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"State of the art: Radicalisation of Western female migrants to ISIS-held territory. Case study from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands"

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Sciences Po

Spring 2021

This paper has received the Kuwait Program at Sciences Po Student Paper Award

Content

Number of words: 4912

Introduction

According to Europol's estimates (2017), about 5.000 individuals from the European Union (EU) travelled to Syria and Iraq.[1] Among them, the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) indicates that 17% are believed to be women. This figure slightly rises to 18% according to the Soufan Group.[2] A study published in 2016 by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) states that around 550 Western women were in Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-controlled territory back then.[3] The table below provides a more precise repartition of Western female migrants depending on EU depart country:

Box 1: Western women in IS-controlled areas

The following numbers are estimates based on different reports of different dates. The numbers refer to Western women residing in IS-controlled areas. Based on these reports we estimate that the number of Western women in IS-controlled areas is at least a few hundred.

Total number of Western women	550[23]
German women	70[24]
of which are German women under 25	28[25]
of which are German schoolgirls	9[26]
French women	63[27] – 70[28]
British women	60[29]
of which are British schoolgirls	20[30]
Dutch women	30[31]
Austrian women	14[32]

Source: ICCT, 2015.

Thus, there are clear indications that ISIS' power of attraction did not resonate only in male combatants: female migrants to ISIS-occupied territory composed a significant part of departees. Let us note that the proclamation of the Caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in June 2014 led to an increase in female departs from the EU.[4] For instance, German authorities pointed to the rise from 15% to 36% in the first year after al-Baghdadi's call to join ISIS. This trend is even sharper in the Netherlands, where percentages of women departees shifted from 20% (January 2014) to 50% (December 2015). The United Kingdom (UK) has seen a similar enthusiasm for ISIS, with 145 women reportedly travelling to Syria or Iraq.

1 European Parliament. (2018). 'Radicalisation ans counter-radicalisation: a gender perspective'. European Parliament. [Online]. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-581955-Radicalisation-gender-perspective-rev-FINAL.pdf

2 Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic.' ICCT research paper. [Online] 6 (2), 1–13.

3 Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

4 European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: how women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation'. European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. [Online]. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf

Such an increase in numbers of female departees is a relatively new phenomenon in the study of foreign fighters, which is rather notorious for its male-dominated nature.[5] For instance, women foreign fighters who belonged to communist or left wing groups are known to have been involved in the Spanish Civil War, along with those engaged in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or the Black Widows who carried out suicide attacks in Chechnya. Yet, the scale of female combatants' presence in conflicts remained relatively low compared to the recent cohorts who joined ISIS. Their decision to join the Caliphate represents new challenges for both governments and the academia. Indeed, the body of literature on this topic is limited not only due to the inherent difficulty of conducting research on violent extremism and terrorism, but also because of gender biases. Those reinforce scholars' tendency to overlook, discredit and set aside women's political violence. The ICCT noted that the participation of women to the phenomenon 'was not yet reflected in targeted policies'[6], a statement that the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) upholds, indicating that there 'is still a misconception that violent extremism and terrorism almost exclusively concern men'.[7]

This article proposes a feminist approach to the profiles and radicalisation processes of Western female migrants to ISIS-controlled territories. By resorting to an intersectional feminist lens, it aims at contributing to a more precise understanding of Western women's radicalisation. After a brief overview of political science's and media's perspectives on women's political violence, this analysis presents a state of the art of the research on Western female migrants' profiles. It then moves on to explaining push and pull factors that motivate women to travel to ISIS-controlled territory. In doing so, particular attention is paid to factors that are exacerbated or mitigated by gender. The paper concludes by calling for the integration of the gender dimension in the field of radicalisation and the development of a contextual approach to this phenomenon. Such improvements would make it possible to grasp the impact of gender-related social constructions (masculinities and femininities) on radicalisation and to compare the potentially different motivating factors between Western women and women born in Muslim-majority countries.

[5] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.
[6] European Parliament. (2018). 'Radicalisation ans counter-radicalisation'.
[7] Ibid.

