Zionist forces. Refugees were forced into overcrowded camps where many lived in dire conditions without access to basic services. Over time, these camps became semi-permanent settlements, symbolizing the unresolved nature of the Palestinian issue.

with the Deir Yassin massacre[18], which intensified the collective mourning of Palestinians (Irving, 2012, p. 13). Her family initially lived with relatives in Tyre before moving to Beirut. Though they were spared the worst conditions of refugee camps, their life in Lebanon was marked by poverty and dispossession. Leila recalled her feelings of humiliation for collecting the United Nations' food rations as a child (Irving, 2012, p. 14).

As she grew older, Khaled's political consciousness was shaped by her family's nationalist sentiments and her education. She attended a charity school run by the Evangelical Church, and her older siblings, influenced by the ANM, introduced her to political activism (Irving, 2012, p. 17). By the age of ten, Leila was already participating in protests against the Balfour Declaration[19] and the United Nations' partition plan for Palestine (Irving, 2012, p. 17). Her political awakening was further fueled by her schoolteachers, who instilled in her a sense of pride in Palestinian identity (Irving, 2012, p. 17).

At the age of 14, she officially joined the ANM, becoming one of its youngest members. The 1958 civil unrest in Lebanon further galvanized her political commitment. She took on dangerous tasks, such as delivering food to fighters on the front lines (Irving, 2012, p. 19). Her involvement with the ANM continued through her teenage years and into her time at the American University of Beirut (AUB), where she initially studied pharmacy (Irving, 2012, p. 21). However, her academic pursuits were cut short when her family could no longer afford her tuition, which forced her to move to Kuwait to work as a teacher and support her family. Despite the restrictions on political activity in Kuwait, Leila remained an active member of the ANM, working underground to recruit new members (Irving, 2012, p. 23).

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[18] The Deir Yassin Massacre remains one of the most infamous and tragic events in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It occurred on April 9, 1948, in the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, a relatively peaceful village that had signed a non-aggression pact with nearby Jewish communities but had the misfortune of being located near Jerusalem. The massacre, carried out by Zionist paramilitary groups Irgun (Etzel) and Lehi (Stern Gang), resulted in the killing of numerous Palestinian civilians and became a defining event in the Palestinian *Nakba*. Estimates of the death toll vary, with Palestinian sources placing it at over 250, while some Israeli accounts suggest a lower figure of around 100-120. Survivors reported instances of sexual violence, mutilation of bodies, and public displays of terror to intimidate the local population. Many were executed after surrendering, and homes were systematically looted and destroyed.

[19] The Balfour Declaration was a statement issued by the British government during World War I that expressed support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine.

The Six-Day War of 1967 marked a turning point for Khaled and the Palestinian resistance movement. The defeat of Arab armies and the further loss of Palestinian territories prompted the formation of the PFLP. Leila, who had grown disillusioned with the limitations of the ANM, eagerly joined the newly established PFLP and underwent military training in Jordan, learning to use firearms and grenades, and participating in hand-to-hand combat drills (Irving, 2012, p. 28). Her determination to become a fighter was met with resistance from her family, who wanted her to return to Kuwait. However, she persisted, bringing two of her brothers to train alongside her (Irving, 2012, p. 28).

Leila Khaled's name became synonymous with Palestinian resistance after her involvement in two high-profile airplane hijackings. On August 29, 1969, Khaled and Salim Issawi hijacked TWA Flight 840 en route from Rome to Athens (Irving, 2012, p. 1). The plane was diverted to Damascus, where the hijackers blew up the nose cone after ensuring the safety of the passengers. This act, which Leila described as a way to "scare but not harm" the passengers, catapulted her into international notoriety (Irving, 2012, p. 2). To avoid recognition for future operations, Khaled underwent multiple plastic surgeries (Irving, 2012, p. 2). The PFLP's use of hijackings was a deliberate strategy to globalize the Palestinian struggle. By targeting Western airlines, the organization forced international governments to confront the consequences of their support for Israel.

Her second hijacking attempt, on September 6, 1970, was part of a coordinated operation involving several planes. Khaled and her comrade Patrick Arguello attempted to hijack an El Al flight from Amsterdam to New York (Irving, 2012, p. 1). The mission went awry when Arguello was shot dead by Israeli security personnel, and Khaled was captured (Irving, 2012, p. 1). She was released as part of a prisoner exchange, cementing her status as a revolutionary icon (Irving, 2012, p. 3).

Following her release, Leila shifted her focus from armed struggle to political activism. She became a member of the Palestinian National Council and a leader in the General Union of Palestinian Women (Irving, 2012, p. 3). Her transition from militant to political leader reflected a broader trend within the Palestinian resistance movement, as

many militants moved toward political negotiation and advocacy (Irving, 2012, p. 3). Despite being banned from several countries, including the United Kingdom, she continued to campaign for Palestinian self-determination (Irving, 2012, p. 4).

Her personal life was deeply intertwined with her political activism. Her first marriage faced challenges rooted in the tensions between personal love and political obligations. She admitted the difficulties of balancing a revolutionary lifestyle with marriage, noting that her first husband could not accept the dangers she faced as a high-profile member of the PFLP (Irving, 2012, p. 62). This marriage eventually ended in divorce after her husband refused to accept the security measures imposed upon her by the PFLP (Irving, 2012, p. 63). Her second marriage to Fayez Hilal, a fellow PFLP member, blossomed during their time in the Soviet Union, where they were both pursuing education. This relationship, though initially cautious due to Leila's past experiences, grew stronger over time and the couple had two sons (Irving, 2012, p. 64). Khaled's role as a mother was a delicate balancing act between political commitments and nurturing her children. She consciously chose to shield her sons from her revolutionary past, instructing them not to reveal her identity to their school friends (Irving, 2012, p. 76).

Leila often reflected on the cultural influences that shaped her life. She emphasized the importance of food, social gatherings, and the traditions of Palestinian life, even amid political turmoil (Irving, 2012, p. 45). She frequently highlighted the role of women in preserving cultural identity and advocated for respect within societal norms, even as she challenged patriarchal structures (Irving, 2012, p. 46). Her insistence on cultural preservation extended to how she raised her children, ensuring they were connected to their Palestinian heritage despite their exposure to different cultures during her political travels (Irving, 2012, p. 77). A traumatic moment in Khaled's personal life was when her sister was mistakenly assassinated in 1976 due to her resemblance to Leila, marking one of the most painful moments of her life (Irving, 2012, p. 89).

Leila Khaled's life and actions continue to inspire debates about the ethics of armed struggle, the role of women in revolutionary movements, and the broader Palestinian liberation effort. Feminists and political activists have both celebrated and

criticized her. While some view her as a trailblazer who challenged gender norms, others argue that her adoption of militant tactics perpetuated a patriarchal model of resistance (Irving, 2012, p. 9). Nonetheless, her journey from a young refugee in Lebanon to an international symbol of resistance encapsulates the complexities of the Palestinian struggle. As she continues to advocate for Palestinian rights, Leila Khaled remains a living testament to the enduring spirit of resistance.

3.4 Brigate Rosse: Mara Cagol

Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades or BR), one of the most famous left-wing terrorist organizations in Italy, played a significant role in shaping the country's sociopolitical landscape from the 1970s through the early 1980s. The BR emerged from the broader leftist revolutionary movements that gained momentum in Italy during the late 1960s. According to Alessandro Orsini's *Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse: Le Radici Ideologiche del Terrorismo Rivoluzionario* (Orsini, 2009), the organization was officially founded in 1970, following earlier conventions that laid the groundwork for militant action. Initially, the group framed itself as a revolutionary vanguard determined to overthrow the capitalist State and institute a communist society. Their formation was fueled by dissatisfaction with traditional political structures and a belief that radical action was necessary to achieve social justice (Orsini, 2009).

The period from 1969 to 1985 saw Italy as one of the countries most affected by terrorist activities in Europe, with the Brigate Rosse at the forefront of left-wing extremism. Indeed, between 1969 and 2007, 333 people were killed in terrorist attacks, 144 of which were attributed to left-wing terrorism (Orsini, 2009, p. 1). The BR's impact extended beyond violence, contributing to political polarization and a heightened climate of fear.

At the core of the Brigate Rosse's ideology was a gnostic belief in the existence of absolute good and evil. The capitalist State was depicted as the embodiment of evil, and the BR members positioned themselves as the chosen agents of societal purification

(Orsini, 2009, p. 17). Orsini identifies this belief system as a form of revolutionary gnosticism characterized by themes such as Waiting for the End (societal transformation was imminent and the current capitalist system was on the brink of collapse), Radical Catastrophism (only through complete destruction could a just and equitable society be established), and Obsession with Purity (disdain for reformist elements within the left, whom the BR viewed as complicit in maintaining the status quo) (Orsini, 2009, p. 4). This ideological framework borrowed heavily from religious narratives, portraying revolution as a form of salvation and the militants as agents of redemption. This ideological framework justified political violence as a necessary and even virtuous act to cleanse society of its corrupt elements (Orsini, 2009). The pedagogy of intolerance, as Orsini calls it, was instrumental in fostering a binary mentality among BR militants. This "binary code mentality" reduced complex social realities to simplistic dichotomies, made up of good versus evil and oppressors versus oppressed (Orsini, 2009, p. 17). Such a worldview not only justified violence but made it a moral imperative. The BR's hatred for reformists was particularly intense. They viewed reformism as a betrayal of revolutionary ideals, equating it with compromise and weakness (Orsini, 2009, p. 42). This disdain led to targeted attacks on moderate political figures and labor leaders, whom they saw as obstacles to the revolutionary transformation of society.

Brigate Rosse functioned as a revolutionary sect, with a rigid hierarchy and strict discipline. Daily life within the organization involved intense ideological training, operational planning, and acts of violence. Members were expected to sever ties with the outside world, creating a social detachment that reinforced their commitment to the cause (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). Orsini highlights the obsessive secrecy and paranoia that pervaded the group's operations. Communication was tightly controlled, and dissent was not tolerated. The "purifiers of the world" mentality led to internal purges and a relentless focus on maintaining ideological purity, and the group's organizational structure was highly militarized, with specialized roles for logistics, intelligence, and combat operations. Key components of the organizational structure included: Strategic Command (the highest decision-making body responsible for planning operations and setting ideological direction); Operational Units (cells tasked with carrying out attacks, surveillance, and logistical support); and Support Networks (individuals and groups who

provided safe houses, transportation, and intelligence). Communication between different cells was minimal to reduce the risk of infiltration and capture (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). Members were trained to operate autonomously, following directives without the need for constant oversight.

The group's militarized structure extended to their operational planning. Attacks were meticulously organized, with reconnaissance missions, escape routes, and contingency plans carefully mapped out. This level of discipline and organization contributed to the BR's ability to evade capture and execute high-profile operations, including the kidnapping and murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978.

Life as a member of the Brigate Rosse was marked by intense ideological indoctrination, rigorous operational training, and social isolation. Orsini describes the daily routines of BR militants as a blend of political education and practical preparation for armed struggle (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). Training sessions often included discussions on Marxist-Leninist theory, as well as practical exercises in weapon handling and urban guerrilla tactics. Members were taught to view themselves as soldiers in a war against capitalist oppression. This militaristic approach was evident in their meticulous planning of attacks and their emphasis on operational discipline. A fundamental part regarded social isolation. Members were required to sever ties with their families and former social networks, which was intended to deepen their commitment to the cause and prevent external influences from undermining their resolve. This had a strong psychological toll on the members of the Brigate Rosse. The constant threat of arrest, combined with the demands of maintaining secrecy and operational discipline, created a highly stressful environment (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). Despite this, many members remained deeply committed to the organization's goals, driven by a sense of mission and ideological fervor.

Brigate Rosse are best known for their violent tactics, which included kidnappings, assassinations, and bombings. The kidnapping and murder of Moro in 1978 marked the zenith of their campaign of terror. Moro's execution was justified by the BR as an "act of justice" necessary to advance the revolution (Orsini, 2009, p. 3). Political

homicide was ritualized within the BR as a "loving gesture toward humanity awaiting an apocalyptic palingenesis" (Orsini, 2009, p. 3). The process of dehumanizing enemies by describing them as "pigs" or "monsters" enabled militants to carry out acts of extreme violence without moral qualms (Orsini, 2009, p. 2). The BR's justification for violence was rooted in a narrative that framed such actions as necessary for the liberation of the proletariat (Orsini, 2009, p. 11). The organization's use of violence extended beyond high-profile assassinations. They targeted industrialists, police officers, and journalists, aiming to disrupt the functioning of the State and create a climate of chaos. The group's operational strategy was based on the belief that such actions would inspire the working class to rise up against their oppressors.

