CANADIAN WOMEN IN ISIS

Deradicalization and Reintegration for Returnees

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Abstract

In 2014, the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared an Islamic Caliphate in Syria and Iraq and called on Muslim men and women to join and help build an Islamic State based on a violent and purist ideology. An unprecedented number of young Muslim women from around the world travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the terrorist group, including many women and girls from Western nations like Canada, the U.K, France and Australia. Young women disappeared from their homes unbeknownst to their parents, crossing the border of Turkey and into Syria to support the cause in their roles as wives to other Western foreign fighters and as mothers to the next generation of ISIS members. Now, both men and women are returning to their home nations, in many cases with small children who do not have any form of identification. While deradicalization and reintegration programs for men have been developed and tested through prison programs and exit programs in the West and abroad, no such model has been created or tested for returning women. Greater research and analysis on women in ISIS is needed to address the distinctive experiences and particular needs of women returning from engagement with ISIS. Given the potential threat of returning women's continued engagement in terrorist activities and the possibility of terrorist attacks supported by returnees in their home countries, deradicalization and reintegration initiatives are imperative. Along with surveillance activities and the application of the Canadian criminal justice system, NGOs and local organizations dealing specifically with radicalization and returning ISIS members will play a critical role in providing support and assistance to low-risk returnees and their families to support successful resocialization and deradicalization.

1. Introduction

The Canadian government faces several challenges in addressing the return of Canadian women from engagement with ISIS, as do the returnees themselves. Further studies on the distinctive roles and experiences of different female participants in ISIS is imperative to developing similarly distinctive responses to their return. Currently, existing deradicalization and reintegration programs require a gender-based analysis in order to respond to the needs of female returnees, as nearly all focus on male returning foreign fighters. This paper will focus on several factors that will inform Canadian deradicalization and reintegration of female returnees, from the radicalization process to paths ahead. This paper will focus on key factors for informing the development of effective deradicalization and reintegration programs designed specifically for women. Most scholars agree that rehabilitation and reintegration programs are essential for dealing with returnees to prevent re-engagement. Effective reintegration involves an individualized program for low-risk returnees based on factors such as age, gender, process of radicalization, specific experiences abroad and the presence of a strong support network upon return. As such, this paper is divided into four sections: the first section provides an analysis of the process of radicalization for young Western women to join ISIS; the second section looks at the three most distinct roles for foreign women in ISIS and addresses questions relevant to their return; the third section provides background and context on existing counter-terrorism and deradicalization policies and programs in the West and their shortcomings; and the final section discusses the challenges of addressing child returnees as well as the future of deradicalization and resocialization for returnees in Canada. This final section addresses some of the remaining gaps in gender-based deradicalization and reintegration programs in Canada, and particular areas of focus for organizations involved in managing returnee cases.

Over the past six years, the terrorist organization known as the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) gained considerable attention in the West after it broadcasted videos of Western hostages and local minorities being beheaded, public hangings, and for its sophisticated marketing strategy. Since 2011, approximately forty thousand suspected foreign fighters from 120 countries travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS[1]. Most media images and stories cover the violent atrocities committed by Western male foreign fighters in ISIS-held territories, but the success of ISIS's recruitment tactics was its ability to recruit Western women just as well. Canadian women began travelling to ISIS-controlled territory around 2014, but it is not clear just how many travelled to join ISIS or how many may have since returned. Neither the Canadian government, nor Canadian countering violent extremist (CVE) organizations have been able to provide any information on Canadian women joining ISIS abroad; however, women are believed to constitute approximately 10-15% of all Western fighters in Syria.[2] More cases of Canadian, British, French, Australian and other European women emerged around the time that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, proclaimed the so-called caliphate in June 2014. The terrorist organization, which began as an offshoot of Al Qaeda in Iraq, lost significant territory in Iraq and Syria in late 2017. Professional ISIS recruiters armed with effective propaganda techniques in combination with factors in the home society contributed to the radicalization of young Muslim women, similarly to young Muslim men.

The participation of Western women in armed conflict as members of a particularly violent and brutal terrorist organization presents a unique challenge in identifying and responding to Canadian foreign fighters and returnees as mainstream discourse has focused on men and because European examples are somewhat contextually different given the differences in political and economic social structures. Canadian women's distinctive experiences and the

extent of their participation as members of ISIS will inform criminal justice proceedings, deradicalization and reintegration programs geared to female returnees. Unfortunately, research on women's radicalization and particularly their participation in ISIS and other Muslim extremist terrorist organizations is severely inadequate. In order for Canada and other nations to prepare for the return of women from engagement with ISIS, immediate extensive research is required. Cases of Canadian Muslim women joining ISIS has worsened perceptions of Muslims in Canada and sensationalized media coverage has further damaged relations with the Muslim community. Fear mongering will only serve to diminish the possibilities of finding a workable solution to the problem.

Canada's response to the phenomenon of radicalization, however, is insufficient to effectively address the challenges of responding to returnees. In June 2017, the Minister of Public Safety and Procurement announced the launch of the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence (Canada Centre) with the objective of supporting local communities, funding research, and providing advice to help prevent the radicalization of young Canadians. Unfortunately, the majority of work on deradicalization focuses primarily on men and Canadian Centres dedicated to counter-radicalization focus primarily on preventing radicalization and limitedly on those that have already been radicalized. Undoubtedly, disillusioned foreign fighters, including men, women and their children, will require extensive support to successfully reintegrate into Canadian society. While Europe faces the prospect of approximately 1,500 - 2,000 returnees, Canada's numbers are significantly lower. Of the 190 Canadian foreign fighters, just over half are suspected to be in Syria or Iraq supporting the Islamic State.[3] Additionally, 60 of the 190 are believed to be back in Canada, and only 16 of the 190 travelled to Syria or attempted to before being caught in transition or voluntarily turning

back from Turkey.[4] U.S estimates are between 9-12 cases of returnees from engagement with ISIS.[5] In contrast, France suspects 690 of its citizens are in Syria or Iraq, of which 295 are women and 400 are children that were born abroad or traveled with their families.[6] The significant difference in numbers from European countries with a large Muslim diaspora can be attributed to many factors, including social structure, colonialism, and geographical proximity to the conflict zone. Therefore, any response to these threats must be contextualized to address the particular factors affecting that society. Although the creation of the Canada Centre is an important step forward in addressing the returning foreign fighter issue, Canada is not yet well-prepared for their inevitable return. Public Safety Canada is currently working on a National Strategy for countering radicalization to violence, but greater policies and resources, in both quantity and quality, are needed for the development and implementation of deradicalization and reintegration programs. Political mainstream narratives describe a dichotomy between the risks associated with being too soft on returning or former ISIS members and the risks associated with being too hard on them. Canadian ISIS returnees, women or men, should not be left unchecked; however, significant barriers present a challenge in holding returnees accountable for their actions. In many cases there is insufficient evidence to prosecute returnees, either due to impermissibility of intelligence in court or simply lack thereof. Therefore, while there are robust laws in place for prosecuting these individuals on terrorism charges, Crown prosecutors may be unable to present a strong enough case. As well, no Canadian precedence involving returning foreign fighters exists, which may simply be a matter of time.

As ISIS continues losing its fighters and control of its territories, it is more and more likely to resort to using more women and children in combat as suicide bombers, while some of these individuals seek to return to their home countries to evade capture and trial in countries like

Iraq or out of fear and disillusionment. Many returning extremist travelers[7] may pose serious threats to public safety, which is not without precedence in the West. Six recently returned former foreign fighters from Syria assisted in the deadly November 2015 attack in Paris, including Belgian and French nationals, while at least three returnees played a role in the March 2016 Brussels attack.[8] As such it is imperative to address the foreseeable challenge of handling the return of women and children returning to Canada after engagement with ISIS. The return of foreign fighters is undoubtedly one of the highest priorities for the Canadian government security agencies and departments, however the government has yet to commit the necessary resources to assist in interventions, criminal justice proceedings, deradicalization programs and reintegration initiatives.

