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**REVERSE MIGRATION: WESTERN EUROPEAN
MUSLIM WOMEN'S FLIGHTS TO ISIL TERRITORY**

by

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September 2015

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FLIGHTS TO ISIL TERRITORY**

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ABSTRACT

Since early 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has increasingly recruited Western Muslim men and women to its radical ideology. This thesis examines why Western European Muslim women—specifically from France and Great Britain—are voluntarily migrating to ISIL territory to support Islamic extremism. It evaluates women's involvement in previous terrorist movements and proposes five potential motivations for migration: grievances toward Western society, ideology, relationships/belonging, identity assertion, and targeted recruitment. Through the analysis of eleven case studies and numerous social media accounts, this thesis demonstrates that European Muslim women choose life in ISIL territory for a variety of reasons. It also illustrates, however, that ISIL's social media and propaganda campaigns are the strongest forces pushing women toward radicalization and migration. Finally, this paper concludes with recommendations to counter ISIL's online recruitment success in the West.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
ICSR	International Centre for the Study of Radicalization
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Apostates	Nonbelievers of Islam
Dawla	State or Country
Dawlah	Country or state
Haram	Prohibited; illegal in Islam
Jihad	A personal struggle or Holy War. There are two types of jihad: the greater and the lesser. The greater jihad is focused on preserving oneself from sin and disbelief. The lesser jihad is focused on war to defend Islam, Muslims, property, or the occupation of an Islamic country.
Kuffar	Nonbelievers of Islam
Muhajirat	Immigrant
Mujahideen	One who conducts jihad (male)
Umm	Mother
Ummah	Muslim Community

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters for the Council on Foreign Relations, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was established in 2006 after the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Since its inception, ISI has fought to establish a Caliphate, or Islamic state ruled by Sharia law. Like al-Zarqawi, ISI adheres to a strict interpretation of Islam and believes it has a duty to purge the world of apostates, or nonbelievers. In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed leadership of ISI. In April 2013, he joined forces with Sunni Muslims in Syria to create the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).¹

Tactically proficient and brutally violent, ISIL made immediate territorial claims in northern Syria. Laub and Masters explain that in December 2013, the organization opened a front in Anbar Province, Iraq, and by January 2014, it had captured Fallujah. Five months later, ISIL victoriously claimed Mosul, Iraq's second most populous city. For two years, Western military forces, Shia Muslims, the Iraqi military, and local governments have tried to suppress the radical group. To date, however, ISIL remains tactically strong, well-funded, and popular among Islamic extremists.²

Increased numbers of European Muslims are accepting fundamentalist principles and migrating to the Middle East to join the ranks of ISIL. According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, approximately 550 Western Muslim women have migrated to Iraq and Syria to support ISIL and the formation of the Caliphate.³ Their stories—and Western nations' subsequent fears—inundate newspapers, magazines, and social media websites. The phenomenon of female terrorists, however, is not new. Groups such as the Black Widows in Chechnya and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka have participated in

¹ Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "The Islamic State," *CFR Backgrounders* (May 18, 2015), <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Alexandra Bradford, Ross Frenett, and Carolyn Hoyle, "Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS," *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, (January 2015): 8. http://www.strategicdialogue.org/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.PDF.

religious and political terrorism for decades, serving as suicide bombers, ideological supporters, and group organizers. There are many scholarly arguments as to why women choose to participate in terrorist activity. Dr. Mia Bloom, a professor of Security Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, states, “Many people have assumed that women could not consciously choose to participate in terrorism of their own volition. We need to work past gender stereotypes and begin to examine the conditions that really influence female violence.”⁴

Western Muslim women’s support for ISIL differs from previous cases of female extremists, however, making it a unique study of motivations. Historically, women were personally connected to war and injustice in places such as Chechnya, Palestine, and Sri Lanka. They were the victims of horrific violence and personal loss on a daily basis; thus, it is easy to understand their depression, anger, and desires for revenge via terrorism. To sustain the Caliphate, ISIL must lure Muslims from all over the world to the battlefield. They must connect Western citizens to the pain and suffering in the Middle East. Consequently, they developed remarkably successful recruitment and propaganda campaigns that the West has been unable to combat.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

Why are Western European Muslim women supporting ISIL? In this thesis, I specifically examine cases of French and British Muslim women who have migrated to Iraq and Syria. France and Britain have two of the largest Muslim populations in Western Europe. According to the Pew Research Center, 7.5 percent of the French population is Muslim—the largest percentage in Western Europe; moreover, approximately 5 percent of the British population is Muslim.⁵ Thus, it is important to comprehend why women reject Western society for violent extremism.

⁴ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), preface.

⁵ Conrad Hackett, “5 Facts About the Muslim Population in Europe,” *Pew Research Center*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/15/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>.

C. SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FIELD

Understanding why Western Muslim women migrate to ISIL is a matter of European and American national security. Since September 11, 2001, terrorism and national security have been at the forefront of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. According to the 2014 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), five countries—Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria—housed 82 percent of all terrorist attacks in 2013.⁶ Moreover, the Syrian Civil War and the ISIL campaign contributed to recent spikes in terrorist violence.⁷ The movement of Western Muslim citizens to top GTI states concerns parent governments who anticipate security threats upon their return.

Terrorist activity is continuously studied and analyzed around the world. Marc Sageman, a senior fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, stresses that only a thorough understanding of terrorist organizations “will enable the world to mount an effective defense.”⁸ ISIL is a terrorist organization that poses a significant threat to Western democracies. To eliminate this threat, scholars and politicians must understand all aspects of it—including the roles and motivations of women. Since terrorism is often perceived as a man’s domain, the role of women is frequently overlooked or understated.⁹ In reality, however, women support extremism in numerous ways, making it rational and prudent for ISIL to recruit females.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

My research sought to explain why Western European Muslim women migrate to the Middle East to support ISIL and Islamic extremism. Since each woman’s story varied, it was often difficult to pinpoint a single motive or reason. Therefore, through case analysis, I looked for common themes, factors, or events that drove these women toward ISIL’s ideology and radicalization.

⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace. “Global Terrorism Index,” accessed January 30, 2015, <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Global-Terrorism-Index-Report-2014.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), vii.

⁹ Katharina Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda’s Women,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no 5 (March 2007): 398, accessed October 17, 2014, doi: 10.1080/10576100701258585.

My research was qualitative in nature and focused on historical and current observations, events, and stories. I developed my hypotheses through past case study analysis that examined women's motivations for supporting terrorism. I reviewed various primary and secondary sources including documented interviews, journal and newspaper articles, academic books, social media venues, and research websites.

E. PARAMETERS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Western European Muslim women continue to migrate to the Middle East to support ISIL. Current events, though, are often difficult to assess because the parameters consistently evolve. Thus, my research is merely a starting point intended to highlight the problem and its roots in hopes that others can develop solutions.

Female involvement in terrorism fascinates the West, so there were plenty of articles, stories, and editorials on the subject. A research limitation, however, was finding complete case studies of British and French defectors. Western governments have been slow to address this problem and to identify, detain, and question these women—making it difficult to compile complete, credible accounts. As such, several of the cases referenced in this thesis were pulled from online news sources and professional reports. Social media, heavily used by ISIL supporters, unfortunately lacks certain elements of totality and reliability. Most social media messages contain probable reasons for migration, yet do not address personal stories that shed light on the path to radicalization.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

Why are Western European Muslim women supporting ISIL? This thesis proposes five reasons: grievances with the West, ideology, belonging and purpose, identity, and recruitment. It ultimately concludes that women's motives for supporting violent extremism are varied and complex. One factor, however, remains fundamental: propaganda. ISIL runs a sophisticated media campaign that actively recruits men and women from the West. Its propaganda penetrates the hearts and minds of young Muslims around the world—prompting them to abandon family, education, and employment to support violent extremism in war-torn regions of the Middle East.

This paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter II provides an overview of ISIL, explains why and how it recruits Western women, and includes a thorough analysis of ISIL's propaganda campaign. Chapter III dissects five potential reasons for Western women's migrations to the Middle East. Chapter IV introduces specific case studies of French and British female migrants. It analyzes their backgrounds for obvious motives for radicalization or migration. It then reviews migrants' social media accounts to examine women's self-identified objectives and to better understand the allure of ISIL's recruitment propaganda. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that women's motivations for supporting ISIL vary; however, the organization's online recruitment campaign—powered by social media—is the strongest force pushing women toward radicalization and migration.

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II. WHY AND HOW IS ISIL RECRUITING WESTERN MUSLIM WOMEN?

This chapter seeks to explain why and how ISIL is recruiting Western European Muslim women. It starts with background information that outlines ISIL's origins, beliefs, and objectives. Focused on its primary goal—survival of the Caliphate—ISIL recruits Western European Muslim women for practical purposes: community building, marriage, procreation, and recruitment. It generates propaganda—disseminated via the Internet and social media—that specifically targets Western women and incites feelings of duty, empathy, and passion for the Islamic State.

ISIL's use of social media has been extremely successful in radicalizing and recruiting Western European Muslims. Social media disseminates mass quantities of information and unites and motivates large groups of people. Alarming, it also disguises radical activists, skews reality, and affects decision making. Consequently, many extremists are bred online, and as technology rapidly extends to developing regions, Internet platforms become more prevalent and powerful. Thus, it is imperative to study their impacts on radicalization and decision-making.

A. THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Islamic State is a militant organization that started approximately ten years ago. Its roots are traced to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Zarqawi was a brutal fighter who ruthlessly attacked infidels, such as American troops and Muslims who failed to adopt his extremist views.¹⁰ Zarqawi's interpretation of Islam included strict adherence to *takfiri* doctrine—condemning people, including Muslims, as apostates or non-believers because of their sins.¹¹ Following Zarqawi's death in 2006, AQI members established the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).¹² To date, the Islamic

¹⁰ Laub and Masters, "Islamic State."

¹¹ Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *Atlantic*, March 2015, 8.

¹² Laub and Masters, "Islamic State."

State, like Zarqawi, believes its duty is to purge the world of apostates.¹³ ISI was initially weakened by the 2007 surge of American troops.¹⁴ In 2010, however, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed control of ISI and revitalized it.¹⁵ In April 2013, Baghdadi merged Sunni forces in Iraq and Syria to form the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).¹⁶

According to Laub and Masters, ISIL's expansion was fueled by Sunni marginalization in Iraq and Syria. After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the Shia majority excluded the Sunni minority from national politics. Hence, the Iraqi government's corruption and prejudice fueled ISIL's will to fight for territory. Concurrently, the civil war between the Assad government and the Sunni opposition created a power vacuum in which Shia, Sunni, and ISIL forces all fought for territory in Syria.¹⁷

In June 2014, after seizing Mosul and Tikrit, the Islamic State declared itself a Caliphate, a political and religious government ruled by a descendant of the Prophet Muhammed and trusted to lead all Muslims. ISIL presently occupies territory in eastern Syria and northern and Western Iraq. Moreover, Islamic militant groups in North Africa, West Africa, and South Asia have declared allegiance to the organization and adopted its radical ideology.¹⁸

ISIL's ideology preaches Islamic extremism and frequently emphasizes the pending apocalypse and Day of Judgment.¹⁹ The Day of Judgment refers to the Muslim belief in personal accountability. Man's fate in the afterlife is based on his submission to God and his contributions to the world. Adhering to a strict interpretation of the holy text, ISIL rejects peace with apostates and promotes an environment incapable of change.²⁰

¹³ Wood, "ISIS Wants," 9.

¹⁴ Laub and Masters, "Islamic State."

¹⁵ Wood, "ISIS Wants," 2.

¹⁶ Laub and Masters, "Islamic State."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Wood, "ISIS Wants," 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

Followers pledge allegiance (*bay'a*) to the Caliphate.²¹ The Caliph, or religious and political leader, must be a Sunni Muslim Qurayshi—descendent of the Prophet Muhammed's tribe, Quraysh.²² The Caliph must own territory and govern it according to Sharia law.²³ Baghdadi, the Caliphate's current leader, is purportedly the eighth true Caliph.²⁴

Muslim communities worldwide debate the legitimacy of ISIL's interpretation of Islam, especially when its followers behead infidels, rape women, slaughter children, burn prisoners, recruit adolescent soldiers, and destroy ancient cities and artifacts. Dr. Bernard Haykel, a professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, argues that ISIL's extremist beliefs are rooted in Islamic genealogy. Haykel acknowledges that the Islamic State is a minority group that does not properly represent the religion. He contends, however, that it adheres to many old tenets of Islam. It uses religious text in a very literal sense and intentionally ignores the faith's nonviolent messages. Its goal is to establish a Caliphate; thus, its battles are modeled after campaigns from the early days of Islam. In many cases, the Islamic State's actions are grounded in the Quran, traditions of the Prophet, and practices of past generations. These include punishments for apostasy, such as beheading and burning.²⁵

Many Muslims, however, reject Dr. Haykel's research. Arsalan Iftikhar, Senior Editor of the *Islamic Monthly*, refers to ISIL as "The Un-Islamic State."²⁶ He asserts, "There is nothing Islamic about beheading foreign journalists, indiscriminately targeting religious minorities, and instilling wanton terror within the general civilian population where your terrorist thugs operate."²⁷ Referencing the peaceful teachings of the Prophet

²¹ Ibid., 16.

²² Ibid., 15–17.

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Bernard Haykel, "A Lot of Muslims are Embarrassed by ISIS," February 23, 2015, Anderson Cooper 360, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/02/23/ac-bernard-haykel-on-isis.cnn>.

