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Approximately 55 young British females joined the Islamic State in 2015 alone, and the number continues to accelerate. While the phenomenon of women joining extremist organisations is not new, ISIS have internationally augmented the recruitment of western females with success. The following paper will attempt to contribute to the discussion of why British women are motivated to joining a terrorist organisation like ISIS. The role of social media in reinforcing ideological messages will also be explored, using case studies of British girls that have fled to Syria; including the Halane twins and Aqsa Mahmood. In doing so, the paper utilises a devised conceptual framework of radicalisation, developed from literature and existing research. In particular, special focus is applied to the predisposing factors, taking into account the sociological and psychological causes that may compel an individual to embrace radical ideology. This paper concludes that extreme religious ideology is a significant element to the radicalisation process and has been severely underestimated. In addition, research findings suggest that the core motivations for women joining ISIS are inherently personal, and relate to the human desires of love, belonging and a sense of purpose.

Keywords: Radicalisation, Islamic Extremism, Terrorism, Identity Crisis, British, Muslim Women

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INTRODUCTION

"Like a moth drawn to a flame,
Patching up her broken wings,
Just to try it once again,
And the world all thought her foolish,
For she never seemed to learn,
But how do you save somebody,
Who's convinced that they should burn?"
Hanson (2014, p.72)

An estimated 6,000 foreign fighters from Europe have travelled to Syria and Iraq since 2012, the majority coming from France, Germany and the UK (Kirk, 2016). Since 2013, Britain has been confronted with an unprecedented number of young Muslim females drawn to the Islamic State in Syria. The exact figure of British women in Syria is difficult to determine however, in 2015, 55 known females willingly joined ISIL - like moths to a flame (Tran, 2016).

The ongoing phenomenon of young British women migrating to Syria, aged between 15 and 20 years, have brought this emerging movement into focus. The available research is useful in identifying the number of push and pull factors for joining ISIS, but is challenged by a lack of consensus over the root cause of radicalisation in young Muslim females. Without first-hand experience, it is difficult to gain a precise understanding on the reality of life in Syria and the role of women in the Islamic State. Peresin (2015) states that these limitations restrict understanding on the core motivations for women joining ISIS and more importantly, can underestimate the potential threat of their return. Moreover, this demonstrates the increasing need for further research on the significance of female involvement in ISIS, which is evolving into a new form of terrorism.
The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding on why young British Muslim women are motivated to join ISIL. In addition, the role of social media will be explored, in terms of its impact on reinforcing the ideological messages communicated by ISIS. In doing so, the paper will utilise a devised conceptual framework, developed from literature and existing research, in an attempt to answer the research questions and outline the incremental stages of radicalisation. The paper is divided into three core sections. First, an extensive review of existing literature, identifying the gaps for new research. This is followed by a description of research methodology, outlining the design, data collection strategies and research limitations. Finally, a discussion and analysis of findings will be presented from case study examples and ten in-depth interviews. The findings will focus on four core themes, including the predisposing factors (identity crisis and grievances), Islamist ideology, radicalisation online and the motivations for joining ISIS.

This paper will argue that extreme religious ideology is a significant element to the radicalisation process and has been inadequately researched. Furthermore, findings suggest that the core motivations for women joining ISIS are inherently personal, and relate to the basic human desires of love, belonging and a sense of purpose.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Rumman (2015), jihadi-salafism has surged over the past decade and more recently, has become the fastest-growing Islamic movement in Europe, Near East and South Asia. A number of academics in the field of Islamic extremism point to a multitude of complex processes and stages that lead to ‘jihadisation’, a term coined by Boon et al (2011) to define violent jihad, in both speech and action. These stages are described as a ‘funnel’ by which individuals become progressively more radical as their extreme religious beliefs intensify (Baker-Beall et al, 2015). The following model will outline the incremental process of radicalisation a British female Muslim may experience, taking into account the sociological and psychological factors that may compel an individual to embrace radical ideology.

Although each female may have different personal experiences and trigger points, the following elements are a common denominator to the small proportion of radicalised British women. The first stage of pre-radicalisation covers the situation of an individual before exposure to extremist Islam, who could be directly or indirectly experiencing Islamophobia and underlying issues of identity. The second stage is self-identification as a response to the external sense of persecution, whereby the individual processes feelings of confusion and alienation. Lastly, having absorbed all these feelings, the individual may succumb to being influenced by extremist propaganda and consequently go through a state which leads to radicalisation.

Stage One: Islamophobia

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment has considerably intensified since 9/11, compounded with an increase of terrorist activities linked to extremist Islam. Stolz (2005, p. 548) simplistically defines Islamophobia as "a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes". Zuquete (2008, p.5) further describes Islamophobia as the stigmatisation of all Muslims, "a widespread mindset of fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgements of Islam as the enemy, the 'other' ".