ISIS's ability to mobilize foreign recruits to fight for the state it sought to create is not the first example of its kind. In the recent past, there have been at least "four distinct waves of foreign fighters drawn to fight in the name of defending Islam—the conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Bosnia, Iraq, and now Syria and Iraq".[9] The emergence of modern-day Salafi jihadism in Islam influenced these call to arms, placing a religious duty upon Muslims to essentially fight to the death if necessary to protect this religious ideology and for the safety of the true Muslims that follow it. ISIS successfully utilized this narrative, disseminating it through a new and enhanced method unavailable to previous groups; modern communication technology made possible the quick and unprecedented flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. This along with ease of travel, aggressive recruitment campaigns, and both social and political factors have heightened the narrative of a global, religious divide between Islam and the West in the minds of young Muslims.[10] Countering this narrative through deradicalization and engaging in successful resocialization for Canadian returnees is a pertinent issue as some are believed to have returned

from Syria and Iraq. Without adequate attention, resources and programming, these individuals may pose a serious threat to national security. Understanding key factors in the radicalization process of Canadian Muslim women will provide the insight required to build deradicalization and reintegration programs for the Canadian context.

2. Motivational Factors & the Radicalization Process

The radicalization and deradicalization processes follow a similar pattern across most extremist groups and organizations, accounting for differences based on the structure and activities of the group. The motivating factors involved in pushing and pulling young Western women towards ISIS reveal various underlying and overlapping risk factors. An analysis of these factors provides insight into the radicalization process itself, which can inform deradicalization processes and explain their decision to eventually return disillusioned. Canadian and European cases show that most Western girls and women recruited to ISIS came from educated middle-class families.[11] The infamous case of British national Aqsa Mahmood effectively illustrates this. The 19 year old British citizen, who later came to be known by her online pseudonym Umm Layth (meaning "mother of the lions"), attended Craigholme School in Glasgow, Scotland, one of the top private schools in the country.[12] Mahmood went on to become a symbolic female Western recruit for ISIS and was subsequently stripped of her citizenship. As is well known in the counter-radicalization and deradicalization fields, there is no set criteria for determining an individual's likelihood for radicalization towards violent extremist ideologies. Both born-Muslim and converts - or commonly referred to as "reverts" by Muslims - from all socioeconomic levels in the West have been targeted, and many have been successfully radicalized and have joined ISIS abroad or planned attacks in their home countries. In recent years ISIS began recruiting

women to reach the next big step in their social nation-building experiment: raising and indoctrinating the next generation of ISIS fighters. Notably, many women from Western countries travelled with their families, including children, to join their husbands in Syria or Iraq; the vast majority of reported cases of Western women travelling to Syria and Iraq, however, reflect younger single women that were prepared to marry foreign fighters abroad and raise 'children of the Caliphate'.

In tackling this issue, it is important to be mindful of the fact that mainstream discourse, and society, still view women and men through the lens of traditional gender roles, although feminist theory continues to challenge those narratives. These notions of men and women in relation to war and peace depict the men as the warmakers and women as peacemakers, and with an inherently peaceful disposition. Although these underlying assumptions may go unnoticed, associating women with peace discounts the efforts of women actively involved in military combat and non-combat roles efforts and stifles the voices of those who are victimized in times of conflict.[13] Thus it is critical to acknowledge and challenge traditional notions about the nature of men and women in society and to work towards mitigating their influence in intellectual discourse and policies on this and other issues. Separating the reality of the situation from assumptions based on stereotypes – such as the oppressed Muslim woman – allows for a more fruitful discussion about Canadian women in ISIS. This includes understanding the role of women's agency in their decision to travel to Syria and Iraq, and whether they are empowered by choosing to fill traditional gender roles, are simply the young and naïve victims of sophisticated radicalization process or differ from case to case. In order to assess the threat that some returnees represent to their home countries and ways to reintegrate those that want to, these questions require answers.

Table 1: Foreign Women and Children in the Islamic State

COUNTRY	TOTAL[173]	WOMEN	CHILDREN
Australia[174]	165	~25	70
Austria[175]	<300	17	40
Belgium[176]	~528	~85	~118[177]
Bosnia[178]	148	60	81
Canada[179]	~185	~35	
EU[180]	~4,000	~680	
France	1,910	~320	460[181]
Germany[182]	~900	~190	56[183]
Indonesia	~600	113[184]	>100[185]
Italy[186]	110	6	
Kazakhstan[187]	~500	>200 women	and children
Kyrgyzstan[188]	~500		>130
Kosovo[189]	~300	44	27
Malaysia[190]	91	12	17
Morocco[191]	1,660	~285	378
Netherlands[192]	280	>90	>90
Russia	3,417		>350[193]
Spain	204	21[194]	
Sweden[195]	267	~70	45[196]
Switzerland	~70	7	
Tunisia[197]	~3,000	~100	
UK	~850	>100[198]	50[199]

Source: The Soufan Center, 2017.

1.1 Push and pull factors towards extremism

Cases of young Canadian and European women vanishing to join an armed conflict in roles that generally contradict Western feminist ideals begs the question: "what compels young and educated middle-class Muslim women and girls to join a terrorist organization known for its brutality and misogynist doctrine?". The mapping of push and pull factors can help explain radicalization pathways and risk factors fundamental to understanding why women join ISIS. A meaningful understanding of the social forces contributing to radicalization, in combination with actual experiences abroad, provides the necessary insight to develop effective counter-radicalization and deradicalization tactics targeting women. Saltman & Smith (2015) produced

an in-depth report for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, titled 'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon". The report is influential in that it presents the key factors that push Western women away from Western values and key factors that effectively pull them towards the extremist ideology of and participation in ISIS. Given the relevance of each of these factors in the deradicalization process, they are presented and discussed here to provide colour and clarity on the motivations of Western women joining ISIS and issues to consider for reintegration initiatives upon their return.

Saltman and Smith (2015) identify the following three main push factors: 1) feeling isolated within Western culture; 2) the belief that Muslims are unjustly persecuted worldwide; and, 3) anger and frustration over international inaction against the persecution of Muslims.[14] The most consistent factor is the feeling of isolating in Western society, stemming from the lack of a sense of belonging. These feelings stem from two distinct experiences. Firstly, second and third generation Muslim Canadian youth often struggle to balance Western values with Muslim values and other values stemming from their cultural heritage, referred to as a 'deculturalization process'.[15] These values may appear to clash and to contradict one another, pressuring young Muslims to negotiate between opposing sets of values and triggering an identity crisis. Many Canadian Muslims learn to manage several different sets of values with proper guidance, but self-discovery and self-actualization can be particularly challenging for youth also in the process of developing and understanding social norms and relationships while the brain is still developing. Secondly, the proliferation of negative labels and stereotypes and sensationalized news about terrorist attacks in the West by the media create an atmosphere where Muslim Canadians may feel unsafe, unwelcomed and isolated. The challenges associated with a dual identity - in this case Muslim and Western – can lead to frustration over Western policies in the

Middle East, such as Western armed interventions, which have led to long and violent wars, and a strong support for Israel. ISIS disseminates images of violence perpetrated against children in the Middle East - particularly in Syria - via the internet to a targeted audience and uses it to proliferate the perception of the West's complicity in these acts of violence by virtue of silence and/or inaction. ISIS propagandists are well aware of the strong emotional response created by images of injured and deceased children. Radicalizers exploit these feelings, building a "cognitive behavioural pathway... around the extremist propaganda that manifests itself as an alternative reality".[16] This alternative reality reinforces the victimization of Muslims by the West and becomes the leading narrative for the radicalized individual and can create an urgency to act. Examples of these narratives can be found on female ISIS members' and supporters' twitter accounts, blaming the West of the injustices faced by Muslims at home and abroad.

Source: Saltman & Smith, 2015.

Source: Saltman & Smith, 2015.

The perceived lack of alternatives for achieving political goals at home in combination with core beliefs and the influence of an extremist ideology increases the appeal of using "extreme measures, such as travelling to Syria or conducting terrorist attacks".[17] This also represents the line between legal forms of activism and illegal forms of activism.

