The Ultimate Escape Plan: Why Western European Women and Girls Were Attracted to ISIS

Sarah Collins
International Affairs
University of Colorado, Boulder

Undergraduate Honors Thesis 2022

Defense Date: 9 a.m. Marth 30th 2022

Honors Thesis Committee:

Dr. Gregory Young
Senior Instructor-Political Science
Primary Advisor

Dr. Doug Snyder
Assistant Teaching Professor- History and International Affairs
Honors Council Representative

Dr. Hillary Falb Kalisman
Assistant Professor- Jewish Studies and History
Secondary Reader

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, or may also be referred to as *DAESH*) recruited thousands of foreigners to join their cause in the name of *jihad*[1] from the organization's creation in 2004. Foreign recruits[2] traveled in the thousands to join ISIS, and not just from predominately Muslim countries, but from countries in Western Europe, North America, and Australia alike. ISIS's ability to recruit not only men, but also women, to join its cause, despite its horrific international reputation, remains an enigma for scholars, and politicians alike. ISIS proved itself unique from other terrorist organizations as they aspired to create an established state, or a modern-day caliphate[3] (McCants, 2015)[4]. In order to achieve this vision, ISIS needed doctors, nurses, engineers, soldiers, educators, and crucially: women. Women were necessary for increasing the population, producing a new generation of jihadists, as well as sustaining and supporting home life within the state. It is estimated that by 2015, 550 European women had left their homes to join ISIS (Saripi, 2015). The need for women and the sheer number of foreigners that risked their lives to join ISIS, differentiates ISIS apart from other Islamic terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah or Al-Qaeda (McCants, 2015).

This research seeks to better understand the radicalization process that Western European women underwent when deciding to join the Islamic State, and moreover, what were the extenuating factors that may have caused them to show interest in ISIS. This thesis hypothesizes

---

[1] A struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam.

[2] Foreign recruits in this setting are any individuals foreign to Iraq and/or Syria.

[3] Land or dynasty ruled by a caliph, an Islamic religious leader.

[4] The Islamic State continues as an organization and an ideological base, however, its territory in Iraq in Sryia is almost entirely diminished and will therefore be referred to in the past tense.

that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation in Western Europe will contribute to the Islamic radicalization of Western Europe's Muslim immigrants and citizens as it is increasingly alienating Muslims within Western European society, and gives ISIS recruiters material to capitalize on. Anti-Muslim sentiment may be considered as repeated harassment or discrimination towards someone or a community because they are Muslim. Anti-Muslim legislation, in this case, is defined as laws and rules made by a federal or local government that target Muslim residents' ability to practice their religion freely, or, legislation that implements discriminatory practices towards Muslims and predominately Muslim communities because of their religious identity.

This study will examine the specific lives of five different women who left Western Europe to travel to Syria and join the Islamic State between 2013 and 2017. Each woman's radicalization process will be framed and analyzed through sociologist Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which will be explained in more depth during the literature section of this paper. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is a multi-step adult learning theory that has previously been applied to radicalized individuals by scholars Alex S. Wilner and Claire Jehanne Dubouloz. Each case study will use Transformative Learning Theory, as well as testimonies from the individual or individual's family and friends to gain greater insight into each woman's radicalization process and what made them vulnerable to radicalization. The findings in these case studies will then be compared to previous scholarly research on why women decided to leave life in the West for Syria to examine similarities or differences in the cases' findings. In comparing each woman's radicalization process, additional context will be provided of how they lived as a Muslim in their home country within Western Europe will be added to their story to

see how their Muslim identity and anti-Muslim sentiment or anti-Muslim legislation affected their decision.

Although the original hypothesis theorized that anti-Muslim legislation would be a crucial impact on each woman's decision to join ISIS, there was a lack of evidence that any specific legislation pushed any women in the case study to join ISIS. However, overarching anti-Muslim legislation can create an overarching hostile environment for Muslims in Western Europe. ISIS capitalized on anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation that left Muslim women feeling ostracized from main streams society. It was ISIS's ability to convince women that Western society was unfit for a devout Islamic lifestyle in their expert recruiting as well that was the most successful pull factor in the cases presented. Additionally, the women's young age at the time of recruitment, unhappiness or dissatisfaction in life, and face-to-face and personal influences were found to be the most prevalent push factors for engaging in ISIS propaganda.

Research Question

"What motivated women and girls living in Western Europe to travel to Syria and join ISIS?"

This question was chosen to address an area of research that is often overlooked: women in terrorism. In regards to counter-terrorism efforts or research on radicalization, men are often studied and focused on, whereas women in terrorism are identified as supporting roles. Women that do join terrorist organizations are also depicted by journalists, politicians, and scholars, as joining terrorist organizations due to coercion or painted as individuals that lack human agency. However, new research demonstrates, that this is not the case, and women's critical thinking and reflection process when joining terrorist organizations should be not overlooked. As scholars Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg state, ".... one shouldn't fall into the trap of zombifying

women, as many security services do when describing them [women] as completely powerless and without agency" (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). This research question is committed to dedicating more time to this area of study and combatting the notion that women in terrorism or Islamic extremism are passive and lack critical thinking.

Hypothesis

Initial Hypothesis

This thesis hypothesizes that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation are in part responsible for fueling Islamic radicalization amongst Western European women and girls between 2013 and 2017 by creating a hostile environment for Muslim women. Furthermore, that ISIS was able to capitalize on promoting the idea that life in Western Europe was incompatible with Islamic values because of anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation. As scholars Michael King and Donald M. Taylor state, "radicalization results in mainly a shift in attitudes and beliefs about one's own group in relation to others' (King and Taylor, 2011)'. ISIS was able to convince their recruits that they were a group separate from greater European society, and radicalization in the scenario is the final shift that one's identity can no longer be comparable with that of the greater group. Meaning, that radicalization can be thought of as in relation or contrast to another group's beliefs or identity. As in Transformative Learning Theory, there is a shift in the beginning of the radicalization process, where one realizes their identity and previous beliefs no longer fits with their old and they need to form a new identity (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2010) (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011).

Therefore, in accordance with TLT, if an individual lives in a country or place with legislation that does not align with their own religious beliefs, such as their ability to wear their own religious dress or infringe on their ability to practice their religion freely, then that can be

more likely to cause a triggering event. As stated earlier, a triggering event or disorienting dilemma is vital to the radicalization process (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2010) (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011). Additionally, a triggering event also does not have to come in the form of legislation actively imposing on one's religion but overall sentiment in one's daily life, and the life of fellow Muslims, such as the inability to find employment, experiencing verbal and physical harassment, or exclusion from social life (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2010) (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011).

Myths of Islamic Radicalization

There are many myths centering around Islamic radicalization in this context that require clarification, the first being that there is not one demographic or person who is more susceptible to being radicalized than another (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011). Meaning that, previous research once theorized that those who come from poorer socio-economic backgrounds or lower education levels were more susceptible to Islamic radicalization, however, in accordance with Transformative Learning Theory, the case studies presented in this thesis, and recent scholarly literature, this claim fails to hold validity, rather anyone can fall victim to radicalization (Perešin, 2015) (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011). Secondly, there is a specific discourse in media, policy, and research that radicalized individuals, especially women, lack human agency or critical thinking skills (Wilner and Dubulouz, 2011) (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) In accordance with Transformative Learning Theory, it is actually an individual's critical thinking and reflection that allows them to reconstruct their known realities and undergo transformation (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010) (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011).

Additionally, there is a myth that an individual who holds a radical ideology must participate in radical behavior (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010) (Malthaner, 2017). One can hold

radical ideology but never act in a violent manner or plan to inflict terror on an individual or a society. An individual who holds seemingly radical or extremist ideas may not even condone violence and violent behavior that is commonly associated with radicalization through media portrayal or previous research (Malthaner, 2017). Lastly, as part of producing ethical research, it is crucial to be explicit in saying that radicalized individuals are not inherently bad or inherently violent, not that that condones violent behavior driven by radicalized beliefs. As it will become clearer when applying Transformative Learning Theory to the women in this case study, the reader will see that all radicalized individuals in this study did not demonstrate acts of violence or malice from a young age. Rather, radical behavior stemmed from their radical ideology that was taught, learned, and then adapted. To be explicit, radicalized behavior and ideology are taught and are not natural.