The term Islamophobia has been disputed for its loose application to diverse phenomena, from xenophobia to anti-terrorism (Zuquete, 2008). Islamophobia is understood to be far more complex than just a fear or phobia of Islam. Halliday (1999), asserts Islamophobia is a fear of Islam as a faith, when the real problem is negatively stereotyping Muslims as people - "Issues of immigration, employment, racial prejudice, anti-immigrant violence are not specifically religious" (Halliday 1999, p.898). However, contrary to Halliday's claim, racial and religious discrimination are in a sense interconnected, as many women reported abuse when they appeared "visibly recognisable as Muslim" (Richardson 2004, p.23).

Islamophobic attitudes have considerably intensified and the negative public opinion of Islam has increased levels of resentment, creating further tensions with the Muslim community (Allen and Nielsen, 2002). According to Ansari, (2005, p.87), the social impact of Islamophobia in Britain has been the stigmatisation of all Muslims, creating an enemy within. Many academics (Bleich, 2001; Moore et al, 2008; Alshammari, 2014) have noted the role of irresponsible media coverage, which has led to a prevailing sense of unknown fear and distrust of Muslims. Consequently, this has severely impacted on the British perceptions of Islam and caused a dramatic surge in Islamophobic attacks (Field, 2007). Sherwood (2015) states, anti-Muslim attacks in London increased dramatically - by 70% in 2015 from the previous year.

In particular, women have become targets of Islamophobia, in relation to veiling, which makes them visibly identifiable as Muslim and more vulnerable to becoming known as the 'other'. Kapur (2002) notes that women are more likely to become victims of Islamophobic attacks than men, because they embody a visible manifestation of Muslim identity. In a study of British Muslim females (Allen, 2014), a prominent driver of Islamophobic attacks was the visibility of their

Muslim identity, which acted as a key driver to provocation, discrimination and abuse. Islamophobia was found to impact on the respondents' perceived and defined identity, subsequently affecting their sense of belonging to Britain. Phillips (2006, p.1) asserts that a sense or direct form of persecution of British Muslims will cause a "withdrawal from social and spatial interactions with the wider British society". The experiences of Islamophobia by Muslim women have a significant impact on their self-identity, causing them to question who they are as a person and their role within society (Allen, 2014).

Stage 1: Identity Crisis

According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000) there is no clear concept of identity, and the use of fragmented, ambiguous expressions have deprived the term of having any significant meaning. Various conceptions of identity have been widely used to reference a sense of self which can be co-constructed, socially constructed and even historically constructed. Baldwin et al (2014, p.95) argue that "identity is created in the context of our social world, histories and relationships. They are inherently political and religious, affording us more or less power, given the context". Golubović (2010) similarly states that identity is not granted to us naturally: it is humanly conditioned and defined by our culture and environment. Josselson (1996, p.30) asserts that identity is built on integration and interpretation of an individual's life: "Identity is how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in our world".

Issues of terrorism, radicalisation and extremist ideology have been closely associated with the notion of identity and, more specifically, identity crisis. In an environment where terrorism poses a grave threat, many Muslim Millennials have experienced discrimination and prejudice, resulting in a serious identity crisis. At a time of doubt, when an individual questions "Who am I", there is often a search for deeper meaning and a sense of vulnerability which can open an opportunity for radicalisation (Al Raffie, 2013). The search for identity has been defined as an identity crisis, which Yoon (2015, p.21) describes as "an acute form of confusion and disorientation that affects individuals, peoples, nations and institutions". Erikson (1968) defines identity crisis as a period of uncertainty, particularly during adolescence, in which an individual experiences a conflict between their individual identity and their role within society. Throughout the process of radicalisation, there are numerous behaviours and motivations, revolving around identity confusion and manifestations of identity. Subsequently, individuals are considered to be more receptive to extremist ideologies when their self-identity is questioned, placed under strain, or even threatened with annihilation (Maruna et al 2006).

Central discussions (Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Veldhuis and Staun, 2009; Rahimullah et al, 2013) suggest that extreme Islamic radicalisation can be triggered by an identity crisis, which is caused by a number of interconnected factors, including a perceived threat to religious identity. Radicalised individuals gradually become isolated and disconnected from their original social environment and Muslim community (Wali, 2016).

The root cause model of radicalisation (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009) (Appendix 1), asserts that possessing a strong Muslim identity can facilitate a positive sense of identity through self-esteem. Though, only when the individual's social identity is threatened through real or perceived discrimination, does the likelihood of resentment and hostility increase. Veldhuis and Staun (2009, p.67) further assert, "when society understands and respects different social identities, strong religious identities may become a positive feature, rather than a negative one".

According to Saltman and Smith (2015), questioning identity and experiencing a sense of conflict are major contributing push factors for women joining ISIS. In British society, the identity of Muslim women is considered to be problematic (Allen 2014). Adolescent females have suffered with personal identity challenges as a result of having to balance the traditional, conservative Muslim values with Western modernity and democracy (Ahmad and Seddon, 2012). Tensions may form when Muslim females attempt to integrate into British society, whilst preserving their religious values. A central and contentious aspect in the debate of Muslim identity is the case of females who wear the hijab, niqab or burka, as a strong identity marker. There are many conflicting views on the matter; Belton and Hamid (2011) argue that dressing with modesty provides Muslim women with a source of freedom and empowerment before Allah. For others, it is also an "expression of defiance" against the wider Islamic identity struggles within the diaspora (Afshar et al, 2005). However, Botz-Bornstein (2015) states that wearing the veil can manifest a rejection of Western values and an identity of emphasised femininity and sexual objectification of women.

