

Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
Human Rights Studies Master of Arts

**‘Deviant Women’: An Examination of the Fate of ISIS Women after the Caliphate and the
Deradicalization Efforts Available to Them**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2022

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between Western prejudices toward women who have left the West to join ISIS's caliphate and the lack of deradicalization programs developed to address the same women who have since defected from ISIS following the caliphate's collapse in 2019. While the factors influencing women's decisions to join ISIS have been extensively researched and debated by experts and academics, there is a dearth of research on the fate of women who have left ISIS and their potential for reintegration into the West, as there is for men in comparable circumstances. This thesis demonstrates the gap in this research and connects it to a clear lack of deradicalization programs tailored specifically to former ISIS women who were citizens of the West. Most importantly, although these women denounced their citizenship when joining ISIS, men are still able to access deradicalization programs even if they too have renounced their home nations. As a result, former ISIS women who are unable to reclaim their citizenship in the West face a slew of human rights violations, in refugee camps in Syria and Iraq where they are essentially left to die. This research demonstrates the critical importance of emphasizing that a person's 'right to citizenship' is inextricably linked to their ability to exercise their human rights and, thus, to be acknowledged as human.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would be completed without the assistance and support of my friends, family, and mentors. This thesis is on a topic that not only intrigues me, but is also largely unexplored. Women are frequently forgotten in the global landscape, and I wanted to highlight an example of forgotten women. It is critical to recognize that the women in question were members of a highly destructive organization, one that had a direct influence on my own life, but regardless of their acts, they need some form of guidance rather than being left in legal limbo. As such, I want to express my gratitude to my interviewees for assisting me in shedding light on this topic and providing tremendously insightful information.

Second, I'd like to express my gratitude to my family for supporting me throughout this process and providing me with an incredible support system. Without them, I would not have been able to do this. I'd also like to express my gratitude to my Columbia professors for motivating and supporting me to pursue my research topics. Despite the unorthodox nature of the topic, my professors, particularly those in my gender and terrorism classes, were quite encouraging. Additionally, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Mia Bloom for not only assisting me with contacting interview candidates, but also for answering questions, listening to my rants, and being there for me at all times. I am forever thankful for her mentorship throughout the last few months and for the relationship I have formed with her.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my outstanding adviser, Dr. Julie Rajan. Dr. Rajan was not only my biggest supporter but also a sounding board for all my thoughts during this process. I am incredibly honored and thankful to have her as an adviser, and without her, I am certain that my experience at Columbia would not have been as excellent and that my thesis would not have been possible. It is professors like her that not only keep students motivated but passionate to learn.

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Chapter 1: Theories, Movements, and Women

Patriarchal interpretations of ISIS women mark them as immoral women because they engage in the execution of violence, which is thought of as a privilege reserved for men. Additionally since ISIS women are Muslim women, Western nations engage in imperial Orientalist interpretations of ISIS women as sexually deviant and as harboring an agency that is threatening to Western societies. Both of these lenses impact the ability of ISIS women residing in camps to access their human rights.

Patriarchy

Negative projections of ISIS women are guided by patriarchy, which is a social system pervading almost all societies globally. Patriarchy is the bi-gendered system that privileges heterosexual men in all institutions, such as the judiciary; legislation; and in social roles.¹ The privileging of cis-gendered men depends on the subjugation of all other human beings in society, namely women. That subjugation is achieved not only by justifying violence against women, but also by the development and affirmation of epistemic violence against them. In the case of ISIS, women face barriers to health care and education as a result of ISIS's discriminatory practices.²

The consistent subjugation of women results in the development of a gendered hierarchy. That hierarchy is sustained by warranting the execution of a range of violence against women as a means of managing what they do in society. In ISIS's caliphate, the social value of women is based on their ability to reproduce children to assure the longevity of the caliphate. It is for this

¹ Charlotte Higgins, "The Age of Patriarchy: How an Unfashionable Idea Became a Rallying Cry for Feminism Today," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, June 22, 2018.

² Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Women Suffer Under ISIS," *Human Rights Watch*, April 5, 2016.

reason that they are recruited primarily to fulfil the social role of ISIS wives and are restricted to the home-space, which privileges ISIS masculinity.³

Orientalism

Since the Crusades, Muslims have been viewed as the 'other.' Consequently, Islam has been associated with danger and violence. This belief has persisted to the present day, manifesting itself in how society perceives terrorism and the Middle East., and in political tensions between Western nations and Muslim-dominated nations in the Global South.⁴ With this in mind, the 'East' is frequently portrayed as uncivilized and dangerous. While the 'West' is seen as safe and organized. The best illustration of this dichotomy is the concept of Orientalism.

According to Edward Said, Orientalist scholarship was used to advance imperialism and colonialism, resulting in the formation of stereotypical conceptions of Islam and the 'East.'⁵ Thus, Orientalism "developed a body of theory and practice" that facilitates the production of images of the Orient or the East that cater to European desires to manage and control people in non-European spaces.⁶ The East is thus portrayed as exotic, feminine, weak, and susceptible, to stress the superiority of the people in the West as rational, masculine, and powerful. Hence, the establishment of the Orient as the 'other' is important in order for the West to define and reinforce its own identity as the moral agent globally through the use of such a juxtaposition and assures that the East's culture is regarded as a distortion and accorded a status of inferiority.⁷

³ House Hearing, 114 Congress, "Women under ISIS Rule: From Brutality to Recruitment" *Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S Congress*, July 29, 2015.

⁴ The term 'Global South' refers to a politically useful classification of "spaces and peoples negatively impacted by modern capitalism globalization," not to a specific geographical place.

⁵ Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism, and the 'War on Terror': Representation, Discourse and Intervention in Global Politics," *Postcolonial Politics*, (2017): 1-157.

⁶ Rachel Osborne, "Orientalism," *Hamilton University* (blog), Accessed April 8, 2022.

⁷ Nasrullah Mambrol, "Analysis of Edward Said's Orientalism," *Literary Theory and Criticism* (blog), November 10, 2020.

Terrorism

At the moment, no commonly acknowledged definition of terrorism exists. At its root, terrorism instills fear in people globally; however, this fear presents itself in a variety of ways. Additionally, there is a distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ terrorism. These inconsistencies in how terrorism is defined has made it impossible to produce a universally accepted definition, but most would say that groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) are terrorist organizations. This is because, unlike previous groups, ISIS disturbs and targets every country worldwide. Its influence is not limited to a single country or ideology, but rather to all countries that oppose its worldview.

Hegemonic notions of terrorism are rooted in historic Western imperial perceptions of people of color, particularly residing in the Global South. Orientalism was utilized to fabricate a picture of the Arab as an enemy, not only politically, but also culturally and morally.⁸ It also reinforced the dichotomy between East and West that was influenced by the terrorist threat. When the George W. Bush (GWB) Administration announced the War on Terror (WOT) in 2001, the West was portrayed as safe and peaceful, while the Middle East became connected with violence and war. This emphasized Orientalist sentiments shown in the media, which contributed to the creation of a negative connotation and links with the East.⁹ These media broadcasts affected Western viewers' perceptions of Arabs and shaped their attitudes and feelings toward them. As a result, anything connected to Arabs was seen negatively.

The WOT's policies and sentiments targeted Arabs, and assessments of news media representations of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11 corroborate the prevalence of earlier Orientalist

⁸ Silke Schmidt, “(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim: Mediating Orientalism in Contemporary Arab American Life Writing,” *Transcript Verlag*, (2014): 137-189.

⁹ Schmidt, “(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim,” 150.

tropes inside the political frame.¹⁰ GWB's opening words during his WOT speech established significant binaries and distinctions between East and West, paving the path for a revival of Orientalism.¹¹ This clear connection between contemporary WOT discourse and century-old Orientalist binaries demonstrates the Orientalist framework's enduring influence.

As with Said's Orientalism, contemporary Orientalist discourse is defined by normative credentials, which pits the West as morally superior versus the inferior East. As such, Said's work serves as an excellent beginning point for establishing a critical lens for reading official U.S WOT depictions as discourse. It is precisely because of the persistence of Orientalist representations that GWB was able to talk of a 'them' and 'other' throughout his presidency after 9/11.¹²

Deviant Women

Women who stray from their culturally and situationally imposed gender standards are nearly always portrayed negatively in patriarchal societies. They are accused of being unfeminine in their conduct, and of being violent and/or aggressive.¹³ These patriarchal allegations projecting women as 'deviant' are meant to regulate women's behavior, and to re-situate them back into 'more normalized' social roles. Accordingly, the very existence of stereotypes of 'bad woman' are designed to reinforce the bi-gendered patriarchy which re-affirms heterosexual men's privilege.

¹⁰ Schmidt, "(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim," 163.

¹¹ Schmidt, "(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim," 165.

¹² Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism, and the 'War on Terror,'" 25.

¹³ Tiina Mäntymäki, Marinella Rodi-Risberg, Anna Foka, "Deviant Women Cultural, Linguistic and Literary Approaches to Narratives of Femininity," *Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften*; 1st edition, (2014): 1-235.

In patriarchy, women's social roles and therefore, social value is restricted to the home-space. Hence, women who abandoned the position of the housewife are classified as 'deviant.' The 'deviant,' also warrants projections of selfishness, acting in self-interest rather than for the 'good' of society.¹⁴ Qualifications of deviance necessitate social acknowledgement of immorality predicated upon a shared knowledge of norms and understanding of what constitutes 'a breach' of gender standards.¹⁵ Deviant women inhabit spaces of resistance, challenging the status quo and reclaiming their agency in the process. Narratives about deviant women are embedded into a broader societal narrative about gender. These are also circulated in various institutions central to the infrastructure of societies globally, including organized religion. For example, in Abrahamic traditions, women are portrayed as harbingers of doom.¹⁶

While these narratives remain ingrained in our society, women have begun to reject the status quo. For instance, women have been involved in political violence throughout history. Indeed, women's involvement in political violence has presented itself in a variety of ways, one of which is through joining rebel and terrorist groups. This was a surprise to many who regard women as weak and without agency.

