



Universiteit Leiden

Master Thesis

Gendered Jihad – Recruitment Strategy of the Islamic State

Helen Stenger

S1848518
July 2017
International Relations
Specialization: International Studies
Master of Arts
Leiden University
Supervision: Dr. Nankyung Choi

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*"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."*¹

- Umm-Layth, female dropout from Glasgow University living in ISIS controlled territory.

¹ Viano, Emilio, C. "Cybercrime, Organized Crime, and Societal Responses: International Approaches." (2016), p. 31.

Gendered Jihad – Recruitment Strategy of the Islamic State

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past few years the news all over Europe included headlines about citizens leaving their home country to fight for the terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).² The increasing number of individuals radicalizing for ISIS leaves the population of Europe, and generally Western countries, including North America and Australia, with a lack of understanding. Why would someone leave their home country to go to a foreign country and fight the *jihad*?³ It is particularly puzzling, because ISIS undermines Western values, such as freedom of speech, religion, and sexuality.

When analyzing the phenomenon of the radicalization for ISIS of individuals living in the West, it is essential to consider the approximately ten percent who are women.⁴ Specifically, because the terrorist group acknowledges a fundamentalist view on women's rights and gender equality the incomprehension is especially strong concerning them.⁵ Even more confusing is the fact that ISIS "justifies" misogynist practices, including sex trafficking and slavery of women through its interpretations of the Islam.⁶ Moreover, although ten percent may not sound high, it makes ISIS the most successful Islamic terrorist group of *muhajirat*⁷ in history.⁸

One aspect which may contribute to the high influx of women may be the advanced recruitment strategy of ISIS. This entails online recruitment via social media, online magazines as well as on-site recruitment. ISIS applies this strategy to indoctrinate their potential members from all around the world.

To help understand the large number of *muhajirat* from the West, this thesis will investigate into which factors affect women's radicalization process. Therefore, first the motivating factors for the emigration will be examined. Furthermore, the advanced recruitment strategy

² Rösing, Patrick. "Jung, männlich, aus der Stadt: Was europäische IS-Kämpfer gemein haben." (2016).

³ Refers to the holy war against the enemies of the Islam.

⁴ Zakaria, Rafia. "Women and Islamic Militancy." (2015), p. 9.

⁵ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren.

"Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

⁶ The Middle East Media Research Institute. "Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet on Female Slaves." (2014).

⁷ Female migrants. (2014).

⁸ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 503.

through which ISIS indoctrinates potential members will be analyzed. The thesis will argue that recruitment is an important aspect of radicalization, because it directly connects with the motivating factors of the individuals and frames the perspective of the affected women. The combination of the motivating factors and the recruitment will lead to the finalizing of the radicalization process. Understanding the connection between the recruitment and the motivating factors will in turn aid to draw implications for policy advice on effective counter-terrorism measures. Hence, my research question is: *To what extent does the recruitment strategy of the Islamic State foster the radicalization process of Western women to join the Caliphate?*

1.1 Conceptualization

Radicalization is a highly contested concept within academic literature. This may be due to the fact that the definition of radicalization depends on the historical and social context.⁹ For instance, the normativity of religious orthodoxy deviates in Western countries compared to more Muslim coined countries. However, although radicalization is context specific, in the following radicalization is defined as the "*process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs*".¹⁰ It is important to point out that within this definition radicalization does not imply executing violence.

1.2 Contribution to Research

This thesis will contribute to academia, because there is a lack of scientific research concerning radicalization, particularly with a gendered approach. Hence, this research will add to the existing literature by identifying whether there is a correlation between the recruitment strategies and the motivating factors with a focus on women. The value of the thesis is taking both, potential motivating factors and the recruitment into consideration.

Additionally, the importance of analyzing motivating factors of radicalized women also has practical reasons. These become apparent when considering that ISIS is the first Islamic terrorist organization which managed to radicalize such a high number of women.¹¹ Apart

⁹ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 3.

¹⁰ Borum, Randy. "Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories." (2011), p. 9.

¹¹ Saltman, Erin. M., and Smith, Melanie. "Till Martrdom do us part. Gender and the ISIS Phenomenom." (2015), p. 4.

from posing a threat to international security when returning to their home countries, these women need to be prevented from emigrating in the first place. Analyzing the motivating factors of these women may identify risk factors of Islamic radicalization. Furthermore, the influence of the propaganda applied by ISIS is essential when attempting to understand the radicalization process. This will help to establish successful gender-specific counter-terrorism measures which directly appeal to the affected women. Therefore, combining gender with terrorism research becomes indispensable as *muhajirat* pose a significant risk for international security.

1.3 Methodology

To answer my research question and gain a deeper understanding of the motivational factors and the connection with the applied recruitment, primary and secondary sources will be analyzed. Concerning the primary sources, non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, newspaper articles, books, and social media channels of ISIS adherents will shed light on the motivating factors and the recruitment strategy. Additionally, propaganda published by the Islamic State itself will be examined, such as the "Dabiq" magazine and the propaganda magazine for women "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade".¹² Moreover, secondary sources will be used, including academic literature and interviews with ISIS defectors as well as former recruiters.

A selection bias might be caused by the fact that the available data have mostly been gathered by Western scholars. However, as the research is focused specifically on women socialized in the West this might not cause a disadvantage. Furthermore, the external validity of the interview videos may be limited, since they have not been conducted by me. Nevertheless, they provide crucial information concerning the factors motivating the women and propaganda mechanisms applied by ISIS. In the investigation triangulation will be used, including propaganda published by ISIS, academic literature, books, interviews, NGO reports, and newspaper articles, in order to maximize the archival coverage and to reveal possible biases in the sources.

¹² Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015).

It is key to understand that this analysis only focuses on emigration of women of non-Muslim countries. Hence, the findings may not be generalizable to *muhajirat* of Muslim countries, because ISIS applies a different recruitment strategy in these countries.¹³ Albeit, many women also emigrate from Muslim countries, such as Indonesia, this is still highly ignored in the academic literature.¹⁴ Additionally, the reasons for joining the *jihad* and for carrying out a terrorist attack may differ. Although, ISIS encourages affiliates to carry out terrorist attacks when they have no possibility to emigrate to the Caliphate, it has not been researched yet whether these motivating factors are similar.

In the subsequent chapter, the preliminary profile of the characteristics of women who joined the terrorist organizations will be outlined. Afterwards, the literature review concerning the motivating factors of the women will be discussed. The third chapter will then explain the recruitment strategy of ISIS and analyze the themes used in their propaganda. A concluding part of the third chapter will connect the factors motivating the women and the recruitment and shed light on how ISIS appeals to the specific individuals. The fourth chapter will provide policy advice for counter-terrorism initiatives on the basis of the conclusions from the analysis. Furthermore, the threat of female returnees from ISIS controlled territory will be addressed. The final discussion section will put forward implications for the debate of the combination of gender and terrorism. Generally, the core argument of the thesis is that certain motivating factors are necessary as precondition in order for the recruitment to appeal to the individual. However, without the recruitment the individual would not radicalize for ISIS.

¹³ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹⁴ Lamb, Kate. "Indonesian women being radicalised into would-be suicide bombers." (2017).

Chapter 2: Motivating Factors

In the following chapter, it will be examined whether specific characteristics can describe the *muhajirat*. However, because the emigration of western women to ISIS controlled territory is a current phenomenon, the findings are preliminary and it is not certain whether they are representative. The lack of knowledge is also caused by affected governments not disclosing these facts. Nevertheless, some studies were successful in gathering information, which will be outlined in the following. Afterwards, the literature review of the motivating factors will be presented. The factors will be divided into subsections, including sociological, political, religious, and psychological factors as well as *female jihad*¹⁵ as a factor. To examine the influence of the recruitment on the radicalization process it is essential to first consider the factors which put individuals at risk for this process. This chapter will conclude with preliminary conclusions of the motivating factors.

2.1 Preliminary Profile of ISIS Affiliates

There is a consensus in the academic literature that in the Western world the individuals most vulnerable to radicalization are second- or third-generation immigrants or individuals that have recently converted to Islam.¹⁶ This is also reflected in the preliminary findings concerning the women who joined ISIS.¹⁷ Additionally it was found that Western affiliates are generally younger than non-Western affiliates.¹⁸ The women who joined ISIS were mainly between sixteen and twenty-four and travelled to Syria or Iraq without their parents' permission.¹⁹ A study by Huey and Witmer identified characteristics of "Fan girls", meaning women who openly advocate ISIS in online forums and blogs.²⁰ The researchers also found that the average age was under 25, the youngest being fifteen and the oldest thirty-two. The women were also mostly immigrants or recent converts.²¹

¹⁵ This concept will be explained later in this chapter.

¹⁶ Wilner, Alex S., and Claire-Jehanne, Dubouloz. "Transformative Radicalization: Applying Learning Theory to Islamist Radicalization." (2011), p. 420.

¹⁷ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 139.

¹⁸ Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis documents leak reveals profile of average militant as young, well-educated but with only 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law." (2016).

¹⁹ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

²⁰ Huey, Laura, and Eric, Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016).

²¹ Huey, Laura, and Eric, Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 4.