The push and pull factors which lead British women to becoming radicalised are multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single cause. A growing body of academic work suggests those who experience an identity crisis through a sense of discrimination, will inevitably question what it means to be a Muslim in Britain, and consequently re-evaluate their place in society.

Stage Two: Self Identification

While many Muslims are successful in managing their grievances, those who cannot, face significant challenges and have the potential to become radicalised (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009). According to Silber and Bhatt's (2007) four-stages of radicalisation, this is the self-identification stage, whereby individuals process a combination of feelings and experiences, including social triggers (Islamophobia, a real or perceived sense of alienation), political (international conflict with Muslims) and personal triggers. During this critical period, there is a range of multifaceted changes which an individual may experience before becoming radicalised, such as an exploration of identity, belonging, or an increase in religiosity (Ali, 2008; Hoyle et al, 2015; Pearson, 2015).

During the self-identification stage, the individual may gradually move away from their previously perceived identity and become influenced by internal and external factors, to fortify their needs which may have been threatened. Veldhuis and Staun (2009) state that during this stage, some silently suffer from an internal crisis and

even remove all social bonds with family and former friends. Thus, the individual may feel ostracised from society, resulting in a negative impact on their psychological state (Knapton, 2014). This can induce a 'cognitive opening' in which the individual becomes more receptive to new ideas and worldviews. Wiktorowicz (2004) asserts that a cognitive opening is the first stage of radicalisation, directly caused by issues of integration, discontent and identity. Wiktorowicz (2004) also states that Muslims may seek further clarity and guidance in response to issues of identity, through "religious seeking" from sources including friends, religious organisations, and social media. Contrary to Wiktorowicz's view, not all Muslims seeking religious knowledge will join a radical cause, as some may wish to attain self-empowerment through their faith. However, the stronger the religious aspect of their identity becomes, the less integrated they may be (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009). Therefore, individuals become more hostile, and are likely to respond to a perceived threat against their Muslim identity through acts of revenge or terror (Allen, 2014). Flannery (2015, p. 138) states that ISIS propaganda addresses the humiliation experienced from the enemy (the West) and through jihad, self-pride can be restored.

Stage Three: Radicalisation

Having processed inner turmoil, individuals may seek guidance from close networks, online resources, Salafi-based NGO's or extremist sermons, all serving as "extremist incubators" for many young Muslims living in diaspora communities (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). There are numerous communication outlets which one may use to relieve their personal battles however, social media are widely used by ISIS recruiters to convert and recruit young Muslim females (Kundnani, 2015). Richards (2015) states that extremist ideologies, through cyberspace, are now providing psychologically damaged persons with new ways of managing their inner turmoil. According to Klausen (2015, p.17), ISIS transformed social media into "an offensive strategy of psychological warfare".

While social media are recognised as one of the key recruitment drivers for female migrants, there is little evidence to suggest that it substitutes the power of face-to-face communication. It is important to note that online propaganda is not singularly responsible for radicalising individuals; human influence must trigger and sustain the process (Koomen and Van Der Pligt, 2015). However, according to Winter (2015), social media have emerged as the decade's "radical mosque", reinforcing ideological messages and facilitating direct contact with former or current ISIS migrants. Social media have a substantial influence among women in particular, who receive practical advice from other females who are already in Syria, on how to get there, what to bring and how to bypass security (Peresin, 2015).

In terms of ISIS narrative, the radical views, ideology and rhetoric are effective in filling "identity voids", with strict guidelines for coping with identity confusion and uncertainty (Peresin, 2015). Saltman and Smith (2015) similarly state that the collectivist force of extremist ideology which ISIS offers, evoke a strong sense of belonging as well as acceptance and stability, which was previously absent in their lives. Havlicek (2015, p.10) emphasises that there are very few sub-cultures or

movements like ISIS which claim to offer females so much, including "a sense of adventure, belonging and sisterhood, romance, spiritual fulfilment and a tangible role in idealistic utopia-building". Furthermore, young Muslim females are vulnerable and more susceptible to this rhetoric if their identities are in question and they feel socially or culturally isolated (Maruna et al, 2006). Living in ISIS territory may consequently be perceived as more attractive than living in their own country. A report by Quilliam Foundation (Rafiq and Malik, 2015) asserts that ISIS propaganda plays on the grievances that women have suffered from the West, and grants the solution of joining "caliphate sisterhood".

