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An Examination of British ISIL Recruits

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1.1 - Introduction

Terrorism is arguably one of the most complex and multifaceted issues facing the international community to date. Groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) perplex many analysts and policy makers. It is estimated that between 3922 and 4294 individuals have travelled from Europe to join the Syrian uprising (ICCT 2016:3). A majority of roughly 2838 European foreign fighters came from just four countries; Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (ICCT 2016:3). Online radicalisation, returning jihadists, home grown terrorists and lone wolf attacks are high risk threats to European security which analysts must fully understand in order to develop effective counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism policies.

In 2016, Global Terrorism Index report stated that 74% of all deaths, resulting from terrorism, were caused by four groups; ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (IEP 2016:3). All four groups are Wahhabi Sunni extremist groups with broadly similar goals and beliefs. What differentiates ISIL from the other three groups is their emphasis on and ability to, recruit Western individuals to either travel to their territory or commit acts of terror in their home nation. Foreign fighter mobilisation has occurred in previous conflicts e.g. the Spanish civil war (Hegghammer 2013:12). However the scale of European recruitment in the Syrian conflict is unprecedented. Recruitment and mobilisation of Western individuals is a pressing issue which must be remedied if Western policy makers wish to address the threats from home grown terrorism, returning jihadis and work towards stabilising the security situation in areas held by ISIL. This thesis will attempt to answer the question; ”How have ISIL managed to recruit large numbers of British individuals” in other words “What is so successful about their recruitment strategy ?”

1.2 - Foreign Fighter Literature Review

As mentioned previously, the mobilisation of foreign fighters to participate in foreign conflicts is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the large numbers of British individuals who are travelling to join ISIL.

Thomas Hegghammer in his February 2013 article examined how Western jihadists from the United States and Europe choose to either conduct attacks at home or travel abroad to conflict zones. In the article Hegghammer used a range of data sources, written by qualified observers, to estimate the number of Western jihadists travelling to join conflicts abroad between 1990-2010. The study indicates that between 1990 and 2001, approximately 100 U.S citizens and 200 European citizens participated in the conflict in Bosnia (Hegghammer 2013:5). Between 2001 and 2010, Hegghammer found that 500 Europeans participated in foreign conflicts; 100 in Iraq, at-least 200 travelled to Afghanistan/Pakistan, at least 10 to Yemen and finally at least 150 in Somalia. In total, Hegghammer's conservative estimate was that between 1990 and 2010, the supply of foreign fighters from the United States and Europe totalled 900 individuals. Hegghammer states that "precise quantification is impossible" and his data set is no doubt incomplete, however he concludes that rough estimates are the only way in which to truly get a "sense of the scale of the foreign fighter's phenomenon" (Hegghammer 2013:3-5). While his findings are limited, the data shows that between 1990 and 2010, the supply of Western foreign fighters rose with the majority of the increase stemming from Europe.

To explain why Western jihadist appear to favour going abroad as opposed to staying at home to commit attacks of terror in their home country, Hegghammer suggests three potential hypothesises. Firstly, foreign fighters appear to go to countries where it is easier to operate, secondly he suggests that while they may prefer to operate at home in the

West however they travel abroad to train thus improving their abilities, thirdly he proposes that militants view foreign fighting as more legitimate than domestic attacks (Hegghammer 2013:6-7).

While these theories may explain why Western jihadist prefer to fight abroad rather than staying at home, they do not entirely explain why more Western individuals have been attracted to ISIL and the Syrian conflict in comparison to other conflicts. Hegghammer estimated that between 1990 and 2010, 700 Europeans travelled to conduct jihad abroad. An April 2016 International Centre for Counter-terrorism (ICCT) report estimated that between 3922 and 4294 individuals have travelled from Europe to join the Syrian uprising (ICCT 2016:3).

The majority of roughly 2838 European foreign fighters came from just four countries; Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (ICCT 2016:3). Understanding why European foreign fighter numbers have increased five-fold in the space of a few years is therefore paramount for both policy makers and academics to allow them to craft effective counter-terrorism polices to deal with this trend.

Duyvesteyn & Peeters in a 2015 paper for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) undertook a cross-case analysis on seven Muslim conflicts which attracted foreign fighter. The seven conflicts examined were; Afghanistan (1980-1992), Bosnia (1992-1995), Somalia (1993-2015), Chechnya (1994-2009), Afghanistan (2001-2014), Iraq (2003-2015) and Syria (2011-2015) (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:4). Duyvesteyn & Peeters examined the potential impact three factors relating to these conflicts which may explain the varying levels of foreign fighter mobilisation. The first factor looked at the ability to access the battlefield, the second factor looked at the internal dynamics and cohesion of groups involved within the conflicts and the final factor looked at was the chance of success of rebel groups in the conflict.

Broadly the study divided all seven conflicts into two categories, one category for conflicts with very low turnout of foreign fighters (below 1000) and the other category for conflicts with relatively high turnout of foreign fighters (above 1000). Somalia, Chechnya and Afghanistan (2001-2014) were categorised as having low foreign fighter turnout. In all three of these conflicts, access to the battlefield was obstructed by various governments such as Russia in the Chechen conflict and the United States in the War in Afghanistan (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:26). The report also found that the chances of success in the three conflicts were limited and the internal cohesion of the opposition groups involved was also limited which is argued to explain the relatively low levels of turnout of foreign fighters (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:26).

Examining the conflicts which had a relatively high number of foreign fighters; Afghanistan (1980-1992), Bosnia, Iraq and Syria; the three factors examined appeared to tell a different story. In all four conflicts mentioned above, access to the battlefield was permissive, arguably the 1980-1992 conflict in Afghanistan was the easiest conflict to access as various Muslim countries allowed or actively enabled recruitment to the conflict (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:26). With regard to the Syrian conflict the report states that a potential reason as to why the conflict has attracted so many volunteers is the fact that no one was stopping them travelling. Duyvesteyn & Peeters highlight a British jihadist's Facebook status which mocks the ease with which the individual was able to cross the Turkish border into Syria stating "1 hour flight from Istanbul, 30min drive from hatai and bing bang boom ur in!!" (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:23). They also suggest that as a result of the relatively low risk of legal punishment, at the beginning of the conflict, travelling to the conflict had relatively few obstacles (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:23).

Again, for all conflicts which witnessed relatively high numbers of foreign fighters, internal cohesion of the various groups involved in the conflicts appeared to be limited but this does not stop foreign recruits from participating in the conflict. In the Syrian case, Duyvesteyn & Peeters suggest that despite infighting between ISIS and various other rebel factions in 2014, European intelligence analysts estimated that a very small number of individuals left Syria while concurrently other fighters were travelling to Syria. While other groups were becoming more reluctant to integrate unknown foreign recruits into their ranks, ISIS was ready to take any and all foreign fighters "even those who do not speak Arabic or are without military training" (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:24).

The report also suggests that the chances of success in the four conflicts also played a factor in explaining why they drew relatively high numbers of foreign recruits. In the Syrian case, the rebel group's hold over a large territory along the norther border meant the conflict was regarded as less dangerous for foreign fighters, in comparison to other conflicts, as there are numerous safe havens free from frontline warfare (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:24). The report also argues that the perceived strength of ISIS may also explain why they have received numerous foreign recruits stating that "ISIS has supplanted al-Qaeda as the leader of the global jihadi movement" (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:24).

Duyvesteyn & Peeters suggest that the mobilisation of foreign fighters can be divided into cycles consisting of the pre-war, war and post-war phases of mobilisation. Their article focused on the war phase and the factors influential to large-scale mobilisation (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:28). They highlight that in the digital age, foreign fighters communicate to an audience back home via social media and jihadi web forums. Duyvesteyn & Peeters also argue that when they engage in online communication, they are in fact communicating about the accessibility of the battlefield, internal cohesion and

chances of success which in turn further mobilises other individuals by convincing “fence-sitters at home to join them” (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:28).

Therefore in order to answer the question and understand how ISIL have managed to recruit and mobilise more Western individuals than other similar terrorist groups it may prove useful to examine how they present the three factors; accessibility to the battlefield, internal cohesion and chances of success in their communications and propaganda.

As Hegghammer suggested, “good data on jihadism is notoriously difficult to obtain (Hegghammer 2013:13). Good data on where various British jihadist travel to and which groups they join is indeed hard to come by, but Syria seems to be an exception. Hegghammer in a 2016 article suggested that between 2011 and 2016 over 5000 European Muslims have traveled to Syria, citing that this number is five times greater than the number of Europeans who went to all previous conflict destinations (Hegghammer 2016:1).

In a 2014 report, Jenkins highlighted that a study found that 55% of British foreign fighters joined ISIL, 15% joined Jabhat al-Nusra and only 2% joined the Free Syrian Army or other groups and it is unknown which groups the remaining 29% joined. Jenkins also highlights another study which suggested that as much as 80% of British foreign fighters joined ISIL (Jenkins 2014:18). Despite the variation in the numbers between the studies Jenkins highlights it would appear that the majority of British foreign fighters who travelled to Syria have joined ISIL. In a 2016 report by the ICCT, it was estimated that between 700-760 Britains have travelled to Syria (ICCT 2016:40).

This would mean that the number of British foreign fighters who joined ISIL could range from a conservative estimate of 385 to the higher estimate of 608. In comparison to other terrorist groups, it is believed that around 100 British fighters have travelled to Somalia to join al-Shabaab (Allen 2015). Bernard & Rabasa suggest that the majority of foreign

fighters in Somalia have been recruited in the UK and Scandinavia with others coming from the USA, the Netherlands and Canada; estimates suggest that 100 are from Britain, up to 50 from Denmark and 20 from Sweden (Bernard & Rabasa 2015:151). Wise argues that foreign fighters only represent a “moderate percentage” of al-Shabbab’s overall membership of several thousand (Wise 2011:9). Wise also highlights the growing tensions between the Somali nationalist factions and the foreign fighter factions within the group. Without the protection of some of the nationalist factions, the foreign fighter faction would be vulnerable to the various clans and warlords who are intrinsically hostile to foreigners and outsiders (Wise 2011:10). As Duyvesteyn & Peeters found, Somalia has witnessed a relatively low level of foreign fighter mobilisation, the internal group cohesion of al-Shabaab could partly explain why only an estimated 100 British individuals have joined the group. Pantucci & Sayyid found that from mid-2010, there was evidence that a steady flow of British individuals were travelling to join the group however over time this has diminished, they suggest that with the rise of other jihadi destinations such as Syria, “young westerners no longer saw the appeal of joining the increasingly xenophobic jihad” (Pantucci & Sayyid 2013:4).