An important factor playing into the distorted Islamic view of these individuals is the fact that most recruits from the West cannot read the Koran in Arabic and believe in biased interpretations.²² However, trusting these interpretations of the Koran does not undermine their education. On the contrary, the individuals attracted to ISIS are often well-educated, but frustrated with their life craving for belonging and identity. On average, Western affiliates of ISIS are higher educated as compared to non-Western affiliates.²³ Indeed, there were multiple adherents arriving in ISIS controlled territory holding PhDs in computer science, English or physiology. Furthermore, most of the recruits indicated that they graduated secondary school. Hence, individual education is not related to vulnerability to radicalization, as already outlined by scholars before the rise of ISIS.²⁴ Individuals involved in terrorism are often well educated, however mostly employed in low-skill jobs. Therefore, it is probable that the expectations exceed the reality of opportunities which may foster their frustration.²⁵

No pattern can be found yet in the question of travel companions, because with whom the recruits travelled were highly diverse among Western affiliates. Most of the times women and men made the *hijra*²⁶ alone or with friends or siblings. However, also families travelled together, such as the three sisters from Bradford who left with their nine children to Syria.²⁷

These preliminary findings show some demographic facts about the Western recruits. But the question remains: Why do young, well-educated women who do not understand the Koran move to ISIS controlled territory? In the following paragraphs this question will be answered by analyzing the motivating factors of these women.

²² Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis documents leak reveals profile of average militant as young, well-educated but with only 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law." (2016).

²³ Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis documents leak reveals profile of average militant as young, well-educated but with only 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law." (2016).

²⁴ Speckhard, Anne. "De-Legitimizing Terrorism: Creative Engagement and Understanding of the Psycho-Social and Political Processes Involved in Ideological Support for Terrorism." (2007), p. 258.

²⁵ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 3.

²⁶ The journey.

²⁷ Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis documents leak reveals profile of average militant as young, well-educated but with only 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law." (2016).

2.2 Literature Review: Motivating Factors

The motivating factors to join terrorist organizations vary considerably including religious, psychosocial, sociological, and political aspects.²⁸ Concerning ISIS, academic scholars who have worked on these motivating factors are rare, but in the following the main findings will be examined. Peresin, for instance, attempted to investigate into factors for radicalization of women by analyzing open source information on social media channels of identified ISIS adherents.²⁹ She outlines that the reasons expressed by women leaving their country to join the *jihad* are multifactorial, including the perception of alienation, the need for a strong meaning in life, romantic illusions, the wish to live in an Islamic state, and hatred on Western society.³⁰ Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett also investigate the *muhajirat* and categorize the factors in three components, namely the oppression of Muslims, individual duty, and building a caliphate.³¹ When stating oppression of Muslims as reason to join ISIS, the women in the process of radicalization, reframe the world into a binary system, either fighting with or against the Muslims. This coincides with Peresin's findings, who mentions hatred on Western society as a motivating factor to leave Western countries. This idea taken further may imply building a caliphate, as mentioned by Hoyle et al.³² This connection shows that the motivators are intermingled, however to understand the different components, the main findings will be grouped to create an overview.

2.2.1 Sociological Factors

The outlined hatred against Western societies serves as an important sociological motivator for women to join the *jihad*. The hatred is caused by the experience of racial harassment and the evoked feelings of marginalization.³³ The harassment of Muslims may entail being the first one to be searched by the police or being insulted on the streets.³⁴ This is particularly prevalent for Muslim women, because they are usually easier to identify as compared to man when they wear a hijab. Experiencing racism fosters feelings of isolation and frustration, which makes individuals more susceptible to radicalization.³⁵ Additionally, it may evoke an

²⁸ Jabbour, Nabeel. "10 Reasons Muslims are Eager to Join ISIS." (2016).

²⁹ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015).

³⁰ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 25.

³¹ Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 11-14.

³² Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 12.

³³ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

³⁴ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

³⁵ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

inferior complex, as demonstrated by the interviews Khan carried out.³⁶ The interviewees mentioned that they were hated "for being Muslim or for being brown" and that "they were told what to dream about, that they cannot be the president".³⁷ Moreover, racist comments give individuals the perception of not being home, as one interviewee argued: "I feel like a Pakistani in England and in Pakistan I feel like an Englander." Furthermore, recruits prior to their emigration to the Caliphate stated: "There is no place or future for me here in this country."³⁸ These statements are triggered by the feelings of hopelessness, insignificance, and being a "foreigner".³⁹ Additionally, to direct racism, these feelings are further emphasized through small interactions, such as conversations in the supermarket or a "hello" by the postman that are normal in everyday life. When instead receiving hostile responses from society, it creates vulnerability and marginalizes the affected people.⁴⁰ These findings make it tempting to jump to the conclusion that integration is the nub of the matter of solving the problem of radicalization. Consequently, it is noteworthy that a lack of integration is not causal to radicalization; hence radicalism is not a by-product of such.⁴¹ On the contrary, assuming this may be dangerous, because it leads to ineffective interventions which will be elaborated on in the fourth chapter.

In addition, another societal factor, which often concerns women in their adolescents, working as motivator is the "freedom" gained when joining ISIS.⁴² This may sound wrong at first sight; however a lot of women come from Muslim communities with highly conservative values.⁴³ This entails arranged marriage, strict rules, and a focus on the honor of the family. Therefore, fleeing to ISIS controlled territory may provide the women with a sense of freedom concerning life decisions, such as whom to marry.⁴⁴ Foreign women arriving in Syria or Iraq can usually choose on arrival whom they wish to marry. However, this freedom is often temporary, since they flee into the control of their husband.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, first and

³⁶ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

³⁷ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

³⁸ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

³⁹ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

⁴⁰ Khan, Deeyah. "What Muslim extremists and rightwing racists have in common." (2015).

⁴¹ Sadiq, Rahimi, and Raissa, Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." (2015), p. 48.

⁴² Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis 'jihadi brides' trying to radicalise girls and encourage UK terror attacks online as they remain trapped in Syria." (2016).

⁴³ Hall, Ellie. "Gone Girl: An Interview With An American In ISIS." (2015).

⁴⁴ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 94.

⁴⁵ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

foremost it was the women's own decision to leave their home country. The pressure from the family or community may also expand to sexuality. On the one hand, the women live in a highly sexualized Western society; however on the other hand, these women are not able to participate in the Western culture due to e.g. no sex before marriage policies. This may cause extensive problems, because the women are trapped between two worlds.⁴⁶

However, strict parenting and daughters' longing to escape from it not only concerns Muslim adolescents.⁴⁷ Generally, parental control is stressing during adolescence and leaves some girls to take extreme measures.⁴⁸ This susceptibility to radicalization is part of a youth phenomenon, wanting to escape rules and boundaries and finding oneself.⁴⁹ Therefore, the *hijra* may be experienced with pride when viewing it as a form of taking control and escaping parental authority in search for the sense of belonging and identity.

2.2.2 Political Factors

Moreover, geopolitics serves as motivating factors provoking hatred and defiance, for instance the Western support for Israel. A young American who was about to board for Syria and arrested immediately before stated: "Why should the taxes of American Muslims go to support Israel? The government of Israel is using this money to kill Muslims in Gaza."⁵⁰ This shows that hatred on the West may work as a political motivator for susceptible individuals when support for Israel is viewed as an attack on Muslims. This anger over foreign policy also extends to other geopolitical decisions of Western countries, such as the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq. These conflicts are viewed as a direct attack on the *ummah* which represents the imagined Muslim community with Muslims all over the world.⁵¹

2.2.3 Religious Factors

Furthermore, ISIS affiliates also argue that religion is a motivating factor for radicalization. Even though, most people in the Western world prefer living in a state under the rule of law, this does not imply that every citizen agrees with the respective national justice system. There

⁴⁶ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

⁴⁷ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

⁴⁸ Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p. 70.

⁴⁹ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 92.

⁵⁰ Jabbour, Nabeel. "10 Reasons Muslims are Eager to Join ISIS." (2016).

⁵¹ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 34.

are also individuals who value living under the Sharia law⁵² as it was outlined by the Dutch woman Khadija who states on her blog: "*I always wanted to live under Sharia. In Europe, this will never happen*".⁵³ This demonstrates that the freedom to execute Islamism as extensively as it is possible in the Caliphate can serve as a motivating factor.⁵⁴ Although there is freedom of religion in Western countries by law, it is not necessarily tolerated by the population. This is illustrated by the fact that wearing a hijab⁵⁵ in public is often received as a sign of repression of women by the non-Muslim population. However, for Muslims wearing a hijab represents faith and liberation which endows honor and dignity.⁵⁶ Furthermore, wearing a hijab implies for women having the power and influence over their families. Taking this into consideration may show the potential of viewing ISIS as an escape of the victimization of Muslim women in the West where they are confined to exercise Islamism.

However, although religiously motivated travels to the Caliphate were a prominent narrative on social media of ISIS affiliates, the opposite was found to be true through ISIS leaked material. On arrival in the Caliphate, jihadists have to fill out an employment form where they have to indicate, among other information, their knowledge of Islam.⁵⁷ The analysis showed that the majority of the Western adherents rated their knowledge of the Sharia and Islam as "basic", which was the lowest category. As opposed to this, non-Western adherents which often stem from Muslim countries indicated an advanced knowledge of Islam. Additionally, it was found that two British affiliates ordered the "Koran for dummies" and "Islam for dummies" on Amazon in preparation to join ISIS.⁵⁸ The lack of knowledge of the recruits demonstrates that ISIS preys on religious ignorance which enables them to create a branch of Islam constructed to carnage and increase territory. Hence, knowledge of Islam is not a prerequisite; rather the opposite is custom.⁵⁹ This finding makes religious factors questionable as credible motivating factor for Western adherents. However, it may also suggest that the differences between the recruits are major concerning religiousness.