Research (Saltman and Smith, 2015) suggests the notion of female Muslims travelling to Syria to become "jihadi brides" is simplistic and one-dimensional. "Jihadi bride" is used to describe Western women who "have travelled to Syria to marry a Jihad fighter and live a domesticated lifestyle in ISIS-controlled territory" (Jacoby 2015, p. 526). Moreover, Bloom (2011) argues that we must work past the gender stereotype of female extremists, and instead look at the factors that really influence violence. Bloom (2011, p.9) also states "Many women are just as bloodthirsty as the male members of terrorist groups, but their motivations tend to be intricate, multi-layered, and inspired on a number of levels; anger, sorrow, revenge or religious zeal coalesce". The idea of being part of the "caliphate sisterhood" is honoured among females, who utilise the sense of belonging as propaganda to attract other females searching for acceptance. In a study by Hoyle et al (2015, p.13) which observes the accounts of female ISIS migrants, "the search for meaning, sisterhood, and identity is a key driving factor for women to travel". Hoyle states a common factor in the accounts is the belief that migration to Syria is a religious duty, which not only gives them a sense of belonging and sisterhood, but also brings them closer to God.

Conclusion

An extensive review of literature has highlighted some of the major discussions in accordance to the phenomena of British women joining the Islamic State. The review has largely concentrated on two particular predisposing social factors, including identity crisis and Islamophobia, which covers the situation of an individual prior to radicalisation. As Hoyle et al (2015) and Pearson (2015) state, the pre-radicalisation factors evoke a range of multifaceted changes including an exploration of belonging or an increase in extreme religious beliefs. This stage is significant in paving the ground for radicalisation, and is often overlooked by academics, researchers and even the media. Furthermore, the connection between the Islamist ideology and motivations for joining ISIS has not been explored enough and debated in literature. As suggested by Rahimullah et al (2014, p.19), "the mechanics of ideological conversion have not been well researched".
The following conclusions can be deduced:

- Whilst politics and religion are strong drivers for joining ISIS, the basic human needs of love and belonging are often overlooked in research.

- Future research needs to place greater emphasis on the early stages of radicalisation, taking into account the vast sociological and psychological factors that may affect an individual.

- There are insufficient theories to explain why, although many adolescent Muslims experience such issues of discrimination and identity crisis, only a minority proceed to adopt extremist views.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to understand why British females are willingly joining the Islamic State, whilst examining the motivating factors that contribute to the complex dynamics of radicalisation. The following research questions include:

- What are the motivations for UK women joining ISIS-controlled territories?
- Is the rise of female ISIS migrants related to ideology, experiences of identity crisis or anti-Muslim hatred?
- What is the role of social media in reinforcing ideological messages?

Since the nature of the paper is exploratory, a triangular approach was applied to the qualitative methods of research. According to Cohen and Manion (1986, p. 254), triangulation is "an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint". Altrichter et al (1996, p.117) similarly define triangulation as a way to achieve "a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation". A triangular approach was best suited for the following research to form an outcome by assessing multi-dimensional perspectives on the issue of British women drawn to ISIS.

Primary research was collated from analysing the social media accounts of British foreign migrants, Salma and Zahra Halane (known as the 'terror twins') and Aqsa Mahmood (known as Umm Layth), who are reportedly living in ISIS-controlled territory. The profiles were selected because they have received coverage in the media and are known to actively promote ISIS propaganda online. Schell (1992) states that case studies enable the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events, whilst at the same time, further illustrate the issue. Since the majority of accounts have been suspended, excerpts from original tweets and Tumblr blogs were obtained online or from the Saltman and Smith (2015) and Hoyle et al (2015) study.

The themes obtained from the literature review, which include Islamophobia, identity crisis, self-identification and radicalisation online, were further explored through qualitative in-depth interviews. Interviews allow the researcher to develop an understanding of "a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell 1994, p. 24). An inductive approach was applied to the study design in which patterns, resemblances and regularities are observed to form conclusions around research

objectives (Lodico et al, 2010). According to Bernard (2011, p.7), an inductive research approach "involves the search for pattern from observation and the development of explanations – theories – for those patterns through series of hypotheses". Due to the discussion of sensitive topics, a semi-structured interview method was appropriate to enable the participant to freely express their opinions, feelings and experiences on the matter. Unlike formal interviews, which follow a firm set of questions, semi-structured interviews aim to collect detailed information on a topic in a conversational style (Galletta and Cross, 2013). A general interview guide was used to cover a list of open-ended questions to ensure that consistency and direction was implemented across all interviews. However, some questions were tailored differently according to the individual's level of expertise on a particular theme.

A maximum variation sampling technique was used to recruit participants, which according to Rubin and Babbie (2010, p.150), "captures the diversity of a phenomenon within a small sample to be studied intensively". A total of ten participants aged between 25 and 54 were chosen from different professional fields, all differing along a spectrum on the issue of Islamic extremism. An epistemological perspective on the research was taken, whereby the researcher samples participants based on their experiences and level of expertise (Mason, 2002). All participants have been known to openly discuss issues of terrorism in the public and academic domain, and they were therefore, identified as valuable contributors to my research.

Due to the nature of the topic, it was imperative that all participants had a level of knowledge and experience, whether direct or indirect, on the matter. The participant demographic criteria were therefore left open (including age, sex and education) and socioeconomic characteristics were not taken into consideration. From March 2015, one-to-one in-depth interviews were carried out, with the average interview lasting 58 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and consistency in the findings and analysis of results (see Appendix 3 and 4). In addition, consent forms, participant information sheets and an ethics checklist were reviewed and completed by all participants prior to the interview.