The psychological transformation of BR members was profound. The revolutionary educational pathway, as Orsini describes it, stripped individuals of their previous identities and reprogrammed them as instruments of the revolution (Orsini, 2009, p. 19). This radical re-socialization process created militants who were willing to kill and die for the cause. The sociopolitical impact of the Brigate Rosse was equally significant. Their campaign of violence plunged Italy into a state of fear and instability, leading to increased government repression and the erosion of civil liberties. The State's response included the deployment of special anti-terrorism units and the enactment of stringent counterterrorism laws. Orsini emphasizes that the BR's actions had a polarizing effect on Italian society. While some leftist groups initially sympathized with their revolutionary goals, the widespread violence ultimately alienated much of the public and contributed to the decline of radical left-wing movements (Orsini, 2009).

The decline of the Brigate Rosse began in the early 1980s, as key leaders were arrested and public support waned. The Italian State's crackdown on terrorism, coupled with strategic errors and internal divisions within the BR, led to the group's disintegration (Orsini, 2009, p. 66). However, their legacy continues to influence discussions on political violence and counterterrorism strategies. One of the defining moments in the group's decline was the arrest and cooperation of Patrizio Peci, a high-ranking member who provided valuable intelligence to the authorities (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). This betrayal dealt a significant blow to the organization and marked the beginning of its unraveling.

Unlike many radical groups that relegated women to support roles, the BR integrated them as full participants in their operations, ideological training, and leadership. Women were not confined to traditional roles such as logistics or communication, they were actively involved in planning and executing violent operations, participating in kidnappings, and even committing assassinations. This participation in armed struggle was often seen as a form of ultimate liberation from the constraints imposed by a patriarchal capitalist society (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). By taking up arms, women rejected traditional societal expectations and claimed a role as agents of political change.

Despite the BR's ideological commitment to equality, traditional gender dynamics were not entirely absent. Women often had to prove their loyalty and competence to their male counterparts in ways that their male peers did not. The militarized culture of the BR, which valorized physical toughness and operational efficiency, sometimes placed additional pressure on women to conform to these expectations. Male members occasionally harbored doubts about women's capacity for violence and leadership, which forced female militants to demonstrate exceptional dedication and resolve. However, some women found that their roles within the BR allowed them to challenge and subvert traditional gender norms. By participating in combat operations and ideological debates, women asserted their agency and demanded respect from their male comrades. The BR's commitment to collective decision-making also provided a platform for women's voices, although this did not completely eliminate patriarchal attitudes. The tension between ideological egalitarianism and ingrained gender biases remained a persistent challenge within the organization.

The motivations of women who joined the Brigate Rosse were varied and complex, often intertwining personal, political, and social factors. For many, the desire to fight against social and economic injustice was a primary motivator. The BR's revolutionary rhetoric, which promised a radical transformation of society, resonated with women who had grown disillusioned with traditional political avenues. The group's emphasis on dismantling patriarchal structures within the capitalist system further

appealed to women seeking gender equality. The promise of a society free from oppression and exploitation offered a powerful vision that motivated many to join the armed struggle. Furthermore, personal relationships often played a significant role in women's entry into the BR, with some being introduced to the group through romantic partners, friends, or family members who were already involved. These connections provided an initial point of contact and facilitated their integration into the organization. However, Orsini cautions against reducing women's involvement to mere followership. While personal relationships were a factor, many women made independent decisions to join the BR based on their political convictions (Orsini, 2009, p. 105).

Encounters with State violence and repression were pivotal in radicalizing some women. Police brutality, mass arrests, and the perceived failure of the legal system to address social grievances fueled a sense of urgency and justified the turn to armed struggle. Participation in the BR offered women an opportunity to break free from traditional gender roles and assert their agency. The act of taking up arms and engaging in revolutionary activities was seen as a form of personal liberation. Orsini highlights the transformative impact of this involvement, noting that many women described their time in the BR as a period of intense personal growth and empowerment (Orsini, 2009, p. 93). By challenging societal expectations and embracing a militant identity, these women redefined their sense of self and place in the world.

An often overlooked aspect of women's participation in the Brigate Rosse was the tension between their roles as militants and potential or actual mothers. The BR's demand for total commitment often led women to abandon traditional family structures and relationships. Some women made the difficult decision to leave their children in the care of relatives or comrades to focus entirely on revolutionary activities. This separation from familial roles was both a personal sacrifice and a radical statement against societal norms. By rejecting conventional motherhood, these women sought to embody the BR's vision of total liberation from bourgeois constraints. However, the emotional toll of these choices lingered, with some former members expressing regret for the impact on their families.

Beyond their operational roles, women in the Brigate Rosse contributed significantly to the group's ideological development. Their perspectives on gender, class struggle, and revolutionary strategy enriched internal debates and shaped the BR's approach to political violence. Some women militants pushed for a more nuanced understanding of oppression that included both class and gender dimensions. This advocacy highlighted the intersections between capitalism and patriarchy, although the BR's primary focus remained on class struggle.

One of the most famous women in the Brigate Rosse was Margherita Cagol, often remembered by her *nom de guerre* "Mara", who played a pivotal role in the genesis and operational rise of the organization. Born in Trento in 1945, Mara grew up in a Catholic, middle-class family. Her early years were characterized by a conventional upbringing, but her enrollment at the University of Trento in the 1960s marked a turning point in her political development (Podda, 2007). Trento was a hub of leftist intellectual activity, and Cagol immersed herself in student movements advocating for social justice and radical political change. It was during her time at university that she met Renato Curcio, who would become her husband and co-founder of the Red Brigades (Podda, 2007). Their shared ideological convictions and desire to challenge Italy's capitalist and bureaucratic structures cemented their partnership, both personally and politically. The intellectual environment at Trento, influenced by Marxist and revolutionary ideas, provided fertile ground for Cagol's radicalization. She graduated with honors on 26 July 1969 from the Sociology Faculty. Her thesis was on "The Qualification of the Labor Force during Capitalistic Development" and she was offered a two-year assistant professorship in sociology at the Milan Umanitaria (Orsini, 2009).

In 1970, Cagol and Curcio, along with a small group of like-minded revolutionaries, established the Red Brigades (Podda, 2007). The organization's early activities focused on symbolic acts of rebellion, such as factory occupations and the distribution of revolutionary propaganda. However, Cagol's influence, along with that of other key leaders, pushed the group toward more militant actions. Mara explains her moral imperative to pursue the armed struggle in a letter to her mother in 1969:

"We now have the opportunity to change this society and it would be criminal (toward humanity) not to exploit it. We must do everything possible to change this system, because this is the profound meaning of our existence. These things are not impossible, you know, Mama. They are serious and difficult things that are really worth doing. . . Life is too important to waste or fritter away in stupid chatter or squabbles. Every minute is vital"[20].

Mara's role within the organization extended beyond ideological leadership. She was instrumental in organizing training sessions, operational planning, and recruitment. Her charisma and unwavering commitment made her a respected figure among militants. She embodied the revolutionary ideal, combining intellectual rigor with practical leadership. Under Cagol's command, the Red Brigades escalated their activities to include bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations (Podda, 2007). Cagol was deeply involved in the strategic evolution of the group's tactics, which aimed to destabilize the State and provoke a revolutionary uprising. One of the most notorious operations associated with Cagol was the kidnapping of industrialists and political figures, which the BR justified as acts of "revolutionary justice" (Orsini, 2009). Even after the arrest of her husband, Mara explains in a letter to her parents she has no intention of interrupting her fight because her battle is "just and sacrosanct" and history will prove her right:

"Dear parents, I write to tell you not to worry too much about me. . . Renato was arrested thanks to a big international spy, Father Leone, a priest working for the CIA. . . Now it is up to me and all the comrades who want to combat this rotten bourgeois power to continue the fight. Please don't think that I'm irresponsible. . . What I'm doing is just and sacrosanct, history will prove me right as it did for the Resistance in '45. But you'll say, are these the means to use? Believe me, there are no others. This police State relies on the strength of its weapons and those who want to fight it have to use the

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[20] Cagol, Mara (1969) *Lettera alla madre*, quoted in Orsini, Alessandro (2009) *Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse: Le Radici Ideologiche del Terrorismo Rivoluzionario*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

same means. . . Therefore my revolutionary choices, despite Renato's arrest,

remain the same . . . no prospect shocks or frightens me"[21].

In 1975, Cagol participated in the kidnapping of Vittorio Vallarino Gancia, a wealthy industrialist. The operation marked a turning point in her life and the trajectory of the Red Brigades. During the Gancia operation, Cagol and her comrades established a hideout in the countryside. However, their location was discovered by law enforcement. A fierce gun battle ensued, during which Cagol was fatally shot. Her death was a significant blow to the Red Brigades, both operationally and symbolically. Eyewitness accounts describe Cagol's final moments as emblematic of her unwavering commitment. Despite being surrounded and outnumbered, she refused to surrender, choosing to fight until the end (Podda, 2007). Her death marked a turning point for the Red Brigades, who viewed her as a martyr for the revolutionary cause. Mara's death did not mark the end of the Red Brigades, but it significantly impacted the group's morale and strategic direction. Cagol's life and death continue to be subjects of analysis and debate. Some view her as a misguided idealist who succumbed to the allure of violence, while others see her as a determined revolutionary who fought for her beliefs.

3.5 Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber: Muriel Degauque

Muriel Degauque's story is a complex tale of identity, conversion, and radicalization, culminating in her death as Europe's first female suicide bomber in Iraq on November 9, 2005. Born and raised in Belgium, Degauque's journey from a seemingly ordinary life to her involvement in global jihad shocked both European society and the world. Muriel was born in 1967 in the predominantly Catholic town of Charleroi, Belgium. Described as a rebellious and troubled child, Muriel often struggled to conform to societal expectations. Her teenage years were marked by experimentation with alcohol,

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[21] Cagol, Mara (1974) *Lettera ai genitori*, quoted in Orsini, Alessandro (2009) *Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse: Le Radici Ideologiche del Terrorismo Rivoluzionario*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

drug use, and a search for meaning outside conventional norms (Brown, 2011, p. 712). Her behavior reportedly strained her relationship with her parents, who were from a working-class background rooted in traditional and conservative European values, at odds with Muriel's search for personal identity and freedom. Her family viewed her as a troubled youth who often rejected societal norms. Her school years reflected these struggles, as she found herself in conflict with educational authorities. Muriel's early social alienation can be seen as part of a broader pattern of disconnection that later made her susceptible to radical ideologies (Brown, 2011, p. 713). In her junior year of high school, she began working as a clerk in a bakery in her hometown. Some of her acquaintances recount that, during that period, she was disoriented and seemed to have lost her balance. Her former employer reported that she would disappear during lunchtime and was soon informed that she was using drugs, information that was also confirmed by local police (Orsini, 2016, p. 204).

Degauque's early years reflect a search for identity and belonging, which remained a recurring theme throughout her life. Despite attempts to reintegrate into mainstream society, she continued to feel disconnected from her cultural environment (Brown, 2011, p. 714). After some time, around age 18, she followed in her older brother's footsteps and became a member of a motorcycle group, the "Apaches" (Orsini, 2016, p. 204). At the age of 20, she suffered a terrible existential trauma. Her brother died tragically in a motorcycle accident, and she, distraught with grief, said she wished she had died in his place so that she would not have to live with the pain of such a traumatic loss (Orsini, 2016, pp. 204-205). Soon afterward she married a Turkish man, much older than she was, a marriage that many thought was a ploy to help him legalize her status in Belgium, from which she divorced two years later (Orsini, 2016, p. 205). While working as a waitress in a restaurant, she met a young Algerian man who introduced her to Islam. This conversion marked a shift in her identity as she adopted Islamic practices, including wearing the veil, which further distanced her from her family and former social circles (Brown, 2011, p. 714).

Her adoption of Islam, while initially moderate, deepened over time. She immersed herself in Islamic teachings and became increasingly aligned with more radical

interpretations of the faith (Brown, 2011, p. 713). She stopped drinking and using drugs and her mother recounts she was happy she converted because of this, but her devotion soon became an obsession (Orsini, 2016, p. 205). Some years after converting, she married Issam Goris, the son of a Belgian man and a Moroccan woman, who was already known to the police for his radical beliefs. Muriel moved to Bruxelles with him and then to Morocco, where she studied Arabic and the Qur'an. When she got back to Belgium, she had become even more extremist. She started living in an extremely marginalized condition, in a migrant neighborhood in Bruxelles. The owner of the building they lived in said she only survived through unemployment checks and that nobody knew what her husband was doing (Orsini, 2016, p. 206). When she went to her family's home, she expected them to follow the most rigid Islamic customs, so she forced her father not to drink alcohol and forbade men and women from eating together. She was completely locked away from the outside world, to the point that, on the last time she went to have lunch with her parents, she was covered from head to toe, with only her eyes visible, and she was also wearing gloves. Her family knew she left for Syria only through a phone call (Orsini, 2016, pp. 206-207).