Female political violence in Political Science and in the media: between omission and discredit

Government, institutions, the academia and the media need to move beyond binary and simplistic explanations of female's political violence reflecting gender stereotypes. Those do not allow for a precise study of the motivations encouraging women to join terrorist groups, nor for the analysis of the rhetoric that resonates with these women, in addition to being a disservice of their political agency.[8]

The field of Political Science started to consider gender to be a pertinent analytical category in the 1990s.[9] Yet, gender mainstreaming in the study of terrorism was not introduced until the first decade of the 21st century. According to Cunningham, it is the confusing recognition of female political violence, particularly in relation to terrorism, that explains this delay and the recent interest in a gendered approach to violent extremism.[10] Yet, feminist analyses of terrorist violence do not always use gender as an analytical category reflecting power dynamics and instead understand the notion in terms of differences in the sexes.[11] Refraining from studying the social construct contributes to perpetuating gender biases. Indeed, it tends to look at women's involvement in political violence solely via the myth of protection, or that of female inherent peacefulness. As a result, a consensus seemed to have emerged on the 'specific conditions that motivate women to engage in political violence'[12], namely on the personal 'jihadi bride' narrative. In contrast to their male counterparts, the analysis of women's violence refers to personal aspects or limits itself to the simplistic assumption that their violence is triggered by men around them.[13] Studies about men's engagement in terrorism account for the multiplicity of motivations and of factors leading to political grievances and violence, acknowledging the diversity of men's cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

The media also participate in dismissing female violence. Indeed, they depict women's 'unimportant' or peripheral roles in terrorist groups and portray women in a binary manner: either as victims of terrorist violence or counter-terrorist operations or as individuals manipulated by their

[8] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'

[9] Herschinger, E. (2014). 'Political Science, Terrorism and Gender.' *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (149), SpecialIssue: Terrorism, Gender, and History. State of Research, Concepts, Case Studies, pp.46-66. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24146113

[10] Cunningham, K.J. (2015). 'Female terrorists – a surprisingly timeless phenomenon.' Research Gate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/blog/post/female-terrorists-a-surprisingly-timeless-phenomenon

[11] Herschinger, E. (2014). 'Political Science, Terrorism and Gender.'

[12] Ibid.

[13] Davis, J. (2017). 'Women in Modern Terrorism, from Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State'. Maryland: Rowland & Littlefield. Introduction, chapters 1 and 2, Conclusion.

recruiters and men in their environment.[14] Yet, evidence point to 'political, economic and social grievances [that] transcend gender'[15]. Assuming that women are less radicalized than men, or that they do not share similar political motivations and goals is to the detriment of our understanding of radicalisation.

Although there is strong gender blindness in the study of terrorism, this paper shows that women's voices are increasingly heard through blogs or social media posts (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr). Women's online presence has allowed them to have more agency and control over narratives surrounding female political violence.[16] Beyond that, it provides valuable data for feminist approaches to the study of their motivations, radicalisation processes and roles once in terrorist groups. Nevertheless, women's online presence cannot radically change the analysis that traditional media make of their case. Moreover, there are doubts about the extent to which women are responsible for the content they post online (are blog posts influenced by the leaders of terrorist groups?)

State of the art: Profiles of Western women migrants to ISIS territory

A. Method

In general terms, gathering data on terrorism and/ or terrorist groups is not an easy task for either government, intelligence agencies or scholars.[17] Yet, the consequences of women's (socially constructed) invisibility in extremist violence add to the pre-existing lacking empirical evidence. On-going police investigations further reduce scholars' ability to gather data, in addition to women's and relatives' reluctance to talk to either the academia or the media a posteriori (out of fear of influencing judicial processes for example).[18]

This paper builds upon analyses made by academics, think tanks and supranational institutions. The data used is therefore drawn from a variety of sources, from the vast online ecosystem (social media), to interviews with people close to migrant women, to sources collected by police forces. Thus, it combines quantitative and qualitative data, ranging from the analysis of dozens of social media accounts (ICCT & ISD) to ISD's closer analysis of the journey of twelve Western women who travelled to ISIS-held territory. Yet, most publications used for this paper rely on Western

[14] Davis, J. (2017). 'Women in Modern Terrorism'
[15] Patel, S. and Westermann, J. (2018). 'Women and Islamic-State Terrorism'
[16] Herschinger, E. (2014). 'Political Science, Terrorism and Gender.'