An open coding method was used to identify and analyse the research results, in which themes and categories were outlined from the data and stages model outlined in the literature review. Coding, according to Charmaz (2006, p.46), is the "pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain the data". A subsequent phase to open coding, known as selective or focused coding (Glaser, 1978), was used to synthesise and explain the large segments of data in a more abstract way. Utilising the process of selective coding was useful in verifying the accuracy of developed concepts. Quantitative research however, has its limitations like any other research methodology. The most notable limitation for this study is the fact that a sample size of ten participants only realistically represents a fraction of the overall perspective on British women joining ISIS. In addition, it is difficult to fully understand the experiences of young British women without having first-hand communication with them. Naturally, this was limited by

the ethical constraints due to the sensitivity of the topic. Nonetheless, the outlined limitations are unlikely to diminish the validity and reliability of the data, as participants were selected based on their direct involvement in profiling real-life examples and case studies. Moreover, due to the credibility of the participants, the research is worthy for consideration.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section will analyse key findings from qualitative data, addressing four core themes in relation to literature. These include: 1) Predisposing factors: identity crisis and grievances. 2) Self-identification: indoctrination of Islamist ideology 3) Motivations for joining ISIS 4) Radicalisation online Key insights gained from case studies will be provided in an attempt to voice the feelings of young British women living in ISIS-controlled territory. An objective description of data will also be presented using interviewees' responses where appropriate. The abbreviation of 'P1' is made to reference a specific participant - see Figure 1 in methodology for participant information.

Predisposing Factors: Identity Crisis

As discussed in literature (Saltman and Smith, 2005; Velhuis and Staun, 2009; Al Raffie, 2013), identity is a powerful and significant element to the radicalisation process. Identity crisis can be triggered by a range of factors including a direct or indirect form of Islamophobic persecution or a lack of integration. A recurrent discussion is the issue of Muslim Millennial women, who experience a conflict with balancing their conservative Muslim values with British modernity (Ahmad and Seddon, 2012; Allen, 2014). The research results emphasised the importance of identity, highlighting specific issues concerning female Muslim identity which had not been deeply explored in literature. Participant four, a researcher at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue stated:

> "It's difficult for young people and women especially - it's even more complicated as there are all these layers of identity. For example, what it's like to be a British Muslim woman in society today, how to express yourself and what femininity means. All those things can create a lot of confusion, especially for someone growing up with an Islamic background. They know they are very different from secular society and living in a country where their religion is not practised by everybody, makes them realise that their social identity is different".

This suggests that for many women, the multi-layered elements and differences of identity are viewed as a hindrance rather than a positive aspect. For some, this can trigger a period of uncertainty in which an individual experiences conflict around their manifestations of identity (Erikson, 1968). Participant eight, a professor, writer and human rights activist, stated that identity is about knowing who you are and your place in the world. This reinforces Josselson's (1996, p.30) definition of identity as "how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in our world". P8 illustrated this point with a personal experience from her daughter, who at the time was fourteen years old:

> "There was a period where my daughter was questioning whether she was Swiss or Arab, I also have Yemen and Egyptian roots which makes it even more confusing. Given the fact that I was very much worried that she might be attracted to Islamism as an ideology, I started to tell her about the manipulation tactics these recruiters use. They tell you that you don't have to choose your identity because your identity is Muslim. Her response really made me realise that for some, this may be a relief. She said: 'But don't you see what a good answer that could be, I wouldn't have to choose if I'm Swiss, Yemeni, Egyptian or Arab'."

This personal account powerfully exemplifies the identity issues that many young Muslim females experience today. Despite coming from a stable and enlightening environment, the participant's daughter still questioned her identity regardless, and acknowledged the "relief" that an individual may experience when their identity conflict is resolved. It also shows how recruiters can manipulate identities to mobilise individuals and serve the purpose of extremist ideology. Participant ten, a representative from a Youth charity combatting violent extremism in London, also stipulated this view:

> "A lot of these teenagers try to fit in an environment where they feel socially and culturally excluded, and radical Islam can be a way for them to find their inclusive identity. Islamism can form part of a complete identity and for many, it's their religious, political and social identity."

It is suggested that Islamism is the "solution" to overcome the identity crisis that adolescents experience because it encompasses every aspect of their identity. As evidenced, instead of national identity formulating part of self-identity, religion has the power to form and satisfy their complete identity. Beit-Hallahmi (2015) states, religious identity is powerful and built upon fundamental beliefs and values, anchored within a sacred and eternal worldview. It is therefore crucial that Muslim parents take the responsibility to communicate with their children and instil the belief that they are part of British society. P4 emphasised this argument and stated that a mother is the most important role within an Islamic family.

> "The emphasis that is placed on that relationship means that the mother is in such a position of responsibility … one of which is making your kids aware of that cultural identity and how that fits within the community they live in."