Muriel Degauque's path to radicalization was shaped by her exposure to extremist networks both in Belgium and abroad. Her radicalization mirrored broader patterns observed in homegrown European jihadists, where disillusionment with Western society intersected with militant ideologies (Brown, 2011, p. 714). Alongside her husband, she traveled to Syria and Iraq, where they connected with jihadist groups. Her transformation from a Belgian housewife to a militant shocked observers and became a focal point for media narratives about female terrorists in Europe (Brown, 2011, p. 715). The Belgian police found out that her husband had joined a group of recruiters that enlisted people in Europe to die in Iraq for al-Zarqawi (Orsini, 2016, p. 207).

On November 9, 2005, Muriel Degauque carried out a suicide attack near Baqubah, Iraq. Although the attack resulted in her death, it failed to achieve significant casualties as the bomb detonated prematurely (Brown, 2011, p. 708). Her identity was discovered only through the passport she was carrying with her since the explosion completely disintegrated her body (Orsini, 2016, p. 208). Her husband was reportedly

killed in a separate encounter with Iraqi forces by a bullet while he was trying to blow himself up, without success. Degauque's death marked the first instance of a European woman conducting a suicide attack in a conflict zone, earning her the title of Europe's "first female suicide bomber" (Brown, 2011, p. 708). Following her death, media portrayals of Muriel Degauque focused heavily on her gender, conversion, and perceived manipulation by male figures. The narrative often framed her as a victim of religious indoctrination, driven by emotional instability rather than political conviction (Brown, 2011, p. 713). Her decision to become a suicide bomber was frequently pathologized, with emphasis on her troubled past and mental state rather than the geopolitical context of the Iraq War and Western interventions in the Middle East (Brown, 2011, p. 712). The media also highlighted her veiling practices as symbolic of her radicalization, reinforcing stereotypes about Muslim women (Brown, 2011, p. 714).

The tendency to pathologize female terrorists, framing their actions as the result of emotional instability, trauma, or coercion, rather than rational political choices, is a common feature of gendered narratives in terrorism discourse. Muriel was frequently depicted as a troubled individual whose radicalization stemmed from unresolved personal issues rather than a conscious engagement with political or religious ideology (Brown, 2011, p. 713). Media reports highlighted her rebellious youth, experimentation with drugs and alcohol, and strained relationships with her family as precursors to her eventual radicalization (Brown, 2011, p. 712). This narrative positioned her as a victim of circumstance, undermining her agency as a political actor. This pathologization was evident in the emphasis on her troubled personal life, including accounts of her perceived inability to conform to traditional social roles as a daughter and wife (Brown, 2011, p. 713). Her conversion to Islam and subsequent radicalization were framed as part of a "descent into madness" where religious indoctrination acted as a tool that exploited her vulnerability.

The pathologization of Muriel Degauque effectively depoliticized her actions, reducing them to a personal tragedy rather than a politically motivated act. This framing obscured the possibility that Muriel may have been motivated by genuine ideological beliefs, however extreme or misguided. This erasure of political agency is problematic

because it obscures the structural factors that contribute to radicalization. By framing Muriel's actions as the result of individual dysfunction, the media ignored the broader socio-political dynamics that may have influenced her decision to carry out a suicide attack.

The portrayal of Degauque as a passive figure manipulated by male radicals denied her political agency. Media narratives frequently dismissed the possibility that she acted out of ideological conviction. Instead, her decision was attributed to personal trauma and emotional instability (Brown, 2011, p. 713). This framing contrasted with the portrayal of male terrorists, who were more often depicted as rational political actors. Furthermore, Muriel's life story underscores the importance of social exclusion in processes of radicalization. Her early struggles with belonging, combined with the alienation she experienced as a Muslim convert in Europe, created fertile ground for extremist ideologies. Her search for meaning and purpose, which was not fulfilled by conventional social institutions, found an outlet in the jihadist narrative that promised redemption and significance (Brown, 2011, p. 714).

As Europe's first female suicide bomber, her case challenged established perceptions about terrorism, gender, and identity. In the article *Muriel's Wedding: News Media Representations of Europe's First Female Suicide Terrorist* (Brown, 2011), Katherine E. Brown reveals how news media representations of Degauque's actions intertwined themes of gender, security, and religion, constructing her as an Other within European narratives. Her research showed that the media often depicted Degauque as a passive figure influenced by her Muslim husband, echoing traditional narratives that portray female terrorists as lacking agency (Brown, 2011). This framing aligned with stereotypes that women are driven by emotional or personal factors rather than political motives. Her motivations were depoliticized, and the geopolitical context of the Iraq War was largely ignored. Degauque's conversion to Islam and participation in a violent act positioned her as a unique security threat. Her case exemplified concerns about homegrown terrorism and the perceived danger of European converts becoming "more Muslim than Muslim" (Brown, 2011, p. 708). The media frequently highlighted her veiling practices as symbolic of her radicalization. Furthermore, Degauque's decision to

carry out a suicide attack was attributed to trauma, mental instability, and her troubled youth rather than political motivations. The media often emphasized her sexual history and deviant behavior as precursors to her radicalization (Brown, 2011, p. 713). Brown argues that the media's portrayal of Degauque reinforced existing gendered and racialized constructions of terrorism. Despite being a white European woman, Degauque was racialized and positioned outside normative European femininity due to her religious identity and political violence.

CHAPTER IV
Dissecting the Female Terrorist

This chapter explores the lived experiences of female terrorists through the main theories described in Chapter II, to understand how female terrorists perceive their roles, construct their identities, and sustain their engagement in violent movements. By examining the lives of Edith Lagos, Zarema Muzhakhoeva, Leila Khaled, Muriel Degauque, and Mara Cagol as described in Chapter III, this study highlights the diverse pathways through which women become radicalized and participate in terrorism.

Each section analyzes her life stories using some phenomenological concepts. Since this analysis wanted to give as much space as possible to these women's own words in describing themselves and to paint a picture as faithful as possible, the sources used incorporate biographies and interviews with their letters, poems, and dreams, most of which were translated by the author of this thesis. Including them is essential for understanding the deeper psychological, emotional, and ideological dimensions of individuals involved in terrorism. Both serve as windows into the subconscious, revealing internal struggles, aspirations, and the symbolic frameworks that shape a person's worldview.

Rather than viewing these women as anomalies or passive victims of male manipulation, this chapter positions them as active agents within their ideological and social contexts. Their trajectories into terrorism are shaped by a combination of personal experiences, political grievances, and structural conditions, all of which contribute to their radicalization and operational roles. Furthermore, this chapter explores how gender both constrains and enables their participation, influencing recruitment strategies, media portrayals, and organizational dynamics. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this analysis seeks to move beyond simplistic narratives and uncover the deeper structures that define the female terrorist experience, acknowledging both the individual and collective forces that shape her reality.

4.1 Edith Lagos

Edith Lagos embodies a complex narrative of revolutionary fervor, personal transformation, and ideological commitment. Edith's early life in Ayacucho, a region marked by poverty and social stratification, profoundly influenced her worldview. Her childhood daily life revolved around formal education with Catholic nuns, participation in cultural activities such as music, declamation, and dance, and interactions within her local community. These routines provided a sense of stability and predictability, reinforcing her identity as a promising student with a bright future. However, even within this structured lifeworld, Lagos displayed signs of discontent and sensitivity to the injustices faced by indigenous communities in Ayacucho. Her encounters with these social realities disrupted the coherence of her lifeworld, planting the seeds of future radicalization and laying the groundwork for her revolutionary path.

Her move to Lima to study law marked a significant rupture in her everyday routines. The structured environment of formal education was replaced by the dynamic and ideologically charged atmosphere of university life. Phenomenologically, this shift disrupted her previous routines and introduced her to new forms of social interaction, particularly with Marxist and Maoist student groups. Her engagement with these groups led to the adoption of new routines centered around political activism, such as attending meetings, participating in demonstrations, and reading revolutionary literature. This period exemplifies the breakdown of conventional routines and the reconstitution of a new lifeworld oriented toward political resistance.

As Lagos became more deeply involved in Sendero Luminoso, her everyday life radically transformed. The routines of a student and aspiring lawyer were replaced by those of a militant. Her new routine involved: physical training for guerrilla warfare; handling explosives and weapons; planning and executing attacks; and strategic meetings in clandestine locations. These new routines were characterized by discipline, secrecy, and a constant awareness of danger. From a phenomenological perspective, this reconstitution of routine provided Edith with a new framework for meaning-making, reinforcing her identity as a revolutionary leader.

Phenomenology places significant emphasis on the temporal structure of experience, where past memories, present routines, and future anticipations shape human existence. Lagos's life as a revolutionary was marked by a constant awareness of mortality, which can be seen also through her poetry. In *Doloroso Grito de la Vida* she writes "*¿Por qué la mía palpita tan aprisa? / Es que el dolor golpea al corazón / tan hondamente que es necesario / correr los latidos antes del dolor*". These verses capture Lagos's awareness of the precariousness of life as a militant and her attempt to find meaning in that existence. Her anticipation of death became a defining aspect of her revolutionary identity, infusing her poetry with a sense of urgency, and the rhythm of the heart, a symbol of life and vitality, becomes a metaphor for the urgency of resistance. Her poetry, much like her speeches, was a form of dialogue with the collective, encouraging reflection and action. The poetic form allowed her to communicate complex emotions and ideas in a way that resonated deeply with her audience.

In *El Remolino Rompió la Calma* Lagos captures the turbulence of revolutionary commitment: "*Hierba Silvestre / Te ruego / Acompañarme en mi camino. / Serás mi amiga / Cuando crezcas / Sobre mi tumba*". The imagery of the Hierba Silvestre symbolizes resilience and renewal, while the acknowledgment of her own grave underscores the temporal structure of her existence, shaped by the anticipation of death. The poem underscores the cyclical relationship between life and death, with Lagos imagining her body as part of a larger ecological and revolutionary continuum and presenting it as a site of rebirth, which happens through nature's regenerative power. This passage underscores the cyclical nature of human existence, with Edith envisioning a future where her sacrifice would nurture the revolutionary struggle. She accepts suffering and mortality as necessary components of life, especially the one of a revolutionary, and does not perceive death as a tragic interruption but as the fulfillment of a temporal arc that aligned with the values of Sendero Luminoso, where sacrifice was valorized.

Edith's poetry offers a unique window into the subjective experiences and revolutionary consciousness that defined her short yet impactful life. As stated before, phenomenological sociology emphasizes the taken-for-granted nature of everyday life,

where individuals navigate their social world through habitualized actions and shared meanings. Lagos's poetry frequently disrupts this routine, exposing the contradictions of daily existence under political repression and insurgency. Her verses depict the mundanity of suffering, the inevitability of struggle, and the transformation of ordinary moments into revolutionary calls to action. In this way, her work subverts the typical order of everyday life, revealing it as a construct that must be challenged and reshaped. For example, in *Doloroso Grito de la Vida*, Lagos presents pain and resistance as interwoven elements of existence. The structured rhythm of daily life is shattered by State violence, forcing individuals to reconfigure their reality. Her poetic language captures the transition from passive acceptance to active defiance, demonstrating the phenomenological concept that social reality is not static but continuously reconstructed through individual and collective action. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodiment theory[22] (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) further supports this interpretation, as Lagos's poetic expressions do not merely convey abstract ideas but are deeply tied to physical and sensory experiences. Her depiction of wounds, hunger, and exhaustion in the midst of conflict serves to highlight the material reality of oppression, making the reader physically experience the embodiment of struggle.

Furthermore, Lagos's poetry typifies the revolutionary subject, constructing an archetype of the committed militant who sacrifices personal comfort for collective liberation. Her depictions of insurgents emphasize qualities such as bravery, martyrdom, and ideological purity, reinforcing the expectations placed upon members of Sendero Luminoso. Through poetic imagery, she draws upon established revolutionary symbols and historical references, situating the militant within a greater narrative of struggle. The repetition of themes such as self-sacrifice, fraternity, and unyielding resistance serves as a Schutzian "recipe for action", instructing individuals on how to navigate their roles within the insurgency. Her poetry functions as a guide for would-be revolutionaries, offering a linguistic structure that aligns personal identity with collective struggle. Michel

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[22] Merleau-Ponty's embodiment theory focuses on the idea that perception, consciousness, and understanding of the world are deeply rooted in bodily experience. He argues that the body is not just a biological object but a medium through which people engage with the world, and is central to both the perception and the understanding of human existence.