²⁶ Arsalan Iftikhar, "Let's Call ISIS 'The Un-Islamic State,'" *Islamic Monthly*, August 20, 2014, <http://theislamicmonthly.com/lets-call-isis-the-un-islamic-state/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Muhammed, Iftikhar explains that the Muslims who kill in the name of Islam are completely tarnishing the essence of the faith.²⁸ Even President Obama proclaimed that ISIL was hiding behind a false Islam. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 24, 2014, President Obama denounced the Islamic State and declared, “There can be no reasoning—no negotiation—with this brand of evil.”²⁹ Whether or not their actions are ideologically warranted, ISIL will continue its terror until its objectives are met.

B. ISIL’S OBJECTIVES

ISIL has a political objective: the Caliphate. At present, its principal goal is survival. It needs to retain and expand its territory; yet, external forces—including other Muslim organizations—are determined to see it collapse. Moreover, ISIL’s failure to negotiate with other states and recognize international borders has severely limited its future.³⁰ Graeme Wood, journalist and lecturer in Political Science at Yale University, explains, “If it [the Islamic State] loses its grip on its territory in Syria and Iraq, it will cease to be a Caliphate. Caliphates cannot exist as underground movements, because territorial authority is a requirement: take away its command of territory, and all those oaths of allegiance are no longer binding.”³¹ The Caliphate’s development and its will to fight are critical.³² Wood explains, “With every month that it fails to expand, it resembles less the conquering state of the Prophet Muhammed than yet another Middle Eastern government failing to bring prosperity to its people.”³³

The Caliphate must preserve and increase its territory and safeguard the jihadist community for future generations. ISIL needs people to accomplish its mission. Thus,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly,” *White House Press Secretary*, September 24, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>.

³⁰ Wood, “ISIS Wants,” 27, 30.

³¹ Ibid., 30.

³² Ibid., 26.

³³ Ibid., 31–32.

after its official declaration of statehood, ISIL strengthened its recruitment campaign, and Western women became key targets of the organization's propaganda.³⁴

C. WHY AND HOW IS ISIL RECRUITING WESTERN MUSLIM WOMEN?

ISIL lures Western women to the Caliphate for practical purposes: to build an Islamic society through marriage and procreation and to recruit other women via the Internet. How? Dr. Haykel refers to the organization as an “unbelievably powerful media machine.”³⁵ ISIL understands its audience in the West and distributes propaganda that satisfies its requirements. Its recruitment campaign has been extremely successful; thus, it is important to examine its key tools—the Internet and social media—and their effects on radicalization and decision making.

1. To Build an Islamic State

ISIL is focused on survival of the Caliphate and maintaining its current momentum in Iraq and Syria. To persist, it needs a society that gradually matures and obtains allegiance from Muslims all over the world.³⁶ Emily Daghli, a research assistant for the Human Security Centre, states, “The desire to form a Caliphate comes with practicalities, notably the need for ‘support’ functions, such as increasing the population and establishing communities and home lives that can keep particularly foreign fighters engaged in the region.”³⁷ Supporting roles are primarily undertaken by women, including those from the West.

Two critical aspects of building and sustaining an Islamic society are marriage and procreation. According to Dr. Mia Bloom, many foreign fighters are promised one or more wives in ISIL territory.³⁸ The promises of family and employment explain why

³⁴ Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, “‘Til Martyrdom Do Us Part’” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, May 2015, 17, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf.

³⁵ Bernard Haykel, “Embarrassed by ISIS.”

³⁶ Wood, “ISIS Wants,” 14–16.

³⁷ Emily Daghli, “Recruitment to ISIS: No Longer a Man’s Game,” *Human Security Centre Policy Brief* 3, no. 1 (March 2015), 1.

³⁸ Mia Bloom, “How ISIS Is Using Marriage as a Trap,” *Huffington Post*, March 2, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mia-bloom/isis-marriage-trap_b_6773576.html.

countless men have flocked to support the Caliphate. For their allegiance, ISIL provides housing, jobs, wives, and slaves, and encourages reproduction by paying for every child born in the Islamic State.³⁹ Many Western fighters do not speak Arabic and prefer wives that speak their native languages.⁴⁰ Thus, Western women are invaluable assets that keep men committed to ISIL's jihad via marriage.

To recruit Western women, ISIL promises “devout, jihadist husbands, a home in a true Islamic state and the opportunity to devote their lives to their religion and their god,” which fuels the desire “to become a ‘founding mother’ to a new nation.”⁴¹ It romanticizes life in the Caliphate and publicizes that it values and supports its female force.⁴² The image of a utopian world is complete with stories and pictures of women sharing home-cooked meals, bathing in the Euphrates River, and raising children together.⁴³ Moreover, ISIL propaganda emphasizes belonging to an ideological society. Emily Daghli notes, “The notion of an ‘ideologically pure state,’ living honorably alongside one’s sisters whilst being closer to god appeals to women and girls who are seeking adventure and see the act as heroic.”⁴⁴ In addition to the appeals of marriage, belonging, and adventure, many Western Muslim women migrate due to pressure from other female recruits.

2. To Recruit Others via Social Media

In addition to domestic responsibilities, ISIL uses Western women to recruit other women because they are well versed in social media.⁴⁵ According to Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith, counter-terrorism researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, “When the declaration of the so-called Caliphate was announced in 2014, ISIS developed a unique jihadist strategy that immediately recognized the importance of bringing women

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rachel Briggs Obe and Tanya Silverman, “Western Foreign Fighters: Innovations in Responding to the Threat,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, May 2015, 15, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/ISDJ2784_Western_foreign_fighters_V7_WEB.pdf.

⁴¹ Daghli, “Recruitment to ISIS.”

⁴² Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 18.

⁴³ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁴ Daghli, “Recruitment to ISIS.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

more actively into propaganda and recruitment efforts.”⁴⁶ As demonstrated in Chapter IV, ISIL encourages women to recruit by grooming “their victims online” via social media.⁴⁷ They instruct recruiters to build relationships, listen, answer questions, and provide support to potential followers.⁴⁸ Ultimately, ISIL hopes female migrants can reach friends and family back home. If they are unable to encourage migration, they hope to inspire terrorist attacks on Western soil.⁴⁹

Using the Internet and social media to recruit is most effective where it is most prevalent—in the West. Therefore, the next section details the importance of propaganda, outlines how the Internet makes users more vulnerable to radical ideas, and explains the impacts of social media on radicalization and decision making.

D. PROPAGANDA AND RECRUITMENT

The significance of propaganda in contemporary hostilities cannot be overstated. According to the American Historical Association, military force is not enough to win wars. Modern-day war is a mixture of military, political, economic, and propaganda or information operations.⁵⁰ States need to “intimidate enemy leaders, to separate them from their people, and to break down resistance by producing evidence that the mass of the enemy people have been deceived and misled.”⁵¹ Propaganda promotes a war effort by reaching millions of people; garnering social, political, and economic support; and demoralizing the enemy.⁵² The propagandist undermines the enemy’s will to fight by

⁴⁶ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 17.

⁴⁷ Hayley Richardson, “ISIS Using Paedophile Grooming Tactics to Lure Young Jihadi Brides,” *Newsweek*, March 16, 2015, <http://europe.newsweek.com/isis-using-paedophile-grooming-tactics-lure-young-jihadi-brides-314140>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 38.

⁵⁰ American Historical Association, “War Propaganda,” accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/what-is-propaganda/war-propaganda>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

illustrating the moral superiority of its cause and only broadcasting information and military victories from its point of view.⁵³

Propaganda plays an integral role in radicalizing and luring young Western European women to the Middle East. In “Women of the Islamic State,” published in February 2015, the authors assert, “IS propaganda is always carefully honed to a particular target audience . . . all the videos and photo reports that make it into Western media are intended to find a home there.”⁵⁴ In addition to positive images of duty, family, and utopia, ISIL’s propaganda incites feelings of anger, vengeance, and fear. It solidifies that Islam has been persecuted violently by “non-believers” throughout history.⁵⁵ Jihadists want Muslims to believe that the West, particularly the United States, yearns for a modern-day Crusade.⁵⁶ Moreover, ISIL instills fear through images of the apocalypse, an event that many supporters joyfully anticipate and imply will come very soon.⁵⁷

Unlike its predecessors, ISIL has mastered its use of social media and propaganda. Extremist organizations competing for Muslims’ allegiance, such as Al Qaeda, have been slow to catch up. Al Qaeda, founded in the 1980s, has never been concerned with the immediate formation of a Caliphate, so it has waged jihad differently.⁵⁸ Whereas ISIL immediately developed an active recruitment strategy, Al Qaeda adopted a more passive method. It believed that successful attacks against the West would attract followers who wanted a global Muslim movement.⁵⁹ Therefore, it focused on large scale attacks against its Western enemies—principally the United

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Quilliam Foundation, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade,” (London, England: Quilliam Foundation, February 2015, 6, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>).

⁵⁵ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 11.

⁵⁶ Wood, “ISIS Wants,” 31.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 22–23.

⁵⁸ Natasha Bertrand, “We’re Getting to Know Just How Different ISIS Is From Al-Qaeda,” *Business Insider*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/difference-between-isis-and-al-qaeda-2015-5>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

States.⁶⁰ Since September 11, however, Al Qaeda has been weakened by its inability to execute another large, successful attack against the West.⁶¹

When Al Qaeda did recruit, its campaign involved written statements from Osama bin Laden and “bland, made-for-tv proselytizing.”⁶² Hence, it is easy to identify the key to ISIL’s success. In *Al-Qaeda vs. ISIS: The Battle For the Soul of Jihad*, Daniel Byman, a research director of Middle Eastern studies at the Brookings Institute, and Jennifer Williams, a research assistant at the Brookings Institute, declare, “Which do you think is more likely to attract the attention of an 18-year-old boy dreaming of adventure and glory: a badass video with CGI flames and explosions, or a two-hour lecture on the Koran from a gray-haired old man?”⁶³

Studying ISIL’s recruitment strategies, Yaroslav Trofimov, journalist for the *Wall Street Journal*, notes striking similarities between ISIL supporters and Western European communist sympathizers in the 1970s and 1980s. Like the utopian Caliphate, communist promises of welfare, social justice, and “a better, fairer, and purer society”⁶⁴ attracted many young people. Hence, a notable achievement of the Islamic State “is its capacity to touch a similar nerve with its own utopian vision today, attracting the bored idealists, the misfits, and the adventurers from across Europe.”⁶⁵ Today, many Western European citizens search for purpose and belonging on the Internet, making it a powerful radicalization and recruitment tool.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Daniel L. Byman, *Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2015/04/29-terrorism-in-africa-byman>.

⁶² Bertrand, “We’re Getting to Know.”

⁶³ Daniel Byman and Jennifer Williams, “Al-Qaeda vs. ISIS: The Battle for the Soul of Jihad,” *Newsweek*, March 27, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/al-qaeda-vs-isis-battle-soul-jihad-317414>.

⁶⁴ Yaroslav Trofimov, “Islamic State’s Scariest Success: Attracting Western Newcomers,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2015, “Middle East Crossroads,” <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-states-scariest-success-attracting-western-newcomers-1424932279>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

E. USE OF INTERNET

Not surprisingly, extremists and terrorists are increasingly using the Internet to radicalize and recruit new members. According to Rachel Briggs Obe and Tanya Silverman, researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, “One of the other striking features of ISIS is its mastery of online communication and propaganda; it is skillfully using the online space to get across its message.”⁶⁶ While the Internet is not the only means of radicalization, it is becoming more powerful and prevalent, particularly in the West, because “it facilitates the formation of (virtual) communities which would be more ‘risky,’ if not impossible, to establish in the real world.”⁶⁷ Moreover, the Internet aids radicalization by desensitizing users to human suffering and emotion.⁶⁸ According to Dr. Gary Small, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and Gigi Vorgan, empathy is learned—often through face-to-face contact and physical interaction.⁶⁹ Therefore, the more time individuals spend online—watching horrific videos, viewing inappropriate photos, conducting business, or socializing—the less emphatic they become.⁷⁰ People that lack empathy more easily dehumanize their enemies and justify horrendous violence against them.

A report from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) highlights three additional problematic aspects of the Internet in relation to radicalization and recruitment. First, extremists use the Internet to illustrate and reinforce their ideological message or narrative to recruits that can easily access powerful videos and imagery. Second, the Internet makes it easier for people to join extremist organizations because it remains a relatively safe way to meet and network with

⁶⁶ Obe and Silverman, “Western Fighters,” 7.

⁶⁷ Tim Stevens and Peter Neumann, “Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action,” (King’s College, London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, 2009), 12.

⁶⁸ Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan, “Is the Internet Killing Empathy?,” *UCLA Newsroom*, March 4, 2011, <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/is-the-Internet-killing-empathy-193294>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

others. Finally, the Internet creates an environment where radical views and behavior are acceptable.⁷¹

Although Internet access has exponentially expanded worldwide, Western nations remain the primary consumers, making them increasingly vulnerable to online radicalization and extremism. Dr. Robin L. Thompson—a security, counterintelligence, and information operations specialist—confirms, “People living in the U.S. and other Western countries, where the Internet is available to the entire population, are more likely to be recruited and radicalized via the Internet.”⁷² Today, *Internet Live Stats* reports that nearly 40 percent of the world is connected to the Internet, compared to less than 1 percent 20 years ago.⁷³ In 2014, 89.9 percent of the British population had Internet access. This was followed by 85.75 percent of the French population.⁷⁴ Although Internet user access in Middle Eastern countries increased an average 10 percent from 2013 to 2014, they still severely trailed the West with only 26.6 percent in Syria, 7.79 percent in Iraq, and 5.95 percent in Afghanistan.⁷⁵ As more people gain access to the Internet, however, they also gain access to social media platforms—increasing these tools’ popularity, power, and influence.