Methodology

This thesis will consist of five different case studies of women who left their homes in Western Europe to travel to Syria between 2013 and 2017. Three of the women chosen are from the United Kingdom, one woman from Germany, and one woman from France. All of the women chosen were young at the time of their radicalization, between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Each woman was intentionally chosen to demonstrate a variety of socio-economic classes and ethnic origins to create a diverse pool of women to study. In order to best understand their story of radicalization, data was collected from a variety of journalistic outlets such as: The New York Times, The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph, The Daily Telegraph, Skye News, CNN, the BBC, Vice News, and more. These sources were selected due to their journalistic credibility and international variety. Additionally, each source's political leanings and biases were considered, however, there was no substantial bias that inhibited research for collecting

factual data that could then be analyzed through TLT and additional scholarly work. These sources provided insight into each woman's life prior to their radicalization as well as testimonies from family, friends, teachers, and classmates of the women studied. Additional data from before each woman's radicalization process, some of the women in this study are still alive and the testimonies of their life prior to and post to their life in ISIS is used as additional data, as they now have the ability to reflect on their experience in retrospect. Although there is not a woman from every country in Western, Europe, the cases chosen are intended to represent a broader trend within Western Europe and demonstrate the effects of anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation that is not strictly designated for singular countries but rather represent the entire region. Each woman's radicalization process is examined through the lens of Transformative Learning Theory, specifically looking for the triggering moment(s) and disorienting dilemmas that initiated their radicalization, as well as cognitive openings and where their beliefs began to intensify. To reinstate, this thesis hypothesizes is that anti-Muslim legislation and anti-Muslim sentiment impacted Islamic radicalization of Western European women between 2013 and 2017. Additionally, that ISIS recruiters were successful in recruiting Western European women by capitalizing on the maltreatment and discrimination toward Muslims in Western Europe.

Background Information

Understanding ISIS

The Islamic State was first created in 2004 by Abu Musab al Zarqawi, as an offshoot of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Wilson Center, 2019). *DAESH*'s presence faded slightly during the increase of American troops during the war in Iraq, but regained prominence in 2011 and continued to grow in ideology and territory. In 2011, the Arab world was erupting in mass protests and rebellions

that had started with Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution which overturned the nation's 24 year-long dictatorship. By contrast, demonstrations in Syria against dictator Bashar al- Assad resulted in horrific backlash from the Assad regime, resulting in the ongoing bloody Syrian civil war. The Islamic State capitalized on the chaos that was happening in Iraq and Syria during this time. Iraqi borders, security, and infrastructure were already destabilized due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq[5]. ISIS took advantage of this and spread its territory into northern Syria. They quickly established their presence in the Syrian civil war, combatting opposing militia and quickly gaining territory in northern Syria (Wilson Center, 2019).

During ISIS's economic and territorial peak in late 2014 and 2015, ISIS had an annual income of 2.9 billion USD. (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). The organization established its wealth through bank theft, ransom for hostages, oil sales through Turkey, sex trafficking, and other smaller income revenues (Speckhard et Ellenberg, 2020). ISIS, led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after al Zarqawi was targeted and killed by United States' military forces, recruited an astonishing number of foreigners to join the organization. The former United States' national intelligence director estimated that between 2012 and 2016, 36,500 foreigners had traveled to Syria, including 6,000 from Western countries (Elbagir et al, 2016). By 2020, scholars believe that this number was more likely 40,000 foreigners that traveled to ISIS territory (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020).

ISIS and the Internet

[5] For more information on Tunisia, Syria, ISIS, and the Arab Springs visit the Wilson Center's website, a bi-partisan, policy forum that conducts independent research on Global Affairs. Or, visit The Middle East Institute's website, non-partisan think tank located in Washington D.C., dedicated solely to the study of the Middle East.

Al Zarqawi and his counterparts used the internet to distribute ISIS propaganda. They spread radical ideas at an alarming speed, across every corner of the world (Atwan, 2015). Indeed, Yemen- American Anwar al Alwaki, an original technology expert and propagandist of ISIS, created his own blog, Facebook page, and YouTube channel where he delivered sermons and wrote posts in English, further-reaching a broader audience (Atwan, 2015). Al Alwaki, and his colleagues at the time, established a vast network of highly skilled web developers that could produce resources for one another. They taught other jihadists how to conceal their identities online and which messaging services and websites were the least trackable (Atwan, 2015). In 2011, Al Alwaki was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen, but after his death, the groundwork of internet usage he established for ISIS would continue to grow the organization's following and world recognition (Atwan, 2015).

Through social media platforms such as Twitter, Ask fm., Tumblr, and Instagram, ISIS established a following and a space where prospective recruits could ask questions and form relationships, including romantic relationships, with jihadists already in Syria, as well as meet other potential recruits who were also considering traveling to Syria. As stated by scholar Galit M. Ben-Israel, "ISIS has succeeded in creating a social consciousness by infiltrating and manipulating the social networks most effectively. ISIS uses social media to unite the "*ummah*"[6], mainly to build an Islamic civilization multilingual *ummah* that includes "good" Muslims from all races" (Ben-Israel, 2018). Ben-Israel continues to explain how ISIS effectively created a united online fan base that followed their updates as one might with their favorite sports team or performer. It is estimated that by 2014, there were over 90,000 ISIS supporter accounts on

[6] The *ummah* refers to the entire, global Muslim community.

Twitter (Berger and Morgan, 2015). Unsurprisingly, all the young women in this study presented had contact with online ISIS propaganda or were in contact directly with an ISIS recruiter online.

Recruitment

To clarify, ISIS was not the first jihadist organization to call Muslim foreigners to its cause. Muslim foreign fighters traveled to Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and Bosnia during the Bosnian War (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). ISIS, however, was unique in recruitment as the organization was growing alongside the rise of the internet. During this time, the world felt "smaller and more connected than ever before" (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Connection is a vital part of the recruitment process and the internet's ability to allow people from anywhere in the world to connect in seconds can be accredited to their success in recruitment. (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) Recruitment was vital for the growth and support of the Islamic State. ISIS recruiters were responsible for hosting online forums and connecting with Muslims that may be interested in the Islamic State. Recruiters would often paint a highly idealistic vision of ISIS, such as posting photos of mothers and their children playing outside happily together, or tales of being a woman in ISIS and promising women they will find a good husband and live a secure life. Simultaneously, they were selling the story that this is life, a life of a peaceful, family-orientated life, centered around Islamic values that were unattainable in Western culture (Perešin, 2013). Moreover, recruiters would answer all questions related to life in the Islamic State and even provide a packing list for future recruits (Perešin, 2013).

Terrorism in Europe

Although terrorism in Western Europe is not a new phenomenon, the political organizations and individuals committing terrorist attacks have changed. Terrorism in Western Europe has evidently decreased since the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, when as many as 400 people would die every

year due to terrorist attacks (Ritchie et al, 2019). The majority of this terror, however, was concentrated in the United Kingdom and Ireland during 'The Troubles' (Ritchie et al, 2019). The Good Friday peace treaty agreement between the United Kingdom and Ireland agreed to end violence and terror between the two nations. Over the past twenty years, terrorism in Western Europe has and continues to be dominated by Islamic extremists and jihadists organizations such as ISIS (Ritchie et al, 2019). Part of the belief system of the Islamic State is that Western life is incompatible with true Islamic values. The Islamic state would then see Western society as a breeding ground for sinners and infidels or *kafirs,* which is why it is commonly a target for terrorist organizations such as ISIS (Spencer, 2016).

As ISIS grew, so did the rate and magnitude of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe. By 2014, France had suffered 250 deaths and over, 2,000 causalities due to jihadist violence (Jones et al, 2018). The most notable of these horrific attacks were the Paris attacks on November 14/15th of 2015, claimed by the Islamic State, where 131 were left dead, and hundreds more were injured in a series of shootings and bombings in and around Paris (Nossiter, 2019). The following year, also in France, a man drove his truck down a crowded street in Nice, killing 80 civilians (Nossiter, 2019). In August of 2017, another vehicular attack, later claimed by the Islamic State, occurred in Barcelona. The driver drove a van down the extremely popular tourist attraction and pedestrian pathway, Las Ramblas, killing at least thirteen people and injuring dozens more (Bolon et al, 2017). Earlier that year, 22 people were killed and almost 60 others wounded, including children, after an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England. The Islamic State also claimed responsibility for the attack (The New York Times, 2017). Even in the wake of these horrific terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State, Muslim Europeans continued to travel to Syria.

Immigration Trends in Europe and Targeted Legislation Towards Muslims

Between 1990 and 2013, there were over 23 million international migrants who immigrated to Europe. 22% of these migrants came from Asia followed by 18% from Africa (United Nations, 2013)[7]. Europe first saw its preliminary wave of immigration post World War II, when industries began to regrow in the 1950s. Immigration during this time consisted mostly of short-term labor contracts and temporary work visas. Immigrants during this time were from other European nations such as Italy and Portugal, or nations on the periphery such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Turkey (Van Mol and de Volk, 2016). During this period, immigration was viewed in an overall positive manner due to its economic benefits (Van Mol and de Volk, 2016). By contrast, the second wave of immigration starting in the 1980s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of global conflicts, and family unification, immigration within Europe quickly diversified (Van Mol and de Volk, 2016).