⁵² Islamic law derived from interpretations of the Quran.

⁵³ Brown, Katherine. "Why are Western women joining the Islamic State?" (2014).

⁵⁴ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 24.

⁵⁵ Headscarf.

⁵⁶ Von Knop, Katharina. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women." (2007), p. 409.

⁵⁷ Batrawy, Aya, Dodds, Paisley, and Hinnant, Lori. "Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith." (2016).

⁵⁸ Batrawy, Aya, Dodds, Paisley, and Hinnant, Lori. "Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith." (2016).

⁵⁹ Batrawy, Aya, Dodds, Paisley, and Hinnant, Lori. "Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith." (2016).

2.2.4 Psychological Factors

Furthermore, psychological factors, such as romanticism influence susceptible women. However, romanticism as motivating factor for joining ISIS is highly contested within the literature. On the one hand, some scholars describe the idea of becoming a "jihadist bride" as a valid factor for women in the process of radicalization.⁶⁰ It has been argued that the emigrating women are "naïve and easily manipulated" and that the only reason for joining the terrorist organization is the idea of marrying a holy warrior.⁶¹ On the other hand, this has been criticized for underestimating the political credibility of women.⁶² It is essential not to undermine the motivational factors of the *muhajirat* only as romantic ones; nevertheless, romanticism may still be a possible contributing factor for the women to join the Caliphate. The affiliated women, particularly those in their adolescence, create a romantic idea of marrying a soldier they have met through the internet.⁶³ For them, marrying a young, male fighter in Syria and staying with him for the rest of their lives is a concept of pure romance.⁶⁴ This belief may also express their disagreement with the sexualizing of women in Western countries, for instance in the advertisements of brands, such as Victoria's Secret.⁶⁵ The commercialized and sexualized image of women includes notions of promiscuity and female devaluation. Therefore, having a romantic marriage lasting a lifetime may act as a motivating factor for some women.

Traumatization is another factor which is commonly associated with radicalized individuals.⁶⁶ Having experienced violence in any form, such as rape or domestic abuse may put individuals at risk for radicalization.⁶⁷ This risk is mostly evoked by the feeling of injustice, which may be fostered by the fact that perpetrators of abuse often do not get punished.⁶⁸ This leads to anger and dissatisfaction with the justice system or blame against society in general. Furthermore, having suffered violence may urge individuals to take revenge. This outlook is

⁶⁰ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 500.

⁶¹ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 500.

⁶² Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

⁶³ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

⁶⁴ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

⁶⁵ BBC Radio 4. "Women of Terror." (2015).

⁶⁶ Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p. 142.

⁶⁷ Khan, Deeyah. "What Muslim extremists and rightwing racists have in common." (2015).

⁶⁸ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

achieved with the Sharia law employed by ISIS, because it may be just the right retribution, particularly when the Western justice system has not prosecuted the perpetrator. Notwithstanding that logically it would be impossible to prove for a women living in the Caliphate that she was a victim of abuse.

Another important aspect of psychological factors is the search for belongingness and identity which is particularly prevalent for adolescents.⁶⁹ This may be provoked by living between two cultures, specifically for second- or third-generation Muslims. As outlined above, it is reported difficult to combine the modern Western lifestyle with the more traditional Islamic culture.⁷⁰ This in turn can provoke an identity crisis, because the affected women have to manage two different identities. Being trapped between the two worlds and hence between two identities makes the individual susceptible for joining extremist groups, such as ISIS.⁷¹

2.2.5 Female Jihad

The concept of *female jihad* has also been used in the literature to explain the emigration to ISIS.⁷² However, to understand how it may serve as a motivating factor, it will first be explained and applied to ISIS. In Islamism there is an essential difference between female and male *jihad*. The *female jihad* ascribes supporting the men as the political act of women.⁷³ This gender-specific interpretation of *jihad* implies that women do not take combatant, but nurturing roles for the future generation of fighters. Hence, the realm of power for women in the *jihad* is the domestic realm. This might be termed misogynist by Western liberal thinkers, however within the concept of *female jihad*, this notion provides the women with a sphere of authority and strong influence on their relatives. Particularly, women educate their children about the Islam and appropriate conduct which allows them to raise and influence future jihadists. Furthermore, *female jihad* also underlines the role of the "sisterhood" meaning the strong bond between women.⁷⁴ The benefit of compliance to *female jihad* will be a place in *Jannah*⁷⁵ and considerable impact on women's families, their children as well as their

⁶⁹ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

⁷⁰ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

⁷¹ Sadiq, Rahimi, and Raissa, Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." (2015), p. 43.

⁷² Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 89.

⁷³ Von Knop, Katharina. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women." (2007), p. 397

⁷⁴ Von Knop, Katharina. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women." (2007), p. 405.

⁷⁵ The paradise in Islamism where the Muslims go after their death.

husbands. Consequently, this concept implies a specific emancipation of the Muslimas. Certainly, not a branch of feminism as valued in the Western world, but rather a part of feminism in line with conservative Islam. This form of emancipation entails that women are complementary as opposed to equal to the men.⁷⁶ Hence, the emigration should not be viewed as the contradiction of gender equality achieved in e.g. Western Europe. The women leaving are not aiming to change roles attached to gender in society. Rather they wish to align with female Islamic role models, such as the sisters or wives of the prophet Muhammad.⁷⁷

When considering the role of women within ISIS, they follow the concept of *female jihad*. For instance, the strong function of "sisterhood" is often mentioned by the affiliated women living within ISIS controlled territory.⁷⁸ Furthermore, women are not allowed to fight, but they have to stay within their domestic role.⁷⁹ This entails the education of children and taking care of the household. Therefore, ISIS strongly adheres to the roles assigned to women in *female jihad*. However, there are exceptions, namely all-female brigades, including "Al-Khanssaa", "Khadija Bintu Kwalid", "Aumahat al-Moamin", and "Umm Al-Rayan".⁸⁰ Their role within the forces extends to surveillance, law enforcement, and infiltration. This may entail attempting to uncover males trying to avoid detection by wearing a burka. Moreover, the forces ensure that women abide to the Sharia law⁸¹ and otherwise punish them.⁸² ISIS needed to establish these all-female brigades, because men are not allowed to search women at checkpoints.⁸³ To prevent the mingling of women and men, the forces have their own facilities.⁸⁴ However, the brigades are supervised by male officers and therefore the women still operate within a paternalistic system. Furthermore, although these forces exist, women do not join combat or terroristic acts. Hence, ISIS still follows the rules of *female jihad*. However, it is noteworthy that members of these brigades receive intelligence and military training. This makes their future role within the Caliphate unknown, because they are not yet executing their military skills on the battlefield.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Zakaria, Rafia. "Women and Islamic Militancy." (2015), p. 121.

⁷⁷ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 91.

⁷⁸ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 94.

⁷⁹ Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 9.

⁸⁰ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. (2016), p. 8.

⁸¹ This entails sticking to the moral code for women, such as the strict clothing rules.

⁸² Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium. "Umm Al-Rayan." (2014).

⁸³ Al Arabiya News. "Al-Qaeda in Syria forms female brigades." (2014).

⁸⁴ Zakaria, Rafia. "Women and Islamic Militancy." (2015), p. 121.

⁸⁵ Speckhard, Anne, and Almohammad, Asaad. H. "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS

2.2.5.1 Female Jihad as a Factor

The *female jihad* may serve as a motivating factor touching upon sociological, psychological and religious aspects. It entails sociological aspects, because it empowers the women through their role within the Caliphate which entails the influence over the family, as well as respect from the society (ISIS).⁸⁶ Moreover, their status as women and mother is honored, because they rear the new generation of jihadists. This is contrary to the Western world where predominantly "career women" are valued within society.⁸⁷ When Muslim women take a domestic role within their home country, it is often not valued by the rest of the society. Therefore, the feeling of empowerment poses a contradicting force to what some of the women experience in the West. This is not exclusively related to the career of the women but also to wearing religious symbols.⁸⁸ As outlined above, the stereotypes about women wearing a hijab are highly prevalent. These stereotypes include that e.g. all Muslim women are forced to cover their hair.⁸⁹ This shows that freedom of religion *de jure*, does not *de facto* determine the mindset of the people. As opposed to the Western stereotypes, "Umm Layth", a University of Glasgow dropout, stated in her blog that in the Caliphate women are respected and honored for covering their bodies and faces and not mocked.⁹⁰ Therefore, what may sound misogynist to some people may be a sanctuary and empowerment for others. This emancipating aspect also becomes prevalent when considering the newly gained authority when operating within the ranks of a female force. ISIS defectors explained that the women, although operating under male supervision, experience authority and enjoy it. The women within the brigades are even described as more brutal than men when it comes to enforcing the dress and moral codes of ISIS. Women misbehaving are often bitten (with a metal device) and flogged until they bleed to death.⁹¹

Furthermore, through honoring the role of the mother and the wife, ISIS provides women with a valued identity as respected Muslim women, which demonstrates the psychological aspect of *female jihad*. Moreover, ISIS emphasizes the "sisterhood" which provides the women with

Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers." (2017), p. 17.

