

A New Sisterhood

The Allure of ISIS in Syria For Young Muslim Women in the UK

by

Elizabeth Pooley

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Mary Jane Parmentier, Chair
Rebecca Robinson
Denise Byrd

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines why young Western Muslim women from the UK are drawn to join and support ISIS in its established territories in Syria and Iraq and identifies their role within these territories. The critical role of technology, specifically social media, in facilitating the recruitment, radicalization, and mobilization of young Muslim women online to join ISIS is also explored. Females emigrating from the UK appear equally drawn to ISIS's ideology and state-building mission as Muslim men. Claims from the media suggest women serve as 'fighters,' however this research finds that women are not permitted by ISIS to participate in fighting. Using Britain as a case study, this study analyzes the social media content of eight young British Muslim women, known as female migrants, for themes motivating them to mobilize. Themes, culled from the literature, include Muslim attitudes and perceptions in the UK regarding Islamophobia or religious discrimination, the erosion of multiculturalism, identity and belonging, and finding purpose in the ummah, and measures whether these variables influence women to mobilize. Excerpts from blog posts and original tweets from their Tumblr, Twitter, and ask.fm accounts provide the actual voices of British female migrants choosing to live within ISIS territory and offers insight on their role as female migrants. Research suggests that, for British Muslim women in the UK, Muslim identity and belonging, both individually and within the ummah, along with attitudes and perceptions of religious discrimination (Islamophobia) and the failing of multiculturalism are influencing them to join ISIS. Additional motives for migration found within the study are based on the following beliefs: that the ummah is under attack, a strong desire to help build a new society, their religious duty as a Muslim, and the opportunity to belong and find purpose

in the new "caliphate sisterhood." The role of female migrants residing in ISIS territory is domestic in nature, where they primarily function as wives and mothers of jihadists, as well as serve in online roles as propagandists, proselytizers, and recruiters for ISIS. The strong online presence of women demands an effective counter narrative to deter prospective female migrants from emigrating.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since early 2011, the civil war in Syria has generated much international attention and concern regarding ongoing humanitarian atrocities, fundamental political disputes, and heightened sectarian tensions against Bashar Assad's regime. More recently, focus has centered on the flow of foreign fighters - both male and female, rebel and extremist - into Syria and Iraq. Although the majority of foreign fighters are male, an increasing number of foreign Western women are also traveling to Syria to join an extremist group, known as ISIS or ISIL, in ISIS territories. Many are young and naive, and traveling with spouses, friends, or even alone with the prospect of marrying a *jihadist* and living in the self-proclaimed "caliphate." Through sophisticated multimedia campaigns and social media platforms, females appear to be just as equally drawn to ISIS's ideology as their male counterparts (Hoyle et al., 2015). But why are young, Western Muslim women, particularly from the UK, suddenly being drawn to the Syrian conflict to pursue radical extremism with ISIS, and how is technology mobilizing them as they seek out this new "sisterhood?"

According to Richard Barrett of The Soufan Group (TSG), "of the estimated 3,000 Westerners 'migrating' to the Syrian conflict, 550 are women...that makes about 18 percent or one-fifth" (2014, p. 16). Despite the fact that little is known concerning the women venturing to Syria to participate in the conflict, their numbers are rising, especially among women from Europe. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) placed them between 10 and 15 percent. ICSR believes that already between 50-60 females from the United Kingdom (UK) have

traveled to Syria with the intent of joining “*jihadist*” efforts (Brown, 2014). This phenomenon is slowly gaining media attention, and will continue to, as more females in ISIS territory influence and motivate other Muslim women to become ‘mobilized’ online.

Thus, this study focuses on the emerging trend of young, British Muslim women, being drawn to ISIS’s “call to global *jihad*” in Syria or Iraq. More specifically, this study focuses on what is enticing young Muslim women in the UK to leave established lives, homes, and families to travel to Syria and Iraq and join extremist groups such as ISIS, and what their role is in ISIS’s state-building efforts. Additionally, it centers on the crucial role technology is playing in their mobilization, as social media platforms are utilized to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers via the internet.

The purpose of this research is to understand and examine why young British Muslim women are being drawn to join and support ISIS in controlled territories in Syria and Iraq, as well as to identify what their role is in such territories, and how social media is mobilizing them. This study analyzes the social media accounts of young British Muslim women for possible themes related to factors that influence them to embark on this journey. These themes, culled from the literature review, include British Muslim attitudes and perceptions regarding *Islamophobia* or religious discrimination, the erosion of multiculturalism, Muslim identity and belonging, and finding purpose in the *ummah*. The use of technology, specifically social media, is also explored as it provides platforms for female ISIS supporters to facilitate the recruitment, radicalization, and mobilization of Muslim female audiences to ISIS’s territories. Primary material is collected from the social media accounts of British females reportedly living in ISIS-controlled territories. Information about these women is found through secondary data sources including think

tank reports and investigative articles/news accounts from online British media forums, in order to specifically identify young British Muslim women who have allegedly joined ISIS in Syria or Iraq since its declaration of the establishment of a “caliphate” in June 2014.

Research Questions:

1. Why are Western women, in particular young Muslim women from the UK, being drawn to the Syrian conflict and what is their role in ISIS-controlled areas of Syria or Iraq?

2. Is this phenomenon related to young British Muslim women encountering *Islamophobia* or religious discrimination and/or the erosion of multiculturalism? Does it stem from the need to establish an identity and/or feel a sense of belonging? Or are they attempting to find purpose in the *ummah*? Do these experiences lead them to seek identity or belonging in ISIS-controlled territories and under the perceived new “caliphate sisterhood?”

3. How is the use of technology, specifically social media, facilitating recruitment, radicalization, and mobilization of young Muslim females from the UK to travel to Syria or Iraq to participate in ISIS’s *jihadist* ideology in their “established” territories?

The Problem:

While the majority of the 3,000 Western foreign fighters that have joined extremist groups, such as ISIS, have been male, gender is no exception (Barrett, 2014). ISCR (2014) has reported a small but notable number of Western women (200 European females in 2013) being ‘lured’ to ISIS’s *jihadist* ideology and venturing to Syria or Iraq. Those already in ISIS territory act as ‘cheerleaders,’ using social media sites such as

Tumblr, ask.fm, and Twitter, to encourage and instruct female followers. Most Western Muslim females answering the “call to emigrate” travel to Syria with a naive, romanticized perception of state-building, anticipate marriage to a *jihadist*, and have strong hopes of raising future generations of *jihadists* within ISIS’s territories (Saltman & Winter, 2014).

More specifically, growing numbers of young Muslim females from the UK have reportedly been identified, through media and reports, as traveling to Syria or Iraq, either with husbands, friends, or alone (Khaleeli, 2014a). Some express a desire to become the wife of a *jihadist* and start a family in ISIS-controlled territories in Syria and Iraq (Khaleeli, 2014a). In an interview with Abigail Esman of *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, Edwin Bakker, a fellow at the International Center for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) the Hague, stated, “women come to Syria as part of a dream to live in a truly ‘Islamic State’ under Sharia law and raise their children in a future heaven on earth” (Esman, 2014, para. 15). Some are in their late teens, early twenties (Saltman & Winter, 2014), and ultimately leave behind family, friends, established homes, and educational pursuits for a new life with ISIS.

Essentially, these British Muslim females begin their journey online, becoming “radicalized then mobilized” through ISIS-marketed propaganda and social media platforms, which are patrolled by disseminators. This is very similar to how the male foreign fighters are being recruited (Saltman & Winter, 2014). However, according to the Quilliam Foundation, their role (female) versus the male foreign fighter role is believed to be quite different, suggesting women serve a domestic, more supportive role in ISIS-controlled territories (Winter, 2015). This statement refutes the claims of some media

reports that women have been allowed to serve in military roles (Hoyle et al., 2015). It is important to mention this because, despite allegations that they are fighting on the front lines alongside men in ‘all-female brigades,’ ISIS has banned females from physically fighting (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 32; Saltman & Winter, 2014, p. 47). Instead, they are asked to strengthen the *jihadist* narrative through their identified roles as wives and mothers in ISIS’s territories.

This is significant because it demonstrates that in comparison to most *jihadist* groups, ISIS does not enforce gender-biased recruitment - both foreign male *and* female Muslims are encouraged to come and contribute to ISIS’s state-building and each possesses a personal and specific role in this goal. A report by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) found that ISIS’s ideology proclaims that it is the religious duty of *all* Muslim men and women to defend Islam and fight to consolidate a pure “Islamic Caliphate” under Sharia law (Saltman & Winter, 2014).

The looming question, then, is why are young Muslim women from the UK suddenly desiring to go to Syria or Iraq and join extremist groups like ISIS? More so, what are the themes influencing this enticement to leave behind a Western life for a new life with ISIS? And, what is the role of social media in connection to recruiting and mobilizing these young Muslim women to join ISIS? This thesis will explore the allure of state-building for young British Muslim women, and provide an in-depth analysis of what is drawing them to join ISIS, why they are going, and what their role is in ISIS-controlled territories. This thesis hopes to present the voices of female ISIS supporters and how they are utilizing technology, more specifically social media, to inspire, recruit, and mobilize more young Muslim females to join ISIS in their territories.

Background of the Problem

Extremist Groups in the Syrian Conflict:

Before one can approach these research questions, it is important to gain a better understanding of *who* is involved in the Syrian conflict and what their objective is. This is imperative, since the civil war in Syria has generated unprecedented levels of mobilization, so much so that it has exceeded previous numbers of foreigners involved in past conflicts, such as those in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Barrett, 2014). In an online article entitled '*The Sunni-Shia Divide*,' the Council of Foreign Relations (2014) states, "Syria's civil war has attracted *more* militants from *more* countries than were involved in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia combined" (para. 29). As such, this conflict has attracted not only foreigners - legitimately interested in joining rebel forces fighting against Assad's regime – but extremists as well. At times, it is difficult to discern rebel opposition groups from radical, *jihadist* groups, especially because infighting among these factions continues to blur once identifiable lines.

In a meeting on November 4, 2014 at the ICCT-The Hague, it was reported that, while feeding on Syria's disillusionment, militant groups, such as ISIS, subsequently occupied Syria's political vacuum by providing a violent alternative to secular opposition ('Meeting Report - Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,' para. 2), alienating themselves from rebel Syrian forces and, at times, preying on those coming to Syria with humanitarian intentions. While most may be found fighting with rebel groups against Assad's government, the majority has joined extremist groups (Barrett, 2014b). This trend has been made possible due to the 'technological element' of the Syrian war, as an increase in fighters 'socially sharing and documenting' their exploits flood social media networks.

Social media, in conjunction with propaganda campaigns through multimedia platforms, reinforce sympathizers and disseminators to ‘call on’ and reach out to their brothers and sisters through Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to join the ‘holy war.’ And many men and women have.

While estimates vary, as of May 2014, over 12,000 fighters from almost 81 countries have joined the civil war in Syria (Barrett, 2014b). In a recent Insight report by ISCR (2015), Director Peter Neumann revealed the latest estimate of total foreign fighters now exceeds 20,000. The majority of rebel fighters is non-Syrian males, from the Middle East and North Africa region and almost 3,000 from Western countries in Europe, North America, and Australasia (Barrett, 2014b). Those arriving from Europe, and from Muslim-minority countries, appear to be joining extremist groups at an alarming rate. They are young, between 16-24 years of age, well educated, and religiously practicing Muslims. The majority of Western foreigners are converts, with no prior connections to Syria (Barrett, 2014b). Many are established EU citizens in their home countries, either second or third generation children of refugees.

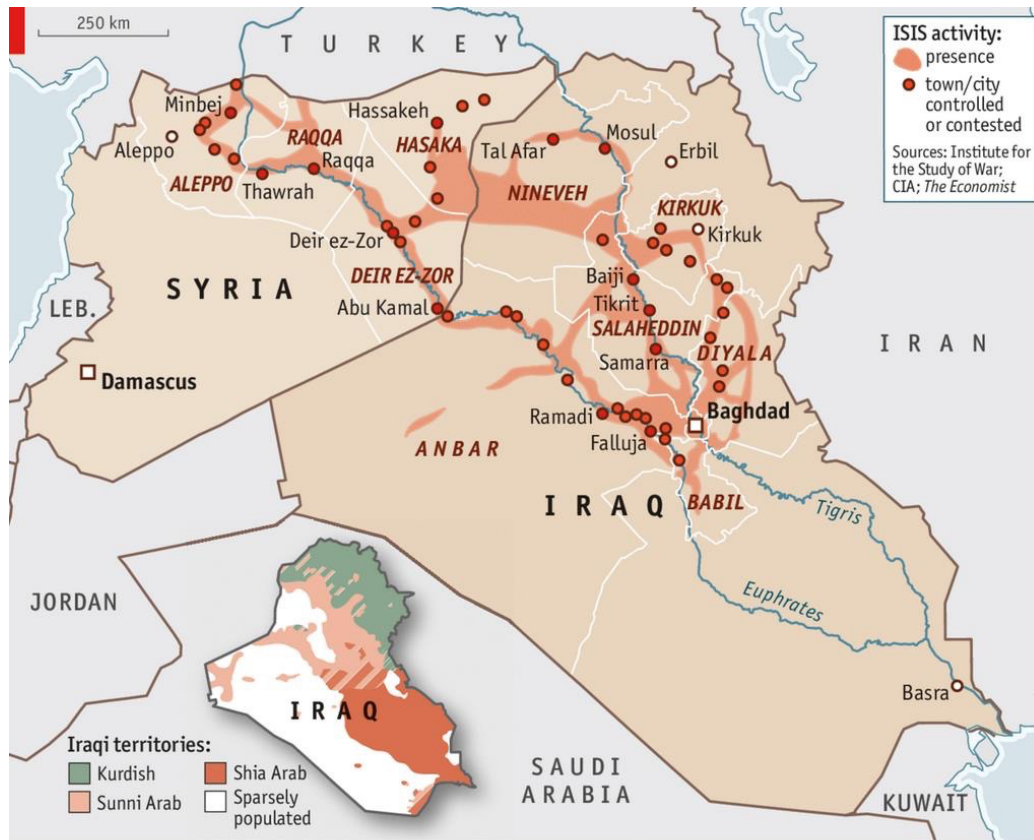
Today, Syria’s two main extremist groups, led by Sunni militants, *Jabhat al-Nusra*, an al-Qaeda affiliated group, and the *Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria* (ISIS or ISIL), continue to attract global support from foreign fighters. Studies have shown that ISIS’s ideology, in comparison to al-Qaeda affiliated groups, tends to draw the majority of recruits, about 85 percent according to The Atlantic Treaty Association (‘The Syrian Foreign Fighter Nexus,’ 2014, para 12). ISIS’s ideology cleverly utilizes the narrative of Islam to appeal to both male and female foreigners outside of Syria, while installing a heavy sectarian rhetoric, Sunni vs. Shia, to intensify growing tensions in the region, and

ultimately reinforcing support for state-building. In *The Atlantic*, Graeme Wood (2015) notes that ISIS's commitment is "to return civilization to a seventh-century legal environment and ultimately bring about the apocalypse" (para. 8). According to Wood (2015), this "path to the Day of Judgment" matters very much to ISIS's strategy (para. 4).

Richard Barrett of TSG states, "indeed the Islamist narrative of Syria as the land of '*jihad*' features prominently in the propaganda of extremist groups...the opportunity and desire to witness and take part in a battle prophesied 1,400 years earlier is certainly a strong motivator" (2014b, p.18). Barrett adds that the *jihadist* narrative places personal duty and individual obligation on Muslims to assist the global Muslim community (known as the *ummah*) that is presumed 'under attack' (2014b, p. 18). In another article entitled *The Islamic State*, Barrett (2014a) further explains "the exploitation of religion both as a tool for indoctrination and motivation, and as a means of control, is an essential part of the administrative model of The Islamic State" (p. 43).

In addition to its ideology, ISIS has drawn in foreign supporters by proving itself capable of governing territories that reach across eastern Syria and much of northwestern and western Iraq (see Figure 1). According to the ICCT, it has also shown effectiveness in presiding over its inhabitants, "by providing 'governmental' services, and imposing law and order in its self-declared Islamic State" ('Meeting Report - Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,' 2014, para. 2). Barrett (2014a) describes how ISIS is able to accomplish this, stating, "one of its [ISIS] first objectives in capturing new territories is to establish centers from which it can spread its particular creed (*dawah*)"(p. 43, 44). According to the London think tank, ISD, overall, ISIS is better resourced, better organized, and more prepared to accommodate Western foreigners, especially those unable to speak Arabic

(Briggs & Silverman, 2014). As ISIS continues to expand its control and power, it seems many more male and female Muslim nationals will venture to Syria and Iraq - willing to live, fight, and ultimately die for such a cause.