Pull factors create positive incentives for joining IS and work in tandem with push factors. The major pull factors, widely accepted within women's radicalization discourse, are: 1)

idealistic goals of religious duty and building a utopian Caliphate state; 2) identity, belonging and sisterhood; and, 3) romanticization of the experience.[18] As discussed above, young Canadian Muslims often struggle with determining the optimal balance between the basic tenets of Islam and Western social norms. An individual may be convinced by external actors and influences exploiting and reinforcing push and pull factors that these values are not compatible, that Islamic duties must come first, and that in order to achieve this it is necessary to distance oneself from the temptations of Western society by living in the kind of purist Islamic society promised by ISIS. The religious call to duty, an ideological tactic used by other extremist jihadist groups, affects young women as it does young men. This pull factor relies on a Salafi-jihadist ideological foundation built by filling the void created by doubts about the compatibility of Western and Islamic cultures. The promise of a pure Islamic society devoid of sinful temptations provides a solution to the ongoing negotiations between values. The opportunity to be a part of something bigger than oneself and a significant moment for the *ummah* (global Muslim community) reinforces their sense of purpose and meaning. Of course, the expectation of young travelers are not always met once they arrive in ISIS-controlled areas.

Push and pull factors play an important role in the radicalization process and can disrupt the process of identity formation in young Canadian Muslims. Sympathizers tend to form a new identity based on propaganda disseminated by ISIS. This in turn shapes their understanding of their role in society and undermines their sense of belonging in non-Islamic countries, pushing them to seek acceptance in other groups. Alternatively, this search for belonging also leads individuals to gangs, religious clubs, or college fraternities/sororities for example. In nearly all cases, Western recruits begin to fundamentally question whether they belong in Western society, often at a sensitive age in the person's identity formation. In each individual case, various

elements play a role in the radicalization process with some choosing to travel abroad in support of a cause. ISIS radicalizers are skilled in securing the loyalty of new recruits through effective propaganda and incentives, such as the promise of marriage to a Western foreign fighter, prestige, respect, and of course heaven. The recruiter's ability to poke enough holes in an individual's understanding of the self and undermine their ability to reason provides the basis for building a new identity founded on extremism. Most of the Western women that have joined ISIS were in their late teens to early twenties when they left.[19] Even without the presence of ISIS or other extremist groups like it, young Canadian Muslims will continue to ask important questions about identity, purpose and values, including what it means to be a Canadian Muslim woman and how to manage the challenges of possessing a dual identity and two sets of values that do not always overlap. Indeed, society requires that we ask ourselves these questions and national identities are built - and divided - by them.

For women in particular, the notion of being a part of a sisterhood based on the beliefs and personal and religious goals is very compelling. The feeling of isolation and discrimination combined with the enticement of being a member of an ingroup has a significant impact on a young people. This sense of sisterhood can also temporarily replaces the sense of loss of family members and friends when girls and women first arrive. Thus, the 'sisterhood of the Caliphate'[20] portrayed and propagated by ISIS is instrumental in reinforcing a sense of camaraderie, of understanding and acceptance, and a positive image of women in ISIS. To support these ideas, ISIS propaganda shows images of women participating in "normal" activities, like having coffee together, eating at restaurants, doing household chores and posing for selfies with their husbands[21]. This 'smooths out' immediate concerns about abandoning one's family and starting a new life in an active conflict zone.

Interestingly, the Islamic State's position on women's rights clashes strongly with Western notions of women's rights. In 2015 the group released a document outlining the roles and duties of women according to ISIS, titled "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study". This document, written in Arabic and distributed by an all-female division of ISIS called the Al-Khanssaa Brigade, seeks to invalidate Western civilization and values and rejects its embrace of feminism, science and education.[22] Filled with religious rhetoric, the document serves as a propaganda tool aimed at recruiting Saudi Arabian women and glorifying the lifestyle of devoted ISIS women as mothers and wives. The Manifesto includes many references to Saudi Arabia and is not translated into English, unlike the majority of ISIS recruiting and propaganda material, which is typically translated into a number of languages in order to reach a wider audience. The document also references many socio-cultural traditional values and Salafi beliefs present in Saudi Arabian society, including the glorification of hyper-masculinity and the upholding of traditional roles for men (as providers and protectors). As the Quilliam Foundation analysis of the text notes, the themes and messaging of this piece of propaganda contrast strikingly with "the messaging that comes from the Chief recruiters of Western women to ISIS".[23] The cover page displays an image of a person in a *burqa[24]* across from an image of a semi-automatic rifle on a pink background. Overall, the document outlines rights and restrictions for women and seeks to build a rationale for the position of women, at least Arab women, under ISIS.

1.2 Prevention and early detection

In an effort to stop the threat of radicalization of Canadian youth, the Government of Canada supports the development and implementation of programs directed at early detection and prevention. These programs are organized and delivered by local-level organizations across

the country committed to counter-radicalization efforts. Prevention efforts in Canada focus primarily on community engagement and local-level programming led by Canadian CVE organizations, such as the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence based in Montreal. There is a wealth of information and data on the radicalization of boys and men as well as several programs by other CVE organizations across the country. Due to the significant gap in the data available on women's radicalization, most of the information that informs the development of prevention programs and conversations reflects experiences of male youth. While women's radicalization is a growing field, more empirical research is needed to inform prevention strategies and programs targeting young girls and women, given the different gender roles and experiences with radicalization.

Modern technology has increased accessibility to propaganda, recruiters' access to vulnerable young people online, and made it easier to make travel plans without the family's knowledge. Social media plays a major role in radicalization and other elements necessary to make the journey to ISIS. In an age where young people experience global connectivity and communication at an unprecedented level of speed and freedom, many harmful influences go undetected. The internet plays a key role in disseminating propaganda from ISIS to its targeted audience and provides a level of privacy, where a young person may engage in private discussions over social media with recruiters without the knowledge of a parent. It can be equally valuable as a tool for delivering counter-messaging against extremism, radicalization and false narratives, and for providing resources for family members seeking support and guidance.

1.3   Push and pull factors for disengagement

A varied mix of several factors influence the decision to disengage from extremist organizations, including a cost-benefit analysis based on push and pull factors leading away from

extremism and participation in the group. This departure from the group depends on the
individual's resolve and commitment to the cause, which itself depends on a complex
psychological process of comparing expectations to reality. For Western female members of ISIS
these push factors may include a "general exhaustion due to the extremist or terrorist lifestyle,"
"doubts in the group's ideology," "frustration with the group's hypocrisy and behaviour," "loss
of status," "mistreatment and physical abuse," "disappointment about results of armed struggle
and effects of violence," and "unmet expectations".[25] The most influential factor distancing the
individual from engagement in the group involves the desire to be reunited with family members
and the presence of highly attractive alternatives and support upon disengagement. This
reinforces other push and pull factors that the individual may be experiencing. Despite gaps in
case studies and other data for women, a number of experts have done research and published
material that provide an overview of disengagement processes and the path to deradicalization
from there. Some examples include Daniel Koehler's book "Understanding Deradicalization:
Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism" (2016) and an article by Kate
Barrelle titled "Pro-integration: disengagement from life after extremism" (2014). Both discuss
the issues of disengagement and reintegration at length, presenting valuable insight and
information on how, why and when disengagement occurs and methods for successful re-
engagement with society that should be considered in the development of government policies
and approaches and in deradicalization and reintegration programs.

2   Women in ISIS: The *Muhajirah* Experience

As discussed, the ISIS Manifesto on Women of the Islamic State helps to illustrate the
roles and expectations for women under the so-called Caliphate. These women fulfill three key

objectives for ISIS: supporting ISIS fighters and fulfilling their Islamic duty by marrying as soon

as possible, bearing the next generation of ISIS fighters, and legitimizing the Islamic State

through their presence and support. They also play an important role as mascots, encouraging -

and sometimes shaming- other Muslim men and women to join the cause. Girls and women that

traveling to ISIS-held territories are interested in being more than just wives. Western women

joined ISIS on the basis of participating in the establishment a utopian Islamic state. To this

effect, many refer to themselves online as *muhajirah*, the feminine noun for 'migrant' rooted in

Islamic history and the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina. Militant Islamic

groups exploit the concept of *hijra* (migration), based on the Prophet's journey, to justify the

duty of Muslims to leave "non-Islamic" lands and travel to "true lands of Islam".[26] It is this "call

to duty" commonly used by militant terrorist organizations to mobilize women and men as a part

of the movement.[27]

  The role of women and their experiences in Syria and Iraq with ISIS are important to

document and analyze in order to help tailor reintegration programs to their specific needs. This

information can help produce a classification of returnee women for both academic and practical

use. The experiences of women from each category may differ slightly or significantly

depending on the individual's personal experience. Given the limited empirical research and

information available on Western ISIS women, especially returnees, it is difficult to accurately

determine the extent of their experiences abroad. With the information collected by journalists

and scholars, however, the main roles for Western women in ISIS are clear: exclusively

traditional roles, engagement in propaganda and activism, and combat training. It is important to

also note that Western recruits' experiences differ considerably from local recruits. In some cases

women recruited locally by ISIS play more central and visible roles enforcing ISIS laws among

women and assisting in a medical capacity.[28] Other local women are sexually abused and/or

bought and sold as slaves.[29] In order to uncover an effective de-radicalization program and

reintegration process, it is critical to understand the particular experiences faced by Western

women, as well as their path to radicalization and reasons for disengagement (discussed in the

previous section). A personalized solution for these women will help mitigate the threat of

returnees re-engaging in terrorism or other criminal activities. To this end, the following section

will attempt to contextualize and discuss in some detail the different types of female returnees to

Canada based on their roles and experiences in IS.