⁸⁶ Dearden, Lizzie. "Isis 'jihadi brides' trying to radicalise girls and encourage UK terror attacks online as they remain trapped in Syria." (2016).

⁸⁷ Adams, Richard. "Having a working mother works for daughters." (2015).

⁸⁸ Janson, Eero. "STEREOTYPES THAT DEFINE "US": THE CASE OF MUSLIM WOMEN." (2011), p. 183.

⁸⁹ Von Knop, Katharina. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women." (2007), p. 409.

⁹⁰ Zakaria, Rafia. "Women and Islamic Militancy." (2015), p. 123.

⁹¹ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet S. "Eyewitness accounts from recent defectors from Islamic State: Why they joined, what they saw, why they quit." (2015), p. 102.

a feeling of belongingness and significance.⁹² Additionally, the *ummah* being an important aspect of *female jihad* may intensify the feeling of belonging and identity. Hence, ISIS creates this feeling of unconditional acceptance for women who are trapped between two worlds without a coherent identity.

Additionally, *female jihad* can also be religiously motivated, because the *jihad* is framed as a duty for all Muslims. Hence, this religious concept serves several functions, providing the women with a valued identity, respect in society as well as alignment with Islamic values.

2.3 Preliminary Conclusions Motivating Factors

The discussed motivating aspects to join ISIS have demonstrated that there are various factors which may put women at risk for radicalization. These factors involve sociological, psychological, political, and religious motives and may be present to varying degrees in different individuals. It is important to emphasize that religion as a motivating factor may specifically differ between the Western recruits, as it was demonstrated that knowledge of Islam varies highly.⁹³ Fleeing from parental or community control without a strong sense of belongingness and identity makes the Caliphate resemble a place of freedom and, although short-lasting, self-determination. This combined with the experience of racism and stigmatization from society makes these individuals more probable to search for a radical solution to their problems. Additionally, being the victim of violence in any form has proven to be a strong risk factor for radicalization. Generally however, there was no clear cause-and-effect relation identified. Nevertheless, the outlined observable factors are reoccurring and serve as push factor to become radicalized. The experienced frustration and pain inflicted through the outlined factors is turned into hatred against the Western society. This twist of thought is achieved by ISIS's propaganda. Hence, ISIS takes advantage of vulnerable individuals susceptible to radicalization by establishing strong pull factors, namely their recruitment technique. This will be analyzed in the next chapter.

⁹² Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 92.

⁹³ Batrawy, Aya, Dodds, Paisley, and Hinnant, Lori. "Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith." (2016).

Chapter 3: ISIS's Recruitment

The third chapter will concern the recruitment strategy applied by ISIS. At the beginning a short literature review will emphasize the importance of considering recruitment strategies in Islamic terrorist organizations, including ISIS. Afterwards, ISIS's gendered recruitment will be explained and the online media campaign analyzed. The themes of the propaganda will be discussed, which include the hatred on the West, the role of women, marriage and family, life within the Islamic State, travel guide, Islamic themes, and martyrdom and fighting. The final part will conclude the analysis and connect the recruitment strategy to the motivating factors.

3.1 Recruitment Strategies in Islamic Terrorism

The motivating factors of women, the push factors, to join the Caliphate are highly connected to the recruitment strategies, the pull factors, applied by ISIS. Whereas the motivating factors represent the personal aspect of radicalization, the recruitment is the systematic organizational aspect. Prior to analyzing the recruitment strategy of ISIS, it is important to demonstrate the significance of recruitment by presenting a short literature review. There is an ongoing debate within academia whether the recruitment is an essential aspect of radicalization. Sageman, for instance, emphasizes that personal and situational circumstances are decisive for the radicalization process and not the recruitment strategy.⁹⁴ He further claims that there is no recruitment needed but that individuals are enlisted, meaning that they join a terrorist organization out of their own will. Venhaus also neglects the importance of recruitment with the example of al-Qaeda. He bases his argument on the fact that young individuals actively look out for al-Qaeda and he does not credit the recruitment strategy applied by the terrorist organization.⁹⁵

It is essential to acknowledge the active search of susceptible individuals for terrorist groups as an aspect of radicalization. Nevertheless, the recruitment strategies of terrorist organizations may not be underestimated. There is evidence that recruitment plays a major role in radicalization and that being "motivated" alone is not sufficient to radicalize. Speckhard, for instance, analyzed the recruitment of several Islamic groups, including al-Qaida and Taliban, and concluded that potential recruits are highly triggered by the

⁹⁴ Sageman, Marc. *Understanding Terror Networks*. (2004), p. 8.

⁹⁵ Venhaus, Colonel, John, M. "Why Youth Join al-Qaeda." (2010), p. 8.

recruitment strategies.⁹⁶ She outlines that this is achieved by spreading pictures of suffering Muslims to create empathy for the *ummah* who experience violence all over the world. Additionally, she argues that the recruitment among family and friendship is efficient by pledging loyalty to the fictive kin (Muslim population - *ummah*). Claiming that the kin is under threat strengthens the urge of recruits to protect the Muslim population. Additionally, this provides possible affiliates with a sense of belonging.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the ideology of the group does not need to be identical with the ideas of the individual. More important is the accordance of the psychosocial needs with the group's ideology. This is also evident when considering ISIS. Their sophisticated recruitment techniques make the recruits believe that their psychosocial needs, such as identity building and feelings of belongingness, are met when joining. This will be elaborated later in this chapter.

Concerning ISIS's recruitment, several authors have analyzed it and argue as well that it is an essential component of the recruits' radicalization. Peresin, for instance, analyzed the recruitment of women for ISIS, and argued that the recruitment strategy does have an increased impact on the women.⁹⁸ She takes into consideration social media statements of radicalized women. These women claimed the importance of online recruiters during their radicalization process in their tweets and posts. Furthermore, she argues that ISIS's propaganda makes use of gender norms appealing to women as wives, mothers, and scholars.⁹⁹ They are addressed as playing a supportive but central role and they should work hard towards the Muslim utopia.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Huey and Witmer found that possible affiliates were drawn into the narrative told by ISIS's recruiters and emphasized the importance of it in the radicalization process.¹⁰¹ Ingram also analyzed the recruitment strategy of ISIS and concludes that the propaganda "*shape[s] the perceptions and polarize[s] the support*".¹⁰² This is achieved through entailing pragmatic and perceptual factors. Pragmatic factors imply that the propaganda addresses stability and security, as well as denigrates the

⁹⁶ Speckhard, Anne. "De-Legitimizing Terrorism: Creative Engagement and Understanding of the Psycho-Social and Political Processes Involved in Ideological Support for Terrorism." (2007), p. 269.

⁹⁷ Speckhard, Anne. "De-Legitimizing Terrorism: Creative Engagement and Understanding of the Psycho-Social and Political Processes Involved in Ideological Support for Terrorism." (2007), p. 258.

⁹⁸ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslims and ISIS." (2015), p. 26.

⁹⁹ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 499.

¹⁰⁰ Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015), p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Huey, Laura, and Eric, Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 8.

¹⁰² Ingram, Haroro. "What analysis of the Islamic State's messaging keeps missing." (2015).

enemy. The perceptual factors are supposed to merge solution, crisis and identity through creating the in-group (Muslim) and out-group (non-Muslim) bias. Both groups are then tied to solution and crisis respectively.¹⁰³ This binary system makes the audience compel in rational decision-making by aligning with one's identity (Muslim). This dichotomy will be further explained in the next section.

3.2 ISIS's Recruitment Strategy

To win the heart and minds of possible recruits, the recruitment strategy applied by ISIS is tailored to the specific needs of susceptible women. The motivating factors outlined above are the precondition to make the recruitment "successful". The experienced frustration and pain of the women is exploited by ISIS and redirected into e.g. anger towards the own country or geopolitics.¹⁰⁴ These mechanisms become evident when considering how ISIS appeals to possible members which will be analyzed in the next section. The propaganda is divided into two main branches, one part addressed to Muslim countries and one addressed to Western, non-Muslim countries.¹⁰⁵ The propaganda distributed in Arabic countries carries a more poetic narrative, incorporating interpretations and history of the Quran; whereas the Western focused propaganda takes a different perspective and appeals more directly to the emotionality of the individuals.¹⁰⁶

ISIS makes use of a social media campaign with vivid pictures and videos as well as on-site recruitment where recruiters appeal to the possible affiliates face-to-face. Recruiters are placed in Western countries to indoctrinate the women on-site.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to gather information about these recruiters and their procedure; however some characteristics have been identified. Recruiters "pick up" possible members at e.g. mosques and indoctrinate them. However, this process is rather indirect and "gentle". This entails that the recruiters do not begin by telling about the *jihad*, but rather by the narrative about the suffering of the *ummah* and discrimination in society.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the possible members are often integrated into a "youth community" with other men or women, resembling the "sisterhood" in the Caliphate.

¹⁰³ Ingram, Haroro. "What analysis of the Islamic State's messaging keeps missing." (2015).