1. Social Media

ISIL operates an extremely sophisticated social media network that promotes its ideals, elicits fear, and expedites recruitment.⁷⁶ In March 2015, J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan published a report for the Brookings Institute that studied ISIL’s use of Twitter in its recruitment campaign. “The ISIS Twitter Census” examined supporters’ Twitter accounts from September 2014 to December 2014. During this time, the authors estimate that ISIL communicated via approximately 46,000 accounts—not all active at

⁷¹ Stevens and Neumann, “Countering Online Radicalization,” 12.

⁷² Robin L. Thompson, “Radicalization and the Use of Social Media,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 172.

⁷³ Internet Live Stats, “Internet Users by Country (2014),” July 1, 2014, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/Internet-users-by-country/>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Daghli, “Recruitment to ISIS.”

the same time.⁷⁷ Each account had approximately 1,000 followers, significantly more than the average Twitter user.⁷⁸ While the total number of ISIL followers on Twitter is relatively small, compared to its monthly user base of 284 million, Berger and Morgan declare, “ISIS supporters are still highly effective at getting their message out.”⁷⁹ ISIL’s Twitter success can be attributed to somewhere between “500 and 2,000 accounts, which tweet in concentrated bursts of high volume.”⁸⁰ Short bursts drive ISIL’s immense success of message dissemination on social media. The authors explain, “Short, prolonged bursts of activity cause hashtags to trend, resulting in third-party aggregation and insertion of tweeted content into search results.”⁸¹

Since content is frequently violent and extremist, ISIL Twitter accounts are carefully monitored and regulated. Not surprisingly, however, ISIL supporters have adapted ways to avoid detection and public scrutiny. In December 2014, ISIL leaders ordered members to immediately disable the GPS on all mobile devices and banned iPhone products in the Islamic State for security purposes.⁸² With its official Twitter account suspended, ISIL maintains an exceptionally active presence by continuously creating smaller, less obvious accounts that fly under the radar.⁸³ To avoid suspicious activity, many ISIL accounts only tweet a few times a week, distributing material via hashtags to information uploaded on websites.⁸⁴ ISIL also uses a variety of apps and bots—pieces of computer software or third-party services that automatically spread or promote content, eliminating the need for a person to send a tweet—to discreetly share information.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ J.M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, “The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter,” U.S. Relations with the Islamic World (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, March 2015), 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11, 26.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

2. Social Media and Radicalization

Activists use social media to raise awareness, increase motivation, and recruit others to their cause.⁸⁶ While social media—applications such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube—does not cause radicalization or revolution, it can greatly influence the effectiveness of both by connecting people and disseminating large amounts of information.⁸⁷ Through the instantaneous transfer of ideas, images, and commentary, social media intensifies news, increases support for revolutions and ideas, and provides activists an efficient means of command and control.⁸⁸

In “Radicalization and the Use of Social Media,” Dr. Thompson outlines the pros and cons of social media outlets. She concludes that these applications are a “triple-edged sword” that slowly break down normal social behaviors in three key ways.⁸⁹ First, social media applications generate “addictive information-seeking behaviors”⁹⁰ in ardent users. Second, the anonymity of the Internet encourages users to share and report information that is normally kept private. Finally, unlimited access to information can manipulate users’ perceptions of the world.⁹¹ Furthermore, in 2011, bloggers examined the Egyptian revolution and three aspects of social media: the people connected to the issue, the sources distributing information, and the emotional perceptions of the situation. The study found that social media followers were pulling their information from multiple social media sources; moreover, they felt emotionally attached to the situation and inclined to get involved.⁹²

ISIL pursues a similar response from its followers: a strong, emotional attachment to extremist ideology and a desire to get involved. It baits people with its propaganda—videos, pictures, stories—and creates the need for more information. It instills feelings of

⁸⁶ Thompson, “Radicalization,” 168.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 175–178.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

belonging and purpose. In doing so, it ultimately manipulates followers' perceptions of the world and alters their decisions.

3. Social Media and Decision Making

In addition to its role in radicalization, social media can impact decision making, increasing its overall influence and relevance. Dr. Daniel J. Power, professor of Management Information Systems at the University of Northern Iowa, and Dr. Gloria Phillips-Wren, professor of Information Systems at Loyola University Maryland, address how social media can alter opinions, influence choices, and impact decision making. Studying consumers and business managers, the authors determine that "People tend to trust the opinions of participants in online networks in which they have chosen to participate. Social media are rich information sources and these tools facilitate crowd behavior, increase peer pressure and may result in saturation and associated negative impacts."⁹³

In the "Impact of Social Media and Web 2.0 on Decision-Making," Power and Phillips-Wren reference studies conducted by Don Bulmer and Vanessa DiMauro in 2010 and 2011. Bulmer and DiMauro identify 12 ways in which social media impacts CEO and business managers and disrupts traditional decision-making. Of note, the authors assert that people trust information obtained from social networks, and they seek input from their online peers when making decisions. Building on Bulmer and DiMauro's research, Power and Phillips-Wren posit that social networks have a large impact on decision-making for several reasons; specifically, social media groups make decisions as "gangs" or "mobs" and act short of rational thought or planning.⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud's contagion crowd behavior theory contends "that people who are in a crowd act differently and are less aware of the true nature of their actions."⁹⁵ Thus, the crowd influences people's behavior. In contrast, convergence theory affirms that like-minded people build

⁹³ Daniel J. Power and Gloria Phillips-Wren, "Impact of Social Media and Web 2.0 on Decision-Making," *Journal of Decision Systems* 22, no. 2 (April 2012): 255.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 256–258.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

crowds.⁹⁶ Whether contagion or convergence, social media unites groups of similar people that possess the potential to act senselessly.⁹⁷

Social media also generates new pressures to conform to group norms and standards. Power and Phillips-Wren declare that informational and normative conformity occur in social networks. Informational conformity refers to a decision maker who turns to his or her social network to attain accurate information. Normative conformity refers to a decision maker who conforms to a group's ideals to be liked or accepted by others.⁹⁸

Clearly, social media works in ISIL's favor. It unites like-minded individuals, provides a sense of belonging, and instills feelings of passion and purpose to a cause. It disseminates large quantities of extremist information in a relatively anonymous fashion. Additionally, people trust the opinions of online colleagues, friends, and networks—even if they have never met in person. As ISIL's online presence increases, its support is likely to follow. As such, a counter-strategy from the West is vital. Absent any obstacles to their propaganda, extremist organizations will continue to use social media to recruit and motivate terrorist activity.

F. LACK OF COUNTER-NARRATIVE

The range and effects of social media are likely to increase in the future;⁹⁹ thus, their links to radicalization and violent extremism must be consistently monitored to effectively counter the threats. The West acknowledges the need for narratives that refute ISIL propaganda; however, it has been slow to react and dedicate resources to the issue.¹⁰⁰ In "Western Foreign Fighters," Obe and Silverman declare, "Counter-narratives are a small and struggling cottage industry in comparison to ISIS's high-tech production and distribution network."¹⁰¹ Counter-narratives should disprove extremist ideas and

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 254–255.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 258.

¹⁰⁰ Obe and Silverman, "Western Fighters," 29.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

focus on the positive—what the West is for, not what it is against.¹⁰² Instead of challenging ISIL’s propaganda, however, the most common response of law enforcement and government officials is an attempt to remove extremist content from the Internet—an overwhelming and ineffective task due to the web’s vast and evolutionary nature.¹⁰³ A more productive approach would increase the material—films, articles, rhetoric—that counteracts extremist measures.

This chapter answered three main questions: Who is ISIL? ISIL is an extremist organization that adheres to a strict interpretation of Islam and lives by Sharia law. Why is it recruiting Western European Muslim women? ISIL must develop an Islamic society to maintain the Caliphate, and women serve practical roles. How is it recruiting them? ISIL is recruiting Western women via propaganda disseminated online. The “how” was broken down to show the value of the Internet, propaganda, and social media in targeted recruitment. This chapter illustrated how ISIL operates a successful recruitment campaign in Western Europe. The next chapter addresses why these women want to migrate to ISIL.

¹⁰² Ibid., 27.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 22.

III. WHY WOULD WESTERN MUSLIM WOMEN SUPPORT VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

The previous chapter explained why ISIL wants Western European women and how it uses social media to recruit and disseminate its propaganda. This chapter seeks to explain why Western European Muslim women—largely connected to and impacted by the Internet—choose to support violent extremism.

To identify potential motives, this chapter examines three previous extremist movements and explains the rationale behind women’s participation in each. It then shifts to the current crisis and examines the role of women in the Islamic State. With this knowledge, it proposes five feasible explanations for Western women’s movements toward ISIL’s ideology.

A. WOMEN IN EXTREMISM: ROLES

For millennia, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu men and women have waged war and violent terrorist attacks against their adversaries. Aryn Baker, a *TIME* magazine correspondent, declares, “Women have always played a role in war, if not in actual combat then in the vital areas of intelligence gathering, medical care, food preparation, and support.”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, women support violent extremism in numerous ways. Furthermore, their reasons for engaging in terrorism remain extremely complex and personal.¹⁰⁵ In the *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Farhana Ali, a terrorism specialist and political analyst, wrote, “A woman’s decision to pursue violent action is impacted by personal experiences and outcomes.”¹⁰⁶ Ali argues that personal reasons—such as revolution, honor, revenge, and identity—initially trump ideological ones.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Aryn Baker, “How ISIS Is Recruiting Women From Around the World,” *Time*, September 6, 2014, <http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>.

¹⁰⁵ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell*, 237.

¹⁰⁶ Farhana Ali, “Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 8, no. 1 (November 2006): 27.

¹⁰⁷ Mia Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend,” *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 96, doi:10.1162/daed.2007.136.1.94.

Like their motives, women's roles in terrorist organizations range from suicide bombers to ideological educators. In "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women," Dr. Katharina Von Knop, assistant professor at the Department for International Politics at the University of the Armed Forces in Munich, Germany, explains that bin Laden viewed women as essential supporters, organizers, and promoters of the Islamic jihad. Women ensure the survival of the terrorist organization by supporting their male relatives, managing the finances, and educating their children on the proper faith.¹⁰⁸ Dr. Von Knop explains, "In some respects, females are considered to be the most effective and loyal supporters of terrorist organizations."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, women sustain the insurgency "by giving birth to many fighters and raising them in a revolutionary environment."¹¹⁰

B. WOMEN IN EXTREMISM: MOTIVATIONS

The Tamil Tigers, Black Widows, and Palestinian bombers are prevalent examples of women in extremist movements. These women personally suffered the mental and physical scars of war and injustice; thus, their motives were primarily rooted in revenge and freedom. While the formal conflict in Sri Lanka has subsided, the tensions in Chechnya and Palestine persist to date.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organized in 1976 in response to ethnic imbalances and favoritism by the majority Sinhalese population toward the minority Tamil people. According to Kate Pickert of *Time*, the Sinhalese population, approximately 75 percent of Sri Lanka, speaks Sinhala and practices Buddhism. The Tamils, 15 percent of the population, have their own language and practice Hinduism.¹¹¹ Therefore, when Sinhala and Buddhism were declared the official language and religion of the state, intense resistance and violence toward the Sri Lankan government ensued.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Von Knop, "Female Jihad," 405.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹¹⁰ Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," 94.

¹¹¹ Kate Pickert, "A Brief History of the Tamil Tigers," *Time*, January 4, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1869501,00.html>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

From May 1976 to May 2009, the LTTE fought for an independent state for the Tamil people.

Defending Tamil life was the LTTE's principal objective.¹¹³ Originators of the suicide belt, the LTTE executed a series of extremely violent attacks against the Sinhalese government.¹¹⁴ They targeted high profile Sri Lankan and Indian officials, successfully assassinating two world leaders: Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991 and President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in 1993.¹¹⁵ The central government tried to suppress the Tamil insurgency with violent force and systematic killing. Tamil businesses and homes were destroyed, and men and women were frequently arrested, tortured, raped, and killed.¹¹⁶ The government's response inspired more violence and persuaded Tamil women to join the rebellion.

The Tamil people live by the Hindu culture that glorifies motherhood and traditional gender roles in society.¹¹⁷ Thus, Tamil women were gradually incorporated into the insurgency and initially served the LTTE in non-combatant roles such as cooks, nurses, and administrators.¹¹⁸ Over time, however, they were integrated into violent missions, to include their sacrifice as suicide bombers.¹¹⁹ Martyrdom was celebrated by the Tamil people as a purposeful death and valorous act, providing women a way to assert their identity, fight repression, and take revenge.¹²⁰ Although the LTTE was officially defeated by the Sri Lankan military in May 2009, subtle violence between the two ethnicities persists.¹²¹ Like the Tamil Tigers, the Chechen Black Widows suffered immense pain under an oppressive government.

¹¹³ Cindy D. Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Female Terrorism and Militancy*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 24.

¹¹⁴ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Frances Harrison, "Tamils Still Being Raped and Tortured in Sri Lanka," *BBC*, November 9, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24849699>.

¹¹⁷ Ness, "Name of the Cause," 23.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹²¹ Harrison, "Tamils Raped and Tortured."