Economist.com/graphicdetail

Figure 1. Source: Lynch (2015) - *Sources of Terrorism and Rational Counterparts*. TRENDS Research and Analyses CVE paper (December 17, 2014).

The Rise of ISIS in Syria:

Equally important is the understanding of *how* a group such as ISIS gained its rise to power, thus, a brief, historical account must be given. This is especially critical in order to better understand the interest it has generated from both male and female supporters in the Arab world and the West. In 2011, ISIS, then known as ISI, was operating under the organization of Jabhat al-Nusra, in its fight against Bashar Assad's

regime in Syria. In April of 2013, the past and current leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, made a startling announcement - that ISI would break away from al-Nusra, expand into Syria, and would be known as ISIS, *Islamic State and al-Sham*.

This announcement sparked immediate infighting between the two groups. Then, ISIS took extremism one step further by beginning the practice of executing other *jihadists*, most notably the al-Nusra leader Ahrar al-Sham, in November 2013, and Abu Khalid al-Suri, an al-Qaeda “mediator,” who was sent to subdue disputes between ISIS and al-Nusra, in January 2014 (Saltman & Winter, 2014). These acts alone gave al-Qaeda reason to ‘officially excommunicate’ al-Baghdadi and ISIS from its organization. In retaliation, ISIS began to ‘publicize’ demonstrations of brutal violence, beheadings, and torture that would ultimately give the newly proclaimed “*Islamic State*” its ‘barbaric’ reputation in the media in the summer of 2014.

In an interview with the Quilliam Foundation, research fellow Aaron Zelin with ICSR highlighted one striking distinction between ISIS and other extremist groups. He states, “not only does it [ISIS] lay claim to a contiguous territory that stretches over a thousand miles across Syria and Iraq, but [ISIS] has established within this terrain a ‘caliphate,’ the first real *Jihadist* state” (Saltman & Winter, 2014, p. 31) - which was proudly announced on June 29, 2014. Barrett (2014a) adds, “the salafist/takfiri interpretation of Islam proselytized by ‘The Islamic State’ underpins its authority as a ‘state’ and the authority of its courts to enforce its sharia rules, aided by the religious police (*al hisbah* for men and *al khanssaa* for women)” (p. 44).

With an unstable political climate raging in Syria and Iraq, ISIS was then able to carefully and quickly seize advantage of the conflict by expanding its range of influence

and network of sympathizers in Iraq through propaganda, popularity, influence, funding, and the training of supportive fighters. According to Saltman & Winter (2014), “it [went] from being a terrorist group to a terrorist state...purporting a pristine Islamic utopia” (p. 32), which realistically has been quite appealing to men and women outside Syria silently watching on. Thus, through the establishment of the “Islamic State,” this reportedly gave ISIS its legitimacy, setting it apart from other extremist groups in the area, and ultimately driving recruitment for its voracious global *jihad*.

Significance of the Problem:

A study examining the flow of female ISIS supporters, in particular young Muslim females from Britain, joining ISIS in Syria or Iraq is important to pursue for several reasons. First, it will present an in-depth analysis of the current allure ISIS has for young British Muslim women, namely why it is attracting them to Syria or Iraq and the role they will play once there. To date, the phenomenon of Western Muslim females joining ISIS is still highly under-researched and understudied. It will also demonstrate the crucial role technology is playing, in particular social media sites, such as Tumblr and Twitter, in facilitating the radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization of young Muslim women via propaganda campaigns and online social networks. Second, because ISIS has such a strong online presence, it will reveal the ease of accessibility for young, Muslim women in British communities to access ISIS-supporting rhetoric through social media.

It will also provide an examination of *why* these females are seeking to join ISIS’s “caliphate sisterhood” - is life in ISIS-controlled territories more fulfilling than life in Britain? Third, it offers further understanding of female British Muslim experiences as first, second, or third generation immigrants and whether they experience feelings of

alienation and exclusion growing up in Muslim minority Western countries such as the UK. Fourth, such an analysis, especially in light of ISIS's rising appeal among young Muslim women, provides policymakers, government agencies, and institutions with information to help formulate a counter-narrative to *jihadism* to deter young women from joining ISIS. Providing a realistic portrait of life in ISIS-controlled territories may sway other Muslim females from going to Syria. Fifth, counter-terrorist measures and policies that result from awareness of this issue could serve to educate communities and parents of Muslim youth in how to look for 'signs' of interest in extremist groups among their children or a desire to travel to Syria or Iraq.

Overall, governments and communities could benefit from prevention of future generations being enticed by extremist and radical solutions and carrying out 'lone-wolf' attacks. So far, we have seen attacks, such as the brutal murder of Lee Rigby at Woolwich military base, the shooting at a Jewish museum in Brussels in 2014 by Mehdi Nemmouche and, more recently, the Paris attack at Charlie Hebdo and the Jewish supermarket. All these events demonstrate the ability for extremists in Western Europe, perhaps frustrated because they are unable to travel to ISIS's territories, to commit terrorist acts in their home country. Recent thwarted terrorist attempts in the UK and Switzerland have raised fears of the potential for more 'lone-wolf' incidents to occur, with possible eminent threats to North America, as seen with the bombing at the Boston Marathon and the attack on the Canadian Parliament.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

BACKGROUND:

MUSLIMS IN THE UK:

For over a century and a half, Muslim immigrants, British-born Muslims, and British converts to Islam have been a flourishing part of British society. Their presence steadily rose throughout the early eighteenth century, until Muslim migration increased more significantly at the end of the Second World War, in an effort to rebuild Britain's economy. In the 1950s, around 20,000 Muslim migrants from rural areas in South Asia came to Britain to work. Two decades later, this population had reached around 250,000-300,000 (Field, 2007). Although the steady flow of migrants ended with the implementation of immigration acts in the 1970s, second and third British-born generations had already begun to emerge and naturally increased the population.

This flow was combined with swells of displaced Africans (mostly Kenyan and Ugandan) and refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Cyprus, Bosnia, and Kosovo, increasing the Muslim population to 1 million by the late 1980s (Field, 2007). By 2001, the census had estimated Britain's total Muslim population at over 1.6 million (PEW) out of a total population of 60 million, with at least 46 percent of Muslims having been born in the UK. Today, the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life estimates this number has increased significantly to about 2.9 million Muslims residing in the United Kingdom (2010).

The 2001 civil census confirmed that the United Kingdom's (UK) Muslim population was 'highly concentrated spatially,' due in large part to the prevalence of British-born Muslim populations forming into ethnic communities, which has since occurred throughout various urban and inner metropolitan areas of Britain, Wales, and Scotland. London holds the largest Muslim population at 38 percent. British Muslims are not a homogenous group. Since Islam is pan-ethnic, many of these Muslim communities remain ethnically diverse, with a majority of its population primarily consisting of descendants of the South Asian countries of Pakistan (42%), Bangladesh (16%), and India (over 8%) (ONS, 2001). The remainder of Muslims in Britain comprises of people of Arab, Albanian, Bosnian, Iranian, Nigerian, Somali, and Turkish descents (Abbas, 2005, p. 25).

An overwhelming majority of British Muslims is Sunni, however, the 2001 census was unable to extract an exact figure regarding the proportions of Shia and Sunni Muslims in Britain. Estimated figures have been formulated through determining the proportion of mosque affiliations available in Britain, with Sunni mosques accounting for 87 percent of the total and Shiite mosques at around 7 percent (Abbas, 2005, p. 28). Britain's Muslims are predominantly young. With over 50 percent of the population under the age of 25, they are mostly identified as second/third generations of immigrants and refugees. The 2001 census confirmed that Muslims had the youngest age profile of all religious groups, with 34 percent under the age of 16 - in comparison to the national average at 20 percent (Field, 2007). To date, they are the fastest growing group in Britain and represent the future of Islam in the UK. According to the Association of Muslim

Schools, approximately three percent of Muslim pupils attend Muslim faith schools (2007).

The experiences of second and third generation British Muslims are unique because they have essentially been raised in a society of Western culture, language, education, etc. However, tension could form when those attempting to integrate *also* seek to preserve their religious values, thus finding themselves in a situation in which they must choose between a Muslim identity and a British identity. For instance, Anwar's (2008) study found that "some Muslim workers had been 'sacked' because they wanted to offer prayers at their workplace and some Muslim women had been refused jobs because of their dress. Young Muslim girls had even been excluded from schools because they had wanted to wear the headscarf" (p. 133).

Navigating such difficulties, especially in one's youth, can be challenging. Throughout Britain's modern history, these difficulties, viewed in the context of critical turning points, served to challenge both Muslim and non-Muslim perceptions of identity and Islam, as well as ultimately affected race relations in Britain. For example, the following domestic and global events relevant to British Muslims include the following: the 1988-1990 Rushdie Affair (which will be explained more later in detail), the Gulf War (1990-1991), the 2001 Bradford protests, the events of September 11, 2001, the Iraq War (2003), and the 7/7 bombings in London.

To begin with, it should be noted that terrorism in the UK is not a new occurrence. Between 1969 and 1998, over 3,500 people in the UK died as a result of violence related to Irish independence movements (Mushtaq, 2013, conclusion, para. 3). However, the new face of Islamic extremist terrorism has been quite a different story and, in the fall of

2001, the issue of British identity versus Muslim identity and public perception of Islam came to a head following the terrorist attacks of September 11. Muslims living in Britain suddenly found themselves being questioned about their loyalty and allegiance to Britain. Muslims, especially British-born Muslims, also began to experience racial tension and heightened religious discrimination, as they rapidly came under close watch and surveillance by the British government and police through the implementation of the Terrorism Act 2000.

This statewide effort of terrorism prevention resulted in increased surveillance and security policies, as well as allowed the enactment of intensified measures in the persecution of radical extremists and perceived “homegrown terrorists.” Fahad Ansari, of the Islamic Human Rights Commission in Britain, stated “daily stop and search of tens of thousands of Muslims and hundreds of arrests of innocent Muslims effectively demonized the Muslim community in Britain as ‘the enemy within’ (2005, p. 9). This distrust of Muslims, Ansari continues, resulted in “irresponsible media coverage, [which] led to increased levels of resentment and intolerance of the community by the wider society...causing a huge upsurge in *Islamophobic* attacks in Britain” (2005, p. 9).

Anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments were once again tested during the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, an event that would threaten to severely impact British perceptions of Islam (Field, 2007). Unfortunately, no one - not even Britons - could have expected what would follow two years later, on July 7, 2005, when the conflict and turmoil in the international arena would be brought home to London in the suicide bombings of London’s transit system by four British Muslim citizens causing the deaths of 52 innocent victims (Field, 2007).

In September, in the wake of the 7/7 bombings, the British government feverishly scrambled to install a new Terrorism Bill in an attempt to ‘clampdown on extremism’ (Ansari, 2005). Members of the Muslim community, including leaders such as Ansari (2005) and Yasmeen (2008), felt such legislation for reasons of national security, would only further target Muslim populations and consequently lead to increased levels of *Islamophobia*. Against this backdrop, there were also “increasing calls for decisive action to be taken by the authorities against imams who openly espoused extremism” (Field, 2007, p. 457).

Overall, Field observed in 2007 “at least one in twenty, disproportionately young Muslims, were so disaffected as to be willing to contemplate complete rejection of mainstream society and the use of violence against it” (p. 469). Further, she stated, “15 percent were partially alienated, to the extent of finding Western values decadent, experiencing no great sense of loyalty to Britain, feeling that Muslims had allowed themselves to become ‘too integrated’ into British culture and sympathized with the motives of those who take up arms for Islam” (2007, p. 469).

Clearly, almost a decade later, the growing political and social distance between Muslims and mainstream British culture can no longer be ignored. Even recent strategic approaches by the British government in 2009 to quell fundamental Islamism, such as the counterterrorist program “CONTEST,” through *pursuit, prevention, protection, and preparation*, received criticism for not addressing the issue of radicalization in the UK (Mushtaq, 2013, conclusion, para. 3). Muhammad Anwar (2008) argues that Western states, especially Britain, still have a long road ahead in terms of appropriate policies that accept Muslims as equal citizens. Attitudes toward the Muslim population remain ill at

ease, as well as negative attitudes of the Muslim population towards Western British culture cannot be denied. The international issues of terrorism and Islamic extremism, as well as the fear of the domestic, 'homegrown attacks,' are still very much a reality in Britain and remain highly debated and pursued in literature.

More recent events mark the evidence of this: for example, the May 2013 brutal murder of Lee Rigby, a British Soldier on Woolwich Base in London by two, British-born Islamic militants. And more recently, in the summer of 2014, the beheading of American journalist James Foley by a hooded ISIS fighter with a British accent in the ongoing Syrian conflict. Thomas Hegghammer (2014) of the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment stated in *The Economist*, "Britain remains in many ways the center of gravity for European *jihadist* networks...and the radical community in Britain is still exporting ideas and methods" (2014, para. 8).

In retrospect, according to Abbas (2005), more recent events such as these have increased anxieties and fears among non-Muslim Britons and threaten to further widen the already large chasm between non-Muslims and Muslims, both spatially and individually. According to Phillips (2006), these fears tend to manifest themselves in the form of tension and distrust between non-Muslims and British Muslim populations. She views the 'spillage over into British spaces' (i.e., politics, media, institutions) as generating, what she believes and is commonly known as, *Islamophobia*. This, along with other sources, will attempt to explain the rising divide between Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of Britain's issues of Islamophobia, failing multiculturalism, Muslim identity, the *ummah*, and the proliferation of online radicalization in relation to these issues.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN BRITAIN:

Controversy, ignited by the 1988 Rushdie Affair and at the beginning of the first Gulf War, ushered in the force of what was to be known in Western societies as *Islamophobia*, or a form of xenophobia directed specifically at Muslims. Defined by The Runnymede Trust (1997), *Islamophobia is the shorthand way of referring to dread and hatred of Islam-and therefore, to fear and dislike of all or most Muslims* (p. 1). Coined in the UK in the 1990s, the term was generally used by the public and media to describe anti-Muslim sentiment, prejudice, and racism towards those practicing the religion of Islam.

Through the perceived numerical strength of Muslims causing concern, The Runnymede Trust (1997) felt it imperative to establish the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia and thus identified seven features of Islamophobia, which included (1) Muslim cultures are seen as monolithic, (2) Islamic cultures are substantially different from other cultures, (3) Islam is perceived as placably threatening, (4) Islam's adherents use their faith to political or military advantage, (5) Muslim criticism of Western cultures and societies is rejected out of hand, (6) The fear of Islam is mixed with racist hostility to immigration, and (7) Islamophobia is assumed to be natural and unproblematic. This characterization of Islamophobia remains relevant today, and the report (1997) concluded that Muslims in Britain faced daily prejudice and religious discrimination that had "contributed significantly to the insecurity complained of by so many."

Research funded by the Home Office confirmed this as well, illustrating that Muslims experienced religious discrimination, as well as racial discrimination (Weller et.

al, 2001). However, later attempts to *understand* Islamophobia were seen as a challenge because it was neither linear nor simple. Jocelyne Cesari (2011) argued that the term was “contested because it often imprecisely applied to very diverse phenomena, ranging from xenophobia to anti-terrorism” (p. 21). Shiffer and Wagner (2011), preferring to describe this phenomenon as “cultural racism,” define Islamophobia as a new form of racism where discrimination targets a religious community (p. 79). Despite varied views, one fact is clear - its presence has become more visible and explicit (Joppke, 2009; Ciftci, 2012). According to Chris Allen, “the spread of Islamophobia, both discursively and conceptually, in the public and political arena, has meant that Islamophobia is now a social reality” (2007, p. 167).

Therefore, for over a decade now, such expressions of Islamophobia in Britain that have occurred have been wide ranging, including various types of stereotyping and discrimination, especially in the display of negative images in the media related to Islam/Muslims. The Runnymede Trust (1997) report also touched on the issue of the stereotypical way in which Muslims were being portrayed in the popular media as either “terrorists” or “fundamentalists” (Anwar, 2008). Poynting and Mason (2007) note a similar rise in expressions of Islamophobia through anti-Muslim racism predating 9/11.

