Women in Terrorism: Motivations for joining the Islamic State

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically, women have been participants in terrorism but are often dismissed as only being incidental and marginal participants of terrorist violence. Women are seen as victims of violence rather than as possible perpetrators (Bloom, 2005:56). Despite growing awareness of the agency, influence, and role that women play in terrorist groups, they are still responded to with surprise (Patel and Westermann, 2018:54). Scholarly attention on women as key players in terrorist groups has lately increased due to the rise in female suicide bombers in the last decade (Spencer, 2016:76). Women are no longer seen as serving only supporting roles such as caretakers and nurturers to their male counterparts. It is important to recognize their participation, because dismissing their role could lead to the neglect of important aspects and characteristics of terrorist activity, and ultimately negatively impact the containment of and the fight against terrorism.

In March 2019, the Islamic State (IS) lost control of their territory (Ali, 2020:79) but the appeal of *jihad* remains (Khalil, 2019:1). Despite this overall major setback for the group, reports about the presence and commitment of female members continue to emerge. Nearly three years after the fall of the Caliphate, the presence of IS women in Syria and Iraq persists with evidence to support this claim. One example is Alicia Fluke-Ekren, a teacher from Kansas, United States, who visited Libya, Iraq, and Syria with an intention of waging war. She trained more than 100 women and girls including her own daughter and commanded an all-female battalion during her rise within the IS. Mrs. Fluke-Ekren appears to have had all intentions to die a martyr defending the Caliphate even after her daughter had gone back to Kansas in 2017 and despite the death of her second, third and fourth husband (Rizzo, 2022). Only in 2021 was she apprehended and held captive in Syria by unidentified forces before her extradition in early 2022 (Goldman, 2022). Furthermore, IS women, many of which were wives of IS soldiers, have been kept in custody by Syrian forces. The female detainees have been moved from their original place of internment, the al Hol Camp, to more secure locations to prevent weekly escapes which were becoming the norm. Women disappear either back to the Islamic State or similar groups, with a few returning to their home countries or reappearing across the border in Turkey (Speckhard, 2020). As demonstrated by the evidence, we can observe that despite the fall of the Caliphate, at least some of the women are still a possible threat for the resurgence of IS with their persisting commitment to escape back to the network.

This thesis focuses on the motivations behind women's commitment to joining terrorist networks, specifically IS. Highlighting and recognizing the agency and influence these women hold is essential to understand the threat they pose. The aim of this thesis is to understand and explore these complex motivations beyond the common assumptions by analyzing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria women in *jihad*. Khalil (2019:1) states that women hold an important role in jihad and since the inception of IS, the scope of female terrorists has increased.

This thesis will present a single case study analysis of women in IS, which remains a relevant and operating terrorist group with a high number of female activists. It will do so utilizing Mia Bloom's 4Rs plus one theory, which sets forth 5 personal factors as possible motivations: revenge, redemption, relationship, respect, and rape (Bloom, 2012: 235). The thesis is guided by the question: "To what extent does Mia Bloom's 4Rs plus one theory explain the motivations of women joining the Islamic State?". The time frame examined from the rise of the Islamic State Caliphate in 2014 until the present. This study is important because it can elucidate the wider question of female terrorists and take a step closer to understanding the phenomenon of modern terrorism and essentially countering it (Khalil, 2019).

The structure of this thesis is as follows; chapter two following this introduction will discuss existing literature on the phenomenon of terrorism in relation to definitions, types of terrorism, the history of women in terrorism, the debate around motivations of women in terrorism and the 4Rs plus one framework presented by Bloom (2012). Chapter three will subsequently discuss the research design and method of this thesis. Chapter four will contextualize the case study of the Islamic State, women in the Islamic State and general motivations they hold. The fifth chapter will apply the 4Rs plus one framework to the Islamic State by discussing and analyzing each individual factor and present the findings. Finally, chapter six will present a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Terrorism

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. According to modern history it dates back to the late nineteenth century (Rapoport, 2004:47). However, there has been more focus on terrorism in literature since the 11 September 2001 attack in the United States, for which the terrorist group Al Qaeda took responsibility, with a significant increase of researchers studying terrorism than ever before (Bergen, 2006 & Silke, 2008:27). Sandler (2014:264) writes that there is no consensus regarding the root causes of terrorism. Schmid (2005:127), in agreement, writes that terrorism is a "seemingly straightforward concept but in reality, one of considerable complexity".

This complexity is shown by the numerous categories of terrorism literature. For example, there is a variety of arguments and debates surrounding the definition of terrorism and as such there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. Scholar Alex Schmid (2004) attempted to bring order to the disputed definition of terrorism, by discussing the factors that would encourage future terrorism if the complexity of the concept of terrorism is not acknowledged, and why it is important to have a common understanding (Schmid, 2004:381). Schmid further quotes his own definition containing 16 elements, known in academia as the 'academic consensus definition' (2004:382):

> *Terrorism is an [1] anxiety-inspiring method of repeated [2] violent action, employed by (semi-) [3] clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for [4] idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The [5] immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen [6] randomly (targets of opportunity) or [7] selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population and serve as message generators. [8] Threat- and violence-based [9] communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to [10] manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a [11] target of terror, a [12] target of demands, or a [13] target of attention, depending on whether [14] intimidation, [15] coercion, or [16] propaganda is primarily sought.*

The preceding definition is a rich interpretation of the concept of terrorism. To problematize it, it should be noted that Schmid wrote this definition in 2004, and it is important to distinguish that terrorism is not a static phenomenon.

From another perspective, Sandler (2014:257) writes for violence to qualify as an act of terror, the attack must have a political, social, or ideological objective. Taking a broader approach, Garrison (2003:40) writes that "terrorism is the use of violence to create fear in the larger audience in order to create change in that larger audience" with the use of "fear and intimidation". In a similar vein, Pinto (2019:1) argues that "terrorism is not a goal, but a means to an end".

Moving beyond the general definitions, as previously mentioned, it is important to recognize that terrorism is not a static phenomenon. One scholar at the forefront of this idea is David Rapoport and his Four Waves theory (2002) which is often used as a framework in academia in this field. Parker and Sitter (2015:198) write that Rapoport's article is one of the most influential contributions to the terrorism studies field and has been frequently referenced since. In this theory, Rapoport suggests that acts of terrorism come in waves, which he defines as "a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases" (Rapoport, 2004:47). Rapoport suggests that the world has experienced four waves of terrorism, with the first wave beginning in the 1880s with the dawn of modern terrorism. Rapoport defines the dawn of modern terrorism with the invention of the blasting cap for detonating nitroglycerin in 1863 by Alfred Nobel (Gupta, 2009:110). Each wave is suggested to last approximately 40 years, which places us in the fourth wave; religious fundamentalism which has been on the rise since 1979 (Weinberg and Eubank, 2010:596; Gupta, 2009:113). Many scholars have focused on the fourth wave of religious fundamentalism.