[17] Herschinger, E. (2014). 'Political Science, Terrorism and Gender.'
[18] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

women's social media activity. Beyond the doubts surrounding women's total or partial control over their social media page, such an approach reduces the scope of our analysis to the study of *self-identified* grievances and motivations, in other words to women's self-introspection. Therefore, gaining a precise understanding of the socio-economic, cultural and family backgrounds of female migrants prior to their departure for Syria or Iraq is difficult. Finally, let us underline the insufficiency of data on radicalised women living in Muslim-majority countries. Indeed, it is worth noting that publications referred to in this paper focus on Western women migrants to ISIS-controlled territory. It seems that their presence online surpasses that of local women's. This prevents from doing comparison within the group of female migrants, which one cannot assume to be homogeneous.

B. Profiles of Western female migrants

Although there are clear limits to today's scholarly research, there is a consensus on the impossibility of drawing one single profile of Western women migrants to Syria or Iraq. The ISD indicates that 'there is significant diversity in the profiles of women becoming radicalised by ISIL/ Da'esh'.[19] It is unfeasible to make a standard profile enabling the identification of women most likely to join the terrorist group. ICCT's research on European women in Syria supports this first statement, pointing to a variety of educational levels, family backgrounds, religiosity, etc.[20]

Table of female migrants' to ISIS-held territory profile, based on ICCT's report (2015).

Conditions of travel	Women make the trip accompanied by their husbands and children, their religious 'sisters', or even alone.
Age	Women migrants tend to be young, some as young as fifteen. Yet, older women have also migrated to Syria or Iraq.
Education	Women sometimes have a difficult school records and are known to have an IQ below average. Others are brilliant and ambitious students. (cf. British case study)
Childhood and family background	Women sometimes have troubled childhood (i.e. experience of gender based violence), or live in families which have issues with national authorities. Yet, a smaller percentage

[19] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. [Online]. Accessible via: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf

[20] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

	of female migrants did not show any difficulty living with their family and found it very challenging to leave their family members behind.
Religiosity	Most women come from religiously moderate Muslim environments. Others were raised in stricter interpretation and practice of Islam or converted to Islam (cf. British case study).
Assessment of vulnerability	Again, multiple levels of vulnerability are observed here, ranging from highly impressionable girls to determined and independent women. According to statements on social media, the majority of women took the decision to travel to Syria autonomously and after long reflection.

The analysis of Dutch female migrants confirms the difficulty of making a single and workable profile: 'personalities, socio-demographic profiles and backgrounds of the women who travelled to Syria and Iraq are too wide-ranging'.[21] Even though it resorts to the push and pull factors approach (cf. below) to understand women's motivations, it acknowledges that this method cannot encapsulate nor predict their radicalisation process. In opposition, the British case provides a unique example where a categorisation of women's profiles is possible.[22] In fact, the study commissioned by the European Parliament proposes four groups of female migrants. First, and in contradiction to popular belief, high-achieving university female students are susceptible to radicalisation. Those young people are well informed about international events and are eager to have a positive impact on the world. Yet, some of them stand powerless in front of what they see as injustices. ISIS capitalises on those insatisfactions and proposes solutions to their distress in the form of a utopian Islamic State. Secondly, girls in government care are vulnerable to radicalisation, mainly due to the feeling of not belonging. For them, sisterhood is key in explaining motivations to join the terrorist group. Third, women with diagnosed mental health issues constitute simple targets for ISIS' propaganda (and manipulation) efforts. Fourth, British female converts are disproportionately represented in those who left for Syria or Iraq. ISIS offers them the 'true way' to practice Islam and an opportunity to escape mundane or unhappy lives. For example, Samantha Lewthwaite (the so-called White Widow) is currently one of the West's most wanted suspected terrorists. Although the British case allows for drawing four profiles of female migrants, their variety, broadness, and the

[21] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'.
[22] Ibid.

room left for sub-factors and grievances to be added to the analysis, prevent from an easy classification. Furthermore, groups outlined above seem gender-neutral: high-achieving university male students, boys in government care, boys diagnosed with mental health issues, or male converts could very well be as vulnerable to radicalisation as women.