Chechnya, located in the Southern part of Eastern Europe, is a federal republic of Russia. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Chechen people have sought independence from the Russian government. From the onset of the first Chechen war in December 1994, the Chechen women have endured dreadful suffering: rape, ethnic hatred, sexism, and depression. Paul J. Murphy, a former U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism official, asserts that within this perverse and terrifying environment, the famous Black Widow bombers were born.¹²²

The Black Widows are the product of horrific suffering and loss. Often the mothers, sisters, or widows of Chechen men slayed in combat with Russian troops, the Black Widows are female suicide bombers. Rather infamous, they played a role in two of the largest mass hostage events associated with suicide terrorism to date: Moscow's Dubrovka Theater and North Ossentia's Beslan School.¹²³ They have executed a majority of the suicide attacks in Chechnya—roughly 42 percent.¹²⁴ In addition to their sacrifice as bombers, Chechen women assist in a variety of noncombatant roles to include intelligence collection, weapons acquisition, funds management, and safe house maintenance.¹²⁵

The physical and mental wounds of the Chechen wars persist; as a result, the motivation for terrorist activity still exists. Dr. Anne Speckhard, associate professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical School, and Dr. Khapta Akhmedova, professor of Psychology at Chechen State University, declare, “Psychological trauma, a desire for revenge, and the nationalist desire to throw an enemy occupier out of their country were the strongest factors motivating them (Chechen women) to seek out terrorist organizations that promised a ready and ideologically honorable way to do so.”¹²⁶ Similar motivations move Palestinian women to violent extremism.

¹²² Paul J. Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 1–6.

¹²³ Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, “Black Widows and Beyond,” *Female Terrorism and Militancy*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 100.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Murphy, *Allah's Angels*, 5.

¹²⁶ Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Black Widows,” 106.

For decades, the Israeli/Palestinian lands have burned with hatred and violence. According to Dr. Mia Bloom, the on-going conflict between the Jewish and Arab peoples started in the late nineteenth century. A Zionist movement and social unrest in Europe encouraged Jewish emigration to the Holy Land. The land, then owned by the Ottoman Empire, needed new trade and currency. As a result, the Ottoman Sultan welcomed the Jewish immigrants in hopes they would bring prosperity. The Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War I and its territories, including the Holy Land, were split between Britain, France, and Russia. The British supported Zionist aspirations in Palestine. From 1931–1936, Jewish immigrants in the Holy Land doubled, and the Palestinians began to revolt in opposition. Nevertheless, the Jewish population flourished. After World War II, Britain could no longer afford to maintain a presence in the Middle East. Thus, on May 14, 1948, British troops left the Holy Land, and Israel declared itself an independent state. Within 24 hours of the announcement, Israel was attacked by its Arab neighbors.¹²⁷

The Middle East remains plagued by turmoil and hatred. The Palestinians maintain that Israel stole their land and consequently refuse to acknowledge its statehood.¹²⁸ As such, Palestinian women remain active participants in and recruiters and suicide bombers for terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hizbollah.¹²⁹ According to Edna Erez, professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Anat Berko, researcher at the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, women's paths to terrorism vary. For some, terrorism is a way to seek revenge for the loss of a relative or friend.¹³⁰ For others, it is a way to assert female identity and rebel against a patriarchal society.¹³¹ Likewise, Erez and Berko explain that terrorism is often “a license for experiencing excitement and thrill that Palestinian women are normally

¹²⁷ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 100–108.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹²⁹ Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 35–36.

¹³⁰ Edna Erez and Anat Berko, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (May 2007): 503, doi:10.1080/10576100701329550.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

barred from having.”¹³² Moreover, participation instills feelings of independence, pride, purpose and uniqueness in women.¹³³

Palestinian women are not the only females supporting terrorism in the region, though. Recent reports estimate that as many as 3,000 Western migrants have joined the Islamic State, with approximately 550 being women.¹³⁴ While motivations for migration vary, women’s roles within the Islamic State are clearly defined.

C. **ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ISLAMIC STATE**

The main role of the muhajirah [female migrant] here is to support her husband and his jihad and [God willing] to increase this ummah [Islamic Community].

—*al-Khanssaa Brigade*¹³⁵

Women’s roles in the Islamic State are instrumental and established on religious duty to family.¹³⁶ The Quilliam Foundation, a counter-terrorism think-tank in England, translated the document, “Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study,” written by the Islamic State’s all-female brigade, al-Khanssaa. Directed toward females in neighboring Gulf countries, the document details the role of women in the Islamic State, stressing no greater responsibilities than those of a wife and mother.¹³⁷ Al-Khanssaa writes, “This is women’s fundamental role and rightful place. It is the harmonious way for her to live and interact amidst her sons and her people, to bring up and educate, protect and care for the next generation to come.”¹³⁸

As such, women primarily serve IS in domestic roles. According to Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue,

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 506.

¹³⁴ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 8.

¹³⁵ Baker, “Recruiting Women.”

¹³⁶ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 14.

¹³⁷ Quilliam Foundation, “Women of the Islamic State,” 17.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 18.

“They [women] support male fighters in a non-military capacity.”¹³⁹ Secondary roles include jihadists (by appointment), teachers, nurses, and doctors.¹⁴⁰ Regardless of their duty, women are expected to remain mostly hidden from society and veiled¹⁴¹ -- a stark difference from the expectations of Western society.

D. POTENTIAL REASONS FOR MIGRATION

Despite the familial separation and professional, educational, and social constraints, Western women continue to migrate to the Middle East. Why? The authors of “Til Martyrdom Do Us Part,” a report published by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue in May 2015, declare, “Ultimately, these women believe that joining ISIL in Syria will secure their place in paradise, give them opportunity to take part in the construction of a utopian society, while also providing those sensations of adventure, belonging, and sisterhood.”¹⁴²

In reality, Western Muslim women’s motivations for migration are complex and multi-layered. Some motives originate with objections to Western society’s discrimination of Muslim citizens and progress toward the ideological desire for a Caliphate. Other factors include relationships, which fulfil the psychological need to belong, and identity assertion, which empowers women in a patriarchal society. A final influence is ISIL’s sophisticated recruitment campaign, which skillfully targets individuals.

Potential motives and their relevance are discussed in the following section. These motivations, however, are not black and white—rather multiple shades of gray. Such motives—isolation in the West, family, religious duty—are publicized via ISIL recruitment propaganda to incite the passion and determination to migrate to the Middle East.

¹³⁹ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 38.

¹⁴⁰ Quilliam Foundation, “Women of the Islamic State,” 22.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 17.

1. Grievances toward Western Society

Post-World War II guest-worker programs introduced scores of Muslim immigrants to Western Europe.¹⁴³ Though intended to be temporary inhabitants, many Muslims stayed in Western Europe and started families and careers there.¹⁴⁴ Despite their numerous contributions to post-war reconstruction, many Muslims withstood, and continue to endure, discrimination and prejudice from native Western Europeans. As a result, many young European Muslims today feel culturally and socially isolated.¹⁴⁵

In *Breeding Bin Ladens*, Dr. Zachary Shore, a historian of international conflict and professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, argues that isolation from European society makes Muslims more vulnerable to violent extremism. He explains that young European Muslims often perceive Europe and America as spiritually empty.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, they are torn between two identities. The first is European – contemporary and worldly. The other is “pan-Islamist: a global community, united under God.”¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Dr. Shore notes, “Islam is providing a powerful magnet to those youth, who crave greater meaning in their lives. They are finding in Islam a sense of fulfillment that they have not found in mainstream European culture.”¹⁴⁸

Today, Muslim immigrants constitute the migrant majority in most Western European states.¹⁴⁹ In January 2015, Conrad Hackett from the Pew Research Center reported that Germany and France have the largest Muslim populations in the European Union. French Muslims make up 7.5 percent of the country’s population, British Muslims 4.8 percent, and the numbers continue to rise.¹⁵⁰ Europe’s Muslim population has

¹⁴³ Robert S. Leiken, “Europe’s Angry Muslims,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 2005, 120–122, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2005-07-01/europes-angry-muslims>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Leiken, “Angry Muslims,” 122–123.

¹⁴⁶ Zachary Shore, *Breeding Bin Ladens* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 7–8.

¹⁴⁹ Leiken, “Angry Muslims,” 122.

¹⁵⁰ Hackett, “5 Facts.”

steadily grown by 1 percent each decade since 1990—a trend expected to continue through 2030.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the median age of Europe’s Muslim population (32 years) is eight years younger than native Europeans (40 years).¹⁵²

Despite seventy years of habitation and a growing population, many European Muslims still fail to integrate into mainstream society.¹⁵³ In an attempt to resolve such issues, Western European governments have adopted multicultural policies to protect, promote, and incorporate minority cultures and religions—versus forced racial assimilation. According to Irene Bloemraad, associate professor of Sociology and the Thomas Garden Barnes Chair of Canadian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, “If minority integration is facilitated, greater civic and political cohesion might follow and prevent the negative consequences that can flow from marginalization and feelings of exclusion among minority residents.”¹⁵⁴

The efficiency of multiculturalism is a contemporary political debate in Western Europe.¹⁵⁵ The discussion focuses on whether or not multicultural policies, laws, and regulations—intended to close inequality gaps—are effective integration tools.¹⁵⁶ In October 2010, German chancellor Angela Merkel stated that multiculturalism had “utterly failed” in Germany.¹⁵⁷ Likewise, in early 2011, other Western European leaders shared similar sentiments. French president Nicolas Sarkozy declared that multiculturalism was ineffective, and British prime minister David Cameron criticized it for “failing to promote a sense of common identity and encouraging Muslim segregation and radicalization.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Shore, *Breeding Bin Ladens*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ Irene Bloemraad, “The Debate Over Multiculturalism: Philosophy, Politics, and Policy,” *Migration Policy Institute*, September 22, 2011, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/debate-over-multiculturalism-philosophy-politics-and-policy>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Proponents of multiculturalism believe that recognizing and accommodating minority cultures increases migrants' attachment and engagement in society.¹⁵⁹ Such policies preserve culture and remedy the economic and political disadvantages that minorities suffer. Critics argue that multicultural states "seem tolerant by showering minorities with rights while segregating them from, rather than absorbing them into, the rest of society."¹⁶⁰ Opponents argue that multiculturalism has become "a proxy for other social and political issues: immigration, identity, political disenchantment, working-class decline."¹⁶¹ Moreover, an unnecessary emphasis on diversity simply accentuates differences and undermines the collective identity. Finally, critics declare that multiculturalism encourages minorities to live "parallel lives" in isolated communities, which hinders economic integration and weakens social ties and social capital.¹⁶²

Effective or not, most Western European states have embraced multiculturalism. Researchers at Queen's University in Ontario developed a multiculturalism policy index that measured eight public policies and their presence in Western states from 1980 to 2010.¹⁶³ The study inspected 21 countries for the following:

An official affirmation of multiculturalism; multiculturalism in the school curriculum; inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in public media and licensing; exemptions from dress codes in public laws; acceptance of dual citizenship; funding of ethnic organizations to support cultural activities; funding of bilingual and mother-tongue instruction; and affirmative action for immigrant groups.¹⁶⁴

In most countries, there was an increase in the number of multicultural policies from 1980 to 2010.¹⁶⁵ Of the eight policies, Britain moderately increased from 2.5 in

¹⁵⁹ Bloemraad, "Debate Over Multiculturalism."

¹⁶⁰ Leiken, "Angry Muslims," 132.

¹⁶¹ Kenan Malik, "The Failure of Multiculturalism: Community Versus Society in Europe," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 1, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2015-03-01/failure-multiculturalism> .

¹⁶² Bloemraad, "Debate Over Multiculturalism."

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

1980 to 5.5 in 2010. France, a historical critic of multiculturalism, increased from 1 to 2.¹⁶⁶

The British government embraces multiculturalism, but many citizens do not. As a result, the UK has witnessed an increase in Islamophobia among native and extremism among Muslim immigrants.¹⁶⁷ France proudly rejects multiculturalism and instead promotes secularism, the strict separation of the state from religious institutions. The French proclaim that every citizen is treated as a citizen rather than a member of a specific racial, cultural, or ethnic group.¹⁶⁸ Secularism—or assimilation—however, has not integrated Muslims in France any better than multiculturalism in Britain. According to Carla Power at *TIME* magazine, “France’s cherished codes of secularism clash with the public nature of the practice of Islam, a faith that in Muslim-majority countries is stamped on public life, from politics to laws to the wearing of beards and veils, or breaking for prayers in the middle of the work-day.”¹⁶⁹ Moreover, French secularism has ignored the rampant racism and prejudice in the country,¹⁷⁰ resulting in workplace discrimination, police profiling, and political scapegoating.¹⁷¹

In many ways, multiculturalism and secularism have fractured European society. European countries have “enacted either multicultural policies that place communities in constricting boxes or assimilationist ones that distance minorities from the mainstream.”¹⁷² Despite the debatable successes or failures of integration, the authors of “Becoming Mulan” argue that Western women that support ISIL are not primarily

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Malik, “Failure of Multiculturalism.”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Carla Power, “Why There’s Tension Between France and Its Muslim Population,” *Time*, January 8, 2015, <http://time.com/3659241/paris-terror-attack-muslim-islam/>.

¹⁷⁰ Malik, “Failure of Multiculturalism.”

¹⁷¹ Griff Witte, “French Muslims Caught Between Islamophobia and Extremism,” *Washington Post*, March 22, 2015, sec. Europe, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/french-muslims-caught-between-rising-islamophobia-and-growing-extremism/2015/03/22/7359329c-c739-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3_story.html.