The rise of religious terrorism can be attributed to two trends; "the global resurgence of religion in response to the perceived destruction of religious values by corrupt and self-serving secular political orders" and, at the same time, "that religion has come under unprecedented assault from governmental religious restrictions, communal hostilities involving religions, and religiously-based civil wars- the withering of religious security" (Saiya, 2015:56). It can be explained as a staunch commitment to a religion and interpreting the religious system as a deviant form (Jurgensmeyer, 2004 in Rausch, 2015:29). Furthermore,

it has been observed that the use of indiscriminate violence to achieve their goals is a more likely approach adopted by religious terrorists (do Céu Pinto, 2004:23).

Post September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, "the threat of Islamic terrorism – rooted in the Middle East and South Asia – has taken center stage" (Moore). Badey (2002:83) states that Islamic fundamentalist extremism is a major influence in international terrorism. Although there is terrorism emanating from other religious groups claiming to be Jewish or Christian, Islamist terrorism is seen as the most violent (Schmid, 2017:6). The problems being addressed vary from social to political, however in Islam there is no separation of the religious and the political and "Islam is the solution" to everything (Bar, 2004:29). It is important to note that what many call terrorism is perceived as *jihad* by Islamists (Holtmann, 2014:140), which can be understood as a "religiously inspired effort or struggle towards a goal of spiritual, personal, political or military nature" (Kusserow and Pawlak, 2015:1). The Islamic State are considered as jihadist, advocating an unforgiving and untainted vision of jihad (Hafez, 2020:40). This context is important to keep in mind regarding this research.

2.2 Females in Terrorism

Despite a long history of women joining, engaging in, and supporting terrorism "in 60 percent of rebel groups over the last few decades" (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2019:3), the phenomenon is often met with surprise or denial (Davis, West and Amarasingam, 2021:58). The surprise or denial can be attributed to women violating existing gender stereotypes and the neglect of women in terrorism research entirely (Banks, 2019:82). Sjoberg and Gentry (2016:24) highlight that scholars should not be surprised when they hear of female perpetrated violence nor should it be assumed that their reasons for violence are significantly different to those of their male counterparts. To fully understand and analyze terrorists and terrorism, it is essential to view women as complex actors able to make their own independent choices. If women are continually seen as secondary actors to males, or as victims, then it leads to an insufficient comprehension of women in terrorism. Furthermore, the lack of integration of women into the terrorism literature will negatively influence practitioners in counterterrorism activities (Davis, West and Amarasingam, 2021:58).

A notable case studied in the literature suggests that the onset of terrorism in Russia can be attributed to a female, Vera Zasulich, who is known for her attack on the Saint Petersburg Chief of Police in 1878. In the following year, the first terrorist party of Russia was

established, Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), which had ten female members out of a total of twenty-nine (Knight, 1979:139). Furthermore, it was a woman, Vera Nikolaeyna Figner, that played a noteworthy role in the planning of the assassination of Czar Alexander II in Saint Petersburg (Hartnett, 2001:252). Sofia Perovskaya was another member of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) who was involved with the planning and assassination of the Czar. She is known as the first female who was hanged for a political crime in Russia (Petrusenko, 2018:75). Later, in the 1970s Germany saw an eruption of females involved in terrorism with the formation of West Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF) formed in 1970. The RAF was also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Meinhof is the surname of one of the two female founding members, the journalist Ulrike Meinhof (Grisard, 2014:83). In the same time period, the fight for national liberation in Palestine also saw a fair share of women participants. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) was established in 1967 (Irving, 2012:27). Leila Khaled and Dalal el Moughrabi were both involved in the liberation movement and members of the PLFP from the onset. They are specifically known for their participation in hijacking operations, as Leila Khaled was the first ever woman to hijack an aircraft (Naaman, 2007:933; Hasso, 2005:25).

The world has also seen women become active in terrorist activity in the 1980s with the recruitment and deployment of female suicide bombers by the Hezbollah - a Lebanese Shia Islamist militant group, and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam - a Tamil militant group based in Sri Lanka whose well known female battalions held a fierce reputation (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2019:3). In addition, there have been female terrorist actors in the Shining Path in Peru, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in which women made up nearly 40 percent of members (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2019:3). In early 2002, Wafa Idris, a twenty-seven-year-old woman, became the first Palestinian suicide bomber in the Palestine-Israeli conflict.

The above-mentioned groups provide evidence of female membership and engagement in suicide terrorism across the world (Banks, 2019:182). The wakeup call attack was when Belgium-born Muriel Degauque detonated a bomb in a police station in Baghdad in November of 2005, killing herself, five others and injuring many others. Degauque was the first European suicide bomber on record, and her background and family life contradicted assumptions about female perpetrators of terrorism. This instance brought to light how little we knew about the growing threat women pose as terrorist actors (Jacques and Taylor, 2013:35). Speckhard and

Ellenberg (2020) draw attention to the fact that IS holds the largest count of female members compared to any other militant terrorist group. Initially women were recruited as wives and mothers of the future generation of IS, but then their roles evolved over time into online recruiters, teachers, nurses, messengers, snipers, and suicide bombers. This variety of possible roles for women "demonstrates the spectrum of female motivations for joining" (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020). This provides further evidence that when analyzed, the reasons for womens' involvement as only secondary roles or caretaking responsibilities is inaccurate.

2.3 Understanding and Discussing Female Motivations

Literature within terrorism studies suggests that there is "no one theoretical perspective that can provide an all-encompassing explanation of terrorism". Instead, there are various theories that can explain and aid us in a deeper understanding of some aspects of terrorism (Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman, 2009:538). Political science has dominated the field of terrorism studies, however, Duyvesteyn (2004:440) notes that other fields such as law, psychology, social science, and history have also made contributions. There are numerous explanatory mechanisms to explain and/or help us understand the motivations for women to join terrorist networks. A discussion of the debate around common explanations regarding motivations for women joining terrorist groups will ensue. Experts in the field of terrorism studies suggest broadly that for a lot of the same personal motivations that entice men to join terrorist networks, those same psychological, personal, social, economic, and political factors are the same for women (Orav, Shreeves and Radjenovic, 2018:3).