Foucault's discourse analysis[23] (Foucault, 1969; Foucault, 1975) further enriches this understanding by demonstrating how Lagos's poetry contributes to the creation of a specific discursive regime within the insurgency. Her words serve as more than personal reflections, they establish a form of knowledge production that dictates what it means to be a revolutionary, defining behaviors, emotions, and ideological commitments within the movement.

Externalization, as theorized by Berger and Luckmann, refers to the process by which human beings project their subjective meanings onto the external world. Lagos's poetry serves as an act of externalization, transforming internal convictions into tangible expressions of resistance. By committing her thoughts and emotions to verse, she contributes to the creation of a shared revolutionary discourse that others can adopt, reinterpret, and disseminate. Her poetry does not merely describe the world as it is but actively seeks to shape it. Through metaphors and allegories, she externalizes an alternative vision of reality, one in which the oppressed rise against their subjugators, and history bends toward justice. Her language fosters solidarity, as readers internalize her vision and incorporate it into their own understanding of the political struggle. From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action[24] (Habermas, 1981), Edith's poetry functions as a form of resistance communication, countering dominant narratives imposed by the Peruvian State. Her poems do not merely document oppression, they engage in dialogue with authority, seeking to delegitimize the official discourse that brands insurgents as criminals and instead present them as agents of justice.

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[23] Foucault's discourse analysis examines how language, knowledge, and power are interwoven in shaping social realities. He defines "discourse" not just as a body of written or spoken words, but as a system of knowledge, practices, and norms that define what is considered true, acceptable, and meaningful in society at a given time. Foucault argues that power operates through discourses, which govern and regulate individuals' thoughts, behaviors, and identities, influence institutions, and create social categories that structure human life. His approach challenges traditional views of knowledge as objective or neutral, instead showing how it is shaped by power relations.

[24] Habermas's theory of communicative action focuses on how human beings engage in rational communication to reach mutual understanding and coordinate actions. Habermas distinguishes between two types of action: *instrumental action*, which is goal-oriented and focused on achieving specific outcomes, and *communicative action*, which is oriented toward achieving understanding and consensus through dialogue. This theory emphasizes the potential for rational discourse to create understanding, cooperation, and social integration, fostering a more just and democratic society.

Once externalized, meanings become objectified, taking on a reality independent of their creator. Lagos's poetry, widely circulated within Sendero Luminoso and among sympathizers, was objectified as a cultural artifact of the movement. Her words became institutionalized within the revolutionary consciousness, reinforcing the legitimacy of armed struggle and the necessity of ideological commitment. Objectification is evident in how her poetry was repurposed for propaganda, ritualized in recitations, and integrated into the symbolic lexicon of the insurgency. Her verses transcended personal expression, becoming part of the collective memory of the movement. Even after her death, her poetic constructions of resistance continued to shape perceptions of the revolutionary cause, solidifying her role as a martyr whose legacy remained embedded in the ideological structures of Sendero Luminoso.

The final stage of the dialectical process, internalization, occurs when objectified meanings are absorbed into the consciousness of individuals, shaping their perceptions and actions. Lagos's poetry was internalized by generations of militants who saw in her words a reaffirmation of their own struggles. Her verses provided a cognitive framework that guided their understanding of reality, reinforcing their commitment to the movement. Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses[25] (Althusser, 1970) helps understand how Lagos's poetry functioned as a counter-ideological force. While the State sought to shape social reality through education, propaganda, and repression, her poetry provided an alternative ideological framework, one that was internalized by those who opposed the dominant order. More than literary works, her poems function as mechanisms for shaping consciousness, fostering solidarity, and legitimizing resistance.

Regarding the phenomenological value that language has, Lagos's engagement with revolutionary discourse not only signified her personal transformation but also reinforced the ideological framework of Sendero Luminoso. Through her rhetoric, she

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[25] Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) refers to institutions and systems that play a key role in maintaining and reproducing the dominant ideology of a society, thus supporting the power structures and social order. These institutions promote ideologies that present the existing social and economic order as natural, necessary, or inevitable, thus ensuring compliance and stability without direct force. Rather than using brute force, ISAs work through ideology (norms, values, education, and culture) to ensure that individuals internalize the values that support the status quo. Althusser argues that this ideological influence is often so pervasive and subtle that individuals are not fully aware of how it shapes their perceptions and actions.

framed the struggle as a battle between the oppressed and the oppressors, simplifying complex socio-political issues into stark contrasts. Her speeches justified the use of violence as a necessary and inevitable means of achieving political change. She was also highly effective in mobilizing supporters, using her ability to articulate the grievances of marginalized communities to attract new recruits and solidify their commitment to the movement. Lagos's speeches played a fundamental role in shaping her identity as both an individual and a symbol of resistance. She relied on repetition to emphasize key revolutionary principles and employed metaphors and symbolism to invoke powerful emotions.

Beyond formal speeches, Lagos's poetry functioned as a deeply personal yet politically charged medium. In works such as *Doloroso Grito de la Vida* and *El Remolino Rompió la Calma*, she combined personal anguish with collective struggle, blending individual pain with the broader suffering of the oppressed. Her poetry often depicted war and sacrifice, portraying herself and her comrades as martyrs for a just cause. In her works, armed resistance was not an act of destruction but a path to liberation, a means of breaking free from systemic oppression. Poetry allowed Lagos to maintain an emotional connection with supporters even after her death, ensuring that her words continued to inspire future generations and reaffirm the ideological foundation of the movement.

The language of revolution is inherently dialectical because it constructs meaning while being contested and reshaped by opposing forces. Lagos's words did not exist in isolation, they were continuously challenged by government propaganda, media portrayals, and the evolving discourse of Sendero Luminoso. The government sought to delegitimize her through negative framing, while her supporters glorified her as a martyr, elevating her through poetic and rhetorical strategies. Her language adapted over time, as her words were repurposed and reinterpreted in different revolutionary contexts. This dynamic process highlights the interplay between language and power, where discourse is not fixed but fluid, shifting according to political and social circumstances. Language was one of Edith Lagos's most powerful weapons. Through speeches and poetry, she constructed a revolutionary identity, legitimized the struggle, and mobilized followers. Even in death, her words continued to shape the discourse of resistance, illustrating the

enduring power of language in political movements. The government's attempt to erase her presence by repeatedly destroying her gravestone was itself an acknowledgment of her deeply internalized impact.

In Lagos's early life, she was typified within her middle-class upbringing as a student, a daughter, and a promising intellectual. These social roles carried implicit expectations that guided her daily interactions and actions. However, as she immersed herself in revolutionary ideology, her typification shifted from that of a student to that of a militant. Through repeated engagement in protests, ideological study, and armed struggle, Lagos internalized the routines and behaviors expected of a committed insurgent, redefining her own identity in the process.

Edith's death at the age of nineteen after a violent ambush by Peruvian security forces holds profound symbolic significance within the context of her revolutionary life and the broader ideological struggle of Sendero Luminoso. Phenomenology views the body as a site of lived experience and interaction with the world. For Edith Lagos, who redefined her embodied existence through militant action, her death symbolized the ultimate transformation of the body into a tool of resistance and defiance. Her physical presence, once marked by normative femininity (described by media as "light-skinned and delicate"), had been reconfigured through her guerrilla activities as a symbol of strength and rebellion. In death, her body became a martyr's body, celebrated by thousands who attended her funeral and immortalized in narratives that elevated her as a symbol of revolutionary defiance. The public procession of her funeral, attended by over 30.000 mourners, transformed her body from a private individual to a collective symbol of political struggle, reinforcing the embodied nature of revolutionary martyrdom.

The rituals surrounding Lagos's death and funeral highlight the intersubjective nature of meaning-making. Her funeral became a powerful site of collective mourning and political defiance, and the symbolic act of thousands of mourners marching in defiance of State authorities turned her death into a public spectacle of resistance. Her grave, engraved with a modified part of her poem *El Remolino Rompió la Calma*, became a site of pilgrimage and continued conflict, with State forces repeatedly bombing it to

suppress her memory. The cyclical reconstruction of her gravesite symbolizes the enduring presence of her revolutionary spirit, defying attempts to erase her legacy.

Through the lens of phenomenological sociology, Edith Lagos's life and poetry reveal the intricate ways in which everyday life and routine can be disrupted, reconstituted, and imbued with revolutionary meaning. Her poetry serves as a testament to this transformation, capturing the emotional and existential complexities of her revolutionary life, and acting as a medium for understanding her embodied experiences and commitment to the cause.

4.2 Zarema Muzhakhoeva

Zarema Muzhakhoeva's early life was shaped by disruption, loss, and cultural norms that reinforced rigid social expectations for women. Her early familial instability marked the beginning of a lifeworld characterized by marginalization and displacement, and these early disruptions fractured its coherence. Born into a Chechen society marked by conflict, she was raised by her grandparents after her mother abandoned her and her father was killed. The war in Chechnya further destabilized her social reality, displacing her family and exposing her to a world dominated by violence, uncertainty, and grief. Despite these hardships, Muzhakhoeva's lifeworld was initially structured by traditional routines and social expectations. As a young woman, she adhered to cultural norms, marrying at nineteen. However, her husband's murder and the subsequent loss of custody of her daughter shattered the stability of her everyday reality and further deepened her sense of alienation. Schutz's notion of "stocks of knowledge at hand" suggests that individuals rely on prior experiences to navigate the world. For Muzhakhoeva, the loss of family and societal shame eroded these cognitive structures, leaving her vulnerable to radical narratives that promised a path to redemption. Her attempts to reclaim her daughter, culminating in her failed escape to Moscow, can be seen as catalysts of shame and personal despair. This shame was compounded by her association with Wahhabist militants, which initially offered her a distorted form of redemption, reinforcing the idea that her social honor could be restored through martyrdom. Her failed attempt to reclaim

agency through escape reinforced her marginalization, cutting her off from traditional social roles and reinforcing a sense of powerlessness. In this context, Zarema's involvement with Wahhabist militants can be understood as an attempt to reconstitute a meaningful routine. Schutz's concept of typification helps explain how she internalized the militant ideology. For Zarema, Chechen society had predefined typifications of womanhood and honor that initially guided her social existence. As a young woman, she typified herself as a traditional Chechen wife and mother, adhering to established societal norms. However, after her husband's murder and the loss of her child, her self-typification was shattered. In the absence of alternative frameworks, the Wahhabist framework provided a new set of typifications: she was no longer a dishonored woman but a potential martyr whose sacrifice could restore her dignity. This role gave meaning to her suffering, replacing the uncertainty of her existence with a rigidly structured ideological framework. This transformation reflects Berger and Luckmann's process of "objectification", where external ideologies become internalized as self-evident truths.

Zarema's time living with militants in the mountains involved a routine designed to psychologically and socially prepare her for a suicide mission. Her daily life included interactions with other recruits, promises of marriage, and exposure to radical teachings. The militants offered her a structured future that involved getting married to a fellow militant and resolving her financial issues, but Zarema rejected this path. According to what can be gathered from her words, Zarema's routine in the camp revolved around waiting, not for life but for death. The temporal structure of her existence became oriented toward the anticipation of an endpoint defined by martyrdom.

Her suicide mission in Mozdok, where she was instructed to blow up a bus carrying Russian pilots, marked a critical turning point. Her subjective experience at the moment of decision revealed a dissonance between expectation and reality. She confessed during interrogation that she "did not have the guts" to detonate the bomb, citing feelings of shame, a splitting headache, and blurred vision. The theoretical promise of martyrdom clashed with the immediate, tangible reality of violence and death. As Schutz notes, individuals retain agency within the structures imposed upon them. Muzhakhoeva's refusal to marry a militant and her reluctance to detonate her explosives during the

Mozdok mission suggest that she struggled against the totalizing nature of this new reality.

On July 9, 2003, Zarema walked into the Mon Café in Moscow, carrying explosives but hoping to be noticed and stopped. Her choice to surrender rather than detonate the bomb marked a radical departure from the path prescribed by the militants. She actively sought recognition from security guards, making deliberate signs until one finally approached her. This act of surrender can be seen as an assertion of agency, in which, by relinquishing the role of a passive martyr, Zarema reclaimed control over her life narrative. It can also be seen as a radical breach of routine, both in the militant world and in the broader discourse of the Black Widows. This moment represents a rupture in the internalized reality of martyrdom. Garfinkel's notion of reflexivity becomes evident as Zarema experiences doubt. Her encounter with Moscow, where she witnessed a different way of life, further disrupted the militant narrative. In her own words, she stated that seeing the shops and daily lives of civilians made her realize that she "would never explode".