¹⁰⁴ Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p .34.

¹⁰⁵ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹⁰⁶ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹⁰⁷ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹⁰⁸ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

They meet up with the community and are taught about the Islam through imams. Additionally, they address conspiracy theories and talk about the detrimental effects of democracy and its incompatibility with Islam. However, they also eat and "hang out" together to give the meetings a sense of "normal" leisure activity.¹⁰⁹ When the possible recruits are fully integrated into the community, the topic of the duty of *jihad* is addressed and the importance to obey the Caliph who had ordered all Muslims to join the Caliphate.¹¹⁰ Due to the lack of more information about the on-site recruitment, in the following, the online propaganda specifically addressing Western women will be analyzed.

3.3 ISIS's Gendered Online Recruitment

The majority of the recruitment is carried out online which is particularly relevant for women as gender segregation in Islamic engagement may be prevalent. This can entail that e.g. access to mosques is limited for women.¹¹¹ Hence, online recruitment may represent an escape from these patriarchal structures. However, seeking religious information on the internet without prior solid knowledge about the Islam puts these women at an increased risk, since they cannot engage critically with the online accessed information. Therefore, as the women are less able to access information offline, the online risk increases.¹¹²

ISIS's global media campaign is considered the most successful one ever to attract foreign fighters.¹¹³ Furthermore, the campaign is predominantly managed by women living in ISIS controlled territory.¹¹⁴ Concerning the Western propaganda, women coming from the West are responsible, because they allegedly easier "access" other women from the West. The general appeal disseminated through the propaganda can be summarized as a call to all Muslims to join ISIS and build the Caliphate.¹¹⁵

Various methods are employed by ISIS to spread their appeal. For instance, members of the recruitment team message the possible recruits in forums and blogs before approaching them

¹⁰⁹ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹¹⁰ Wood, Graeme. *The Way of the Strangers – Encounters with the Islamic State*. (2017), p. XXV

¹¹¹ Pearson, Elizabeth. "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad." (2015), p. 15.

¹¹² Pearson, Elizabeth. "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad." (2015), p. 18.

¹¹³ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 503.

¹¹⁴ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 503.

¹¹⁵ Heinke, Daniel. H., and Fouad, Hazim. "Das Dabiq-Magazin als Rekrutierungswerkzeug des IS." (2015).

on private encrypted channels.¹¹⁶ Specifically social media is inevitable for the communication with possible recruits, because this method presents a low cost strategy reaching a broad audience. The social media used includes Ask.fm, WhatsApp, kik, viper, justPaste.it, Telegram, Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter. The online profiles of the recruiting women are often decorated with flowers and butterflies, tying into the gendered *jihad*.¹¹⁷ Moreover, an all-female group emerged in November 2016 called "Bintu al-Azwar Battalion" to recruit possible members. The group is recruiting offline and online, particularly targeting young Sunni Muslimas who are either divorced or widowed in Europe.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, ISIS has multiple media outlets, including "Al-Hayat" and "Ajnad" and a news sender called "Amaq" where they publish propaganda. The videos and pictures published may include documentaries about the life within the territory of ISIS, videos of battlefields, public beheadings or hostages. In addition, magazines are published, such as "Dabiq"¹¹⁹ and "Rumiyah"¹²⁰ to distribute their message. Distributing propaganda through magazines is not a new phenomenon in Islamic terrorist organizations. Since the 1980's the Taliban have published monthly magazines, including "The Mujahideen".¹²¹ However, ISIS specifically addresses women in their magazines which has not happened before. These sections directly addressing potential recruits are called "to our sisters". Furthermore, in 2014 a "Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade" was released which is a propaganda piece only addressed to women.¹²² In their gendered propaganda, a wonderful picture is painted to encourage Western women to join the Caliphate. Moreover, the propaganda, just as the profiles of the online recruiters, is enhanced with images of beautiful sunsets and colors associated with women. This stands in sharp contrast with the sections of the magazine addressed to man where brutal images are predominant.¹²³

In addition to the outlined measures, loyalists disseminate links and supportive messages on

¹¹⁶ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 26.

¹¹⁷ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Speckhard, Anne, and Almohammad, Asaad. H. "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers." (2017), p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Named after a town in Syria which is important for Islamic Mythology.

¹²⁰ Named after "Rome", because of its importance for Islamic Mythology.

¹²¹ Robins-Early, Nick. "4 Things To Know About Dabiq, ISIS' Propaganda Magazine." (2016).

¹²² Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015).

¹²³ Pearson, Elizabeth. "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad." (2015), p. 19.

social media.¹²⁴ However, only few jihadists post on the platforms themselves; mostly, the disseminators' only repost what fighters in insurgent zone have posted or they repost official accounts.¹²⁵ Hence, the propaganda from the Caliphate is strongly monitored to avoid spreading information which may be useful for enemies. Furthermore, controlling the messages assures that the content is dramatic, violent and shocking with symbolic meaning, targeting to reach a wide audience (e.g. execution of American journalists in orange jumpsuits resembling Guantanamo inmates).¹²⁶ Therefore, through its wide-ranging social media campaign, ISIS has managed to create its own army of media jihadists which presents an unprecedented dangerous dynamic.¹²⁷ This development has potentially fostered a new phenomenon termed "self-radicalization".¹²⁸ Through the readily accessible radical material on social media, the *jihad* became leaderless. Thus, radicalization can occur through smart phones and the internet, secretly in isolation of the society, without direct interaction with a recruiter.¹²⁹

The recruitment strategy may be termed psychological warfare, because it appeals to the emotionality of women.¹³⁰ As outlined before, these possible recruits do not feel a strong sense of identity in their own country, facing marginalization and the desire for a meaningful life. The feeling of alienation may provide a "*cognitive opening into which radical ideas are more readily introduced*".¹³¹ Therefore, these individuals are particularly attracted to terrorist ideologies once exposed.¹³² In the following the main themes addressed by the propaganda will be analyzed.

¹²⁴ The Redirect Method: <https://redirectmethod.org/>.

¹²⁵ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 17.

¹²⁶ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 2.

¹²⁷ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 99.

¹²⁸ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 5.

¹²⁹ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 5.

¹³⁰ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 27.

¹³¹ Rabasa, Angel, and Cheryl, Benard. *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*. (2014), p. 4.

¹³² Speckhard, Anne. "De-Legitimizing Terrorism: Creative Engagement and Understanding of the Psycho-Social and Political Processes Involved in Ideological Support for Terrorism." (2007), p. 258.

3.3.1 *Binary System and Hatred on the West*

One of the main topics addressed by ISIS is the hatred on the Western world. Through their propaganda they manage to divide the world into a binary system, either being with or against the Muslims.¹³³ This is achieved by propagating that the world is populated by Muslims and non-Muslims and that everyone has to decide to which side of the dichotomous system they belong to.¹³⁴ Hence, possible recruits are forced to choose between these two sides. The Muslims are presented as oppressed but righteous, and the non-Muslims as enemy and cruel.¹³⁵ This dichotomy is demonstrated by the following quote of an ISIS member.

*"To those who are able and can still make your way, hasten to our lands... This is a war against Islam and it is known that either 'you're with them or with us'. So pick a side."*¹³⁶

Therefore, the affiliates are forced to dismiss the non-Muslim world, the Western world. This channels hatred against the West and subsequently it becomes the scapegoat for the personal pain experienced by the women. The binary system is supported by claims that the West is attacking Islamic lands, such as in Iraq or Afghanistan.¹³⁷ Furthermore, it is often stressed that there is no concern about Israel invading Palestine (Muslims attacked), but the Ukraine is helped by the West by all means when Russia occupied parts of it (non-Muslims attacked).¹³⁸ In addition, enemies, such as Assad or the West, are denigrated and dehumanized through postings and pictures. This is achieved by portraying innocent civilians killed by e.g. Western forces.¹³⁹ Moreover, drone strikes and collateral damage are underlined in the propaganda, such as the 16-year old son of al-Awlaki who was killed by a drone strike.¹⁴⁰ These cases are repeatedly emphasized to raise the claim that the "*ummah* is

¹³³ Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 11.

¹³⁴ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

¹³⁵ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

¹³⁶ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

¹³⁷ Heinke, Daniel. H., and Fouad, Hazim. "Das Dabiq-Magazin als Rekrutierungswerkzeug des IS." (2015).

¹³⁸ Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p. 116.

¹³⁹ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Anwar Al-Awlaki was an Islamic preacher made responsible for multiple radicalizations through his radical views on the Western world. He was killed in a drone strike and so was his son on the 14.11.2011, which was highly criticized all around the globe (Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p. 141).

under siege from the West".¹⁴¹ Therefore, injustice against Muslims is amplified through the propaganda and simplified through a distorted view on reality. This results in a worldview where the West poses an existential threat to the *ummah* and to the Islam.¹⁴² The worldview is supported and nourished through ISIS's online network, full of individuals sharing this belief, which suffocates more nuanced explanations.