Significant literature exists exploring how women join terrorist groups, suggesting that this question can be answered by either individual or organizational factors. The individual factors can be divided into the two categories of push and pull factors (Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022:464. Pull factors are more focused on the individual and utilize incentives, such as pride, political motives, and image (Salcedo, 2019; Tarras-Wahlberg, 2020:4). Furthermore, Bakker and de Leede (2015:6) express that research demonstrates that acceptance and belonging can be another pull factor. It is apparent from studies, that the combination of one or more factors mentioned leads to heightened motive to join and engage with terrorist networks (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2020:4). Phelan (2020:4) advocates, similarly to Bloom (2012) that the chances are much higher for women to join terrorist groups when there is a personal connection.

Push factors, on the other hand, suggest that individuals are more inclined to join terrorist networks due to individual, political circumstances and/or social situations, such as weak economic circumstances, familial and/or romantic relationships and revenge (Salcedo, 2019). The Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) suggests adding grief and aspiration to create distinct societal changes to the list of push factors (Fink, Shetret and Barakat: 2013:3). In addition, Mahmood (2019:13) writes that "women's motivations are cast as personal and gendered".

Although some motivations to join terrorist networks might be gender neutral, it does not imply that there are no differences between male and female motivations (Bakker and de Leede, 2015:5). The CGCC takes it a step further by claiming that there is a gender dimension to be considered and that some factors are specific to men or women (Orav, Shreeves, Radjenovic, 2018:3). The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe emphasized several gender discrepancies as factors, including inequality, lack of opportunity, oppression and violence against women, leading to the assumption that women participate and join terrorist networks to establish themselves and gain respect and equal treatment by their male counterparts (Orav, Shreeves and Radjenovic, 2018:3). It is important to consider a certain gender dimension because women and men might be more vulnerable to specific motivations. In this context, personal trauma has also been listed as an important motivation for women. Experiences of personal trauma may vary; however, studies have brought attention to rape as a specific motivator common to female suicide bombers. In specific societies, honor is associated with their commitment to sexual piety and consequently will bring shame on the family if they are raped (Orav, Shreeves and Radjenovic, 2018:3).

Despite the plausible motivations suggested by the literature, there are still some varying explanations for women's motivations to join terrorist networks. As discussed above, personal, and private reasons are often advocated as the main motivations, but Cunningham (2003) disagrees. Cunningham (2003) instead claims that women's motivations are more collective and dualistic in nature in the sense that they combine collective and individual motivations. She further writes that the claim that women only engage in violence for personal reasons suggests that their decision to partake is unconscious and they are lured in unwillingly (Cunningham, 2003:186). This assumes a lack of rational agency of women, portraying them as victims rather than perpetrators. Similarly, Jacques and Taylor (2008:308) are in agreement that motivations tend to hold a dualistic nature of personal and ideological, instead of being

purely religious, for example. Clearly, the discussion of gendered motivations presents a disconnect between the aforementioned claim that men and women have the same motivational factors and shows a gap in the understanding of gender-based push and pull factors.

2.3.1 4Rs Plus One

Similarly, to Mahmood (2019) suggesting that women's motivations are personal and gendered, the literature has shown that several scholars have analyzed female radicalization "in personal terms" (Pearson and Winterbotham, 2017:62). Mia Bloom highlights five personal categories for analysis to emphasize the role of the personal, which has been criticized as contributing to existing stereotypes. However, women, just like men, join terrorist groups for a variety of reasons, which can also be personal or political (Pearson and Winterbotham, 2017:62). However, for the context of this thesis, the personal is separate from the political. The personal includes the individualistic motivations and the political would refer to ideological and nationalist ideas. Bloom's theory focusses solely on what is understood as the personal and neglects to include political motivations. Therefore, the research conducted will focus primarily on the personal, but it is evident this can be seen as an oversight.

Mia Bloom is one of the leading experts on terrorism among females and covers the involvement of women in many different terrorist groups around the world, with her books *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* and *Dying to kill: the Allure of Suicide Terror* being cited and used by many scholars. Bloom explores motivations among females to join terrorist groups along with the roles that women play within many groups. Her work *Bombshell: Women and Terror* published in 2012 is an important contribution to the study of the emergence, motivations, and consequences of female terrorism. Schweitzer (2012:80) writes that the book fits in with the growing body of literature, "wherein academic researchers have chosen to deal with the matter in a popular rather than academic manner, so as to deepen the wider publics' understanding of the phenomenon". Furthermore, Bloom (2012) develops her own theoretical framework to reveal and explain the main motives behind female participation. It is important to take note of their involvement for academic purposes, policy, and strategic objectives and to further understand the increasingly complex world terrorists operate in. Brettschneider (2014) argues that society is unprepared for the growing and evolving roles women hold in terrorist groups.

Brettschneider (2014:2), in her review of Mia Bloom's, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists*, also writes that Bloom offers us the overlapping framework, "The Four Rs Plus One". This framework can be used to analyze different groups, with varying conflicts and geographical locations. Furthermore, the intention of the book other than being a contribution to the field was to provide accessible knowledge to non-specialists as well. However, Brettschneider (2014:3) presents a criticism as well, by stating that Bloom should consider analyzing a U.S Christian group as a case study. This proves to be a major oversight, considering the growing concern and increase in right-wing terrorist attacks throughout Europe and the United States (Coolsaet and Renard, 2022). Furthermore, this neglect of acknowledging the growing threat of right-wing extremism by Bloom (2012) could be due to the claim that "the gradual rise of right-wing extremism occurred mostly in the shadow of the jihadi threat" (Coolsaet and Renard, 2022). Despite these shortcomings, the paper falls more in line with Pinto's view (2019:4), who writes that the framework is sufficient when explaining "the affiliation of women living in Islamic countries where the cultural pattern is very vigorous" because the case study of IS is utilized.

This paper will capitalize on Mia Bloom's 4Rs plus one theory. The four Rs include: Revenge, Redemption, Relationship, Respect, and the plus one, Rape. Bloom (2012:235) summarizes the R's as follows:

> *"Revenge can be understood as an act of vengeance for a lost loved one or against an oppressive entity such as the state. Redemption is seen as women attempting to repent their sins in the form of sacrifice. This sacrifice is often seen through suicide bombing. Relationships imply that because of a close family member, friend, or partner is what links you to a certain group. Relationships are a strong factor when analyzing women's engagement. The fifth and final R is for rape. Rape can be understood as sexual assault. Rape is often used as a recruitment tool in conflict environments" (Bloom, 2012:235).*

This is evident with the IS in Iraq and Syria, where rape was used to motivate women to join the group, willingly or through pressure. One can say that rape as a motivating factor bears a connection with redemption. Women who were raped and could not return home due to cultural values, often felt they had no other alternative than to sacrifice themselves and commit themselves to participate in suicide attacks, making them vulnerable to the recruitment

by networks seeking suicide bombers (Bloom, 2007:102). Terrorist organizations utilize this to their benefit (Bloom, 2012:236). It is also important to note that these 5 factors are not static and greatly overlap and coexist with one another (Brettschneider, 2014). The theory was successfully used to analyze the women in LTTE by Bloom (2012) and could prove to be a useful tool for analyzing other terrorist groups with female members. This theory was chosen to test a different case study to see whether it is universally applicable to all terrorist groups that have female involvement.