Initially, she provided a false version of events, adhering to the militants' instructions that "if she was a good liar, they would save her", however, when she "felt safe" in custody, she began to tell the truth, leading to the dismantling of an explosives warehouse and the discovery of the base in Tolstopaltsev. Her testimony, though instrumental in preventing future attacks, was not met with leniency. The jury's decision to sentence her to 20 years in prison reflected a societal refusal to acknowledge her repentance and this aversion to mercy highlighted the social barriers faced by repentant terrorists seeking reintegration. Her acknowledgment that she could not return home due to social stigma reflects the power of typifications in shaping individual trajectories. Her lifeworld remained fractured, neither fully part of the terrorist network nor accepted by Russian society. The difficulty of reestablishing a routine after breaching social expectations aligns with Garfinkel's argument that social norms, once disrupted, are difficult to restore. This highlights a key paradox: while societies demand acts of defection and repentance from extremists, they simultaneously struggle to reintegrate those who comply, maintaining exclusionary social boundaries even in the face of change.

Garfinkel's concept of accountability applies here, as Zarema's actions required justification within multiple competing social frameworks. Russian authorities saw her as an unreliable figure, while terrorist organizations perceived her as a traitor. Her subsequent imprisonment, despite her cooperation with authorities, highlights the rigidity of social typifications and the difficulty of reconfiguring a new social identity after breaching an established routine. Muzhakhoeva's surrender functioned as a real-life breaching experiment, disrupting the established expectations surrounding female suicide bombers, particularly within the framework of the Black Widows. This act did not merely deviate from terrorist routine but also fractured broader social perceptions of ideological commitment, martyrdom, and gendered expectations of loyalty and honor. Garfinkel suggests that when breaches occur, society reacts by reinforcing existing structures rather than adapting to accommodate the anomaly. Muzhakhoeva's case demonstrates this dynamic, as both State and extremist factions responded by reinforcing the binary classification of terrorist or civilian, without room for an intermediary identity.

Zarema's descriptions of her dreams offer a window into her subconscious processing of trauma. Dreams play a crucial role in how individuals process experiences and search for meaning within their lifeworlds. There is ample literature that analyzes their symbolic and psychological meanings, starting from Sigmund Freud who describes them as "the royal road to the unconscious" (Freud, 1899) and believes in their function to show people's deepest desires, fears, and unresolved conflicts that may not be fully articulated in waking life. It is evident that dreams are related to waking states: there is a strong link between people's dream content and their current levels of well-being (Zadra, 1996). From a phenomenological perspective, dreams are not merely fleeting unconscious experiences but reflections of the subjective world of the dreamer. They serve as a tool to question the boundaries between subjective and objective experience and expose the mechanisms of consciousness in ways that waking experience cannot (Stanghellini, 2024). Schutz argues that the lifeworld is the paramount reality in which individuals operate, providing a stable framework for their actions and interpretations. However, for those who experience extreme disruption, such as war, radicalization, and incarceration, the lifeworld becomes fractured. Dreams, in this context, serve as a means of processing these disruptions and reconciling conflicting realities. Zarema's dreams, as recounted

during her interviews with Bykov, provide profound insight into her psyche, highlighting themes of guilt, loss, longing, and disillusionment. They also reflect her attempt to reclaim her humanity amidst the dehumanizing experiences of war, radicalization, and incarceration.

One of the recurring themes in Zarema's dreams involved the girls she had lived with at the militant base, Zulikhan Elikhadzhieva and Mariam Sharipova, who later carried out a suicide terrorist attack that killed 15 people and injured 60 more. In her dreams, she often saw these girls as sick and herself as unable to help them. This imagery suggests a lingering sense of guilt and helplessness. From a phenomenological standpoint, this dream scenario can be interpreted as Zarema's subconscious reckoning with her perceived failure to protect or influence these girls positively. Her subconscious portrayal of the girls as sick reflects a moral and emotional conflict: while she escaped the path of martyrdom, these young women did not. The dream imagery positions her in a caretaker role, emphasizing her desire to undo the harm that she associates with her involvement in their lives, but at the same time the impossibility of acting in such a way, since in her dreams they are far away and she cannot reach them.

Another recurring theme in Zarema's dreams was her home and her daughter, Rashana, which underscores her longing for familial connection and a return to normalcy, which she believed was no longer possible due to the shame she carried. In phenomenological terms, dreams of home often signify a yearning for stability and rootedness. For Zarema, whose life had been marked by displacement, social exclusion, and radicalization, the image of home most likely represented a lost ideal, a place where she could be accepted and whole again. However, she acknowledged that this was an impossibility, stating that for her grandparents she was already dead and that her return to her hometown would bring only shame or coercion to kill again. Beyond their role in challenging radical narratives, these dreams also functioned as a space for healing and reflection. The recurring imagery of her daughter and home highlighted her enduring love and hope for reconciliation, even in the face of social rejection. These dreams allowed her to mentally revisit a time before her radicalization, serving as a reminder of her humanity and desire for a peaceful life. Her ability to articulate and remember them and their

emotional impact during interviews suggests that they were a crucial part of her psychological processing. They provided a way for her to confront her guilt, reassess her beliefs, and imagine a future beyond the confines of her current reality.

Furthermore, Zarema's reflections on the promises made by the militants reveal a critical awakening, which led her to reject the militant ideology, recognizing it as a manipulative exploitation of her grief and longing. Her newfound skepticism extended to the behavior of the militants themselves. She noted that many "did not behave the right way", such as those who drank alcohol, despite their religious teachings. This dissonance between ideological rhetoric and lived behavior further fueled her rejection of extremism.

One of the most striking moments in Zarema's testimony was her account of how the sight of Moscow stores changed her decision to detonate the bomb. "I have never had such things. None of our girls had them. If they had seen what stores were like, no one would have exploded" she explained. This seemingly trivial observation highlights the phenomenological significance of materiality in shaping human consciousness. Indeed, material objects are not merely passive things but carriers of social meaning and significance that structure how individuals perceive and navigate the world. Her reaction may seem trivial on the surface, but it holds profound sociological significance. For young women like Zarema, who had grown up in war-torn Chechnya with limited access to material goods, the sight of well-stocked stores was a revelation that challenged the nihilistic worldview propagated by the militants, who had framed death as the only honorable escape from social shame and economic despair. Zarema's upbringing in a conflict-ridden environment was marked by material scarcity. This deprivation shaped her perception of the world as a place devoid of joy or material pleasures, which was exploited by the militants that promised her spiritual rewards in the afterlife rather than material satisfaction in the present. The sight of Moscow stores, filled with goods that were beyond her imagination, shattered this narrative and introduced the possibility of a life worth living and represented a profound disruption to her "taken-for-granted" reality.

Zarema's encounter with the stores prompted a reevaluation of her beliefs and intentions. They represented a form of everyday pleasure that challenged the abnegation

of martyrdom. Her realization that she "would never explode" after seeing what the stores had to offer highlights a profound shift in her psyche. Through the phenomenological lens, this seemingly mundane experience emerges as a transformative moment that disrupted her radicalized worldview and reoriented her toward life. The sight of material abundance, freedom, and beauty challenged the narrative of martyrdom and affirmed the value of everyday pleasures. Understanding this encounter underscores the significance of the everyday as a site of meaning-making and transformation, even in the most extreme circumstances.

Zarema Muzhakhoeva's everyday life, routine, and decisions can be understood through the lens of phenomenological sociology as a journey through trauma, social shame, and eventual awakening. Zarema's case highlights how disruptions to routine, whether through war, displacement, or radicalization, create existential crises that can lead individuals down unexpected and sometimes tragic paths. Her testimony further illustrates the difficulty of reintegration. Her acknowledgment that she could not return home due to social stigma reflects the power of typifications in shaping individual trajectories. Her lifeworld remained fractured, neither fully part of the terrorist network nor accepted by Russian society. Her surrender was not merely an act of defiance against her handlers but a reclaiming of agency and an attempt to rewrite her social narrative.

4.3 Leila Khaled

Leila Khaled is one of the most iconic figures in Palestinian resistance history, and as she continues to advocate for Palestinian rights, she remains a living testament to the enduring spirit of resistance. During her years of active militant training with the PFLP, Leila's daily life revolved around rigorous physical and ideological preparation. At a camp in the North of Amman, she underwent intense training that included firearm use, grenade handling, military tactics, and hand-to-hand combat (Irving, 2012, p. 28). She recalled living in tents on a mountainside, where even the summers were cold.

Despite the hardships, she described feeling overjoyed that her dream of becoming a fighter had come true (Irving, 2012, p. 28). The routine in the camp involved early mornings, physical drills, and long sessions of tactical instruction. Discipline was strict, and comrades were expected to remain vigilant due to the constant threat of enemy attacks.

Leila's daily life during her involvement in hijackings was a blend of strategic planning, psychological preparation, and constant alertness. Before her first hijacking in 1969, she spent days memorizing flight schedules, rehearsing scenarios, and mentally preparing for the operation (Irving, 2012, p. 1). On the day of the hijacking, she carefully chose her attire, which was a white suit, sunhat, and sunglasses, that had the goal of making her look unassuming and blend in with other passengers. The hours leading up to the operation were filled with tension, as she and her comrade Salim Issawi waited for the right moment to act (Irving, 2012, p. 1). Khaled described the hijacking itself as a carefully orchestrated event, where maintaining composure was crucial. Her focus was on ensuring that passengers were not harmed while successfully diverting the plane (Irving, 2012, p. 2).

Following her release from prison, Khaled transitioned to political activism, thus her routine shifted from militant operations to political meetings, public speaking engagements, and grassroots organizing. Despite her demanding schedule, she maintained a strong commitment to her family, but balancing motherhood with her political work required careful time management and resilience. Khaled's routine included regular visits to Palestinian refugee camps, where she met with women and families affected by displacement and conflict (Irving, 2012, p. 72). She emphasized the importance of women's participation in the resistance and worked to empower them through educational and social initiatives. Her days in the camps were filled with listening to the stories of refugees, offering support, and organizing activities aimed at strengthening communal ties. These interactions were a source of inspiration and reinforced her commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Despite her intense life, Leila found moments for personal enjoyment and reflection. She was known for her love of good food, good conversation, and, as she humorously noted, cigarettes (Irving, 2012, p. 4). Her vibrant personality often surprised those who met her, as she defied the stereotypical image of a hardened militant. Leila also valued cultural experiences, including art and literature, which provided her with a sense of connection to Palestinian heritage and global revolutionary movements (Irving, 2012, p. 136).

From a phenomenological perspective, Khaled's lifeworld was defined by intentional acts rooted in her political, cultural, and personal existence. Her consciousness was continually directed toward the Palestinian liberation struggle, shaping not only her grand revolutionary actions but also her everyday interactions, routines, and practices. Khaled's subjective understanding of herself as a revolutionary and a mother informed her choices, structuring her everyday activities around both political engagement and familial care (Irving, 2012, p. 114). Khaled's lifeworld was shaped by the *Nakba*, which forced her family to flee Haifa when she was just four years old. Her early experiences of displacement and statelessness fundamentally shaped her understanding of home, identity, and belonging. Her expulsion from Haifa disrupted her initial lifeworld, replacing it with an existence defined by displacement, longing, and exclusion. This foundational trauma became a key reference point from which Khaled constructed her life narrative, motivating her commitment to the Palestinian cause. Schutz's concept of "stocks of knowledge at hand" helps explain how Leila's interactions within nationalist circles provided her with interpretative frameworks for making sense of her role in history.

Phenomenology also emphasizes the role of the body in the human experience, as Leila's body became both a symbol and a site of political resistance. Her participation in the hijacking of TWA Flight 840 in 1969 and her subsequent plastic surgeries to alter her appearance highlight the embodied nature of her activism. The image of her holding an AK-47 while wearing a keffiyeh was circulated worldwide, transforming her into an icon of the struggle. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "lived body" argues that the body is not merely an object in the world but the primary medium through which individuals

experience and engage with reality. Leila's physical presence as a militant icon illustrates how her body became both a personal and collective symbol of Palestinian resistance. Her body was not just a passive recipient of ideological constructs but an active agent in their reproduction and dissemination. Khaled's decision to alter her face through plastic surgery illustrates Merleau-Ponty's theory that the body is not just a physical entity but a fluid medium shaped by political necessity. Her transformed face symbolized both the sacrifices required in militant activism and the malleability of identity within revolutionary contexts.