Both Allen and Rigoni emphasize, in their chapters in *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society* (2007), that the role media plays in influencing societal attitudes and perceptions of Muslims and Islam in Britain. According to Allen, “they [Muslims] are without doubt increasingly problematized, framed in discourses of violence, terrorism, and misogyny, amongst others” (2007, p.161). In Allen’s research, he notes two controversial incidents. In 2006, the British paper, *The Daily Star*, decided to

run a spoof issue titled *The Daily Fatwa* with the headline “How your favourite paper would look under Muslim law” (see Socialist Worker, 2006). While the issue was subsequently blocked from publication, a similar article was later published in the British men’s magazine, *Zoo* (2006), instantaneously creating an outcry among various Muslim communities.

The second incident occurred in Denmark over the publication of ‘insulting’ cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands Posten* (see Modood et al., 2006). This controversy created a backlash among Muslim communities throughout Europe, as well as clashes with those defending the paper’s right to freedom of speech. These clashes eventually escalated into widespread, violent protests, not only in Denmark but also worldwide. Both of these examples demonstrate the impact and influence of the media. However, according to Allen, it can be very difficult to prove if such events promote or incite Islamophobia in their audience (2006, p. 163).

Reports of physical and verbal attacks have also been linked to Islamophobia. Unfortunately, Muslim women seem to have received the brunt of such anti-Islamic attacks, more so than Muslim men, a finding reported by The European Research Centre (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010). The report, titled *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Case Study*, found increased unreported and reported attacks occurring against women; victims of anti-Muslim attacks were more often women (p. 12), whereas victims of racist attacks were invariably men.

Following the events of 9/11, British Muslims suffered attacks and reports of harassment, as they bore the brunt of waves of suspicion and hostility, and the

questioning of their loyalty as British citizens. The Gulf War conflated boundaries between “categories of Iraqi/Arab/Muslim/terrorist and resulted in an upsurge of racially based attacks on residents of Middle Eastern appearance or the Islamic faith” (Poynting & Mason, 2007, p. 72). After the atrocities of 7/7, West Yorkshire Police saw an increase in ‘Islamophobic’ incidents, with more than 30 recorded in the two weeks following the 2005 bombing (Sheffield Police Report, 2006). In a study of British youth in Barnet, England (Ryan et al., 2009), a focus group revealed that most of the incidents of verbal abuse or harassment were described primarily by female participants rather than male, due to the nature of the insults being based on their identifiable symbols of religion, i.e., the *hijab*.

Further, this trend, not only seen in Britain but throughout many European countries, seemed to act as a *catalyst* for a rise in retaliatory attacks and responses. For example, after the September 11 attacks, Muslim women in Austria and Ireland became the targets of physical and verbal abuse, while in Denmark a woman was thrown from a moving taxi simply for being a Muslim (Allen, 2007). In Australia, the terms ‘towel-head’ or ‘rag-head’ became popular racist terms for Arabs and Muslims especially aimed at women who wore the *hijab*, as numerous cases of Muslim women being abused and attacked in public spaces surfaced in connection with their use of the *hijab* (Poynting & Mason, 2007, p. 72).

Today’s tightened security and clampdowns on terrorism present an increase of anti-terrorism laws and legislation throughout Britain that have reinforced the popular suspicion of and belief that Muslims are ‘terrorists.’ Following the 9/11 attacks, it was reported that, in comparison with the United States (US), European Union (EU) countries

had arrested 20 times more terrorism suspects (Cesari, 2006). In Britain, the two high profile shootings of Jean Charles de Menezes, a Brazilian national mistaken for a suicide bomber, and Mohammed Abdul Kahar, a British Muslim shot in a security raid, brought into question the debate over police tactics and use of deadly force in suspected 'terror raids.' Nevertheless, Allen (2007) suggests that Britain, 'under increased legislation,' has pushed for intensified surveillance and police activity, the banning of various Muslim and Islamic groups, and a rise in deportation of those suspected of radicalism or extremism, all of which he identifies as consequences of Islamophobia (p. 156).

Another consequence of Islamophobia may be found in the prevalence of political rhetoric related to nationalist and right-wing political discourse. Naturally, issues of immigration, security, and anti-terrorism will surface during political debates, however, a shift towards right-wing rhetoric has begun to emerge more prevalently in Britain's political space. For example, following the 2001 Bradford protests (see Allen, 2003), the British National Party (BNP) issued a variety of 'Islamophobic campaigns,' including such derogatory slogans as "I.S.L.A.M." (Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, and Molestation of Women) and "Islam out of Britain" (Allen, 2007). These examples highlight the dramatic political changes that have occurred in Britain, as well as across Europe, as similar shifts in the political climates of Denmark and Italy toward anti-Islamic statements and anti-immigrant campaigns have become common (Cesari, 2006).

It is imperative to add Muslim standpoints regarding Islamophobia, especially being that it has intensified in the international arena. Events involving Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, such as the Palestine/Israeli or Bosnian conflict, may trigger what Abbas (2005) defines as 'Muslim assertiveness.' When attacks on Muslims occur in

such places, it incites cohesiveness and solidarity among Muslim communities regardless of their geographical location. Abbas further asserts that typically this gathering of support or assertiveness is explained using contemporary Western ideas about equality and multiculturalism, for example Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1993), and not in terms of Islamic beliefs (2005, p. ix). He adds the question of why intellectuals, as well as politicians, continue to explain *Islamophobia* or hostility against Islam in relation to Huntington's theory, and argues that this tendency only serves to reinforce the incongruence of political relationships between Islam and the West. This perceived division between Muslim and non-Muslim communities may be attributed to deep-seeded multicultural divides that have historically persisted, not only in Britain, but also throughout Western Europe. Many have perceived it as multicultural erosion, most notably in Britain.

THE EROSION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN BRITAIN AND WESTERN EUROPE:

Historically, European perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims can be traced to the influx of the large Muslim populations that migrated to Western European countries during the past 50-70 years. Today, Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium hold the greatest percentage of Muslim populations and Pew Research projects that by 2030, through natural increase and immigration, these countries along with other EU states will see a 44 percent total increase in the European Muslim population which will be more than 38 million or approximately 7 percent of the total population (2011).

Despite Europe's lengthy immigrant history, it is clear that Britain, with its growing Muslim population, continues to struggle between with being defined as a 'multiethnic'

or multicultural nation that values cultural diversity through its visibility, particularly due to the incongruities and contradictions that arise over promoting the need for control and refusal of ‘outside aliens.’ Anthony Heath and Neli Demireva (2014) ask the question, “Has Multiculturalism Failed in Britain,” in their analysis of whether ethno-religious groups in Britain do in fact lead “parallel lives” (as cited by Phillips, 2006) and, as a consequence, fail to integrate into the wider society by preferring separate communities (and the mainstream culture’s rejection of them). Phillips (2006) noted such demands on integration, stating “in the past, cultural racism brought demands for ethnic minority assimilation...today these demands are being muted, [giving way instead] to the implicit message of one’s obligations of citizenship and the need for British Muslims to ‘opt-in’ (p. 37).

Today, this self-same visibility of multiculturalism and Islam is apparent in British schools, streets, and public spaces. Multicultural awareness or visibility remains in discussion among public policymakers regarding the nature of ‘integration’ in European societies (Begum, 2008). Visibility also seems to raise levels of anti-Muslim sentiments among non-Muslim British citizens, especially regarding Britons’ feelings towards the *hijab* and violence in Islam.

In an Australian study interviewing non-Muslim men and women about their perceptions of Muslims in Western Australia, they typically found *Muslim women* to be the signifiers of difference and Muslim identity, and referred to the tradition wearing of the *hijab* or *niqab* as a sign of oppression (Yasmeen, 2008, p. 56). Katherine Brown’s research (2006) also noted that women in Islamic dress (for example, the *niqab* or a

headscarf) operated as a signifier of difference and dominated the public discourse on Islam (p. 418).

Anthropologist Gabriele Marranci (2004) hypothesized that the phenomenon of Islamophobia was not ‘an unfounded hostility towards Islam’ but in fact ‘a fear or phobia’ of *multiculturalism* and its consequences (p. 115), which had previously been argued to be a “*transruptive effect* (Hesse, 2000) that Islam has on the West and Europe through transcultural processes.” Marranci further contended that Islamophobia stemmed from a resistance to the effects of real multicultural contacts between Islamic values and European-Western ones (2004, p. 116).

Across Western Europe and Australia, the erosion of multiculturalism is occurring institutionally. Tahir Abbas (2005) defines multiculturalism as “*a policy suitable where groups want to maintain some level of distinction among communities*” (p. 33). He argues that multiculturalism is in retreat and, when European Muslims are asked to ‘integrate,’ this is in fact difficult to accomplish, especially considering that Muslims in Britain are socio-economically marginalized (2005), an effect that can have dangerous outcomes according to Samina Yasmeen (2008) of the Centre for Muslim States and Societies.

In her study, Yasmeen (2008) highlights what is known as the ‘opportunity deficit,’ based on theories about poverty inducing the emergence of ‘homegrown terrorism’ in the context of Muslims’ experiences as citizens in the West (2008, p. 1). As Yasmeen notes, “the relevance of socio-economic marginalization combined with the prevalence of Islamophobia [has been shown to be] a significant contributor to the radicalization of Muslims living in liberal democracies” (2008, p. 2).

Evident in the writings of Abbas (2005) and Phillips (2006) is the notion that there are financial limitations that preclude British Muslims' desires to live outside of 'designated' ethnic neighborhoods, for example, 'Bangaltown' located in London's borough of Tower Hamlet. Instead, politicians in Britain essentially blame the 'ethnicization' of Muslim populations in certain parts of Britain's urban landscape as "self-imposed segregation and cultural separatism," arguing that multiculturalism has instead fostered *fragmentation* rather than *integration* and 'Britishness' (Abbas, 2005).

Such ethnic isolation and the persistence of ethnic-clustering or 'self segregation' was examined in a field study by Deborah Phillips (2006), in which she observed the large populations of Pakistani/Kashmiri and Bangladeshi Muslims living in Bradford, England following the Rushdie Affair protests in 2001. Phillips's research sought to better understand the societal claims that British Muslims were "failing to act as active citizens by withdrawing from interactions with wider British society...instead choosing to self-segregate" (2006, p. 31). According to Phillips, they were essentially being accused of living "parallel lives" (2006). She challenged this view, instead hypothesizing that such concerns were only symptomatic of the wider, longstanding anxieties regarding immigration, national identity and citizenship that overtly existed in Britain, and all of which ultimately became involved in the 'racialization of space' (p. 25). Phillips's group discussions and interviews with British Muslims were the most telling and fascinating, especially with female youth participants. She found that about one-fifth tended to avoid "all-white areas," attributing this to fears, worry, and a sense of 'unwelcomeness' because of religious differences and rejection of Muslim women (2006, p. 33).

Interestingly, among these British Muslim women, she states, a common attitude that was expressed was not wanting to be “the only Asian family living on the block” (p. 33).

THE ROLE OF IDENTITY FOR YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS:

The question of “Who am I” is a universal one and is especially pertinent during adolescence. Against a backdrop of different social science disciplines, theorists, sociologists, and psychologists have all attempted to define the concept of identity and identity crisis in adolescence. One definition, the search for identity, is defined as the process of defining one’s relationship with the world (Choudhury, 2007). Oxford dictionary (2014) defines identity crisis “as a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person’s sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society.” In his book, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Psychologist Erik Erikson defines ‘identity crisis’ as the time during adolescence in which an individual experiences a conflict between individual identity and role confusion (1994). From these definitions alone, one realizes the process itself can be complicated.

Identity, according to Castells (2010, p. 7), is a person’s source of meaning and experience. Thus, for some, identity can be developed and shaped in response to racial or religious discrimination, the erosion of multiculturalism, or, as noted already, by Islamophobia. But, for others, the search for identity and belonging seems the most difficult to negotiate and acquire, as contesting views are likely to pull young Muslims in various directions, including separatism or integration. For example, in a 2006 PEW study exploring the sense of identity among Muslims in the UK, a sample size of 412 Muslims were asked whether they considered themselves ‘Muslim’ first or ‘British’ first.

The majority, about 81 percent, responded Muslim first, with only seven percent identifying themselves as British. Thus, research suggests that there is an increasing prominence of religion as a notable marker of identity among Muslims.

As an example illustrating this trend, the Home Office Citizenship Survey (2001) conducted interviews with people aged 16 and older from England and Wales in 15,524 households and 5,509 ethnic/minority households. They asked participants to identify the top ten most important things about themselves. Religion, among Muslims, was found to be a more important marker of identity than ethnicity. Further, the Social Policy Research Center at Middlesex University conducted a study on Muslim youth in the northern city of Barnet (Ryan et al., 2009), aimed at exploring identity and belonging in religion and found that the majority of its participants described religion as important or the most important identity marker.

Other related studies (Jacobson, 1998; Saeed et.al, 1999; and Archer, 2003) found religion to be a more significant identity among Muslims than ethnicity. A study by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) asked Muslim women studying at various universities in Britain to identify their motivations, experiences, and identities. They discovered that Muslim women, although acknowledging their ethnicity, rejected ethnicity and asserted agency by displacing it in favor of Muslim identities.

However, three recent cases of religious identity claims made by British Muslim women questioned more conservative practices in British culture. In 2006, 16-year-old Shabina Begum was expelled from school for wearing a *jilbab*, a ruling that was later overturned by the House of Lords. In that same year, 24-year-old Aishah Azmi, a teaching assistant, was suspended when she suddenly began to wear a *niqab* veil to class.

Interestingly, she had not worn the veil during her interview nor had expressed any intention to do so in the classroom. The argument was made that her students (aged 7-11), who were receiving English-language instruction, needed to see their teacher's lip movements in order to effectively follow her direction. Lastly, in 2007, a female Muslim police cadet refused the traditional congratulatory handshake at her graduation with the Police Commissioner, a gesture that was only permissible with her father or close relative by her faith.

Besides religious affiliation, significant political and social events, whether intentional or domestic, can also bring contending identities to the forefront. Perhaps the most significant event in British history that brought Islam and the identity of religion into national focus was the controversial publication of *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie in 1988. Its 'perceived demonizing of Islam' and blasphemous treatment of the Prophet Mohammed incited violent protests and public burnings of the book among Muslims, in turn "unifying the British Muslim community in a way that no other issue previously had" (Field, 2007, p. 448). Consequently, it resulted in the radicalization of many young British-born Muslims who gained support overseas, leading to a harsh media backlash against Muslims and bringing into focus the phenomena *Islamophobia*. By the early 90s, the Rushdie affair had succeeded in the first of its kind 'mobilizing of Muslims.' In Yunas Samad's (1996) study of the young Bangladeshis in Bradford's Tower Hamlets who had participated in the protests, he found that their reaction to the devaluation and discrimination of Muslims and Islam had been met with a need to respond through mobilization in order to demonstrate the group's solidarity.

Gardner and Shuker (1994) attributed this same need for solidarity among Muslims to Islam's positive identity, an intrinsic escape from constantly being negatively stereotyped. Anthropologist Roger Ballard (1996) argued, rather than ethnicity, religion could be used more prominently in identifying oneself because it is the one feature that Muslims felt was under attack and therefore could be the most useful in such political mobilization (p. 164). In a report titled *Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims*, a focus group of young male and female Muslims in Brixton, England were asked about their sense of belonging in the context of foreign policy (Ahmed, 2009). Ahmed notes, "while there was a closer affiliation with people outside of Britain, the grounds were different...and one female respondent made the comment that "there was nothing holding [her] in Britain" and so she felt 'no connection'" (2009, p. 54). He then suggests that this displayed the notable 'distance' of Britain's mainstream cultural norms and religious beliefs *from* the Islamic religion in contrast to Saudi religious thought.

Ultimately, Muslim youth seem caught in a web of conflicting paths regarding issues of identity, inclusion, belonging, and alienation, especially in the context of living in Muslim-minority countries like Britain. Al Raffie (2013) notes experiences of discrimination or feelings of non-acceptance or exclusion can contribute to a sense of identity crisis. According to Ahmad and Seddon, "this identity crisis, facing young British Muslims, is often framed as a proverbial tug of war between Muslim society and the dominant British culture" and the ability to choose between the two, thus resulting in 'identity crisis' (2012, p. 15).

While an 'identity crisis' can lead an individual to internally question what it means to be Muslim in Britain, individuals experiencing 'crises of identity' *and* belonging,

through encounters with Islamophobia and racism will undoubtedly reevaluate their place in British society. Quintin Wiktorowicz (2005) and P. Lewis (2006) identify this central theme of identity and understanding among Muslims in non-Muslim societies, and M. Appleton (2005) expounds this central theme based on the need for second-generation youth to develop a 'British Islam' because their parent's version of Islam 'seems distant and irrelevant.'