To offer a full theoretical background of each R, this research will engage in a discussion regarding each of the five R's, respectively.

Revenge

Schmid (2013:2) writes that an individual or collective desire for revenge is enough reason to engage in terrorist activity. The discussion of revenge as a factor motivating the participation in terrorism is not a new one, as it has been used as a common explanation when analyzing motives (Silke, 2003 in Jacques and Taylor, 2008:307). Authors have suggested that a simple summary of the motivations instigating terrorism are "revenge, renown, and reaction" (Bruce, 2013). The revenge motivation can be categorized into two broad terms; a personal term which would be the death of a loved one, or a broader term which could be anger towards the West and their treatment of Muslims. Bloom focuses more on the personal narrow term; she writes "revenge for the death of a close family member is most often cited as the key factor that inspired a woman to get involved in the first place" (Bloom, 2012:235). Pinto (2019:4) furthers the argument of the broader term of revenge and writes that often ideological and mental brainwashing results in the suggestion that the West "is the devil that must be defeated" and requires vengeance to be adopted towards the West.

It is important to note that this information is difficult to gather although there exists some data collection of a limited amount of failed suicide attack missions, and/or pre-attack letters or recordings (Bruce, 2013). Evidently, literature has suggested that suicide attackers have claimed revenge as a dominant motivator. Research demonstrates that revenge has been cited as a motivation for both female and male suicide attackers, with no evidence suggesting that males are more vengeful than females (Jacques and Taylor, 2008:307). Many Islamic terrorists are fueled by a desire to seek revenge and make a violent declaration to convey their hatred for what they see to be a war on Islam (Mueller and Stewart, 2012:14). As witnessed in

the cases of many of Chechnya's Black Widows, proactive searching may be motivated by revenge or anger brought on by a turning point in the subject's life (Jacques and Taylor, 2008:310). Furthermore, a study of 67 Palestinian suicide bombers conducted by Saleh (2004:24) confirms that many were attacking for the purpose of revenge, with one Hamas attacker who left a letter for his family where he writes revenge as one of his motivations. The motivation of revenge can extend to extreme levels of hatred and the intent of total annihilation of the perceived or actual enemy. Sheikh (2016:64) writes that interviews with Danish foreign fighters reveal that IS was viewed as an entity to restore religious pride in Islam and they also argued that by legitimizing the IS network, they were seeking revenge against the West.

Speckhard (2015) looks closer at the revenge factor in terms of women. She (2015:7) states that women who are victims of sexual violence often turn to terrorist networks with a desire for revenge, which is likely to be against the opposing entity. Furthermore, women often act with a desire for revenge in cases where they are troubled by the difficulties faced by Muslims and the belief that they are under attack, which prompts reaction by the IS narrative. Research has shown that in conflict zones such as Palestine, women are inspired to partake by their motive of revenge. In an interview, Arin Ahmed, a Palestinian student, revealed that after her boyfriend was killed by an Israeli missile attack, she was ready to abandon her future and volunteered herself for a suicide attack (Speckhard, 2012 in Speckhard, 2015:8).

Redemption

Schmid (2013) writes that no single motivation can lead people to terrorism, but it is a combination of varying factors. Participants "…join for personal advantage, which might include access to criminal networks to enhance income, thrill seeking for those looking for excitement, or redemption for those wanting to atone for previous misdemeanours" (Moghaddam, 2009 in Schmid, 2013:22). Angry, troubled, and frustrated individuals who often have histories of abuse and traumatic childhood experiences that engage in crime and violence are often those that believe extremist/terrorist networks can be a means of redemption. These networks often provide a false sense of purpose to these individuals by validating their frustrations by encouraging these feelings and violent behavior (Bjørgo and Munden, 2020).

Salcedo (2019) narrows the scope of this factor to focus on women in the statement that, "redemption and honor motivate women to join terrorist organizations". In an analysis of Martha Crenshaw's six organizational motives, one of them was "the group offers a path to

redemption" (Dawson, 2021:8). However, Dawson (2021:8) further states that there is no "independent psychology of redemption" according to scholars of religion. The term redemption itself is suggestive of religion and holds symbolic value of partaking and upholding a shared religious heritage, which in the case of the IS network is Islam. Finding purpose and belonging in religious groups provides protection from feelings of social exclusion. This feeling of sharing and support of religious heritage can motivate individuals to develop violent attitudes towards others (de Graaf and van den Bos, 2021:57). Bloom (2012:235) writes that women appear to want redemption for past indiscretions. Women in illicit relationships often consider martyrdom as their only option to repent their sins. Martyrdom is seen as a way of regaining pride and washing away any previous sin.

Relationship

The third R of Bloom's (2012) framework is relationship, which is an important motivating factor to understand. Bloom (2012:236) writes that a strong predictor of women joining terrorist networks is her affiliation with a romantic, familial, or friendly member who is engaging in terrorism. This is not a new motivator, as women throughout history have joined "battles alongside their husbands and sons" (Bjørgum, 2016:94). According to Jones (2007), relatives and/or partners are the bridge between the terrorist group and the female individual, whether they join out of free will or are forced to. When analyzing female terrorists and their histories, pressure from male relatives is a recurring factor (Darden, 2019:6). The relationship aspect of the framework can most commonly be divided into two categories: romantic relationships and the sisterhood.

Bloom writes that in some cultures, women's actions are controlled by the men in their lives, who sometimes even have the power over their life and death (2012:236). In some groups that are very concerned about privacy and infiltration, the male member will vouch for reliability of their female tie. These relationship ties are supported to develop network unity. For example, in analyses on female motivations for joining Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l -Jihad, known in English as Boko Haram - the active terrorist network in Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon – it is clear that because women are often dependent on men, the involvement of their husband or male relative such as a father automatically forces their participation (Okenyodo, 2016:100). This is also observed in the case of IS, through the example of a 22-year-old Belgian national, named Salma, who recalls joining IS after her father had contacted her from Syria. However, once she had moved and realized the reality of the

situation and tried to escape, her father was killed by the network itself (Speckhard, 2020). In the context of the death of a loved one, such an occurrence can make a woman even more determined to stay in IS territory (Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett, 2015:28).