Women in Rebel and Terrorist Groups

For decades, women have been involved in rebel organizations. By joining these organizations, women have defied the 'norm' which dictates how they should behave and act. Women's participation in rebel groups exemplifies how women defy social standards and assert their agency. According to research on revolutionary movements, armed groups actively recruit

¹⁴ Mäntymäki et al., "Deviant Women," 15.

¹⁵ Mäntymäki et al., "Deviant Women," 12.

¹⁶ Mäntymäki et al., "Deviant Women," 10.

women , and women help rebel activities when given the opportunity.¹⁷ Studies demonstrate the prevalence of women’s engagement in armed organizations throughout history: more than one-half of all groups contain women members. These statistics demonstrate that women may join these groups on their own volition.¹⁸

Though practically all rebel groups include gender-based divisions of labor, the actions and duties of female participants differ widely between organizations. This is because established gender norms in certain societies may have an influence on women's prospects both inside the group and in these endeavors.¹⁹ Thus, the positions of women in rebel organizations are likely to mirror the ingrained gender norms of the communities from which they emerge.

Women frequently desire to join armed groups and engage in combat activities despite the inherent dangers. As is the case with males, women may be driven to take high-risk group action by their dedication to political, social, or religious issues.²⁰ Although these factors continue to inspire women to join rebel organizations, radical interpretations of religious rhetoric has increasingly impacted women’s engagement particularly in international terrorist organizations. More precisely, the global expansion of Islamic fundamentalism has increased the need for women’s recruitment. In contrast to other rebel organizations, Islamist terrorists groups at the international level, namely Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State, aspire to re-organize society to reflect their interests and visual of Islam.²¹

¹⁷ Jakana L Thomas, Reed M Wood, “The social origins of female combatants,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue: Gendered Participation, Well-being, and Representations in Political Violence, (2018): 215-232.

¹⁸ Thomas et al., “The social origins of female combatants,” 216.

¹⁹ Thomas et al., “The social origins of female combatants,” 217.

²⁰ Jakana L Thomas, Reed M Wood, “Women on the frontline: Rebel group ideology and women's participation in violent rebellion,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (2017), pp. 31-46.

²¹ Thomas et al., “Women on the frontline,” 35.

Women's roles within Islamist rebel organizations often follow conventional gender hierarchies, with women assisting combatants in their duties as mothers and spouses.²² In the case of ISIS, patriarchal norms enforcing the roles of women as mothers' and wives' excludes them from holding combatant positions. The participation of women particularly in Islamist groups, illuminates a critical but under-discussed issue: the link between gender and terrorism and, more precisely, the history of women's involvement in terrorism.

Gender and Terrorism

Historical evidence underscores that women have been active participants in terrorism, but, their motivations for joining a terrorist organization have been based on patriarchal assumptions. It is assumed that men, must join terrorists groups to demonstrate their commitment to their cause. When it comes to female terrorists, women's motivations are frequently deemed to be coercive. It is for this reason that women terrorists are frequently portrayed as victims rather than perpetrators.²³

Today's terrorist organizations use a large number of female members who may command, plan, manage logistics, write or translate publications, supervise safety operations, and serve in intelligence, covert operations, and reconnaissance. Women are active participants in contemporary terrorism, although this fact is not sufficiently acknowledged.²⁴

For example, there is a widespread misconception that young Muslim women must be misled or brainwashed into joining ISIS. While this may be true for some women, this does not entail that all women have been coerced into joining. Similarly, others say that a woman can join

²² Thomas et al., "Women on the frontline," 35.

²³ Cyndi Banks, "Introduction: Women, Gender, and Terrorism: Gendering Terrorism," *Women and Criminal Justice*, (2019): 181-187.

²⁴ Christopher Harmon, Paula Holmes-Beer, "Women in Terrorist Undergrounds," *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, Vol.4, No. 4 (2014): 19-37.

the organization only if she is driven by romance or is persuaded against her will.²⁵ Both of these assumptions lead to the perpetuation of the stereotype that women are passive, incapable of independent thought, and unaware of their own agency.

This stereotype of women persists, particularly in Western media. The media's audiences are regularly presented with pictures of female terrorist agencies that are completely new to them. As a result, many Western citizens are bound to harbor anxieties about these women, all the more so given preconceived notions about Islam as 'dangerous.' Once again, Orientalism plays a role in how the West views Muslim women and the East. Furthermore, these stereotypes imply near-universal patterns for how civilizations regard women and violence.²⁶

Women are still portrayed in this manner because, according to social conventions, women give birth to life, not take it. Thus, when women commit acts of violence, there appears to be a process underway to explain or excuse the conduct on the grounds that it deviates from historically accepted female behavior. As a result, women terrorists are projected most commonly in three stereotypes in Western media: the Mother, the Monster, and the Whore.²⁷ Society and the media assign women to one of these three roles based on their conduct, and thus absolve women of responsibility and agency in their acts.

Within the three categories discussed, the mother role portrays women as soft and compassionate, and justifies the use of violence to defend their family. In the character of the monster, there is something fundamentally wrong or 'unbalanced' about women, that accounts

²⁵ United Nations Women, "Chapter 9: Countering Violent Extremism While Respecting the Rights and Autonomy of Women and their Communities," *Countering Violent Extremism Report*, (2015): 222-231.

²⁶ Rebecca Cruise, "Enough with the Stereotypes: Representations of Women in Terrorist Organizations," *Social Science Quarterly*, (2016): 33-43.

²⁷ Cruise, "Enough with the Stereotypes," 38.

for their violent behavior. Finally, in the whore role, women are manipulated by their sexual impulses and act out in order to satisfy them.²⁸

The Mother, Monster, and Whore categories represent an effort to rationalize women's presence and active political engagement in terrorist groups. Female terrorism is not a new phenomena and the increased involvement of women in terrorist acts reflects a shift in terrorist groups' strategic methods.²⁹ Furthermore, additional research should be conducted on the role of women in ISIS in order to ascertain their responsibilities within the organization and hence the extent of their involvement. Without more research, Western governments will be hesitant to reintegrate foreign women who joined ISIS.

²⁸ Cruise, "Enough with the Stereotypes," 38.

²⁹ Cruise, "Enough with the Stereotypes," 39.

Chapter 2: ISIS Women- Recruitment and Social Roles in the Caliphate

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or DAESH, sprang from the remains of Abu Musab al Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), in 2004.³⁰ The group remained largely inactive until 2011, when it used the escalating turmoil in Iraq and Syria to launch assaults and recruit new members. By 2013, the group had been named ISIS, and by 2014, its most prominent and now-deceased leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, had declared the formation of a caliphate, stretching from Syria, to Iraq. Following this expansion, ISIS renamed itself as the 'Islamic State.'³¹ By December 2017, even as ISIS had increased its assaults in Europe it had lost an estimated 95% of its territory, including Mosul (Iraq) and Raqqa (Syria).³² Finally, in 2019, the loss of Baghouz effectively terminated the caliphate's territorial claim.³³ Despite this loss, ISIS has spread globally in the hopes of resurrecting its caliphate.³⁴

ISIS and the Caliphate

ISIS distinguished itself from AQ by achieving a long-held objective of worldwide Islamists: the establishment of a caliphate by targeting not only the West but Arab states it regards as heretical thus purifying the world. This purification would allow for the creation of a global caliphate fashioned after the first Islamic State established by the Prophet Muhammed between 621- 632 AD.³⁵ ISIS sought to revive this caliphate in 2014 and accomplished this through the deployment of senior members to Iraq and Syria in order to infiltrate and absorb

³⁰ Wilson Center, "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State," *The Wilson Center*, October 28, 2019.

³¹ Center, "Timeline."

³² Center, "Timeline."

³³ Center, "Timeline."

³⁴ Josh Meyer, "ISIS is regrouping and expanding despite the death of its leader in US raid, experts say," *USA Today*, February 6, 2022.

³⁵ Britannica, "Caliphate," *Britannica*, Accessed April 8, 2022.

those communities into the caliphate. At the height of its territorial acquisitions, ISIS is reported to have governed over 41,000 square kilometers.³⁶ Not only did ISIS seize territory and people, but it also absorbed the state resources and bureaucracy of the spaces in which it expanded.

The support spread globally, incentivizing radicalized women, and men to join the group. While in the past experts have stressed distinctions between the motivations of women and men to join ISIS, there is more of a resonance between their motivations than there are distinctions. Radicalized women from all over the world were lured to the organization for the same reasons that men were: isolation in their spaces of residence, dealing with prejudice in Western nations; looking for adventure; and the allure of a seemingly ‘good’ cause in accordance with their radicalized views of Islam.³⁷

Additionally, some women, like men, may have been drawn to the prospect of leading a romanticized life in the caliphate. Women were drawn to becoming brides of jihadi fighters, or ‘jihadi brides,’ who would support their husbands.³⁸ The most prominent on Western anti-terrorism radars are the radicalized Islamist women who left their home countries in the West in 2014 to join the caliphate. By 2016, between 663 and 883 women were reported to have joined ISIS.³⁹ The increased number of Western women is a result of ISIS's recruitment efforts through social media, which have catered directly to the interests of Muslim women residing in Western nations who may be motivated to become radicalized by the factors mentioned previously (isolation, adventure, etc.).