Wiktorowicz (2005) also notes this tendency among the second and third generation sons and daughters of immigrants, born and raised in Britain and now finding themselves trapped between two worlds, the traditional culture of their family and a secular society that does not accept them (p. 88). Thus, he argues, "the experience of both racial and religious discrimination has prompted some young Muslims to think about their identity and how they fit into British society" (p. 90) and the perception of "growing up in Britain but not being considered British by many in society" (p. 91) - and thus looking for belonging and identity in the *ummah*.

FINDING PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE THROUGH THE UMMAH:

The concept of the *ummah* arises from the notion that Muslims are a 'globally connected group.' The most famous verse referring to the *ummah* is found in the Quran verse 3:110, which states, "Ye are the best of peoples [*ummah*], evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah" (Ali, 1992). Al-Ahsan (1992) translates the *ummah* as "nation" or "community." For many Muslims today, strengthening the *ummah* is considered the most important objective of Islam and contributes to a form of collective identity. It is important to note, however, that each

Muslim community has its own ideas about standards of the ummah and how it can best be promoted among Muslims.

The ummah is not a new concept. In 1989, following the publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini declared a *fatwa* (or directive) to the global Muslim community (the ummah) calling for the death of Rushdie. Later, in the wake of the 2005 London bombings, Osama Bin Laden used the rhetoric of the ummah to call upon the Muslim global community to wage *jihad* against the Western infidels. Today the *jihadist* group, ISIS, has once again invoked the ummah to call for the support of Muslims worldwide for its cause, including their participation in the Syrian conflict and state-building efforts.

ISIS's extremist narrative rejects the notion of states, therefore, the "caliphate" itself functions not only as a governing institution but operates as a uniting force for the whole of the ummah, rejecting "false" differences in identity based on nationality or ethnicity (Furlow et al., 2014, p. 4). According to Jessica D. Lewis (2014), ISIS's ideological objectives are four-pronged: breaking down political boundaries in Iraq and Syria, establishing a governing 'Islamic Emirate,' bringing like-minded people to fight and defend such a territory, and expanding state-building efforts through the support of the wider Muslim community or ummah (p. 1).

Within the extremist narrative, the United States and its Western allies are seen as direct threats to the ummah. Thus, ISIS's state-building is strengthened by purging such apostates (Westerners) through a "pure" Islamic society in the hopes of restoring the ummah's unity. Evidence of this can be found in ISIS's online propaganda magazine *Dabiq*, produced and printed in several languages including English. Its first issue, "*The*

Return of Khilafah” (2014), focused on the declaration of the “caliphate” and aimed to recruit Western *jihadists* to join its ideology. According to the Clarion Project, the publication regularly boasts of ISIS’s ‘victories,’ and contains photo reports and informative articles discussing issues of *jihad* (holy war), *tawhid* (unity), *hijrah* (migration, in this case, to ISIS territory), and *jama’ah* (community) (‘The Islamic State’s Magazine,’ 2014, para. 2).

According to Anthony N. Celso (2014), *Dabiq*’s first issue “sees the [Islamic State] as Allah’s prophesied vanguard to rejuvenate Islam by restoring *tawhid* (unity), purging it of apostasy (*shirk*) and fortifying the true ummah by integrating political and religious authority under the caliph Ibrahim” (p. 2). Further, he states, “only after the imposition of sharia and the fortification of the ummah can the regression of Islamic society be reversed” (Celso, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, Muslims united under the aegis of the ummah can serve as a potent joining force within ISIS territories. Similarly, ISIS’s expansion relies on an allegiance from all Muslims regardless of their geographic location and it asserts the ‘caliph’s’ leadership over the entire ummah (Allison, 2014, p. 3).

Katherine Brown (2006) explains how this collective Islamic identity through the ummah enables Muslim communities to develop a universal identity in Islam. Brown notes, “the ummah reintroduces unity among an otherwise divided community; divided by class, ethnicity, age, and history...and not only removes barriers within States, but generates a globalized community” (2006, p. 419). Certainly, the search for significance is universal and can span demographics, gender in particular. In the context of females, the realization of the ummah is equally meaningful to women as well through developing a tangible “sisterhood.” For example, a 22-year-old interviewee made the comment in

Brown's (2006) study that "knowing Muslim women was a central pillar in her support network" (p. 419).

Psychological theorists have identified this search for purpose and significance as one of the greatest human motives (Maslow, 1943; Fiske, 2004), designated as the importance for humans to be noticed, matter, deserve honor, and be esteemed (Kruglanski, 2014, para. 8). In an article by Arie W. Kruglanski entitled *'Psychology Not Theology: Overcoming ISIS' Secret Appeal*, she adopts a similar psychological approach in explaining extremism, stating "the appeal of violent extremism derives from a clever exploitation of two basic human needs: the need for *cognitive closure* (defined as a quest for certainty and the eschewal of ambiguity) and the need for *personal significance*" (Kruglanski, 2014, para. 2). By focusing on the latter, she further explains, "the ideology of ISIS [in particular] offers its adherents an invaluable psychological reward...that by joining the fight against the infidels, they earn the status of heroes and martyrs...gaining a 'larger-than-life significance' and earning a spot in history" (Kruglanski, 2014, para. 8).

From Kruglanski's psychological standpoint, and considering the current allure of ISIS, one is able to appreciate the rhetorical power of the ummah in recruiting and mobilizing Muslims to extremist groups. This can be effective for those especially on the path seeking belonging in a Muslim community, when they have been rejected by the larger Western societies in which they reside, and searching for purpose in their life. ISIS presents its cause as the 'purest' form of Islam, which translates in the ultimate achievement for individual Muslims who participate in the ISIS community and version of the ummah.

The Soufan Group's Richard Barrett observes similar trends among Westerners becoming *ihadists* as "people seeking a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives" (2014, p. 18), and in the same breath categorizing them as "disaffected, aimless, and lacking a sense of identity or belonging" (2014, p. 18). Much of *ihadist*-themed propaganda depicts the offensive and humiliating treatment of Muslims as a collective group by the West. For example, in the cases of Bosnia, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq, *ihadist* protagonists use these conflicts not only to inflame the viewer (fellow Muslims), but also to ignite within them a summons to redeem the Muslim population. Thus, alienated and frustrated Muslim youths seeking purpose and significance will be more prone to identify with these messages of 'suffering' and respond to the collective loss as a group.

RADICALIZE THEN MOBILIZE - THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN RECRUITMENT:

There is a wealth of existing literature and research that has focused on the process of radicalization: *how* a person becomes radicalized (through what source or by what means), *who* the actors are involved in the transformation, and *what* this transformation looks like (Skidmore, 2014). Thus, in order to more fully understand the flow of foreign recruits - more specifically British Muslim females - being drawn to the Syrian conflict through the extremist group ISIS, we must understand the process of radicalization itself. Since this thesis refers to the rebel extremist narrative of ISIS, reference to radicalization will be investigated in terms of *ihadism* or global *ihad*, whose influences are both religious and political in nature. Due to the technological nature of ISIS's recruitment

tactics, seen through Internet propaganda and social networking platforms and media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, the process of radicalization can easily begin online through connecting with recruiters or sympathizers.

When turning away from both mainstream British society and orthodox or mainstream Islam, younger individuals begin to look towards an “alternate” choice, and find many ‘options’ at their disposal and all accessible via the internet; *Islamism* (political Islam), *fundamentalism* (literal translation of the Quran), *radicalism* (open-minded egalitarians), and *extremism* (close minded supremacists) (Schmid, 2014). While all of these terms were prominent in literature, it was observed that many times they were used interchangeably, when more consideration for differentiation between them was warranted.

Equally, clarity is warranted regarding the notions of ‘*jihadism*’ and ‘terrorism,’ which were also found to be ambiguous at times and, therefore, must be specified for the sake of this thesis (Schmid, 2011). Alex P. Schmid (2014), of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) - The Hague, describes this complex, often confusing relationship between *jihadism* and terrorism. He explains, “Islamists sometimes claim to be opposed to ‘terrorism’ but when one refers to a particular act of violence perpetrated by Islamists that is widely understood as an act of terrorism, they claim that it is part of a legitimate *jihad* (effort or struggle on God’s way to ensure the supremacy of Islam) and therefore cannot be possibly labeled terrorism” (Schmid, 2014, p. 16).

Due to the nature of ISIS’s ideology, when referring to radicalization it will be in the framework of Islamism, and will include the component of ‘*jihadism*.’ Furthermore, “Islamists in Syria are seen as the most threatening...for they polarize the current conflict

and strengthen the extremists (Skidmore, 2014, p. 50). Bale's (2013) definition of Islamism can be seen as "anti-secular, anti-infidel, and anti-Western, seeking to establish a state (caliphate) whose puritanical features are meant to resemble the situation in early Islam" (p. 28).

To be more systematic, but keeping in mind the varying degrees of Islamism, 'Islamists' will be categorized into two groups: the violent and the non-violent. The violent group is typically in open pursuit of *jihad* or holy war (ISIS), while the classified 'non-violent' group aims at actively engaging the spreading of Islam through proselytization, and the political process in some countries, yet shunning extremist violent means in the process. Some "contemporary *jihadists* have even pushed the concept of *jihad* further by declaring *jihad* to be the sixth pillar of Islam and the individual duty of every Muslim" (Schmid, 2014, p. 17). However, as Joseph Franco (2013) coined in a workshop held in Singapore on countering violent extremism, non-violent and violent religious extremism must be considered as two sides of the same Islamist coin.

Consequently, the proliferation of the more violent, radical Islamist groups, seems to have overshadowed the non-violent groups in the last decade, especially as they have publicly continued to attack Western values and interests, attempted to develop "no-go zones" (where Western law is replaced by traditional *Sharia* or Islamic law), and sought to influence and exploit European policies regarding conflicts in the Muslim world (Lebl, 2014, p. 1). Such groups have also utilized media as a *catalyst*, not only in recruitment and mobilization but as evidential coverage, illustrating graphic, 'apocalyptic imagery' that is often sensationalized in order to incite affiliation with such identity and gain

supportive responsibility as a defender of Islam (Skidmore, 2014). Online, multimedia platforms and propaganda can severely alter an individual's radicalization process and inspire them to embark to the conflict zone and fight in defense of their so-called, threatened transnational identity (Skidmore, p. 16).

This situation has also been exacerbated by the use of radical or extremist groups to expand sectarianism (Sunni vs. Shia) outside of the Arab world and into Western society. For the Syrian conflict, the Sunni-Shiite divide cannot be ignored, as it has become one of the defining features drawing in foreign *jihadi* support (Skidmore, 2014). According to Patrick Cockburn (2014), it is even not uncommon [now] to find sectarian strife occurring in Western countries, such as Britain, between Sunni and Shiites, as the latter finds themselves targeted with unprecedented viciousness by those considered to “belong” outside their community.

Today's Muslim communities in the UK are physically fragmented into different, distinct hubs, some teeming with radical networks, while others cling to more moderate, mainstream beliefs. According to Schmid (2014), “its members, mostly second and third generation Muslims who have experienced first-hand the ills of racial discrimination and anti-religious attitudes, take this [prejudice] as rejection and in turn reject ‘the system’” (p. 3). Skidmore (2014) adds, “discrimination breeds hostility that can quickly transform into a desire for revenge...such feelings of humiliation or isolation are commonly cited precursors to the radicalization process, leading a person to radicalize and partake in *jihād*” (p. 57). Similar research by Kepel (2004) on European Muslims found that detachment from mainstream society played a crucial part in reshaping an individual's

inclination for violence and *jihad*. Kepel's (2004) research also demonstrated that religion, in particular militant Islamism, was the source of identity in the study.

The continuing threat of radical groups, such as Young Muslims Organization, Hizbut-Tahrir (an Islamist group calling for the return of the Caliphate), or al-Muhajiroun ('The Emigrants'), pose a real risk for Muslim youth today, especially for those searching for identity and lacking purpose, as previously explained. Watt's (2008) study focused on foreign fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan found that they were lacking in purpose and in search of identity - a similar theme now being used in the Syrian conflict - thus militant Islamism provided sufficient identity and purpose in a group setting.

In the case of British Muslims, researcher Tahir Abbas adds, "internally, young British Muslims are increasingly found in the precarious position of having to choose between one set of loyalties in relation to 'the other' (for instance Islamic vs. British, liberal vs. radical), and being impacted by radical Islamic politics on the one hand [Sunni vs. Shia], and developments in British multicultural citizenship on the other. This creates tensions and issues, which encourage some to take up the 'struggle' more vigorously, while others seek to adopt more Western values, for example" (Abbas, 2005, p. 16).

In a similar vein, Oliver Roy (2004) found British Muslims tended to adopt Islam as a "badge of collective identity in order to counteract feelings of exclusion, cultural alienation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement from a society they perceive as unaccepting of them" (p. 18). In a report titled, *Born in the UK: Young Muslims in Britain* (2006), Director Hugh Barnes of the Foreign Policy Centre in London addresses exclusion and alienation of young British Muslims by discussing the effects of these issues leading to temptation of radicalization among youth. In his study, he attempts to

discover why young male and female Muslims in Britain become attracted to these groups, finding a collective identity in their resentment toward non-Muslims' treatment of Muslims outside the UK. According to Barnes (2006), at the time of this report, young Muslims were witnessing the events in Afghanistan and Iraq unfold and thus were outraged by the large numbers of Muslim deaths being reported.

Shiraz Maher (2006), a former member of the radical group *Hizbut-Tahrir*, attributes the dilemma of alienation and exclusion of young British Muslims as the failure of imams and mosques to address such issues as well as identity with youth in a meaningful and engaged way (Barnes, p. 11). Thus, British Muslim youth are at risk of looking elsewhere in their search for belonging. In a study by Quintin Wiktorowicz (2005), interviews with members of UK's radical group, *Al-Muhajiroun*, expressed disillusionment in mainstream religious institutions when local imams and mosques failed to provide guidance regarding specific concerns for them as British Muslims, and resulted in their seeking out 'alternative' explanations outside the mainstream (p. 24). Moreover, Choudhury notes that many times the most vulnerable to radical groups are those 'religious novices' (converts), initially exploring Islam and inexperienced in their understanding of Islam (2007).

Schmid's ICCT report (2014) examines more closely the delicate position young men and women must negotiate between late adolescence and early adulthood and their susceptibility to the radicalization process. He notes this it is a "vulnerable period where extremist ideologies are most likely to be embraced by Muslim young men and women rebelling against their parents or social surroundings" (Schmid, 2014, p. 22). He further contends that relying on so-called de-radicalization or counter-radicalization efforts or

programs is risky, because they essentially leave their ‘education’ to religious sects, extremist political organizations, or online radicalization via the Internet” (Schmid, 2014, p. 22). Attitudes among young British Muslims were found to be particularly extreme; for instance, Joppke (2009) suggests that limitations to integration policy are causing a rift between Muslims and the majority society that is only growing.

This ‘rift,’ which Caldwell (2007) also identified between Muslims and non-Muslims, unfortunately, is deepening, not disappearing. Opposition to ‘integration’ stood out in a survey conducted by Policy Exchange (2007) in Britain in which they found that 31 percent of Muslim participants ‘felt more in common’ with Muslims in other countries than with fellow citizens (p. 38). They found a considerable percentage (13%) of younger participants (aged 16-24) admired organizations like Al-Qaeda that are prepared to fight against the West (2007, p. 62). Clearly, this demonstrates the issue of alienation that youth face in mainstream British society. The scale of alienation from British society for Muslims is astounding. When those being interviewed in Barnes’s study (2006) were asked how loyal they felt towards Britain, a majority 46 percent responded that they felt “very loyal,” 33 percent said “fairly loyal,” and 18 percent (1 in 5) felt “little to no loyalty at all.”

In another startlingly finding, about 6 percent felt the July 7th bombings in London were fully justified and supported those carrying out the terrorist attacks (Barnes, 2006, p. 14). And finally, when British Muslim students were asked how they felt towards Western society, and how, if at all, they felt Muslims should adapt to it, 56 percent responded that while Western society was not perfect, Muslims should adapt to it and not seek to bring it to an end. However, 32 percent (nearly a third) believed Western society

to be decadent and immoral and that Muslims should seek to bring an end to it (Barnes, 2006, p. 15).