C. Gendering socio-demographic profiles of Western departees

Yet, research shows that there remains a gender component into socio-demographic profiles of individuals migrating to Syria and Iraq.[23] First, women converts are more numerous than their male counterparts. For instance, Germany estimations indicate that one third of all female migrants are converts, when male converts only account for 17% of male migrants. Similar trends are visible in other European States, namely the Netherlands (31% of women converts vs. 7% of men), France (25% of women converts vs. 20% of men), or the UK (estimations only). For those individuals, the identity struggle (later described in this paper) might be even more challenging. In fact, women have to prove that they are 'as Muslim' (if not 'purest Muslims') than their Muslim-born female counterparts.[24] Thus, women converts have to overcome both the alienation they feel from Western-style society and the need to prove their full membership to the Muslim community. This additional pressure, often coupled with a relatively low religious education, as well as the age variable and the online element (which this paper later examines), increases their vulnerability to radicalisation. Women are relatively more prone to find themselves in such a situation in comparison to men, hence why it is crucial to pay attention to this gendered socio-demographic element of their profile.

Second, female migrants are young and tend to be younger than their male counterparts. For example, the median age for travel in Germany is of 23.5 years for women (vs. 26.5 y.o. for men), with female minors accounting for 13% of women migrants (vs. 6% for boys). [25] Again, this trend is supported by other observations in the EU.[26]

Third, women's decision to travel to Syria or Iraq more often comes as a surprise to States' authorities and is very rapid after their radicalisation. Female migrants attract the police's attention prior to leaving the EU less than male migrants and they are less known to security agencies.[27] They are also more numerous to leave within one year of the start to their path to radicalisation. To sum

[23] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'.
[24] Khosrokhavar, F. & Benslama, F. (2017). 'Le jihadisme des femmes. Pourquoi ont-elles choisi Daech ?'. Le Seuil.
[25] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

up, trying to draw a standard profile of women's migrants to ISIS-held territory would not encompass the variety of their family situation, nor of their level of education or religiosity, etc. Yet, a gender lens adds to the analysis of their socio-demographic background.

State of the art: Researching jihadists' paths to radicalisation and the added value of gender lens

A. External/internal factors approach vs. Push/pull factors approach

The question of motivation behind foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) travel to Syria and Iraq has been the focus of numerous publications on terrorist violence. Scholars often refer to two approaches to the study of radicalisation: the internal/external factors and the push/pull factors approaches. There remains disagreements as to the prioritisation of factors, as well as to the extent to which intertwined causes should be taken into account (monocausality vs. multicausality, extent to which intersectionality should be introduced in multi-causal analysis of radicalisation).[28]

On the one hand, the internal/external factors approach attempts at explaining radicalisation based on a combination of personal (internal) aspects with political (external) features.[29] As mentioned before, scholars and the media tend to sensationalise female terrorist violence and to justify women's acts either as resulting from manipulation of their peers or from brutal revenge for the loss of a loved one. Therefore, explanation for women's political violence mostly deals with internal factors, which are often delegitimised and discredited.[30] In addition, such explanations dismiss women's autonomous agency while engaging in violent behaviours and overlooks their legitimate ideological goals. Finally, this first theoretical approach to radicalisation distinguishes between individual and collective traits, a difference that may not be as evident to implement in practice. For instance, peer-pressure may strongly affect an individual's decision to join a terrorist group. Yet, it is neither a structural nor a fully individual feature.[31]

On the other hand, the push/pull factors approach to radicalisation allows for merging internal and external factors, and rather looks at motivations in terms of individuals' willingness to 'escape' from given contexts or insecurities (push) and of their desire and quest for other forms of identity

[28] Herschinger, E. (2014). 'Political Science, Terrorism and Gender.'
[29] Davis, J. (2017). 'Women in Modern Terrorism'
[30] Cunningham, K.J. (2015). 'Female terrorists'
[31] Davis, J. (2017). 'Women in Modern Terrorism'

and situational stability (pull).[32] Among push factors, one could state the need to escape from societies where individual discrimination against Muslims become unbearable. Let us underline that levels of islamophobia rose significantly after the 9/11 attacks,[33] increasing Muslim minorities' feeling of exclusion. The perception that the Ummah is being threatened and the sentiment that the West plays an important role in this fight against Islam are also two significant push factors. Pull factors could encompass the search for identity and belonging, the prospect of marriage, or the desire to contribute to a divine state-building project.[34]

Experts from the ISD, the ICSR, the Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, or the ICCT (among others) suggest that the combination of, and interaction between push and pull factors transcend gender. ICCT's review of social media accounts shows that women are not enclosed in personal struggles only and that they too emphasize their political and religious duty to support the jihad.[35] Both men and women can be attracted by brotherhood/sisterhood or the appeal of a fresh start in the Caliphate that would conclude in the afterlife.