In comparison to al-Shabaab, the researcher could only find one British individual, Aminu Sadiq Ogwuche who was confirmed to have joined Boko Haram. Robin Simcox highlights that Boko Haram unlike al-Shabaab or al-Qaeda is not a well-known group and has therefore been unable to attract Westerners (Peachy & Dugan 2014). In other conflicts such as the Iraqi occupation, it was estimated by the British secret service that 70 British Muslims had travelled to Iraq to fight with groups such as Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups (Brandon 2008:7). Stuart highlights in 2006 this figure was estimated to have risen to between 120 and 150 British Muslims fighting against coalition forces in Iraq (Stuart 2014:4). Pearson has suggested that members of the proscribed group al-Muhajiroun

stated that 600 British Muslims were fighting in Afghanistan however there was no evidence and so these claims were unsubstantiated (Pearson 2011:27).

Robin Simcox highlight that security services claim that more British individuals have travelled to participate in the conflict in Syria in comparison to the combined number of British individuals who participated in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (Simcox 2014). Hegghammer has stated that the conflict in Syria represents “the largest foreign fighter mobilisation of Islamist foreign fighters in history” (BBC News 2015). Therefore will it is nearly impossible to conclusively quantify and confirm that ISIL has indeed attracted more British individuals than other similar terrorist organisations, the research undertaken for this thesis seems to suggest that this is indeed true.

2.1.1 - Theoretical framework

To fully understand how ISIL are so successful in their recruitment of British individuals a theoretical framework is required. In the field of critical terrorism studies there are a growing number of academics who are applying the sociological framework of social movement theory to the study of organisations and groups engaged in political violence (Gunning 2009:156). Gunning highlighted that in 2009, a keyword search in the two prominent academic journals on terrorism (Terrorism and Political Violence, and Studies in Conflict and Terrorism) found only one article with the phrase 'social movement theory' (Gunning 2009:156). Presently using a keyword search and utilising the search query "social movement theory"~10, there are just under 50 articles containing references to social movement theory in these two prominent journals; 22 in 'Terrorism & Political violence' and 24 in 'Studies in Conflict and Terrorism'. As Gunning suggests, even in 2017, the use of social movement theory is still relatively marginal in the critical terrorism field. It should be noted that social movement theory is not homogenous or a theory in the traditional definition of the word (Gunning 2009:158). It can be understood as the synthesis between earlier and later incarnations of related aspects of social movements such as resource mobilisation, political opportunity, framing and cultural aspects which will be explained in detail later in this chapter.

The inspiration to use social movement theory framework in this thesis, to answer the question as to why more British individuals have been recruited to ISIL relative to other similar terrorist organisations, stems from Duveysten, Peeters and Hegghammer. The factors and hypothesises which they found contributed to the number of foreign fighters in their various studies can be synthesised and combined into the social movement

framework itself. Other academics have also argued that social movement theory provides utility in the study of recruitment.

In a 2008 report for the European Commission, Neumann and Rogers examined the recruitment and mobilisation of Europeans into Islamist militant movements. They suggest that “social movement theory is the most appropriate framework through which to look at the question of recruitment” (Neumann & Rogers 2008:11). Neumann & Rogers propose that there are three insights which makes social movement theory useful for their research on recruitment and mobilisation. Firstly, social movement theory argues that movements or groups act rationally in their mobilisation of resources (Neumann & Rogers 2008:8). Secondly, social movement theory examines the process through which messages or ‘frames’ as the theory calls it are conveyed to potential recruits (Neumann & Rogers 2008:8). Thirdly social movement theory argues that informal connections and social networks play an important role in the process of mobilisation (Neumann & Rogers 2008:9).

Scholars such as Beck have suggested that many terrorist groups appear to be structured like social movements as they consist of a professionalised core which orchestrates and directs attacks, assembles resources and provides leadership to a broad base of supporters (Beck 2008:1568). Beck argues that resource mobilisation theory is evident in groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah which have developed into quasi-governments in their territory while also launching attacks. ISIL would fit into this description as the group has been described as a quasi-state which operates judicial and governmental functions within captured territory; they exploit lootable resources such as oil and have engaged in minting their own currency. Beck also suggests that terrorist groups depend on the external environments in which they operate, for example these groups thrive in unstable environments void of any effective central authority which enables groups to attract recruits, carry out terrorist attacks and gather resources (Beck 2008:1569). Beck highlights

that Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which would later morph into ISIL, came into being, not just as a result of grievances or the mobilisation of resources, but because after the US forces invaded they dismantled the central government which created void and thus an opportunity for the group to thrive (Beck 2008:1569). Similar to Neumann & Rogers, Beck argues that 'framing' is an important aspect of terrorism as groups spend time and effort justifying and explaining their actions in order to mobilise and recruit supporters. He further suggests that framing is an important aspect of issue driven movements such as Islamic militancy (Beck 2008:1570).

New social movement theory is concerned with identity, academics such as Gould have argued that the creation of an identity is a crucial aspect of mobilisation as it enables recruitment of a broad and motivated base of supporters (Beck 2008:1571). Other academics such as Sutton and Vertigans have argued that new social movement processes are evident in radical Islamic groups (Beck 2008:1570).

Militant groups tend to be born out of a larger social movement, even the militants themselves often begin as activists in a wider social movement before becoming involved in militancy as a result of the dynamics inside the wider social movement and the wider external context and political environment (Gunning 2009:160).

Understanding ISIL as a social movement group based on the transitional religious-political ideology of jihadist-Salafism, which is part of the wider spectrum of transnational Salafist social movements, could yield utility in understanding why so many British individuals have joined the group as opposed to other similar terrorist groups.

2.1.2 - Resource Mobilisation

In the critical terrorism field, grievances and strains are argued to play a central role in motivating individuals and groups to commit acts of violence. Beck highlights that terrorists and terrorist groups are motivated to commit acts of violence not only as a result of several grievances and structural strains, they are motivated by idealised religious ideology which contradicts society's social norms and practices. In addition they are motivated by strain caused by the modernisation of society and also by foreign military occupations coupled with external influences and other broad grievances (Beck 2008:1567). While it is argued that grievances are indeed necessary and required in order to explain terrorism, they do not fully explain the emergence of terrorist organisations themselves. McCarthy and Salad argued that grievances alone are not enough to explain contention and hostility as most individuals at most times have grievances and complaints about societal structures (Beck 2008:1567). Gunning highlights that the theory of resource mobilisation emerged as a critique of the socio-psychological explanations of grievances and strains (Gunning 2009:158). The fundamental issue with regard to collective action is the need for the resources required to tackle issues related to grievances and strains. A solution to this resource problem is to establish a group or organisation which has the capacity to mobilise more human resources and rally supporters, has the capacity to raise and mobilise material contributions, in the form of money and tangle goods, and has the capacity and the desire for collective action and thus turn it into a movement (Beck 2008:1568). From this perspective, individual activists involved in the movement are viewed as rational choice actors rather than being psychological deviants and thus a distinction is introduced between the wider unstructured movement and the structured social movement organisation within it (Gunning 2009:158).

ISIL is an organisation structured as a quasi-state with large amounts of human, financial and material resource. The organisation is also distinct from the wider Salafi movement. Understanding ISIL from the resource mobilisation perspective will yield a deeper understanding of the group and will enable the understanding as to how they have been able to recruit so many British individuals.

2.1.3 - Political Opportunity

Political opportunity is the second aspect of the social movement theory. Movements not only arise as a result of successful resource mobilisation but due to the fact that political and/or social conditions are suitable for successful and sustained contention (Beck 2008:1568). Giugni highlights that there are four dimensions to political opportunity; the open or closed nature of the political system, the stability or instability of elite alignments, the presence or absence of allied elites and finally the States capacity and/or disposition for repression (Giugni 2009:361). The political opportunity or political process model is a critique of both the socio-psychological and resource mobilisation frameworks, political opportunity theories also emphasis the importance of ideology, specifically the role of 'cognitive liberation' which shifts the view from seeing inequalities as assured to regarding them as correctable through the re-examination of the existing conditions, opportunities and resources (Gunning 2009:159). The opportunity for mobilisation may occur as a result of either a large shift in the overall political structure or a specific event which provides the opportunity for an instance of contentious action, movements are shaped by the wider political landscape (Beck 2008:1568-69). The political opportunity framework is especially applicable to the study of ISIL as academics such as Fawaz Gerges argues that the social and political instability caused by the US-led invasion of Iraq, coupled with dismantling the Baathist state institutions, propelled the rise of the precursor group to ISIL (Gerges 2017:11-12).

Beck also argues that terrorists depend on the external environment in which they operate rather than solely on internal political processes, al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was the predecessor to ISIL, arose not just as a result of grievances and the mobilisation of resources but due to the US invasion and the subsequent demolishing of the central

authority which created an opportunity to mobilise and threaten the established power arrangements (Beck 2008:1569).

The conflict in Syria can also be viewed as a political opportunity, not only for ISIL but also for British individuals as well. Both Hegghammers' hypothesis, that foreign fighters go to countries in which it is easy to operate and Duvyvesteyn & Peeters argument that access to the battlefield is an important factor in explaining the levels of foreign fighters in a conflict, can be synthesised into the framework of political opportunity which could provide utility in explaining why so many British individuals have joined ISIL.

2.1.4 - Framing theory

Framing theory is the third aspect of what Beck describes as the tripartite of social movement framework. Framing is the term which is used to describe the justifications which movements' utilities in order to attract support. Therefore the meanings which participants attribute to their actions play a central role in the mobilisation process (Beck 2008:1569). Framing theory, as with the resource mobilisation framework, focus on the micro-mobilisation of individuals but shifts the perspective to focus on how opportunities, identities and actions are framed. Framing theory examines how movement entrepreneurs reinterpret, amplify and extend existing ideologies, cultural and religious 'master frames and life experiences to mobilise both movement activists and non-members of the movement (Gunning 2009:159).

As with other social movements terrorist groups a significant amount of time and effort both justifying and explaining their actions. Similarly to how political parties act during electoral campaigns, terrorist groups during their campaigns, produce ideological manifestos, encourage and call individuals to action and give speeches and issue communiques to both supporters and potential supporters (Beck 2009:1570).

While political violence and terrorism can be viewed as a tactic utilised by insurgents, the selection of targets for terrorist attacks can also be viewed as symbolic (Beck 2009:1570). The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11th 2001, perpetrated by Al-Qaeda, can be considered part of the groups' framing mechanism (Beck 2009:1570). The World Trade Centre can be seen to symbolise America's financial wealth and the Pentagon can be seen as a symbol of America's military might and its military industrial complex. Targeting these symbols had immense psychological effects on the

American public while also signalling to supporters and potential supporters of Al-Qaeda their perceived strength and substantial ability to inflict pain and suffering in the American heartlands. Therefore rhetoric and meaning are thus not only basic features of social movements but also features of terrorist organisations as well (Beck 2009:1570).