The binary system and being part of the *ummah* also provides the possible members with another advantage. ISIS advocates that once an individual is part of the community, the member belongs to a group she or he can identify with.¹⁴³ The identification may also apply to an online community. Already through this community mutual support and affirmation can be shared via posts and tweets. These bonds provide the women exactly with what they need – the feeling of belongingness and an identity.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, by increasing the perception of the crisis in which the *ummah* is, but also by providing solutions (*jihad*), it serves to motivate people.¹⁴⁵ It provides them with a solution in which they can take part. Hence, it appeals again to the lack of the feeling of belongingness and significance.

3.3.2 Role of Women within the Caliphate

The propaganda of ISIS underlines the strict separation between male and *female jihad*. Throughout their online campaign they emphasize that women, as opposed to men, should not be involved in suicide attacks or combat until the situation is "desperate".¹⁴⁶ This separates the role of women in ISIS from other Islamic terror organizations, such as in Palestine or Chechnya where women have taken highly active roles in combat and suicide missions.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the role of the women within the Caliphate is depicted in the propaganda, making ISIS the first Islamic terrorist organization providing women with a concrete outlook. The organization draws upon the importance of women to build a state and to raise a new generation of

¹⁴¹ Sadiq, Rahimi, and Raissa, Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." (2015), p. 43.

¹⁴² Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

¹⁴³ Huey, Laura, and Eric Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Huey, Laura, and Eric Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Robins-Early, Nick. "4 Things To Know About Dabiq, ISIS' Propaganda Magazine." (2016).

¹⁴⁶ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Harmon, Christopher. C., and Holmes-Eber, Paula. "WOMEN IN TERRORIST UNDERGROUNDS." (2014).

fighters. This is also adapted by ISIS's recruiters with statements by bloggers, such as Umm-Layth:

*"Our role is even more important as women in Islam, since if we don't have sisters with the correct Aqeedah [conviction] and understanding who are willing to sacrifice all their desires and give up their families and lives in the west in order to make Hijrah [migration] and please Allah, then who will raise the next generation of Lions?"*¹⁴⁸

The section specifically addressed to women in "Dabiq" also underlines the domestic, nurturing role of woman.¹⁴⁹ In addition, in the "Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade", the domestic role of women is emphasized, describing motherhood and maintenance of household as the women's duty.¹⁵⁰ This may be particularly important for women who pursue a domestic role as opposed to a career, because, as already outlined, the domestic role is not valued as much in the West. ISIS however, views it as the only appropriate role for women.¹⁵¹ In particular the propaganda states that *"the Western way of life a female adopts brings with it so many dangers and deviances, threatening her very own soul"*.¹⁵²

One aspect ISIS also frequently highlights in their media campaign is the "sisterhood", which as opposed to "Western friendships" is not superficial and provides you with a sense of belonging.¹⁵³ Furthermore, in the propaganda it is stated that women should be educated from seven until fifteen years of age and marriages should ideally be with nine years.¹⁵⁴ This demonstrates the high importance of marriage and family within the Caliphate.

3.3.3 Marriage and Family

The recruitment also entails highly emotional appeals resembling internet seduction.

¹⁴⁸ Zakaria, Rafia. "Women and Islamic Militancy." (2015), p. 119.

¹⁴⁹ Islamic State. "Break the Cross." (2016), p. 22.

¹⁵⁰ Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015), p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015), p. 7.

¹⁵² Islamic State. "Break the Cross." (2016), p. 25.

¹⁵³ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade." (2015), p. 24.

"Future" husbands appeal to possible recruits, asking them online to marry in Syria or Iraq and raise a family.¹⁵⁵ Hence, the women are targeted through offering attractive fighters as husbands. Their future life is presented as a "Disneyland for Muslim", with a perfect love story.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, ISIS addresses the subordinate role of the women within marriage. In the magazine "Dabiq" they state that "*Men are in charge of women by what Allah has given [...]*."¹⁵⁷ Additionally, ISIS uses children as advertisement dressed in ISIS gear and colors to advocate a "peaceful" family life.¹⁵⁸

3.3.4 *Life within the Islamic State*

Furthermore, the propaganda entails pictures and videos of the Caliphate depicting "daily activity". The pictures range from selfies (with a burka) and pictures of women cooking with the "sisterhood" to images of women taking care of children.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, footage of fighters handing out candy to children or pictures of fighters playing with kittens are common.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, particularly for the Western audience, pictures with "Western" treats, such as Nutella, are posted. These posts are essential to provide a positive picture of the situation in ISIS controlled territory, presenting it as a pleasant experience and feign "normality".¹⁶¹ These videos and pictures are specifically important for women, because they do not participate in combat yet. Hence, it mainly depicts "their aspect of life".

In addition, ISIS emphasizes throughout their propaganda that houses as well as electricity and food is free for every inhabitant of the Caliphate. This is opposed to the Western world, where the "citizens are slaves to wages".¹⁶²

3.3.5 *Travel Guide*

Another aspect of their recruitment, which is particularly attractive for possible

¹⁵⁵ Speckhard, Anne. *Bride of ISIS*. (2015), p. 36.

¹⁵⁶ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 504.

¹⁵⁷ Islamic State. "Break the Cross." (2016), p. 23.

¹⁵⁸ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 501.

¹⁶⁰ Whitehead, Tom. "Islamic State using kittens to lure jihadists to fight." (2016).

¹⁶¹ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

¹⁶² Robins-Early, Nick. "4 Things To Know About Dabiq, ISIS' Propaganda Magazine." (2016).

recruits close to starting their *hijra*, includes providing online travel guides. These may entail practical information, such as packing lists, recipe books, or books about required competences, such as computer or nursing skills. Typically, online recruiters who chat with possible recruits in encrypted channels provide this information to women who want to emigrate to ISIS controlled territory.¹⁶³ Furthermore, information is provided concerning the behavior of recruits before the immediate journey. This entails that the women should stop wearing a niqab before departure to pretend they are not religious anymore.¹⁶⁴ This is particularly important for women where the environment, e.g. the parents, have become suspicious about the behavior. As part of the recruitment some women were also offered incentives, including travel expenses, to make it easier for them to travel.¹⁶⁵

3.3.6 Islamic Themes

Moreover, the propaganda entails messages about prominent jihadist figures, such as al-Awlaki or Bin Laden. Videos are posted where these significant Muslim figures talk about the *jihad* as obligation for Muslims.¹⁶⁶ Stating that the *jihad* is mandatory, with outlining a specific *female jihad*, provides the women with a meaning in life and a feeling of significance.

Additionally, within their propaganda Western feminism as well as secular political empowerment is framed as "un-Islamic". Within the scope of "Dabiq" it is often stated that the women have lost their actual roles (the domestic role) and further, feminism is described as "evil".¹⁶⁷ Additionally, in the "Al-Khansaa Brigade" propaganda piece, it is often underlined that feminism is a Western program which emasculates men and confuses women.¹⁶⁸ They argue that through feminism women forget to worship God.

ISIS also makes use of a specific Islamic narrative in their propaganda. This entails

¹⁶³ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 26.

¹⁶⁴ Ben Ali, Saliha. "Foreign Fighters." (2017).

¹⁶⁵ Sherwood, Harriet, Laville, Sandra, Willsher, Kim, Knight, Ben, French, Maddy, and Gambino, Lauren. "Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters." (2014).

¹⁶⁶ Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ Islamic State. "Break the Cross." (2016), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Winter, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade." (2015), p. 17.

promising virtue and glory to everyone who joined. Furthermore, they outline the honor of being a part of the Final Judgement Day¹⁶⁹, the finale of the universe.¹⁷⁰

"Dabiq" and "Rumiyah" rely strongly on excerpts from Islamic texts and cite frequently to present the magazines as legitimate religious authority.¹⁷¹

3.3.7 *Martyrdom and Fighting*

Moreover, martyrdom is made subject within the scope of the propaganda. Individuals which have died in a suicide mission are glorified and their wives are congratulated.¹⁷²

In addition, the bravery of the fighters is emphasized through pictures with weapons and videos of the battlefield. The role of the widows is worshiped as they are honored within society. Furthermore, ISIS allows the women to remarry (due to the high number of fighters dying in combat), which is usually forbidden in Islamic societies.¹⁷³

Additionally, pictures of brutal violence scenes from terrorist acts in the Western world are part of the magazines and websites. Although, for most of the Western population it is repelling, it is not for individuals radicalizing. For them these images are motivating in the sense that even the "strong West" cannot do anything against their terror.¹⁷⁴ These actions are glorified through reposting pictures of e.g. beheadings and emphasizing the fight against infidels.

3.4 Conclusions

ISIS's recruitment strategy aims to disseminate a picture to be feared by enemies and loved by affiliates, in order to effectively recruit from the West. The terrorist organization presents itself as a shelter where Muslim fantasies can flourish and domination can be reclaimed through the "perfect" society.¹⁷⁵ ISIS is the first terrorist organization to create this appealing

¹⁶⁹ The belief that there is a final assessment of humanity which will consist of judgment, resurrection and of the annihilation of life.

¹⁷⁰ Wood, Graeme. *The Way of the Strangers – Encounters with the Islamic State*. (2017), p. XXV.

¹⁷¹ Ingram, Haroro. "ISIS: ASSESSING RUMIYAH." (2016).

¹⁷² Klausen, Jytte. "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq." (2014), p. 11.

¹⁷³ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 94.

¹⁷⁴ Heinke, Daniel. H., and Fouad, Hazim. "Das Dabiq-Magazin als Rekrutierungswerkzeug des IS." (2015).