To understand how Europeans were feeling in the wake of rising immigration, the World Economic Forum conducted a 22-survey question among European residents to understand the extent of nationalist, anti-immigrant, and anti-religious minority sentiments among different European nations (Diamant, 2018). Respondents' scores were based on a 1-10 scale and increased if they expressed negative feelings towards immigrants, Muslims, or Jews. For example, responses stating that they were, “unwilling to be neighbors or relatives with Muslims or Jews; that immigrants from certain regions are not honest or hardworking; that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their national cultures and values” (Diamant, 2018), would

7 https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full_Document_final.pdf

increase a respondent's score. In Italy 38% of the surveyed population scored above a five on the scale, followed by 29% of Austrians, and 25 % of Danes. In Sweden, only 8% of the population surveyed scored higher than a five (Diamant, 2018). Looking at these statistics, one could conclude that there is a higher rate of Italian, Austrian, and Danish immigrants that feel that increased immigration and minority religious groups pose a cultural threat to their country and value systems. Public sentiment is commonly reflected in politics and policy, because of this, one can hypothesize that these countries either have or have considered stricter policy and legislation in the assimilation of minorities and immigrants compared to a country such as Sweden where only 8% of the population scored higher than a five. Although the cases chosen in the evidence section of this thesis do not reflect women from every country listed above, the study done by the World Economic Forum is to show greater trends in Western Europe regarding immigrants and Muslims as my thesis is not limited to only analyzing The United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

Multiple Western European countries created policies and legislation to assimilate non-Western immigrants and Muslims into European society in order to preserve national values and identities. Assimilation is different from integration as it is the absorption of a minority group into the majority group's culture and values. Minority groups are expected to adapt and understand the way of the majority group in an assimilation model. Whereas integration is an exchange between the minority and majority group where both groups modify and adapt for one another. In adjusting to the influx of immigration and multiculturalism, Western Europe, for the most part, has taken an approach of assimilation versus integration. For example, France, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands have either passed or considered passing laws that would make full-face coverings in public space and government buildings prohibited (Alderman and

Eddy, 2021). Moreover, during the influx of Syrian refugees in Germany in 2015, copies of the German constitution were distributed in Arabic, to clearly display German values and the expectation that incoming refugees adopt these values (Karnitschnig, 2015). Additionally, in 2017, the European Court of Justice, the highest court in the European Union declared that private companies had the right to prohibit employees from wearing any signs of religious dress or wear in order to maintain an image of neutrality. The ruling came after two German women took the case to court after being suspended from their jobs for refusing to remove their *hijabs*[8] (Alderman and Eddy, 2021). For Muslim women that identify the veil or *hijab* as part of their religious and personal identity, this ruling poses the question if they are allowed to religiously express themselves fully in Europe as Muslim women.

More specifically, French public schools are focused on establishing French culture and identity, and as stated before, secularism or *laïcité* is an unquestionable French value (Daly, 2012). *Laïcité* does not have a direct translation in English. It can be thought of as the French version of secularism or separation of church and state. Rather, instead of protecting freedom of religion as it is thought of in the United States, *laïcite* can be framed as the "freedom of conscience" (Mikulis, 2020). It is the belief that individuals have the right to their own religious thoughts and freedoms but that these should be kept strictly separate from the state and the public sphere. This is to prevent an individual from imposing their religious ideas and beliefs on others, as well as preventing the state or any member of the state from inflicting their own religious beliefs or biases.

[8] Hijab is generally referred to a cloth wrap or fabric that covers a Muslim women's hair, and sometimes the neck, but leaves the face exposed.

As religious demographics in France have changed over the past several decades, with the influx of North and West African as well as Asian immigrants, *laïcité* has continued to change and adapt. In 1989, three French schoolgirls refused to remove their headscarves when asked by their teacher. The case reached national attention and stirred debate on the reach of *laïcité*. The school told the girls they could not attend school until their headscarves were removed but eventually the students won and were allowed to return to class. Almost a decade and a half later in 2004, the case was pushed to the supreme court of France where the court passed a law that, "prohibits all clothing or other attire displaying religious worship to be worn in schools" (Ministère de L'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères[9]). This includes any forms of religious dress such as the veil, *burka*, or *hijab*. All must be removed upon entry. However, this policy raises the question of how students who believe that wearing a veil or *hijab* is an important part of their religious and personal identity are welcomed and appreciated in French culture. Germany and Belgium have also attacked Muslim women's right to wear their own religious dress. For example, German employers also told women to remove their headscarves, and their decision was backed by the European Union Supreme Court. Additionally, in 2020, Belgium passed a law that religious symbols in higher education institutions would be prohibited as well, this includes hijabs and veils of course that cover their hair (Brussels Times, 2020). These attack on Muslim women's dress is a direct attack on their right to freedom of religion and expression. It further alienates them from society and creates an overall hostile environment toward Muslim women in Western Europe.

[9] https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france

Literature Review

Islamic Radicalization in Men vs. Women

Scholars Anne Speckhard and Molly D. Ellenberg conducted a study of over 220 ISIS returnees, defectors, and prisoners to understand the individual and collective motives of joining the Islamic State and the inner workings of ISIS. The interviewees came from over 35 different countries, multiple different ethnicities, as well as converts and Muslim-born participants. In their study, Speckhard and Ellenberg found important differences in the recruitment and radicalization process in men versus women. The most common vulnerability in foreign men was substance abuse, as well as underemployment and unemployment, which they cited as a cause of them being Muslim (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). By contrast, women cited poverty, family conflict, and prior trauma, and European women added discriminatory practices (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Discriminatory practices are broad but can be displayed as anything that inhibits Muslim women or their families from feeling that they face discrimination as a result of their religious identity, practices, beliefs, or dress (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). For example, not being able to wear their hijab or headscarf at their workplace, or the inability to find work due to their name (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Scholar Ben-Israel adds that ISIS capitalized on promoting traditional roles to women and that they should fulfill their role as housewives and mothers in Syria (Ben-Israel, 2018).

In regards to the recruitment process, men sighted the most frequent and meaningful influences were face-to-face- ISIS recruiters (meaning not virtual but in person), friends, and passive videos of propaganda that were found on sites such as Twitter and YouTube (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). These videos include sermons of ISIS recruiters glorifying the Islamic state, displaying the atrocities committed by the Assad regime in Syria, and recruiters arguing it

is part of *hijra*[10], to help their fellow Muslims in Syria. Additionally, men in the study cited the Syrian civil war as a focal point for interest in the Islamic State as it was framed as a cry for help for all Muslims (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). ISIS recruiters were incredibly strategic in tracking anyone that liked, reposted, or engaged in any ISIS material or propaganda. They would then find their page and begin communication with the individual.

Theory of Radicalization

Radicalization remains a human phenomenon in academic literature in both sociology and psychology. It is a difficult process to understand and there are many competing studies and cases that try to explain radicalization. However, this thesis has chosen to use the framework of scholars Alex S. Wilner and Claire Jehanne Dubouloz's theory of radicalization framed through Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, to examine each woman's radicalization process because their work provides a clear structural process of radicalization that builds off of sociologist Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Wilner and Dubouloz's work was also chosen because it frames radicalization as a process that does not discriminate or target a single demographic of the population. Meaning, that it does not theorize that only poorer, undereducated, or less intelligent individuals can be radicalized but rather that anyone can radicalize regardless of those factors.

Jack Mezirow first coined Transformative Learning Theory in the 1990s, as an adult learning theory that combined cognitivism and constructivism to see how adults learn and adapt when presented with new information. He then wanted to see how they process this new

[10] Originally the Prophet Muhammed's pilgrimage from Mecca to Medina. Now used as a term for a religious migration or pilgrimage.

information to make sense of it in their own realities, environments, learned behaviors, and emotions. His research found that "adults don't apply their old understanding to new information, instead they find they need to look at new perspectives in order to get a new understanding of things as they change" (Western Governors University, 2020). An alternative to this is cognitive dissonance where an individual is presented with new information and finds a feeling of discomfort as they hold two conflicting beliefs at the same time. When an adult is presented with new information that does not fit their reality, they will reconstruct their known truths in order to fit this new information in their new environment. Something in their new way of life will have to change, either their identity, their environment, or their truth (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010). This theory has not only been applied to radicalization, but to adults that suffer severe accidents that impact their identity and course of their life, such as a spinal injury or the loss of limb(s). It can also be applied to understand how adults suffering from addiction in rehabilitation programs will transform through learning (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011).

In applying Mezirow's theory, Wilner and Dubouloz identify that there must be a triggering moment to cause a cognitive opening, in order to initiate the transformative process. They defend the idea that a triggering moment will become a transformative period in an adult's life where they will then take what they learn in the moment and apply it to their own social context and environment to undergo transformation. Following the transformation phase is the outcome phase, "in which new meaning perspectives encourage and are reflected in novel behavior" (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). In order for this process to happen, one must undergo intense critical reflection of themselves and their experience in relation to the new information present. This transformation can be a result of a single event or happen gradually in response to a series of events In relation to Islamic radicalization, a triggering event may consist of one's

country engaging in war in the Middle East, laws or policies that target Muslims or immigrants, or constant discrimination or harassment in their lives or the lives of other members of their community (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). Once an individual's ideology has been challenged and begins to shift, it will further be reinforced and strengthened by being surrounded by like-minded individuals (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011).