The impact of family influence has not been specifically explored in literature with regards to potentially radicalising and also de-radicalising Muslim youth, and it is an area which requires further research. Another aspect of discussion is social integration and the challenges Muslim women face when attempting to simultaneously integrate and preserve their cultural or religious identity (Sartawi and Sammut, 2012). P1, an independent researcher on political Islam, illustrated this point with an example of how, from such a young age, Muslim girls are already being socially excluded from Western practices because of Islamic requirements on modesty.

> "There are cases where even parents stop their daughters from attending certain classes like P.E. in the name of religion. It's very relevant to females in Europe who have been excluded from western

> cultural and societal practices because of their religion. If they can't take part in certain things, then they won't feel part of society."

Tensions are formed by a conflict of two opposing worlds when religious requirements are combined with strict family upbringing, thus Muslim girls are excluded from practices such as physical education. As noted in literature, adolescence is a key period of identity transformation for Muslim women who experience stricter constraints than men. Consequently, young girls negotiate their identity according to their experience of being a Muslim in a non-Muslim country (Zahidi et al, 2012). Moreover, if the individual experiences discrimination and anti-Muslim hatred, their vulnerability is further multiplied. This can create personal identity challenges, whereby the individual searches for deeper meaning and questions "Who am I" (Al Raffie, 2013). Some women will find a way to overcome these difficulties through will-power; however, others may undergo a period of vulnerability and experience an identity crisis (Baker-Beall et al, 2015).

Alongside integration and conflict between cultures, grievances (whether real or perceived) also contribute to an identity crisis, which can make an individual more vulnerable to extremism (Rafiq and Malik, 2015). These may emanate from encounters with anti-Muslim hatred, marginalisation and even early childhood experiences. For participant three, an independent filmmaker whose stepbrother was a convert and became radicalised, childhood experiences were one of the major triggers for identity crisis and radicalisation.

> "The separation between his mother and father played a big development in the process and his character. It's obviously not the reason why he became an Islamist as lots of people experience divorces, but that really affected him and made him more open and vulnerable. Someone like Anjem Choudary was like a father figure and he tapped into the family and sense of community which was missing."

Storr (2005) believes a sense of powerlessness experienced in childhood is likely in some cases, to be twisted into anger or hate in adulthood. Rafik and Malik (2015) state, an individual's grievances are magnified by recruiters who promise solutions, which often involves making "hijra" (migration). In P3's case, the grievances his stepbrother experienced in childhood were leveraged with positive values of family and community offered by extremist Islam.

Theme Two: Islamist Ideology

The role of Islamist ideology has been severely underestimated in the radicalisation process by our policy makers, mainstream media and academics. Bale (2013, p.5) describes this denial to be peculiar, given that ideological extremists "openly and proudly emphasise the central role of their strict, puritanical interpretations of Islamic scriptures in motivating their violent actions". Ideology is a predominant motivating factor for attracting female migrants, who not only reject the culture and foreign policy of the West, but also embrace a new worldview (Saltman and Smith, 2015). While the theme of extremist ideology was not intensely explored in the literature review, it was a recurrent issue which arose from research. The case studies showed the emphasis placed on ideology and religious duty, which was also utilised to encourage other females to join. Zahra Halane for example, who in 2014 at the age of 16 joined ISIS with her twin sister, exemplifies the nature of her ideological beliefs in the quoted

tweet: "Jihad is the most excellent form of worship and by means of it Muslims can reach the highest ranks … most people don't know"

According to Zahra's post, jihad is glorified through the words "excellent" and "worship". The connection between being a jihad fighter in Syria and being a Muslim, is particularly harmful because it may encourage others to perceive it as their religious duty. This narrative which is communicated across many social media platforms could potentially be a strong recruitment tactic for other girls in the same position. Qualitative research also emphasised the importance of religious ideology, in which all participants shared the view that extremist Islamist ideology is the least explored element in the radicalisation process. This was a refreshing approach to the subject since the role of Islamist ideology in acts of terrorism has not been acknowledged enough by academics.

P8, a professor, writer and Muslim scholar, described Islamist ideology as a "virus" which is consistently ignored and becoming increasingly problematic.

> "We need to stand up to this fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, as Muslims … we cannot ignore the fact that it comes from Islam. Part of the problem is acknowledging that it has to do with us, with the misinterpretation of Islam which is paving the ground for extremism. We have to stand up to that. It is time to face the ISIS that is within us".

This highlights the biggest gap in literature, where very few studies have examined the connection between the puritanical interpretation of Islam and joining a terrorist organisation like ISIS. It also shows how the misinterpretation of religion leads to violence, an element that requires not only research, but also open debate. Similarly, P1 concluded that researchers must look beyond the sociological factors impacting the radicalised individual, and examine the root cause; ideology which is rooted in Salafism:

> "Understanding how ideology sells and manipulates identity in order to serve goals, is what is really important. The way that ideology is framed is highly emotional and it appeals to the hearts and minds of these young people."

The reference to the hearts and minds of young people, or more specifically women, is a particularly striking element to the issue of radicalisation and an area of research which is understudied. Weiss and Hassan (2016) state, ISIS narratives have not only captured the hearts and minds of youths experiencing conflict, but have also targeted youths that are far removed from struggle. Young British Muslim women are drawn to a warped Islamist view of feminism, where the ideology is recrafted through modern values and empowering messages (Peresin, 2015). The ISIS narrative places an emphasis on women building the caliphate and breeding the next generation of jihadi fighters.