Finding romance in the caliphate proves to be one of the major pull factors drawing both men and women to IS. This idea of a romantic adventure of leaving home to move to the IS territory proves to be particularly attractive to the younger generation. The idea of being rewarded with romance as a prize for traveling to the Caliphate encourages individuals to make the trip (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2020:39). The fantasy of experiencing and being rewarded meaningful romance unlike high school flings appeals to the younger women (Bjørgum, 2016:96). Specific to research on women in the IS, it was revealed that some women move to Syria willingly and freely and others claim to have been forced.

The second but smaller category of relationship is sisterhood. Studies have shown that the idea of belonging to a sisterhood has been influential in motivating women to join terrorist networks, with women expressing that their relationships in the West felt superficial (Saltman and Smith, 2015:15). Social media platforms used by the IS network are filled with promises of creating and finding deep relationships with other women who have moved to the caliphate (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2020:39).

Respect

Respect holds the position of the fourth 'R' in the framework. Bloom (2012: 236) states that women frequently crave the respect of their community, albeit this is usually in conjunction with other motivations. Women try to show that they are as committed and dedicated to the cause as their male counterparts by engaging in violence. Female suicide attackers are portrayed as role models for younger girls. These women achieve fame and heroine status through their deaths. The quest for respect is a significant pull factor for young women who have a desire to do something great with their lives, especially if they have experienced hardship. This desire to win respect by the ones they are surrounded by, can make violence attractive women (Bloom, 2012:236).

A repeated issue is the advice that women will earn the respect of her community from marriage and motherhood as soon as they arrive in the Caliphate (Zakaria, 2015). IS women then use the prospect of respect to entice other females to join the network. In other instances,

the rise of Islamophobia in the West has made the Caliphate appeal to women. Attacks on women wearing Islamic attire like hijabs or burqas have increased hostility, pushing Muslim women to IS. The IS Caliphate was seen as a safe place where women could practice their religion and be treated with honor and respect (de Leede, 2018:46). Another example of this are the Palestinian women who committed suicide attacks between January 2002 and January 2004. These women have been described as outsiders from their society who pursued these suicide attacks in an attempt to restore respect to their families (Cunningham, 2008)

Rape

The final R in Bloom's framework stands for rape. Bloom (2012:237) writes that women are increasingly being sexual exploited in conflicts. Women have been coerced into joining combatant roles through rape especially in Iraq and Chechnya. Rape as a motivating factor holds some likeness to the redemption factor, however the main difference between the two is that women who have willingly committed a shameful act seek redemption, whereas women who are victims of sexual violence join involuntarily. Van Knop (2007:400) writes that women are driven to terrorism to regain honor because of being raped and ostracized by their communities.

In Sri Lanka this was quite common, with many Tamil women who were victims of sexual violence turning to terrorism. These women were seen as unworthy of being married or bearing children. Being unable to fulfil the duty of being a wife due to rape brings up the subject of "sacrifice as an ideal", which is understood as a broad cultural standard that is extended to the sacrifice of oneself for her family (Cunningham, 2003:181). Cunningham (2003:181) claims that self-sacrifice was encouraged in society to overcome the humiliation brought on by rape on both an individual and societal level. Regarding the Middle East, a report in *Yediot Ahronot,* the daily Isreali newspaper, published with regards to Palestinian women in the Beit Lehem area that "this is how terrorist organizations recruit female suicide terrorists to commit suicide attacks: 'If you don't commit a suicide attack, we'll tell people you were raped'" (Issacharoff, 2006:44). With reference to an Islamic terrorism group, Kimberly Pullman left Canada with a history of sexual abuse, moving to Syria to join her husband and restore her honor. However, once she reached Syria, she experienced the same sexual violence with IS men (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020:15). This example clearly illustrates that although some women turn to terrorism for refuge, they are not always successful.

It is clear from the literature and evidence discussed above that each R holds some power when looking at motivating factors for women in terrorism.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Case Selection

The research conducted in this thesis focused on the case study of the Islamic State group for two main reasons. First, as literature suggests, it is the terrorist group with the highest number of female members (Perešin, 2015:21). Statistics from July 2018 demonstrate that 4,761 Western women had joined IS out of an estimated 41,490 (Ulas, 2019), and 16% of adult foreign nationals being women (Vale, 2019:2), making it an interesting context in which to study women's motivations. Secondly, Bloom's 4Rs plus one theory had not yet been applied to this case study, which presented an opportunity for this thesis to add to this field of research.

3.2 Source Selection

The majority of the sources used to answer the research question were secondary sources. These consisted of books, journal articles and news articles. The advantages and disadvantages of using secondary sources in research should be acknowledged. Using secondary sources proved to be an advantage in this context due to the low costs and high accessibility it provided (Smith, 2008:332). Furthermore, Smith (2008:332) writes that secondary source analysis is an unobtrusive method to conducting research. However, this thesis analysis was limited to the use of secondary source information only and therefore the information available was not complete. There was a difficulty in obtaining access to first-hand testimonies and interviews, especially those trying to persuade them to share information and experiences, which resulted in a limited amount of primary source data in general and regarding IS in particular (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020:83). The available data to facilitate this research was accessed through tumblr accounts belonging to IS women, *Dabiq* which is IS' online propaganda magazine, and academic sources found on Jstor and Google Scholar.

3.3 Methodology

This research analyzed the chosen case and sources through a qualitative case study analysis. Case study research is relatively flexible in comparison to other qualitative research methods, making it a popular approach (Hyett, cited in Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift, 2014:1). The justification for using a case study research design is to capture the complexity of the terrorist group being studied (Stake, cited in Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift, 2014:2).

According to Pathak, Jena and Kalra (2013:192), qualitative methods can be understood as a process or method to follow to explain phenomena that are neither statistical or numerical, and instead uses description and observation for analyses. A qualitative, rather than quantitative, research design was chosen because the goal of this thesis was to analyze various texts to better understand societal occurrences that could observe subjective accuracy over generalization.