Thus, against the backdrop of the current situation in Syria, Britain's extremist community and radical recruits confirm the reality of Barnes's study, and verify the proliferation of seeking radicalization online through YouTube and other social media. It also indicates the attraction of such groups, as Maajid Nawaz (2014) of *The Daily Beast*, states, "thousands of young Muslims seem ready to subscribe to ISIS and al-Qaeda and are eager for mobilization" (para. 5). Already, ISIS has drawn thousands of young foreign fighters from the West to its increasing spiral of extremist violence, and technology is facilitating this mobilization. Thus, the continuing evolution of global terrorism, *jihadism*, and the persistence of radical Western networks, it all seems underscored by the increasing ease of accessibility to extremist ideologies on the internet because of the use of technology, in particular social media, to advance such recruitment and mobilization efforts in ISIS's *jihadist* narrative in Iraq and Syria.

CONCLUSION

British-born Muslims and British converts to Islam have been an integral part of British society for the last half of the century, with almost three million total Muslims in the UK today (PEW, 2010). Due to the large presence of Muslims in Britain, more specific research has focused on the unique experiences second and third generation British Muslim youth have felt while being raised in British society within 'Westernized' culture, language, education, etc. Examined literature and studies revealed strong individual and societal factors influencing Muslim communities today. Thus, researchers

have utilized exploratory studies, for instance interviews, focus groups, and surveys to better understand Muslim perspectives, and explore the various sentiments of British Muslims.

Studies found that for most young males, attempts to ‘integrate’ into society, but also preserve religious values, were particularly difficult for them to negotiate. These studies suggested that more often than not, young Muslims found themselves in a situation in which they had to ‘choose’ between a Muslim identity or a British identity and which to represent. Research found that critical turning points in Britain’s history served to challenge both the Muslim identity as well as non-Muslim perceptions of Islam, which ultimately resulted in constrained ethnic relations among Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK. Events frequently mentioned in literature included the following: the 1988-1990 Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War (1990-1991), the 2001 Bradford protests, the events of September 11, 2001, the Iraq War (2003), and the 7/7 bombings in London.

In addition to the role of identity and identity crisis, relevant literature demonstrated other social influences in the British society, today and past. Such factors that disrupt or alter British Muslim understanding of its place in mainstream British society included: the phenomenon of *Islamophobia* and other anti-Muslim sentiments and discrimination occurring in the UK, the erosion of multiculturalism in Britain, the influential concept of the *ummah* in one’s search for purpose and significance, and the proliferation of online extremist propaganda for the purpose of recruiting young Western Muslim followers to ISIS’s global *jihād*, as seen through social networking platforms and media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It is important to note that a strong majority of British Muslim youth encountering racial and religious discrimination was women, as the *hijab*

or headscarf worn exclusively by Muslim women, was considered a signifier of difference in some studies and at times led to more gender-targeted verbal and physical abuse/attacks from non-Muslim individuals in Britain's public spaces.

One weakness in the literature review was that there is a gender gap in relevant research pertaining specifically to exploratory studies on young British Muslim females, especially analyzed through the lens of identity or identity crisis. Generally, it was young, disaffected and unemployed Muslim men who were examined in studies. There is a current lack in scholarly research regarding the Syrian conflict and the notion of Western Muslim females being drawn through social media to the conflict. Equally important, while the majority of foreign fighters are male, British newspapers, journals, and think tanks suggest that there is an increasing number of foreign Western women also traveling to Syria to join ISIS and research on this phenomenon still remains slow to come. Perhaps, this is partly due to fact that it remains a fluid, developing situation. Regardless, the situation remains significantly under-researched. Therefore, future research should not only measure and assess this emerging trend, but its relationship to lacking identity, exclusion, and belonging for young Muslim females in the West.

This thesis will aim to understand why established, Western Muslim women in the UK are becoming increasingly enticed to join ISIS through multimedia and social media platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter. It will use a case study of Britain to indirectly observe the social media accounts of a group of young British Muslim women believed to be living in ISIS-controlled territories and supporting 'migration' to such territories. This in-depth analysis will not only examine why young British Muslim women are joining ISIS and identify what their role is in ISIS's territories, but it will also provide a voice for

the female ISIS supporters recruiting and mobilizing other young Muslim women through social media to join ISIS. Female ISIS supporters examined here are *self-identified* online, but also think tank organizations, scholarly, and/or British media reports are used to help determine which social media accounts to examine.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the introductory chapter, a description of the flow of foreign fighters traveling to the Syrian conflict was identified. More specifically, the chapter discussed the emerging phenomenon of young British Muslim women in the UK mobilizing in an attempt to influence the Syrian conflict through joining ISIS in its state-building mission. This was followed up with a description of the study's research problem and purpose statement, and the research questions that will be examined in this study. This section will describe the methodology of this research project. Furthermore, the research design, data collection strategies, and data analysis procedures are described as well as the study's limitations.

While there is growing concern over the flow of Western male foreign fighters answering ISIS's 'call to *jihad*,' equal attention should be given to the number of young British Muslim females leaving their homes in Britain to travel to Syria or Iraq and join ISIS's "caliphate sisterhood." It is imperative to understand why these generally perceived to be 'established,' second and third generation British Muslim women are attracted to ISIS's ideology and being lured to Syria or Iraq via the internet. It is equally important to recognize the use of technology in mobilizing young Muslim women, through the usage of multimedia campaigns and social networking sites such as Tumblr and Twitter, and seek to better understand the attraction of ISIS and state-building. Therefore, an equally salient question related to this research is: what is social media's role in attracting women to the ISIS cause?

This study uses primary data obtained from the social media accounts of self-identified British Muslim females believed to be living within ISIS-controlled territories. It employs secondary data sources from relevant academic literature, think tanks (Hoyle et al., 2015) and media reporting on Western females traveling to the Syrian conflict to join ISIS in order to determine the probability that the individual is actually living in ISIS-controlled areas of Syria or Iraq. Primary materials provide an exclusive more in-depth look at the emerging trend of young British Muslim women from the UK joining ISIS and how social media is ‘radicalizing then mobilizing’ them to ISIS’s territories in Syria and Iraq. The researcher uses Britain as a case study to measure the mobilization of British Muslim females traveling to Syria to join ISIS, emboldened through social media sites such as Tumblr, ask.fm, and Twitter.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

This research project is based on a group of self-proclaimed Western *muhajirats* (female migrants) believed to be living in ISIS-controlled territories and utilizing social media to further recruit and mobilize other Muslim women to Syria or Iraq. Primary data was obtained from the social media accounts of seven British Muslim females identified as British nationals and believed to be in Syria or Iraq, with secondary data from an eighth British Muslim female acquired from the Hoyle et al. study (2015) because the account had been suspended by Twitter. The researcher used reports from think tanks and the British media in order to determine which women had allegedly left the UK to join ISIS; these reports subsequently confirmed the women’s migration to ISIS’s territories through their social media use. The eight British Muslim women also self-identified

online as originating from the UK, with one of the women being identified in the Hoyle et al. study (2015). It should be noted that at no point did the researcher attempt to engage in conversation or personally communicate with any of the women involved to confirm their location or country of origin. Unobtrusive observation of their social media accounts was maintained throughout the entire study.

The phenomenon of young British Muslim females (aged 16-24) leaving their families and homes in the UK in order to travel, sometimes secretly, to join ISIS in its state-building efforts in Syria and Iraq is growing. Thus, this research specifically utilizes Britain as a case study, in order to provide an in-depth look at the allure of ISIS's efforts in state-building for young British Muslim women, why they are choosing to go, and what role they will play once they arrive in the territory. This research also features the use of technology, for instance, social media, in order to highlight the increasing accessibility for young Muslim women to become radicalized and mobilized to join ISIS. More importantly, it demonstrates the proliferation of online 'radical' connections being developed through Tumblr and Twitter.

I chose to undertake this research due to the increasing concern in Western countries related to young Muslim females from the UK and elsewhere being drawn to join ISIS's "caliphate sisterhood" in Syria and Iraq. Many travel with spouses, friends, or even alone, enticed through the same social media campaigns and multimedia propaganda of ISIS supporters as the males are. Those embarking to Syria or Iraq alone are often times doing so with the intention of engaging in arranged marriages with a *jihadist*, communicated privately via social media sites beforehand, in order to live out a "romanticized" version of *jihadism*, and raise 'future *jihadist*' children within ISIS's

territories. Muslim females already living within ISIS-controlled territories assist new recruits traveling alone through online communication.

Watt's 2008 study found a similar trend in the mobilization of foreign fighters to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. His research discovered that, from a practical standpoint, foreign fighters promoted the cause by giving guidance to others on "how to travel to the conflict and who to seek out upon arrival" (Watts, 2008, p. 8). The proliferation of technology in mobilizing more Western foreigners to the Syrian conflict demonstrates the ease of accessing information on platforms, such as Twitter and Tumblr, on how to join ISIS. Thus, young Muslim females, who have already successfully emigrated to Syria, act as online 'cheerleaders,' recruiters, and instructors for other vulnerable and impressionable young Muslim women seeking to join ISIS. Fellow "sisters" in ISIS territory assist potential recruits on how to travel to Syria and who specifically to contact upon arrival and provide information or assistance on needed travel funds.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES:

There is a large online ecosystem of female ISIS supporters believed to be living within ISIS-controlled territories (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 8). With the exception of one inactive account, the researcher collected data from the social media accounts of eight British Muslim females. Using unobtrusive observation, the researcher read and analyzed primary material comprised of publicly shared 'tweets' and Tumblr 'blog posts' from young British Muslim women already mobilized to Syria and allegedly living in ISIS-controlled territories. Secondary data for the inactive account was obtained from the Hoyle et al. study (2015).

The active social media accounts of the seven British Muslim women had a total of 2,855 tweets, with an average of 571 tweets and had a combined total of 6,826 followers and followed 315 accounts. One distinct characteristic observed among the cases is that, on average, account holders typically had more followers than accounts they were following in Twitter: 664 followers versus 49 being followed. This feature was also recognized in Klausen's 2015 study, *Tweeting the Jihad*.

The role of social media in supporting ISIS's state-building efforts is also assessed as well as themes being used in social media to entice other women to join ISIS. The researcher collected secondary material from think tank reports and analyses performed by organizations pursuing an understanding of this trend as well as searching current, online British news articles and recent journal/magazines investigating and reporting on the phenomenon of British Muslim women traveling to ISIS territories in Syria and Iraq. The researcher attempted to personally contact, via email, these groups known to be involved in similar studies regarding the mobilization of young British Muslim females to join ISIS in order to gather information on the subjects and additional "leads" on more British Muslim females traveling to join ISIS. However, due to the fluidity of the situation and the sensitive nature of the data, the researcher was unable to access the primary data from their research.

Data collected is measured in order to gain a current portrait of British Muslim women living within ISIS-controlled territories. By combining all of this gathered information, the researcher forms an in-depth analysis of why young British Muslim women are traveling to join ISIS, what their role is in ISIS-controlled territories, and how social media is mobilizing them to Syria.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Using content analysis, the researcher analyzes the ‘tweets,’ blogs, and posts from the Tumblr and Twitter accounts of eight British Muslim females, in order to develop an understanding of why they’ve joined ISIS and what their role is in ISIS’s territories. These techniques are similar to those employed by ICSR to develop a database archiving information on about 30 British Muslim women from the UK believed to be living in ISIS-controlled territories through monitoring their social media accounts. ISD has also developed a similar database of female ISIS supporters’ social media postings (Hoyle et al., 2015).

Content is analyzed for themes culled in the relevant literature review which include Muslim attitudes and perceptions in the UK regarding *Islamophobia* or religious discrimination, the erosion of multiculturalism, identity and belonging, and finding purpose in the *ummah*, and whether these variables influence young Muslim women from Western countries, like the UK, to join ISIS. Themes are coded and organized in order to identify trends indicative of much larger ideas and provide a simple framework for current female involvement with ISIS in Syria or Iraq.

An interesting feature of this analysis is the amount of original content versus retweeted content posted. Over 75 percent of content in the sample is retweeted content from other ISIS supporters and proselytizers rather than original content posted by the subjects. The highest amount of retweeted content originated from two prolific proselytizers consistently found among the social media accounts of female *and* male ISIS supporters. They are London-based preacher Anjem Choudary and the Australian

preacher Musa Cerantonio. Both stood out as currently the two most influential figures within associated social media networks.

Despite the proliferation of retweeted content, only original content posted by the females in the sample is analyzed. Excerpts from their posts and original tweets are included in this thesis in order to present the actual voices of young British Muslim women joining ISIS in Syria or Iraq, and their intentions for recruiting other young Muslim women to travel to ISIS-controlled territories. Inclusion of original text also supplies information concerning the role women have in ISIS-controlled territories as it emphasizes what is expected of them once they've arrived in such territories.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS IN DATA COLLECTION:

There are several limitations and challenges to this research project. The most notable limitation is the fact that a captured network of seven females realistically only comprises a fraction or 'sliver' of the growing global network that currently exists. The researcher realizes that others examining the same network of female ISIS supporters and online female proselytizers may yield a different set of 'network' leaders, which in turn may produce a different set of themes or variables than those highlighted in this study.

Another immediate challenge recognized by this study is the 'lifespan' of some of the social media accounts created by the females. For instance, out of the eight accounts analyzed in the case study, one of the accounts was no longer accessible because Twitter had suspended it. Therefore, the researcher had to pull the original tweets and posts from the Hoyle et al. study (2015), who had conducted a similar study on the allure of ISIS for Muslim females in the West, in order to include this British Muslim female's online

content in the analysis. Protected, suspended, or inactive accounts were a frequent occurrence met by this researcher and, as a result, diligence in saving accessible social media accounts of these women offline was a must.

British Muslim females communicating from within ISIS's territories frequently found their Twitter accounts suspended by Twitter or and their Tumblr blogs deleted or deactivated. This occurrence is clearly frustrating for the women communicating online, and the researcher observed many times that active accounts were being used almost as 'hubs' to pass along information concerning those suspended accounts, directing followers to the new accounts to follow. However, the majority of accounts in the case study was and remained active throughout the study.

Within the field of female extremism and terrorism as well as counter-terrorism studies, the ability to gain or access reliable, primary data or sources has been scarce and difficult to obtain to say the least. Schuurman & Eijkman (2013) of the ICCT - The Hague, offer an insightful analysis on this scarcity, discussing the cases and consequences of the lack of primary data research and sources. They state, "no less worrying is researchers' over-reliance on pre-existing secondary sources of information - essentially books, articles, and media reports - and their tendency to use a limited number of methodologies" (2013, p.1). The researcher is fully aware of this reality, especially as preliminary attempts were made to collect such 'scarce,' primary source-based research on related topics. Additionally, there is a stark, underlying gender gap that exists within this field already, at times, hindering improvements for future research methods and strategies on such studies. In essence, this growing issue of young British Muslim women

joining ISIS and being drawn to state-building efforts is important, but is notably under-researched.

The researcher realizes that such a lack of primary data could ultimately affect the prescriptions of policymakers, politicians, government agencies, and private companies involved in counter-terrorism measures, as these and other practitioners rely on academic research as valuable insight in efforts to counter terrorism and extremism (Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013). Thus, while this may be seen as a limitation or challenge for the researcher, the hope is that future research may be able to overcome these gaps through collaboration between scholars, practitioners, and government officials.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This section will now provide key insight into why young British Muslim women desire to join ISIS and what their role is within ISIS territory. Excerpts from Tumblr blogs, ask.fm posts, and original ‘tweets’ obtained online (or from the Hoyle et al. study, 2015) will be included to provide the actual voices of eight British Muslim women believed to be living within ISIS’s territories. Their ‘tweets’ and posts will be displayed in their original form, including grammatical errors, without any editing. Content is analyzed for themes culled in the relevant literature review which include Muslim attitudes and perceptions in the UK regarding *Islamophobia* or religious discrimination, the erosion of multiculturalism, identity and belonging, and finding purpose in the *ummah*, and whether these variables influence young Muslim women from Western countries, like the UK, to join ISIS.

The presence of women, both within ISIS’s territories and online, is also explained, as many female ISIS supporters living in ISIS’s territories appear utilize social media as a tool to motivate and encourage other Muslim women to migrate to the conflict. The eight British Muslim female’s social media accounts provide evidence and assist the researcher in determining their country of origin and whether they have in fact made the migration to Syria or Iraq. This information is also based on online interactions with other female migrants within ISIS’s territories, pictures posted, and reports from the media and think tanks.

The researcher will refer to young British Muslim women traveling to ISIS-controlled territories by how they self-identify in social media: the Arabic terms

muhajirah (singular) or *muhajirats* (plural) for female migrants. As previously mentioned, these are the most appropriate terms because women traveling to and living within ISIS-controlled territories are forbidden from fighting in the conflict and thus cannot be referred to as 'foreign fighters' like their male counterparts (Hoyle et al., 2015; Saltman & Winter, 2014; Winter, 2015).