Evidence

Case #1 Shamima Begum

Shamima Begum was fifteen when she left her home in East London to travel to Syria. Begum traveled with two other girls from her school, Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana, in February of 2015 (Welby, 2019). Shamima's family last saw her at the bus stop on a seemingly normal Tuesday morning, claiming that they had no idea she would later fly to Turkey that same night. They plead on national television for Shamima to come home, that they would still accept her, and that it was not too late for her to change her mind. Shamima, however, never returned. She survived life in the Islamic State and is currently in a detention camp in northern Syria, stateless, widowed, and pleading to regain her United Kingdom citizenship (Woolcock, 2021) (Bunkall, 2021) (Sky News, 2021).

Shamima's family claim that they saw no changes in behavior nor any signs of radicalization in the months leading up to Shamima's departure. Her classmates, however, say differently (Woolcock 2021). Shamima attended Bethnal Green Academy in East London, where Sharmeena Begum (no relation) had also left to join ISIS without warning in 2014 (Woolcock 2021). One of Shamima's classmates reported to the MyLondon website that Shamima and Amira had been talking to other students about ISIS and Islam. Their classmate, known as Jon, said that they (Shamima and Amira) had begun to wear matching badges with black flags and

white Arabic writing, and became increasingly persistent in persuading him of their beliefs, eventually chatting with him outside of school on messaging platforms. Furthermore, their description of ISIS became utopic. They described it as a place where "... you don't need to worry about money or whatnot, everything's there for you. If you just study and learn religion, uphold the values of religion, your life is sorted for you" (Woolcock, 2021). Moreover, another student of Bethnal Green, and a friend of Shamima, Sharmeena, had left earlier in the school year to join ISIS in Syria as well. It is plausible to assume that Sharmeena influenced Shamima in her radicalization process and also made ISIS seem less of a foreign, isolated place as she assumed she would be reconnecting with an old friend once there.

It is evident that Shamima and Amira were showing signs of radical ideology before they left for Syria. What remains unclear is the triggering moment (or moments) that made them interested in ISIS in the first place. Shamima is the only woman out of the Bethnal Green trio that survived life under ISIS. The fact that Shamima is alive provides insight into her life before ISIS and her process of radicalization. Through interviews conducted by the BBC, Sky News, and The Guardian, her story of Islamic radicalization becomes clearer and can further be examined through Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. As stated previously, the Transformative Learning Theory is a multi-step adult learning theory process centered around the ideas of transformative beliefs and identities where one's previous identity and reality can no longer be accepted. It is, "…the process of using a prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). In order for TLT to take place, there must be a triggering event or events that cause an individual to begin the process of transformation and in this case Islamic radicalization (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011) (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010). Much of the

information gathered about Shamima is coming from her own personal testimony. That being said, Shamima is in a difficult position as she is fighting for the right to reenter the United Kingdom. It is possible that her ongoing legal battle may affect her testimony and what she chooses to share with reporters, however, her testimonies are still the best possible opportunity to examine her radicalization process.

When Shamima is asked about how she came to ISIS, she most often accredits her decision to her age, unhappiness in her life at the time, and inability to live the Muslim lifestyle she wanted to in the U.K. (Sky News, 2021) (Bunkall, 2021) (Vale, 2021). She describes being in a vulnerable spot in her life and that she was taken advantage of by friends and recruiters online. In an interview with Sky News Shamima says, "I didn't hate Britain, I hated my life really. I felt very constricted, and I felt I couldn't really live the life I wanted to in the U.K. as a British woman" (Bunkall, 2021). Shamima was influenced by friends around her and recruiters that joining ISIS would let her live a more devout Islamic lifestyle. In another interview, she was quoted saying, "I didn't fit into my community or my family so I felt I was going somewhere where I could be accepted more" (Sky News, 2021). Shamima expresses that her Muslim identity at the time felt incompatible with British society and culture. She says her motivations for joining ISIS were, "to get married, have children, and live a pure Islamic life" (Vale, 2021). As recalled from TLT, when one begins to shift their ideas and beliefs they will align themselves with others to strengthen their beliefs (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011) (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010). In this case, Shamima's friends, Amira and Kadiza, were also undergoing radical change at the same time, and as being in a group setting their beliefs became stronger amongst one another. Additionally, by 2019, it was suspected that 900 British citizens had left their homes to join ISIS (Dearden and Hall, 2019).

Case #2 Linda Wenzel

Linda Wenzel grew up in a small town in eastern Germany called Pulsnitz. Pulsnitz is a quiet, conservative town, and at the time had aligned itself against Prime minister Markel's pro-refugee policies (Noack, 2017). Linda came from a traditionally Christian family, with little exposure to Islam. It was in the spring of 2016, that Linda first told her parents she was interested in Islam (Ensor and Huggler, 2017). Her mother and step-father did not think much of the then fifteen-year-old's curiosity about religion, and her mother even stated that she bought Linda a copy of the Koran in support (Ensor and Huggler, 2017). By July of 2016, Linda Wenzel went from an ordinary school girl to a jihadi bride.

Linda's family claim that they had no idea about Wenzel's radical transformation. Linda's sister said that she had suspected Linda had converted but did not want to make assumptions about her sister and Islam, stating "But I didn't want to make too much of it, I wanted to be open-minded" (Ensor and Huggler, 2017). By contrast, Linda's teachers, classmates, and friends were noticing behavioral changes in Linda associated with her conversion. Naturally, all her classmates and teachers noticed when Wenzel started to change her dress to include long sleeves and pants (Noack, 2017). Linda's friends say she converted around this time in the spring of 2016. They noticed that Wenzel had started to learn Arabic, was taking the Koran to school and was fasting during Ramadan, but telling her parents it was part of a diet (Ensor and Huggler, 2017). After she had already traveled to Syria, her friends told investigators that she had been radicalized in online chat rooms and that she was in touch with two different Muslim families in Germany, whom her friends believed aided in Linda's radicalization (Ensor and Huggler, 2017).

After it became evident that Linda traveled to Syria, her room was searched, in which a tablet was found with a second Facebook profile containing messaging exchanges with Linda and recruiters in Syria. In addition, thousands of Islamic and jihadist images were found stored on the tablet (Ensor and Huggler, 2017) The most shocking discovery was that Linda was already married to a jihadist she was introduced to through online chat rooms and forums (Roberts, 2017). Chechen national and former ISIS fighter Abu Usama al-Shisani told Linda that he could help her cross the Turkish border into Syria and the two were married over the phone prior to Linda's departure (Roberts, 2017). What prompted Linda's initial interest in Islam remains unclear. However, her radicalization process did occur during the Syrian refugee crisis, a time when Germany was accepting an astonishing number of refugees as well as asylum seekers. In 2015 alone, Germany accepted one million refugees (Roberts, 2017). Most of these refugees were Middle Eastern and/or Muslim and Germany was grappling with how this would affect German identity and culture (Roberts, 2017). It is possible that the abnormal amount of media attention towards Muslim refugees and the Middle East sparked Linda's interest in Islam.

Linda also expressed how her parents' separation created sadness and distress. Her mother describes her as being very withdrawn during this time (Moore, 2017). To review, in TLT, the first step of the transformative process is a disorienting dilemma (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). In Linda's case, it is most likely that her parents' separation caused a traumatic response and disorientation strong enough to start the transformation process. According to TLT, she would then fall into self-examination followed by critically assessing assumptions and eventually exploring new roles, relationships, and actions (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). It is in the state of exploring new roles, relationships, and actions that Linda started looking toward religion to make sense of her parent's separation in her life (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2011). From

here she looked toward like-minded individuals, such as the Muslim families she was seeing in Germany, and the recruiters she was talking to online, to make sense of her experience. Linda was not alone in her journey, as by 2020 counter-terrorism officials estimated that 1,000 Germans had left to join ISIS (Gartenstein- Ross et al, 2020).

Case #3 Asqa Mahmood

Asqa Mahmood was once described as a normal, happy teenager. She was friendly, docile, passionate about reading and music, and very close to her family, (Shubert and Naik, 2014). Born in Glasgow, Scotland to Muslim, Pakistani parents, Asqa's family was relatively affluent and well-integrated into Scottish society (Shubert and Naik, 2014). She went to private school and lived in a nice neighborhood in Glasgow, overall, she had a great education and home life (Shubert and Naik, 2014). Asqa's seemingly standard upbringing is why it was so shocking to Asqa's family and friends when she traveled to Syria in 2013, at only nineteen years old. Her parents reported that they saw no signs of Asqa radicalizing or holding extremist beliefs, as did Shamima and Linda's family (Shubert and Naik, 2014).