Yet, it appears that some factors may have stronger influence depending on gender, which terrorist groups are well aware of and tend to capitalise on for their recruitment (i.e. victimization discourses).[36] In terms of push factors for instance, troubled family background may have a greater impact on a woman's decision to leave the EU than a man's, whereas the internet is crucial in building a permissive environment for female radicalisation. The OSCE concludes that although the push and pull factors approach is relevant for all genders, factors can be experienced differently along gender lines.[37] This calls for a more detailed understanding of women's paths to radicalisation.

[32] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. [Online]. Available at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

[33] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'

[34] Ibid.

[35] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

[36] Ranstorp, M. & Galesloot, J. & Gielen, A-J. & Simcock, K. & Schlaffer, E. & Weilnböck, H. & Köttig, M. & Baer, S. & Pearson, E. (2015). ,RAN Issue Paper. The Role of Gender in Violent Extremism'. Radicalisation Awareness Network. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_gender_dec2015_en.pdf

[37] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2013). 'Women and Terrorist Radicalization'. OSCE. [Online]. Available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/a/99919.pdf

B. Social and cultural isolation, discrimination and uncertainty of belonging within a Western society

Several scholars point to the sentiment of being excluded from one's society and the quest for sisterhood as significant push and pull factors for women. We have seen that female migrants tend to be younger than their male counterparts. In addition to gender, age can be an explanatory variable of radicalisation. Indeed, adolescence is a period of deep confusion and quest for one's identity, which are specifically reflected in a two-fold manner for women and girls.[38] Firstly, they are more susceptible to radicalisation because of the taboo surrounding their sexuality and the close link between sexuality and family honour.[39] Additionally to a sole identity struggle, girls may therefore seek answers regarding their sexual behaviour within Islam. This sometimes lead female teenagers to early consummation of an informal marriage (which terrorist groups may have advised).[40] In turn, this reinforces girls' social exclusion because of family dishonour. Hence why Dutch prevention and 'deradicalisation' programmes aims at filling the void left by an insufficient sexual education,[41] creating convincing and persuasive counter-narratives able to alleviate jihadi discourses that offer women a route to salvation within a pure Islamic State. Second, more often than not, female departees present problematic family backgrounds and may have experienced personal trauma grounded on gendered power dynamics.[42] Some face troubled relationships with members of their close environment. Others record being victims/ survivors of gender-based violence, whether verbal, mental or physical (sexual abuse).[43] Research suggests that the encounter with violence is a central driver in motivating women to radicalise.[44] Gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls may therefore overlap, interact with and exacerbate pre-existent non-gendered push factors such as discriminations linked to individuals' race, ethnicity, or belief.

Moreover, for individuals who are second or third generation living in Western societies, the need to belong to a society and to identify to one's environment constitutes an additional challenge that terrorist groups can transform into a vulnerability.[45] Evidence suggest that a substantial part of Dutch departees have dual nationality, with Moroccan (45% of migrants) and Turkish (12%)

[38] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[39] De Leede, S. (2018). 'Women in Jihad: A Historical Perspective.' International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19608
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.
[43] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'
[44] European Parliament. (2018). 'Radicalisation ans counter-radicalisation'
[45] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

affiliation being particularly prominent.[46] As a result, one of the largest pull factors for (young) women seeking acceptance is the sense of sisterhood that terrorist groups bring about.[47] Social media pages celebrate this camaraderie (cf. picture below) and indicate that women distinguish between the sincerity of the sisterhood and the fade and superficial relationships of their country of origin.[48]

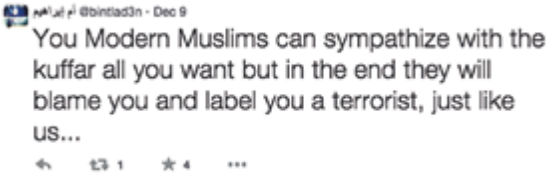
Source: ISD & ICSR, 2015.