The eight British Muslim female migrants are assigned numbers and will be referred to as, for instance, Female Migrant #1, Female Migrant #2, et cetera. All eight Muslim women are confirmed to have originated from the UK. The original content and Twitter feeds from their social media accounts will be shared in this section. As a side note, the terms "caliphate" or "Islamic State" have been avoided throughout this thesis and will remain as such, following other studies (Hoyle et al., 2015), so as to not legitimize such entities. The researcher will continue to refer to the territories to which the migrants emigrated as ISIS-controlled territories or ISIS territory.

As noted in other studies, the researcher found that these female migrants generally blog or 'tweet' in their native language. Throughout the study, it is observed that British Muslim female migrants predominantly use English with a mix of Arabic in their online communication and blogs. Female migrants use the Arabic term *hijrah* frequently. However, it is utilized in a context different from its original meaning of the migration or journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the seventh century. Therefore, it should be noted that when the women in the case study use *hijrah* it will be referring to migration to ISIS territory.

Another key characteristic among these female migrants, similar to that identified by Quilliam Foundation's Dr. Saltman and Winter (2014), is that they commonly adopt

the moniker of “Umm” (Arabic for mother) once they’ve conceived a child within ISIS’s territories or if they’ve migrated to territories with children (p. 46, 47). This is a prolific online practice found among females migrating to ISIS’s territories, and many identify themselves, through their handle or account name, using this honorific title. Other common monikers are *muhajirah* (Arabic for female migrant) or *ukhti* (Arabic for ‘my sister’). It should be noted the majority of female migrants making the trek to Syria aim to settle inside Raqqa, the self-proclaimed “caliphate” capital and well known ISIS stronghold, or Mosul, Iraq, another ISIS-held territory.

MOTIVES FOR MIGRATION TO ISIS TERRITORY:

THE OPPRESSION OF MUSLIMS:

As previously stated in the literature, strengthening the ummah is considered one of the most important objectives of Islam and contributes to a form of collective identity (Ali, 1992; al-Ahsan, 1992). The most frequently mentioned theme observed in the case study of British Muslim female migrants is the belief that the *ummah* (global Muslim community) is under attack or in distress. As found in similar studies (Hoyle et al., 2015; Saltman & Winter, 2014; Winter, 2015), this is discussed at length among female migrants in the online social network. The ummah is referenced repeatedly among the women in response to perceptions of anti-Islamic attitudes from the West as well as culled from literature. They admonish their audiences that this is a war against Islam *and* that it is directed at the ummah. This is being portrayed much in the same way that *jihadist*-themed propaganda is depicting the offensive and oppressive treatment of

Muslims as a collective group by the West. For example, Female Migrant #2 tweets:

“My advise to Muslims all over the world, make hijrah [migration to ISIS territory] before its too late. This is a war against Islam, so you are either with us or against us.”¹

Female Migrant #2 later adds:

“A wake up call to all muslims, we are being fought just because we believe in Allah [God], and we have taken Islam as our religion.”²

While examples of global Muslim oppression referenced by the females appear frequently, they also vary. All of the women in the case study refer to the global oppression of Muslims at least once and some mention it on a daily basis or even several times a day. For instance, Female Migrant #2 tweets:

“China Muslims are banned from fasting. If this doesn't show how much we are being oppressed than what will? Also 1 country banned halal meat!!”³

This theme is also observed in ‘retweeted’ content depicting graphic images of dead Muslim women and children that stem from different conflicts around the world. These types of images are prolifically ‘shared’ and ‘passed on’ among the women in the group as well as throughout the larger network. Similar to the Hoyle et al. (2015) study, this finding is a prime reason for females to migrate to ISIS-controlled territories, stating “the empathy these women feel for the Muslim victims of violence and the complicity they feel the Western powers have in perpetuating these conflicts are important factors in their decision to leave the West and seek an alternative society” (p. 11). For instance, Female Migrant #1 posts this comment:

“How can you live amongst people who desire to get rid of Islam... Wallahi [I swear to God] these Kuffar [unbelievers] and Munafiqeen [hypocrites] will do anything to cause the Muslimeen [Muslims] harm” (Hoyle et al., 2015, p.12).

Female Migrant #8 shares her feelings about this:

“So yh guys, dnt B afraid to do wat u kno is best. Its better 2 B farrrrrr away from da enemies of Islam, dan to liv next to dem.”⁴

The tweets and posts of British female migrants regularly condemn US or Western involvement in global conflicts involving Muslims or the ummah. For instance, Female Migrant #7 makes the comment:

“How humiliating that the Kuffar [unbelievers] tell us their plots + we arrogantly believe thy are our allies. Wake-up Ummah!!”⁵

Abbas’s (2005) notion of solidarity and ‘Muslim assertiveness’ is evident among the content of the women, as original posts or ‘retweeted’ content from female migrants aim to reinforce ISIS’s narrative which ultimately operates as a unifying force for the whole of the ummah (Furlow et al., 2014). The global oppression of Muslims is illustrated as a key indicator of the prophesied ‘Day of Judgment’ that is perceived to be fast approaching. For instance, Female Migrant #7 states:

“Not a day passes without the news of attacks & killings, Indeed the Signs of the Hour are manifesting before our eyes.”⁶

These types of ‘End of Days’ references place an urgency on *muhajirats* (female migrants) who are advised to “make *hijrah*” (migration to ISIS territory) before it is “too late.” Statements like this are made in conjunction with the belief that, because the situation of the ummah is dire, the waging of *jihad* in order to defend the Muslim

community is justified. In a similar study by ICSR (Carter et al., 2014), this notion of all able-bodied Muslims waging *jihad* anywhere Muslims are being oppressed by an outside force is seen as foundational to contemporary jihadism. In this case study, the women frequently refer to non-Muslims as *kuffars* (unbelievers) and infidels and violence against the West is presented as necessary in defending the ummah. For instance, Female Migrant #2 condones the beheading of American journalist James Foley in August of 2014 by tweeting this:

“What is 1 James Foley compared to thousands of innocent muslims being slaughtered daily by filthy US.”⁷

Other female migrants not only accept such gruesome acts as necessary, but believe it is a requirement for expansion (Wood, 2015). At times, the women celebrate the violent kidnappings, beheadings, and crucifixions as victories for ISIS’s cause. Moreover, the researcher observes many of the women in the sample reveal a desire to even participate in such acts of violence. For example, when Female Migrant #3 is questioned by an anonymous user on ask.fm about what she thinks of the killing of American-Israeli journalist Steven Sotloff, she simply responds:

“I wish I did it.”⁸

THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A NEW SOCIETY:

Another prominent theme found throughout the case study of British Muslim female migrants is the exciting opportunity for Muslim women to come to ISIS’s territories and help build this “new society.” The declaration of a “caliphate” by ISIS this past summer provided female ISIS supporters an actual ‘destination for migration,’ rather

than just supporting ISIS online. Since ISIS's self-proclaimed "statehood" on June 29, 2014, female migrants on social media regularly refer to this announcement with pride and admiration, and utilize it to motivate other Muslim women to go to ISIS's territories. This tweet posted by Female Migrant #2 on July 4th, shortly after the declaration, demonstrates her support of state-building efforts as she proudly declares:

*"The muslim ummah has no excuse to make hijrah [migration to ISIS territories] now. The khilafa [caliphate] is established, the flag is raised and the shariah put into practise."*⁹

Later that same day, she tweets this message:

*"The amazing feeling when you see the flag of tawheed [unity] everywhere, mujaahidiin [jihadist fighters] with theyr ak47 and shops closing for prayer. Allah akbar [God is the greatest]!"*¹⁰

Female Migrant #5 comments on those who, like her, have migrated:

*"It feels like I never left the West. Im surrounded by so many Brits and Europeans its unbelievable."*¹¹

Following her arrival to ISIS's territory, Female Migrant #7 proclaims:

*"I love walking around, Seeing Muhajireen [emigrants] of all races! Its so beautiful. Alhamdulillah [praise God] we finally have a State that all Muslims can call home."*¹²

The opportunity for female migrants to contribute towards state-building range from the practical (mothers, teachers, cooks, nurses) to the ideological (all female 'morality' brigades). By subscribing to efforts in state-building, British female migrants openly reject Western culture based on their perception of the failure or erosion of

multiculturalism in the UK as culled in literature. The opportunity to live in *and* contribute to this new society governed under Sharia law is a strong factor in their decision to renounce or forgo their previous ‘Western lives’ and instead live among others seeking to preserve their religious values, as noted in the studies of Ballard, 1996; Anwar, 2008; and Ahmed, 2009. They accept this new vision of society because it provides them with a sense of inclusion or acceptance they feel they cannot achieve in the UK. A society governed by a strict exegesis of Sharia law is ultimately perceived among the British female migrants in this case study as more desirable and beneficial to all Muslims desiring to live “closer to Allah.” For example, Female Migrant #7 insists to her followers:

“Syria is where u have the opportunity to prolong your life, If Muslims only knew!”¹³

Female Migrant #2 makes this suggestion to followers living in Britain:

“My humble question to my fellow british muslims protesting about sharia law. Why don’t you make hijrah [migration to ISIS territory]? I’m sure you would achieve more!”¹⁴

For female migrants, the appeal of religious purity and political unity within a territory is also worth defending - even with their own lives. Thus, migrating to territories controlled by ISIS is seen as worthwhile because here they are able to not only live honorably under Sharia, but also help spread ISIS’s vision of expanding this ideologically pure “state.” For instance, Female Migrant #5 appears to have just made *hijrah* when she tweets this message upon entering ISIS’s territory. She excitedly states:

“Alhamdulillah [praise God]. I have made it to Dar al-Islam and am finally living under the shade of Sharia. Join me my brothers and sisters.”¹⁵

Female Migrant #7 admits with pride:

“I live n the Lion’s Den. Its not as terrifying as ur led 2 believe! Come join us & b part of the State which shook the world off its feet!”¹⁶

For female migrants, living under a “higher law” is considered a great honor, however those who are martyred during such efforts will be rewarded in *jannah* (heaven). For example, Female Migrant #2 proclaims:

“There’s no such a thing as defeat. We Muslims will always win! It is either victory or martyrdom. Bringing khalif [caliphate] or attaining Al Jannah [heaven].”¹⁷

This same female migrant, along with Female Migrant #4, openly condemn family, friends, and even “cowardly males” who refuse to answer ISIS’s call to *hijrah* and “make [their] feet dusty” as dishonorable. Female Migrant #2 explains:

“I don’t understand the generation of our parents. Willingness to live in submission and in oppression under the kuffaar [unbelievers] law. Wheres the honour.”¹⁸

The findings of this analysis, similar to those in the Hoyle et al. (2015) study, also suggest that women are willing to contribute to state-building because they view ISIS’s territories as ‘safe havens’ where they are free to follow Islam in its entirety and ultimately ‘live by *Tawheed*’ [the concept of oneness-or that there is no God but God] (p. 12). This is apparent in the Twitter profile of Female Migrant #7, in which she comments:

“Born+raised in the west, Ive never felt more safe+protected than n #IS.”¹⁹

As suggested in the literature of Shiffer & Wagner, 2011; Anwar, 2008; and Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010, living in ISIS territory may be perceived as attractive if one has experienced the stigma of anti-Islamic discrimination or alienation as a Muslim living in a Muslim-minority society. For instance, an anonymous Muslim female posts this comment on Female Migrant #3’s ask.fm page:

“You know what I hate about the West is that they call everyone who made hijrah to Shaam [Syria] traitors to their country. How can you be a traitor to your country when it never fully accepted you or your beliefs? Today, my first day of Uni I got called a “suicide bomber” and was the butt of several ISIS jokes. All because I chose to dress modestly. May Allah bless you and everyone who went there and all those who are trying hard to make his word one. It really sucks being stuck here.”²⁰

Additionally, as culled from the studies of Yasmeen, 2008; Brown, 2006; and Phillips, 2006, Muslim women raised in Muslim-minority countries voice in their accounts that they feel more acceptance living among those who primarily identify with Islam in ISIS-controlled territories, than among those of the same ethnicity, nationality, et cetera. This is in line with ISIS’s extremist narrative that “rejects the notion of states so the vision of the ‘Caliphate’ itself becomes the basis for imagining a unified ummah” (Furlow et al., 2014). This rejection of states and nationalities is apparent in the Tumblr blog post of Female Migrant #4:

“We make it known to the world that never has our allegiance been to the Scottish, British, Swedish, American, Canadian etc...government.”²¹

RELIGIOUS DUTY:

The next theme found among British Muslim *muhajirats* (female migrants) is the belief that *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) is a mandatory responsibility and religious duty (*fard*) for Muslims, according to ISIS's interpretation. While this theme was not specifically explored in the literature review, identity as identifying oneself as Muslim first and the responsibilities that come with preserving one's religious values was. Since all of the women in the case study are confirmed to have made *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) to Syria or Iraq, they emphatically promote this duty as an obligation to their online audiences. For example, Female Migrant #3 urges her online 'followers' with this tweet:

“Trying to build an ‘Islamic state’ is a Must [fardh ayn] upon all Muslims.”²²

One interesting feature observed online by the researcher is the number of young, teenage Muslim women 'following' the accounts of female migrants in this case study. Activity on ask.fm reveals a few of these young Muslim women directly pose questions related to *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) to this group of British female migrants. For instance, one anonymous user asks the advice of Female Migrant #3 on what to do *“if you are a teen muslimah and want to make hijrah?”²³* Another anonymous 'teenage' Muslim female seems desirous to perform her *fard* (obligatory) duty of making *hijrah* to Syria or Iraq, but appears torn between it and leaving behind her family and loved ones. She posts this question on Female Migrant #3's ask.fm page:

“Hello sister! I am 17 years old and I want to come to Syria very much. I have done my research but the only obstacle i am facing is my family. They have

no idea i want to join isis. I want to come very badly but how? do i leave without telling them? what did you do? ”²⁴

Female Migrant #3 responds:

“I tried giving them daw’ah [invitation to Islam]. They were completely at the end spectrum of the correct aqeeda [discourse], then I knew they would be an obstacle, so I came without telling them. ”²⁵

The perception of parents as an “obstacle” or “barrier” for *muhajirats* (female migrants) is common and was noted several times throughout the analysis. A few female migrants, when asked about this subject by prospective female migrants, couple their advice with religious recitations of Qur’anic verses. For example, Female Migrant #3 offers this verse to another prospective female migrant who is torn about leaving because she *“is the youngest and the last to leave her mother. ”²⁶* Female Migrant #3 responds:

“He [God] will give you something better than what has been taken from you. ”²⁷

Female Migrant #4 also discusses the difficulty in leaving family behind and offers this advice in her Tumblr blog, *Diary of a Muhajirah*:

“Leaving your family behind for the sake of Allah [God] is a big enough Fitnah [trial] to handle, but realistically that is the smallest hurdle you will face along this blessed path involving your family...it will be emotionally draining. ”²⁸

Later, she adds this thought:

“Most sisters I have come across have been in university studying courses with many promising paths, with big, happy families and friends and everything in the Duniyah [world] to persuade one to stay behind and enjoy the luxury. If we had stayed behind, we could have been blessed with all of it from a relaxing and

comfortable life and lots of money. Wallahi [I swear to God] that's not what we want, and in these lands we are rewarded for our sacrifices involved in our Hijrah (migration to ISIS territory). ”²⁹

Difficulty in fulfilling one's duty by leaving family behind is not the only barrier perceived by female migrants. The physical nature of performing this *Fard* (obligatory) duty and making *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) can be difficult and demanding, as well as dangerous. Two of the female migrants (Female Migrant #1 and #6) 'share' their migration experience of being detained at the border by Turkish authorities when attempting to cross into Syria. Female Migrant #6 tweets:

“Even my own self, I was caught at the border but by Allah's [God's] will I was released that same night and allowed to cross so never lose hope. ”³⁰

A *muhajirah* (female migrant) living in Mosul, Iraq, Female Migrant #5 echoes her sentiments on the difficulty of fulfilling this *Fard* (duty):

“Don't expect to come here and not be tested. Tests in ways you will never expect. ”³¹

The duty of migration is also perceived among *muhajirats* (female migrants) as the ultimate act that will bring them closer to God and guarantee their place in *jannah* (heaven), as noted previously. Similar to the Hoyle et al. (2015) study, the women in the sample possess deep beliefs in the afterlife and attribute fulfilling this religious duty as crucial to securing their place in heaven (p. 13). For example, Female Migrant #2 tweets her followers:

“This [migration] was never meant for ease but a lesson of patience and hardship to understand what jannah [heaven] was always meant for and see if we’re worthy of it.”³²

In another example, Female Migrant #1 writes:

“We love death as you love life” (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 13).