³⁶ Martin Chulov, “The rise and fall of the Isis ‘caliphate’,” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, March 24, 2019.

³⁷ Jack McGinn, “Female Radicalisation: Why do Women join ISIS?,” *London School of Economics* (blog), August 15th, 2019.

³⁸ McGinn, “Female Radicalisation.”

³⁹ Kiriloi M. Ingram, “IS’s Appeal to Western Women: Policy Implications,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2017): 3-10.

For instance, ISIS has capitalized on projecting romanticized social roles for women in its English-language magazine *Dabiq*. These images stress that ‘good’ Muslims women should be weary of Western influence.⁴⁰ One strategy, it encourages, is to renounce the West and to support ISIS, a group of ‘True Believers.’ By portraying the West as a space where Islam is jeopardized, migrating (or completing ‘*hijrah*’) to the caliphate is portrayed as the only rational, safe, and ethically fair course of action for ‘true’ Muslim women.⁴¹ Moreover, *Dabiq* informs its readers that ISIS is aware of Muslim women residing in the West, their challenges, and their sentiments of alienation and persecution. It portrays the caliphate as the perfect moral, legal, and religious place for them.⁴² Western women are promised a feeling of purpose, belonging, and stability in life following their *hijrah*, which they will achieve by fulfilling gendered roles as ‘mothers’ and ‘wives.’ ISIS claims these roles are critical to the caliphate’s success.⁴³

Another motive for membership is that, having been socialized in a Western state, ISIS understands that some of their women recruits have been forced to choose between the ‘modern’ Western social ideals and preserving their families’ traditional Islamic views.⁴⁴ ISIS has skillfully exploited this situation by emphasizing that women who join ISIS will be free to live Islamic lives unburdened by Western rules. Second, ISIS leverages rising Islamophobia and the ban of religious practices in Western nations, by using this factors to recruit them to ISIS.⁴⁵

ISIS has recruited more members than any of its terrorist predecessors by romanticizing these roles in the caliphate. For example, although women are expected to fulfill the social

⁴⁰ Ingram, “IS’s Appeal to Western Women,” 5.

⁴¹ Ingram, “IS’s Appeal to Western Women,” 5.

⁴² Ingram, “IS’s Appeal to Western Women,” 6.

⁴³ Ingram, “IS’s Appeal to Western Women,” 6.

⁴⁴ Debangana Chatterjee, “Gendering ISIS and Mapping the Role of Women,” *Contemporary review of the Middle East*, Vol. 3, Issue. 2, (2016): 201-218.

⁴⁵ Chatterjee, “Gendering ISIS,” 210.

duties of mothers and wives in the caliphate, they are also giving birth to the next generation of jihadists, increasing ISIS' global reach.⁴⁶ All of these are vital roles in advancing the cause, and women's efforts should therefore not be underestimated.

Roles of Women in ISIS

Women's recruitment to ISIS from Western nations has increased significantly over the last several years, necessitating an inquiry into women's roles in the caliphate. ISIS, like many conservative organizations worldwide, believes that women belong in the home, hence the majority of ISIS women recruits adopt the responsibilities of mothers and spouses inside the caliphate. More critically, women who bear children in the caliphate are expected to raise their children in accordance with the group's ideological worldview, ensuring an increase of future ISIS leaders, fighters, and followers.⁴⁷

Upon their arrival in the caliphate, women are taken to an all-female safe house which acts as a matchmaking agency. There they are taught five disciplines: 1) first-aid instruction; 2) social media marketing; 3) Islamic law; 4) firearm and explosives instruction; and 5) how to create a family.⁴⁸ Apart from giving birth to and raising the next generation, their primary role is to support and care for their spouse and to provide him with comfort and security. Some women are given leeway to pursue only specific roles outside of the home, most notably as recruiters, if they are widowed or unmarried.⁴⁹ By working as recruiters, women are able to not only attract new women, but also generate ISIS propaganda and raise funds for the organization.

⁴⁶ Amanda Spencer, "The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State," *Journal of Strategic Security* Vol. 9, No. 3,(2016): 74-98.

⁴⁷ Gina Vale, "Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps," *International Center for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague*, (2019): 1-9.

⁴⁸ Spencer, "The Hidden Face of Terrorism," 79.

⁴⁹ Christina Chatzitheodorou, "The role of women in ISIS: From Wives and Mothers to Soldiers," *Strife* (blog), April 20, 2021.

Research reveals that ISIS depends heavily on Western female recruits to spearhead its social media campaigns on platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr, Kik, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Ask.FM in order to recruit additional Western women.⁵⁰ ISIS uses these social media platforms to specifically target women in Western nations who perceive themselves as outliers within their communities. Recruiters then target these women by responding to their personal disappointments and dissatisfactions with specific, enticing responses and by promising religious freedom, and improved living circumstances, in exchange for their allegiance to the caliphate.⁵¹ Recruiters may also assist women in traveling to the caliphate and through airports, security. Using social media, ISIS women have commemorated ISIS terrorist activities by emphasizing the importance of these attacks for the survival of a Muslim state. The promotion of these 'activities' can also serve as an extra recruiting tactic by fostering a similar sentiment for ISIS in women in Western nations.

Similarly, women who recruit for ISIS appeal to doctors, teachers, and others for assistance with women living in the caliphate, as women and men are separated within ISIS territory. This separation has developed sections dedicated to women's affairs and employed women in order to avoid mingling unrelated men and women. Women were permitted to fulfill other social roles and responsibilities in addition to that of mothers, wives, and recruiters, such as nurses, teachers, charity workers, and administrators.⁵² They assisted in registering and relocating overseas women, distributing aid, and establishing welfare institutions and

⁵⁰ Chatzitheodorou, "The role of women in ISIS."

⁵¹ Chatzitheodorou, "The role of women in ISIS."

⁵² Vale, "Women in Islamic State," 3.

orphanages. Additionally, if a woman is widowed or unmarried, she may be allocated low-level professional tasks outside the house that are expressly meant to assist the caliphate.⁵³

Selected women were also permitted to join units dedicated to moral policing, the most notable of which being the Al-Khansaa Brigade. ISIS established the Brigade in 2014 with the purpose of imposing ISIS' morals and beliefs on women living in the caliphate. Women in the Brigade were outfitted with AK-47s and other weapons and were given a mandate to punish women who broke the rules in the spaces of the caliphate.⁵⁴ Research on demographics of the Brigade is inconsistent and sparse, the nationalities of the participants are unknown; however, it can be generalized that the Brigade was comprised of women between the ages of 18 to 25. The Brigade was largely located in Raqqa, but given ISIS's territorial loss, it is impossible to tell what happened to the women who were part of it and where they are now.⁵⁵

As noted, women's role in ISIS society was in the house; yet, it has been suggested that some women have taken on the role of combatants. ISIS initially maintained that women might only join in actual physical battle “if the enemy is attacking her country, the men are not strong enough to protect it, and the ulama have given a fatwa for it”.⁵⁶ ISIS authorized women to engage in acts of violence only within the context of a Defensive Jihad, while acknowledging that such circumstances had not yet been reached. This viewpoint, however, shifted in 2017 when ISIS published an Arabic-language editorial in *Naba* headlined "Women's Responsibility

⁵³ Spencer, “The Hidden Face of Terrorism,” 83.

⁵⁴ Spencer, “The Hidden Face of Terrorism,” 83.

⁵⁵ Spencer, “The Hidden Face of Terrorism,” 84.

⁵⁶ Charlie Winter, “ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention,” *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, (2018): 3-14.

to Wage Jihad against the Enemy," in which the author declared that women were now required to wage *jihad* on behalf of the caliphate.⁵⁷

ISIS justified this shift in ideology by citing the example of women who fought during the Prophet Mohammad's lifetime and urging female sympathizers to follow in their footsteps. The group later published its first official video footage featuring a female combatant in 2018, which appeared to show a *niqab*-clad combatant.⁵⁸ Since the video footage was blurry, it is not clear whether the videos were indeed of ISIS women, but, the document's distribution in connection with the video did signal that ISIS may be more amenable to using women in combat roles in the future. The range of roles that women have assumed within the caliphate suggests that women have to some degree been able to participate in the inner workings of the group.⁵⁹ As such, it is difficult to assess the degree of threat they pose to the global community.

As a result, their treatment by their home countries in the West and the international community has been a source of contention since the caliphate's fall in 2019. For instance, Western nations have deradicalization programs aimed at rehabilitating former ISIS men who formerly resided in the West. However, comparable deradicalization initiatives do not exist for radicalized ISIS women who have abandoned the group and wish to return to home. As a consequence, former ISIS women who have rejected ISIS do not have the same choice as former ISIS males to return to and be reintegrated. Instead, ISIS women have been confined to camps in Iraq and Syria, where they endure a slew of human rights violations.

⁵⁷ Winter, "ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention," 10.

⁵⁸ Winter, "ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention," 11.

⁵⁹ Spencer, "The Hidden Face of Terrorism," 97.

Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

An understanding of the human rights of former ISIS members, particularly women, and how to account for and demand accountability for the human rights violations they are subjected to can be formed by integrating information from a variety of sources, including academics, the UN system, governments, and organizing it around themes of gender; women's roles within ISIS; post-ISIS life and deradicalization.

Gender

Women and girls⁶⁰ account for roughly one-half of the world's population, yet they have historically faced discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV).⁶¹ Women's agency management is synonymous with gender assignment in patriarchy, thus, the continuous and pervasive practice of GBV against women is intended to regulate their agency within patriarchy.⁶² This is also true in contexts relating to terrorism, which are generally recognized as being dominated by men. Gentry believes that, until recently, women's participation in political violence was regarded as unique by Western culture.⁶³ However, women, like men, have utilized violence to address the political environment in which they live.