While it remains the case that members of ethnic or religious minorities (whether men or women) are likely to experience some form of discrimination[49], gender may reinforce that trend. Indeed, Muslim women are more likely to be discriminated against because their religious affiliation is more visible than men's.[50] For instance, wearing the hijab in a community where islamophobia is on the rise makes you an easy 'target' of critics. The experience of discrimination then leads to a greater feeling of isolation and exclusion, eventually impacting women's vulnerability to radicalisation.[51]

Let us note that political instrumentalisation (as currently observed in France for example) further expands the room for islamophobic behaviours and therefore for extremist narratives to resonate with women who feel distant from their home society.[52] The media play a crucial role in framing

[46] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'
[47] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[48] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'
[49] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[50] De Leede, S. (2018). 'Women in Jihad: A Historical Perspective.'
[51] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[52] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'

public discourses about ethnic minorities.[53] They sometimes contribute to escalating the prejudices towards given groups, for instance by lumping together Muslims with terrorists. Ethnic minorities are well aware of both instrumentalisation mechanisms and the role of the media. Some radicalised migrants consider that the excessive politicisation of religious matters or the sensationalisation of events by the press is part of what they see as the global and illegitimate war waged against Islam by complicit Western powers:



Source: ISD & ICSR, 2015.

To sum up, the sentiment of non-belonging to a Western society that discriminates against religious minority's belief and practices is a permissive factor for radicalisation. Women's struggle for identity appears more challenging because of their regular situation as adolescents. In addition, it can be assumed that they are more often victims of discrimination. They therefore appear to be more vulnerable than men to extremist narratives.

C. Romanticization of the experience and the hope of entering *Jannah*

Several scholars point to the opportunity of marriage as a significant pull factor for women to join ISIS.[54] This assumption is stressed by female migrants' online posts or pictures (cf. below) which romanticise their love romance and refer to the narrative of the heroic lion and the honourable lioness.[55]

Source: ISD & ICSR, 2015.

[53] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[54] European Parliament. (2018). 'Radicalisation ans counter-radicalisation'
[55] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.

Beyond the appeal of romance (and the feeling of belonging brought about it), getting married to a mujahid who is willing to sacrifice himself for the cause is much valued by female migrants and the community of 'sisters'.[56] Women who become martyrs' widows see their social status rise and suddenly reflect all the perceived glory of their husband. Their chance of entering *Jannah* thus increases indirectly.[57]

Source (both pictures): ISD & ICSR, 2015.

To sum up, marriage answers several of female migrants' needs: sense of belonging and meaning, romance, status and respect, sometimes accompanied with increased opportunities for entering *Jannah*.

D. The Ummah under attack and the contribution to building the Caliphate in the form of a pure Islamic State.

Like their male counterparts, female migrants believe that the *Ummah* is under attack.[58] They criticize the oppression of Muslims internationally and show a binary understanding of the world around them (cf. below). On the one hand, there are the kuffar to combat and on the other hand, the Muslim brothers and sisters to defend.

Source: ISD & ICSR, 2015.

Not only do jihadists reject the culture and foreign policy of the West (which they consider complicit and/or responsible for waging a war against Islam), they also appeal to the 'Ummah consciousness'

[56] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'
[57] Bakker, E & De Leede, S. (2015). 'European Female Jihadists in Syria'.
[58] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.

in order to rationalize, justify and actively mobilize for jihad.[59] This narrative of fighting for a divine cause while protecting innocent Muslims was particularly influential at the beginning of the conflict, which called to Western fighters' sense of humanitarianism.[60]

Scholars have observed that the state-building mission of ISIS, coupled with a sense of urgency and religious duty, particularly resonates with women.[61] Women see the defense of the *Ummah* as one of their mandatory religious duty (*fard al-ayn*) which will help secure their place in the afterlife:

> "Umm Khattab writes that she has 'no desire to live in this world as [her] aspirations is the hereafter'. She even goes so far as to say that '[w]e love death as you love life'."[62]

Female migrants call themselves 'mujahiraat' in reference to the women who protected the Prophet during battles in the seventh century.[63] Their contributions to building the Caliphate and sustaining its functioning are diverse, ranging from being virtuous wives or mothers, to actively recruiting for the cause.[64] To conclude, participating in the emergence of an ideologically pure State where they will be treated with honour and respect under the law of Shariah presents both immediate and long-term benefits for female migrants. They are also more prone to be drawn into what they consider a humanitarian enterprise than male departees.

