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A group affair: understanding involvement in terrorism in Mali

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Acknowledgements

During my first trip to Mali in early 2016, our research team had a meeting with the Minister of Justice to discuss the training of prison staff in Bamako's central prison. Halfway through the meeting, he asked if we would be willing to figure out why these terrorists, held in Bamako's central prison, joined terrorist groups to begin with. Back then, I had just started researching terrorism prison policies in the Philippines, Nigeria and Pakistan with the idea of turning that into a PhD. When I returned from Mali, I discussed adding the Mali case to the research with my supervisors. Quite quickly, we concluded that instead, this would be a unique opportunity to focus on Mali as a single case. It provided me with the chance to really dive into the perspectives of not just prison staff, policymakers and the international community on involvement in terrorism – but also the perspectives of those who were accused of and or sentenced for terrorism in Mali. From 2016 to 2020, I travelled to Mali eighteen times, each time talking to new as well as the same people and to deconstruct the process of involvement in terrorism in the country.

As with most work in academia, this doctorate thesis profited from the contribution of many people. First, I would like to thank my supervisors Edwin Bakker and Marieke Liem, who have offered invaluable guidance and support throughout the project. They provided the perfect mix of great attention for structure versus detail, academic rigor and humor and a continuous belief in a successful completion of this research. I am most grateful for the cooperation with and financial support of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT – The Hague) and Clingendael; and the support of director Renske van der Veer as well as the Mali research team: Julie Coleman, Méryl Demuynck and Mika Naulais. Additionally, I would also like to acknowledge the support provided by the United Nations, and the UN-colleagues I had the pleasure of working with: Dr. Elena Dal Santo, we jointly started this research, and I could not have finished it without you. The work in Mali greatly benefited of the intellectual insights and brainstorm sessions with the UN's Jean-Pierre Esnault and Philippe Prevost, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Roelof Haveman and Mirjam Tjassing and my direct colleague Sergei Boeke.

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Liesbeth van der Heide – April 2022

Curriculum Vitae

Liesbeth van der Heide was born in the Netherlands on the 6th of April 1986. After completing high school at the Zeldenrust-Steelantcollege in Terneuzen, she obtained an Associate of Arts Degree at Dordt College, Iowa, USA in 2005, followed by a Bachelor of Science in Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2010. Then she completed the Master Program 'International Relations in Historical Perspective' *cum laude* in 2011, delivering a thesis on lone wolf terrorism. This thesis was written as part of an internship at the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (CTC) at Leiden University's Campus The Hague, where Liesbeth accepted a position as a junior researcher after graduation in 2011. In 2015, the CTC was absorbed into the larger Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA), and the CTC became ISGA's research group on (counter)terrorism and political violence. At ISGA, Liesbeth started the PhD-process at the end of 2016 under the supervision of Prof. dr. Edwin Bakker and Prof. dr. Marieke Liem.

In 2014, Liesbeth was offered a position as Research Fellow and Program Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), a cooperative platform shared between Leiden University, the Clingendael Institute and the Asser Institute. At ICCT, she became the Centre's coordinator for its activities in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders in and after prison, bringing her to countries such as the Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Singapore, Bosnia, North-Macedonia and Kosovo to organize and implement research and capacity-building programs for prison staff, policymakers and a range of actors in the field of counter-terrorism. In 2016, she received a grant from the United States Department of State – CT Bureau to setup a rehabilitation and reintegration program for violent extremist offenders in prison in Mali, together with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). It was this program that allowed her access to the prison environment and the ability to gather primary resources through conducting interviews with prisoners accused of terrorism-related offenses in the country's main high-security prison in Bamako. As of 2018, the program continued with funding from the Royal Danish Embassy in Mali; and throughout the work in Mali, the data gathering, including interviews with professionals in the field of counter-terrorism, continued.

Over the years, Liesbeth has been involved in a variety of research projects, ranging from profiling lone operator terrorists for the National Police, crisis-communication in the aftermath of terrorist events for the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and evaluations of Dutch efforts to reintegrate extremists back into society for the National Coordinator of Security and Counter-Terrorism (NCTV). Besides working on a variety of research projects and her PhD thesis, Liesbeth has been involved in a number of courses on (counter-)terrorism that the ISGA offers to both students and professionals. In 2013 Liesbeth conducted archival research as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Onati International Institute for the Sociology of Law in Spain. In 2018, she became a Research Fellow at George Washington University's Program on Extremism. In 2020, Liesbeth accepted a position at the Municipality of The Hague as the coordinator for the city's policies to prevent and counter polarization, radicalization and extremism. While staying on in a research and teaching position at ISGA, she is currently looking ahead to a variety of new research projects that combine her dedication to deconstructing societal challenges like terrorism with topics at the forefront of the current academic and societal debates on terrorism.