¹⁷⁵ Khan, Deeyah. "For Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape." (2015).

view of a "Muslim Utopia" from all jihadist movements.¹⁷⁶ The absence of neutral information of the life within ISIS controlled territory aids this strategy so that an idyllic picture of the Caliphate can be painted.¹⁷⁷ The women respond to the recruitment, because they see a solution to their psychosocial needs. In other words, the recruitment, the pull factor, draws the women into ISIS's narrative and presents them with the answer to what they desire.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the recruitment is directly linked with the motivating factors resembling a lock-and-key principle.

This is achieved through various mechanisms, such as creating the binary system. Dividing the world in two parts reinforces the feeling of "us" and "them".¹⁷⁹ As explained in the social identity theory by Tajfel in 1979, a social identity defines who a person is according to their membership to a certain group.¹⁸⁰ This group then represents a source of self-esteem and provides the individuals with the feeling of belonging to a social group. This is achieved by ISIS through the divide of the world into the non-Muslims and the *ummah*. Hence, an in-group (*ummah*) and an out-group (non-Muslim) are created. Due to the fact that the in-group is at war with the out-group, the idea of being part of the *ummah*, turns into a belief that this community has to be protected from the attacks of the non-Muslims. Therefore, hatred against the Western society is fostered. If the individual internalizes this belief it may lead to adapting an extremist new identity.

Additionally, the West is presented as the scapegoat for the frustration experienced by the women through e.g. racial harassment or stigmatization. Underlining the wrongdoings of the West, such as the invasion of Muslim lands in Afghanistan or Iraq and the collateral damage through drone strikes, further steers the hatred.

Moreover, ISIS targets the lack of the feeling of belongingness and significance is exploited. This is achieved through emphasizing *female jihad*, hence the importance of being a mother and a wife and worshipping this role. Furthermore, stressing the "sisterhood" underlines these feelings. Additionally, ISIS outlines what the West does wrong to the *ummah*, but also to the

¹⁷⁶ Kneip, Katharina. "Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS." (2016), p. 97.

¹⁷⁷ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 22.

¹⁷⁸ Roy, Oliver. "Who are the new jihadis?" (2017).

¹⁷⁹ Khan, Deeyah. "What Muslim extremists and rightwing racists have in common." (2015).

¹⁸⁰ McLeod, Saul. "Social Identity Theory." (2008).

specific individual. This entails claims, such as that in the West inhabitants are slaves to wages.¹⁸¹ By stating that in the Caliphate citizens are provided with all basic needs, as well as a house and electricity, the decision to join becomes more probable for women who are e.g. stuck in low-paid jobs in the West. Therefore, in general one can argue that the women are picked up at their preconditions and ISIS tries to provide "rational" arguments for joining through the propaganda.

Another factor which is supporting the recruitment strategy is group dynamics. The radicalization is accelerated and intensified through these dynamics, no matter whether in the real world (on-site recruitment) or in an online group.¹⁸² The emphasized "sisterhood" in ISIS's propaganda serves as such a group, where the women actively discuss about topics including clothing tips, travel tips, but also more emotional topics, such as the death of friends or the husband.¹⁸³

Returning to the research question, the analysis has shown that the recruitment fosters the radicalization process and it may be claimed that without the recruitment the radicalization would not finalize. However, it is necessary to mention that the recruitment does not radicalize people. Individuals have to be susceptible to the propaganda, otherwise it does not appeal to them. In other words, the recruitment strategy applied by ISIS catalyzes the individual motivational factors; however certain preconditions are necessary for the propaganda to be "successful". Therefore, the push factors (motivating factors) are a prerequisite for the pull factors (recruitment) to be efficient and finalize the radicalization process.

To summarize, it has been demonstrated that the women are susceptible towards the propaganda, because they are searching for an identity and they do not feel at home in the West, due to racist harassment. ISIS takes advantage of this by providing the women with an identity and feeling of belongingness through the appreciation of the "sisterhood" unity, the role of the woman in the Caliphate, and the *ummah*. Furthermore, by framing the world into a binary system, the decision to align one's identity becomes imperative. This shows the

¹⁸¹ Robins-Early, Nick. "4 Things To Know About Dabiq, ISIS' Propaganda Magazine." (2016).

¹⁸² Huey, Laura, and Eric, Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 5.

¹⁸³ Huey, Laura, and Eric, Witmer. "#IS_Fangirl: Exploring a New Role for Women in Terrorism." (2016), p. 5.

importance of the recruitment, the organizational aspect, for radicalization and supports that the motivating factors, the personal aspect, are only the precondition.

Generally, the recruitment strategy of ISIS has reoccurring themes since it started in July 2014 with the publishing of the first episode of "Dabiq". At the beginning, ISIS predominantly propagated the military success and the expansion of their territory. However, since mid-2016 ISIS lost territory and hence needs to focus on other strengths than the territory.¹⁸⁴ In September 2016, ISIS started issuing "Rumiyah" where it was argued that territorial loss is divinely part of the plan. Further they explain that regardless of losses (territorial, material and humane), the battle against the infidels is never-ending.¹⁸⁵ Currently, as Raqqa is attacked by Western alliances and the Kurds, it is uncertain what will happen if the "capital" of ISIS will fall. It is probable however, that terrorist attacks in the West will increase when the survivors have no territory left.

¹⁸⁴ Ingram, Haroro. "ISIS: ASSESSING RUMIYAH." (2016).

¹⁸⁵ Ingram, Haroro. "ISIS: ASSESSING RUMIYAH." (2016).

Chapter 4: Policy and Agenda

The final chapter will present policy advice for counter-terrorism measures based on the findings of the study. Additionally, it entails a subsection concerning the treatment of the female returnees from ISIS controlled territory. The final section of the thesis will address gender aspects which became prominent during the research and will outline future academic agenda when combining terrorism and gender research.

4.1 Policy Advice

When considering the analysis of the motivating factors of the *muhajirat* it becomes apparent that they are multifactorial.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, the recruitment strategy addresses a variety of these factors through tailoring the propaganda to the specific needs of the women. Hence, the trajectories to radicalization are highly diverse, which complicates tailoring counter-terrorism measures to specific individuals.

Counter-terrorism programs have two main aspects. Firstly, they aim to tackle the symptoms of active terrorism (reaction), including the re-socialization of radicalized individuals. Secondly, these programs address the underlying factors which put individuals at risk for radicalization (precautionary measures), such as discrimination and racial harassment. This second aspect of counter-terrorism measures is also essential with regard to ISIS. It is impossible to eliminate all online propaganda to hinder individuals to radicalize and emigrate. Therefore, the preconditions of why people are vulnerable to such propaganda should be focused on as well. Without the elimination of these risk factors, terrorism is ensured to be a phenomenon in the next centuries.

Effective counter-terrorism measures need to include a sociological perspective and concern topics, such as integration. It has been argued that the lack of integration¹⁸⁷ is causal to radicalization.¹⁸⁸ However, counter-terrorism policies which focus on integration are not proven to be effective and there are also studies showing that integration is not directly

¹⁸⁶ Peresin, Anita. "Fatal Attraction: Wester Muslimas and ISIS." (2015), p. 23.

¹⁸⁷ Integration is defined as the experience of friendliness in society creating a feeling of inclusiveness and belonging in daily behavior or the experience of justice within government functions (Khan, Deeyah. "What Muslim extremists and rightwing racists have in common." (2015)).

¹⁸⁸ Jenkins, Brian M. "Building an Army of Believers: Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment." (2007).

correlated with radicalization.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, assuming a direct relationship between radicalization and integration is dangerous, because it may lead to ineffective and counterproductive policies. These may further decrease trust within the community when forcing integration measures upon specific groups. This has also been outlined by Goli and Rezaei who argued that recent shifts in policy-making, such as forced integration policies in Great Britain, have to be contradicted.¹⁹⁰ In the case of Great Britain the policies become more involuntary and rigid concerning specific groups to ensure more integration. However, this is counterproductive; therefore rather autonomy should be proposed.¹⁹¹ As outlined before, the pathways to radicalization are intricate and cannot be blamed upon failed integration only. Hence, the policies have to be comprehensive.

Another sociological aspect of counter-terrorism measures entails the education about radicalization starting in school. Teaching about Islam and addressing terrorist groups and their recruitment strategies is essential, so that young individuals do not fall prey.¹⁹² Furthermore, the importance of family in precautionary measures cannot be undermined. Families are usually closest to possible recruits and can postpone or even hinder the individuals to emigrate. Apart from emotional influence, this also extends to practical problems, e.g. hiding the passport or not providing money to prevent the girls from leaving.¹⁹³ Therefore, working with families to educate about early signs of radicalization and measures to prevent it, are of high importance.

Furthermore, counter-terrorism strategies need to be cautious concerning their religious perspective. As outlined by Ingram, several secular governments, such as Australia, have employed laws which advocate moderate Islam leaders within Muslim communities. The aim is to counter violent extremism through ascribing moderate Islam to specific Muslim figures. However, this strategy rather catalyzes radicalization, because it tends to discredit and

¹⁸⁹ Sadiq, Rahimi, and Raissa, Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." (2015), p. 29.