Berger and Luckmann argue that routine provides stability, structuring daily life into predictable patterns. For Leila, training in PFLP camps imposed a strict routine that replaced civilian life with military discipline. Waking early, undergoing combat drills, learning to handle weapons, and engaging in ideological education became part of her new lifeworld. This routine was crucial in maintaining her revolutionary identity, as predictability reduced cognitive dissonance and reinforced her commitment to the struggle. However, routines also serve as sites of resistance. Schutz and Garfinkel highlight how breaching routines can reveal underlying social structures. Leila's participation in high-profile hijackings disrupted the global aviation routine, forcing the international community to confront the Palestinian cause. These breaches were intentional acts of resistance, designed to destabilize established political structures and challenge dominant narratives about the Palestinian struggle.

Despite the rigidity of her militant routine, Leila demonstrated reflexivity, her ability to step back and analyze her own role within the resistance. After her release from prison, she transitioned from armed struggle to political activism, advocating for Palestinian rights through diplomatic channels. This shift illustrates Berger and Luckmann's argument that social roles are fluid rather than fixed. Leila redefined her role while maintaining continuity with her past, integrating her militant identity into a broader political framework. The transition from an active militant to a political figure required her to reshape her own typifications and reconcile them with the evolving demands of the Palestinian cause. While routine provides order and stability, it also imposes constraints. Leila's established identity as a militant made it difficult for her to be perceived outside

of this framework. Even as she engaged in diplomatic efforts, media representations, and political opponents continued to associate her with past militant activities. This highlights a key limitation of internalized typifications, indeed, once an individual's role is firmly embedded in social consciousness, altering perceptions becomes an ongoing struggle.

Khaled's routine was deeply influenced by gendered expectations and her defiance of traditional female roles. As a revolutionary woman, she navigated a complex social world where women were often expected to remain in supportive or domestic roles. By participating in militant operations and assuming leadership positions, Leila challenged these societal norms (Irving, 2012, p. 28). Furthermore, her interactions with male comrades in the PFLP challenged traditional gender roles, as she demanded respect and equality within a predominantly male-dominated movement (Irving, 2012, p. 63). Her involvement in the General Union of Palestinian Women demonstrated her commitment to empowering other women and integrating gender equality into the resistance movement. Through her daily interactions, Leila co-constructed new social meanings around femininity and resistance. In addition, face-to-face interactions in refugee camps allowed Khaled to bridge the gap between her public image and the lived realities of ordinary Palestinians (Irving, 2012, p. 72). These encounters reinforced a collective sense of purpose and affirmed the legitimacy of the resistance.

Leila Khaled's everyday life and routine exemplify the phenomenological interplay between individual agency, social structures, and lived experience. Her intentional acts, temporal structuring of daily activities, and embodied practices reveal a life deeply rooted in the pursuit of justice and liberation. Through her negotiation of multiple roles as a revolutionary, mother, and community leader, Khaled constructed a lifeworld that challenged societal norms and affirmed the enduring spirit of resistance. Her everyday life and routine offer a unique perspective on the challenges and complexities of living as a revolutionary figure. From the rigors of military training to the responsibilities of political leadership and motherhood, her life embodies the intersection of personal and political commitments.

4.4 Mara Cagol

Before delving into Mara Cagol's analysis, a brief phenomenological examination of the life of a member of the Brigate Rosse is needed. Their experience was marked by intense ideological indoctrination, rigorous operational training, and social isolation. In this context, routine was deliberately designed to detach members from the "natural" social world and immerse them in a new, militant lifeworld defined by ideological commitment and operational readiness. This structured daily life served to reorient members' perceptions of reality and reinforce their identification with the revolutionary cause. From a phenomenological standpoint, their immersion in ideological discourse functioned as a form of "thematic reorientation," redirecting attention away from the conventional social order and towards a revolutionary worldview. Members were encouraged to interpret their everyday experiences through the lens of class struggle and capitalist oppression. In phenomenological terms, this enforced detachment disrupted the "natural attitude" - the taken-for-granted engagement with the social world - and replaced it with a new relational framework centered on the militant community. The group became the primary source of social validation and meaning. The daily routines of the Brigate Rosse did more than facilitate operational efficiency, they constructed a militant lifeworld that redefined members' perceptions of self, others, and society, making them internalize a new set of meanings and values that justified and normalized violence.

While Mara's role in the BR was significant, it is essential to briefly look at her experience through the lens of gender. Women in revolutionary movements often faced dual expectations: they were both militants and symbols of ideological purity. Furthermore, male militants who engaged in violence were seen as fulfilling their revolutionary duty, but for women, these acts carried the weight of transgression, not only against the State but against social norms of femininity. Cagol's position as a leading female revolutionary defied traditional gender roles, yet she was still subject to the pressures of proving her ideological and operational competence in a male-dominated movement. Additionally, the BR's emphasis on equality within militant ranks did not entirely erase patriarchal dynamics since women had to navigate a space where their contributions were sometimes scrutinized more than their male counterparts. Cagol's

involvement in the Red Brigades also exemplifies the profound personal sacrifices made by women in revolutionary movements. As a leader and combatant, she navigated a predominantly male-dominated environment, challenging traditional gender roles. Her marriage to Renato Curcio was both a personal and political partnership, but the demands of their revolutionary activities often took precedence over their relationship. The isolation and clandestine lifestyle required by their militant activities further underscored the personal costs of their commitment.

One of the most controversial aspects of Mara Cagol's life concerns her choice not to have children. Renato Curcio himself recounted how in the early years of their marriage the couple had discussed the possibility of having a child, but the kind of life they led made this prospect impossible: "We talked at length about what for us was a major personal problem, but we decided that, with the kind of life we now led, having a child would be too big a gamble" (Curcio & Scialoja, 1995, p. 44). The issue of motherhood in the Red Brigades has been much debated among militants. For many women, this renunciation represented an emotional burden that was only fully processed years later. Some former female militants chose to become mothers after their experience in the armed struggle ended, seeing motherhood as a way to resignify their female identity and their role in society.

Cagol's transition from a middle-class student to a revolutionary militant can be understood through Berger and Luckmann's theory of social reality construction. Before her radicalization, Cagol's world was defined by the norms of a Catholic middle-class upbringing in Trento. Her early life followed predictable patterns, shaped by family expectations and conventional academic aspirations. Her time at the University of Trento exposed her to Marxist and radical leftist ideologies, forming the interpretative framework through which she understood oppression and social change, marking a departure from her routine. Before her radicalization, Mara's typifications were shaped by her middle-class upbringing, academic environment, and traditional gender expectations. She likely saw herself as a promising intellectual with aspirations in academia or activism within the bounds of legal political engagement. However, her exposure to revolutionary ideology and militant circles altered these typifications. The

capitalist State was no longer an entity to be reformed but an oppressive structure that had to be dismantled through armed struggle, and the militant was no longer an extremist outcast but a committed revolutionary engaged in historical necessity. This shift in typifications reshaped Cagol's perception of her social world, guiding her toward increased radicalization. The process of "secondary socialization" into the militant world involved an immersion in revolutionary discourse, which redefined her perception of justice, violence, and political action (Orsini, 2009, p. 89). As she participated in ideological discussions and activism, her taken-for-granted reality was reoriented away from middle-class stability and toward the revolutionary struggle. This transformation was not merely ideological but experiential, as her routines, interactions, and aspirations were increasingly shaped by the militant worldview. This re-socialization process detached her from conventional social structures and embedded her in an alternative reality where political violence was not only justified but seen as necessary.

Daily life in the Brigate Rosse was structured around ideological training, operational planning, and acts of violence. This disciplined routine played a key role in the cognitive transformation of its members. Through continuous engagement with revolutionary rhetoric and action, Cagol's perception of morality, legality, and personal sacrifice was reoriented. Violence was ritualized as a means of societal purification, a concept deeply embedded in the BR's ideological framework (Orsini, 2009, p. 17). The Brigate Rosse's militant lifestyle functioned as an alternative lifeworld, where ordinary acts such as studying or working were replaced with revolutionary tasks. Berger and Luckmann describe the process of habitualization, through which repeated behaviors become ingrained. For Cagol, carrying out revolutionary activities - whether organizing training sessions, planning kidnappings, or producing propaganda - became habitualized, reinforcing her new identity. The intensification of these routines meant that alternative paths, such as returning to academic life, became increasingly unthinkable.

Moreover, social isolation was another key factor in the internalization of militant ideology. Members of the BR were required to sever ties with their families and previous social networks, reinforcing their identification with the revolutionary cause. This detachment mirrored the "purifiers of the world" mentality, wherein militants saw

themselves as agents of radical transformation, untainted by mainstream political compromises (Orsini, 2009, p. 42). The intensification of group identity through isolation led to a heightened sense of purpose and an increased willingness to engage in extreme actions. The Brigate Rosse maintained a structured routine that facilitated the reconfiguration of its members' perceptions. This included rigorous ideological training, repeated acts of defiance against State institutions, and the normalization of clandestine operations. As Berger and Luckmann argue, routine reinforces social constructions of reality by making them habitual and unquestioned. The more Cagol engaged in these militant practices, the more they became embedded in her consciousness, making alternative paths less likely to be chosen.

Furthermore, the BR constructed a highly insulated community where members viewed outsiders as enemies or traitors. This created a closed feedback loop in which dissent was minimized and ideological conformity was reinforced. The heightened suspicion of external influences and the fear of infiltration made trust and unity within the group paramount, further deepening members' commitment. Cagol's death in 1975 during a confrontation with law enforcement marked a turning point for the Red Brigades. In phenomenological terms, her death was imbued with meaning within the BR's interpretative framework as it was perceived as an act of martyrdom, reinforcing the movement's commitment to its revolutionary ideals. The symbolic power of her death exemplifies how collective meaning is constructed and sustained within militant groups (Orsini, 2009, p. 3).

Her death can also be seen as the culmination of a dialectical process in which she externalized revolutionary ideals, objectified them through routine militant activities, and ultimately internalized them as self-evident truths. She had consistently externalized her militant identity through acts of violence, ideological commitment, and leadership within the Brigate Rosse. Her actions projected a reality where armed struggle was the only legitimate path to justice. The environment she existed in had reinforced the necessity of combat. Police repression, revolutionary rhetoric, and the internal dynamics of the organization solidified the perception that survival meant continued resistance, even at the cost of life, and by the time of her final confrontation, Cagol had completely

internalized the logic of revolutionary struggle. Surrender was not an option, as it would have negated the reality she had constructed and lived by. Her death became a meaningful act within the Brigate Rosse's social reality, reinforcing their commitment and serving as a martyrdom narrative for future militants. Mara's willingness to fight to the death was not merely a strategic choice but the logical conclusion of a lived reality in which armed struggle had become the defining element of her existence.

Language, according to Berger and Luckmann, is a primary means through which reality is constructed and sustained. Within the Brigate Rosse, revolutionary discourse played a crucial role in legitimizing violence. Letters written by Cagol, particularly to her mother, illustrate how she framed armed struggle as a moral imperative. Her language reflected the internalized worldview of the Brigate Rosse, reinforcing the idea that violence was not only justified but required for the realization of a just society. Moreover, the use of specific revolutionary terminology served to reframe actions that would otherwise be considered criminal. Her choice of words such as "resistance," "war," "oppression," and "sacrifice" serves to project a reality in which armed struggle is not only justified but required. Kidnappings were described as "acts of revolutionary justice", and assassinations were framed as necessary purges of the oppressive system. This linguistic transformation, as discussed by Berger and Luckmann, illustrates how routines and social roles are maintained through discourse. As Cagol's involvement deepened, her use of this language reinforced her identity as a revolutionary, further entrenching her within the militant lifeworld. Her letters reflect a process of reification, in which revolutionary struggle ceased to be a matter of choice and became an unavoidable, almost natural reality. The abstract notion of "revolution" transformed into a daily routine of armed struggle, clandestine activity, and ideological reinforcement. Reification is particularly evident in how Cagol describes acts of violence and organizational discipline. What might have initially been framed as tactical necessities soon became sacred imperatives and these actions became inherent to her identity, removing the space for critical reconsideration. Her letters serve as a textual artifact of her radicalization, showcasing how she constructed her reality, engaged in typification, and reinforced militant routines through language. Martyrdom is one of the strongest indicators of internalization, as it represents the ultimate expression of a fully assimilated identity. In

Cagol's letter to her parents, dated less than one year before she was killed, her willingness to sacrifice herself for the cause reflects the culmination of this process. By this stage, her militant identity was no longer something she performed, it was her reality. Death was not feared but embraced as a logical continuation of her revolutionary existence.