There are challenges in examining' Asqa's story of radicalization, as she is believed to have been killed in Syria in 2019, leaving no post-ISIS testimony to understand, as well as her relatively low profile before joining the terrorist organization, which makes it difficult to collect testimonies prior to her departure. She did, however, become an extremely active social media user and recruiter once in Syria with ISIS. Although difficult to examine all possible steps in Asqa's radicalization, there is possible insight in identifying Asqa's triggering moment/ disorienting dilemma: the Syrian civil war. When the Syrian civil war started, Asqa's parents say, "she became increasingly concerned about the violence. She grew more religious, praying and reading the Koran" (Shubert and Naik, 2014). The Syrian civil war was frequently

manipulated by ISIS recruiters and used as a pull factor for convincing foreigners to travel to Syria (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). It is not surprising that Asqa, felt helpless in Scotland as children and civilians were being killed in a country with such a high Muslim population, as Syria. Violence in a predominately Muslim country is enough to become a triggering moment when you feel that your state government is participating in a war in a way that is harmful to fellow Muslims. ISIS also knew how to capitalize on vulnerable and emotional topics to pull people towards their organization. When recruiting women, they looked for a more humanitarian approach to recruitment, such as telling women they needed to help suffering Muslim children and women for the greater *ummah* (Bryant, 2014)

Despite her seemingly low profile in Scotland, once in Syria, Asqa became one of the most active online recruiters known by her new name as *Umm Layth*[11] (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) (Perešin, 2021). She was frequently in touch with potential recruits, posting on her blog and social media accounts about life in the caliphate, one's duty as a Muslim, and packing lists and advice for those about to depart. In Asqa's radicalization, her beliefs were strengthened when she was around other like-minded individuals already in Syria. This is not the case for every recruit, like other women who joined ISIS explain having known they made a mistake only shortly after arriving (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) (Perešin, 2021).

Case #4 Nora el-Bathy

In January of 2014, Nora el-Bathy boarded a train to Paris from her home in Avignon, France. Nora was getting on a flight from Paris to Istanbul, where she would then be smuggled across the Turkish border into ISIS territory in Syria (De Leede, 2018). Nora was only sixteen at the time, and like all the other women in these cases so far, lived what appeared to be a normal

[11] Asqa did have a child in Syria, *umm* being the Arabic word for mother.

life with no signs of radical behavior or thought. After Nora disappeared, her family searched her room for signs of radicalization. Her brother, Fouad el-Bathy, found a secret Facebook account and a second phone that Nora was using to communicate with female recruiters, with whom she expressed was going to make *hijra* to Syria (De Leede, 2018). Additionally, Nora had formed a personal connection with French super jihadist and experienced ISIS recruiter Omar Osman (Bitterman and Jones, 2014). Osman was known to be incredibly charismatic and skilled at recruiting. He is assumed to have recruited hundreds of other French to join ISIS and know for spreading extremist ideology (Bitterman and Jones, 2014).

Similar to Asqa, Nora had spoken of the Syrian civil war and how it was upsetting to her, but her family never suspected that her feelings would lead to such extreme action. Nora grew up Muslim, but not devout, from a Moroccan immigrant family. France had one of the highest rates of foreigners leaving for Syria. By 2014, the French government thought there to be 900 French citizens in Iraq and Syria participating in *jihad* (Bitterman and Jones, 2014) France also has an extremely high and ever-growing hostile population of Muslims who feel excluded by mainstream French society (Packer, 2015). In adjusting to France's drastic change in demographics and the increase of multiculturalism in the 21st century, France has been definite in establishing and pushing a singular national identity centered around French values and secularism (Packer, 2015). However, for French Muslims and French of immigrant descent, this manner of adaptation has proved problematic and has systemically backfired, as more Muslim immigrants and Muslim citizens feel excluded and separated from mainstream French society (Packer, 2015).

It is likely that the combination of the Syrian civil war, as well as an overall adverse environment towards Muslims, resulted in Nora's disorienting dilemma. As seen in previous

cases, she then looked to the dark corners of the internet to find others that may be experiencing similar thoughts and feelings, from here recruiters would encourage these feelings and her thoughts would strengthen, eventually leading to Nora's escape to ISIS territory. Once Nora arrived in Syria, her brother Fouad el-Bathy traveled to ISIS territory in the hopes of finding her and bringing her back to France. Fouad was successful in finding her sister and he describes that she looked completely terrified. Fouad was unsuccessful in bringing Nora back to France, as she was forbidden to leave. Fouad reported, "I told her to come back with me but she cried and beat her head against the wall and she said I can't I can't" (Bitterman and Jones, 2014). Nora's case is an example of where ISIS recruitment was so successful in hiding the violent and restrictive side of ISIS while convincing women that ISIS was a safe, secure place for young Muslim women.

Case #5 Sharmeena Begum

When Shamima Begum left for Syria, her classmate and friend Sharmeena Begum, had already been there for two months. Sharmeena was the first student from Bethnal Green to leave for Syria in December of 2014. Sharmeena, as was Shamima, was of Bengali descent but raised in East London's Bethnal Green neighborhood. Sharmeena's mother passed away from lung cancer eighteen months before her departure to Syria, and her father noticed that her death, as to be expected, affected Sharmeena deeply (Wahid, 2015). Sharmeena lived with her grandmother after her father remarried, but still kept a close relationship with her father. Her father noticed that Sharmeena changed her dressing style and began praying more frequently in the months after her mother's death. The biggest change of all was her frequent visits to the East London Mosque (Wahid, 2015). The East London Mosque quotes itself on its website as being, "one of

the most active Islamic Institutions in Britain" (The East London Mosque[12]). Within the mosque and Islamic center, it contains schools, after-school programs, weekend Islamic educational programs, a pre-kindergarten program, counseling for women, and services related to marriage and birth (The East London Mosque). It is clear that the East London Mosque is an incredibly influential part of the East London community and provides services related to practically every area of life for its participants.

Members of Sharmeena's family believe she was radicalized by members of the Sisters Forum, an all-women's group and offshoot of the Islamic Forum of Europe that was meeting within The East London Mosque (Wahid, 2015). According to their most updated Facebook page, the Sisters Forum's mission statement is, "is to engage, educate and empower Muslim women within the communities who are vulnerable and isolated, with the skills and confidence necessary to become independent, secure a job, create a healthy lifestyle, and regain confidence for themselves and their children" (Sister Forum's Facebook[13]). They host educational workshops with women as well as organize meetings with local government officials and activists on issues they see pertinent to their community. Members of Sharmeena's family say that she was spending the majority of her free time at the Sister's forum before her departure, although the Sisters Forum denies any allegations of participating in Sharmeena's radicalization (Wahid, 2015). In Sharmeena's case, her disorienting dilemma was most likely her mother's death which forced her to make sense of a new reality in her mother's absence. It is not

[12] https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk

[13] https://www.facebook.com/groups/200936609977950/about

uncommon to turn to religion in times of despair, which could explain Sharmeena's enthused involvement at the East London Mosque. At a time of vulnerability, she was easily influenced by others' beliefs, and then by being surrounded by those with like-minded beliefs she began to fortify her own radical beliefs.

Sharmeena, like so many others who left, did not survive and is not able to give any post-ISIS testament. However, through research on other radicalized individuals, researchers know that recruiters promote the idea that life in the West is oppressive towards Muslims and Muslim women, and that Western values are incompatible with Islamic values (Perešin, 2015). Moreover, they sell the idea to vulnerable individuals that ISIS will provide them a sense of belonging and a place where they can live a pure Islamic lifestyle free of prejudices (Perešin, 2015). Sharmeena was young, and in a position where having a sense of belonging and meaning is attractive to her in a time when she felt lost and alone.

Analysis

This section will analyze the case studies presented previously in contrast to prior research, to examine how women's reasoning when joining ISIS is related to overall anti-Muslim legislation and sentiment in Western Europe. Undoubtedly, ISIS had an incredibly skilled and powerful network of online recruiters as well as an expansive internet presence that is cited as the most powerful pull factor for the women in this study, as it had been noted as extremely influential in previous studies as well (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) (Perešin, 2015) (Ben-Israel, 2018). The most common push factors found in the five cases presented are the subjects' young age at the time of recruitment, unhappiness or dissatisfaction in life, and face-to-face and personal influences. This analysis examines these four different categories, and how they impacted one's susceptibility to radicalization in order to identify what made women and girls in

Western Europe at this time vulnerable to Islamic radicalization. These variables will also be compared to variables found in previous research of greater samples of foreign women and girls who either joined or attempted to join ISIS. Finally, the variables found in these cases will be examined to see how these vulnerabilities intersect with greater European societal sentiment and state policy towards Muslims.