This thesis specifically utilized a qualitative theory testing research design because it is an adequate method according to literature and previous studies "to determine whether a theory…depends on a specific context (i.e., cultural, social, or temporal), or has the capability of explaining a phenomenon in other situations, and to identify if the theory is generalizable or transferable to a different context…" (Yin, 2018 in Vargas-Bianchi, 2020:1). For a theory to be constituted as generalizable or transferable, it must be applicable to multiple cases in different contexts. For a theory or framework to be analyzed and reviewed, a deductive approach should be followed (Creswell, 2007; Hyde, 2000; Løkke & Sørensen, 2014; Miller & Crabtree, 2005; Bitektine, 2008 in Vargas-Bianchi, 2020:2). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007:25) define deductive theory testing as a process of using "data to test theory". Furthermore, when observing a single case study, to keep both the theory and evidence focused throughout research, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007:29) suggest presenting a complete contextualization combined with supportive evidence. For this method, an already existing theory must be used, and empirical evidence should be collected to either prove or reject the theory based on the findings (Creswell, 2014 in Vargas-Bianchi, 2020:2).

The framework applied to answer the research question of why women join terrorist groups was based on Mia Bloom's framework "Four R's plus One", presented in her book *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Bloom, 2012:235). As summarized above, the four categories of the theory can be simplified to and understood as: revenge as the urge to avenge an enemy for the death of a loved one, redemption as the intention to seek religious pardon for violating a social standard that has tainted a woman's honor, relationship as the recruitment of a female to the terrorist network through a personal relationship, familial, friendly, or romantic, respect as the desire to establish and earn a social status for themselves and often their families and rape is defined as the act of sexual violence against women. The research question was answered with the application of the "Four R's plus One theory" to the Islamic State case study to determine to what extent it holds explanatory power for female motivations to join IS.

This framework has existed for over a decade now and although it has been applied to several terrorist networks that have women participants, it has yet to be applied to the IS. Scholars and experts in the field have used or focused on one element of the framework to look at IS. However, these elements will now be collectively applied to IS under Bloom's 4Rs plus one framework. The limitations of this research should be acknowledged; they include the limited data and difficulty to access the data which does exist. Additionally, only anglophone sources were utilized for this thesis.

Chapter 4: The Islamic State

4.1 History of IS

In order to understand the motivations for joining the organization, even in the case of women it is vital to understand what the group is and how it came to be. When understanding the emergence of IS, it is important to remember that the organization did not emerge out of nothing and is the product of certain circumstances, such as the Iraq war, the Arab Spring, and the ongoing civil war in Syria (Oosterveld, Bloem, Farnham, Kayaoğlu, and Sweijs, 2016/2017:5).

The origins of the IS, also known as ISIS, ISIL and, in the Arabic world, Daesh (Irshaid, 2015) trace back to a Jordanian-Palestinian mujahideen Abu Musab al Zarqawi who was born in October 1966 in Jordan. In 1999, Abu Musab al Zarqawi established the 'Organization of Monotheism in Jihad', known in Arabic as 'Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad' (Ould Mohamedou, 2014:2). The organization then expanded in 2003 into Iraq and pledged allegiance to the Al Qaeda organization under leader Osama bin Ladin in October 2004 and the group was renamed 'Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn' in Arabic, or in English as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) (Abbadi, 2015:9). After the US invasion of Iraq in early 2003, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi became leader of 'Jaish Ahl al Sunnah Wal Jamaah', translated to 'Army of the People of Tradition and Unification', which was active in three provinces: Baghdad, Diyala and Samarra. Later, Al-Baghdadi joined the Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC), a corporation established by Al Qaeda, in Iraq in early 2006 for all active jihadist networks operating in Iraq led by Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub Al-Masri. Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi served in the MSC and was also a member of the Shura Council of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) which formed in October 2006 (Abbadi, 2015:9; Alkaff, 2014:5). In November 2006, following the death of al Zarqawi during the Iraq war, the latest leader of AQI, Hamza Muhajir, pledged loyalty to the ISI. However, in 2010 following the death of both the Iraqi jihadist leaders, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi - the leader of 'Army of the People of Tradition and Unification' - was appointed the leader of ISI (Abbadi, 2015:9; Alkaff, 2014:5).

Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi initially focused on Iraq, but then to facilitate his breakaway from the Al Qaeda network, he began to consider the Syrian situation. The Syrian civil war provided Al-Baghdadi a window of opportunity to expand ISI's presence in Syria (Stenersen, 2020:785). In April 2013, Al-Baghdadi formally announced his intent for ISI and the Nusra

Front to merge into a combined network known as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (Abdulrazaq and Stansfield, 2016:538). However, despite having accepted some confidential support from the ISI, the Nusra Front managed to break away, which unfortunately led to larger clashes with the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham later in 2014 (Lister, 2016:5). The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham network officially claimed themselves as a Caliphate, with their leader Al-Baghdadi as the Caliph on the 29 June 2014. It was renamed to 'ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah' in Arabic and became more commonly known to the non-Arabic world as 'Islamic State' in English (Roggio, 2014; Oosterveld and Bloem, 2017:8).

In 2014, IS was primarily active in Iraq and Syria with a few attacks in North Africa, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, but 2015 was considered "a banner year" for the network (Dobbins and Jones, 2017:59). November 2015 saw one of the worst IS attacks in Europe, killing 130 people and wounding another 368 in Paris, France (Hinnant, 2015). On 20th November 2015, at the 7565th United Nations Security Council meeting, IS was declared an "unprecedented threat to international peace and security" (UNSC, 2015). Literature and collected data have suggested that by early 2017, IS controlled population had declined by 56% in Syria and 83% in Iraq compared to 2014 (Dobbins and Jones, 2017:55). The fall of IS began with Mosul, the former capital of IS, being recaptured in 2017. Following their loss of control of Mosul, IS was defeated in Baghouz in 2019. The recapturing of Mosul and eventually of Baghouz in March 2019, symbolized the long-anticipated defeat of the IS Caliphate which at its peak, controlled territory almost the size of the United Kingdom (Almohamad, 2021:2; Al Jazeera, 2019 in Vale, 2019:2). Never had the world seen a jihadist network take control of such vast amounts of territory so quickly (Stenersen, 2020:774). 2019 saw the death of the IS caliph Al-Baghdadi during a United States raid on his hiding place in the Idlib province (Schweitzer, 2019:1).

Following the death of Al-Baghdadi, the IS network announced that Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi, was proclaimed the new Caliph and was believed to be a descendent of Prophet Mohammad himself (Davison, 2022). Along with this public announcement, the group boasted of their expansion beyond the Middle East, despite their huge losses of territory in Syria and Iraq (Callimachi and Schmitt, 2019). Al-Qurayshi was a former soldier during Saddam Hussein's reign and was a religious scholar. He only maintained his role as caliph for approximately two years (Davison, 2022). During a United States raid in Northern Syria in early 2022, al-Qurayshi blew up himself and his family members (Klein, 2022; Davison, 2022). On March 10, 2022, the new leader was announced, Abu Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, to

avoid an image of fragmentation. Despite a lack of territorial dominance and decreased human power, IS was adamant to ensure the existence and relevance of their network, with thousands of supportive and inspired individuals across the world but mostly concentrated on the Asian, African continent and the Middle East (Ajjoub, 2022; Dobbins and Jones, 2017:56).