2.1   Traditional Role

Most women travelling to join ISIS marry foreign fighters, typically from their home

country, almost immediately upon arriving. They immediately take up the responsibilities of the

household and other duties traditionally associated with women, such as child rearing, education,

caring for orphaned children, cooking, cleaning, as well an obligation to obey and serve their

husbands.[30] In many cases, these women are introduced to potential husbands online before

making the journey to Syria. Mainstream media reports on Western women in Syria consistently

use terms such as "jihadi bride" and "ISIS wives" to describe these women and girls, but the

assumption that women join ISIS to become jihadi brides is reductionist and does not

encapsulate the various complex factors leading to their decision to join ISIS. The use of such

terms risks trivializing their function in the organization as well as the complex process that

leads to their decision to join ISIS's cause. Therefore, this paper does not refer to them as either

"extremists," "jihadi brides," or their preferred term "muhajirah" in order to avoid dehumanizing

these women, trivializing their roles or legitimizing their actions. Nonetheless, women

significantly contribute to the organization's mission despite their restricted roles. Nevertheless,

women's lives under ISIS can be challenging for those used to certain luxuries readily available in Western societies. For example, whereas in a country like Canada, a young woman can freely travel to the nearest supermarket, women living in ISIS-controlled regions must be accompanied by a close male relative.[31] This role for women, however, this role is expected of every woman across the board. They may participate as recruiters and influencers online, and in some rare cases receive some form of combat training, but this must be in addition to their roles as wives and mothers first.

2.2   Online Activists and Recruiters

While all women must take up traditional roles as wives and mothers, some women also engage in online activism supporting ISIS through propaganda and recruitment. They answer questions online about their lifestyles in Syria and share advice with other women interested in traveling to Syria. Even for those without an online presence, women function in a central role for ISIS simply through their presence and visibility. This makes women a powerful propaganda tool for recruiting other men and women. For ISIS, women are most useful in non-combat roles[32], meaning that the vast majority of them do not have weapons training or any other combat skills. This is particularly true for Western women, given the hierarchical structure that puts Western foreign fighters in a protected status given their strategic value to the group. One study by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict noted the influence of female ISIS supporters in Indonesia, including their involvement in terrorist attacks.[33] The case for Western women, however, may be different given the stark contrast between Indonesian and Canadian societies and their distinctive experiences under ISIS. Alternatively, Peresin and Cervone (2015) note that disillusioned women that return to their home countries are unlikely to continue to support the struggle. Regardless of the likelihood, effective security measures should be put in place to

protect the public and the state. The role of women in carrying out terrorist attacks under ISIS also speaks to the concept of "female jihad". While different schools of thought within Islam may interpret the 'true' meaning of the word *jihad* in Islam differently, it broadly refers to personal, spiritual struggles as well as physical struggles depending on the context. The concept of female jihad is similarly varied and nuanced. For ISIS, the female jihad is limited to the duties prescribed in traditionalist and extremist religious ideology. This interpretation of religious law disapproves of militant interpretations of female jihad and focuses instead on women's roles in supporting and encouraging male members of the family to fight for ISIS. As mentioned, their primary role includes auxiliary support functions such as raising children with a Salafi-jihadist ideology, managing finances for operations, providing medical care for women, recruitment and propaganda, much of which takes place online[34]; however, cases of women assisting in terrorist attacks outside Syria and Iraq conflicts with ISIS's messaging regarding the duties of women in female jihad.

2.3   Combat roles

Although participation in warfare is officially and sharply discouraged by ISIS, it has made exceptions to this rule under extreme circumstances like other militant groups before it. One of the very few known exceptions includes the infamous ISIS recruit from Toronto known by her online pseudonym Lama Sharif Al-Shammari, or LA, who travelled to Syria in 2014 to join the group.[35] Unlike most of the other women bound to traditional household roles, LA travelled extensively between Syria and Iraq for what experts believe were intelligence gathering missions.[36] ISIS women's roles in information gathering are well-known in academic discourse, but how many are involved and whether or not Western recruits fill these roles is not clear. There are also a small number of women who are permitted to participate in minor law enforcement

capacity. The all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigade represents an example of such a function. It is suspected that some Western women participated in this group, which was responsible for maintaining ISIS rules among women.[37] Women may be compelled to participate in combat roles if the group no longer possesses a strong number of male fighters, often due to a shortage of fighters owing to heightened conflict. In these somewhat rare and extreme cases, women are deployed as suicide bombers such as in Iraq in 2006, where a female Belgian ISIS member committed a suicide attack.[38] In a separate case, a woman carrying a baby, who appeared to be escaping the siege of Mosul, was seen on film detonating a suicide bomb near Iraqi forces in July 2017[39]; however, such tasks are more likely to be given to local ISIS women as opposed to foreign members. There are also several benefits to using women in combat roles. Women are less visible to security forces simply by virtue of the social construct of the feminine identity as being peaceful, nurturing, and non-violent. This allows them to move around largely undetected and provides valuable strategic opportunities for the group, allowing women to access soft targets much more easily than men.

As ISIS attempts to hold on to consistently diminishing territory and power in the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, the group may become desperate enough to force women to participate more actively. Rather than seeing empowered women in *niqabs* exchanging fire with great foreign armies, they are more likely to be used as suicide bombers. The level of women's autonomy in ISIS is highly questionable. The Manifesto on Women includes a provision for allowing women to engage in warfare through a *fatwa* if "the situation of the *ummah* has become desperate, 'as the women of Iraq and Chechnya did, with great sadness'".[40] There is no indication that such a *fatwa* was ever released by the group, nor has the document itself been sanctioned by ISIS or its leadership.[41]

There also is no substantial evidence to suggest that Western women received weapons training by ISIS. Some images posted by ISIS members online show covered women holding guns, while others report receiving self-defence training. Overall, ISIS has discouraged the militarization of women, in stark contrast to their position on the militarization of children. Based on ISIS's position on the role of women in Islam, it is unlikely that any women received anything other than basic training. The possibility of training, however, still requires attention and the appropriate precautions with regards to returnees, but should not be the primary source for concerns. Lack of training, however, does not equate to a lack of desire or willpower. The possibility exists that while some may return disillusioned by ISIS and reject its interpretation of Islam, others may remain devoted to the same violent ideology despite being disengaged with the group. The primary challenge for Canada is twofold: assessing the prospect of Canadians returning with combat experience, skills and/or training and determining whether returnees are still committed to the ISIS ideology and mission.