Duvyvesteyn & Peeters reported that conflicts, such as Syria, which witnessed high levels of foreign fighter participation, also showed high levels of internal cohesion of the groups and high chances of success. These two factors of internal cohesion and chances of success, can be viewed as ‘framing’ and were used by both ISIL and foreign fighter movement entrepreneurs use these ‘frames’ to mobilise further support. Therefore the framing perspective and framework will provide utility in understanding as why so many British individuals have joined ISIL.

2.1.5 - New social movement theory

New social movement theory (NSMT) can be considered part of the larger cultural turn in the study of social movements, which brought attention to the non-structural factors in movement mobilisation and dynamics (Beck 2008:1570). NSMT provides a perspective on culture and identity movements from mainly the macro-level and meso-level and it can be expanded to examine micro-level factors such as leadership, membership and ideology (Gentry 2004:275). New social movements are characterised by several factors; firstly the public and private spheres become intertwined, meaning new social movements use personal and cultural identities as stakes in conflicts; secondly the level of deviance is an important factor which can be viewed as the opposition to social norms; thirdly solidarity is a key objective and collective action is based upon a solid and centralised identity; finally direct participation is crucial in new social movements (Gentry 2004:277). Beck suggests that in the study of terrorism cultural factors have clearly played a crucial role especially in terrorism motivated by religion or religious ideologies, as religious commitment has be used to explain seemingly irrational tactics and has been used for the justification of committing violence against civilians (Beck 2008:1571). New social movements and activists are united by a common enemy, for example national governments or 'imperialist' powers; these groups create networks which disseminate information and collective action is marked by the level of deviance which usually rises as each new action seeks to gain more attention (Gentry 2004:277-278). The combination of ideology, common opponents, networks and collective action leads to the development of solidarity which contributes to the zeitgeist of the movement (Gentry 2004:278). Considering that ISIL espouse a religiously based ideology in which the public and private spheres are intertwined and which utilises the religious identity as a source of conflict and to foster solidarity and

collective action, new social movement theory framework could prove to be useful in understanding how ISIL has managed to recruit so many British individuals. Gentry also proposes that new social movement theory framework can be utilised to fully understand the role of women and gender in new social movements (Gentry 2004:274).

NSMT framework could also prove useful in deepening the understanding of why so many British females have joined ISIL. Neumann highlights that since 2013 up to 15% of emigrants to ISIL have been female. He further states that the “high number of women joining Islamic State … reflects stronger and more active female participation in the Salafist scene” (Neumann 2016:119). Utilising the new social movement framework will also provide utility into understanding why so many British females have also joined the group.

3.1 - Methods

Having outlined the theoretical framework and foundation of this thesis, it is necessary to provide an overview of the methods and approaches utilised in conducting the research for this dissertation. The approach utilised in this research was mix methods with a focus on qualitative research with evidence based on a combination of primary and secondary sources. The research began by conducting a review of literature into foreign fighters, social movements and terrorism.

Empirical evidence for this research was obtained in a similar manner as Hegghammer utilised for his foreign fighter study. The BBC News open source database of British jihadists forms the basis of the database which was supplemented with data from other sources. The BBC News database contains information about more than 200 Britons who have died, been convicted of related offences to the conflict or who are still in the region of Iraq and Syria. As the database contains information about individuals who joined other groups such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, the first step was to codify and enter into a spreadsheet all the information regarding individuals who could be confirmed and verified as to have joined ISIL. While the BBC states that approximately 850 individuals from the UK have travelled to support or fight for jihadists groups in Iraq or Syria, the database only has 156 profiles of individuals who have travelled to the region. Other information regarding the real names of individuals, their age when they left the UK and the home town of individuals is also missing (BBC News 2017). Of the 156 profiles contained on the BBC News database, 137 were confirmed to have travelled to Iraq and Syria to join ISIL. The database only contains just over 15% of the total number of Britons who have joined ISIL, while this does not constitute a representative sample, it is hoped that some deeper understandings of both ISIL and the British individuals who have joined the group can be

gained. As Hegghammer suggests “good data on jihadism are notoriously difficult to obtain (Hegghammer 2013:13). This dissertation research is therefore a modest attempt to make the most of the available data on British jihadist who have joined ISIL.

A copy of the database spreadsheet can be obtained here : goo.gl/ZDNxHP

As the research question for this thesis looks at why so many British individuals have joined ISIL, the analysis section will not focus on the actual radicalisation process of individuals. As mentioned previously, grievances do not fully explain the emergence of terrorist organisations, grievances also therefore do not fully explain why large numbers of British individuals have become radicalised and therefore joined ISIL. In order to explain this phenomenon this thesis will examine the causal mechanisms utilised in recruitment of British individuals to explain the high levels of mobilisation. Lee highlights that in resistance movements “causal mechanisms are the activities and techniques used by insurgents or activists to exploit antecedent conditions for resistance purposes” (Lee 2016:137). Lee highlights that there are four types of antecedent conditions in social movement theory; political, economic, social and informational (Lee 2016:135). The effects are outcomes which terrorists aim to achieve by exploiting the condition through a variety of mechanisms (Lee 2016:137). Below is a figure which demonstrates the development of resistance movements.

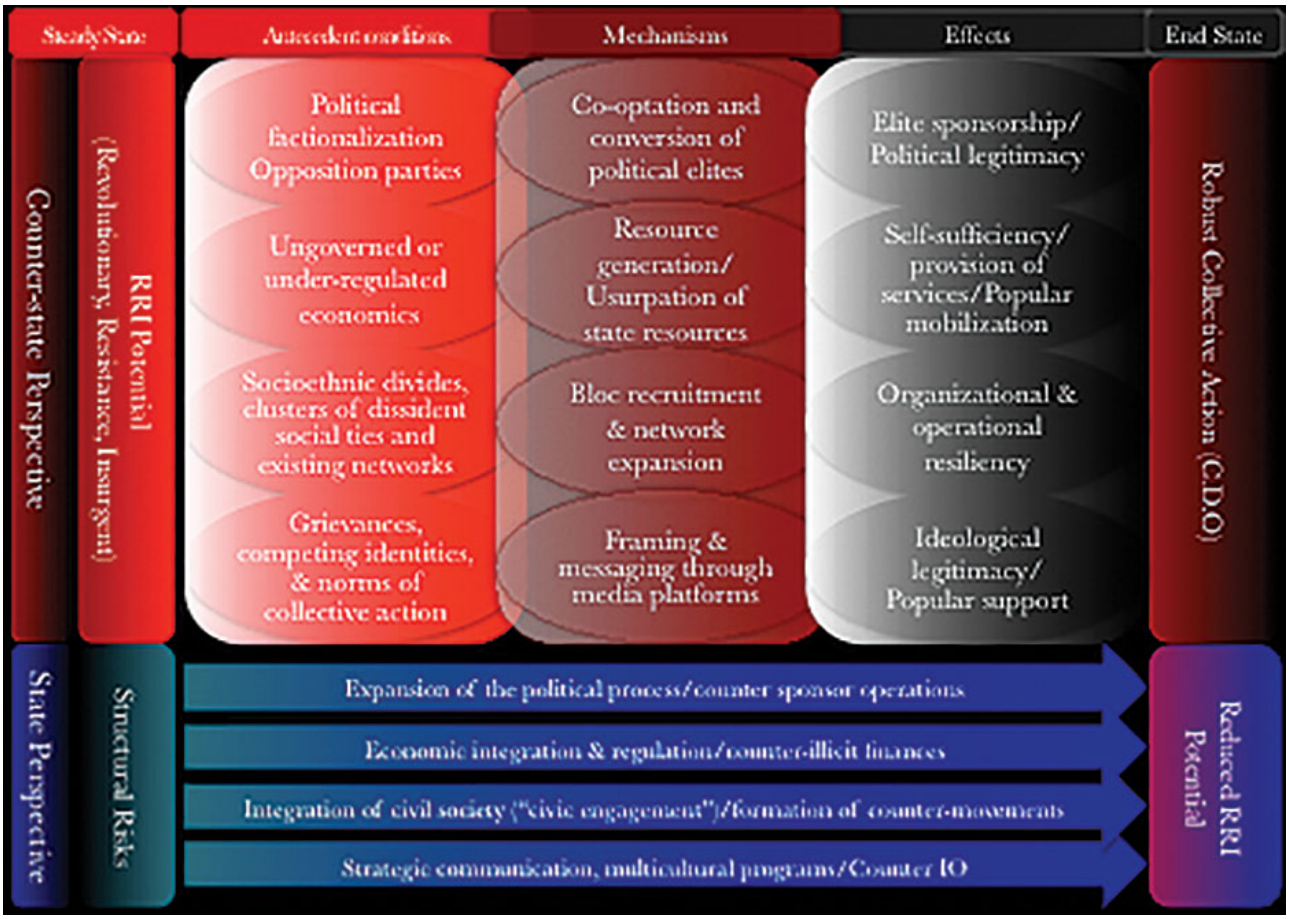


Figure 1: Social Movement Approach to Resistance Dynamics (Lee 2016:133)

In order to answer the research question, this thesis will examine three causal mechanisms utilised by ISIL and movement entrepreneurs; bloc recruitment, network expansion and framing. Examination of these mechanisms with regard to specific sample cases from the dataset will help to explain why so many British individuals have joined ISIL.

In the following analysis section a brief overview of the antecedent conditions which enabled the developed ISIL and the groups which proceeded it will be examine. The thesis will then examine two samples cases of geographic clusters and pre-existing social networks from the dataset. It will then move on to examine the al-Muhajiroun network before moving on to examine samples from the dataset of female British ISIL recruits.