When an anonymous user posts this comment to Female Migrant #3... *“U haven’t posted in 3 days. Lets pray you’re dead...”³³* she replies by saying:

“Pray I’m a Shaheeda [martyred woman] in sha Allah :)”³⁴

Their martyrdom, as well as the martyrdom of their *mujahideen* (jihadist fighters) husbands is an imminent reality in the lives of the female migrants living in conflict zones. This reality is frequently mentioned in the Tumblr blog of Female Migrant #4, as she writes concerning migration, marriage, and martyrdom:

“Sisters with this comes the great acceptance and hefty reality which is that this decision means we will probably have to sooner or later hear the news of our husbands success, which is shahadah”³⁵ [the researcher believes this female migrant meant to say “*shaheed*,” which is the term used to refer to a martyred man. *Shahadah* refers to the dual testimony declaring belief in God and in his prophet, Muhammad].

Female Migrant #7 tweets:

“Reality hits you when u celebrate a walimah [marriage banquet] and console a widow on the same day. Life in Dar ul-Jihad!”³⁶

Female Migrants #1 and #8 lost their husbands, both ISIS fighters, late last year and tweet about this experience. Female Migrant #8 was only married to her Swedish jihadist

fighter for a short time before he was killed in battle on December 5th, 2014. She tweets about it on her Twitter account shortly after she hears the news:

“May Allah [God] accept my husband as shaheed [martyred] and reunite me and him in highest level of Jannah [heaven] Ameen. Till martyrdom do us part...truly it has!”³⁷

Female Migrant #1 tweets this message soon after she learns of her husband’s death on the battlefield, stating:

“Wallahi [I swear to God] i would never of thought I would be in shaam [Syria] yet alone being a widow at 18, we plot and plan but Allah [God] is the best of planners” (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 27).

Later in her Tumblr blog, despite acknowledging that she misses her husband, Female Migrant #1 appears to handle the news with forbearance and understanding, evident in this philosophical entry:

“My heart was content knowing that my husband had left this dunya [world] striving in the way of Allah insha’ Allah [God willing]” (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 27).

And she seems more resolute in her next blog post, indicating that reaching heaven is more important for him:

“ My hearts joy, my husband my best friend shaheed inshallah [martyred, God willing], some days I miss u more but in jannah [heaven] is everlasting joy.”
(Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 27).

SEARCHING FOR BELONGING AND PURPOSE IN SISTERHOOD:

Lastly, the theme of searching for belonging and purpose in this new sisterhood, as suggested in the literature, is appealing to British Muslim female migrants, especially if they have experienced exclusion or alienation in Western society. As noted previously, female migrants in the case study regularly tweet about the difficulty of “*living among the Kuffar*” (unbelievers) and the perception of religious intolerance in the West is also culled from the literature. For instance, Female Migrant #6 tweets:

*“The Kuffar [unbelievers] will not love you or appreciate you till you leave your Deen [religion]. No matter how hard you try to fit in with them, it just won't work.”*³⁸

The Hoyle et al. (2015) study also observes female migrants openly speaking of the camaraderie and sisterhood they experience within the ISIS territories and find that “the search for meaning, sisterhood, and identity is a key driving factor for women to travel” (p. 13). British female migrants seem to celebrate in being a part of the “caliphate sisterhood” online and employ this sense of belonging as propaganda in order to attract others who may be searching for acceptance. The following are examples of a few of the ‘enthusiastic’ tweets and posts demonstrating this phenomenon. For instance, Female Migrant #2 writes:

*“I can't even count how many sisters from different countries I have met. Allah [God] swt truly brings us together under 1 banner. Allahuakbar [God is greater]!”*³⁹

Female Migrant #7 tweets:

*“#Raqqa is filled w/beautiful righteous Muslims.”*⁴⁰

In another tweet, Female Migrant #2 shares:

“Being in a land of shariah and land of mujahideen [jihadist fighters]. What more can you ask for. This is also the best place for sisters to live.”⁴¹

Female Migrant #7 adds:

“When ur called “ukhti” (my sister) Its just beautiful. U feel like u belong to a family, U feel protected + safe. Alhamdulillah (praise God) for #IS.”⁴²

In utilizing social media as a tool for dissemination and recruitment, the female migrants in the analysis instead opt to advertise camaraderie, acceptance, and safety found in sisterhood. They exhort their audiences to make *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) to experience this “caliphate sisterhood,” an ultimate sense of belonging related to a global cause. Other motives for migration identified by the females themselves in this case study are the oppression of Muslims on a global scale and the perception that the ummah is under attack, the opportunity to build a new society, and marking the migration of faithful Muslim men and women as their religious duty and responsibility. The role of British female migrants within ISIS’s territory and online, as supporters and recruiters, is equally important to understanding the current allure of joining ISIS and is explored next.

THE ROLE OF FEMALE MIGRANTS IN ISIS-CONTROLLED TERRITORIES:

Life in ISIS-controlled territories is explained in great detail by the *muhajirats* (female migrants) themselves. Prolifically ‘sharing’ their experiences as residents in ISIS’s territories online, through Twitter and Tumblr blogs, is meant to not only gain followers and bolster support for ISIS, but also reinforce ISIS’s image of a righteous, ‘purist’ life under Sharia law. Within these territories, female migrants are observed to

act as key participants in upholding and maintaining ISIS's image, especially online. They are avid propagandists and devoted proselytizers, dedicated in promoting ISIS's campaign of state-building and expansion. These women are staunch advocates of the "caliphate sisterhood," portraying life within these territories as idyllic, posting pictures, and tweets, and light-hearted messages in social media. The 'passing on' or *disseminating* of content from other accounts is a necessary and common practice among female migrants, as well as making efforts to convince potential followers that life in ISIS's territories is worth undertaking *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory).

ISIS's sophisticated multimedia campaign of *jihadism* utilizes social media and other media to actively call upon men *and* women to become mobilized against the apostates who dishonor Islam and provoke its followers to defend Muslim honor. However, as noted previously in the Hoyle et al. study (2015) women are discouraged from fighting. This was confirmed by the twitter accounts of three British female migrants. For instance, when asked anonymously this question on ask.fm "*sister are you planning on joining the battlefield,*"⁴³ Female Migrant #3 responds:

*"There is nothing for women here with regards to qitaal [fighting] or anything of that sort right now believe me I have tried but maybe the time for us to participate is soon Allahu a'lam (most of those pictures you see online of women participating are not part of the Islamic groups and fight for "freedom" and democracy etc)."*⁴⁴

Female Migrant #4 echoes this statement:

*"About Jihad...I will be straight up and blunt with you all, there is absolutely nothing for sisters to participate in Qitaal (fighting)."*⁴⁵

Finally, Female Migrant #7 shares her feelings concerning this issue by simply tweeting:

“There are NO women engaged in military combat within #IS.”⁴⁶

Instead, female migrants promote a more important role for women within its territory - the privilege to be wives and mothers in this new, self-proclaimed “state.” Acceptance of the role as “*muslimah* mothers’ and the pride they express in fulfilling it is a recurrent theme among the women. British female migrants openly profess their responsibilities of supporting their fellow ‘brother fighters’ online, reinforcing state-building efforts, as well as the honor they find in marrying *jihadist* fighters and raising future *jihadist* children. According to Homa Khaleeli of *The Guardian* (2014), young, school-age girls back in Britain find appeal in this “romanticized” role ISIS is offering them online. And the female migrants themselves reinforce such notions, as Female Migrant #3 tweets:

“I came here for hijrah [migration to ISIS territory], to take care of my husband and fellow mujahideen [jihadist fighters] and to fulfill my duties as a muslimah [Muslim woman].”⁴⁷

Female Migrant #4 also comments on this role on her Tumblr blog:

“That is the reality of my dear sisters. We are created to be mothers and wives - as much as the western society has warped your views on this with a hidden feminist mentality...sisters don’t forsake this beautiful blessing being able to raise the future Mujahideen [jihadist fighters] of Shaam [Syria].”⁴⁸

This role also offers Muslim women the opportunity to serve in a cause much greater and larger than themselves (Khaleeli, 2014). This is perceived as a very desirable role among female migrants and their followers, as this researcher observes tweets and

posts of encouragement, inspiration, and even empowerment. The image of faithful, *Muslimah* women donating their time, skills, and education towards the building up of this new society is manifested in these accounts. For instance, when asked specifically by an anonymous user in ask.fm the question “*what can I do as a girl in Sham (Syria)?*”⁴⁹ Female Migrant #3 responds to her inquiry with words of empowerment:

*“The main role of the muhajirah [female migrants] here is to support her husband and his jihad and in sha Allah [God willing] to increase this ummah, however if you have Islamic ilm [knowledge] perhaps dawla [state] can sort something out for you where you could teach Syrians and muhajirahs [female migrants], and also any thing could be useful here and could provide the sister with something to do and to aid the state with, such as nursing, being a doctor etc.”*⁵⁰

Female Migrant #4’s blog provides her own words of inspiration to prospective migrants:

*“Our role is even more important as women in Islam...willing to sacrifice all their desires and give up their families and lives in the west in order to make Hijrah [migration to ISIS territory] and please Allah [God].”*⁵¹

Content such as this, with heavy religious and ideological rhetoric, may be difficult to resist, especially when read by an impressionable, young Muslim woman wanting to migrate.

Another desirable feature frequently advertised among the women in the case study is the understanding that residents in ISIS-held territories appear to be completely provided for by ISIS. Almost all of the British female migrants assert that they do not pay rent or utility bills. Additionally, women in the case study claim they are given an

allowance of food and some type of monetary stipend every month. It was also reported that those who choose to marry in ISIS's territories are given a house and a significant monetary wedding gift from ISIS. Some of the more prolific *muhajirat* (female migrant) bloggers write extensively about the concept of receiving *ghanimah* (spoils of war) as an advantage of living in ISIS territory. Female Migrant # 4 (reportedly from Scotland) explains these 'gifts of ghanimah' in her *Diary of a Muhajirah* blog:

*"In these lands we are rewarded for our sacrifices involved in our Hijrah [migration to ISIS territory], for example one is by receiving Ghanimah [spoils of war] ...taken off from the Kuffar (unbelievers) and handed to you personally by Allah [God] swt as a gift. Some of the many things include kitchen appliances from fridges, cookers, ovens, microwaves, milkshake machines etc, hoovers and cleaning products, fans and most importantly a house with free electricity and water provided to you due to the khilafah [caliphate] and no rent included."*⁵²

The *Diary of a Muhajirah* blog is quite popular among current and prospective female migrants because she provides in great detail what life under ISIS control is like. This type of information is seen as beneficial to those desiring to migrate to ISIS's territories, especially if they're accustomed to a more 'Westernized-type' of life. For instance, in one blog post Female Migrant #4 describes a typical day for *muhajirats* (female migrants):

"Your day will revolve around cooking, cleaning, looking after and sometimes even educating the children...you can have electricity most of the time or you can rarely have it...but you have to be prepared for not having your mobile charged or their not being light...and maybe even learn how to wash your clothes by

hand since you really cannot depend on the washing machine here.”⁵³

This female migrant appears to want to prepare prospective *muhajirats* (female migrants) for some of the hardships that lie ahead, especially when it pertains to living a more “domestic” type of lifestyle than others are perhaps used to. Thus, while it has been reported that life under ISIS-held territories is domestic in nature (Hoyle et al., 2015), this was confirmed in exploring the accounts of British female migrants in the analysis. Therefore, it is perceived that women living in ISIS-controlled territories spend most of their time in the home, which is substantiated by the findings of *Becoming Mulan* (Hoyle et al., 2015, p. 23). Yet, female migrants seem to embrace their domestic role. For example, Female Migrant #7 shares this light-hearted tweet:

*“Beautiful blue skies #Raqqa today. What to do? Do the washing of course!
Spoken like a true domestic pro!”*⁵⁴

The majority of the time, however, tweets and blog posts appear to mainly supply audiences, especially those preparing to migrate to ISIS-controlled territories, with the information they will need for emigration. For example, in another blog post by Female Migrant #4 she writes:

*“The winters here are freezing, trust me I’m from North of Britain and even still I found it cold. Bring a warm coat.”*⁵⁵

Other times, she gives the impression that she is seeking to ease any reservations prospective female migrants may have in making *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory). For instance, she reassures readers in one post that they will find basic hygienic supplies in ISIS’s territories:

“You can find shampoos soaps and other female necessities here, so do not stress

if you think you will be experiencing some cavewomen life here.”⁵⁶

Sharing tweets and pictures of food, either prepared by the female migrants themselves or purchased at the store indicates that much of these women’s time is spent cooking meals. A few ‘share’ their pleasure in finding ‘junk food’ or Western-type of foods, such as a favorite candy bar or drink, while shopping. One Female Migrant #6 tweets a picture of her lunch (see Figure 2) with this message:



Figure 2... “Lunchtime under the #Khilafah that’s right chicken n chips and pizza, fast food exists here too.”⁵⁷

Female Migrant #7 tweets:

“Dinner. Simple. Delicious. Alhamdulillah [thanks be to God] To top it off, kids asleep+we have electricity! #SimplePleasures in #IS.”⁵⁸

Despite this image of ‘carefree’ tweets and ‘shared’ photographs, British female migrants make it clear that the motive for joining ISIS must be genuine and that above all performing *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) should be done for *Allah* (God). Female

Migrant #4 urges those interested in migrating to Syria or Iraq to come with only sincere intentions, and insists that young single women traveling to ISIS-controlled territories to not delay in marrying once they arrive. She even exhorts her single sisters who hope to come and remain unmarried, that this is completely out of the question, especially when all are expected to live under Sharia law. She explains this in one of her posts:

“The reality is that to stay without a man here is really difficult...sisters please do not listen to any sources online...encouraging and supporting sisters to make hijrah [migration to ISIS territory] and never getting married. There is no housing for ‘single muhajirat’...makkar (type of women’s hostel) is just a place where someone may allow you to reside till you get married.”⁵⁹

Again, her post confirms the importance of women fulfilling their “*muslimah*” role of becoming wives and mothers in this new society. This post also references the type of ‘short-term’ housing for unmarried women, known as *makkar* or *maqkar*, a type of women’s hostel. A few of the single British female migrants ‘share’ their experiences living in this type of housing upon arrival to ISIS territory. In their accounts, they claim that they were married within a few months, at which point ISIS gave them houses.

This type of housing arrangement also demonstrates their strict interpretation of Sharia law in preventing gender-mixing and enforcing proper relations between men and women living in ISIS-controlled territories. The British female migrants in the case study not only approve of such interpretations but also wholeheartedly endorse them and their role in sustaining obedience to such laws. They generally praise the privilege of living under ISIS control and pay tribute to its benefits. For instance, Female Migrant #3, a strong supporter of living under ISIS control posts:

“...they [ISIS] set up Islamic courthouses and also set up houses for families, the apartment I’m living in is provided by ISIS. They provide electricity and also they give food and clothes [mostly Ghanima- ‘spoils of war’] to families, today for example we received fresh bread. It’s almost like a normal town but the shops all close for salah [prayer] and you see mujahideen [jihadist fighters] everywhere.”⁶⁰

More importantly, as a requirement of living in ISIS’s territories and under Sharia law, women are expected to maintain its standard of modesty by wearing the *niqab* (face veil covering all but the eyes) in public areas at all times. The female migrants were aware of this requirement by ISIS and utilize their social media accounts to educate those interested in migrating that it is strictly enforced. Female Migrant #3 explains this in more detail on the Tumblr page she manages for al-Khanssaa, the all-female brigade formed by ISIS as a sort of ‘modesty’ patrol. She states:

“Women have to wear the niqab [face veil] outside. However, if they’re at home, excluding if there are non mahram men there (men who are allowed to marry her) then she does not have to wear it and also the scarf, like around her husband, father, other, sibling, her muslim friends etc. And if a women in Syria goes outside without a niqab she’ll get warnings and then if she doesn’t listen then she’ll get whipped.”⁶¹

This brigade is allegedly responsible for enforcing morality codes, modest dress, and gender segregation. These all-female units, proposed and endorsed by ISIS, ‘police’ the streets of Raqqa, Syria, an ISIS-stronghold, with the duty of ensuring that women in ISIS territory obey and observe strict Sharia laws of modesty and comporment (The Economist, 2014).