2.4 Victims or perpetrators

One of the key questions leading efforts to address female returnees involves assessing their culpability. It is important to determine the level of culpability of each returnee to uphold the rule of law, ensure the safety of other citizens, and to identify the needs of returnees to allow them to reintegrate into society. It is equally important to ensure that any victims of physical or sexual abuse or manipulation and coercion are not treated unjustly under the law. Although culpability is pertinent to discussions about reintegration, it is outside the immediate scope of this paper and is therefore only briefly addressed. Finding the answer, however, involves developing a thorough and gendered understanding of the many layers of radicalization in combination with the individual's personal history and should be dealt with on a case by case

basis. Some scholars argue that "women who have joined [ISIS] must be assumed to have known what they were doing, and be treated accordingly".[42] Others, however, argue that because teen girls that joined ISIS were typically younger than their male counterparts, some or many were simply naïve and easily manipulated by ISIS recruiters to support a cause they did not fully understand. Biological factors are also cited as influencing factors. The part of the brain responsible for decision-making and impulsive behaviour is underdeveloped in teens and plays a central role in what is more commonly considered "youthful rebellion".[43] It is also vital to determine whether returnees are simply disengaged or are disillusioned by what they saw and experienced abroad and no longer wish to be a part of ISIS's movement. Medium or high-risk female returnees may include women that do not show signs of disillusionment but may have instead abandoned the group out of need for health care and/or official documents for children as well as opportunities to network with extremists in their home countries while remaining loyal to ISIS. The Soufan Centre report cites a separate August 2017 report by The Heritage Foundation that found a marked increase "in the involvement of women in terrorist plots in Europe over the previous two years,"[44] but does not prove a causal link between an increase in female returnees and an increase in the number of terrorist plots involving women, nor any other link between the two. Overall, the bigger threat to Canadian security comes from men and women unable to travel abroad and plan attacks from within Canada, or "lone wolves".[45] A recent Canadian example from July 2017 involved a Toronto-area woman who received 14 terrorism-related charges for attacking employees at a Canadian Tire store in Scarborough, Ontario, and pledging allegiance to ISIS in court following the incident.[46] The RCMP also cited her failed alleged attempt to travel to Syria via Turkey in 2016. This points to the continued value of counter-radicalization programs in the country. Some returnees may indeed continue to support the ideology preached

by IS and accept their roles according to it and it is critical to differentiate between the two groups.

While the differentiation between roles and experiences provides valuable information about a returnee's background, other important factors such as age, influences leading to radicalization, education, personal history, and social connections should be taken into consideration to support reintegration. Deradicalization programs will be necessary to counter the ideological indoctrination by ISIS to ensure continued disengagement with the group. Adequate measures will be required to guide these women away from the ideological ties to the group. Disengagement without de-radicalization risks the possibility of re-engagement at home and precautions should be taken to mitigate any such risks.

3 Policies for Responding to Women Returnees

Despite the works of many scholars in the field, the role of women in deradicalization and terrorism studies continues to be marginally discussed in academia and hardly at all in mainstream discourse. Although committed researchers and scholars have vastly contributed to the specific research on women and terrorism over the past decade, several scholars agree additional research is required within de-radicalization and reintegration discourse. Figure 2 illustrates the severe lack of data available on the number of women and girls having travelled from nearly all parts of the world. The map only covers data from a handful of countries, which may indicate that information about female travelers is either scarce or protected. In both cases, the unavailability of this kind of information and lack of transparency on the issue may harm the development of accurate intervention and reintegration policies by front-line NGOs involved in de-radicalization for returnees. This is also true for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

programs. Though prevention tactics and intervention programs exist in the West,

deradicalization programs are still a relatively new concept. Even though deradicalization

programs today apply an individualized approach, greater research and awareness is needed on

women's particular needs and how policies and laws already in place may impact returning

women.

Figure 1: Demographics on Women and Girls
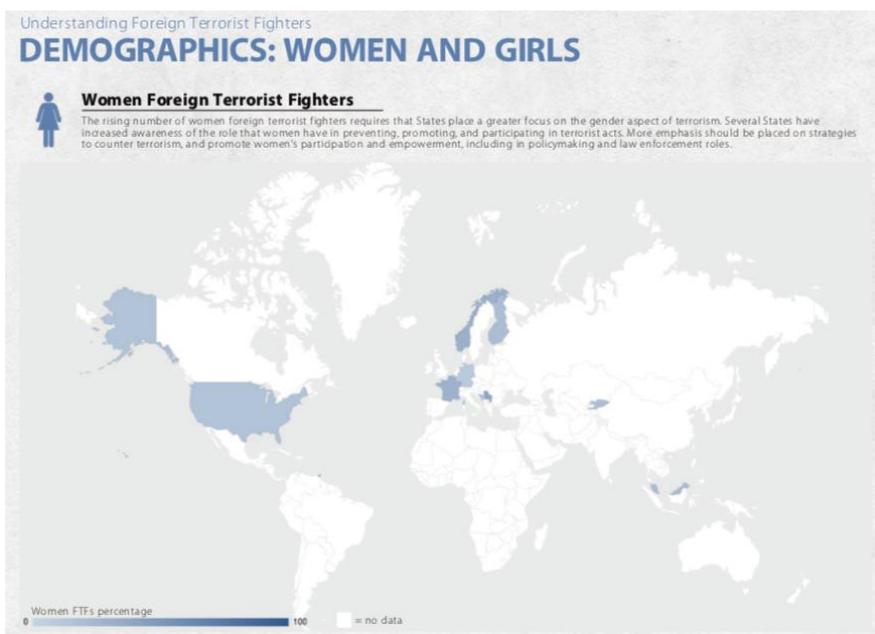
Source: United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2016.

3.1   USA

The U.S government's strategy for addressing the threat of foreign fighters involves a

whole-of-government approach, including the U.S-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, bilateral

and multilateral engagement with partner states, domestic efforts to identify and thwart terrorist

attacks, and CVE programs. The Obama administration launched its domestic CVE strategy in

2011 entitled "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States".

As the title suggests, this program moved beyond the national security narrative to community-

level engagement and awareness with stakeholders in affected and at-risk communities. A

'Community Awareness Brief' (CAB) was developed and implemented as part of this initiative in cities across the US to support local community members as well as law enforcement to develop a clearer understanding of recruitment tactics by terrorist organizations, identify best practices in addressing these threats at the local level, and address foreign fighter recruitment by ISIS.[47] Through community partnerships, these programs can effectively achieve community buy-in from key stakeholders, such as religious/community leaders, and create a network for sharing vital resources and information with the public.

The U.S's strategy for countering the threat of foreign fighters takes an international dimension alongside its domestic strategy. This includes strengthening the legal and prosecutorial capacity of partner nations to be able to prosecute terrorists in local courts and mitigate the financial burden of prosecuting them abroad and the risk of fighters fleeing the region and travelling to neighbouring countries.[48] In 2014, President Barack Obama chaired the September UN Security Council meeting that led to the unanimous passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2178 on foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq.[49] The UN resolution discusses domestic strategies and international cooperation to address the spread of terrorism. It raises the issue of foreign fighters and the importance of "comprehensively addressing underlying factors" including prevention measures, recruitment, impeding travel of extremists, stemming financial support to terrorist organizations, as social factors leading to the alienation of certain groups[50]. It also aims to deny terrorists access to safe havens abroad, which provide terrorists organizations with opportunities to regroups and recruit. The main mechanism for dealing with returnees in the U.S is through the criminal justice system.

3.2   Canada

The previous Canadian government made counterterrorism a priority and counterterrorism policies at the time centered on applying punitive measures as a deterrent to participation in terrorist activities or groups at home or abroad. This hard-lined stance included the passing of the 2013 Combating Terrorism Act, which added terror-related crimes to the Criminal Code of Canada, for example making it an illegal to attempt to travel abroad with the intention of participating in terrorist activities,[51] joining a terrorist organization[52] and/or facilitating terrorist activities at home or abroad[53], carrying with them a up to a 10 or 14-year prison term if convicted, depending on the offence. As with most countries, however, prosecutorial evidence is difficult to attain and therefore legal cases of Canadian foreign fighters attempting to leave or returning post-engagement remain scarce. In the first Canadian case of its kind, a 29-year old Quebec man was sentenced to 9 years in prison after admitting to an undercover RCMP officer that he planned to use a fake passport to travel to Syria and fight for ISIS.[54] The previous government successfully passed the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act in June 2014, providing the government with the power to revoke the citizenship of dual citizens convicted for terrorism-related offences or for joining a terrorist group. Despite having cancelled several passports following passage of the act, the Federal Court ruled in 2017 that a number of subsections would no longer be applicable due to violation of the Canadian Bill of Rights.[55] The court also added new provisions that would make cases of citizenship revocation the responsibility of the Federal Court to decide on a case by case basis.[56] In any case, no proof exists indicating that revoking citizenship prevents terrorist attacks. The purpose is primarily punitive politically justified as a measure for deterring people from participating in terror-related activities and involves significant security risks as well. Fighters will most likely be forced to

stay in volatile regions and are more likely to join other terrorist organizations if not allowed to return home. Denying citizens the right to return also adds financial and political pressure on transit states involved in capturing foreign fighters, forcing transit states to release suspected terrorists back into Syria where they may then travel to other safe havens and regroup.