Through the emergence and course of existence of the IS, the group has developed a strong basis of support as well as an anti-West mentality and commits themselves to *jihad*. The sentiment of anti-West is also a large motivating factor towards joining the organization as previously mentioned. This sentiment has been used as an advantage to draw not only male but female members into the group.

Despite the considerations of the reduced IS threat, the network has not been completely disbanded. The group still has potential to rise again. Although IS has not always encouraged women in certain roles, women have remained motivated towards joining the group. A discussion on women in IS followed by the analysis of their motives will follow.

4.2 Women in IS

The Islamic State, unlike other terrorist groups, managed to recruit with "promises and propaganda that was attractive to and that resonated with women" (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2021:1). Data from 2016, shows that the number of women in the Islamic State is unparalleled when comparing it to other terrorist groups, with 1 in 7 Western members in Syria and Iraq being a woman (Bergen, Sterman, Sims and Ford, 2016:4). IS has built itself a reputation of being a successful recruiter of local and foreign women to their network. In 2015, an estimated 600 women left fair, and gender-liberated societies to join IS and even more from the non-Western world, with an estimated 700 women from Tunisia (Huckerby, 2015). A study conducted in 2019, reconfirmed that the numbers of women in IS had not disappeared, with women compiling 16 percent of the foreign nationals who joined the group (Vale, 2019:2).

The general responsibilities held by IS women include being wives to fighters, bearing children to ensure the future generation of IS, assisting the online recruitment of other women and upholding the order that exists amongst the women in the group, which are all believed to be essential for the network. Although these responsibilities are often underestimated, they contributed significantly to maintaining their regional and international threat (Spencer, 2016:75). These initial responsibilities were more administrative and supportive rather than

operational. The official position held by IS on women in combat shifted between December 2016, when women were encouraged to partake in defensive *jihad*, and July 2017, when they were urged to be involved in combat (Winter and Margolin, 2017:24). *Rumiyah*, the Islamic State magazine that took over in 2016, was clearly against women in combat by suggesting that women should focus their attention on being good wives and mothers in the articles such as, "Abide in Your Homes" (Winter and Margolin, 2017:26).

In an interview by Gardner (2015), a BBC security correspondent, former female member of IS, Aimen Deen replied "Indeed, there is no question about it. They are half of the society. They are playing an important role in many departments: the medical department, the educational department and even the tax collection department, so they are essential for the survival of Islamic State" when asked if women are essential to the group's survival. From this, we can observe that women still prove necessary for the terrorist network to exist. Despite this observation, more focus needs to put on what motivates them to join in the first place.

Chapter 5: 4Rs plus one

With the historical background of IS and women in IS in mind, the following section will discuss the motivations in depth through the 4Rs plus one theory. In the context of *jihadism*, motivations for women to join organizations such as IS are complex, with no common or obvious profile of women who join. The analysis of the sources revealed that there was a wide range of motivations from seeking acceptance and belonging, the prospect of romantic relationships and the contribution to building an Islamic state (de Leede, Haupfleisch, Korolkova and Natter, 2017:9). The research suggests that the majority of female motivations are emotional rather than ideational, which ties in with Bloom's 4Rs plus one framework, seeing as all the Rs are emotional. Each of the R's will be analyzed and discussed individually, followed by a synthesis of the information to identify patterns, comparisons within the literature and determine to what extent Bloom's theory applies to this case.

5.1 Revenge

With relation to IS women, news reports have emerged highlighting cases for revenge. In the first case, 18-year-old Aqsa Mahmood left Glasgow, Scotland in November 2013 to marry an IS fighter and become a '*jihadi* bride'. Under the *nom de guerre*, Umm Layth, started an online blog with snippets of writing, quotes, videos, and pictures in support of the IS network, the Syrian crisis as well as personal references. In one of her poems, Umm Layth writes "Revenge. This is an answer to our imprisonment, they try to make us deaf, dumb, and blind to the light of Allah, but it will always outshine" and added at the end of the post that "This is a war against Islam..." (Swarbrick, 2015). The second notable case occurred with the siege on Baghouz and the collapse of the caliphate when thousands of extremists had fled, where one unidentified veiled woman living at the al-howl camp threatened "we will seek vengeance, there will be blood up to your knees. We have left, but there will be new conquests in the future" (Harris, 2019; Mann, 2019).

These examples clearly illustrate that despite the clear role that revenge plays in motivating women to join terrorist groups and in these cases the IS, it is not the only pull factor that plays a role. As previously mentioned, it is more likely that a combination of several pull factors motivate women to partake. It is therefore important to go further and consider the other 4Rs when studying women's motivations for joining IS.

5.2 Redemption

To better understand this factor, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence conducted research on the motivations for why people joined the IS organization. They found that many of the foreign fighters who were drawn to the caliphate were looking for redemption (de Graaf and van den Bos, 2021:58). Patel and Westermann (2018:60) state a list of important motivating factors in relation to women joining IS with redemption being one of them. It is believed that by moving away from living as free women in the West to the IS caliphate in Syria and Iraq, they would receive 'divine redemption' (Strasser, 2017). This idea of 'divine redemption' has inspired and drawn a substantial number of women to IS and provided an alternative to gender-equality and the emancipation of women (Khelghat-Doost, 2017:17). For further evidence, a study conducted on 220 IS returnees, defectors, and prisoners – 182 males and 38 females – collected from September 2015 to September 2019 revealed that 2.6% of the female sample identified redemption as a motivating factor to join IS (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020:106). Even though literature has revealed that redemption holds some motivational power, it is not overwhelming.

5.3 Relationship

A social media survey conducted by Melanie Smith from King's College International Center for the Study of Radicalization finds evidence that the concept of being married to a brave fighter who is prepared to give his life for a greater cause is alluring for some women. This is exemplified with online messages such as "In the Holy Land I Found You My Dearest Mujahedeen" being posted by the women in the organization (Bakker and de Leede, 2015:6).

In another instance, Umm Layth wrote, on her blog "the family you get in exchange for leaving the ones behind are like the pearl in comparison to the shell you threw away into the form of the sea, which is the Ummah. The reason for this is because your love for one another is purely for the sake of Allah. … Rejective your family is a religious duty if they make allies with the kuffar and reject *jihad*. … Blood ties are nothing compared to living a truly Islamic life." (Petrou, 2015). Evidence suggests this factor as a strong motivation, with a statistic representing that for 29% of young women leaving Germany were motivated by marriage (de Leede, Haupfleisch, Korolkova and Natter, 2017:52).