Each woman in this study was exposed to extensive ISIS propaganda and online recruitment. ISIS recruiters were skilled and strategic in targeting those in vulnerable and emotional states. Recruiters would track individual accounts that interacted with a Jihadist post on social media platforms to then contact that account in the hope that they could communicate directly and privately with a possible recruit (Ben-Israel, 2018). When communicating with younger female recruits or converts, recruiters would often use language and terminology that is confusing in order to manipulate possible recruits. For example, some women who have said *hijra* was their reason for joining ISIS do not actually understand the full meaning of the word *hijra*, as recruiters use it out of context (Perešin, 2015). For example, girls and women may believe that it is a mandatory pilgrimage. Even though Linda did not cite *hijra* directly, as a convert she was new to the religion and still learning Islamic history and terminology. It is likely that during her recruitment she was manipulated through language she did not fully understand and, without substantial previous religious knowledge, she was especially vulnerable to manipulation through religious concepts and terminology.

Furthermore, ISIS recruiters were committed to depicting life in the West as incompatible with an Islamic lifestyle and value system. ISIS recruiters were calculated and deliberate as painting Western society as intolerable and demonic for good Muslims (Perešin, 2015). They convinced their recruits that they were living in a society of infidels and that if they came to

Syria they could live a pure Islamic lifestyle, free of judgment, harassment, and discrimination that accompanies them living in Western society. They continued to promote this ideology by showing photos and videos of women playing with their children outside and eating ice cream together, or families at a carnival, to convey a direct contrast to their negative experiences in the West (Perešin, 2015) (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). In one interview, Linda explained that the images she was seeing of Syria seemed peaceful and even "rosy." She told the German press that videos showed that "Men and their wives and children wandered together through parks…they baked bread together. It was like being in another world" (Noack, 2017) Shamima also explained in a video with BBC News that she saw videos that ISIS produced of "families walking in the park and the life they can provide for you" (BBC, 2019), as a reason for joining ISIS. These images depict a sense of peace and togetherness that vulnerable individuals may be lacking in their life. It displays a holistic family-oriented life that is a way for them in Syria. It is clear that propaganda that depicted ISIS as a paradise-like place for Muslims was an extremely persuasive marketing tool.

Moreover, ISIS's expansive network allowed recruits to form personal and romantic relationships over social network platforms and online forums. For example, Nora el-Bathy had a personal relationship with French jihadist and ISIS recruiter Osmar Osman, who described the relationship as fraternal, with Nora as his little sister (Elbagir et al, 2016). Linda Wenzel even formed a romantic relationship online with CheChen Abu Usama al-Shisani. The two were married via Twitter prior to her departure to Syria (Roberts, 2017). Additionally, although Asqa Mahmood did not reference any deep interpersonal relationships during her radicalization process, she became an active recruiter online once in Syria. Asqa had a highly active blog post where she spoke of life in the caliphate to future jihadi brides and even provided detailed packing

lists (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) (Ben-Israel, 2018). As demonstrated above, although a meaningful virtual relationship may not be necessary, those who developed personal online relationships may feel closer and more trusting of their recruiter, which could then make them more inclined to travel to Syria when they know they will be met by someone familiar and someone who has their confidence. Additionally, even though her relationship was not virtual, Shamima knew Sharmeena as a friend from school, and therefore still knew someone in Syria before she left.

All of the women in this study were between the ages of fifteen and nineteen during the time of their departure. Their young age puts them at a position of incredible vulnerability and innocence that allows them to be more easily groomed by recruiters. As explained by journalist Rick Noack who originally reported on Linda's case, children are "particularly susceptible because they lack experience in separating fact from fiction and are often not targeted in counter-radicalization schemes set up by government agencies and nongovernmental organizations" (Noack, 2017). When only a teenager, one lacks perspective and maturity that an older woman may have had when approached by someone online with the same recruitment strategies. Also as a young person, there is little already tying that person to a life in the West besides their immediate family. None of the women in this study had children of their own, a serious relationship, or even a steady job. Instead, because they were young, single, and "pure", and promised a life of possibility. They are promised a future consisting of stability, a romantic partner, and a role as a mother and wife to fulfill the vision they have been sold that living under ISIS would make them a good Muslim. This ideal life is very tempting when one feels dissatisfaction or is grieving and looking for a way to cope and recreate purpose for

themselves—which was promised to all of the women in this case study when they were recruited.

The second push factor identified is a sense of unhappiness or overall dissatisfaction with life. This is simultaneously a pull factor, as recruiters look to prey on those that are vulnerable and unhappy with their life. Shamima expressed in an interview that at the time of her radicalization she felt very lost and did not feel as if she was a part of her community. She told the interviewer, "I couldn't really live the life I wanted to in the U.K. as a British woman" (Bunkall, 2021). Feeling rejected from her community is in part what made life with ISIS appealing. Shamima conveyed that she was being sold a life that would be full of meaning and acceptance. Linda first came in contact with ISIS as a convert who was looking to make sense of her new life after her parents divorced. Her unhappiness and distress, her new understanding of the religion, and her young age made her susceptible to be vulnerable to online recruitment that promoted the idea that the West was discriminatory and unfit to live an Islamic lifestyle. Nora felt that going to Syria gave her a sense of purpose over her helplessness in watching the Syrian civil war. Lastly, Sharmeena was struggling with the loss of her mother and her dad's remarriage and looked to find comfort through religion. This overall distress and unhappiness in her life are what led her to the East London Mosque, where she was ultimately radicalized through ideology shared at the Sister's Forum.

Finally, in addition to online relationships and recruitment, personal influences also had an effect on the women in this study. Much of Sharmeena's recruitment happened in physical settings around people whom she knew and presumably trusted. Sharmeena was then attending school with Shamima, where the two were friends who confided in one another. Sharmeena first shared with Shamima what she was learning during her time with the Sisters Forum. Although a

trust can be built online with recruiters, jihadists, and other possible recruits, having personal influences, especially those that are already trusted friends, is incredibly impactful. As shown through TLT, radical ideas will strengthen and multiply among like-minded individuals who share similar beliefs (Wilner and Duboulz, 2010). For example, even though Linda was capable of forming meaningful relationships over the internet, she was also influenced by authentic, real-life relationships in Germany that furthered her radicalization and her decision to go to Syria (Ensor, et al 2017).

In this study, Aqsa does prove to be the biggest outlier, as there is no substantial evidence that shows she had a personal relationship online or in real life that would aid in her radicalization. Despite this, Asqa arguably became the most involved or influential within ISIS once in Syria. Shamima now testifies that ISIS was actually "hell on earth" (Sky News, 2021). After Linda was captured in 2017, she told reporters and the German press that she wished she had never joined the organization (Noack, 2017). Fouad el-Bathy, Nora's older brother, went to Syria to try to convince his sister to come home. He was ultimately unsuccessful and asked to leave ISIS territory, but tells reports of how his sister looked terrified (Elbagir et al, 2016). There is an overall theme of regret that these women show once in the organization, whether it be in Shamima's case to regain her citizenship or in Nora's case where she realizes she has been sold a lie. Asqa demonstrated no such feelings. Asqa was reportedly presumed dead in 2019, so it is possible that if she was still alive her feelings may have changed. But nonetheless, while in Syria, Asqa played an active and enthusiastic role as an ISIS propagandist and recruiter.

Scholars Speckhard, Ellenberg, and Perešin have also studied why Westerners, foreigners, and non-foreigners are drawn to joining ISIS. For the purpose of the study, the

research on those individuals from the West[14] will be most closely examined. In interviews conducted with former female ISIS members, Speckhard and Ellenberg found that the most meaningful influences for recruitment were cited as spouses, internet recruiters, and parents (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Family and romantic relationships were also strong influences on many women's recruitment process. In comparison with men in their study, Speckhard and Ellenberg found that only 2.2% of men in the study cited partner/spouse influence as important to their recruitment versus 55.3% of women (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). However, as the authors stress and it should be stated again: relationships and romantic influence does not negate individual agency when deciding to join ISIS (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Speckhard and Ellenberg, as well as Perešin, also found that women were promised a purer Islamic lifestyle without the discrimination or harassment they faced living in the West (Perešin, 2015). These findings are consistent with the findings in this thesis's case studies as all five women were presented with the argument by either physical or virtual recruiters that their life as Muslims would be more fulfilling by living in the caliphate than in Europe.

Moreover, in addition to personal and financial reasons, Perešin also found that her respondents cited religious reasons and the inability to practice their religion freely for leaving life in the West, and furthermore, that second and third-generation European Muslims were caught in between two different identities and ideologies, that of Islam and their life in the West. The Islamic State offered them comfort as it promised a sense of belonging and reassurance, a world where they could be dedicated fully to only one of their identities (Perešin, 2015). ISIS recruiters took advantage of this new demographic whose lives felt split between those of their

[14] "The West", for the context of this study refers to Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

parents and grandparents and their religious ideology with life in Europe. Recruiters recognized this struggle and as Perešin explains, "The main goal of ISIS' propaganda is to motivate women from the West to join the 'Caliphate' by offering them solutions for resolving the above-mentioned frustrations and dissatisfaction with their lives" (Perešin, 2015). The solution, in this case, was the relocation to ISIS territory and life under *sharia* law. Recruiters further made this an easier, more appealing option through the propaganda previously mentioned such as videos of carnivals and families walking in the park. This is the kind of propaganda that was highly effective for women in the case study such as Linda and Shamima.