4.1 - The origins of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

Gentry highlights that in order to fully understand a new social movement the historical and social context in which the movement arose must be examined (Gentry 2004:277). In order to fully understand the social movement that is ISIL, we must examine the historical and social context of the group, as Gerges suggests “as a social movement, ISIS must be contextualised through its origins” (Gerges 2017:73)

Stern and Berger argue that while there are many factors which enabled the rise of ISIL, its roots stem from the 2003 US led invasion of Iraq and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Stern & Berger 2015:13) . Al-Zarqawi was the Jordanian Salafi leader of the group al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which was composed mostly of Iraqi jihadists, the group formed in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq (Moubayed 2015:87). Gerges argues that the invasion of Iraq coupled with the resulting social turmoil and protracted insurgency led to the destruction of Saddam’s political apparatus and state institutions which were replaced by a new political system based on “muhasasa”, this system distributed power along communal, ethnic and tribal lines (Gerges 2017:8). The de-Baathification campaign which discharged people based on their affiliation to the former regime was viewed as a discriminatory policy towards Iraqi Sunnis which was implemented by the newly installed Shia led regime, this fostered a widespread feeling of injustice in the Sunni community (Gerges 2017:91). Over 100,000 Sunni Ba’athists were removed from positions in the government and military leaving these individuals unemployed and angry and in the case of military personnel armed as well. Lieutenant General Jay Garner of the US army stated that de-Baathification policy had created a large number of educated and experienced individuals as “potential recruits for the insurgency” (Stern & Berger 2015:19).

Moubayed highlights that the Sunni insurgency began with 50,000 former Baathists taking up arms against the US led occupying forces but the insurgency was not initially an Islamic uprising (Moubayed 2015:91). The Sunni resistance was composed of Islamic nationalists, secularists and tribal leaders and that the Sunni fight was framed as a conflict against the foreign occupying forces based on the widespread belief that the occupiers were handing Iraq over to Shia led Iran (Gerges 2017:93). The instability and turmoil in Iraq coupled with the growing resentment of the coalitions' forces presented the leaders of al-Qaeda with a "unique opportunity" to expand the global Jihad into the heartland of Arabia (Gerges 2017:91). Jihadist leaders from around the world described the intervention in Iraq as beneficial to their movement which had begun to decline as a result of the destruction of al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan (Stern & Berger 2015:18).

What is clear from examining the historical and social context, in which AQI and later ISIL developed in, is that the social fabric of Iraq had been ripped apart. The collective national Iraqi identity fostered by the Baathist regime had been replaced with local sectarian and ethnic identities (Gerges 2017:8). Eisentadt & White highlight the Sunni Arab males sense of grievances stemmed from losing family members as part of the intervention and conflict, being humiliated , harshly treated or wrongly imprisoned by both the coalition forces or Iraqi security forces (Eisenstadt & White 2005:10). Grievances from the Sunni community in Iraq also arose as a result of the dismissal of 100,000 Sunni Baathists from the government and military and the perceived shift in political power granted to the Shia community. As mentioned previously grievances alone do not explain the development of the Sunni resistance groups. Fundamentally collective actions require the mobilisation of resources. Found Hussein suggests that Zarqawi had fewer than thirty fighters at the start of the coalition forces intervention in Iraq but he was able to quickly recruit 5000 full time

fighters which were supported by 20,000 homegrown supporters, this is an indication of how rapidly Iraqi society began to radicalise and militarise (Gerges 2017:89).
The establishment of AQI enabled Zarqawi to effectively mobilise resources both human and financial in order to continue the insurgency. Eisentadt and White suggest that while Zarqawi did not “hijack the insurgency” his organisation, AQI, co-operated with Baathist elements of the Sunni resistance to carry out actions and in order to achieve tactical objectives (Eisentadt & White 2005:15).

Apart from sharing a common enemy, the Baathists and Zarqawi shared little else in common (Moubayed 2015:91). The main differences between the armed Sunni resistance groups were mostly related to their differing ideological agendas (Gerges 2017:89). While many of the Iraqi Sunnis involved in the resistance were not ideologically aligned with Zarqawi’s brand of Salafist-Jihadism, the sectarian political environment coupled with their shared common enemies enabled these groups to cooperate.

Zarqawi and the al-Qaeda movement utilised the political instability caused by the large shift in the Iraqi political structure after the invasion as a political opportunity to revitalise their movement after losing their base in Afghanistan. The al-Qaeda movement also capitalised on the widespread and generalised anti-US sentiment present after the occupation (Gerges 2017:91). These factors provided the al-Qaeda movement with a “golden and unique opportunity” to expand their global jihad network into Iraq (Gerges 2017:91).

Although the Sunni fight was originally framed as a conflict against the coalition forces who were perceived to be handing Iraq over to Iran, Zarqawi began increasingly to target Shia’s and Sunni’s who would not convert to his cause (Gerges 2017:91). Lee argues that AQI

would continually utilise targeted violence in order to exacerbate the sectarian divide and tensions in the country. By accentuating the sectarian divide, AQI and latter ISIL sought to mobilise and recruit disenfranchised Sunnis. This is what can be described as a frame amplification technique which is utilised in order to ingrain a sense of active agency by utilising social and religious norms which resonant with activists (Lee 2016:143).

4.2 - The resurrection of the Caliphate

The resurgence of the al-Qaeda movement in Iraq was short-lived. In June 2006, Zarqawi and many in the AQI leadership were killed in an air-strike. The move was an attempt to implement a decapitation strategy which sought to collapse AQI by removing the group's leaders (Stern & Berger 2015:26). After the death of Zarqawi, the then second in command of Al-Qaeda central, Zawahiri released a statement eulogising Zarqawi. The statement was utilised in order to call for AQI to establish an Islamic State (Stern & Berger 2015:26).

When Zarqawi was killed the al-Qaeda movement in Iraq was faced with a major setback and the surge in US troops also pushed the movement further to the brink. In 2004, two years prior to the death of Zarqawi, the now infamous leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was detained and sent to Camp Bucca which was an American prison camp (Neumann 2016:62). The experience of prison only led to further deepen al-Baghdadi's extremist beliefs and gave him the perfect opportunity to extend the Salafist-Jihadist movements following. Thompson & Suri argue that the way in which the camp was structured facilitated the radicalisation process of many; detainees were separated along ethnic lines and the most radical inmates were held with individuals who had not even committed crimes, this dynamic provided a space for the radical message to spread (Stern & Berger 2015:34-35). Camp Bucca held not only radical Salafist-Jihadis but also former Baathist members as well. Gerges highlights that former Baathists who joined AQI and ISI, were that they were typically detained at prison camps such as Camp Bucca, Camp Copper and the infamous Abu Ghraib prison.

While it is also true that the radical elements present in these prison camps did indeed network, Gerges, suggests that high levels of radicalisation can also be attributed to the

incarcerated individuals' experiences in prison, many of whom experienced torture (Gerges 2017:155). Incarceration and ill-treatment in prison has long been understood to initiate the radicalisation of individuals and further radicalise those already thinking that way. Many prominent individuals in the radical Salafist-Jihadist movement have become further radicalised in jail. Notable figures in these movements who were further radicalised in prison are Sayyid Qutb who was central to the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhoods ideology, Zawahiri who is al-Qaeda's central leader and Zarqawi who is reported to have lost his toenails in a prison in Jordan due to torture and infection (Till 2011).

Prisons such as Camp Bucca became hotspots of radicalisation and recruitment centres for jihadists. It is in this environment that transformed Baghdadi from an unknown solider into a driven and ambitious member of and then leader of a larger social network of Sunni militants (Gerges 2017:157). When Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi left prison in December 2004, he immediately founded an insurgent group which was soon affiliated to ISI (Neumann 2015:62).

In 2007 in order to counteract the insurgency the US rapidly increased troop numbers in order to secure the Iraqi population against attacks from AQI and other armed groups involved in the insurgency. By 2008 the surge have achieved its goal as groups such as al-Qaeda were no longer overrunning the country which lead the situation to stabilise and relations between ethnic and religious communities to begin to improve (Stern & Berger 2015:26). However these inter-communal relations would not last, the political establishment in post-Saddam Iraq was divided and Prime Minister Maliki's growing authoritarianism was one of the underlying factors which enabled ISI to experience resurgence (Gerges 2017:132).

A turning point in the sectarian dimension of Iraqi politics came when Prime Minister Maliki insisted that US troops leave Iraq by 2011. Even before troops had left the country Maliki

began to distrust Sunnis (Stern & Berger 2015:29). A day after the last US troops left Iraq, Maliki issued an arrest warrant for the Sunni Vice Presidency Tariq Hashimi who was charged with terrorism related offences. Hashimi was the first Sunni in Iraq who had agreed to participate in the new political regime and his removal led other Sunni political leaders to boycott the parliament (Stern & Berger 2015:29). This increased the Sunni's feeling of disenfranchisement which in turn increased sectarian tensions. Along with Sashimi other Sunni politicians such as the finance minister and a Sunni parliamentary member were also charged with terrorism and which left Sunni's feeling further alienated and fearful of the new regime. With few options open to them many turned to supporting the insurgents (Stern & Berger 2015:30).

In 2010 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the new emir of the Islamic State of Iraq (Moubayed 2015:97). When the senior leadership of ISI was killed in an airstrike, the group sought a new leader who possessed religious authority. Baghdadi fitted this description as he was educated in Islamic law (Stern & Berger 2015:37). When Baghdadi rose to power, he rebuilt ISI by bringing in individuals from Camp Bucca and many of these individuals were former Baathist leaders. Richard Barret argues that the Baathists initiated into the ISI ranks brought military and organisational skills which AQI & ISI desperately lacked (Stern & Berger 2015:37-38). In 2011 Baghdadi a group of men into Syria in order to expands ISI's influence into the country, this expansion was a secret project and it was not until April 2013 that Baghdadi confirmed that al-Nusra was an offshoot on ISI (Neumann 2016:63). Neumann suggests that when ISI gained control of territories in both Syria and Iraq the jihadist group had the jihadists movements first real opportunity to "bring a large, transnational, historically significant area under its control", when ISIL consolidated territory in Syra and made gains in two provinces of north-western Iraq Baghdadi formally proclaimed the Caliphate in June 2014 (Neumann 2016:64).

4.3.1 - Geographic Clusters and pre-existing networks

Examination of the database suggests that the majority of individuals who joined ISIL travelled with other people. While it is confirmed that 74 individuals travelled with one or more other individuals this number could be potentially higher as it is difficult to definitively confirm that the other 63 individuals in the database travelled alone. Many of the individuals who have travelled to Syria in groups have done so with close friends or members of their family. What is also clear from the database is that the majority of individuals who have joined ISIL have left the UK from several locations which appear to be geographic hotspots for ISIL recruits.

Medina & Hepner suggest that social activities and geographic space are interrelated, meaning that individuals tend to interact most with people they are near geographically and individuals prefer to be geographically near those who they interact with the most. Terrorist social networks function in a similar way to general social networks. Therefore it is vital to identify geographic and social patterns in order to counter modern terrorism (Medina & Hepner 2013:151-153). McAdam & Paulsen have also found that individuals are more likely to join movements in which their family, friends and acquaintances participate (Beck 2008:1571). Examining these individuals' geographic and social patterns will hopefully provide utility in attempting to answer the thesis question and thus understand why so many British individuals have travelled to join ISIL.