P8 reinforced this view, emphasising the situation of women experiencing conflict at home.

> "Many young women attracted to the ideology of ISIS see a way out of this patriarchal structure that they are living with at home ... In a sense, their limits are being expanded from what they often experience in

> their restricted surroundings. This dimension may be playing a success in the recruitment of these women".

On one hand, these women are viewed as innocent victims who are escaping their restricted upbringing or personal grievances, but on the other hand they are drawn to a violent and aggressive ideology. Peresin (2015) states that female migrants even express their willingness to participate in militant functions. This relates to Bloom's assertion (2011, p.9) that "many women are just as bloodthirsty as the male members of terrorist groups … but they are inspired on a number of levels; anger, sorrow or religious zeal coalesce". Participant four commented on the one-dimensional view of female foreign fighters, and stated that the assumption of British women being mere passive "jihadi brides" is statistically false.

> "There is a responsibility to acknowledge these women as threats; if you don't see them as angry, bloodthirsty and violent, then you won't see them as that when they come back, which is a huge problem … it's a simplification of what is happening."

Theme Three: Motivations for Joining

The following theme will analyse the predominant motivating factors which subsequently lead British females to the path of radicalisation. Since the key push factors have previously been discussed, such as issues of identity and exclusion, the focus will be placed on pull factors. These factors include belonging, sisterhood and romance, and have been identified through literature, qualitative research and case studies. According to Saltman and Smith (2015), unlike push factors, pull factors place an emphasis on positive incentives and empowerment.

Participant three, whose stepbrother was radicalised, stated that while politics and religion are important factors, they are used as mere justifications to fuel anger and hate against the West. "A lot of people forget that it's about that basic human desire and need to be important and powerful. It's about wanting to do something extraordinary with your life."

Qualitative data concluded that ideology plays a huge role in the radicalisation process, however, it is used as a justification for gratifying the deep level of vulnerability, lack of value and sense of purpose these individuals may feel. The core motivation for joining an extremist organisation is inherently personal and often relates to the desire of wanting to be important, recognised and socially accepted – an attribute that is within our human nature. Wali (2016) asserts, the motivations for women joining ISIS are universal, in the sense that they are often in search for a cause, a purpose and something meaningful. This can be triggered by an inner conflict surrounding who they are and where they belong. Participant four, a researcher at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, after examining several hundred case studies, stated that identity was the most important motivating factor among young women. More specifically, P4 placed identity at a value of 60%, followed by religious duty at 20% and a sense of adventure, romance, sisterhood or utopia building at 20%.

The "caliphate sisterhood" was identified through literature and qualitative data as a predominant motivating factor among young British Muslim females. As

previously noted in the Hoyle et al (2015) study on female migrants, sisterhood and the sense of camaraderie is openly discussed on social media platforms to attract other recruits. The emphasis on sisterhood can be seen by one of the alleged female online recruiters, Aqsa Mahmood from Glasgow, who writes under the name of Umm Layth. Aqsa wrote a series of blog posts (fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com) and tweets between 2013 and 2015 for sisters in the Islamic State (see Appendix). The tweet quoted below was uploaded with an image of Aqsa and two sisters wearing the full burqa: "Umm Haritha, me and Umm Ubaydah – My most beloved sisters, may Allah unite us in Jannatul Firdous for loving for his sake"

To assist newcomers, Aqsa wrote a five-page post on Tumblr titled "Diary of a Muhajirah [migrant]" (2014) with guidance for female migrants on marriage and the role of women. In her post, the 'paradise' of Syria is juxtaposed with the realities of living in a warzone, as she advises soon to be married sisters to "bring makeup and jewellery from the West because trust me, there is absolutely nothing here". To diminish any doubts and for further reassurance, the reader is told that the intentions are to please Allah; "you are blessed to be placed in this situation out of the billions of Muslims around the world". This evidently shows the power of religious ideology in recruitment and propaganda strategies.

The sisterhood and sense of community are particularly strong elements in online propaganda, providing a sense of stability which these females previously lacked (Peresin, 2015). However, as acknowledged by P8, there is a dark and more serious side: "No matter how strong the sisterhood is, the reality is often very different to what it is made out to be. It's a warzone and these women are usually sex objects." Despite the brutal reality of living conditions in Syria communicated online and in the media, propaganda disseminated by female migrants like Umm Layth, for example, still receive positive admiration from an audience. In some cases, it is even successful in the recruitment of women because propagandised pull factors like sisterhood, belonging, empowerment and religious ideology, are powerful enough to dismiss any other reality.