Therefore, the primary focus of investigation into women rebels/terrorists should not be on speculations about why women have engaged in political violence, but on how they have perpetrated that violence in the face of patriarchal challenges. Treating 'women terrorists' as a

⁶⁰ Women and girls in this paper will reference cis-gender identities.

⁶¹ Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 3, No. ½, (1975): 1-10.

⁶² Caron E. Gentry, "Handbook on Gender and War- Chapter 7: Gender and Terrorism," *Edward Elgar Publishing*, (2016): 146-166.

⁶³ Gentry, "Gender and Terrorism," 158.

novel issue reflects the biases that academics, policymakers, and the media have in their reliance on gender ideals.⁶⁴ Additionally, it highlights Western media's adherence to patriarchal, Orientalized projections of women engaging in violent movements.⁶⁵

Furthermore, despite the evolving and varied roles of women in terrorist groups, Phelan observes that gender preconceptions continue to impact (and, in some cases, impede) a more comprehensive understanding of how motivations, radicalization, and participation in terrorist activities might diverge.⁶⁶ Likewise, Phelan contends that approaching terrorism via a gendered lens enables individuals to comprehend not only how women are radicalized, but also what motivates their post-radicalization life.⁶⁷

Gender neutrality, which ignores how terrorism and counterterrorism measures treat and, therefore, impact women and men by assuming they share the same life experiences, is problematic. It is problematic because, as Phelan argues, it may emphasize the relevance of men to terrorism and, thus, reflects the assumption that only men's experiences with terrorism are relevant to address and examine.⁶⁸ An 'objective' gender-neutral approach would most likely reinforce the prejudices and ideas of males, which are dominant in patriarchy.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) produced a report in 2019 examining the relationship between gender and the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF).⁶⁹ The study discovered that FTFs, particularly women, return to their Western nations at a far lower rate than men and children. Only 4% of the 7,366 confirmed FTF returnees from ISIS were women, and of

⁶⁴ Gentry, "Gender and Terrorism," 158.

⁶⁵ Gentry, "Gender and Terrorism," 158.

⁶⁶ Alexandra Phelan, "Special Issue Introduction for Terrorism, Gender and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, (2020): 1-10.

⁶⁷ Phelan, "Special Issue Introduction for Terrorism," 2.

⁶⁸ Phelan, "Special Issue Introduction for Terrorism," 5.

⁶⁹ UNSC *Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters*, CTED Trends Report (2019): 1-30.

that number, 5% accounted for women who had traveled to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS.⁷⁰ The causes for women's lower rate of return are unknown, however, numerous factors are thought to contribute to this. For instance, the fact that fewer ISIS-affiliated women returned to their home countries may be explained by the fact that some of these women 'voluntarily' burned their passports upon their arrival in the caliphate to demonstrate their allegiance to ISIS. Conversely, women residing in the caliphate were forbidden to travel without a male guardian making escaping from the caliphate more difficult.⁷¹

The UN report notes that how women FTF are treated has significant ramifications for the development of prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies, as well as long-term peacebuilding in the region.⁷² For example, women who join ISIS frequently encounter obstacles in reintegrating into their old communities. Additionally, the family members of ISIS fighters who are acquitted by a court may be penalized through administrative processes that deny ISIS-affiliated individuals' access to critical social services and benefits.⁷³

Women's Motivations to Join

There's no single motive for a woman to join a terrorist organization, however, Bloom summarizes that women's involvement in terrorism can be motivated by the five R's: Revenge, Redemption, Relationship, Respect, and Rape.⁷⁴ Revenge is a powerful incentive for women, especially for those seeking vengeance for the death of a loved one. Redemption is another reason why women may seek membership in these groups. Bloom suggests that some women involved in terrorism may have a shameful past such that their involvement in terrorism will

⁷⁰ United Nations Security Council, *Gender Dimensions*, 8.

⁷¹ United Nations Security Council, *Gender Dimensions*, 8.

⁷² United Nations Security Council, *Gender Dimensions*, 10.

⁷³ United Nations Security Council, *Gender Dimensions*, 10.

⁷⁴ Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," *Gender Issues*, No. 28 (2011), pp. 1-21.

provide an opportunity to erase.⁷⁵ For instance, if a woman's social position has declined for a variety of reasons, she may gravitate toward these organizations as a means of reclaiming her dignity.

Furthermore, Bloom argues that being related to a current member of a terrorist movement is one of the best predictors of whether a woman will engage in terrorist activity.⁷⁶ As a result, family bonds are one of the strongest motivators for women and contribute to the establishment of a network of 'family' connections involved in terrorism. Another motivating component, is the concept of respect.⁷⁷ Earning the respect of one's peers within a movement can entice women into violence and build a sense of higher purpose in them, even if that purpose is becoming a martyr. Therefore, being a 'martyr' may elevate them to 'hero status,' resulting in more respect and possibly inspiring other women and to follow suit.

Finally, Bloom raises the role played by rape.⁷⁸ In many of patriarchal societies, a woman who is raped is blamed for having violated the honor code of the society. These women are victims not only of the conflict, but of their assailants and the larger society that perceives women who have been sexually violated as 'damaged goods.' As a result, some women may decide to join the organization *in lieu* of being stoned (the traditional punishment for honor code violations). It is important to remember that the Rs are ideal types and not mutually exclusive.

Recruitment Strategies from Men-Led Rebel Groups

Social media is one of the most effective recruitment tools ISIS employs to recruit Muslim women. According to Peresin, social media advertising for the purposes of recruitment

⁷⁵ Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," 5.

⁷⁶ Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," 7.

⁷⁷ Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," 10.

⁷⁸ Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," 16.

is primarily carried out by women who have already joined and pledge their allegiance to ISIS.⁷⁹ This type of marketing is conducted in multiple languages in order to gain visibility on a range of social media platforms so as to recruit the greatest number of women.⁸⁰ These platforms enable supporters to participate in the creation and dissemination of an narrative appealing to would-be recruits in order to entice individuals interested in an active role inside the organization. Peresin further argues that social media promoters publish official propaganda generated by the group in order to promote their philosophy and personal experiences as testimony to the happiness that joining ISIS would provide.⁸¹ By displaying their daily routines, promoters create a positive image of life for women under ISIS's authority, which is likely to attract women and encourage them to migrate.

Similarly, Huey et al. view social media as one of the most effective recruitment tools for attracting women. They suggest that in general online recruiters for terrorist groups are women who have already joined the movement.⁸² Recruiters will publish useful information about completing the journey successfully and will even teach young girls how to obtain finances and services to assist in their migration without parental knowledge through a direct messaging system.⁸³

Leaving ISIS

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to lay out the basic principles of human rights. The

⁷⁹ Anita Peresin, "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2015), pp. 21-38.

⁸⁰ Peresin, "Fatal Attraction," 21.

⁸¹ Peresin, "Fatal Attraction," 25.

⁸² Laura Huey, Rachel Inch & Hillary Peladeau, "@ me if you need shoutout: Exploring Women's Roles in Islamic State Twitter Networks," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2019), pp. 445-463.

⁸³ Huey et al, "@ me if you need shoutout," 447.

UDHR's Articles 13 and 15 both acknowledge the right to freedom of movement and the right to nationality for all human beings. Additionally, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) founded in 1966 reiterates the right to freedom of movement for all.⁸⁴

However, the looming threat of terrorism, has been identified as a constraint on the scope of this right and, thus, a source of contention, particularly given the absence of a UN convention on terrorism. Hare-Osifchin examines the human rights of individuals deemed terrorists by the international community. She focuses on women who have been labeled terrorists by their home countries in the West and are now striving to return following time spent in jihadist movements overseas. She also argues that once women enter these organizations, preconceived assumptions about women's roles and responsibilities may result in disillusionment, prompting many to leave. Furthermore, Hare-Osifchin argues that women in these circumstances regularly suffer miscarriages, child deaths, and widowhood, all of which contribute to their desire to return to their Western homes.⁸⁵

Western nations such as France, the UK, and the U.S have received re-entry petitions from women and girls who had been citizens of their nations but who had left their country to migrate to the caliphate. Many countries, however, have rejected readmission and in some cases even revoked citizenship. For instance, Hare-Osifchin introduces the case of Hoda Muthana, a New Jersey native and daughter of a former Yemeni diplomat who left her family in Alabama at the age of twenty to join ISIS.⁸⁶ She married twice during her time in the caliphate and now lives in an IDP camp with her two-year-old daughter. When she applied to reenter the U.S, since she

⁸⁴ Casey Hare-Osifchin, "The Right of Return: The ISIS Bride," *American University National Security Law Brief*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2021), pp. 93-111.

⁸⁵ Hare-Osifchin, "The Right of Return," 94.

⁸⁶ Hare-Osifchin, "The Right of Return," 96.

publicly burned her passport, the Trump administration rejected her request for a new passport and refused to allow her to return, alleging that she was not actually an American citizen.⁸⁷

While there is no legal reason to deny Muthana and other similarly situated women the right to reenter, both the Trump administration and the Biden administration might consider Mutahna too great a risk.

Articles 13 and 15 of the UDHR declare that "(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within each state's borders, and (2) everyone has the freedom to leave and return to any country, even his own."⁸⁸ These articles express a belief in an inherent right to mobility. Countries who are signatories to this agreement and deny their nationals entrance risk violating the UDHR. These clauses within the articles do not exclude someone from being prosecuted for their acts; rather, they affirm that it is their countries' responsibility to allow them to return and not to deprive them of citizenship. Hare-Osifichin finds that unless these women commit significant crimes against their home countries, they should be recognized as citizens and thus have the same rights as any other citizen.⁸⁹ In essence, they should not be barred re-entry into the country after defecting from ISIS.