4.5 Muriel Degauque

Muriel Degauque's trajectory from a rebellious Belgian youth to Europe's first female suicide bomber in Iraq presents a complex case of identity formation, alienation, and radicalization. Regarding Muriel's early-life routines, her life in Charleroi was characterized by rebellion and a struggle to conform to social norms. As a teenager, she sought meaning outside traditional paths, engaging in alcohol, drug use, and behavior that set her apart from her peers. These actions reflected a lifeworld marked by disconnection from the prevailing societal values of her conservative working-class environment. Her disconnection from the lifeworld of her upbringing was evident in her strained relationships with family and educational authorities. From a phenomenological perspective, this period of alienation disrupted the continuity of her everyday existence, prompting a search for meaning outside the conventional structures of Belgian society, which was found in her conversion to Islam, which represented a radical reconfiguration of her lifeworld and an introduction to a new typification system that restructured her worldview. Her daily routine began to incorporate ritual practices, such as prayer, dietary restrictions, and the adoption of the Islamic veil (Brown, 2011, p. 714). These embodied practices signified a shift in how she experienced herself and her interactions with others. Her new routine involved participation in Islamic community activities, which provided her with a sense of purpose and belonging that had previously eluded her.

Muriel's marriage to a Moroccan man and later to a radicalized Muslim militant played a significant role in shaping her everyday life. Her relationships with these men introduced her to new social networks and ideological influences that further transformed her lifeworld (Brown, 2011, p. 714). As she encountered more radical networks, her

identity as a 'pure' believer was reinforced through socialization, which provided her with a sense of purpose previously absent from her life. Phenomenologically, her interactions with her husbands and the communities they were part of can be understood through Husserl's concept of intersubjectivity, and her increasing alignment with radical interpretations of Islam was reinforced through these interactions.

Foucault's discourse analysis further highlights how Muriel's new identity was not merely a personal transformation but part of a larger power dynamic. The ideological narratives she absorbed constructed a reality where martyrdom was framed as an ultimate act of devotion and resistance, objectifying the role of the female jihadist as an instrument of ideological warfare. Moreover, as Foucault argues, language is not neutral but shapes reality. Muriel's exposure to jihadist discourse redefined her role as a woman, a believer, and a militant, embedding her actions within a grander ideological struggle. This discursive shift also explains how her European background did not exempt her from radicalization but rather intensified her ideological commitment. In jihadist narratives, European converts are often perceived as exemplars of true faith, having willingly abandoned Western decadence. This discourse reinforced her belief in the inevitability of her mission, making alternatives to radicalization increasingly inaccessible. Foucault's notion of "biopower"[26] is also relevant in analyzing how Muriel's life was governed by competing systems of control. In her pre-radicalized state, she was subjected to European disciplinary mechanisms (education, employment, and legal structures) that failed to provide her with a meaningful identity. In jihadist networks, she became embedded in an alternative system of power, one that governed her body and actions through religious and ideological imperatives. The transformation in discourse thus reshaped not only her identity but the very structures of power that dictated her choices.

Analyzing Muriel's trajectory through Habermas's theory of communicative action allows to see a breakdown of communicative rationality. As she became more entrenched in radical ideologies, she rejected dialogical engagement with her family, community, and Belgian society at large. Her increasing isolation mirrored what

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[26] Foucault's notion of biopower refers to the way modern states regulate and control human life through institutions, norms, and policies. It operates by managing populations through disciplines like healthcare, education, and security, shaping individuals' behaviors and identities.

Habermas describes as the colonization of the lifeworld, where ideological systems replace open communication with rigid dogma. Her radicalization can thus be seen as the result of communicative closure, where interactions were confined to an echo chamber of extremist validation. Attempts by her family to challenge her beliefs were dismissed, reinforcing the self-sealing logic of jihadist discourse. This highlights how radicalization is not just about ideological adoption but also about the systematic erosion of alternative communicative possibilities. Habermas's emphasis on the public sphere further underscores how Muriel's isolation was exacerbated by a lack of meaningful participation in democratic discourse. The failure of Western societies to engage effectively with individuals at risk of radicalization by offering alternative narratives or fostering inclusive dialogue allowed extremist ideologies to dominate her communicative space.

Muriel's decision to travel to Syria and Iraq marked a departure from the familiar rhythms of European life. Her everyday existence in these conflict zones involved training, ideological indoctrination, and adapting to the harsh realities of life in a war-torn environment (Brown, 2011, p. 714). The spatial dislocation from Belgium to the Middle East redefined her lifeworld, where routine acts such as preparing food, navigating public spaces, and social interactions took on new meanings within the context of militant life. The shift from mundane domesticity to life as a militant highlighted a radical transformation in her mindset, now directed toward martyrdom and jihad. This temporal orientation toward death disrupted conventional routines centered on life preservation and social reproduction. Instead, her actions became now oriented toward preparation for a perceived transcendental reward (Brown, 2011, p. 715). Material encounters in Iraq, where life was stripped of the consumer comforts she had known in Belgium, further reinforced her commitment to the militant cause. The austerity of her environment contrasted sharply with the material abundance of her former life, reshaping her perceptions of value and purpose (Brown, 2011, p. 714).

Muriel's social reality construction can be analyzed through Berger and Luckmann's three interconnected processes: externalization, objectification, and internalization. After her conversion, Degauque externalized her newfound beliefs by adopting visible markers of religious identity, such as veiling and adherence to strict

Islamic codes. These externalized behaviors signaled her departure from her Belgian past and her alignment with an alternative lifeworld. Merleau-Ponty's embodiment theory is relevant here, as her veiling and bodily discipline were not merely symbolic but transformed how she navigated social spaces. Her physical presence in public, now marked by Islamic dress, reconfigured her interactions and the way others perceived her, reinforcing her separation from her previous social world. Her progression toward martyrdom can be understood as a reorientation of her embodied experience. As she internalized jihadist ideology, her physical presence in spaces, her interactions, and even her sensory perceptions became attuned to the militant worldview. The suicide attack itself was the culmination of this embodied transformation, an ultimate act where the body ceased to be an individual entity and instead became a political instrument. Merleau-Ponty's concept of "being in the world" suggests that human existence is fundamentally shaped by bodily interactions with the environment. Muriel's transition from a Western secular lifestyle to an Islamic militant identity can be seen as a shift in how her body navigated and experienced the world. Through ritualized practices and submission to a new social order, her radicalization process was enacted not just in thought but in the very movements and gestures of her daily life. This embodied change made the act of martyrdom seem like an extension of her transformed being.

Degauque's radicalization deepened as she moved to a marginalized Muslim neighborhood in Brussels, where extremist narratives provided an alternative structure to her existence, and her marriage to Issam Goris, an individual already known for radical affiliations, further entrenched her commitment to a militant identity. Through daily routines and exposure to radical networks, her beliefs were reinforced as objective truths. Her increasing isolation from her family, who noted her rigid enforcement of Islamic customs during visits, underscores how objectification solidifies ideological commitments. The move to Syria and Iraq represented a full integration into this objectified reality, where militant jihad was not only an ideological stance but a lived practice. By the time Muriel carried out her suicide attack in Iraq, her radicalized identity was fully internalized. The decision to sacrifice her life was not an impulsive act but the culmination of a dialectical process in which her reality had been reconstructed around the inevitability of martyrdom. Schutz's concept of intersubjectivity is useful in

understanding this process. Her interactions within jihadist circles reaffirmed her commitment, as she shared a reality where death in jihad was framed as the highest form of devotion. This intersubjective reinforcement eliminated doubts, as alternative worldviews had been systematically excluded from her consciousness. Degauque's final act was the ultimate demonstration of internalization, where ideological commitment overrode self-preservation.

Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) provides a macro-level understanding of Muriel's journey. Her radicalization was not solely an individual phenomenon but was shaped by broader ideological structures. The marginalization she experienced as a convert in Belgium reflects the State's role in shaping social identities through institutions like education, religion, and media. The securitization of Islam in Europe, combined with racialized surveillance, contributed to her alienation, making radical networks appear as viable alternatives for belonging. Furthermore, her entry into jihadist networks can be understood as a shift from one ideological apparatus to another. While European secularism had failed to provide her with a sense of purpose, radical Islamism offered an alternative ideological structure that promised redemption and agency. This shift illustrates Althusser's argument that ideology functions by interpolating individuals into subject positions that appear natural and inevitable. Althusser's framework also explains how Muriel's radicalization was not merely a result of personal grievances but a manifestation of ideological competition. The European state's failure to integrate marginalized individuals into its ideological apparatus left a vacuum that extremist ideologies could exploit. By positioning jihadism as an alternative hegemonic structure, radical networks provided Muriel with a new sense of belonging and purpose, making her final act of martyrdom appear not only logical but necessary.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this thesis provides a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the female terrorist, moving beyond reductive stereotypes to explore the complex interplay of ideology, routine, and self-perception in shaping the identities and roles of women engaged in violent extremism. Chapter I established the literature framework by engaging with key scholars who have extensively studied the motivations, roles, and socio-political contexts of female terrorists. Their contributions challenge traditional narratives that depict women in terrorism as anomalies, victims, or mere pawns of male manipulation, revealing that their involvement in terrorism is shaped by a multitude of factors, including personal grievances, ideological commitment, strategic organizational needs, and broader socio-political conditions. This chapter emphasized the importance of incorporating gender perspectives into terrorism studies, arguing that a failure to do so results in an incomplete and often misleading understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter II provided the theoretical background, while Chapter III gave empirical depth through an examination of five prominent female terrorists: Edith Lagos of Sendero Luminoso, Zarema Muzhakhoeva of the Chechen Black Widows, Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Mara Cagol of the Brigate Rosse, and Muriel Degauque as Europe's first female suicide bomber. Each of these women followed unique pathways into terrorism, shaped by their specific cultural, political, and ideological contexts. However, common patterns emerged across the analysis done in Chapter IV, shedding light on the broader mechanisms that sustain female participation in extremist movements.

One of the most significant findings of this research is the role of radicalization as a gradual and structured process rather than a sudden transformation. These women did not simply wake up one day and choose violence, rather, their involvement was a product of prolonged exposure to militant ideologies, socialization within extremist networks, and, in many cases, deeply personal experiences of trauma, marginalization, or perceived injustice. The process of radicalization involved both cognitive and behavioral shifts,

reinforced through participation in organizational activities, ideological indoctrination, and routine interactions within their militant circles. This aligns with the broader understanding of radicalization as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, where the interplay of political repression, personal loss, and ideological conviction creates a fertile ground for terrorist recruitment and sustained engagement in extremist activities.

Routine emerged as a crucial element in the construction and reinforcement of the female terrorist's identity. The phenomenological approach adopted in this thesis demonstrated that daily practices - whether ideological education, weapons training, logistical support, or direct combat - played a central role in normalizing violence and embedding it within the individual's perception of reality. Routine transformed the extraordinary into the ordinary, allowing these women to integrate acts of terror into their personal and political identities. The case studies showed how people who engage in terrorist activities often find a sense of structure, purpose, and belonging through their involvement, which further solidifies their commitment to their respective movements. The construction of identity through repetition and discipline ensured their continued allegiance to their cause, demonstrating that their involvement was not momentary but deeply ingrained within their day-to-day existence.

A crucial dimension of their terrorist trajectory was the process of revolutionary awakening. Each of these women encountered moments of political or personal crisis that led them to reassess their place in society and embrace militant ideologies. The realization that systemic change can only be achieved through violence often marks a turning point, leading to their deeper engagement in extremist movements. Whether through direct experiences of systemic oppression, exposure to radical literature, or personal trauma, they gradually reconstructed their worldviews, positioning violence as a necessary instrument of change. Leila Khaled's revolutionary awakening was driven by her exposure to the Palestinian struggle and her belief that armed struggle was the only viable path to liberation. Similarly, Mara Cagol's commitment to leftist extremism was reinforced by her increasing disillusionment with traditional political systems, ultimately leading her to co-found the Brigate Rosse. However, this shift was not merely ideological, but it was deeply embedded in socialization processes that reinforced their emerging

revolutionary identities. Radical socialization played a key role in sustaining their commitment, as their immersion into militant circles provided both validation and a structured reinterpretation of reality. Within these groups, ideological education, tactical training, and the normalization of violence became defining aspects of their existence, shaping their perceptions of self and action.