Theme Four: Radicalisation Online

Social media have been recognised (by Klausen, 2015; Koomen and Van Der Pligt, 2015; Kundnani, 2015) to be a facilitator for the radicalisation of young Muslim women online. Qualitative data further explored whether social media had the potential to facilitate the recruitment of female migrants, or if face-to-face contact was more powerful. Findings reinforced the view, outlined by Koomen and Van Der Pligt (2015), that there must be a human influence to trigger and sustain the radicalisation process. Participant four emphasised the importance of face-to-face contact and stated:

> "The introduction to ISIS or the ideology will happen offline in the immediate community, through friends or a family member who have exposed them to radical Islam … the process is then facilitated on social media from that point onwards when individuals go online to satisfy their curiosity."

The importance of pre-existing social ties has been observed in cases of radicalisation. Like many female migrants who have joined ISIS, the Halane twins (explored as case studies) had a prior introduction to extremist ideology through their family. Zahra and Salma Halane are believed (Saltman and Smith, 2015) to have come from a strict orthodox Muslim background, where their father and brother held extreme radical beliefs. Their 21-year old brother Ahmed Halane was a primary influencer and led by example with his own departure to join ISIS in 2013. According to Dearey (2010), the family influence of religious fundamentalism can pose a stronger impact on an individual than the ideology itself.

The findings suggest that social media do not act as a substitute for direct contact, and instead, enhance the radicalisation process. Participants agreed that in many cases, social media were found to accelerate the grooming and recruitment of young females. Participant seven, a researcher from a counter-extremism think-tank, noted the powerful effects of online propaganda and its impact on attracting young vulnerable women:

> "The way ISIS use social media to their advantage is extremely powerful in creating a distorted reality of life in a warzone. The role of women is exaggerated in order to attract recruits, but the reality is far worse than imagined for these vulnerable females."

ISIS propagandists have recognised this vulnerability in females, and exploited it through the use of compelling language, rhetoric and visual content which appeal to a mass audience. The rapid dissemination of online propaganda has enabled ISIS to package themselves as a brand and gain global exposure like no other group (Winter, 2015). While social media have not been proven to singularly radicalise individuals, it could may well be the next evolution of terrorist recruitment. It is therefore crucial that research in this area continues to develop and examine the impact of social media in the radicalisation process.

CONCLUSION

There is a tendency to assume that women are not as bloodthirsty as men or capable of committing terrorist activities. Based on literature and research examined in this paper, it is clear that gendered misconceptions still remain concerning the phenomena of females joining the Islamic State. As Saltman and Smith (2015) state, the biggest issue is that women continue to be viewed as 'victims of terrorism', and are subsequently constrained by stereotypes such as the 'jihadi bride'. However, cases like Samantha Lewthwaite, known as the White Widow of Al Shabaab, have defied the traditional paradigm of women. British-born Sally Jones, aged 46, is another example of a woman who transformed her conventional role from being a mother to an ISIS recruiter. In a perverse sense, Lewthwaite and Jones are viewed by extremist sympathisers as an inspiration for being two of the most wanted females, consequently attracting others to follow their path. Until we diminish the view of women as victims, we cannot implement policy and change.

To address the phenomenon of radicalised women, we must face two perspectives; the viewpoint from these women and the terrorist group themselves. Further research is required to understand the hearts and minds of the youth to whom ISIS ideology appeals so strongly to. In addition, we must acknowledge that prior to joining ISIS, many had opportunities to be successful and were not necessarily marginalised. This leaves room to question, what makes these women join a terror organisation? The answer, derived from research and findings, lies within the power of religious ideology.

Unlike previous research where ideology has been underestimated, this paper highlights the importance of confronting the root cause: acknowledging the ideological dimensions to radicalisation. Qualitative data demonstrates the biggest gap in research is the connection between the puritanical interpretation of Islam and joining ISIS. An interesting conclusion derived from research is that while ideology is an important element to the radicalisation process, the core motivations are inherently personal. These motives relate to the basic human needs of love, belonging and a sense of purpose, often overlooked in literature. Future research must closely examine these factors in order to understand the hearts and minds of young women. More significantly, research highlighted the issues of female identity in the UK. Families therefore have the responsibility to instil the belief in their daughters that British and Muslim identity can be embraced simultaneously.

This paper has attempted to contribute to existing research by providing a refreshing approach on the issue of British women joining ISIS. Furthermore, the research questions have been answered through the key findings and a devised stages model of radicalisation. This presents valuable insight into the incremental process of radicalisation that a female may experience, taking into account the complex factors and multi-layered drivers. As previously noted in methodology, the limitations of this study are based on the small sample of research participants which only realistically represents a fraction of the overall perspective. Due to ethical constraints, first-hand experiences of radicalised females were unobtainable and for future research, this must be taken into consideration.

A recommendation to prevent radicalisation is to take an educational approach and micro-analyse the Islamist ideology, which stems from a misinterpretation of Islam. An open debate is required and acknowledgement of this fact is needed from educational bodies, Muslim organisations and policy makers who must collectively unite in search of the solution. To tackle the 9,000 radicalised would-be jihadists in France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls recently announced a €40 million program to set up de-radicalisation centres across France. It is important to treat the causes of radicalisation, rather than the symptoms. Acknowledging the connection between Islam and extreme ideology, which often leads to terrorism, is paramount. It is important to invest in further research, education and pre-radicalisation programs to detract the moths from the flame.

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