¹⁷² Malik, “Failure of Multiculturalism.”

motivated by their grievances with Western society. Instead, many simply desire an ideologically pure state that lives and abides by Islamic law.¹⁷³

2. Ideology

The appeal of ISIL's ideology, a sect of Jihadi-Salafism, is growing among Western European Muslims. According to Marc Sageman, many Muslims are morally disgusted by the West.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, they believe that democracy is a sham and only Islamic societies are truly just.¹⁷⁵ They profess that "Islam is the path to peace;"¹⁷⁶ thus, it is their religious duty to defend it from apostates and external attacks.¹⁷⁷ These feelings—validated and encouraged by Jihadi-Salafism—motivate radical behavior.¹⁷⁸

Salafism is a distinct movement within Sunni Islam that is deeply rooted in "pre-modern theological tradition."¹⁷⁹ Salafi Muslims perceive themselves as the only "true" Muslims and seek to purify Islam by eliminating idolatry and affirming God's "Oneness."¹⁸⁰ Although Al Qaeda and ISIL both practice Salafism, "the Islamic State does so with greater severity ... it is absolutely uncompromising on doctrinal matters, prioritizing the promotion of an unforgiving strain of Salafi thought."¹⁸¹ ISIL's extremely violent version of Salafism is attributed to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the deceased founder of Al Qaeda in Iraq.¹⁸²

Salafist ideology is preached, exercised, and enforced in the Caliphate. In "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," Cole Bunzel, a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University, translates ISIL's "Creed and Path," which outlines the

¹⁷³ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, "Becoming Mulan," 12.

¹⁷⁴ Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror," *Foreign Policy* 165 (March–April 2008): 40.

¹⁷⁵ Obe and Silverman, "Western Fighters," 17.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Sageman, "Next Generation," 40.

¹⁷⁹ Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," Analysis Paper (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, March 2015), 7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

organization's core beliefs. Fundamental principles include the necessity to destroy all forms of idolatry, such as democracy, and to kill apostates and unbelievers.¹⁸³ The creed declares, "Secularism in the multiplicity of its banners and the variety of its programs, such as nationalism, patriotism, Communism, and Ba'thism, is flagrant unbelief, nullifying Islam and expelling one from the religion."¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Christians and Jews within IS territory are "people of war" and do not warrant a protection status.¹⁸⁵

Bunzel reports that ISIL summons all jihadi groups to consolidate under one banner. It believes in worshipping the Prophet and upholding God's Sharia law. It demands that women remain chaste and pure, veil their faces, and refrain from socializing with men. Moreover, ISIL declares that Islamic jihad is an individual obligation and its rejection is a great sin. In return for jihadists' sacrifices, ISIL pledges to care for the families of martyrs and prisoners of war.¹⁸⁶

Western female migrants must fully embrace Salafism in the Caliphate.¹⁸⁷ Although many outsiders perceive the Caliphate as an extremely oppressive and violent entity, many Muslim women recognize it as a positive and powerful existence.¹⁸⁸ The Islamic State promises the holy rewards of the afterlife, since a whole-hearted commitment to religious duty secures one's place in heaven.¹⁸⁹ As such, ISIL's state-building mission is a particularly strong motivation for Western women to migrate.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 38–39.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 39–41.

¹⁸⁷ Saltman and Smith, "Til Martyrdom," 13–14.

¹⁸⁸ Harriet Sherwood et al., "Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home To Join ISIS Fighters," *Guardian*, September 29, 2014, sec. World News, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>.

¹⁸⁹ Saltman and Smith, "Til Martyrdom," 15.

¹⁹⁰ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, "Becoming Mulan," 38.

3. Relationships/Sense of Belonging

A strong obligation to family and desire for marriage, friendship, and a sense of belonging frequently attract women to violent extremism.¹⁹¹ The needs for relationships and a sense of belonging are heavily researched by psychologists. In the 1940s, Abraham Maslow, an American Psychologist and professor, studied human survival needs and people's motivation to acquire them.¹⁹² The most basic human needs, or first level, are physiological: water, food, shelter, and sleep.¹⁹³ Physiological needs are followed by safety: family, employment, and health.¹⁹⁴ The third level, interestingly, is "love and belonging."¹⁹⁵ Belonging needs cannot be fulfilled until one's physiological and safety needs are met.¹⁹⁶ Belonging, however, takes precedence over the fourth and fifth levels: self-esteem and self-actualization.¹⁹⁷

In 1995, Dr. Roy F. Baumeister, a professor of Psychology at Florida State University, and Dr. Mark R. Leary, a professor of Psychology at Duke University, published "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." In it, the authors defend the "belongingness hypothesis," which states that human connection is a basic psychological necessity.¹⁹⁸ The article asserts, "A need to belong, that is, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared among human beings."¹⁹⁹ The authors' empirical research highlights two key features.²⁰⁰ First, humans need frequent personal

¹⁹¹ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 235.

¹⁹² W. Huit, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," *Educational Psychology Interactive*, 2007, <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/conation/maslow.html>.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 497.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 499.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 500.

interactions, preferably positive and peaceful, with other people.²⁰¹ Second, the perception of a relationship fulfills the need to belong.²⁰² Therefore, to achieve a sense of belonging, “People need to perceive that there is an interpersonal bond or relationship marked by stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future.”²⁰³

Promised relations—through marriage, family, and sisterhoods—are the backbone of ISIL’s recruitment campaign targeted toward women. Research from the Institute of Strategic Dialogue reveals, “For any young individuals coming to terms with adulthood, there is an important developmental period of identity building; of defining oneself within wider society.”²⁰⁴ As such, young Western Muslim women, often dissatisfied with Western society, are captivated by the Islamic State’s romanticized stories of Muslim sisterhoods and weddings with jihadi warriors in the Caliphate. Female migrants consistently discuss the camaraderie, community, and sisterhood they experience via social media platforms.²⁰⁵ Muslim sisterhoods offer companionship, comfort, social activity, and study groups that discuss the proper way to educate children in the faith.²⁰⁶ Dr. Von Knop writes, “Members of the sisterhood are usually recruited by other females, especially relatives.”²⁰⁷ She adds, “This special relationship goes much deeper than that to the level of the heart from which the bonds of Sisterhood emanate.”²⁰⁸ In addition to friends and community, family plays a role in women’s decisions to migrate. In Islam, arranged marriage is a powerful tradition that often unites men and women for social, religious, or political reasons.²⁰⁹

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.

203 Ibid.

204 Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 9.

205 Ibid., 15.

206 Von Knop, “Female Jihad,” 408.

207 Ibid., 409.

208 Ibid., 408.

209 Ibid., 410.

4. Assert Female Identity

Women from patriarchal societies, like the Chechen Black Widows, challenge gender rules and norms and hope that their militant acts will transform their social status.²¹⁰ In “Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters,” Farhana Ali declares, “Many women are determined to raise the gender equality issue.”²¹¹ Every role, whether bomber, organizer, or facilitator, gives women a sense of power and freedom. Terrorist activity occurs in the public realm—a world prohibited to many women. As a result, “Female terrorists are thus able to pursue opportunities other than the limited ones available in traditional societies. . . . As agents of violence, women are no longer defined according to their gendered roles.”²¹²

There is debate, however, as to whether women’s participation in extremist movements actually advances their social status or promotes gender equality. Ali asserts, “No conflict today has elevated the status of the Muslim woman, nor attempted to address the societal and religious norms that solidify the role of the Muslim woman.”²¹³ Like-minded scholars argue that women’s roles in terrorist organizations are limited to what men deem appropriate and can oversee/control.²¹⁴

According to Marc Sageman, the next generation of terrorists “are young people seeking thrills and a sense of significance and belonging in their lives.”²¹⁵ Women are increasingly part of this generation. ISIL propaganda plays heavily on women’s romantic ideas of adventure.²¹⁶ It highlights the notion “that supporting a jihadist husband and taking on the ISIS ideology is an empowering role for females.”²¹⁷ In addition, some

²¹⁰ Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend,” 96–97.

²¹¹ Ali, “Rocking the Cradle,” 27.

²¹² Von Knop, “Female Jihad,” 399–400.

²¹³ Ali, “Rocking the Cradle,” 27.

²¹⁴ Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend,” 97–98.

²¹⁵ Sageman, “Generation of Terror,” 37.

²¹⁶ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 16.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

scholars argue that women are fascinated by ISIL and may feel more respected and significant in ISIL territory than in the West.²¹⁸

5. Targeted Recruitment

As previously addressed, ISIL operates a sophisticated propaganda and recruitment campaign. It actively pursues Western women through social media and personal connections. As illustrated below, it tailors its recruitment tactics to specific individuals. It is possible, then, that a strong motive for migration is the act of being single-handedly recruited.

The article, “ISIS and the Lonely American,” published by *New York Times* on June 27, 2015, illustrates how ISIL actively recruits Western citizens via social media. The article follows “Alex,” a 23-year-old Sunday school teacher and nanny from rural Washington State.²¹⁹ Her mother battled drug addiction and lost custody of her daughter when she was 11 months old.²²⁰ Alex suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome, which according to a therapist, “Contributed to a persistent lack of maturity and poor judgment.”²²¹ Since infancy, Alex had lived with her grandparents; yet, she always felt lost and alone.²²² She dropped out of college and struggled to retain employment for various reasons.²²³ Her life, according to *New York Times* author, Rukmini Callimachi, “Mostly seemed like a blurred series of babysitting shifts and lonely weekends roaming the mall.”²²⁴ In a quest for identify and friendship, Alex discovered Islam via the Internet.

Online, Alex developed friendships with several Muslims who guided her through the fundamentals of Islam. She joined multiple online chat groups and engaged in hours

²¹⁸ Sherwood et al., “Schoolgirl Jihadis.”

²¹⁹ Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/world/americas/isis-online-recruiting-american.html?_r=0.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

of conversation regarding Islam on Twitter, Skype, and email. Finally, she felt the necessary connection she always desired. Her Muslim friends were constantly online for her—willing to spend hours answering questions about Islam and providing companionship. Unaware to Alex, her new friends were Islamic extremist recruiters, professionally trained to radicalize Western men and women. Recruiters are taught to spend time with potential recruits, to listen to them carefully, and to share in their joys and sadness. They are taught to gradually introduce the basic fundamentals of Islam and to avoid the topic of jihad. Moreover, recruiters are well-versed in Christianity. They understand the Bible and how to challenge its messages. For example, they use John 12:44, “And Jesus Christ cried out and said, ‘Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in He who sent me,’” to stress that Jesus was a prophet but not God. Allah is God.²²⁵

Alex was wholly committed to her new online community. She met Muslim men who were willing to engage in conversation and support her conversion from Christianity to Islam. She started to receive gifts from friends: a \$200 gift card to Islamicbookstore.com, prayer rugs, colored hijabs, chocolates, and money for dinners. Finally, when she was comfortable, Alex declared her faith, the Shahada, on Twitter and instantly acquired new Muslim “brothers” and “sisters.”²²⁶

Through it all, recruiters encouraged Alex to keep her conversion to Islam a secret from her Christian family. One man, Faisal, encouraged her to only communicate with Muslims online because Muslims were persecuted in the United States; as such, she could be branded a terrorist.²²⁷ Alex successfully kept the secret from her family. At first, this was not an issue. As the lie deepened, however, she again felt isolated—this time from her family and the ones she loved.²²⁸ According to Mr. Mubin Shaikh, a former radical Muslim and recruiter for an extremist organization, Alex’s story is quite common. Mr.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

Shaikh states, “We [recruiters] look for people who are isolated and if they are not isolated already, then we isolated them.”²²⁹

Alex’s grandparents eventually discovered her secret life online and immediately intervened.²³⁰ The friendships and bonds Alex created, however, were quite strong. To date, she still communicates with an old “friend” on Skype.²³¹ Callimachi, observes, “Even though the Islamic State’s ideology is explicitly at odds with the West, the group is making a relentless effort to recruit Westerners into its ranks, eager to exploit them for their outsize propaganda value.”²³²

E. SUMMARY

This chapter examined five potential reasons for European Muslim women’s migrations to ISIL territory: grievances toward Western society, ideology, relationships/belonging, identity, and targeted recruitment. It demonstrated that women’s motives to participate in violence are varied and complex. Moreover, it highlighted a significant difference between the European women that support ISIL and the women involved in past extremist movements. The Black Widows and Tamil Tigers, for example, lived in war-torn regions. They personally suffered the physical and mental wounds of violence and injustice, spawning their desires for revenge, righteousness, and freedom.

As discussed in the next chapter, many of the West’s female migrants come from moderate Muslim or Christian families. They are not exposed to routine violence or recurring personal loss. ISIL is thousands of miles away; however, the Internet brings the wars in Iraq and Syria to France and Britain. ISIL’s online propaganda radicalizes young Western women and generates feelings of hate and vengeance. For these reasons, the organization’s recruitment campaign is invaluable to its survival.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

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IV. WHO ARE THE WESTERN MIGRANTS AND WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

This chapter introduces a sample of 11 female European migrants—eight from Britain and three from France—who traveled to ISIL territory. These women were deliberately selected because they journeyed without a male companion, eliminating any patriarchal influence. Their backgrounds, presented below, were analyzed for common themes or obvious motives for migration. Since family, culture, education, and social life could encourage radicalization, the following questions were considered: Are there any known incidents of Western discrimination? Were the women outcasts or misfits in society? Were they exposed to extremist beliefs at their schools or mosques? Did local family or friends introduce them to ISIL ideology?

Unfortunately, these women's motives were not easy to identify; moreover, it was difficult to determine definitive trends due to the limited sample size and gaps in personal information. As such, the second part of this chapter reviews social media conversations and messages from a broader pool of European female migrants. Social media interactions expose women's true values and beliefs, feasibly suggesting why they chose to migrate. Ultimately, analysis of both the backgrounds and social media accounts revealed a few common patterns, beliefs, and vulnerabilities that are worth noting—particularly because many are echoed in ISIL's propaganda and narratives.