The Canadian government has doubled efforts in CVE prevention policies aimed at community engagement and outreach. Prevention programs funded by the government include conversations with community groups, sharing individual experiences with violent extremism, meeting with local community members to help identify individuals who may be at risk of being radicalized, and interventions involving community-based mentors, counselling, and other key resources[57] to facilitate an early exit from the radicalization process. The government also funds CVE programs across the country dealing with prevention and de-radicalization. Public Safety Canada launched the Canada Centre in June 2017 to deal with the issue of countering radicalization leading to violence, "supporting intervention efforts through funding, research, policy and programming".[58] The Centre does not manage or advise on individual cases, but is involved in increasing awareness about radicalization and engaging in dialogue with affected communities on prevention.[59] Public Safety's outreach also involves consultation with the public as well as leading Canadian scholars, law enforcement and organizations involved in programming and research.[60] The Community Resilience Fund was established to provide these organizations with financial assistance to advance research and programming related to counter-radicalization initiatives including interventions, performance measurement and tools for program evaluation, and youth engagement.[61] Through the fund, the government has funded important research at Ryerson University on the performance of multi-agency approaches to

counter-radicalization in Canada and the University of Waterloo on foreign fighter radicalization and rehabilitation programs.[62]

In general, governments prefer funding research and local organization programs dealing prevention strategies for 3 main reasons. Firstly, federally-funded prevention efforts involve coordination and collaboration with local-level organizations and community members, which increases community buy-in, a critical factor in building trust with the community. Secondly, prevention measures mostly fly under the political radar, whereas reintegration programs are seen as being 'soft' of terrorists and evokes concern and strong emotions among the larger population. The Canadian government has been accused of 'rewarding' returnees by allowing them to return and putting Canadian citizens at risk in the process. While provisions should be put in place to ensure that returnees are prosecuted to the full extent of the law when possible and that high-risk returnees are kept under surveillance, fear mongering serves only to diminish the positive impact of deradicalization and reintegration programs. Furthermore, under sections 19 of the Immigration and Refugee Act, Canadian citizens and permanent residents possess the right to enter Canada, as long as they can prove their status.[63] Thirdly, de-radicalization programs and reintegration initiatives require a significant amount of funding, personnel and other resources. Supporting CVE centres and programs is a more efficient and effective use of resources for the government rather than developing, funding and implementing a national level program.

In dealing with Returning Extremist Travelers, once a returnee is assessed as low-risk by Canada's security agencies, their families are "encouraged to access relevant social services".[64] Currently, there is no information on how many interventions government agencies or local organization have conducted with returnees or if any have been successful. The government supports separate programs in prison aimed at social reintegration for young offenders, however

these programs are designed and currently only available for convicted individuals. Further

research should be done to assess the feasibility of using similar programs for returnee men,

women and children. One of the greater challenges is ensuring that returnees check in with

deradicalization centres for assistance and access to social workers, counselling and other vital

resources for returnees and their families.

3.3   The Aarhus Model

The premise of de-radicalization programs for returning foreign fighters is to support a

former extremist in rebuilding an identity of a former extremist to be compatible with the values

and ideals of the society in which they are trying to reintegrate. The city of Aarhus, Denmark,

located 187 km from Copenhagen, developed and implements such a program. The Aarhus

model is based on the 'principle of inclusion,' focusing on "the meaningful participation in

common cultural, social and societal life".[65] This program focuses on the criminal conduct of

individuals as opposed to religious and cultural ties. It centers on the concept of Life Psychology,

a theoretical model developed by the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences at

Aarhus University.[66] Life Psychology is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates social,

societal and personality psychology with social sciences and humanities to understand the factors

leading to radicalization and therefore leading away from radicalization as well.[67] The principles

of Life Psychology are based on three presumptions: 1) everybody aspires to live a good-enough

life; 2) an individual must possess certain necessary skills to cope with life's various challenges;

and, 3) every person faces "exactly the same fundamental life tasks".[68] This understanding then

feeds into the purpose of the Aarhus model, to provide those exiting extremism with the skills to

meet this tasks. The theory of Life Psychology merits greater attention in the study of

deradicalization. The Aarhus Model involves a three-pronged approach: early prevention and

exit program, prosecution (committed in or outside Denmark), and preventing radicalization.[69] This model places a strong focus on crime prevention, "ensuring constitutional rights and freedom of expression while also acknowledging the democratic necessity for political and religious activity". The goal is to rehabilitate the extremist element of the ideology so that individuals can freely express their beliefs and opinions through non-violent and legal means. Expert opinion is still divided on whether deradicalization should target ideology or behaviour. On this issue, the Aarhus program does not focus on ideology, politics or religion but instead sees deradicalization through the lens of reforming criminal activity and illegal forms of activism. Balancing democratic rights and national security requires interventions, deradicalization and reintegration programs to be flexible and individualized to that person's experiences and needs. As discussed in previous sections, these needs and experiences will vary not only from individual to individual, but age and gender will also play a role. For example, if a mother returns with her child, her ability to be in contact with her child may impact her response to deradicalization and reintegration programs.

A democratic nation must also be robust in its implementation of the rule of law. The Aarhus model does not provide a free pass for returning foreign fighters. If evidence exists that a returnee participated in criminal activities at home or abroad, that individual is prosecuted and does not qualify for the exit program. Through a conviction, returnees could be ordered by the court to participate in deradicalization and reintegration programs; however, voluntary participation in disengagement and deradicalization or reintegration programs is more likely to be effective in the long-term. The Aarhus program primarily exists for those individuals committed to renouncing extremism and reintegrating back into their community and society. To this end, the Aarhus Model provides those interested in and eligible for the exit program with

support in finding employment, pursuing education, and accessing housing, counselling and therapy, and medical care.[70] In comparison, similar resources are also available for Canadian offenders, such as vocational programs, social programs and education programs, albeit offered in a different format (through prison as opposed to an open, voluntary program). Several correctional programs tailored to women currently exist in Canada and could be a starting point for developing similar programs for female returnees. Additionally, the mentors, facilitators, workshop instructors and other staff involved in deradicalization attend courses on the radicalization process and risk factors, conflict management and coaching and Life Psychology as part of their comprehensive training.[71]

The US strategy focuses on preventative measures and on punitive measures once individuals become involved in illegal activities, but no successful US model exists for addressing deradicalization. As demonstrated throughout this paper, strategies for deradicalization are much more complex and require more resources than do preventive strategies, which are centered on awareness and community outreach. A study conducted by the George Washington University Program on Extremism notes that US's main strategy for addressing the threat of returnees is through the criminal justice system, through which several have been charged with violations of the material support statute.[72] While there is one example of a Canadian convicted and sentenced to prison for attempting to join ISIS in Syria, based on testimony from an undercover RCMP officer, no other legal precedence exists in Canada for dealing with returnees. In a Minnesota case, a district judge ordered four men charged with violations of material support to ISIS to undergo evaluation with a deradicalization expert in order to assess the probability of successful rehabilitation. Additionally, special counselling is available for prisoners given the significant number of ISIS sympathizers in the state.[73] Overall,

the US is far behind on setting up the needed programs for deradicalization and reintegration, which may be due to a lack of funding for such programs. The emphasis on the use of the criminal justice system should be made in tandem with resources to fund more programs in more prisons and exit programs similar to the Aarhus Model.