Another critical theme to take into consideration is the role of external socio-political factors in shaping the participation of women in terrorism. The oppression, occupation, or political instability faced by these women's communities often fueled their radicalization, making terrorism seem like a viable means of achieving change. The Palestinian struggle, in the case of Leila Khaled, or the Chechen conflict, as seen with Zarema Muzhakhoeva, highlight how women's engagement in violent extremism is often linked to broader political contexts that drive them toward militancy. However, the research highlighted the significant role of personal agency in shaping the trajectories of female terrorists. While structural factors such as political conflict, repression, and ideological movements created enabling environments for radicalization, individual choices, motivations, and psychological components played an equally important role. Their life stories demonstrate that female terrorists are neither passive victims nor purely ideological zealots; rather, they navigate complex social realities, making strategic decisions about their involvement based on their experiences, beliefs, and aspirations. There is also a significant variation in the personal and ideological motivations that drive women toward terrorism. While some, such as Leila Khaled, were primarily motivated by nationalist struggles, others, like Muriel Degauque, were radicalized through religious extremism. Personal trauma, social marginalization, political repression, and a sense of injustice frequently acted as catalysts, pushing these women toward extremist ideologies that promised a sense of purpose, belonging, and revenge.

Furthermore, a recurring theme is the sense of alienation and marginalization, often present in the early lives of female terrorists. Edith Lagos of Sendero Luminoso was radicalized in the context of systemic inequality and State repression in Peru, aligning her personal struggle with the broader Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement. Similarly, Muriel Degauque's transformation from a Belgian woman with a troubled personal

history into a suicide bomber for an Islamist cause reflects her search for belonging and purpose. Joining a militant group provided them with a clear identity and a structured environment in which they could channel their grievances. Edith was revered as a revolutionary martyr, and her involvement in Sendero Luminoso gave her a sense of mission. Zarema, on the other hand, was manipulated into believing that martyrdom would give her life meaning after experiencing personal losses. Muriel's radicalization was fueled by feelings of cultural displacement and a deep yearning for purpose. Leila and Mara found intellectual fulfillment in their organizations, where they played significant roles in shaping ideological discourse and strategy.

Routine and discipline served as fundamental mechanisms in reinforcing their commitment. Daily practices, whether ideological indoctrination, physical training, or strategic planning, were not simply instrumental tasks but structured engagements that transformed their cognitive and emotional orientations. The transition from seeing violence as an extraordinary act to accepting it as an ethical duty was facilitated through this consistent reinforcement. Routine created a stable psychological environment where the boundaries between personal and political life dissolved, making militancy not just a choice but an all-encompassing reality. By incorporating discipline into their daily lives, these women found purpose, direction, and legitimacy in their actions, further entrenching their identities within their respective organizations.

One of the most striking aspects of their experiences was the moral justification of violence. The acts they committed or supported were not perceived as arbitrary brutality but as necessary interventions against oppressive structures. These women constructed a moral framework that legitimized their actions, often portraying themselves as warriors for justice, freedom, or religious duty. This moral recalibration was essential in mitigating cognitive dissonance and sustaining their engagement in violent activities. The narratives of Leila Khaled and Zarema Muzhakhoeva, for example, illustrate how female terrorists framed their actions as necessary responses to systemic oppression, occupation, or war, thereby positioning themselves as agents of resistance rather than perpetrators of violence. This process of moral justification was further reinforced by

collective narratives that glorified martyrdom and positioned these women as heroic figures within their movements.

Gender played a significant and nuanced role in their journeys. While traditionally, terrorism has been perceived as a male-dominated endeavor, these women navigated a landscape where their gender could serve as both an obstacle and an advantage. Some had to work harder to prove their ideological and operational commitment within male-dominated groups, while others capitalized on gendered stereotypes to gain tactical advantages, such as avoiding suspicion from law enforcement. The tension between femininity and militancy often required them to craft hybrid identities, balancing societal expectations with their revolutionary convictions. In doing so, they not only challenged conventional gender norms but also reshaped the roles available to women within terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, gender expectations also made women particularly susceptible to radicalization through personal relationships. Many female terrorists were recruited or encouraged to join extremist movements by relevant figures in their lives, such as partners, husbands, or ideological mentors. Muriel Degauque's radicalization, for example, was tied to her marriage to a jihadist, highlighting how intimate relationships can serve as powerful accelerators for ideological transformation. Zarema Muzhakhoeva's path to extremism similarly underscores the role of coercion and manipulation, as she was pressured into becoming a suicide bomber, exemplifying how terrorist organizations exploit gendered vulnerabilities.

Another critical factor is the way terrorist organizations strategically utilized female recruits, who were often assigned roles that leveraged societal perceptions of femininity to advance extremist agendas. Because women are generally viewed as less threatening, they were used in suicide missions, propaganda efforts, and recruitment campaigns to gain public sympathy and evade security detection. Muzhakhoeva's recruitment as a suicide bomber was based on the assumption that she could bypass security screenings more easily than a male operative. Similarly, Degauque's martyrdom was framed within the jihadist narrative as an ultimate act of female devotion, reinforcing

rigid gender hierarchies even as women took on active roles in violence. At the same time, women like Khaled and Cagol disrupted traditional gender roles by engaging in leadership and strategic planning within their respective organizations. Khaled's involvement with the PFLP was not merely symbolic, she played an active role in planning and executing operations. Cagol, as a co-founder of the Brigate Rosse, helped shape the ideological and tactical direction of the group, demonstrating that women could occupy significant positions within terrorist networks despite the prevailing gender biases that often relegated them to secondary roles.

Perhaps the most profound aspect of their lived experiences was the perceived inevitability of death. Many female terrorists, whether suicide bombers or members of armed revolutionary movements, approached their missions with an acceptance of mortality. Death was not just a risk, it was often framed as a form of ultimate devotion to the cause. This acceptance reinforced their ideological commitment, as the willingness to die for their beliefs became a testament to their dedication. It also cemented their legacy within their movements, as martyrdom often played a symbolic role in inspiring future recruits and sustaining the revolutionary myth.

The essence of female terrorism, as revealed through a phenomenological lens, is the intersection of personal agency, sociopolitical structures, and gendered expectations. Unlike the stereotypical view that women are all coerced into terrorism, these case studies demonstrate that female terrorists exercise agency, albeit within constrained sociopolitical contexts. Their lived experiences reveal a dual reality: on the one hand, they actively engage in political violence, redefining traditional notions of femininity; on the other hand, their participation is often mediated through deeply ingrained gender norms that frame them as victims, avengers, or anomalies. The process of radicalization is rarely instantaneous, it unfolds through experiences of injustice, ideological socialization, and habitual participation in militant activities. Furthermore, the role of routine and community in sustaining terrorism cannot be understated. Whether through ideological education, operational training, or the reinforcement of collective identity, daily life within terrorist organizations provides the scaffolding for long-term engagement. The

blurred boundaries between personal conviction and organizational influence illustrate how female terrorists internalize and sustain their commitment to violence.

Ultimately, female terrorism is not a monolithic phenomenon but a spectrum of experiences shaped by historical, political, and social conditions, and the study of female terrorism remains a complex and evolving field that challenges traditional understandings of both political violence and gender dynamics. A nuanced understanding of female terrorists is essential for developing effective counterterrorism strategies because, historically, women's roles have been overlooked. However, as this study has shown, they are active participants in terrorism, often occupying strategic roles in recruitment, logistics, and operational planning. Counterterrorism efforts must therefore adapt to address the specific ways in which female terrorists operate and the social environments that sustain their radicalization. One crucial implication is the need for more gender-sensitive intervention programs. Many deradicalization and disengagement strategies fail to account for the distinct social and ideological pathways that lead women into extremist groups, misdiagnosing the problem and implementing ineffective or counterproductive measures. Programs aimed at rehabilitation must consider factors such as familial pressures and societal expectations, which may shape a woman's entry into terrorism. Additionally, counterterrorism strategies should avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes that portray female terrorists solely as victims, as this can undermine efforts to understand and address their agency within terrorist networks.

From a gender studies perspective, this thesis contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of gender and violence. The involvement of women in terrorism disrupts conventional narratives that associate femininity with passivity and peace, revealing how women navigate complex identities within violent movements. The cases analyzed in this study illustrate that female terrorists do not simply adopt male models of militancy, rather, they operate within gendered frameworks that shape their participation in unique ways.

This research also raises questions about how society responds to female perpetrators of violence. Media portrayals of female terrorists often sensationalize their

actions, emphasizing their perceived deviance from traditional gender norms. Such representations obscure the structural and ideological factors that contribute to their radicalization, reinforcing a binary perception of women as either innocent victims or aberrant aggressors. A more nuanced feminist analysis of female terrorism should challenge these dichotomies and explore the broader implications of women's involvement in political violence.

Phenomenology provides a valuable methodological approach to understanding terrorism, particularly in capturing the lived realities of those who engage in violent movements. As a qualitative research approach, it focuses on understanding how individuals experience, interpret, and make sense of their realities. By focusing on routine, identity construction, and meaning-making, this thesis has demonstrated how female terrorists experience and internalize their roles within extremist organizations. One of the primary advantages of phenomenology is its emphasis on subjectivity. Traditional studies of terrorism often rely on structural analyses, focusing on economic, political, and ideological factors that contribute to radicalization. While these aspects are critical, they can overlook the personal, emotional, and psychological dimensions of radicalization. A phenomenological approach prioritizes the voices and experiences of the women themselves, analyzing how female terrorists perceive their roles, identities, and moral justifications for their actions. A key contribution of this study is its emphasis on the everyday dimensions of terrorism. Much of the existing research on radicalization focuses on ideological frameworks, recruitment strategies, and organizational structures, often overlooking how individuals sustain their commitment to terrorism through daily practices and social interactions. By integrating phenomenological insights, this research highlights the importance of routine in maintaining extremist identities and suggests that disrupting these habitual practices may be a crucial strategy for countering radicalization. Moreover, phenomenology provides a means to explore the moral and ethical frameworks constructed by female terrorists. Many women involved in extremism develop justifications that allow them to reconcile their actions with their personal beliefs. These justifications are not simply dictated by ideology but are shaped through lived experience.

While this thesis has explored the phenomenological aspects of female terrorism, further research is needed to deepen our understanding of the interplay between ideology, experience, and structural conditions. Several areas warrant further investigation, first of all by expanding the pool of women to analyze, that was limited for reasons of time. Then some space should be given to the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs for female terrorists, including how gendered experiences influence disengagement from extremist movements and reintegration into society. By expanding research in these areas, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of female terrorism, ultimately informing more effective policies and intervention strategies.

The study of female terrorism is an ongoing and evolving field that requires critical engagement with both theoretical and empirical dimensions. This thesis has sought to challenge reductive narratives and highlight the complex realities of women in terrorism, giving a more humanized understanding of their radicalization trajectories and demonstrating that their participation is neither incidental nor monolithic. Ultimately, addressing female terrorism requires an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates insights from gender studies, counterterrorism research, and phenomenology. By adopting a perspective that acknowledges both agency and structure, researchers and policymakers can develop more effective strategies for preventing radicalization, supporting disengagement, and ultimately fostering more comprehensive approaches to countering political violence.

DEDICATION

This work is for my second mother, Selvaggia, whom I always called Zia Titì or *mamma due*. Growing up I was lucky enough to have not one but two mothers, and when things were not going well at home I could always call you to pick me up. We would play games, me, you, and Zio Franci, and you would let me "borrow" your books and your CDs. Now I can't listen to *You Can't Always Get What You Want* by The Rolling Stones without crying, by the way.

You always encouraged my curiosity, teaching me new things and challenging my perspective, it seemed like you knew everything about the world. I miss the way you talked to me, like what I had to say mattered. You always had such a way with words that was magical to hear. I don't think I would have made it without you and your support, and it sucks that I can't even tell you in person. I hope you know that you are always in my heart and my mind, and no day goes by without me thinking of you, of all the things I want to tell you, and how much I still need your advice. You and Zio Franci are the reason I believe in love. You made me feel like I was your daughter even when you had no obligation to do so, and I will never be thankful enough for this.

You were there for me in the darkest periods of my life, always believing in me and being on my side. You made me feel less alone and lost and you gave me so much advice that helped me survive and learn this difficult mission of loving myself and accepting my flaws. You made me into the nasty feminist I am today and you helped me not be afraid to raise my voice and be unapologetically myself. December is an awful month and cancer is a monster against which we are powerless creatures. But, as you have taught me, I will not succumb to anger and despair, and even if the pain is there, I want to remember you smiling and happy, laughing at something stupid I said, or making fun of Zio Franci.

All I know about love I know because of you. Thank you. I hope you're proud of me, *mamma due*.

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