Turton defines a cluster as a "localised excess incidence rate". Examples of geographic clusters are crime hotspots, areas of high unemployment, and patterns of fraud (Turton 1998).

Figure 1 below highlights the geographic locations of individuals and where they lived before leaving the UK to join jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria.

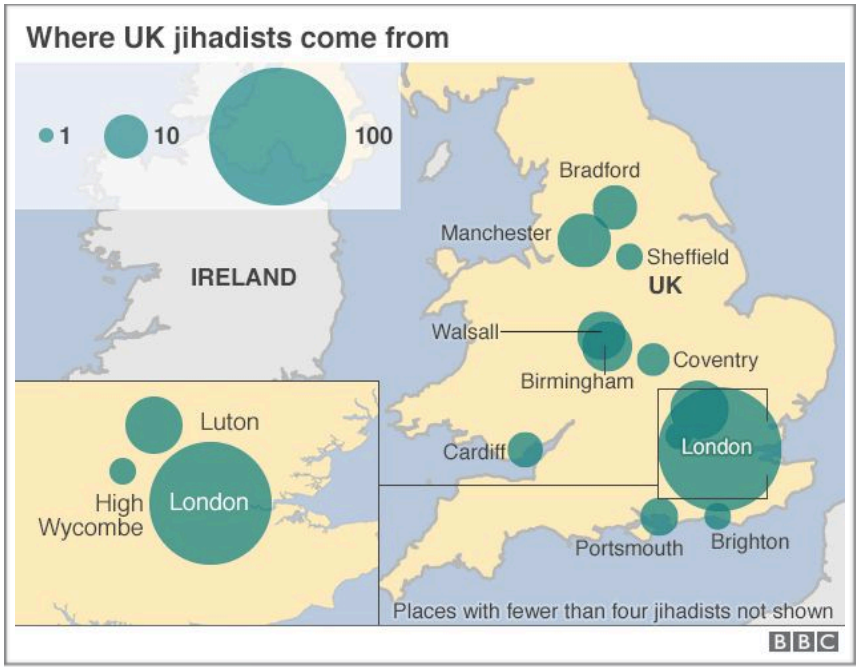
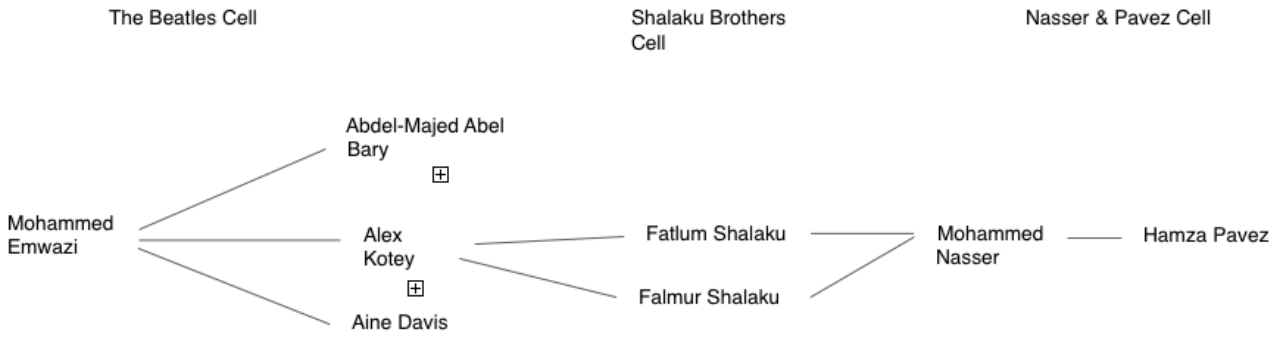


Figure 2: Where UK jihadists come from (BBC News 2017)

4.3.2 - London Network - Ladbroke Grove Holland Park School

The figure above shows that London has produced the largest number of individuals who have travelled to Iraq and Syria to join terrorist groups. The dataset produced for this thesis confirms at least 54 individuals have joined ISIL. Considering that London is the largest city in the United Kingdom with the largest population it is therefore logical that the largest number of individuals who have traveled to join ISIL originate from the city. When looking at the dataset and reports with regard to ISIL recruitment, two geographic locations and social networks overlap and suggest that they may have proved to be vital in the recruitment of British individuals. These locations are the Al-Manaar Mosque in Labroke Grove and the Holland Park School. Google Maps states that Al-Manaar mosque is 1.3 miles away from Holland Park School. Individuals who attended Al-Manaar mosque and are confirmed to have joined ISIL include Alex Kotey, Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, Aine Davis, Mohammed Emwazi, Hamza Parves and Flamur Shalaku (Parry 2016). The Al-Manaar mosque network and Holland Park School network overlap as Hamza Parves, Mohammer Nasser and Falmur Shalaku attended both institutions. Other individuals who are confirmed to have joined ISIL and attended Holland Park School include the brother of Flamur Shalaku, Fatlum Shalaku. It is reported that both bothers were recruited by Alex Kotey and both brothers were friends with Mohammed Nasser who would join the pair later with Hamza Parves (Webb 2017:16). Two other individuals Mohammed al-Araj and Nassim Terreri, also attended Holland Park School (Austin 2015). It could not be confirmed which group they joined in Syria and so they have been omitted from the database.

As Neumann and Rogers suggest, informal connections and social networks play a role in the process of mobilisation (Neumann & Rogers 2008:9). What can be seen, when examining the individuals who joined ISIL and who attended Al-Mannar Mosque and Holland School Park, is that there was an overlap in the social networks and informal connections between the various individuals. Below is a flow diagram of the various cells with connections between cells representing social connections between the individuals.



The cells and connections between cells can be described in terms of what Neumann and Rogers described as ‘guided cells’. Guided cells are usually self-recruited and through a members association establish a ‘link to jihad’ meaning they form a relationship to a member and/or an associate of the network, in this case ISIL (Neumann & Rogers 2008:13).

Mohammed Emwazi can be viewed as the guided cell leader who provided a ‘link to jihad’ for the rest of the individuals in the Al-Manaar mosque and Holland Park network. Emwazi attended the University of Westminster in London and through the university’s Islamic society he was exposed to the ideology of the transnational group Hizb ut-Tahrir (CEP 2017). After completing his university degree, in August 2009, Emwazi was arrested in with two friends by Tanzania officials, the group were accused of travelling to the country to join al-Shabaab. Emazwi and his friends were then put on a plane to Amsterdam after

being refused entry (BBC News (2) 2015). Thus Emwazi attempted and failed to establish a link to jihad by travelling to Tanzania. After returning to the UK Emwazi traveled to Kuwait to stay with family and on attempting to return to Kuwait, in July 2010, he was detained and told he could not return do so (BBC News (2) 2015).

In the thirteenth issue of ISIL's Dabiq magazine, there is a tribute to Mohammed Emwazi, under his chosen Arabic name Abū Muhārib al-Muhājir. The article states that "Despite the efforts of MI5, Abū Muhārib never ceased in his struggle to make hijrah for the sake of Allah. On his last attempt to leave the UK for his homeland of Kuwait, " Abū Muhārib was stopped at the airport and kept for questioning by MI5, the result of which was their refusal to allow him to travel … it was just a matter of days before Allah opened for Abū Muhārib the opportunity to make hijrah to Shām … Abū Muhārib together with his companion in hijrah carefully and secretly made their departure, utilizing every means available to them … the journey that totaled approximately two months" (Al-Hayat 2015:22-23). The tribute to Emwazi which featured in Dabiq magazine can be interpreted as ISIL attempting to frame the important role which Emwazi played in the group and that Emwazi can be considered an infamous celebrity in the British jihadist circles. Paying tribute to him and painting him as a martyr and hero is a thinly veiled attempt to inspire other British and Western individuals to embark on the 'hijrah' and join the group.

While Duyvesteyn & Peeters argued that Syria received high levels of foreign fighter participation as a result of the conflict being viewed as being less dangerous in comparison to others, the opposite could indeed be true. Munkler argues that the West can be considered to have a "post-heroic" mentality meaning that heroic war and the sacrifice of life is no longer considered an ideal (Munkler 2003:9-10). ISIL therefore can be considered to hold a "heroic" mentality in which the sacrifice of life in the name of the Caliphate and to die a martyr is considered the highest ideal. Just as Hegghammer argued

that foreign fighters view fighting abroad as more legitimate than conducting domestic attacks. Dying abroad as a martyr and fighting for the Caliphate is considered more legitimate. Maher highlights that most European recruits have no desire to return home, most want to achieve martyrdom or live as heroes in the Caliphate they are seeking to establish (Jones 2014). Therefore success is achieved both through dying and succeeding in the goals of ISIL. Framing success through dying and highlighting the perceived important role of Western foreign fighters is a successful tactic which ISIL have utilised in mobilising British individuals.

Maher highlights that the Muslim advocacy group Cage blamed Emwazi's radicalisation on MI5, however others such as Robert Verkaik stated that "Emwazi was already on an extremist path before he had finished his studies at Westminster University." (Maher 2016). The Syrian conflict provided Emwazi with a political opportunity to mobilise and attempt to establish another 'link to jihad'. After his attempt to join Al-Shabaab he was monitored by MI5, his departure to Syria could be viewed as an attempt to travel to a country in which it is easier to operate as Hegghammer suggested. Despite the extended journey Emwazi and his companion took to join ISIL, the Syrian battlefield proved to be more accessible to Emwazi in comparison to access to the Somali battlefield. Once the link to jihad was established by Emwazi, Davis and Bary travelled to Syria in 2013. It is unclear when Kotey travelled to Syria. These four individuals formed the infamous "Beatles" cell named as a result of their British accents (Goldman & Mekhennet 2016). Neumann argues that Western individuals are "militarily worthless" in comparison to Chechens or Iraqis. The commonest role for Western recruits is often guard duty (Neumann 2016:102-103). While these individuals are indeed "militarily worthless", individuals like the Beatles cell members prove to be powerful propaganda tools and also recruiters. Neumann argues that Western Europeans are disproportionally represented in

beheading videos, highlighting that these individuals are essential to ISIL as the project the image of power, strength and ideological determination which is then disseminated through Western news channels (Neumann 2016:104).

A former ISIL fighter started that ISIL utilised these individuals in the beheading videos of James Foley and Steven Sotloff in order to “project the image that a European, or a Western person, executed an American so that they can showcase to their Western members and appeal to others outside of Syria and make them feel that they belonged to the same cause.” (Itkowitz 2014). As Beck suggested the selection of targets for terrorist attacks can be viewed as symbolic but in this example the individuals utilised to commit these horrendous acts of violence can also be viewed as symbolic. Utilising Western individuals to kill high value Western hostages can be interpreted as ISIL attempting to frame the important role which Western recruits play in the group and as such mobilise other individuals to join.