A. CASE STUDIES

Selection of case studies was reliant on adequate information from secondary sources—family testimonies, interviews, and articles. Since ISIL and Islamic extremism are sensitive topics in the West, many migrants' families and friends have avoided the media and withheld private details about the girls' lives. Thus, it was difficult to find a sample size that could pinpoint conclusive trends or behaviors. Despite the restrictions, 11 women were selected; moreover, background analysis revealed six common characteristics among them. First, all 11 migrants were—and still are—active on social media. On this note, ISIL uses Western female recruits' social media accounts to lure

other women to the Caliphate. Second, 9 of the 11 migrants were young, between 15 and 24 years old, and possibly attracted to the romantic images of marriage and humanitarian service in the state. Next, research confirmed that 8 of the 11 came from moderate religious families, indicating their radicalization originated with outside sources—not relatives. Furthermore, ISIL’s propaganda and social media campaigns most likely exacerbated and expedited radicalization. Fourth, 10 migrants performed well in school or had already achieved a professional career. Fifth, 7 of the 11 were liked by their classmates and peers. Finally, all migrants’ families were shocked and appalled by their disappearances and decisions to support violent Islamic extremism. Unfortunately, several families are still unaware of their daughters’ exact whereabouts or circumstances.

1. The Halane Twins

On July 9, 2014, the sixteen-year-old Halane twins, Zahra and Salma, entered Syria from the Turkish border. Born of Somali descent, the girls, from Chorlton, Greater Manchester, were described by friends and neighbors as well-adjusted, liked, and intelligent—both aspiring to work in the medical field. A few factors suggest the girls’ conservative upbringing and religious beliefs were stricter than other migrants. For example, the girls’ father ran an intensive Quranic studies program and was known to unashamedly recite scripture. In addition, unlike other female migrants, the Halane sisters were exposed to ISIL ideology and extremist beliefs by their older brother, Ahmed Ibrahim Mohammed Halane, who migrated to the Middle East in 2013. Despite these influences, the girls’ friends say religion was rarely mentioned in their relationships.²³³

The Halane family was devastated by the girls’ departure to ISIL territory. On November 2, 2014, the *Daily Mail* reported the twins’ parents, Ibrahim and Khadra, traveled to Syria in July 2014 to rescue their daughters. Unfortunately, Khadra was detained by IS fighters and not freed until September 2014. Ibrahim worked through a

²³³ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 20.

charity to communicate with Zahra. Both girls, however, refused to leave and insisted their lives were in the Caliphate.²³⁴

Since migrating to ISIL territory, the twins have maintained a very active online presence, primarily via Twitter and Instagram.²³⁵ They have demonstrated a high proficiency in social media and have overcome online censorship mechanisms by “alternating usernames, changing Twitter handles and using ‘shout-out’ tactics to regain their follower networks quickly and efficiently.”²³⁶ Both girls capitalized on the media attention surrounding their disappearance and continue to encourage other Western women to make the hijra.²³⁷

Studying their behavior on social media, scholars conclude that the twins have become more extreme since joining ISIL and losing their husbands to martyrdom.²³⁸ Both girls support and glorify violence against disbelievers, accept martyrdom with great pride, encourage immediate marriage for migrants, and attempt to induce feelings of guilt and failure in Western women not supporting the Caliphate.²³⁹ Of interest, the girls, particularly Zahra, display a strong sense of “ummah consciousness.”²⁴⁰ The ummah refers to the global community of Muslims and generates a sense of belonging and unity. The term transcends identity boundaries and creates a meta-identity, such as the Caliphate.²⁴¹ It reinforces the “us” versus “them” mentality, with the ummah (Caliphate)

²³⁴ Sam Webb, “Mother of British ‘Terror Twins’ Who Went to Syria to Become Jihadi Brides Is Snatched by ISIS While on Rescue Mission to Find Them,” *Daily Mail*, November 2, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2817639/Mother-Manchester-terror-twins-went-Syria-Jihadi-brides-snatched-ISIS-tried-rescue-daughters.html>.

²³⁵ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 20–21.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21–24.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

against the kuffar (others).²⁴² By setting the two groups—Muslim and non-Muslim—as rivals, Zahra dehumanizes and justifies violence against the “other.”²⁴³

There are two prominent factors in the Halane sisters’ case. First, the girls were raised in a strict, Muslim home. Conservative religious standards were engrained in their lives. Moreover, their brother migrated to ISIL territory in 2013, perhaps signaling that it was an appropriate path for Muslims. Second, the girls are now extremely vocal recruiters online, which raise questions of whether they were heavily recruited and are now mirroring the process they underwent. Together, ideology and recruitment appear to be the strongest factors that pulled the girls to ISIL territory.

2. Amira Abase, Shamima Begum, and Khadiza Sultana

Amira, Shamima, and Khadiza migrated from the UK to ISIL territory on February 17, 2015. The three friends were hardworking students from Bethnal Green Academy School in Tower Hamlets. Little background information is available on Shamima Begum and Khadiza Sultana; however, Amira’s disappearance attracted media attention when news surfaced that her father had attended an Islamic extremist rally in 2012. Extremist ideology was not a prevalent or noticeable part of her life, though. Amira was fifteen years old when she migrated, and classmates described her as a normal teenage girl: active on social media, frustrated with school exams, and infatuated with Western clothing brands. She was a Chelsea football fan, a high academic achiever, and an accomplished public speaker.²⁴⁴

In January 2015, Amira and Shamima started sharing their opinions of the Syrian conflict with friends online. Amira expressed sorrow and anger when tweeting images of Syrian children living in war-torn conditions.²⁴⁵ Shamima voiced a desire to help

²⁴² Ibid., 22.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 43–45.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 44–46.

suffering Syrians.²⁴⁶ Six days before leaving the UK, Amira asked for prayers and tweeted, “Really need it. Pray Allah grants me the highest ranks in Jannah.”²⁴⁷ Days later, Amira, Shamima, and Khadiza began their journeys to Syria.

The girls’ families begged for their return. In a public statement, Shamima’s family said, “We miss you terribly and are extremely worried about you. Please, if you hear this message, get in touch and let us know you are safe. We want you home with us. You belong at home with us.”²⁴⁸ Khadiza’s family expressed concern for her safety and declared, “We, together, sincerely pray and hope this message reaches you. We pray that no harm comes to you, and you are all safe and in good health. In your absence, we, as a family, are feeling completely distressed and cannot make sense of why you left home.”²⁴⁹ Finally, Amira’s family begged, “Please come home Amira, everyone is missing you. You are strong, smart, beautiful and we are hoping you will make the right decision. We miss you more than you can imagine. We are worried and we want you to think about what you have left behind.”²⁵⁰ Such compassionate appeals suggest the girls had strong support networks at home.

Like the Halane sisters, Amira, Shamima, and Khadiza were young, teenage girls. Their motives for migration seem quite different, though. These girls were popular and appeared to blend into Western society. They had close friends and families, which seems to eliminate the need for belonging or relationships. Instead, they were drawn to ISIL’s online propaganda and touched by the immense suffering in war-torn Iraq and Syria. Life in the Caliphate was an opportunity to help Muslims around the world. It was an adventure and a chance to assert their identities in a new Islamic state.

²⁴⁶ Ashley Fantz and Atika Shubert, “From Scottish Teen to ISIS Bride and Recruiter: The Aqsa Mahmood Story,” *CNN* (CNN, February 24, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/23/world/scottish-teen-isis-recruiter/>.

²⁴⁷ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 47.

²⁴⁸ Harley, “Family of Third Missing Schoolgirl Plead With Her to Come Home,” *Telegraph*, February 21, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11427576/Family-of-third-missing-schoolgirl-plead-with-her-to-come-home.html>.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

3. Shams

Known only by her username, Shams runs a fascinating blog about her life with ISIL, praising the good aspects and prudently addressing the less desirable ones. Authorities suspect that she is of Indian and Pakistani descent but lived in the UK for an extended period of time.²⁵¹ Unlike many of the younger migrants, Shams is a physician and has operated a women's clinic in Syria since February 2014.²⁵² Her role as a physician, however, is secondary. As a wife and mother, "Sham extols her role . . . as principally important responsibilities for both personal development and the development of the state."²⁵³

Shams' blog is more moderate than others, indicating that she is more engaged in religion than politics.²⁵⁴ She openly professes an unconditional love for her husband and struggles with the thought of losing him in war.²⁵⁵ She frequently reflects on the reality of life as a mujahid's wife. She writes, "I know the fact that one day—my husband will be a Shaheed and I have to prepare for it. I can't ask Allah to grant my husband a long life—for death is pre-destined. All I'm asking Him is a strong heart and mind."²⁵⁶ She praises ISIL for raising her status as a woman and for providing exceptional public services, such as healthcare, in Syria.²⁵⁷ She also admits, however, that conditions are not ideal and encourages migrants to have patience, to manage their expectations, and to prepare for hardship.²⁵⁸

Shams seems to be motivated by ideology versus adventure, political grievances, identity, or relationships. As such, she does not try to recruit every Muslim woman to ISIL territory—only those completely devoted to Islam. In fact, she believes many

²⁵¹ Saltman and Smith, "Til Martyrdom," 36.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

Western Muslim women are naïve and not physically or mentally prepared for life in the Islamic state.²⁵⁹ She encourages migration only for the sake of Allah and warns, “Don’t make marrying a mujahid as your priority.”²⁶⁰ She does not romanticize or glamourize life in the Caliphate. Shams’ realistic tone undoubtedly discourages some women; however, it challenges and encourages others. Thus, her blog remains a popular and dangerous recruitment tool.

4. Aqsa Mahmoud

Aqsa Mahmoud was raised in an affluent neighborhood in Glasgow. In the 1970s, her father, a moderate Muslim, became the first Pakistani cricket player in Scotland. His success provided Aqsa and her three siblings a comfortable life, with all four children attending a prestigious private school.²⁶¹ Aqsa had a normal upbringing. She was a fan of pop culture: Coldplay, *Harry Potter*, and *The Hunger Games*.²⁶² She was 19 years old and attending university when she migrated to ISIL territory in November 2013.²⁶³

When Aqsa went to college, her family noticed small changes in her behavior, such as abandoning her loves of music and fiction. Her parents knew she studied and prayed the Quran; however, they were not alarmed because she never expressed extremist beliefs and remained close to the family.²⁶⁴ Her family was appalled by her disappearance, begged her to return, and stated, “You are a disgrace to your family and the people of Scotland. Your actions are a perverted and evil distortion of Islam.”²⁶⁵

It is difficult to pinpoint Aqsa’s potential reasons for migration. She seems to come from a strong family that put her on the path to a successful future. Her family believes her radicalization occurred online,²⁶⁶ where she was also potentially targeted and

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Fantz and Shubert, “Scottish Teen.”

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

recruited. She now maintains a strong social media following on Tumblr. Her messages support and encourage Muslim women to leave their families in the West to build new families with ISIL.²⁶⁷ She posts pictures of guns and encourages attacks on the West.²⁶⁸ She proclaims, “If you cannot make it to the battlefield, then bring the battlefield to yourself.”²⁶⁹ Aqsa praises ISIL for providing for its people and inspires believers to focus on the heavenly rewards of the afterlife.²⁷⁰ While her parents continue to plead for her return, Aqsa remains committed to her life in the Islamic State. In a Tumblr post, she quotes Anwar al-Awlaki, a Muslim scholar and militant for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. She writes, “Change, always in history, depends on the youth.”²⁷¹

5. Khadijah Dare

Grace Dare, now known as Khadijah Dare, was born in Nigeria but emigrated to Lewisham, South London as a child. Like other ISIL migrants, Dare had a typical upbringing. According to her mother, Victoria, she was raised a devout Christian, and friends described her as popular, loveable, and sweet.²⁷² Dare had normal pastimes: watching football, ordering Chinese food, and enjoying her mother’s home cooking. Prior to migration, she studied media, film, and social sciences at a local college.²⁷³

Now twenty-two years old, Dare converted to Islam approximately four years ago at college. She worshiped at the Lewisham Islamic Center, an institution that insists it does not breed terrorists despite its links to the killers of British Soldier, Lee Rigby, and

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ruth Styles, “‘The Devil Took Her Away’: Heartbroken Mother of British Jihadi Bride Khadijah Dare Uses First Ever TV Interview to Beg Her Daughter To Come Home,” *Daily Mail*, April 8, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3030324/The-devil-took-away-Heartbroken-mother-British-jihadi-bride-Khadijah-Dare-uses-TV-interview-beg-daughter-come-home.html>.

²⁷⁰ Fantz and Shubert, “Scottish Teen.”

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Daily Mail, “White British Girl Who’s Now a ‘Celebrity Jihadi’: Mother-of-Two a ‘Top Priority’ for MI6 and She Calls on Muslims to Join the Terror Group,” *Daily Mail*, September 1, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2739705/White-British-girl-s-celebrity-jihadi-Mother-two-priority-MI6-calls-Muslims-join-terror-group.html>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

the radical cleric, Abu Hamza.²⁷⁴ Sources believe Dare was radicalized online.²⁷⁵ As a British Muslim, Dare was a victim of overt Western prejudice—the only case of known discrimination in this thesis. When she started to wear the full face veil, locals told her to “go back to her country,” to which she would reply, “I was born round the corner.”²⁷⁶ Dare moved to Syria in 2012 and married the now deceased Swedish fighter, Abu Bakr, with whom she had two sons.²⁷⁷

Her candid online presence has made her a celebrity among ISIL supporters. She appeared in an ISIL recruitment video that called on British Muslims to join the jihad. Alongside images of slaughtered Muslim children, Dare declared, “These are your brothers and sisters as well and they need our help, so instead of sitting down and focusing on your families or focusing on your studies, you need to stop being selfish because time is ticking.”²⁷⁸ When James Foley, an American journalist, was beheaded in August 2014, Dare reveled on social media and boasted that “she would be the first British woman to kill a U.S. Soldier.”²⁷⁹ Dare defends life in the Islamic State and declares, “I’m not oppressed. If I was oppressed, I wouldn’t be a Muslim right now.”²⁸⁰ Despite her mother’s requests, Dare refuses to return to the UK.