3.4   Canadian deradicalization programs

Contrary to the US example, anti-radicalization programs receive a lot of attention in Canada. Centres dedicated to the problem of radicalization exist in several major cities across Canada, including Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. These centres represent the first-line of support for returnees and their families. The most headway on this issue being made in Quebec, home to a large Muslim diaspora. The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV), which opened in Montreal in December 2015, is one of the leading centres in deradicalization in Canada and the only Centre of its kind in North America. The CPRLV utilizes a "pool of resources, knowledge and skills" to find innovative, comprehensive, and sustainable solutions to preventing acts of radical violence and promoting respectful coexistence.[74] The Centre works in partnership with a diverse team of community workers, organizations, institutions, and multidisciplinary professionals in developing specialized expertise and the implementation of prevention strategies on the ground. The goal is to increase awareness and provide support to those affected directly or indirectly, working towards social inclusion and harmony. One of the most important elements of their work focuses on analyzing the role of the Quebec identity in radicalization. The role of identity development and its interruption by radical thoughts and extremist influences is key to rebuilding a returnee's trust in their home society and successful reintegration. The Centre also oversees interventions without the participation of local authorities.[75] As previously discussed, the Canadian

government indicated it does not participate in interventions. A similar initiative in Brussels is modeled on the Montreal Centre and the Aarhus Model in Denmark to tackle the radicalization of Belgian youth.[76]

4   Challenges Regarding Children and the Path Ahead

4.1   Children

"These children are victims. They have not committed any crimes and they need

support and protection" -*Nadim Houry, Human Rights Watch.*

Some travelled to Syria and Iraq with young children in tow and many more had children living under ISIS. Children born under ISIS and raised as the next generation of its society and fighters represents a basic element of the group's social experiment. In February 2018, the Toronto Star reported that at least two Canadian women were being held in Kurdish temporary camps for suspected ISIS members in Northern Syria one of whom had given birth in custody after surrendering to Kurdish forces while the other had given birth in Syria.[77] The second woman was 8 months pregnant when Nadim Houry, the director of Human Rights Watch's terrorism and counterterrorism program, met with her at the camp. She initially travelled to Syria with her Canadian child.[78] Houry says almost all of the women in the camp "have more than one child who was born in [ISIS]-held territory in Iraq or Syria"[79] and without the proper documentation these children are effectively stateless. A large number of the children are under 5[80], due to the fact that most foreign women travelled to join ISIS around 2014 and their strongholds in Iraq and Syria were captured late in 2017. Whereas women typically do not receive training to use weapons or participate in a military capacity, children in the Islamic State are.

The children groomed and trained by ISIS are commonly referred to by the group as 'Cubs of the Caliphate'. The primary concern with regards to returnee children is twofold, the first being proving the identity of the child as the offspring of a Canadian foreign fighter and secondly how to address the experiences and trauma experienced by the child. Not all children will have been born in Syria or Iraq, as some women are known to have travelled with older Canadian-born children; however, many women will likely return with young children up to 5 years old as most Western girls and women travelled to ISIS-controlled territories starting in 2014. Given the significant number of British women and girls known to have travelled to join ISIS, the UK has also recently started to see many young women return with children. In January 2018, a 27-year old woman was arrested at Heathrow airport as she re-entered the UK with her child, aged under two-year-old.[81] Confronted with an influx of returnees, the UK is developing methods to address complicated questions about the identity of undocumented children returning with women. The London Metro Police has conducted DNA-testing on children to confirm their relationship with the young mothers; however, fewer than five of these cases have appeared in the UK so far.[82] No such case has been reported in Canada yet and there is no clear sign of a Canadian strategy for determining the identity of children born under ISIS to Canadian men or women.

As for some of the older children either orphaned, kidnapped or having traveled with parents, ISIS developed and carried out a relatively sophisticated and systematic method of indoctrination to train the next generation of ISIS fighters and leaders. One report found that ISIS "recruited and trained more than 2,000 boys between the ages of nine and fifteen" between 2014 and 2016.[83] Mia Bloom (2015) discusses six stages of institutionalized indoctrination of young boys and children: socialization, schooling, selection, subjugation, specialization, and stationing.

These stages involve witnessing and later participating in violence activities, weapons training, hardcore Salafi-jihadist ideological schooling, and intense military training with a long-term vision leading the model.[84] The purpose of including children in deep psychological indoctrination as early as possible is to prepare them as tomorrow's ISIS soldiers, dehumanizing those that do not follow the strict ISIS doctrine and to create a deep level of loyalty to the group and to one another. Like women, children also play information-gathering role as well as receiving training as spies, snipers and recruiters.[85] Although the training and long-term function of ISIS children differs from that of child soldiers in Africa, there may be more to learn about the reality of the children's experiences as 'Cubs of the Caliphate'. Propaganda videos and reports offer a glimpse into the extent of child indoctrination under ISIS. The grooming process must start early to develop and strengthen a military sense of brotherhood among the boys as they compete for glory and pledge loyalty to the group. These child soldiers both witness and are forced to commit atrocities against civilians. In one example, children are shown executing Syria soldiers in a 2015 video released by the group.[86] If and when any of these children return to Canada, interventions must be carried out in order to address the psychological trauma inflicted upon these children. Reintegration for children will need to include their Islamic re-education to unlearn the warped interpretation of Islam taught to them, one-on-one counseling and therapy programs informed by similar programs created for children returning from conflict zones as well as programs for child soldiers and for children exposed to gang violence. These children will likely have problems with socialization, "as they may lack empathy and suffer from attachment problems" among other issues.[87] Front-line practitioners will need to be properly trained and well informed on the types of trauma they will deal with.

As pre-existing and new actors fight for control of the region, and the void left by ISIS's defeat in Syria and Iraq, stateless children could become prime targets/new recruiting ground for other terrorist groups. In order to stop the cycle of radicalization and mitigate the ability of new extremist organizations to recruit young fighters, these children will need to be rescued and receive emotional and psychological support as well as a proper education to enable them to eventually lead "normal" and productive lives. Furthermore, children – unlike their parents – did not volunteer to travel to, join or support and participate in ISIS. Men and women foreign fighters from the West that traveled with young children are the ones responsible for exposing their child or children to extremist ideology, illegal activities and a dangerous environment. Although outside the scope of this paper, the government will need to establish a process to determine whether children are better off living with their parent(s), other close relatives such as grandparents or other immediate family members, or should be removed from the family and placed into care with children's services. In Canada, child protection services are provincially administered. This indicates that while the majority of deradicalization and reintegration initiatives should be managed at the local level, streamlined communication and partnership between local centers and the relevant provincial and federal departments will be imperative. Discussions should also be held at the federal level to determine the culpability of any minor that accompanied their parent(s) but continued to participate with the group after reaching the age of majority, if any such examples exist.

4.2   The Path Ahead

A 2016 UN report by the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee prescribes different methods for addressing the foreign fighter problem based on the size of the state, advising larger states to develop comprehensive and sophisticated strategy for inter-agency

coordination and data exchange and smaller states to utilize the efficiency of operational level information exchange. The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), a network of policymakers, scholars and civil society for the European Commission, published a manual for responding to the threat of foreign fighters for Member States in July 2017. The 102-page document offers a list of recommendations and in-depth research and analysis on risk-assessment and multiagency cooperation, prosecution and imprisonment, resocialization, and child returnees. It also addresses the cross-cutting issues of gender and communication and their importance when responding to returnees. For example, the manual recommends that Member States consider a specialized response for reintegrating female returnees alongside reintegration programs for male returnees, as well as taking into consideration their fear of losing their children to child protection services.[88] Through excellent use of infographics, this document provides quick facts and numbers, including broad classification of returning foreign fighters, their reasons for returning and key actions for Member States to consider. With the Canada Centre, the Canadian government is using the correct model for a state of its size; however, significant financial resources and consistent political will is going to be required for efforts on the ground to be successful. While an arm's length distance from local-level organizations and initiatives, the government can support local counter-radicalization organizations by working in tandem to ensure safe passage for returning women and children. This type of work and partnership will allow the government to know when foreign fighter families return, from where, and where they are in Canada, allowing for accurate and necessary data collection. In reality, many women may wish to return and bring their children to safety but are discouraged by the prospect of facing charges or being refused entry into the country. Others are afraid of the consequences if they are caught deserting the group, having undoubtedly witnessed the brutality

of the group. Women and children held in Kurdish temporary camp for 'foreign ISIS families' in legal limbo as the resource-strapped Kurds wait for countries to take responsibility for their citizens, to which only Indonesia and Russia have responded.[89] The issue is unlikely to disappear and leaving vulnerable Canadian women and children in the volatile and unpredictable region risks their lives while increasing the likelihood of continued violence and conflict. The government has faced significant challenges in accessing and providing consular assistance to Canadian citizens in Syria[90], but a directive issued from the Minister himself may help open up lines of communication with partner states to assist in contacting those trapped in Northern Syria or having travelled to Turkey.