⁸⁷ Hare-Osifichin, "The Right of Return," 96.

⁸⁸ Hare-Osifichin, "The Right of Return," 97.

⁸⁹ Hare-Osifichin, "The Right of Return," 108.

Chapter 4: Methodology

. My study veers on the side of qualitative research as guided by the information I gathered from interviewing experts in the areas of deradicalization, and terrorism. At first, 25 individuals were approached about participating in the study. Only eight of the twenty-five individuals contacted responded. Four of the eight respondents agreed to an interview. The four individuals who responded but did not participate in the interviews did so for two reasons: 1) they had ceased conducting research on ISIS women and were concentrating their efforts on other areas; and/or 2) they lacked the time necessary to participate in the study.

The four individuals who took part in the study have all conducted research on terrorism, namely ISIS and women. However, one participant requested anonymity throughout the writing of my study and also requested a transcript prior to any research being utilized. Another accepted to be interviewed on the condition that they would only answer questions about an article they had written. That participant's interview was not used for the thesis. Additionally, a third participant in the research later requested that specific material be omitted from the transcript owing to a potential conflict of interest. As a result, three of the four individuals interviewed had terms that were required to be met in order for the interview to take place, whereas just one individual did not have a condition.

Data Collection

Given the intricacy of this subject, I based the majority of my analysis on academic journals, UN and other international agency reports, and news articles. I also reviewed media publications to ensure that the information provided in these pieces was up to date due to the novelty of the topic and the gaps in academic research. Although media articles were necessary

to complete my research, I was aware of the media's potential biases. To address these biases, I examined only news articles from reputable, well-known news organizations.

For academic journals, I ensured that a diverse range of scholars of various ages, genders, and races were included to guarantee that bias was eradicated. For UN and other publications, I examined how the research was conducted to verify that the findings were accurate, current, and reliable. Finally, for the United Nations Human Rights Articles, I consulted the UDHR and selected those articles that most closely aligned with my research.

Interviewees: Information and Recruitment

For this research I sought to interview 25 individuals who had knowledge about women in terrorist groups. Initially, I intended to interview individuals from many parts of society, including academics, government officials, lawyers, and activists, as well as previous male terrorists who had attended deradicalization programs. This proved to be much more difficult than anticipated, as the majority of the non-academic or government personnel I desired to contact were incredibly difficult to locate. As a result, I gathered material only from academics and former U.S government officials.

Only eight out of twenty-five individuals responded, and only four of those eight respondents agreed to be interviewed. Three of the four who consented to participate were currently in academia, while one had prior experience working in the U.S government's counterterrorism sector. The former U.S government official wanted to remain anonymous throughout the research. To recruit individuals, I tried using the snowball sampling technique. Given the low response rate, the strategy was not as effective as initially believed. A recruiting email was issued to all potential participants to ascertain their interest in being interviewed.

All participants held graduate degrees: a PhD or Master's degree . One individual possesses a doctorate in social sciences, another in war studies, and the final one holds a doctorate in communication. Finally, the last interviewee holds a master's degree in government. The three individuals with PhDs are mostly employed by colleges in the U.S or the UK, whereas the individual with an M.A. formerly worked for the U.S government.

For those who showed an interest, I emailed them a consent form to complete prior to the interview, indicating that they may remain anonymous. It is also important to highlight that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the process. Additionally, individuals could opt to withhold information if necessary and decline to answer questions.

The semi-structured interviews occurred in April 2022. All interviews were done through Zoom and were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and analyzed by a transcript service prior to being written up in this study. The interviews were conducted entirely in the English language. Interviews lasted between half an hour to an hour and 45 minutes. I utilized semi-structured interviews because they provide more leeway for asking follow-up questions in response to the participants' replies. All interviews were conducted with the consent of the participants, including the one who requested anonymity.

Challenges and limitations

Although the sample size was intended to be larger, I was only able to conduct four interviews and I was also unable to conduct interviews with people who had participated in deradicalization programs, which was one of my main hopes. Overall, this demonstrates the importance of conducting research focused on the consequences of former ISIS women's inability to reintegrate back into the West. Likewise, my research tries to understand why their

home nations have chosen to abandon these women rather than implement programs or policies for their reintegration.

Chapter 5: ISIS Women after the Caliphate

Western governments have made no attempt to locate ISIS who wish to return home. Equally troubling is the fact that although these Western governments have invested efforts and resources on deradicalization programs to reintegrate and repatriate ISIS males who have renounced ISIS, no comparable programs have been devised for former ISIS women.⁹⁰

Clearly, just as there are ISIS males seeking reintegration into their Western homelands, there are certainly ISIS women who wish to return to their Western homes following the caliphate's collapse. As with ISIS males, ISIS women have been privy to valuable intelligence that might prove critical to the West's counter-terrorism activities against ISIS. This lack of research and the reluctance to even seek out these women is quite revealing. This disparity in treatment between ISIS men and women implies that states have made a conscious decision to avoid dealing with ISIS women.

Today, a substantial number of women and children who were once members of the caliphate are settling in Kurdish-run camps in Syria, Iraq and Libya since the fall of the caliphate in 2019.⁹¹ While the majority of camp inhabitants have defected from ISIS, some women have confessed their desire to continue being active members of ISIS. This section, will analyze the available information regarding the life of ISIS women in these camps. Finally, it will examine how Western perceptions of ISIS women may misinterpret these women's behavior based on Western fears.

⁹⁰ Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, Christopher Boucek, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," *RAND National Security Research Division* (2010): 5-244.

⁹¹ Gina Vale, "Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague*, (2019): 1-9.

The Camps

Al-Hol is the largest of three detention centers in northeastern Syria operated by the Kurdish-led administration. The camp was created in 1991 with a population of roughly 9,000, but grew to more than 72,000 with the final collapse of the Islamic State's nearby hold-outs.⁹² The increased population has placed a strain on the camp's resources, resulting in overcrowding and lengthy lineups for food, fuel, and drinking water.

Moreover, around 12,000 residents of al-Hol are foreign women, thought to be affiliated with ISIS and originating from a variety of nations, including France, Germany, the U.S, and the UK.⁹³ Unclaimed by their nations, they have been housed in a separate sector gated off within the camp known as the "Annex." The Annex is closely guarded, as the women who live there are deemed a larger security risk, and hence subject to stricter limitations within the camp. Among these limits are a policy prohibiting the use of cell phones and limiting access to markets for food and other commodities.⁹⁴ Furthermore, many of the injured in al-Hol are ISIS women and their children born of ISIS men and some women are so ill that they are unable to stand and have received no medical attention most likely because of their connection to ISIS.

In Hassan Sham in Iraq, the majority of the camp's 6,000 occupants are the wives and children of ISIS combatants, and they, like those in al-Hol, are living a life in the camp in limbo. Residents of the camps have nowhere to go if the camps close and many see themselves as outcasts of the global community.⁹⁵ Some people have lived in the camp for up to five years, and in that time have continued to be confronted with rising health and educational challenges. At the

⁹² Ben Hubbard, "In a Crowded Syria Tent Camp, the Women and Children of ISIS Wait in Limbo," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2019.

⁹³ Vale, "Women in Islamic State," 7.

⁹⁴ Vale, "Women in Islamic State," 7.

⁹⁵ Jason Beaubien, "A life in limbo for the wives and children of ISIS fighters," *National Public Radio*, March 15, 2022.

camp, the only help available to these women is a monthly stipend of \$12 from the World Food Program, which is insufficient to support whole families. As a result, women have begun digging up roots for food and have tried selling any possessions they might have to earn additional money. Moreover, money for food, education, and healthcare has decreased. For instance, the camp has only one health clinic, which serves 500 people every week. However, the donor that funded the clinic declared that it is ending its contract, denying thousands of people access to potentially lifesaving treatment and care.⁹⁶ Although it has not been publicly confirmed, camp administrators suspect that financing has been discontinued due to the significant number of ISIS women residing in the camp.

A further challenge presented is the fact that many camp residents who have been associated with ISIS lack identification. Approximately 40% of camp inhabitants, including adults and children, do not have identification cards or papers. This prevents children from attending schools, located outside the camps, and adults from passing through security checkpoints on the routes leading into and out of Hassan Sham to see a doctor.⁹⁷

Likewise, some women may have outstanding arrest warrants, preventing them from leaving the camps to seek medical care or qualify for food stipends. Residents of the Hassan Sham camp claim that the lingering stigma associated with ISIS has made it far more difficult for them to live comfortably in the camp. This reputation has also had an effect on how guards treat individuals, with some stories claiming that armed guards used torture measures to punish people.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Beaubien, "A life in limbo."

⁹⁷ Beaubien, "A life in limbo."

⁹⁸ Beaubien, "A life in limbo."

Reading the Agency of ISIS Women in the Camps

Camp life has mostly relegated women's responsibilities to the domestic sphere, and having lost its 'caliphate,' ISIS is philosophically and physically incapable of supporting female militancy.⁹⁹ Thus, inside the camps, women's roles have shifted back to child care. Women are encouraged to maintain their support for ISIS and to continue preaching its ideology to their children. For instance, a video emerged of a group of children gathered around a homemade ISIS flag erected from a lamppost in al-Hol.¹⁰⁰ The video surfaced on news platforms worldwide, however, it is unclear who released the video. Even after the caliphate has fallen, ISIS continues to encourage ISIS women in the camps to embrace and promote its ideology to their children.