Like Aqsa, college was an important time in Khadijah Dare’s life because of her conversion to Islam. Unfortunately, Western discrimination and prejudice soon followed. A likely consequence of that discrimination has been Khadijah’s violent tone toward the West. She has been extremely vocal on social media, praising beheadings and gloating that she would someday conduct violence. Thus, it appears Khadijah’s migration was primarily motivated by ISIL’s ideology, her grievances with the West, and the unique opportunity to assert female identity and emerge as a heroine.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

6. Hayat Boumeddiene

Twenty-six year old Hayat Boumeddiene is infamously known for her husband, Amedy Coulibaly, and his acts of terrorism. On January 9, 2015, two days after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, Coulibaly shot and killed a Paris policewoman; immediately after, he took hostages and killed four Jewish men at a kosher supermarket before being killed in a police shoot-out in Porte de Vincenne, France. Five days prior to Coulibaly's stint, Boumeddiene flew to Istanbul, Turkey. Investigators believe she crossed into Syria on January 8, 2015, the day before her husband's attack.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, officials suspect she helped plan the event.²⁸² Hayat's father, Mohamed Boumeddiene, was "shocked and heartbroken" to hear of his daughter's involvement.²⁸³

The second issue of *Dar al Islam*, an ISIL magazine in French, claimed—without proof—that Boumeddiene had safely reached the Islamic State.²⁸⁴ The issue, entitled "May Allah Curse France," displayed pictures of the Paris attacks, encouraged future attacks, and praised Coulibaly. Moreover, it printed a two-page interview with Boumeddiene, in which she allegedly stated, "Praise be to Allah who made the road easy. I had no difficulty getting here. ... I am relieved to have fulfilled this obligation."²⁸⁵

Little is known about Boumeddiene's childhood. She was born into a large French-Algerian family and was placed in foster care after her mother's death in 1994.²⁸⁶ In 2010, Boumeddiene told police, "I was placed in care [foster] at the age of 12, because I did not accept the speed with which my father remarried after the death of my mother. I

²⁸¹ Kim Willsher, "Islamic State Magazine Interviews Hayat Boumeddiene," *Guardian*, February 12, 2015, sec. Islamic State, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/12/islamic-state-magazine-interviews-hayat-boumeddiene>.

²⁸² Emily Thomas, "Who Is Hayat Boumeddiene?," *BBC Newbeat*, January 12, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/30760975/who-is-hayat-boumeddiene>.

²⁸³ Andrew Marszal, "Paris Shooter Widow: Hayat Boumeddiene's Father 'Handed Himself In After Shock at Seeing Daughter's Police Mugshot,'" *Telegraph*, January 12, 2015, sec. World, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11339492/Paris-shooter-widow-Hayat-Boumeddiene-father-handed-himself-in-after-shock-at-seeing-daughters-police-mugshot.html>.

²⁸⁴ Willsher, "Interview Hayat Boumeddiene."

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Marszal, "Hayat Boumeddiene's Father."

changed care [givers] numerous times because I was beaten often.”²⁸⁷ Boumeddiene met her husband, Coulibaly, through mutual friends while studying Islam;²⁸⁸ they married in 2009 in a religious ceremony not recognized by French law.²⁸⁹ French and American forces continue to hunt for Boumeddiene in ISIL territory.²⁹⁰

There are many details missing from Hayat’s story; however, it reasonably appears she embraced Islamic extremism in search of meaningful relationships and belonging. As a child, she was moved between multiple families—a victim of abuse and displacement. As such, she conceivably longed for positive attention, stability, and love. When she converted to Islam, she found Coulibaly and other friends who embraced her. Therefore, it is not surprising that after losing her husband, she fled to a place where she believed she would be accepted, revered, and cared for—the Islamic State.

7. Sahra Mehenni

Sahra Mehenni was raised in a middle-class home in Lezignan-Corbieres, a wine town in Southern France. Her mother is a French-born Catholic, and her father is an Algerian-born Muslim who works at a local wine factory. In early 2014, 17-year-old Sahra attracted negative attention from family members when she insisted on wearing the full Islamic veil—a violation of French law. Concerned, Sahra’s parents carefully watched her behavior and temporarily hid her passport in fear she would migrate. Shortly after, Sahra switched schools, and her parents immediately recognized positive changes in her behavior. They never heard Sahra talk about Syria or jihad; thus, her sudden disappearance was a devastating surprise.²⁹¹

Officials believe Sahra, now 18 years old, traveled alone to Turkey, and ultimately Syria, in March 2014. On March 11, Kamel Ali Mehenni took his daughter to the local train station for school and never saw her again. Since joining ISIL, Sahra’s

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Thomas, “Who Is Hayat.”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Willsher, “Interview Hayat Boumeddiene.”

²⁹¹ Associated Press, “How 2 French Girls Were Lured to Jihad Online,” *Daily Mail*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2788294/How-2-French-girls-lured-jihad-online.html>.

communication with family has diminished. Within days of her migration, Sahra called her older brother and explained that she had just met and married a 25-year-old Tunisian man. She explained that her daily life was normal: cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. According to her family, Sahra's communication feels hollow—like she's forced to recite a script. She continues to post messages on Facebook—often videos about jihad and Islam. Sahra told her brother that she has no intention of coming home; however, she wants her mother to accept her religion and her marriage. Sahra's exact whereabouts and condition remain a mystery to family and friends.²⁹²

Like Hayat, there are many details missing from Sahra's story. On the surface, though, it appears she was searching for identity, purpose, and possibly belonging. Her behavior prior to migration resembled a teenage rebellion against Western conformity—particularly her family's rules and French law. It is not known why—at 17 years old—she switched schools. Was she struggling academically or socially? While Sahra has established a life in the Caliphate, she still seeks her mother's approval, which implies that she still considers her Western family a part of her identity. Thus, she may be willing to someday return.

8. Nora El-Bahty

The third of six children, Nora El-Bahty is the daughter of Moroccan immigrants residing in Avignon, France. The El-Bahty family practices Islam; however, it does not consider itself strictly religious. As such, Nora carefully hid the signs of radicalization from her family. Following her disappearance on January 23, 2014, family members discovered a second cell phone number and Facebook account used by recruiters. Investigators later determined that Nora, only 15 years old at the time, had flown from Paris to Istanbul to Syria.²⁹³

Upon arrival to ISIL territory, Nora immediately contacted her family. Like the Mehenni family, the El-Bahty's thought their daughter's conversations were scripted and superficial. In mid-March 2014, Nora expressed a desire to come home and admitted she

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

initially left France because she believed it was her duty to help those suffering in the Middle East. Now, however, she feared that she would never see her family again. Her family still seeks her return and prefers that she face legal consequences in France than the horrors of life with ISIL.²⁹⁴

Nora was young and vulnerable—only 15 years old—when she decided to migrate. She wanted to help suffering Muslims. More importantly, though, was her association with ISIL’s online propaganda and recruiters. Her second cell phone and Facebook account indicate she was hiding numerous conversations. For her to travel alone at such a young age, she must have received a lot of assurance that someone would assist her upon arrival in Istanbul. Recruiters most likely encouraged her and made her feel protected. Nora’s case implies that targeted recruitment and online propaganda were the strongest motivations for her migration.

9. Conclusion

The above case studies highlight common characteristics of migrants—such as age, education, and religious upbringing. Unfortunately, they do not demonstrate decisive trends or motives for migration. Instead, they illustrate how Western female migrants’ reasons for immigration are quite varied. The one common factor among all cases, however, is the use of the Internet and social media. These women routinely use Twitter, Facebook, and blogs to share pro-ISIL news, stories, pictures, and videos with friends, followers, and potential recruits. Thus, given the inability to identify conclusive trends from women’s backgrounds, the following section examines their social media interactions and includes a broader sample of European female migrants.

Many scholars are analyzing women’s online communication to better understand life in the Caliphate and to determine self-identified reasons for migration. In addition, if an individual repeatedly discusses a topic, such as sisterhood, it could be her primary motive for supporting ISIL.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

The quality and integrity of online sources must be questioned, though. Sahra Mehenni and Nora El-Bahty’s families felt their communication was scripted—not real. Indeed, ISIL has a propaganda agenda, and it undoubtedly only allows certain information and opinions to be disseminated online. Evaluating the reliability of social media is a difficult task and could be addressed in future studies. Assuming Western female migrants are freely managing their social media accounts, the following section highlights some of the principles commonly discussed.

B. SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES

ISIL’s sophisticated propaganda machine exerts cult-like control over its supporters and uses its successes—such as the case studies above—as recruitment tools.²⁹⁵ Essentially, these women become a critical component of ISIL’s propaganda campaign because they inspire and actively encourage others to migrate via social media.²⁹⁶ The authors of “Til Martyrdom Do Us Part” declare, “Much of this encouragement [by Western women] is subtle, achieved by representing daily life in ISIS territory in a positive light and by creating a vision of a utopian society in which their values are venerated and shared.”²⁹⁷ Therefore, following migrants’ social media transactions provides greater insight into women’s motivations and recruitment techniques.

In early 2015, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue published “Becoming Mulan,” a report that tracked and analyzed the social media chatter of Western European female migrants who traveled to ISIL territory without a male escort. The study’s sample followed 12 women: 6 British, 2 Dutch, 1 French, 1 Canadian, 1 Austrian, and 1 undetermined. Based on these women’s social media conversations, the study concluded that women migrate for various reasons. The four most common motives, however, were

²⁹⁵ Holly Yan, “Why Is ISIS so Successful at Luring Westerners?,” *CNN*, n.d., <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/07/world/isis-western-draw/>.

²⁹⁶ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 33.

²⁹⁷ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 25.

to protect Islam, to build the Caliphate, to assert female identity, and to fulfill individual duty.²⁹⁸

In addition to these four motives, Western female migrants repeatedly post comments online about Islamic sisterhoods and violence against the West. Finally, they routinely comfort each other by talking about the loss of family in the West and of husbands on the battlefield. These six reoccurring topics—to protect Islam and build a Caliphate, assert female identity, fulfill individual duty, gain sisterhood, justify violence, and recover from loss—are tenets of ISIL’s propaganda and are reiterated via social media. As such, ISIL’s narratives are consistently reinforced and are successfully recruiting others to the Caliphate.

1. Protecting Islam and Building the Caliphate

Western female migrants express a deep concern for the future of Islam and appear convinced that non-Muslims are at war with Muslims. The authors of “Becoming Mulan” explain, “The women within our sample express their deep grievances at the treatment of Muslims across the world, and deplore the West’s foreign policy.”²⁹⁹ Within their sample, one woman wrote, “This is a war against Islam, so you are either with us or against us.”³⁰⁰ Another noted, “Their [kuffar] agenda is to destroy and prevent the awakening of Muslim Ummah [community].”³⁰¹ Finally, one exclaimed, “How can you live amongst people who desire to get rid of Islam. . . Wallahi [I swear to God] these Kuffar and Munafiqeen [hypocrites] will do anything to cause the Muslimeen [Muslims] harm.”³⁰²

To protect the faith, many Muslim women embrace the vision of the Caliphate. This holy state is perceived as a “safe-haven for those who wish to follow Islam in its

²⁹⁸ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 8–11.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 12.

entirety.”³⁰³ One migrant noted, “We don’t resort to violence because of the wrong America has done. We are trying to build an Islamic state that lives and abides by the law of Allah.”³⁰⁴ Many women hope to contribute to this ideologically pure state; thus, they openly celebrate ISIL’s territorial gains and hope to fulfill their duties in this new society.³⁰⁵

2. Fulfilling Individual Duty

Female migrants are radicalized to believe that it is their religious duty to pledge allegiance to the Caliphate.³⁰⁶ One woman declared, “Hijrah [migration] is FARD [a duty]!”³⁰⁷ This duty secures the heavenly rewards of the afterlife;³⁰⁸ thus, another woman explained that she had “no desire to live in this world as [her] aspirations are in the hereafter. . . we love death as you love life.”³⁰⁹

Many women recruit by emphasizing individual duty and instilling feelings of guilt and shame in Muslim women who have not migrated to support jihad. For example, the Halane sisters use disgrace and embarrassment to successfully recruit other British women to ISIL territory.³¹⁰ Zahra Halane praises jihad and shames Western Muslims who do not support it. She wrote, “No difference between one who abandons jihad without excuse when it is fard’ayn, and one who eats without excuse during the day in Ramadan,” and “Do you not find it disgusting how brothers back at home proper slander the mujahideens...thinking they’re the righteous ones.”³¹¹ ISIL relies on women to recruit other women, and their messages of guilt and shame are extremely powerful with

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 27.

³¹¹ Ibid., 22.

young females who yearn to belong—not to be ostracized or embarrassed by their peers. They strive for inclusion and desire to be a part of something special.

3. Sisterhood

Many women seek camaraderie, friendship, and belonging; thus, one of the strongest motivations for migration is the promise of Muslim sisterhood. Female bonds seem strong in ISIL territory; thus, ISIL women attract others by highlighting the importance of their friendships and sisterhoods.³¹² One migrant wrote, “MashaAllah [Bless the Lord] the sisterhood in Dawla is amazing, the bonding immediate and no fake relationship, based on love fillah only.”³¹³ Migrant women write little about the Syrian and Iraqi women in the region, which suggests that most of their time is spent with other muhajirat (migrants).³¹⁴ When speaking of the native women, however, Western women’s comments are generally positive, suggesting the women are welcoming and hospitable.³¹⁵ Supported by sisters, many women also believe the Caliphate is a place to express their femininity.