The US State department in, 2017, added Alex Kotey to the list of designated terrorists stating the Beatles were responsible for holding captive and beheading two dozen hostages. It also stated Kotey was responsible for recruiting several British nationals (US DoS 2017). Western recruits such as the Beatles prove to be useful for propaganda purposes such as in the beheading videos or the tribute to Emwazi in Dabiq magazine. They also prove useful as they recruit others in their spare time. Brandon argues that jihadists groups in Iraq and Afghanistan decided that while British volunteers were enthusiastic they were of limited use on the battlefield, recognised they would be more useful retuning to the UK to conduct acts or raise funds (Brandon 2008:8). ISIL understood that they would be useful as objects to frame propaganda around and also as recruiters. They understand that resource mobilisation is vital to the survival of a social movement. While combat experienced individuals are preferred unlike other jihadists groups ISIL

appears to have prioritised the mobilisation of any and all volunteers over the mobilisation of solely fighters or the mobilisation of financial resources.

The Al-Manaar mosque and Holland Park network expanded as a result of Kotey. The Shalaku brothers, Fatlum and Falmur were reportedly recruited by Alexenda Kotey, a year later in May 2014 and the brothers' friend Mohammed Nasser travelled to join ISIL with Hamza Parvez (Webb 2017:15-16). Once an individual in a social network makes a link to the jihadist network, the number of individuals who then become involved begins to snowball. As McAdam & Paulsen suggest, individuals are more likely to join movements in which their friends and family are involved (Beck 2008:1571). Lee argues that "Brokers … organically connect structurally disjointed groups in order to facilitate bloc recruitment play an irreplaceable role." (Lee 2016:141). Movement brokers or activists turned movement entrepreneurs such as Alex Kotey are vital in the micro-mobilisation of individuals involved in the Al-Manaar mosque & Holland Park School social network. A cluster of dissidents with pre-existing social ties enabled the network to expand, this helps to explain why such a relatively small geographic area can produce a disproportionately large number of ISIL recruits.

4.3.3 - The Portsmouth, Cardiff and Manchester Network

As in the London network, the Manchester network of ISIL recruits comes from a surprisingly small area. The largest Manchester cell which travelled to Syria together consisted of four individuals, Raphael Hostey, Anil Khali Raoufi, Mohammed Javeed who travelled to Syria in October 2013, and a fourth named Nur Hassan joined the group in November 2013 (Webb 2017:21). The leader of the cell, Raphael Hostey was also involved in recruiting other individuals from Manchester such as the Halane sisters, Salma and Zahra who travelled together to join ISIL in June 2014 (Webb 2017:24). Below is a graphic which shows how close Raoufi, Hostey and Javeed lived.

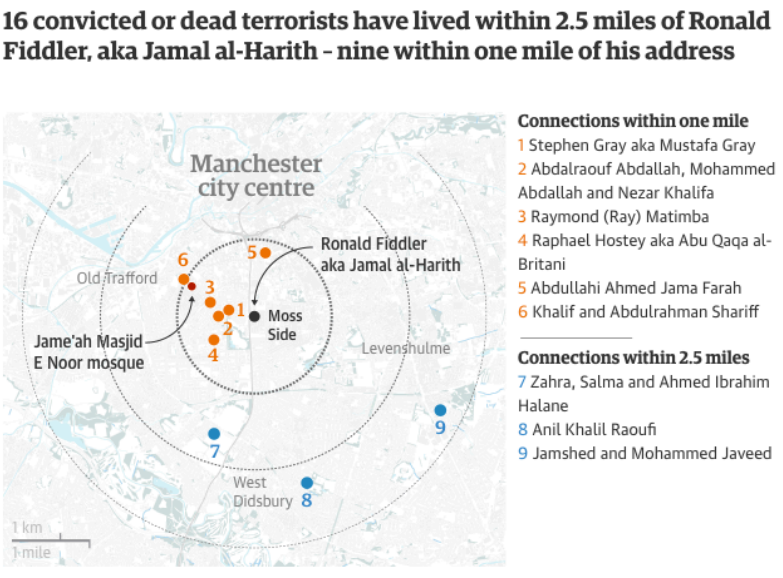
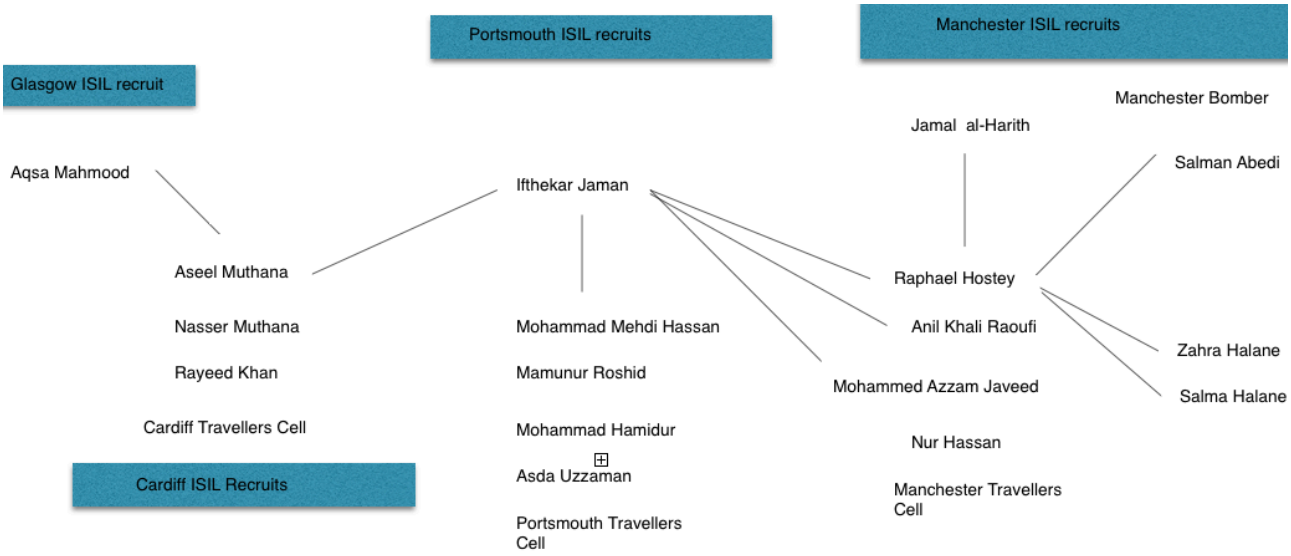


Figure 3: Small part of Manchester that has been home to 16 jihadis (Paven 2017)

From the dataset and from examining reports, another aspect of the Manchester ISIL recruits cell which deserves academic attention is the interconnectedness of various cells between different geographic regions. The Manchester cells' social network extended to

other ISIL cells in Portsmouth and Cardiff. Below is a flowchart diagram which highlights the connections between the various geographic cells



Maher has argued that Ifthekar Jaman became one of the most significant recruiters and without him the Portsmouth, Cardiff and Manchester cells would have found it far more difficult to travel and join ISIL (Maher 2017). Maher highlights that Jaman was part of the initial wave of jihadis who travelled to join ISIL in May 2013. During Maher's interview Jaman stated "I went alone" as he did not know where he would sleep or what he would be doing. Originally Jaman wished to join Jabhat al-Nusra however as the barriers of entry are higher for foreigners there he joined ISIL (Maher 2014). Jaman can be viewed as what Neumann and Rogers would describe as a genuine self-starter. Self-starter cells are often compared to street gangs; they are entirely self-recruited and maintain no formal links to the terrorist network (Neumann & Rogers 2008:14). Neumann highlights that Jaman at first was only allowed on guard duty and that during the long hours he published thousands of tweets and photos which made him a local celebrity in his hometown (Neumann 2016:92).

As Duyvesteyn & Peeters suggest foreign fighters communicate to an audience back home via social media and disseminate information about the accessibility of the battlefield, internal cohesion and chances of success in order to convince “fence-sitters at home to join them” (Duyvesteyn & Peeters 2015:28). Jaman’s social media activity and contact with various clusters of dissident cells back in the UK enabled there mobilisation.

Once Jaman had established the ‘link to jihad’ the Portsmouth cell transformed into a guided cell. The Portsmouth cell consisted of 6 individuals, Ifthekar Jaman can be considered the cells’ leader and he was the first to establish links, which enabled the others to mobilise and join him in October 2013. The self-proclaimed “Britani Brigade Bangladeshi Bad Boys” cell included Hamidur Rahman, Mashadur Choudhury, Assad Uzzaman, Mehdi Hassan, Mamunur Roshid (TRAC 2017). It should be noted that Mashadur Choudhury has been omitted from the flow diagram and database as he returned to the UK on the 26th of October 2013 shortly after travelling with the cell.

Jaman also transformed the Manchester cell into a guided cell. Webb highlights that Jaman had been in contact with Raphael Hostey, Anil Khali Raoufi, Mohammed Javeed prior to their departure from the UK. Once both the Portsmouth cell and the Manchester cell had arrived in Turkey Jaman guided both groups together to Reyhanli and into Syria (Webb 2017:23). While Jaman played a role in mobilising the Manchester cell, it is also important to understand that Hostey had a connection to the ISIL member Jamal al-Harith who was previously held in Guantanamo, it is believed that Hostey’s father was good friends with al-Harith (Paven 2017).

While Maher argues that the Cardiff cell would have found it harder to travel to join ISIL without Jaman, the link between the cells is strong. Nasser and Aseel’s father claimed that

his son Nasser was radicalised at the local al-Manar centre mosque in Cardiff where he also attended with Reyaad Khan (Webb 2017:30). He also said that Nasser & Aseel began to behave differently after they attended the centre (Webb 2017:32). Westrop highlights that al-Manar centre in Cardiff frequently organised courses with a group called iERA, which stands for the Islamic Education and Research Academy and the individuals from the Portsmouth cell "were members of the Portsmouth Dawah Team, a group of local proselytisers who wore iERA clothing and distributed iERA literature" (Westrop 2014). While the Portsmouth and Cardiff cells social networks could have potentially overlapped as a result of these factors it is confirmed that Aseel had made contact with an individual connected to the Portsmouth cell. Webb highlights that Aseel was in contact with Forhad Rahman and Adeel Ulhaq prior to his departure. These two contacts are known to be connected with the Portsmouth network through Ifthekar Jaman's brother, Mistakim (Webb 2017:33).