Furthermore, renouncing support for ISIS and making any non-ISIS connections, such as communicating to humanitarian workers or media, are considered violations of ISIS religious law.¹⁰¹ Consequently, despite the lack of ISIS men in these same camps, pro-ISIS women have continued to enforce ISIS's rules there. This is most clear in the fact that ISIS women have begun policing other residents' appearance and behavior in the manner of the *hisbah*, or moral police, in the spaces of the caliphate. This policing has been most notable amongst women formerly associated with ISIS.¹⁰² For example, physical punishment is meted out to anyone who is thought to be dressed improperly. As per Gina Vale's interview:

“Some of these women are punishing other women for not dressing in in line with ISIS strictures. By upholding these ideals even now, they are punishing women who are in contact with a humanitarian organizations, or legal representation, or if they renounce support for the group. In some cases, the punishment is physical, and they've burned tents

⁹⁹ Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 6

¹⁰⁰ Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 6.

¹⁰¹ Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 6.

¹⁰² Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 6.

down, there's also been knife attacks, and several women have actually been murdered.”¹⁰³

Baghouz women are especially known to replicate ISIS's values and judicial methods by designating anyone who betrays the group as 'apostates,' a crime punishable by death in their view.¹⁰⁴ However, because much of the violence occurs at night, it is difficult to ascertain the scale of the violence.

In order to raise awareness about their own insecurity in the camps and how this fear is undermining their capacity to remain 'true' to ISIS, a group of ISIS women have created online campaigns. Although the exact number of women participating in these campaigns is hard to gauge, the most recent campaign began in June 2019 with the release of videos and letters on online social media platforms in Arabic, German, and English under the title 'Justice for Sisters' by a group of ISIS women claiming to be held against their will in al-Hol.¹⁰⁵ In the video, the women spoke about the insecurity they were facing in the camps and stated that they were being forced to cohabit with 'infidels' (non-ISIS men and women). The same campaign also highlighted food, water, and energy shortages, as well as insufficient healthcare and sanitation standards. Gina Vale and Ayse Lokmanoglu touched upon these campaigns in their interview.

Gina Vale: “There have been other cases where women have launched media campaigns from these camps, and have spoken about the poor sanitation and conditions that they are living in.”¹⁰⁶

Ayse Lokmanoglu: “There are fundraising campaigns from ISIS sympathizers to get these women beds, food, clothing, etc., because the conditions are so bad.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Alexia Cervello, “Gina Vale Zoom Thesis Interview,” April 1, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 7.

¹⁰⁵ Vale, “Women in Islamic State,” 7.

¹⁰⁶ Alexia Cervello, “Gina Vale Zoom Thesis Interview,” April 1, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Alexia Cervello, “Ayse Lokmanoglu: Zoom Thesis Interview,” April 3, 2022.

Both academics' remarks indicate that ISIS women continue to utilize social media to advocate for the group and its members. Although campaigns like these have been shut down, their existence demonstrates the role that women may play in the camps while also indicating that, despite the caliphate's land being dissolved, ISIS retains control over the lives of these women.

Moving Forward

Given the fact that the poor quality of life in Syrian and Iraqi camps was only recently brought to public attention, there has been little political effort to address it. Few nations have recognized these individuals' appalling living conditions, and foreign governments throughout the world are cautious to accept them as refugees because of the possible danger to national security they may pose.¹⁰⁸ This leaves hundreds of women and children stuck, nationless, and destitute in a country where they may not speak the language fluently. Further, inaction might result in an overburdening of local authorities' legal and custody resources, which raises the likelihood of human rights violations, and creates the possibility of greater radicalization of women.¹⁰⁹ As such, repatriation must be considered by governments when implementing any strategy aimed at this group of women.

Western nations may be fearful about reintegrating former ISIS women into their societies as a result of the notion that ISIS retains control over these women even after they leave the caliphate. There is always the possibility for ISIS women to continue to support ISIS in any setting, even if they have publicly renounced ISIS. Western nations may thus regard these

¹⁰⁸ Micaela Rodriguez, "The Women and Children of ISIS," *Harvard Model Congress-Harvard University* (2020): 1-12.

¹⁰⁹ Joana Cook, Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (2018): 3-59.

women as women who have transgressed the boundaries of normalized female gender norms and as such they should not be reintegrated back into Western society.

It is exceedingly difficult to determine the genuine danger these women pose to society without first doing a full examination of women's roles and the ways in which those roles may constitute a threat. To estimate the danger, monitoring these people would be necessary; however, this would involve large government resources, which many countries are unwilling to devote. As a result, governments find it simpler to keep these women at a safe distance within the camps.¹¹⁰ That being said, abandoning them entails a number of hazards, including increased radicalization and human rights violations. The longer these women linger in the camps without access to rehabilitation or justice, the more likely they will become re-radicalized.

Additionally, the absence of formal interviews with ISIS women in these camps and the explicit refusal to engage with ISIS women in deradicalization programs have hampered the collection of information regarding their circumstances following the caliphate's fall. They have been compelled to live in abhorrently challenging conditions and to deal with human rights violations that jeopardize their security. Leaving these women in camps and preventing their reintegration into their own countries is extremely dangerous. Without a doubt, there are women in these camps who are devoted to ISIS, but there are other women who wish to leave. Leaving the latter behind would just raise the danger of re-radicalization.

All of these points underscore that ISIS women should be repatriated to their countries of origin to face charges, and if found guilty, to be monitored, and to receive rehabilitation.

However, it is important that these women and their children have a community to return to in

¹¹⁰ Khalil, "Behind the veil," 17.

order to perform a successful repatriation and reintegration program.¹¹¹ Before embarking on any reintegration initiatives, governments must identify and communicate with possible community partners. This is critical to the success of any reintegration attempts. While prosecutions may be challenging given the difficulties of getting sufficient admissible evidence, they are preferable than simply leaving the women in camps.

Assumptions about women and violence, as well as a misunderstanding of women's responsibilities in *jihad*, may prevent many of these women from being held accountable for their conduct. While society believes that all women who join ISIS are brainwashed, many, particularly foreign women, join the group on their own free will. Their reasons are political, religious, and ideological, and their support for the Islamic State is the same as men's.¹¹² To facilitate prosecutions and punishment, the definition of participation must be extended to encompass the whole contribution of women in the group. By broadening the term, all female positions would be viewed as aiding ISIS, perhaps making prosecution and sentencing easier. Rehabilitation is another topic that governments should consider. Women "tend to receive less rehabilitation and reintegration help," according to a recent UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate Trends Report.¹¹³ Women's deradicalization initiatives must be adjusted to recognize their changing position in *jihad*. This represents a fundamental change in the way women are perceived in the contexts of deradicalization, rehabilitation, and counterterrorism activities more broadly.

The detention of thousands of arrested ISIS members has created one of the most challenging post-war issues in recent history. The local government is unable to hold these

¹¹¹ Khalil, "Behind the veil," 18.

¹¹² Khalil, "Behind the veil," 19.

¹¹³ Khalil, "Behind the veil," 19.

individuals forever due to a lack of funding and staff. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that relatively few women have any kind of identification, making it more difficult for governments to intercede on their behalf.¹¹⁴ Almost no state, however, is ready to take them as refugees. Women can continue to play a vital part in the organization in the future, contributing to the ideology's survival, passing it on to the next generation, recruiting new members, helping ISIS in other ways such as fundraising, or inflicting violence on the group's behalf. As a result, we cannot ignore or abandon these women within the camps and greater efforts should be made to reintegrate women into society via deradicalization initiatives.

¹¹⁴ Rodriguez, "The Women and Children of ISIS," 6.

Chapter 6: Deradicalization

Significant research has been conducted to better understand the process of radicalization, but considerably less research has been conducted to properly understand the process of deradicalization. A large reason for this is that the literature on radicalization and deradicalization is divided on how the terms should be defined and published mainly through a Western lens in resonance with Western perspectives on women terrorists.¹¹⁵ Secondly, the terms ‘disengagement’ and ‘deradicalization’ have been used interchangeably, complicating research on this issue.

Disengagement v Deradicalization

Deradicalization is the process of rejecting an extremist viewpoint and recognizing that using violence to promote social change is not acceptable.¹¹⁶ There are no methods for someone to certify their deradicalization, but, it is assumed to be exhibited in an individual’s conduct after leaving a terrorist organization. On the other side, disengagement happens when an individual modifies their conduct, such as abstaining from violence and withdrawing from extremist organizations, without necessarily changing their beliefs. As such, disengaging from a terrorist organization does not always imply abandoning the organization; rather, a person disengages from terrorism by refraining from carrying out violent acts, even if the individual remains linked with the organization.¹¹⁷ In the case of former foreign ISIS women, their defection from ISIS

¹¹⁵ Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez and Christopher Boucek, “Disengagement and Deradicalization,” in *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, ed. Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez and Christopher Boucek (RAND Corporation, 2010): 1-32.

¹¹⁶ John Horgan, “Walking Away: Disengagement and De-Radicalization From Terrorism,” *Wilson Center*, November 13, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Rabasa, “Disengagement and Deradicalization,” 5.

must be publicized since they pledged an oath to join the group. They are thereby violating that pledge by publicly renouncing ISIS.

Although the terms 'deradicalization' and 'disengagement' are frequently used interchangeably, their objectives and contexts are unique. When someone disengages, they stop participating in violent acts but continue to believe in the group's ideology; deradicalization is a profound shift in one's beliefs and intentions in which total separation from the group occurs. However, disengagement may be the initial step on a longer-term route to deradicalization in some circumstances..¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, present deradicalization programs lack a precise measure for effectiveness, but their existence indicates a step forward in addressing the issue of what to do with returning terrorists.