The existence of the al-Khanssaa Brigade was confirmed not only by the female-migrants themselves, but also in an analysis report by the Quilliam Foundation's Charlie Winter (2015). In this study, Winter translates a document entitled *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study*, which circulated online among ISIS supporters recently in January 2015. According to Winter, this propaganda document, uploaded by the al-Khanssaa Brigade's media wing, not only presents the "realities" of living as a female *jihadist* in "IS" [ISIS]-held territories, but verifies the "divine" importance of motherhood, already emphasized in this study. He states, "this semi-official ISIS manifesto on women gives a lengthy rebuttal of 'Western civilization' and universal human rights such as gender equality...[and that] indeed all-female police brigades operate in Iraq and Syria" (Winter, 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, it states that women are appointed "the qualities of sedentariness, stillness and stability, and men, their opposites: movement and flux" (Winter, 2015, p. 9). Conceptually, the themes being used by British female migrants online to recruit female Muslims coincide with this treatise and demonstrate the effectiveness of social media in enticing others to become 'radicalized then mobilized.'

SUMMARY

The motives found to influence young British Muslim females to migrate to ISIS-controlled territories, along with identifying what their role is in these territories, are identified by the female migrants themselves. According to the findings, all of the themes culled in the literature review were found to influence women to migrate, for instance, Muslim identity and belonging, both individually and within the ummah, along with

attitudes and perceptions of religious discrimination (Islamophobia) and the erosion of multiculturalism do guide young Muslim women from Western countries, like the UK, to join ISIS.

The most frequently mentioned motive for migration among the women in the case study is the belief that the ummah is under attack or in distress. This is spoken of at length among the British female migrants. Depictions of Muslims enduring offensive treatment or oppression is prolifically ‘tweeted’ about online, as well as ‘shared’ in the form of disturbing and graphic images of dead Muslim women and children. The narrative of ISIS operates to unify the whole of the ummah under this negative proliferation of content and images and serves to hasten all Muslims to make *hijrah* to ISIS’s territories before the impending ‘Day of Judgment’ (Wood, 2015).

Another prominent theme among British female migrants is the unique opportunity to build a new society and contribute to efforts in state-building. Women subscribing to such efforts not only openly reject Western culture but also believe the failure of multiculturalism in the UK has led to feelings of exclusion or alienation as discussed in the literature. Thus, they willingly accept this new vision for society and wholeheartedly subscribe to it because it allows them to ultimately live and be governed under the ‘higher law’ of Sharia, as well as take part in a ‘higher,’ worthwhile cause. Among the female migrants this is not only appealing but worth defending with their lives and they condemn those unwilling to migrate or make the sacrifice of martyrdom. Women from Muslim-minority countries express a sense of safety and acceptance residing within ISIS territory and therefore encourage others to migrate to this society.

An additional prominent theme found among women migrating to the Syrian conflict is that *hijrah* (migration to ISIS territory) is perceived as a mandatory (*fard*) religious duty for Muslims. This responsibility is frequently mentioned among the British female migrants. The emotional difficulty of leaving family behind is also discussed among females already migrated to ISIS's territories and is therefore revealed as a barrier. Advice and religious encouragement is given to help those experiencing the difficulty of leaving parents and loved ones behind. The possibility of their husband's martyrdom, as well as their own, is also a constant reality for these women and is evident in their 'tweets' and posts as they learn to handle such news with forbearance and understanding.

Lastly, the search for belonging and purpose in this new sisterhood is expressed among the women in the case study. As suggested in the literature review, this is appealing among British Muslim female migrants if they have previously experienced discrimination, exclusion, or alienation in Western society. Female migrants regularly tweet about the difficulty of "*living among the Kuffars*" (unbelievers), and this perception of religious intolerance in the West is also culled from the literature. Female migrants openly speak of and refer to the sense of camaraderie and sisterhood found in joining ISIS in its territories and they celebrate belonging to the "caliphate sisterhood."

The role of female migrants in ISIS-controlled territories is also discussed in great detail by the *muhajirats* (female migrants) themselves. Functioning as avid propagandists, proselytizers, and recruiters, they advocate for ISIS online, describing the "caliphate sisterhood" as idyllic and posting pictures and light hearted 'tweets' to entice others to join. The role of serving as the wives of *jihadists* and mothers of future *jihadists*

in this new self proclaimed “state” is seen as a divine role, honor, and privilege. British female migrants appear to not only accept this role but also embrace it with pride, as they voice the honor and privilege of participating in a cause greater than themselves. Female migrants are encouraged to donate their time, skills, and education towards state-building and this appears to empower them. However, the reality is that life under ISIS’s control is mostly domestic in nature, and women in its territories spend most of their time at home cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Al-Khanssaa, an all-female brigade, ensures that when women do venture outside they observe and obey Sharia law of modest dress and comportment and gender segregation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MOBILIZATION:

Female migrants and ISIS-supporters are prolific ‘bloggers’ and ‘tweeters.’ Based on the analysis of content, social media is evidently being used as the tool of choice for the radicalization and mobilization of women to ISIS’s agenda. The extensive utilization of social media among female migrants as ISIS supporters has given ISIS an invaluable propaganda apparatus (Hoyle et al., 2015, p.15). This case study of British female migrants utilize online platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and ask.fm to support efforts in ‘state-hood,’ advertising a new society under Sharia and recruiting Muslim female audiences to ISIS’s ideology.

Contact initiated through such forums, for instance, from female Muslim audiences on ask.fm and Tumblr, usually involve inquiries posed to female migrants about how specifically to travel to ISIS’s territories; i.e., what one should bring and whom one should contact upon arriving in Syria or Iraq. Usually at that point, the prospective female migrant is encouraged to “message privately” using instant messaging services such as KiK and Wickr. For example, Female Migrant #5 makes this comment to her followers: *“Sisters who need any help regarding Hijrah can message me on Kik.”*⁶² Along with Wickr and KiK, ask.fm seems to be the current ‘app of choice’ among recruiters and their recruits because it allows an individual to post anonymously, as well as post the comment to Twitter or Facebook without needing to identify the author. A few of the female

migrants seem to prefer using ask.fm because of its question and answer format and its users' ability to maintain anonymity.

Other multimedia outlets aimed at Muslim female audiences are meant to draw interest in ISIS. For instance, in November of 2014, ISIS allegedly launched the media site “Zora Foundation” described as an ‘ISIS finishing school,’ complete with tips, recipes, and even advice on how to prepare to join ISIS-controlled territories (Khaleeli, 2014). (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Source: *the guardian*, Homa Khaleeli. A page from the website “Zora Foundation,” dubbed an ISIS finishing school. 5 November 2014.

Mark Tran’s (2014) article in *The Guardian* highlights the nature of the website as catering to Muslim women interested in marrying *jihadist* fighters and becoming

mothers, featuring videos illustrating animations of sewing machines and cooking hobs, a certain type of flattop cooking appliance.

From the analysis, the captured network of eight British female migrants, though small, was significant and demonstrates how social media sites, such as Twitter, are an effective tool in influencing supporters and sympathizers based on the ability for accounts to be ‘followed.’ For instance, the seven active social media accounts of British female migrants had a combined total of 6,826 followers, illustrating the probability that some of their ‘followers’ will attempt (or may have already attempted) migration to Syria or Iraq if given the opportunity. This analysis also demonstrates the reality that these women are connected to a much larger online network. To illustrate this point, using a simple ‘snowball’ method, the researcher was able to quickly gather an additional 12 Western female migrants based on their interactions with at least two or more of the original seven British female migrants, mapping them as part of a much larger “caliphate sisterhood” network. As a result, instead of 6,826 followers, this larger network now had a combined total of 9,294 followers, ultimately enlarging its potential scope of reach.

According to Klausen (2015), “Twitter networks, utilized for purposes of recruitment and indoctrination, as well as to build a transnational community of violent extremism, are successful because they drive traffic to other social media platforms” (p. 17). Thus, the proliferation of online male *and* female recruiters and social media users, noted among think tanks and the media, has dramatically expanded the jihadist grasp and potency outside Syria’s and Iraq’s conflict zones.

Another interesting dynamic of social media’s involvement in mobilizing women to ISIS-controlled territories is its effectiveness in using viral pictures as an illustrative tool.

Today, images and photographs captured in ISIS-controlled territories are instantly ‘shared’ with followers and supporters online. The researcher observed that this was a frequent practice among the British female migrants. Many of the female migrants have sent, received, and ‘re-tweeted’ dozens of images, with or without messages attached, but still containing deep-seeded meaning. Even the widespread use of “*jihadist* selfies,” a term coined by the media, by both male foreign fighters and female migrants was observed.

An Economist article published in the summer of 2014 entitled *It Ain't half hot here, mum*, demonstrates this phenomenon. The article highlights how the flow of male foreign fighters to the battlefield last summer generated a deluge of pictures ranging widely from gory and brutal beheadings and hangings to pictures of kittens, sunsets, and hanging out with friends. Similarly, Klausen (2015) finds this phenomenon in his study, *Tweeting the Jihad*, emphasizing, “this mixture of brutality with innocuous tourist pictures [as meant] to drill home one message: You belong with us because *jihad* is an individual obligation for every Muslim...fighting - and dying - will give your life meaning, and is just plain fun and similarly exciting, but ‘better’ than playing video games like ‘Call of Duty’ on the couch at home” (p.19, 20). Quite often snapshots of kittens, landscapes, and hanging out with friends are ‘shared’ to create the feeling that life in Raqqa or Mosul is more desirable and meaningful than life back home.

In a study by ICSR researchers Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann entitled *#Greenbirds* (2014), they too identify and measure the networks of Syrian foreign fighters based on Facebook and Twitter accounts. They find that “disseminators - defined as unaffiliated individuals who are broadly sympathetic with the

jihadist insurgents in Syria - play a significant role in supplying information about the conflict” (p. 8). In Klausen’s (2015) study, data from the Facebook and Twitter accounts of 59 Western fighters known to be in Syria are collected. Its content analysis demonstrates recurrent themes from disseminators as proselytizing, religious instruction, and jihadist dogma discussions (2015, p. 10). Klausen (2015) also finds that women were managing three disseminator accounts, based outside of the Syrian conflict. Identified as @Amaatullahearly, Umm Muthannah, and @greenbird 313, these women, believed to be from the UK, were “disseminating very violent material on behalf of ISIL” [ISIS] (Klausen, 2015, p. 15), demonstrating the effectiveness of social media in global *jihadism*.

This striking characteristic of women’s involvement as ‘disseminators’ is also illustrated in this case study, indicating that the social media use of female propagandists and proselytizers to spread *jihadism* is a growing phenomenon. British female migrants repeatedly use social media as a tool for disseminating and spreading *jihadist* propaganda and extending the scope of associated networks. Social media content, whether in the form of ‘tweets’ or blogs, attempts to make extremism and *jihadism* appear normal, desirable and worthwhile. Overall the involvement of women, both online as strong supporters of *jihadist* insurgency and those physically residing in ISIS-controlled territories, will continue to increase as long as ISIS employs its female migrants to serve in these types of capacities within the domain of social media.

CONCLUSION

While much has been reported on the flux of male Western foreign fighters, particularly *jihadists*, traveling to join the opposition groups in the Syrian conflict, little is known about the small but significant number of Muslim women also traveling to conflict zones and joining extremists groups like ISIS. The following was concluded based on two key findings from the content analysis. First, despite media claims, women within ISIS's territories are not permitted to take part in *qitaal* (fighting). The women themselves in their online accounts confirmed this. As a result, they cannot be classified as 'foreign fighters' like their male counterparts. Instead, these women prefer to be identified as *muhajirats* (female migrants). Second, research suggests that these female migrants, many British Muslim women from the UK are equally drawn to ISIS's ideology and the state-building mission as Muslim men are (Hoyle et al., 2015; Saltman & Winter, 2014).

Thus, the paramount purpose of the thesis was an attempt to explain the allure of ISIS for British Muslim women in the UK and identify reasons why they choose to leave their Western lives behind for ISIS's "caliphate sisterhood." Although they emigrate to ISIS territory in Syria or Iraq for various reasons, these motivations are imperative to understand in order to successfully develop a counter-narrative aimed at female audiences interested in migrating. Equally important to comprehend is the honorable role ISIS offers its female residents, as well as the wider implications social media and other multimedia platforms have in mobilizing Muslim women to the conflict. Although this thesis may only offer a starting point for discussing the emerging trend of British Muslim females migrating to ISIS-controlled territories, its analysis and crucial findings do

provide an in-depth look at the motives and *self-identified* roles of female migrants residing within its territories.

Based on this case study of British female migrants, the following key findings were drawn. First, female migrants strongly believe that the *ummah* (global Muslim community) is under attack and that evidence of the oppression of Muslims can be found in various conflicts throughout the world. This theme, cleverly promoted and reinforced by ISIS through propaganda and dissemination, serves to then emotionally draw Muslim women *and* men into its territories to join its efforts in defeating the *kuffars* (infidels) and vindicating the *ummah*. Second, Muslim women migrating to ISIS's territories do so because they see this as a unique opportunity to help build a new society and contribute to ISIS's state-building efforts. Third, they believe that it is the mandatory duty of *all* able-bodied Muslims, both male and female, to migrate. This theme is strategically important to ISIS's ideology and mission, as they profess Syria to be the location and path to the Day of Judgment (Wood, 2015). Lastly, women joining ISIS do so in an attempt to secure a sense of belonging and camaraderie within a sisterhood they believe cannot be found living among *kuffars* (unbelievers) in Western society.

British female migrants are observed to be prolific 'tweeters' and 'bloggers,' which suggests the proliferation of online female migrants and disseminators using social media to serve in the recruitment, propaganda dissemination, and proselytizing to 'radicalize then mobilize' other Muslim women to ISIS's territories. Similar findings in the Carter et al. study (2014) note that the use of social media is unique to the time. In fact, according to Carter et al. (2014), "Syria may be the first conflict in which a large number of

Western fighters [and female supporters] have document[ed] their experience of conflict in real-time” (p. 29).

The large groups of male foreign fighters and female migrants traveling to the conflict also demonstrate the increasing span of ISIS’s network of supporters, ready and willing to engage in state-building efforts at whatever costs. While women are not permitted by ISIS to engage in fighting, instead serving in the capacity of mothers and wives to *jihadists* and future *jihadists*, this may change in the near future. Given the sense of their strong beliefs in martyrdom and their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the *Khilafah* (“caliphate”), displayed in many of their ‘tweets’ and posts in the analysis, these women appear inclined to act if they are one day allowed to do so.

Therefore, the current capacity and intellect of young Muslim women joining ISIS in its efforts should not be underestimated or left un-researched. As this thesis has shown, along with the studies before it (Hoyle et al., 2015; Saltman & Winter, 2015; Winter, 2015), the overall involvement of women, both as strong supporters of online radicalization and residents of ISIS’s territories, has the potential to escalate and expand in size if left unchecked. Unfortunately, as long as ISIS continues to employ its female population to serve in these functions, willing female migrants and ISIS supporters will continue to make extremism and *jihadism* appear normal, necessary, desirable and worthwhile to their online followers.

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APPENDIX A

THE CAPTURED NETWORK OF FEMALE MIGRANTS

8 British Muslim Female Migrant's Tumblr and Twitter Accounts:

http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com	(inactive-see Hoyle et al., 2015).
https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahid1	(active)
http://al-khanssa.tumblr.com	(active)
https://twitter.com/ummlayth2 http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com	(active)
https://twitter.com/ummmuawiyahh	(active)
https://twitter.com/ukht_fillah2	(active)
https://twitter.com/BintWater	(active)
https://twitter.com/Isa_Muh89	(active)

Additional 12 Western Muslim Female Migrant's Tumblr and Twitter Accounts:

https://twitter.com/_BirdOfJannah http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com	(active)
https://twitter.com/umm_esa73	(Inactive -account suspended by Twitter - see Hoyle et al., 2015).
https://twitter.com/bintlad3n	(Inactive - account suspended by Twitter - see Hoyle et al., 2015).
https://twitter.com/UmmHussain103	(Inactive - account deleted by Twitter – see Hoyle et al., 2015)
https://twitter.com/UmmMuhajirah_	(active)

https://twitter.com/Siddiqa1905	(active)
https://twitter.com/mario51	(active)
https://twitter.com/UmmSalahudin	(active)
https://twitter.com/bint_ibraheem97	(active)
https://twitter.com/biint_amina	(active)
https://twitter.com/muhajirahfillah	(active)
https://twitter.com/UmmYaqin	(active)

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