This study found four major variables that contributed to young women's decisions to join Syria from Western Europe: ISIS online recruitment and propaganda, young age, overall unhappiness/dissatisfaction with life, and personal or face-to-face relationships. Behind all these factors was the underlying reason that they felt or were convinced that life in the West was incompatible with the Islamic life each girl should be living. Recruiters took advantage of this theory as did personal and in-person influences. However, the reality is that there can be truth in the belief that life in Western Europe is discriminatory toward Muslims and Muslim Women. Over the past ten years in Western Europe, there has been increasing legislation that targets Muslim women's right to religious dress as seen in France, Germany, and Belgium (Alderman and Eddy, 2021).

Additionally, the World Economic Forum's study discussed previously in the background section of this paper showed European's response to those not ethnically European and Muslims that showed high rates of Europeans that held negative feelings towards Muslims and religious minorities (Diamant, 2018). Both Asqa and Nora felt betrayed by their home countries involvement in Syria and moved by the atrocities happening against Muslims in Syria. In

Speckhard and Ellenberg's study, multiple women cited discriminatory practices and trends toward Muslims in Europe as reasons why life in ISIS seemed like a better option for a Muslim. For example, a 25-year-old Belgian woman in Speckhard and Ellenberg's study explained how she is worried about her children facing decimation as they get older and the difficulty for members of her community to find employment in Belgium. She states, "I know people who change their name. They won't get work" (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020). Similarly, in France where the *banlieues*[15], which are increasingly becoming a parallel society to mainstream France, feels increasingly forgotten and discriminated against by their predominantly Muslim population (Packer, 2015). Women were joining ISIS during this time due to an underlying feeling of alienation prompted and promoted by anti-Muslim laws and sentiments in their home country.

In combination with the cases presented and previous research, there is a correlation between anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation in creating a hostile environment for Western European Muslims. ISIS recruiters were able to capitalize on this and manipulate recruiters by convincing them that living in the West was incompatible with their religious beliefs and that joining ISIS would provide them a sense of belonging and purpose. Each woman in this case study was demonstrating some form of vulnerability that could be exploited by recruiters in addition to dealing with a sense of unhappiness/dissatisfaction in life, and the influence of personal and face-to-face relationships.

Conclusion

ISIS achieved world recognition through its horrific terror attacks and apocalyptic vision of establishing a modern-day caliphate. Despite their infamous reputation of violence towards civilians and sexual violence towards women, hundreds of women and girls left their homes in

[15] *Banlieues,* refer to French suburbs and housing located on the outskirts of major cities. Typically, *banlieues* are poorer and more diverse then French cities.

Western Europe to travel to Syria in order to join their cause. Simultaneously, Western Europe was struggling with how to adjust to an increasingly ethnically and religiously diverse population. Overall, Western Europe has taken an assimilation approach versus an integration approach to incorporate this diverse and multicultural population into traditional Judeo-Christian societies. In countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, anti-Muslim legislation or anti-Muslim sentiment has created a hostile environment towards Muslims and immigrants. This research sought to gain an understanding of why hundreds of Western European women left their homes in Syria to join ISIS between 2013 and2017. It found that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation further sparked Islamic radicalization due to exclusion from greater European society as displayed throughout this thesis.

In order to examine how ISIS recruiting was so successful and how feelings of ostracization or disorientation from one's country abetted in their radicalization process, this thesis studied the Islamic radicalization process of five different Muslim women from three different Western European countries. It examined their lives prior to joining ISIS and then their radicalization process as framed through Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. The women chosen were all between the ages of fifteen and nineteen during the time of their radicalization process and had a variety of socioeconomic statuses, education levels, and ethnicities. This study found that Western European anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation at the time impacted each of the women's radicalization, but moreover, was capitalized by recruiters who emphasized how life in the West was incompatible with Islamic values. Recruiters demonstrated this idea through propaganda of showing life under ISIS as peaceful, where Muslim families could live together without harassment or discrimination found

in the West, and convincing prospective recruits that living under ISIS rule in Syria was the only way to live a true Islamic lifestyle.

Looking Forward

ISIS, throughout the duration of this paper, has been referred to in the past tense, since the vast majority of this organization's territory in Iraq and Syria has been dissolved. However, ISIS's ideology still remains intact and they have created territorial pockets in Yemen, Libya, and the Sinai Peninsula. The pandemic has slowed travel and made it more difficult to cross borders, however, the pandemic will eventually settle, and when travel restrictions ease, ISIS might once again be able to lure followers to reinstate their vision of a caliphate and continue to wage war on the West. If given more time and resources, further research would expand on the question of why Westerns are lured to ISIS and other Islamic extremist groups. This thesis consisted of a comparative case study of five different women to examine how European anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim legislation affected their Islamic radicalization process. The case studies were not able to represent every Western European country but were meant to demonstrate a greater Western European sentiment towards Muslims, and the countries chosen all have the highest Muslim population within Western Europe. If more time and resources are available, a study consisting of in-depth interviews with ISIS defectors and returnees would be conducted to gain a more complete understanding of each individual's radicalization process. From here, these responses would be coded into quantitative data. Future research would also include access to archived social media accounts and chats due to the fact that they were proven previously to be incredibly influential.

The findings in the research conducted predict that further Islamic extremism will flourish as a result of a population that feels discriminated against or neglected by the state, due

to their religion, therefore, using the information found in further research for counter-terrorism purposes and working with local and state governments on how to best avoid Islamic extremism, possibly presenting an integration versus assimilation model for incorporating immigrants and non-Westerns into Europeans society. Additionally, those returning from ISIS territory need intense reintegration assistance. Living in a war zone is undoubtedly traumatic. Women in ISIS faced not only the constant fear of living in a war zone but domestic, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as the trauma of being separated from their family and everything familiar to them at a young age. Of course, those that made the decision to join a terrorist organization should be held accountable for their actions and receive the appropriate punishment, however, their mental, emotional, and possible physical damage needs to be evaluated and treated promptly after arrival and again before being reintegrated into society. This means that counter-terrorism efforts should be simultaneously focused on reintegration, and embracing multiculturalism, as having a single national identity is no longer realistic in today's world. Not only can it be viewed as unrealistic, but based on the research presented in this paper, dangerous.

Bibliography

Abbas, T. (Ed.). (2007). *Islamic political radicalism : A european perspective*. Edinburgh University Press.

Alderman, L., & Eddy, M. (2021, July 15). *Wearing a head scarf can be grounds for job suspension, E.U.'s top court rules*. The New York Times. Retrieved March 1, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/15/business/Europe-court-head-scarves.html

Atwan, A. B. (2015). *Islamic state : The digital caliphate*. University of California Press.

Barry, E., & Sorensen, M. S. (2018, July 2). *In Denmark, harsh new laws for immigrant 'ghettos'*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/europe/denmark-immigrant-ghettos.html.

BBC. (2021, March 2). *Who is Shamima Begum and how do you lose your UK citizenship?* BBC News. Retrieved December 1, 2021, from https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53428191.

Ben-Israel, G. (2018). Telling a Story Via Tumblr Analytics: Europe's Young Muslim Female Attractionto ISIS.*International Annals of Criminology, 56*(1-2), 55-78.

Berger, J. M. and Jonathon Morgan. 2015. The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter. The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper No. 20, March 2015. Retrieved April 20, 2016 (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/ 2016/06/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf).

Bilefsky, D. (2017, March 14). *Ban on head scarves at work is legal, E.U. Court rules*. The New York Times. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from

Bittermann, J., & Jones, B. (2014, October 2). *Why are so many young French people turning to Jihad?* CNN. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.cnn.com/2014/10/02/world/europe/france-jihadis-isis-syria-iraq/index.html

Bolon, A.-sophie, Karasz, P., & Mckinley, J. C. (2017, August 17). *Van Hits pedestrians in Deadly Barcelona terror attack*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/17/world/europe/barcelona-catalunya-van.html.