E. Gender-specific restrictive and permissive factors

Apart from push and pull factors leading to radicalisation and which can be exacerbated by gender, enabling conditions (catalysts) as well as restrictive features also differ depending on gender. First, research shows that women are more likely to join when they have personal connection to the terrorist group, such as a male relative who is already a member.[65] Female Dutch departees strongly support this claim. Many of them are believed to have known each other prior to leaving the Netherlands and sometimes even radicalised together.[66] Beyond the support provided by such an environment, it should be noted that it has proven ineffective in trying to dissuade radicalised women from travelling to Syria or Iraq. [67] Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that families often play a crucial role in deactivating women's increasingly extremist projects. They help to establish

[59] Saltman, E M. & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom do us part'.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'
[62] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'
[63] Center for the Study of Democracy. (2016). 'Theoretical Framework and Concepts', in Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature, chapter 1, pps 7-25
[64] Spencer, A. N. (2016). 'The Hidden Face of Terrorism, an Analysis of the Women in Islamic State.' *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 3. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.3.1549
[65] Davis, J. (2017). 'Women in Modern Terrorism'
[66] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'
[67] Hoyle, C. & Bradford, A. & Frenett, R. (2015). 'Becoming Mulan?'

powerful emotional pressure (if not imposing practical or economic barriers) that can persuade women to delay or even refuse migration.[68]

Second, the online element is crucial in understanding women's radicalisation process. Pearson and Winterbotham indicate that gender norms, which prevent or limit women's access to public spaces is partly responsible for this second aspect.[69] Female radicalisation is less likely to take place in-person in the street or around mosques. It is therefore transferred online or in the private sphere. The internet is used as a tool to answer future muhajirats' questions and to give them a variety of advice, from how to travel to the Caliphate's territory to the methods to be a good wife, etc.[70] Women are best placed to reassure those who have not yet left the EU. They are an asset to recruitment because they establish living role models which are made easier to identify with through regular online contact.

Yet again, and as both the Dutch and British case studies underline, gender and age must be looked at together in order to better understand the extent to which online tools are a catalyst for radicalisation.[71] Adolescents regard the internet as a reliable source of information and of religious education. They are more prone to believe extremist ideologies disseminated on social media or blogs. Dutch female departees were highly active online and regularly kept contact with their 'sisters' via Facebook and WhatsApp.[72] British female converts tended to be younger than average UK's departees.[73] They are also known to be highly connected to one another via Twitter, Skype or YouTube or to communicate through encrypted social media such as Telegram, Sure Spot and KiK. The increasing use of the internet and the freedom and anonymity that it guarantees therefore greatly facilitates terrorist groups' recruitment strategies.[74] Evidence show that propaganda aimed at disenfranchised women and girls is much stylised, romantic and that it depicts the ISIS adventure not far from a fairy tale.[75] The internet therefore opens up new possibilities for aiming at a specific audience that expresses singular grievances and enables for personalised answers to given needs.

[68] Ibid.
[69] Pearson, E. & Winterbotham, E. (2017). "Women, Gender and Deash Radicalisations. A Milieu Approach." The RUSI Journal 162(3):60–72.
[70] Spencer, A. N. (2016). 'The Hidden Face of Terrorism'.
[71] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Patel, S. and Westermann, J. (2018). 'Women and Islamic-State Terrorism'
[75] European Parliament, Committee on Women's rights and gender equality. (2017). 'Radicalisation and violent extremism'

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper builds upon the body of academic and governmental research on Western female migrants' profiles and radicalisation processes. It demonstrates that no workable, standard profile can account for the great variety of women's socio-economic, family, religious, etc. backgrounds. Although evidence suggest that the push and pull factors approach transcends gender, resorting to gender lens enables to assess the extent to which radicalisation can also be experienced, eased or limited along gender lines. For instance, Western women present multiple vulnerabilities to radicalisation which their gender exacerbates: from higher risks of being discriminated against due to their physical appearance, to the experience of personal trauma and gender-based violence in their childhood, or to a stronger willingness to participate in what they see as a humanitarian, state-building enterprise. Yet, the present analysis does not reflect in detail the impact of masculinities as conductive to men's radicalisation. It does not either provide for a precise and context-specific understanding of the radicalisation process of women from Muslim-majority countries. Therefore, the feminist study conducted in this paper should be completed by a gendered research accounting for the entire spectrum of social constructs, expectations and power dynamics (including nuances within masculinities and femininities) and of their impact of paths to radicalisation. In addition, the need for gathering data regarding Muslim-born women that eventually radicalise seems crucial, as it would enable for comparing radicalisation processes within the group of female migrants.

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