¹⁹⁰ Goli, Marco, and Rezaei, Shahamak. "Radical Islamism and Migrant Integration in Denmark: An Empirical Inquiry." (2011), p. 107.

¹⁹¹ Sadiq, Rahimi, and Raissa, Graumans. "Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization." (2015), p. 44.

¹⁹² Speckhard, Anne. "De-Legitimizing Terrorism: Creative Engagement and Understanding of the Psycho-Social and Political Processes Involved in Ideological Support for Terrorism." (2007), p. 271.

¹⁹³ Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 18.

undermine the credibility of the Muslim figures involved.¹⁹⁴ Terrorist organizations, such as ISIS create militant narratives warning of these governments, because it "sanctions Islam". Eventually, this often leads to moderate Muslim advocates losing legitimacy.¹⁹⁵

From a psychological perspective counter-terrorism measures need to address the frustrated, alienated individuals within the society.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, it is essential to directly appeal to susceptible individuals through venting the frustration. This includes programs, such as creative arts, political outlets, sports, or adult mentors. Furthermore, it is necessary to appeal to the identity of the susceptible individuals through making groups more accessible, such as community service programs, adventure groups, student societies, or sports leagues.¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, it is recommended that the government has to tarnish ISIS's image established through propaganda.¹⁹⁸ Interventions have been proposed by Saltman and Smith particularly addressing the usage of counter-narratives to neutralize the propaganda of ISIS.¹⁹⁹ This includes redirecting individuals who try to access ISIS's propaganda, to videos which show counter-narratives. This entails ISIS defectors negating the message ISIS attempts to deliver. These counter-narratives have already been introduced by Google and Microsoft, however until now their scope is not far reaching.²⁰⁰ Additionally, as the "war against Islam" is a main aspect of ISIS's propaganda, it needs to be emphasized more frequently by politicians as well as in the media that Western countries are not at war with Islam but with violent extremism.

Another challenge concerning counter-terrorism is the dissolution of ethnic ghettos, such as in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek in Belgium. These ghettos present a catalyst for participation in terrorism, because inhabitants mostly cannot participate in politics in their home country which may lead to a radical response.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ Ingram, Haroro. "ISIS: ASSESSING RUMIYAH." (2016).

¹⁹⁵ Ingram, Haroro. "ISIS: ASSESSING RUMIYAH." (2016).

¹⁹⁶ Khan, Deeyah. "Jihad." (2016).

¹⁹⁷ Venhaus, Colonel, John, M. "Why Youth Join al-Qaeda." (2010), p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ Bodo, Lorand, and Speckhard, Anne. "How ISIS Disseminates Propaganda over the Internet Despite Counter-Measures and How to Fight Back." (2017), p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ Saltman, Erin. M., and Smith, Melanie. "Till Martrdom do us part. Gender and the ISIS Phenomenom." (2015), p. 52.

²⁰⁰ Bodo, Lorand, and Speckhard, Anne. "How ISIS Disseminates Propaganda over the Internet Despite Counter-Measures and How to Fight Back." (2017), p. 4.

²⁰¹ Bremner, Charles. "Ethnic ghettos prove a perfect breeding ground for terrorists." (2015).

4.1.1 Female Returnees

For the first time, a new threat to international security is posed through the high number of returnees from ISIS controlled territory. Important to underline is that the women returning, although lower in number compared to men, may pose a greater threat. These women are experienced with war, violence and mass casualties and might be particularly dangerous, because they are underestimated and romanticized. However, for instance members, of all-female brigades, such as "al-Khanssaa", have received military training for years and have been indoctrinated. Hence, they pose a significant threat to home countries upon arrival.²⁰²

Additionally, Western countries tend to have light sentence or no sentence at all for women involved in terrorist organization. It is assumed they were coerced or simply followed their brother or husband, such as in Kosovo.²⁰³ Concerning female returnees of ISIS, most of them (until now) were found innocent. These verdicts are caused by a lack of evidence to convict them, apart from their stay in Syria.²⁰⁴ Peresin argued that it is important not to criminalize women who return, because they often did not carry out violent acts and will stay in Syria if they are punished upon arrival. She states that when the women return to their home country, they will not continue the struggle of jihadism.²⁰⁵ However, more women than previously thought received military training. Although their illusion of ISIS as paradise may be smashed, it cannot be ruled out that the female returnees are radical and willing to carry out an attack.²⁰⁶ Therefore, not criminalizing the female returnees should not be an option. Hoyle et al. suggested another approach which entails that these women should be criminalized but also reintegrated in Western society. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be aware that these women are desensitized to violence and may justify it according to Sharia law.²⁰⁷ Therefore, the treatment of female returnees requires great cautions. Otherwise gender stereotypes of the "jihadi bride", who is only joining to find a husband, undermines the political and violent will of the women.

²⁰² Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 37.

²⁰³ Speckhard, Anne, and Almohammad, Asaad. H. "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers." (2017), p. 10.

²⁰⁴ Speckhard, Anne, and Almohammad, Asaad. H. "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers." (2017), p. 10.

²⁰⁵ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p.32.

²⁰⁶ Speckhard, Anne, and Almohammad, Asaad. H. "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers ." (2017), p. 10.

²⁰⁷ Hoyle, Carolyn, Bradford, Alexandra, and Frenett, Ross. "Becoming Mulan?" (2015), p. 36.

Another reason to keep a close eye on female returnees is the possibility of female suicide bombers. This option has been prevalent in the past for Islamic terrorist organizations which were in distress due to e.g. high number of casualties. Encouraging women to commit suicide attacks also entails multiple advantages in the West, because women are not under suspicion.²⁰⁸ This threat is particularly important to take into consideration, because the Caliph of the Islamic State, al-Baghdadi, has uncovered the marriage certificate in May 2015: "*If the Prince of believers [al-Baghdadi] consents to her carrying out a suicide mission, then her husband should not prohibit her.*"²⁰⁹ The statement implies that in case the Caliph dictates this, the husband who could possibly oppose a suicide mission, has no right to codetermination over his wife. ISIS taking these measures shows that it is probable that women will soon be used in suicide missions.

4.2 Future Agenda

It is noteworthy that female radicalization is important for the gender debate within terrorism research. Although, it is long known that women participate in terrorism, it is still underrated. This becomes evident when considering the comment by the UN special rapporteur who reiterates that "*ignoring women as potential terrorists undermines the ability of counter-terrorism measures to identify terrorism suspects and may serve to promote the recruitment of female terrorists.*"²¹⁰ Hence, combining gender and terrorism research is highly important to advance the knowledge of these women to create more comprehensive counter-terrorism measures addressing both men and women.

Furthermore, when female radicalization is considered within the media or among scholars it is often discriminating against women. The recruitment strategies, as well as the motivating factors of the women joining ISIS, have been judged as unpolitical and romantic.²¹¹ The women were often reduced to being young adolescents who dream about their own love story and do not mind living subordinate to men. Hence, the women are portrayed by media and

²⁰⁸ Peresin, Anita, and Cervone, Alberto. "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS" (2015), p. 506.

²⁰⁹ Speckhard, Anne. "ISIS Recruitment of Western Women. International Center of Violent Extremism."(2016), p. 4.

²¹⁰ UN General Assembly. "Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism." (2009), p.18.

²¹¹ Paquette, Danielle. "Why young American women are joining ISIS." (2015).

academia as naive and without political motives.²¹² Also the reported recruitment strategy to attract women is undermining the political will of the women. This occurred when ISIS started posting pictures of Nutella and fighters holding kittens in order to demonstrate "normality" within the Caliphate. In the media outlet, such as CNN it has been reported that women join the organization specifically due these pictures.²¹³ Additionally, it was claimed that posting pictures of kittens and the usage of emoji's in posts predominantly appealed to the women. This statement shows that women's motivating factors are not always taken seriously and reduced to being lured by kittens and Nutella, hence presented as unpolitical, childish and romantic.²¹⁴ These stereotypes provide the Western society with a convenient way for thinking about this phenomenon when these women are presented as emotional instable, deviants, victims or monsters.²¹⁵ Experts, however, underline the importance to understand that women join terrorist groups for the same intricate reasons as their male counterpart.²¹⁶ Apart from the necessity to take the women's motives seriously, it may be dangerous to underestimate the female returnees, as it has been outlined before.

Concerning future research a gendered aspect of radicalization needs to be addressed more intensively. The trajectories the individuals take when radicalizing as well as promising counter-terrorism measures need to be researched and developed. Furthermore, the question whether radicals stemming from second- or third-generation immigrants and converts pursue the same radicalization process should be answered by research. Extending the knowledge about the phenomenon of female radicalization is essential to stop terrorism from growing in the twenty-first century.

²¹² Paquette, Danielle. "Why young American women are joining ISIS." (2015).

²¹³ Hall, John. "They have learned our secrets: CNN ridiculed after ludicrous claim that ISIS is luring women with kittens and Nutella." (2015)

²¹⁴ Hall, John. "They have learned our secrets: CNN ridiculed after ludicrous claim that ISIS is luring women with kittens and Nutella." (2015)

²¹⁵ Carter, Becky. "Women and violent extremism," (2013), p. 7.

²¹⁶ Carter, Becky. "Women and violent extremism," (2013), p. 2.

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