As with the London network once an individual establishes a link to jihad, in this case Jaman, then other individuals closely connected to his social network begin to follow. While Jaman proved to be "militarily worthless" because he died in his first skirmish (Neumann 2016:92), he did indeed provide utility to ISIL as he had managed to recruit other British individuals. Other individuals such as Hostey also enabled the mobilisation of other British individuals. Maher has suggested that Hostey may have been involved in helping to produce ISIL's propaganda magazine Dabiq and that his death marked an "end of an era" (Osborne 2016). Activists turned movement entrepreneurs are vital in the micro-mobilisation process and the existence of pre-existing clusters of dissidents only improves the ability of movement entrepreneurs to engage in the bloc recruitment of cells.

4.3.4 - al-Muhajiroun network

One of the most influential networks associated with British individuals who have travelled to Iraq and Syria is the al-Muhajiroun network. This network is connected to various other groups in the United Kingdom and Europe. Vindo argues that over the last few years, many individuals from Western countries who have engaged in violent jihadist activities have been involved with groups such as al-Muhajiroun and its later incarnation as the Shira4 global movement (Vindo 2015:2). Al-Muhajiroun was founded in 1996 when Omar Bakri Mohammed was ejected from Hizb ut Tahrir , which is a pan-Islamic group that was founded in the 1950's in East Jerusalem (Vidino 2015:3). The organisations main goal was to re-establish the Caliphate wherever its members are as it "cannot be restricted by time and space". This implied the group, with predominately British members, sought to resurrect the Caliphate on British soil, a belief explicitly expressed by this group (Connor 2005:121).

The al-Muhajiroun network and its subsequent successor groups can be understood to be new social movements as they fit within Gentry's characteristics. Firstly, al-Muhajiroun played a role in British public political debate and sought to encourage religious conversion of others in the British society (Connor 2005:122). As Salafist-Islamism is a religious-political ideology the public and private sphere are intrinsically linked. Secondly there was a high level of deviancy which was the complete opposite to British social norms, a prime example being the 'celebrations' on the anniversary of the September 11th attacks (Connor 2005:122). Another example of the networks high level of deviancy is when Islam4UK & Muslims against Crusaders, successor groups to al-Mujairoun, handed out leaflets and put up posters in areas of East London with large Muslim populations stating "You are entering a Sharia- controlled zone – Islamic rules enforced". These

posters and leaflets also stated “No Alcohol,” “No Gambling,” “No Music or Concerts,” “No Porn or Prostitution,” and “No Drugs or Smoking.” (Vindo 2015:7).

Thirdly, solidarity and collective action revolving around a centralised identity is present in the group. Connor highlights that al-Muhajiroun’s doctrine argued that individual Muslims were responsible for the territorial, cultural and religious integrity of the Muslim ummah (Connor 2005:129). Finally direct participation is crucial to a new social movement and al-Muhajiroun believed that Da’wa (the call to Islam) and jihad are linked and they believed that jihad was the individual duty of every Muslim (Connor 2005:121). Gentry also suggests that activists in new social movements are united by a common enemy, in the case of al-Muhajiroun network, the West is viewed as a general “oppositional force” however the main enemy is the United States (Connor 2005:125).

The al-Muhajiroun and its ideological successor groups can be viewed as non-violent; their deviant and provocative actions are utilised to gain media attention rather than to disrupt or trigger violent confrontations (Vindo 2015:6). However what is clear is that individuals connected to or associated with these various groups have gone on to commit acts of violence. Pantucci highlights that between the late 1990’s and 2013, al-Muhajiroun was connected to 23 out of a total of 51 terrorist incidents and plots (Pantucci 2015:21). In particular, the individuals involved in the 7/7 London bombings and the murder of Lee Rigby were linked to the “seemingly non-violent Islamist group” (Ahmed 2016).

While ideology is not the only factor which radicalises individuals to commit acts of violence and not all individuals who possess radical ideologies go on to commit violence, the role of ideology cannot be dismissed (Vindo 2015:8). The European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation suggested that radicalisation occurs “at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory”, the “enabling whether virtual or physical is where individuals are introduced to radical ideologies”. Groups such

as al-Muhajiroun and its successors contribute and provide such an environment which can act as a gateway towards violent militant groups (Vindo 2015:8-9). Ahmed, Comerford & El-Badawy found in a study of 100 prominent jihadists' profiles from the Middle East and Africa that 51% had links to non-violent Islamist groups and movements prior to joining violent movements (Ahmed et al 2016:6).

In September 2014, Anjem Choudary along with nine other men were arrested on suspicion of acting as a member of al-Muhajiroun and encouraging extremism. A day later one of the individuals arrested, Siddhartha Dhar, left the UK with his wife and four children travelling to join ISIL's Caliphate in Syria (Moore & Mosendez 2016). Other British individuals such as Nasser Mutha who was part of the Cardiff network, had, according to leaked Islamic State documents, a recommendation from the former leader of al-Muhajiroun Omar Bakri Mohammed (Webb 2017:31).

Anjem Choudary was convicted and sentenced in 2016 to five years and six months for supporting ISIL. The police revealed he had links to an estimated 500 British jihadists fighting for ISIL (Evans et al 2016). The prosecutor Richard Whittam QC stated that "the defendants sought to validate the legitimacy of both the Caliphate and the Caliph and in doing so emphasised the obligation on others to obey or provide support to ISIS and Baghdadi" (Kirk 2016). The al-Muhajiroun network and movement entrepreneurs such as Choudary are influential in the British Salafist scene. Their rhetoric of framing ISIL as the legitimate Caliphate coupled with their emphasis on the obligation to support ISIL has enabled large numbers of British individuals who were part of the pre-existing al-Muhajiroun network to be inspired and mobilised to join the group. The conflict in Syria

coupled with the relative ease of access to the battlefield has provided a unique political opportunity to the al-Muhajiroun network to mobilise individuals to their cause.
While a large number of domestic attacks committed in the UK can be linked to the network, the estimated 500 individuals connected to the group highlights the preference of these individuals, as suggested by Hegghammer; to travel to countries where it is easier to operate and the view that foreign fighting is more legitimate than domestic attacks. The perceived legitimacy of the newly proclaimed ISIL Caliphate which was preached by Choudary can also be considered a factor as to why so many British individuals who are connected to the group chose to leave the UK to join ISIL.

In 2015, the leader of Sharia4Belgium, Fouad Belkacem and other members of the group were convicted for encouraging dozens of Belgium Citizens to travel to Syria. Brandon states that the trial shows the highly visible group campaigning peacefully for Sharia in Belgium had in-fact been covertly encouraging members and followers to travel to Syria to join violent groups (Brandon 2015:1). The Soufan Group report on foreign fighters states that as of October 2015, it was believed 470 Belgium citizens had travelled to Syria, making it the country with the highest number of foreign fighters per captia (TSG 2015:12). Brandon also suggests the trial highlights the role Islam4UK, which is a successor to al-Muhajiroun, played in exporting extremism to Belgium. Sharia4Belgium was reported by Anjem Choudary to have been established and “set up under our own guidance” (Brandon 2015:2). Out of the 46 individuals who were tried in the Sharia4Belgium case, only 8 actually stood trial because the other co-defendants were believed to be in Syria (Brandon 2015:1). Pantucci believes that there are around 50 former members of Sharia4Beglium are currently in Iraq and Syria (Pantucci 2015:23).

As Gunning suggests, militant groups are part of a large social movement, activist are often involved in the wider social movement before transitioning towards militancy. The al-Muhajiroun and the Islam4 and Sharia4 networks which succeeded it created an “enabling environment” and providing individuals with a gateway into violent groups. The existence of such groups and networks in the United Kingdom can partly explain why so many British individuals have joined ISIL. Non-violent groups which hold the same Salafist ideology as ISIL yet do not explicitly condone the use of violence to achieve their goals have created environments which exposes and facilitates the radicalisation of individuals.

4.4.1 - The non-combative side of Jihad

While ISIL has been very successful at recruiting British men to join the ranks, the group has also been successful at recruiting women. Neumann highlights that prior to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the presence of women's involvement in jihadist movements was hardly recorded. This trend has changed over the past six or seven years (Neumann 2016:119). 15% of individuals who have travelled to join ISIL since 2013 have been female (Neumann 2016:119). Khelghat-Doost argues that the trend of women travelling and being incorporated into ISIL is unlike what any other jihadist organisation in recent history has south and attempted to achieve (Khelghat-Doost 2017:17). 10% of Westerners who join ISIL are female, this number is smaller and more often closer to zero in other jihadist terrorist organisations (Khelghat-Doost 2017:17).

Ghanem-Yazbeck suggests that Western women who join ISIL have a complex set of motivations which may be "religious, economic, political, psychological and philosophical" (Ghanem-Yazbeck 2016). Bjorgum argues that the women who travel to join ISIL do so as they are "searching for a meaning in their lives that did not exist in the Western world." (Bjorgum 2016:100).

The database utilised for this thesis indicates that 24 out of the 137 individuals are females, which means 17.5% of the individuals who have been confirmed to have joined ISIL are female. These 24 females can be split into two categories based on their individual demographics; one category is teenagers and students, the second category is mothers and older females. Of the 25 females from the database, 13 fit within the first category and 12 fit within the second. What is clear about the diverse range of ISIL female recruits is that there is no single motivating factor which can explain why all 25 British

females have chosen to travel to join the group. Two motivational factors however could be understood as generalised motivational factors for all British female recruits; religious duty and state-building activities. These general narratives are utilised by movement entrepreneurs who reinterpret the basic cultural and religious Islamic 'master frames' in order to mobilise women to join the group.

One of the master frames reinterpreted by ISIL movement entrepreneurs such as "Umm Basir al-Muhajirah" in Dabiq magazine is the concept of hijrah. Umm Basir al-Muhajirah's real name is Hayat Boumeddiene, who is the wife of Amedy Coulibaly who killed 5 individuals in a kosher supermarket in France (MacDonald 2015). Basir al-Muhajirah features regularly in Dabiq magazine from issue 7 until issue 13 writing articles titled 'To Our Sisters'. These are articles feature tailor-framed narratives directed at potential female recruits.

'Hijrah' refers to the migration the Prophet Mohammed undertook from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution in 622CE and the word muhajirah can be translated as 'emigrants' (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2015). In the eighth issue of Dabiq magazine, al-Muhajirah wrote an article titled "The Twin Halves of the Muhajirah". In the article she states that "as for the ruling on hijrah from dārul-kufr to dārul-Islām, then it is obligatory … this ruling is an obligation upon women just as it is upon men" (al-Muhajirah 2015:32-33). She argues that it is the obligation of both men and women to emigrate from the land of the non-believers to the land of Islam and she reinterprets the master frame of hijrah to mean it is the religious duty of men and women to emigrate from the West to ISIL territory which is viewed as dar al-Islam by ISIL and its supports because they have established the Caliphate and utilise the 'true' Sharia.