4. Asserting Female Identity

Many women believe that Islamic extremism is a way to assert their identity. Deviating from Western notions of female empowerment, women assert their identity in the Caliphate by serving male warriors via domestic roles, marriage, and motherhood. In ISIL territory, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of women’s domestic roles.³¹⁶ Many women migrate for marriage, an important transition from childhood to adulthood.³¹⁷ They are naively drawn to the romantic images of the lion and lioness, symbolizing the woman finding a brave and noble husband.³¹⁸ Numerous tweets talk

³¹² Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 23.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

about being a righteous wife and raising righteous children in the faith. Women should be good mothers and obedient wives.³¹⁹ One woman declared, “You may gain more ajr [reward] by spending years of sleepless nights by being a mother and raising your children with the right intentions and for the sake of Allah than by doing a martyrdom operation.”³²⁰

These women understand and accept the risks their husbands assume as mujahideen. A woman’s social status, however, is elevated with the martyrdom of her husband.³²¹ It is a privilege and honor for a man to sacrifice his life for the Caliphate; thus, husbands’ deaths are publicly glorified.³²² Following the death of her husband, Zahra Halane wrote, “He was a blessing from Allah . . . may Allah accept my husband who got his shahadah [martyrdom] in Iraq.”³²³ Women are praised for being widows and perceived as strong and noble.

5. Violence Against Apostates

Another way for women to assert their female identity is to support and inspire violence against apostates. The 12 women studied in “Becoming Mulan” unequivocally praised violence, celebrated beheadings, and encouraged infinite brutality against apostates.³²⁴ To them, Sharia law was justice; many approve of and appear desensitized to horrific violence. One woman stated, “Beheading is halal [permissible under Islamic law]. Go kill yourself if you say it’s haram,” and another noted, “Uff! Some Muslims are condemning [sic] the slaughtering of a dirty U.S. kaafir. . . Pathetic! What pathetic Muslims.”³²⁵ After the beheadings of the American reporter Peter Kassig and Syrian hostages, one woman proclaimed, “So many beheadings at the same time, Allahu Akbar

³¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Saltman and Smith, “Til Martyrdom,” 24.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Bradford, Frenett, and Hoyle, “Becoming Mulan,” 28.

³²⁵ Ibid., 29.

[God is greatest], this video is beautiful #DawlaMediaTeamDoingItRight.”³²⁶ There was even a request for “more beheadings please!”³²⁷

While women consistently express their deep antipathy for the West, their violence is not limited to this region.³²⁸ Many women also express disdain toward the Bashar al-Assad regime, Israel, and Shia Muslims. Messages declared, “Shias are not in the folds of Islam so the term ‘shia muslim’ makes no sense,” and “how filthy Jews slaughter [sic] day by day muslims in Gaza and Palestine just makes me so angry. InsAllah [God willing] soon the destruction will come.”³²⁹ The glorification of violence on social media strengthens ISIL’s propaganda and recruitment campaign; furthermore, it has the potential to inspire more violence around the world.³³⁰

6. Coping With Loss of Family in the West

Many Western Muslim families are appalled by ISIL’s violent ideology and construct practical obstacles, such as confiscating passports, and emotional barriers to deter their daughters’ migrations.³³¹ To comfort and encourage other women that it is okay to abandon family in the West, many ISIL supporters reassure followers that the pain of leaving family is normal. They share mechanisms to cope with the pain and discuss the hardships associated with moving to a foreign land.³³² They also advertise the rewards of a new family and an Islamic sisterhood. One woman wrote, “The family you get in exchange for leaving the ones behind are like the pearl in comparison to the Shell you threw away into the foam of the sea which is the Ummah [Muslim community]. The reason for this is because your love for one another is purely for the sake of Allah.”³³³

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid., 30.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³³¹ Ibid., 16–17.

³³² Ibid., 15.

³³³ Ibid., 24.

C. CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this chapter, analyses of women's background information and social media communication did not pinpoint a decisive answer to the research question; however, social media did provide insight into women's values, beliefs, and perhaps their motives for migration. Moreover, it played a crucial role in radicalization, making it a vital element of ISIL's recruitment success. In conclusion, it is important to note that the themes frequently discussed online—ideology, grievance toward the West, sisterhoods, and identity assertion—are all key tenets of ISIL's overarching propaganda campaign. Thus, migrants not only fulfil domestic roles within the Caliphate, they also sustain the organization's propaganda machine.

V. CONCLUSION

This thesis examined why Western European Muslim women—specifically French and British women—migrate to the Middle East to support ISIL. It outlined ISIL’s mission and women’s roles within the organization. Within that context, it studied five potential motives: grievances toward Western society, ideology, relationships/belonging, identity assertion, and targeted recruitment. The research illustrated that all five were rational explanations based on the women’s personal circumstances and needs. Now, this chapter closes with a brief review of the research findings, additional thoughts on the power of propaganda, and recommendations for future consideration.

A. REVIEW

No single factor presented itself as a definitive answer to the research question. Instead, analysis of women’s stories and social media interactions unveiled evidence to support all five motives. Ultimately, ISIL means something different to every woman. The authors of “Western Foreign Fighters” suggest that ideology and grievances toward the West’s discrimination of Muslims are key factors in radicalization.³³⁴ In contrast, Max Abrahms, an assistant professor of Political Science at Northeastern University, suggests that people seek camaraderie. He asserts that “people become terrorists not to achieve their organization’s declared political agenda, but to develop strong affective ties with other terrorist members. . . people participate in terrorist organizations for the social solidarity, not for their political return.”³³⁵ Thus, many recruits join extremist organizations for a sense of purpose, friendship, and adventure—not the political agendas.³³⁶ Finally, Scott Atran, a French and American anthropologist, explains, “What inspires the most lethal terrorists in the world today is not so much the Quran or religious teachings as a thrilling cause and call to action that promises glory and esteem in the eyes

³³⁴ Obe and Silverman, “Western Fighters,” 23.

³³⁵ Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 94.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

of friends, and through friends, eternal respect and remembrance in the wider world.”³³⁷ In summary, women and their motives are complex; thus, no single factor defines the problem.

B. REALITY OF ISIL

Of the five motives proposed, however, one deserves further attention. It is worth emphasizing the significance of ISIL’s targeted recruitment campaign in the West. In the case studies examined, the Internet and social media were the only fixed variables, and they played noteworthy roles in the women’s lives by recruiting and radicalizing them.

ISIL’s propaganda is extremely powerful—so powerful that it masks and justifies the organization’s horrific reality. According to Mona Mahmood in the *Guardian*, life in ISIL territory is repressive and harsh for Sunni Muslim women; it is an inconceivable hell for those deemed “apostates.” Upon arrival, European women are forced to discard their jeans, heels, and t-shirts. Women in ISIL territory must be covered from head to toe and are only allowed to wear veiled, black abayas (long dresses) with gloves.³³⁸ The dress code is non-negotiable. Even female doctors and nurses must remain veiled while performing medical care—an uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situation. Most women are banished from schools, expelled from work, and told to remain “hidden.”³³⁹ They are only allowed to leave home under exceptional circumstances, and when they go out, they must always be accompanied by a male guardian.³⁴⁰ ISIL’s cities are patrolled by the Hisbah, religious “accountability” police, who ensure citizens are acting according to Islamic law.³⁴¹ Violators and their family members are subject to beatings, public humiliation, or fines.³⁴²

³³⁷ Obe and Silverman, “Western Fighters,” 31.

³³⁸ Mona Mahmood, “Double-Layered Veils and Despair...Women Describe Life Under ISIS,” *Guardian*, February 17, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/isis-orders-women-iraq-syria-veils-gloves>.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

All women are restricted in the Caliphate; however, the most brutal, unimaginable treatment is reserved for apostates. On December 9, 2014, Sarah Margon, the Director for Human Rights Watch in Washington, DC, testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria. In her testimony, Margon explains that ISIL uses cruelty “to sow fear and subdue populations under its control.”³⁴³ Minority groups are thereby thrust into “cramped detention, abuse, forced conversion, forced marriage, and sexual slavery” in the Caliphate.³⁴⁴ Female apostates, some as young as twelve years old, are systematically sold into slavery, routinely beaten, and repeatedly raped by ISIL fighters who are encouraged in their actions.³⁴⁵ ISIL leaders have used the Quran and other religious rulings to rationalize violence and “celebrate each sexual assault as spiritually beneficial, even virtuous.”³⁴⁶ Likewise, Amnesty International reports that women are victims of “unlawful execution-style killings” for criticizing or disobeying ISIL’s orders.³⁴⁷

The reality of life in ISIL territory is not a secret. It is illustrated in the news and addressed in government meetings. Yet, despite the organization’s blatant intolerance, violent practices, and gross violations of civil liberties, it still attracts Western females—a testament to its marketing scheme. The psychological and emotional effects of ISIL’s ideological narrative, online propaganda, and targeted recruitment cannot be overstated. As Internet and social media access continues to grow, there is a greater need to study online radicalization and develop effective counter-narratives.

³⁴³ Sarah Margon, *ISIL’s Reign of Terror: Confronting the Growing Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq and Syria, Testimony of Sarah Margon* (Washington, DC, 2014), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/09/isils-reign-terror-confronting-growing-humanitarian-crisis-iraq-and-syria-testimony>.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html?_r=0.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Report 2014/15: Republic of Iraq” (Amnesty International), accessed August 30, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/report-iraq/>.

C. RECOMMENDATION: EFFECTIVE COUNTERMEASURES

As discussed in Chapter II, the West has been slow to challenge ISIL's propaganda. Most efforts have lacked the necessary resources or expertise—resulting in an “investment without a return.”³⁴⁸ To counter ISIL's powerful narratives, the West must understand them. According to Monitor 360, a narrative analytics and strategy company, ISIL's narratives contain several ideological tenets from Al Qaeda in Iraq; however, the organization has also developed new grievances to attract a younger Sunni audience. These narratives continue to entice local and foreign populations, particularly young people who have never experienced legitimate state services.³⁴⁹ For example, an 18 year old Iraqi male has known war for two thirds of his life. It is unlikely he remembers an effective government or functional state services, such as police or military. Consequently, ISIL's promises of law, order, and justice are celebrated changes to the younger generation.³⁵⁰

ISIL's *takfiri* ideology, expressed in its narratives, resonates with Muslims seeking a strong, Islamic state. ISIL believes in fighting at home—whereas Al Qaeda attacked on Western soil. It encourages its members to target and kill apostates—including other Muslims. It identifies the West as a “villain”—the enemy that constantly persecutes Muslims worldwide.³⁵¹ It glorifies the Caliphate and the Caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. According to Monitor 360, “This narrative leverages feelings of economic disenfranchisement and social exclusion of Muslim communities in the West to promote the Caliphate as a place where they have a purpose and are part of a broader transnational movement.”³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Clint Watts, “Countering ISIL's Ideology: Keep It Limited, Focused, and in Tune with Lessons Learned,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Washington, DC, February 2, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/WattsStatement20150202.pdf>.

³⁴⁹ Peter Lavoy, Alexa Monti, and Elizabeth Wentz, “Why Is ISIL Winning the Narrative War?,” August 30, 2015, <http://monitor-360.com/ideas/isil-narratives>.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*

Counter-narratives are crucial in the war against Islamic extremism. Monitor 360 declares, “The success of the U.S. strategy to reverse ISIL’s territorial gains and popular appeal in the Middle East will depend in large part on the development of an effective counter-narrative strategy to combat the wider ISIL threat.”³⁵³ As previously mentioned, Western counter-narratives should disprove or undermine ISIL’s propaganda. According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, successful counter-messages target an online audience, deny ISIL’s victory on the battlefield, highlight the infighting between Sunni jihadi groups, and showcase the organization’s abuse of and criminal behavior toward innocent populations.³⁵⁴

This thesis recommends an additional approach. The West’s counter-narrative should consist of three elements. First, it needs to highlight the inherent risks of social media, with an emphasis on the dangers of anonymity. Too often, young men and women share personal information online with acquaintances— frequently people they have never met before. Moreover, they seek these people’s advice and approval. Unfortunately, many times, they do not really know who is on the other end of the account. As demonstrated earlier, ISIL thrives on fear and oppression; thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the female migrants who promote ISIL on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr are forced to do so—or are not even women at all. The integrity of social media communication is certainly an area for future study.

Next, counter-narratives must directly target women online. Just as ISIL’s Internet propaganda attracts Western Muslims via graphic videos and images, the West needs to show Western females what ISIL’s fighters are doing to innocent women and girls. Evidently, violence is an effective recruitment strategy. As such, crimes against women -- rape, slavery, and physical abuse—must be shown, not censored. Moreover, the counter-narrative needs to emphasize that such behavior is not appropriate or legal—politically or religiously. Finally, counter-narratives should focus on the positive, what the West is for—such as freedom of religion and speech—not what it is against.³⁵⁵ Muslim women

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Watts, “Countering ISIL’s Ideology.”

³⁵⁵ Obe and Silverman, “Western Fighters,” 27.

need to believe they can have successful and faithful lives in the West. They must see images and stories of Western Muslim men and women raising strong families in the West—side by side with Christians and Jews. They need to hear Muslim women’s positive stories of religious, social, and economic success. Ideally, these three elements would deter women from Islamic extremism and guide them toward a more peaceful and loving existence, making the world a better place.

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