A prime example of this is Zehra Duman, an Australian 19-year-old left home in 2015 to join her *jihadi* husband. She then helped other women to find *jihadi* husbands on various online platforms (Saltman and Smith, 2015 in Darden, 2019:5). In another case, 21-year-old Russian student Varvara Karaulova had converted to Islam and was ready to cross the border into Syria from Turkey after she had fallen in love with an Islamic State fighter online (Mirovalev, 2017). Or in the case of a Tumblr user called diary-of-a-muhajirah, who writes that after the ceremony "I just fell in love with someone – my husband! Allah has answered my prayer..." (Bjørgum, 2016:96). Whereas Samantha Sally, an American living a comfortable life in the United States married to her Moroccan husband, claims to have been tricked into going to Syria. Sally claims that in 2015, they were on a family holiday when her husband Moussa Elhassani declared he was joining the Islamic State and there was no way of returning into Turkey. They then moved to Raqqa where she claims to have been living with two Yazidi girls who El Hassani kept as slaves and continuously raped (Myre, 2018; Malm 2018).

It is not uncommon that women leave their old friends and families to move to the IS and build new relationships. An unnamed woman expresses her experience about the sisterhood she forged: "Mashallah the sisterhood in Dawla is amazing, the bonding immediate and no fake relationship, based on love *fillah* only" (Hoyle, Bradford, and Frenet, 2015:24).

5.4 Respect

Respect in comparison to the other R's remains slightly less apparent in motivating women to join IS according to the literature and evidence found. IS tries to represent a narrative of the West slandering the honor of women. These women can then regain their honor and respect by returning to Islam's core values of "chastity, modesty and piety" (Islamic State 2015c, 35, 2016a, 25). In a particular instance, a first-hand account of Umm Layth posted on her blog that in IS territory, women are not mocked like in the West but are treated with "respect and honor" (Zakaria, 2015).

5.5 Rape

The rape factor proved to be the most difficult R to find empirical evidence on regarding women in the IS. No articles specifically discussing rape were prominent. This lack of evidence could demonstrate a shortcoming in the theory. However, another point to highlight for further research would be to consider where majority of the women are coming from. For example, cases of sexual violence as a motivating factor would be significantly lower with females

joining the IS from Western countries. Furthermore, there is a possibility that this is not a shortcoming in the research, but rather an under researched area that deserves more scholarly attention.

Synthesis

As aforementioned, Bloom (2012:235) writes based on her evidence that revenge is often noted as the most compelling motivation for women to get involved. However, from the research and analysis in this thesis, relationship stands out as the key factor amongst the Rs for the case of the IS. The relationship motivational factor is the most prominent 'R' based on the literature observed, with the most evidence found for this factor which was not surprising. According to the scholars Darden (2019) and Bjørgum (2016) cited previously, the evidence found regarding relationship as a motivating factor can confirm to be critical for female IS members.

Within Bloom's framework, the redemption factor seems to hold some religious notion however it is not all encompassing and excludes the possibility of religion as a motivating factor beyond trying to repent past indiscretions. This highlights a gap to include a more holistic factor of religion within an analysis of a *jihadist* group, as literature suggests religion playing a vital role in *jihadism*.

Rape and respect proved to be the most difficult factors to find empirical evidence on. The rape factor had a lot of examples among women in the LTTE, which could either explain a shortage of information on this factor when analyzing other groups or a shortcoming of the theory. The theory proved to be useful in explaining the female motivation of rape for the LTTE, having enough evidence to support the theory. As literature suggested, in Sri Lanka, cases of sexual violence making women turn to terrorism were common. As it stands, the plus one factor of Rape, does not full apply to IS with the information that is currently available.

Evidently, testing this theory against IS has demonstrated that it is transferable and generalizable to another group in another context in many ways, but is not 100 percent explanatory. This analysis has demonstrated that this theory to some extent might prove useful and important for research on *jihadist* groups, but not for right wing extremist groups; in a similar vein it has highlighted a lack of empirical evidence to fully test Bloom's theory against IS network. There is literature and evidence to support all five Rs presented in Bloom's

framework and although this theory has been tested against IS, and holds some explanatory power, more research is required to fully appreciate the usefulness of the framework. There is still a lot of research needed to further understand women's motivations to join the IS, however, it is important to remember that one must not assume that all women in IS were lured into the organization solely based on these 5 factors mentioned in Bloom's theory.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the research question "To what extent does Mia Bloom's 4Rs plus one theory explain the motivations of women joining the Islamic State?". With this question in mind, it is important to remember that women just like their male counterparts have varied and specific motivations for joining terrorist organizations. This question was answered by utilizing secondary sources. A qualitative method was adopted for research, testing a theory against a single case study. The theory used was Mia Bloom's 4Rs plus one, to explain women's motivations to join the Islamic State.

This research proves to be relevant because history has revealed that women have been participants in terrorist organizations for years spanning across different parts of the world. Although women in terrorism is not a new phenomenon, the number of women in IS has been incomparable with women from across the world to supporting and joining their *jihad*. It is important to study and comprehend the motivations of female IS affiliates. As stated throughout this thesis, women should also be considered as potential security threats. Without specific research into the motivations of women, we can often overlook the agency of women proving to be problematic because the problem cannot be solved without understanding the roots of women joining terrorist organizations.

The evidence found and used was also to identify any of the motivating factors that stood out more in comparison to the others. As the synthesis suggests, the factor of relationship stood out significantly in comparison to the other four. The factors of rape and respect proved to be difficult to find substantial evidence on, compromising the research.

Further studies are necessary to develop this case study and/or adapt the framework accordingly. Although the evidence used to test the theory are convincing to a certain extent on a stand-alone basis, future research is necessary to fully test the explanatory power of the theory. It is important to acknowledge that using this theory does not provide an explanation for all women's motivations into terrorist organizations. By addressing and applying the Rs to women in IS, this thesis intends to serve as a catalyst for more research into women's motivations to join terrorist organizations. Research that is evaluating and analyzing women's motivations to join terrorist networks, despite the territorial loss of the Islamic State, gender considerations should not be overlooked which could then dismiss women's agency within these organizations.

To conclude, as research suggests, the appeal of *jihad* remains, and women are still motivated to join the Islamic State. For all the motivating factors discussed above, women must be recognized as significant security threats and should remain a central focus for further studies. Research and analyses of women's motivations should remain a priority to academics and policy makers.

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