This religious duty narrative is also utilised by al-Muhajirah in other articles she has written for Dabiq magazine in order to frame female recruitment to ISIL as a religious obligation of

all good Muslim women. In the eleventh issue she states that “the absence of an obligation of jihād and war upon the Muslim woman – except in defense against someone attacking her – does not overturn her role in building the Ummah, producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle.” (al-Muhajirah (2) 2015:41). In this statement al-Muhajirah frames jihad also as a female religious duty. The womens role in ISIL is to help in the state-building project by producing children to build the Muslim Ummah and to raise fighters. Khelghat-Doost argues that unlike al-Qaeda which holds unclear and conflicting views on establishing a Caliphate and the female contribution to it, ISIL has a clear desire to establish a functional Islamic State and in order to attain this goal women are required to play a significant organisational role (Khelghat-Doost 2016:21). Pearson highlights that the recruitment of families is both a central aim of ISIL and a decentralised activity undertaken unofficially by many male and female members of the group (Pearson 2016:19)

Academics such as Melaine Smith & Erin Saltman have argued that ISIL female recruitment can be understood as ‘warped feminism’ and many female recruits view jihad as liberating them from Western societies. They highlight that “Women are valued in IS as propaganda, not as sexual objects but as mothers of the next generation” (Neumann 2016:122-123). Ingram states that Dabiq portrays women as ‘contributors’, preforming hijrah to ISIL territory is an essential expression of the female Muslim identity. By preforming hijrah these women are both solving their own crises and reverse the corrupting nature of living in the West and are concurrently solving the collective crisis of the Muslim community or ummah by building the “Islamic-utopia” (Ingram 2016).
The message is framed in such a way as to imply that success for ISIL is heavily dependent on women travelling to join the group, to conceive, deliver and raise the next

generation who will protect the ummah. Khelghat-Doost suggests that since ISIL portrays itself as more than just a military force and a movement, women play a critical role in both the growth and the survival of the state (Khelghat-Doost 2016:21). While other jihadist groups such as the Taliban and al-Shabaab have established political control over relatively large territorial areas and populations, while ISIL is not the first organisation to establish a quasi-state, it is relatively to Taliban and al-Shabaab, the most successful at integrating and incorporating women in the state institutions and the state apparatus (Khelghat-Doost 2017:19)

4.4.2 - Teenagers & Students

While it is argued that the primary role of women in ISIL is to act as jihadi brides and foster the next generation, examining the profiles of the British teenage girls who have joined the group it has become apparent that they are also engaged in the mobilisation process of others. One of the most famous British teenagers to join the group is Asda Mahmood. Moubayed highlights that Mahmood started a blog on arrival in Syria which offered advice on how to reach Syria and what to expect living under ISIL (Moubayed 2015:184). Ali highlights that Aqsa is one of the leading figures in the al-Khansaa Brigade which is an all-female militia comprised of mainly educated Western women who operate as an oppressive religious police force (Ali 2015:13). It is estimated that 60 British women are members of this all-female Sharia police force (Culzan 2014). Webb highlights that Aqsa has been described as “one of the main recruiters” of women for ISIL. Webb also highlights Aqsa was in contact with Shemima Begum who is part of the Bethnal Green Network (Webb 2017:29). Dearden suggests that Mahmood is suspected of helping the Bethnal Green trio consisting of Shemima Begum, Kadiza Sultana and Amira Abase. Once in Syria Amira and Shamima married jihadists (Dearden 2016).

Khelghat-Doost highlights that the diversity of roles that women are assigned by ISIL challenges conventional perspectives on women in jihadist groups. They have evolved from holding mainly secondary and supporting roles to being assigned more primary roles (Khelghat-Doost 2016:22). One such example is the utilisation of women in the health sector by ISIL (Khelghat-Doost 2016:23). In 2015, a group of 12 British medical students studying at the University of Medical Sciences and Technology in Sudan travelled to Syria. Tasneem Suliman, Lena Mamoun Abdelgadir, Nada Sami Khider & Lojain Abusibah

travelled with 8 other male medical students to join ISIL in order to work in the healthcare system. Unlike other jihadist groups, ISIL is utilising women, with diverse capabilities, in more significant ways which challenge conventional understandings of women's engagement with jihadist groups. It is simplistic and misleading to consider women who join ISIL as only 'jihadi brides' (Khelghat-Doost 2016:25).

In groups such as al-Shaabab, women tend to hold roles such as fundraisers, cooks, intelligence officers and suicide bombers (Bilala 2012). The only primary role in which women recruits in al-Shaabab can be involved is as a suicide bomber. The other roles are secondary supporting roles.

In Boko Haram, women are utilised by the group in order to "add reproductive capacity, carry out attacks, maintain order within camps and as bargaining chips with the Nigerian government." (Bloom & Matfess 2016:109). Boko Haram have fostered group cohesion by providing abducted girls as rewards thus fostering loyalty in the fighters (Bloom & Matfess 2016:109-110). Bloom & Matfess argue that women from economically underdeveloped countries tend to join terrorist groups as a result of desperation. Women from advanced economies however are attracted to terrorist groups for their ideology or religious determination (Bloom & Matfess 2016:108).

While British women may join ISIL as a result of the groups' ideology, they are far less likely to join al-Shaabab and Boko Haram which have broadly similar ideologies. The provision of important primary roles by ISIL such as health care providers, positions as religious police and online recruiters coupled with ISIL's acceptance of foreign jihadists is a likely reason why female British teenagers and students have gravitated towards the group.

4.4.3 - Mothers with Children

Another interesting aspect of the phenomenon of British ISIL recruitment is the number of mothers with children who have left the relative safety of the United Kingdom and travelled to join the group in a conflict zone. The dataset highlights that there are four different families which have travelled to join the group comprising 9 mothers with a total of 22 children. Attracting women with children to join the group is part of ISIL's state building strategy. Just as they require women to fill diverse roles such as in the health sector or in the religious police unit they also require women to raise the next generation of jihadists. Mothers and families who travelled to join ISIL originate from three geographic hotspots, Bradford, Luton and London. Out of the 22 British children living in ISIL territory, 14 originally come from Bradford in West Yorkshire, 3 from Luton and 5 from London. One of the largest groups to travel to ISIL consisted of the Dawood sisters; Sugra, Zohra and Khajida who travelled with their 9 children. While ISIL has deviated from other jihadist groups by providing non-traditional roles to women there is still a presence of traditional female roles such as mothers (Khelghat-Doost 2016:24-25). Similarly to to other jihadist organisations there is still an emphasis on the domestic role women play in jihad, these include being righteous and moral wives to their male jihadist husbands and to be nurturing mothers to the next generation of jihadists (Khelghat-Doost 2017:18).

5.1 - Conclusions

ISIL and the groups which preceded it were born out of the instability of the US-led invasion of Iraq and the destruction of the Saddam Hussain regime. The group can be viewed as a new social movement as it centres itself on the Sunni Muslim identity. ISIL is incredibly effective at resource mobilisation because Baghdadi has surrounded himself with a large number of former Baathist members who have impressive organisational skills. As ISIL is a new social movement which is part of the larger Salafist movement the group it has a broad appeal to a diverse range of British individuals. In comparison to other groups ISIL is far more accommodating to Western recruits who do not speak the language and have no prior military experience. Brandon highlighted that in previous conflicts jihadi groups, present in US-led conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, were hesitant to accept British recruits regardless of how enthusiastic they were because of their lack of military skills. As ISIL seeks to establish a functioning state it understands that in order to survive and achieve its goal it must mobilise a diverse range of individuals with a diverse range of skills and must also provide a diverse range of roles into which these individuals can fit. The gendered nature of the strict Islamic society ISIL seeks to create has resulted in the need to recruit and mobilise women to work in a wide range of roles from health care providers, religious police officers, to mothers who's responsibility it is to raise the next generation of jihadists. Whereas other terrorist groups effectively sought to only mobilise young men with military experience. ISIL, in its attempts to create a fully functioning state, required to mobilise a wide range of individuals with different skills.

Just as the conflict in Syria provided ISIL with the political opportunity to expand and capture more territory, the conflict has also provided the political opportunity for British and

Western individuals to join the group because of the relative ease of access to the conflict zone. Individuals such as Emwazi or Siddhartha Dhar were monitored by security services and were supposed to have been prevented from leaving the UK still managed to travel to Syria and join the group. From the analysis of geographic clusters and pre-existing networks it is clear that once one individual manages to form a link to jihad, close friends and acquaintances in their both their online social network and physical social network in their local geographic area are enabled to follow. What is also apparent is that many individuals who have joined ISIL were part of non-violent Islamist groups prior to departure. Pre-existing groups and networks such as the al-Muhajiroun network have mobilised a larger number of individuals who have joined ISIL. In Britain 500 individuals connected to the al-Muhajiroun network have joined ISIL, with another 50 from Belgium. The expansion of the al-Muhajiroun group has enabled bloc recruitment of large numbers of associated individuals.

ISIL's recruitment strategy can be considered to have been successful as they have utilised a two fold approach.

Recruitment is undertaken in an official capacity through ISIL's well-resourced media centre producing high quality English language videos and films and publishing a glossy magazine in English to specifically target British and Western audiences. The use of the 'Beatles cell' members to carry out the execution on the videos and the tribute paid to Emwazi in Dabiq magazine was an effective strategy which seeks to communicate and frame the important message, that Western individuals do play a vital and important role within the group and that Western individuals are both accepted and integrated into the ISIL group through which they attempt to demonstrate high levels of internal cohesion.

Recruitment is also undertaken in an unofficial capacity, the recruitment of other potential British individuals had been undertaken by existing British ISIL members. Potential recruits communicate online through social media with existing ISIL members which can lead to friendships then to their recruitment. This can lead to more individuals being recruited because they are more likely to join a group where their friends and family are already a part. Activists turned movement entrepreneurs such as Asqa Mahmood, Raphael Hostey and Ifthekar Jaman have proven to be extremely effective in communicating and framing the online propaganda and they have also been effective in mobilising other potential British recruits encouraging them to join the group and guiding them towards ISIL territory.

As a result of all these factors, ISIL has managed to mobilise more British individuals in comparison to other contemporary terrorist group such as al-Shaabab and Boko Haram. They have also been more successful in mobilising British recruits than to the conflict in Syria than to any other previous conflicts such as in Iraq or Afghanistan.

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