Additionally, deradicalization programs should focus on removing the violent element of extremism rather that changing core beliefs and ideology. This aim is to support the reconstruction of a non-extremist identity that is compatible with Canadian society. The protection of freedom of thought and expression and freedom of religion as important Canadian values should be reiterated throughout efforts to support rebuilding a former ISIS member's identity. The lines between dangerous ideologies and freedom of religion sometimes overlap, or become too blurred to separate. An effective strategy aimed at re-introducing returnees to universally-held Canadian values without the pressure to revert to a Western mentality could be more effective than attempting to undo the damage left by their radicalization. If the individual seeks religious support, counter-messaging by local Muslim religious leaders aimed at re-educating as opposed to unlearning may also be effective, given the common ideological base. Regardless, local community and leaders should be involved at every stage to support returnees or their families and the affected local Muslim community.

Rebuilding strong social connections also require the support of family members, friends, and the Muslim and non-Muslim community as much as possible. Depending on the individual's specific needs, this could include cultural support, religious support, or any other type of support through which the individual can rediscover a sense of belonging. Empirical research shows the importance of establishing strong social relationship within "tight-knit, underground, mission-oriented radical groups,"[91] and it is very likely that women in ISIS, particularly foreign recruits, develop similar social bonds amongst each other. These relationships tie them to the group and to the sense of 'sisterhood', and their ability to develop new social relationships will be just as important to the reintegration process. The RAN Manual specifically recommends reaching out to potential returnees through family members as they are well placed to relay key information and counter narratives developed by ISIS to dissuade deserters.[92] Attempts to communicate information to ISIS members through family members, however, should be undertaken with caution. Their strategic positioning is extremely sensitive and families must not feel coerced to guarantee returnees fair trial and treatment upon return as it may lead to distrust, hostility and isolation in the case that returnees feel harshly treated by the state, media, and justice systems, and may complicate chances of deradicalization and successful reintegration. Once safely back in their home country and reunited with family members that are in contact with supporting NGOs, families must continue to receive the necessary support to assist returnees and their children, as the initial stages of re-entering the home society and dealing with potential psychological trauma will likely require constant supervision and a robust support network. Some counter-radicalization centers are in contact with an influential and supportive network of people and these centres should seek to build stronger ties with other associations, councils, and organizations such as the Muslim Association of Canada, active in 11 cities across Canada and

the Canadian Council of Imams. These groups and others like them provide access to other resources, a wealth of knowledge and community buy-in from Muslim communities, which is crucial to CVE efforts.

Public Safety Canada is currently working on the development and implementation of a National Strategy on counter radicalization. Access to relevant social services and other resources does not appear to be facilitated by the government. If this is the case, returnees may choose not to access these resources or may not know how, undermining the overall effectiveness of intervention and de-radicalization programs in Canada. The department has consulted key stakeholders from across Canada, including academics, leading organizations, and other subject matter experts, however consultations should also include meaningful engagement with and feedback from community leaders in the areas most affected by foreign fighters and returnees. The National Strategy should also thoroughly address women and child returnees, including desperately-needed research on the topic such as the impact of laying criminal charges on these women, the impact on child returnees, as well as the impact on returnee men, women and children in the case that children are forcibly removed and put into the charge of Child Services. Additionally, a group within the department responsible for connecting returnees and their families with the relevant organizations located in their city or closest to them will benefit both parties by providing returnees with key funding by the government to support them and put the department in contact with returnees and their families directly.

The long-term solution to countering this particular issue and violence and extremism in Canadian society more generally must involve the participation of everyday citizens. No meaningful change can occur while divisions and discrimination based on misinformation remains unchallenged. The perspective endorsing harsh punishments for returnees does not

encourage reintegration but rather risks more radicalization. The continued dehumanization and stigmatization of a group of citizens constitutes a subtler threat to national security and identity. Working backwards from the process of radicalization as discussed in section 1 and examining both push and pull factors leading to extremism highlights risk factors that can be minimized by working towards destigmatizing the Canadian Muslim diaspora, something prevention programs and policies should incorporate alongside programs aimed at Muslim youth and parents.

There is also the option of pursuing policies based on criminal justice-led reform. Although prosecution of known foreign fighters is challenging, the legal avenue provides an appealing balance between accountability and support. Existing programs in prisons include one-on-one counselling, access to education, vocational programs, and other resources. With the proper mechanisms in place, this could be an option for the government to consider. There is currently a healing program for incarcerated Aboriginal women, leading to the possibility to create a deradicalization and reintegration program through the prison in collaboration with counter-radicalization organizations. The risks associated with prison radicalization, however, should be considered carefully prior to moving forward with this direction.

5   Conclusion

Evidently, the radicalization of young Western women and the factors leading to their disengagement are complex and significant gaps in research on women and deradicalization still exist. Nations must prepare for the challenges of assisting disillusioned returnee women upon returning from engagement with ISIS. This task will require counselors and workers to have a deep understanding and knowledge of the situation to support reintegration, including a strong grasp of the factors leading toward radicalization discussed by Saltman and Smith (2005) as well as several other scholars that have built upon and provided alternative lenses for radicalization of

women. The development of policies and programs targeting returnee women require there to be substantial and useful research on the conditions that Western women faced in ISIS, whether they participated in exclusively traditional roles or had roles as activists and combat training or experience. Their intimate relationships with other women, with their husband and whether their husbands were martyred will be important to assess. Finally, the return of children, particularly toddlers and infants, will require a long-term strategy to ensure that child returnees receive the appropriate level of support and attention in order to mitigate risks of psychological trauma. The approach to children will have a heavy impact on resocialization efforts of women returnees as well. Without adequate research and data, government policies and programs cannot be effective.

One of the key factors in ensuring the success of reintegration involves rebuilding their identity as Canadians and encouraging legal, non-violent forms of activism. This will involve developing trust and new relationships with the community and support from family members. In the interest of Canadian democratic values, deradicalization should not focus on changing the individual's religious or political position, but tackle the criminal and/or violent components. It is equally important to address the initial push and pull factors leading to radicalization, such as a sense of belonging in the local community and as a member of the larger Canadian society. In the worst cases of discrimination, Muslims have been targeted in violent attacks, including the 2017 Quebec mosque shooting that claimed the lives of six men. Given the upward trend of Islamophobia in Canada, it is important to highlight the impact of positive community engagement following these events to prevent more Canadian youth from walking down the path of isolation, vulnerability and radicalization. Although challenging Islamophobia narratives in Canada and ending the stigmatization faced by Muslim Canadians will undoubtedly take time, it is an important part of preventing radicalization inadequately discussed in Canada. The

discomfort that Canadians experience in confronting issues of racism and islamophobia serves to remind us that it is time to start discussing them.

The process of the radicalization serves to highlight the challenges that lay ahead with deradicalization and counter-radicalization efforts. It is very likely that for most returnees these factors will no longer hold the same appeal as they did before they experienced the reality of life under ISIS rule. To ensure the development of the most robust counter-radicalization, deradicalization and reintegration initiatives, more research on the gender-specific needs and experiences and impacts of current policies on female returnees and children must be conducted. Existing programs must incorporate gender perspectives and be tailored to Canadian women returnees. Input from Canadian Muslim women in the development of the programs and the conversation on returnee women continues to be inadequate, despite its value. This will undoubtedly take time and resources, but the valuable knowledge available to policy makers and CVE centers will improve the country's response to the threat of returnees and facilitate reintegrate into their home society as possible.

Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for all states or returnees. Punitive measures range from revoking citizenship and preventing the return of foreign fighters to incarceration on terrorism-related charges, whereas rehabilitation and reintegration measures are typically developed and administered on a local level for low-risk offenders. In U.S and European cases, convicted individuals may be presented with the opportunity to attend deradicalization and reintegration programs as part of their sentencing or through special programs available to offenders; however, the Canadian government appears to be focusing on the reintegration method. For Canada to be successful in managing the return of ISIS members, more research will need to be done to provide accurate and transparent information on Canadian women and

the federal government must work in tandem with local level organizations to ensure that robust

exit programs address the individual needs of returnees and that low-risk returnees can easily

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