Deradicalization Programs

While counterterrorism policy in Western nations has remained military in nature, through the use of drone technology, an increased emphasis has been made on the incorporation of deradicalization efforts during the past five years.¹¹⁹ These programs are designed to rehabilitate detained terrorists and persons with extreme ideologies by engaging underlying 'problems,' as defined by the Western nations in which they are situated, that may influence their beliefs. They require not just establishing how people were radicalized, but also deciding if the process can be reversed and devising strategies to guarantee that they do not return to the organization when the program is completed.¹²⁰ Therefore, deradicalization programs are frequently tailored to the unique circumstances of each individual.

¹¹⁸ Rabasa, "Disengagement and Deradicalization," 6.

¹¹⁹ International Peace Institute, "A New Approach? Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism," *International Peace Institute* (2010): 1-20.

¹²⁰ Marisa L. Porges, Jessica Stern. "Getting Deradicalization Right," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2010.

Deradicalization aims to reduce the number of active terrorists, re-socialize ex-members, increase government legitimacy, and decrease reliance on oppressive counterterrorism measures. These programs provide a counter-terrorism strategy that not only reintegrates these individuals into society, but also increases the legitimacy of their state in their minds, which may deter them from turning to extremism and also ensures that states refrain from using torture as a counter-terrorism technique. Deradicalization efforts, due to their breadth of services, have the potential to benefit governments globally.¹²¹ Successful programs can persuade formerly dangerous individuals to refrain from terrorism and radical organizations, while also supplying important intelligence and evidence against current terrorist organizations thereby connecting these programs to national security.

To be effective, however, deradicalization programs must be customized to both the areas in which they operate and the individuals within them. This means that they should be customized to reflect the political agendas of a state's policies and governance. By customizing programs to a state's context, the possibility of individuals reintegrating into society is increased. As such, the assumption is that their loyalty will be to their state. Without community acceptance that deradicalized people are no longer a threat, programs will eventually fail and lack credibility.

Programs should also emphasize an individualized approach for each detainee, which often includes religious, cultural, historical re-education, therapy, mentorship, and post-release care.¹²² Since each individual's motivation for joining a terrorist organization is unique, an individualized approach is critical to the effectiveness of deradicalization initiatives.

¹²¹ International Peace Institute, "A New Approach?" 11.

¹²² Juan Soto, "Deradicalization Programs: A Counterterrorism Tool," *American Security Project*, October 15, 2020.

Additionally, successful deradicalization programs frequently feature components aimed at instilling a feeling of hope and purpose in participants. This might include possibilities for education, economic or career prospects, mentorship, counseling, or other relevant efforts.¹²³ By instilling sentiments of hope and purpose, deradicalization programs foster a sense of community and provide support networks for participants.

Although there is no definitive way to judge if these programs are effective, the most often used metric is recidivism: the rate at which graduates of a given deradicalization program return to their previous activities, in this case, to terrorism. Furthermore, the majority of deradicalization initiatives have not been operating long enough for observers to determine which tactics have the longest lasting effect on behavior.¹²⁴ However, deradicalization programs must be valued not only for their effect on detainees, but also for the secondary advantages they might provide to governments. Likewise, deradicalization programs may open up new possibilities for individuals who have joined terrorist organizations and are now seeking to return to their home states. Repatriation might thus be more possible because of these programs.

Women and Deradicalization Programs

The intersection of gender, terrorism, and deradicalization has sparked renewed attention, particularly in the aftermath of ISIS's caliphate's demise. Women account for 13% of the 41,490 foreigners who joined ISIS in Iraq and Syria. However, just 256 of them are believed to have returned to their home nations.¹²⁵ Unfortunately, little is known about these returning women,

¹²³ George Popp, Sarah Canna, Jeff Day, "Common Characteristics of 'Successful' Deradicalization Programs of the Past," *National Security Information* (2020): 1- 11.

¹²⁴ Porges, "Getting Deradicalization Right."

¹²⁵ International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), "Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism," *United Nations Development Program* (2019): 6-122.

and there are no national or international regulations governing how women returning from ISIS are treated by society or their governments. This is partly due to the fact that women have been almost absent from Western literature on FTFs for many years, and much of the information acquired has been lacking in gender analysis.¹²⁶ International policy incoherence is also reflected in a lack of consensus on vocabulary and priorities among policymakers, scholars, and practitioner communities working in counter-terrorism.

Another obstacle to these women's reintegration is opinion, stigma, and fear in the spaces in which they are nationals. Domestically and internationally, the return of women affiliated with ISIS is typically accompanied by an increase in community fear, anger, and distrust.¹²⁷ As a result, nations face a conundrum: safeguarding people from possible violence and seeking justice for terror victims, while ensuring effective due process and compliance with human rights laws for women who have left and desire to return home. Given this predicament, the majority of nations lack uniform regulations or legislation governing the handling of returnees linked with ISIS, particularly women.¹²⁸ Therefore, their rehabilitation and reintegration programs are unreliable, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by state and community actors and increasing their risk of re-radicalization and re-recruitment.

Current policies and programs frequently neglect or choose to portray women and girls connected with ISIS as victims, despite the fact that their relationship with the organization is often considerably more nuanced. To develop successful remedies for women, more focus should be placed on addressing their underlying drives, circumstances, and motivations.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 10.

¹²⁷ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 11.

¹²⁸ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 12.

¹²⁹ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 12.

Understanding why women joined the organization can therefore aid in deradicalization. For example, some women were enticed to join ISIS by propaganda or by family members, while others joined due to political and religious grievances.

Additionally, it is critical to consider the responsibilities that women have inside the organization. The roles that women play inside ISIS may assist Western nations to better understand them, paving the road for them to be included into deradicalization programs and thus have a better chance of repatriation. Gina Vale argues this point by stating:

“Any information we do have regarding what women have done under ISIS territory comes from women who have blogged or commented about their experiences on social media. Thus, that kind of information blackout on women's activities makes it extremely difficult to prosecute, and even convict, linked women of any offenses other than group membership. And, of course, no legislation can be applied retroactively, as some women would be unable to be prosecuted. They constitute a threat. Therefore, if we are unable to convict them of anything, we would prefer to just not have them. As a result, a widespread policy of inactivity exists. That is why there are presently so many women incarcerated indefinitely in these camps.”¹³⁰

A recurring element in much of the writing on gender and terrorism is the persistence of gendered stereotypes in our understanding of men's and women's involvement in terrorist groups.¹³¹ Women are relegated to domestic settings, whereas males are viewed as combatants, and while this is frequently true, women play far more intricate roles in terrorism. Thus, gendered stereotypes are detrimental, as they may prohibit women from receiving the same deradicalization efforts as males. Furthermore, the majority of mainstream writings on

¹³⁰ Alexia Cervello, “Gina Vale Zoom Interview,” April 1, 2022.

¹³¹ Sitg J. Hansen, Stian Lid, “Routledge Handbook of Deradicalisation and Disengagement,” *Routledge* (2020): 1-347.

deradicalization make no mention of gender. Consequently, there are essentially no deradicalization initiatives that include gender.¹³²

The few deradicalization programs with a gendered approach have a history of perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes. This issue is frequently linked to fundamental beliefs about the roles and experiences of women and men in terrorist groups, as well as in society more broadly, that associate women with patriarchal stereotypes that restrict their agency to roles such as mother and wife.¹³³ These stereotypical roles are not only inaccurate, but they ignore a woman's autonomy in seeking membership in a violent group. Secondly, these misconceptions contribute to the simplification of gender norms and expectations.¹³⁴

This minimizes women's agency and the 'danger' they present. Males who are perceived to pose a greater danger to society will have greater access to deradicalization programs than women. Gender is frequently overlooked, which is why deradicalization programs appear to be developed for and focused on the needs of males, are based on 'gender blind' ideas, and seldom examine the significance of gender in the data. Understanding women's roles is difficult but important to the success of these programs because it demonstrates that there is no simple dichotomy between victim and offender and that women engage in extremist violence in nuanced ways.¹³⁵ As argued by Gina Vale:

¹³² Hansen, "Routledge Handbook," 71.

¹³³ Hansen, "Routledge Handbook," 74.

¹³⁴ Hansen, "Routledge Handbook," 74.

¹³⁵ Katherine Brown, "Gender-specific approaches in exit work," *Radicalisation Awareness Network Practitioners-European Commission* (2019):1-13.

“The fact that the majority of deradicalization initiatives continue to be almost entirely focused on males demonstrates that women's involvement with terrorism is still viewed as an anomaly, a shock and surprise, or an uncommon circumstance.”¹³⁶

Women's roles are critical to examine in these programs since some women may desire to leave ISIS in order to be free of GBV to which they were subject in the caliphate, while others may seek to leave due to ISIS's failure to live up to their expectations. Alternatively, some women may not be attempting to leave voluntarily, but are being forced to do so as a result of the caliphate's fall.¹³⁷ As such, their affiliation with ISIS makes prosecution more difficult which might make it harder for them to be considered for deradicalization programs at all. If they do qualify, women may prefer to work with female exit workers, yet many programs lack female workers.¹³⁸ The former U.S government official I interviewed shared a similar point by mentioning that:

“The U.S government did not engage in special programs aimed at women and radicalization; and there still aren't any that focus only on women. This is because the vast majority of those involved in counterterrorism are men. Sexism plays a significant role.”¹³⁹

Men are also more likely to be accepted into deradicalization programs because of the widespread assumption that men's inactivity is dangerous. The reason why keeping males employed with deradicalization initiatives is prioritized above keeping women occupied is because it is inferred that women do not represent security concerns in general, since their family

¹³⁶ Alexia Cervello, “Gina Vale Zoom Interview,” April 1, 2022.