Bryant, L. (2014, October 10). *Western Women New Face of Radical islam*. VOA. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://www.voanews.com/a/western-women-show-another-face-of-radical-islam/2477932.html

Bunkall, A. (2021, November 22). *Shamima Begum: Is bride insists she 'didn't hate Britain' when she fled to Syria - and now wants to face trial in UK*. Sky News. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from https://news.sky.com/story/shamima-begum-is-bride-insists-she-didnt-hate-britain-when-she-fled-to-syria-and-now-wants-to-face-trial-in-uk-12475239

Daly, E. (2012). The Ambiguous Reach of Constitutional Secularism in Republican France: Revisiting the Idea of Laïcité and Political Liberalism as Alternatives. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, *32*(3), 583–608. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41682794

De Leede, S. (2018). Western Women Supporting IS/Daesh in Syria and Iraq – An Exploration of their Motivations. *International Annals of Criminology, 56*(1-2), 43-54. doi:10.1017/cri.2018.9 (De Leede, 2018)

Dearden, L., & Hall, R. (2019, February 19). *What happened to the Britons who went to join ISIS?* The Independent. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/uk-isis-recruits-syria-return-british-caliphate-terrorism-jihadis-a8781056.html?r=44377

Diamant, Jeff. S. W. E. at P. R. C. (n.d.). *What do Western Europeans think about immigration and religion?*World Economic Forum. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/this-is-how-nationalist-anti-immigrant-and-anti-religious-minority-attitudes-vary-in-western-europe.

Dennison, J. and Geddes, A. (2019), A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe. The Political Quarterly, 90: 107-116. https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12620

Duroy, Q. (2020). The rise of neo-nationalism in Europe: A veblenian perspective. *Journal of Economic Issues*, *54*(4), 987–1001. https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2020.1818507

Elbagir, N., Haddad, M., & Jones, B. (2016, August 12). *France's Super Jihadi and the teenage girl trapped in Syria*. CNN. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/09/europe/france-super-jihadist-omar-omsen/index.html

Elondonmosque. (n.d.). *Overview*. East London Mosque. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/overview

Ensor, J., & Huggler, J. (2017, Jul 19). Captured in mosul, german 16-year-old who ran away to be isil bride. *The Daily Telegraph* Retrieved from https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/captured-mosul-german-16-year-old-who-ran-away-be/docview/1920035683/se-2?accountid=14503

EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (TE-sat). Europol. (n.d.). Retrieved December 9, 2021, from https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat-report.

Facebook. (n.d.). Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.facebook.com/groups/200936609977950/

Fernando, M. L. (2008). [Review of *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics and Social Exclusion*, by T. D. Keaton]. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *40*(2), 316–317. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30069616

Garcet, S. (2021). Understanding the psychological aspects of the Radicalisation Process: A sociocognitive approach. *Forensic Sciences Research*, *6*(2), 115–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/20961790.2020.1869883

Gartenstein-Ross, D., Chace-Donahue, E., & Clarke, D. C. P. (2020, May 20). *The threat of Jihadist terrorism in Germany*. ICCT. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://icct.nl/publication/the-threat-of-jihadist-terrorism-in-germany/

Guardian News and Media. (2017, December 15). *German girl imprisoned for Isis Role has fleeting family reunion*. The Guardian. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/german-girl-linda-wenzel-imprisoned-for-isis-role-has-fleeting-family-reunion

Guardian News and Media. (2021, September 16). *Shamima Begum, regardless of her new image, remains the UK's responsibility | Gina Vale*. The Guardian. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/16/shamima-begum-uk-british-muslims
http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cri.2018.6
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/world/europe/headscarves-ban-european-court.html

Jones, S. G., Toucas, B., & Markusen, M. B. (2018). *From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep22489

Karnitschnig, M. (2015, October 20). *Germany's identity crisis*. POLITICO. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.politico.eu/article/german-identity-threat-refugees-migration-merkel

King, M., & Taylor, D. M. (2011). The radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A review of theoretical models and social psychological evidence. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *23*(4), 602–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.587064

Malthaner, S. (2017). Radicalization: The Evolution of an Analytical Paradigm. *European Journal of Sociology, 58*(3), 369-401. doi:10.1017/S0003975617000182

Mikulis, T. (2021, September 10). *The challenges and consequences of covering laïcité*. European Academy on Religion and Society. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://europeanacademyofreligionandsociety.com/news/the-challenges-and-consequences-of-covering-laicite/

Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères. (n.d.). *Secularism and religious freedom in France*. France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Retrieved February 20, 2022, from https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france

MITTS, T. (2019). From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West. *American Political Science Review, 113*(1), 173-194. doi:10.1017/S0003055418000618

Moore, C. (2017, October 4). *German girl who joined Isis reveals how she was groomed*. Daily Mail Online. Retrieved December 4, 2021, from https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4947820/German-girl-joined-ISIS-reveals-groomed.html

Noack, R. (2021, December 1). *At 15, she joined ISIS after converting to Islam. now this German teen wants to go home.*The Washington Post. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/07/24/at-15-she-joined-isis-after-converting-to-islam-now-this-german-teen-wants-to-go-home/.

Nossiter, A. (2019, October 31). *How ISIS changed France*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/world/europe/al-baghdadi-isis-france.html.

Packer, G. (2015). The Other France. *The NewYorker*.
Perešin, A. (2015). Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *9*(3), 21–38. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297379

Ritchie, H., Hasell, J., Appel, C., & Roser, M. (2013, July 28). *Terrorism*. Our World in Data. Retrieved December 1, 2021, from https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism.

Roberts, R. (2017, October 5). *Teenager who faces execution for joining Isis 'was groomed'*. The Independent. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/german-isis-bride-death-penalty-hanging-iraq-groomed-teenager-linda-wenzel-a7984171.html

S O C I A L A F F A I R S international migration ... - un. (n.d.). Retrieved March 2, 2022, from https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full_Document_final.pdf

Saripi, N. I. B. (2015). Female Members of ISIS: A Greater Need for Rehabilitation. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, *7*(3), 26–31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351339

Shubert, A., & Naik, B. (2014, September 5). *CNN Exclusive: From glasgow girl to 'bedroom radical' and isis bride*. CNN. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/index.html.

Skynews. (2021, November 21). *'I was groomed': Shamima Begum talks to Sky News*. YouTube. Retrieved December 17, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjp9jvdN-nY

Speckhard, A., & Ellenberg, M. D. (2020). ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment over Time – Analysis of 220 In-depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors and Prisoners. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *13*(1), 82–127. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26907414

Spencer, A. N. (2016). The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *9*(3), 74–98. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26473339

The New York Times. (2017, May 23). *Manchester bombing: What we know and don't know*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/world/europe/manchester-arena-bombing.html?searchResultPosition=8.

Timeline: The rise, spread, and fall of the islamic state. Wilson Center. (n.d.). Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state.

Times, T. B. (n.d.). *Belgian universities stress that they will not ban headscarves*. The Brussels Times. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from https://www.brusselstimes.com/news/art-culture/117067/belgian-universities-stress-that-they-will-not-ban-headscarves-in-class

Timsit, A. (n.d.). *In Denmark and throughout Europe, assimilation is becoming mandatory*. Quartz. Retrieved December 7, 2021, from https://qz.com/1320234/denmarks-new-laws-targeting-ghetto-children-show-how-assimilation-is-becoming-mandatory/.

Tom Ough and Hannah Lucinda Smith. (2015, March 14). *Revealed: First of four teenage schoolgirls who fled to Syria*. The Times. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-first-of-four-teenage-schoolgirls-who-fled-to-syria-8ff5wx3nnpg

Van Mol C., de Valk H. (2016) Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective. In: Garcés-Mascareñas B., Penninx R. (eds) Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_3

Wahid, Omar. (2015, August 1). *ISIS jihadi bride groomer schoolgirl radicalised in London mosque*. The Mail On Sunday. Daily Mail Online. Retrieved February 25, 2022, from https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3182561/Britain-s-jihadi-bride-groomer-Schoolgirl-radicalised-London-mosque-recruited-three-classmates-join-ISIS-Syria.html

Welby, P. (2019, February 22). *What led to Shamima Begum's radicalization*. Arab News. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from https://www.arabnews.com/node/1456501

Western Governors University. (2020, October 21). *What is the transformative learning theory*. Western Governors University. Retrieved November 17, 2021, from https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-transformative-learning-theory2007.html

What led to Shamima Begum's radicalization. Arab News. (2019, February 22). Retrieved December 11, 2021, from https://www.arabnews.com/node/1456501.

Wilner, A. S., & Dubouloz, C.-J. (2010). Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: An interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalization. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, *22*(1), 33–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/14781150903487956

Wilner, A. S., & Dubouloz, C.-J. (2011). Transformative radicalization: Applying learning theory to Islamist radicalization. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *34*(5), 418–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2011.561472

Woolcock, N. (2021, June 20). *Shamima Begum and classmates who joined Isis 'tried to rope in other pupils'*. News | The Times. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/shamima-begum-and-classmates-who-joined-isis-tried-to-rope-in-other-pupils-r6w95js0k

Zempi, I., & Chakraborti, N. (2015). 'They make us feel like We're a virus': The multiple impacts of islamophobic hostility towards veiled muslim women.*International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, 4*(3), 44-56. doi:http://dx.doi.or