¹³⁷ Brown, “Gender-specific,” 4.

¹³⁸ Brown, “Gender-specific,” 6.

¹³⁹ Alexia Cervello, “Interview with U.S government official,” April 5, 2022.

obligations rarely allow them to be idle.¹⁴⁰ Another issue is that reintegrating women into communities is much more difficult than reintegrating men, owing to the increased stigma they endure from their nation, making the stigma multi-leveled.¹⁴¹ Women are consequently viewed as double deviants by their communities, who may consider them as violators on two fronts: first, for violating gender standards, and second, for supporting terrorism.

The Women Left Behind

Few women have returned to nations in the West, while many remain in combat zones. One explanation for this may be that, while preventative and intervention strategies and programs exist in the West, deradicalization programs are a relatively new concept, and those that exist mostly serve men.¹⁴² Another explanation is that radicalization of young Western women and the variables that contribute to their disengagement are complicated, which has caused gaps in the research. To build more programs, considerable research on the conditions that Western women encountered in ISIS, is required.¹⁴³

Simply put, a greater focus should be placed on gender evaluations, and women should have access to the same program alternatives as males. Not only must a stronger emphasis on gender and programs tailored exclusively to female returnees be made, but human rights compliance must be at the center of every policy or program aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration. Counter-terrorism efforts should thus be grounded in a broader international human rights framework that safeguards fundamental rights to security and safety.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, "Gender-specific," 9.

¹⁴¹ Brown, "Gender-specific," 9.

¹⁴² Rabiya Mirza, "Canadian Women in ISIS: Deradicalization and Reintegration for Returnees," *University of Ottawa* (2018):1-43.

¹⁴³ Mirza, "Canadian Women in ISIS," 44.

Chapter7: Human Rights

Addressing the link between gender and terrorism demands a comprehensive approach that emphasizes "respect for women's human rights."¹⁴⁴ Without adequate policies, it is unclear how these women's conditions will be addressed through legislation. As a result, ex-ISIS foreign women's rights may be jeopardized. The treatment of ISIS women in these camps is disproportionate and a violation of their rights. These women are not only living in deplorable conditions, but also in a state of uncertainty. It is therefore critical to protect these women's rights as outlined in the UDHR, which is widely regarded as the worldwide human rights framework.

The Right to Citizenship

Article 6 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law everywhere. Article 15 similarly stresses the right to nationality.¹⁴⁵ According to both articles, women should be recognized by their nations' laws and have access to their nationality regardless of their affiliation with terrorism. Governments cannot disregard these women only on the grounds that they may constitute a security risk. As such, this calls attention to the human right to citizenship and therefore, rights. The law is precise: citizens have a right of return and their citizenship cannot be revoked regardless of their actions abroad.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, in certain nations, ISIS women who have children with ISIS men who are not citizens of their own originating nation are unable to transfer their nationality to their children.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, "Preventing Violent Extremism Through Sport," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (2020): 1-123.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations, "Universal Declaration on Human Rights," United Nations (1948): 1-8.

¹⁴⁶ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 38.

Similarly, in many cases, children are unable to travel since they lack passports and other forms of legal identification. If their children are unable to travel, mothers are unlikely to attempt to return to their homeland. In other instances, like in France, mothers are left behind when their children are repatriated.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the idea of citizenship is critical since several nations, such as France, Belgium, Canada, and Denmark, have enacted legislation stripping citizenship from dual or naturalized citizens thought to be linked with terrorist groups.¹⁴⁸

In terms of deradicalization, current programs utilize strategies that contradict the human rights principle of non-discrimination, which requires states to analyze the intended and unintended gendered consequences of deradicalization initiatives and to establish if their activities promote or obstruct gender equality in their design.¹⁴⁹ They are harming gender equality in the case of ex ISIS women because there are no programs or policies aimed at them due to gender stereotypes.

Subsequently, these programs cannot be utilized for other security purposes, such as covert monitoring or data collecting. This is significant for gender mainstreaming since preconceptions about women acting as spies obstruct their access to other state services and benefits (including education, welfare, justice and health care). Critically, nations must guarantee that "human rights of women and girls are goals in themselves" while creating, executing, and assessing all deradicalization initiatives, which implies that states must "defend women's and girls' rights at all times" and "not merely as a means of counterterrorism."¹⁵⁰ A gender-sensitive

¹⁴⁷ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 41.

¹⁴⁸ Meghan Benton, Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan. " Foreign Fighters: Will Revoking Citizenship Mitigate the Threat?" *Migration Policy Institute*, April 3, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ United States Institute of Peace, "What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security," *United States Institute of Peace*, Accessed April 18, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ United States Institute of Peace, "What is UNSCR 1325?" 14.

situational analysis can assist in determining the current state of affairs and potential risks for women.

If women lose their right to citizenship, they may be forced to reside in camps indefinitely and which may result in stripping them of their human rights and subjecting them to a range of human rights violations, for example, human trafficking or sexual slavery.¹⁵¹ When nations refuse to acknowledge these women, they are effectively proclaiming that they do not belong, which may encourage traffickers to abduct them with little to no penalties. Additionally, individuals in the camps may commit acts of violence against them based on the same concept, and these acts may go unpunished. While governments have a legitimate obligation to defend individuals' rights within their borders, they should also respect the human rights of returnees.

The Right to Citizenship: The Case of Shamima Begum

Citizenship is a necessary condition for humans to enjoy a multitude of rights and advantages that are only available under the auspices of a lawful and politically constrained territory. Subsequently, revoking an individual's citizenship results in statelessness, which has dire effects for humans.¹⁵² The British government's treatment of Shamima Begum, who left the UK in February 2015 to join ISIS and was discovered in al-Hol camp is an example of this. Begum escaped ISIS territory after four years and asked for re-entry to Britain in order to create a better life for her child. When Begum applied for reentry, British Home Secretary, Sajid Javid revoked her citizenship due to her connection with ISIS. Begum's decision to join ISIS in 2015

¹⁵¹ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 41.

¹⁵² Mercedes Masters and Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr, "Citizenship Revocation as a Human Rights Violation: The Case of Shamima Begum," *Leiden University*, (2020), pp. 1-5.

elevated her to the level of "significant threat" in British society, making her the first British woman to have her citizenship revoked ¹⁵³

Citizenship is a primary human right, that is, a right that is required in order to realize a range of other rights. Due to the fact that citizenship serves as the foundation for all human rights, the loss of citizenship equates to the loss of all rights. By revoking Begum's citizenship, the UK effectively stripped her of all rights and left her in a state of limbo with no home.¹⁵⁴

Additionally, the case demonstrates how human rights are vulnerable to contemporary society's politics.

The events of 9/11 redefined the requirements of citizenship and public security and ultimately contributed to Begum's citizenship revocation.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the media's "othering" of Begum added to the notion that she posed a threat to the state and that the only way to safeguard Britain was to ultimately expel her. The Shamima Begum case diminishes the importance of individual rights of a human being in comparison to the collective nation's perceived security needs and results in the rapid expulsion of a human being from their political community, effectively reducing that human being to a "bare" human.¹⁵⁶ The rights of these women must be respected, and greater effort should be made to ensure they have a place to call home, even if they were previously involved with terrorism. Although these women opted to join a terrorist organization, it is critical to conduct additional research on what is happening to these women, particularly now that they have constituted a new category of stateless individuals.

¹⁵³ Masters et al, "Citizenship Revocation as a Human Rights Violation," 3.

¹⁵⁴ Masters et al, "Citizenship Revocation as a Human Rights Violation," 3.

¹⁵⁵ Mercedes Masters, Salvador Santino F Regilme Jr, "Human Rights and British Citizenship: The Case of Shamima Begum as Citizen to Homo Sacer," *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Vol.12, Issue 2, (2020), pp. 341–363.

¹⁵⁶ Masters et al "Human Rights and British Citizenship," 345.

Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS)

When nations disregard returnees' rights, they risk violating their own obligations to existing human rights laws and norms in the interest of national security.¹⁵⁷ This includes UNSC resolutions protecting the rights of all women during and post-conflict, especially those comprising the WPS agenda. The first of those, UNSCR 1325 (2000) is meant to safeguard women in conflict situations.

Most critical to this research, UNSCR 1325 does not distinguish between women involved in terrorism and those who are not. Former terrorist women are still women in conflict settings; and in light of this philosophy, their rights should be protected. Human rights compliance, especially women's human rights duties, should thus be included more fully into initiatives aimed towards protecting the security of any women in the context of conflict.

Abandoning current commitments to women's human rights, for example, for political purposes or security concerns is to selectively apply human rights laws to some women and not others. Gender responsiveness is also required because terrorism has particular and disproportionate effects on women's human rights. Rather than just acknowledging gender issues or adopting a gender neutral stance, being gender responsive requires actively addressing gender prejudices and disparities that women in particular face. The WPS also calls for the protection of women's welfare, health, and dignity in all circumstances, including refugee camps populated by ISIS women. Without this protection, these women are left in state of legal limbo, as Ayse Lokmangolou states,

¹⁵⁷ ICAN, "Invisible Women," 43.

“Western states are at a loss for what to do. As a result, they're doing everything possible to avoid making a decision. Thus, those women that are apprehended typically wind up in refugee camps, where they await their fate.”¹⁵⁸

As noted previously, ISIS foreign women in al-Hol are being confined in a portion known as the Annex. Of the women in this section, it was discovered that one hundred injured trauma patients were at risk of acquiring infection and dying.¹⁵⁹ The Annex's overcrowding exacerbates their sicknesses and suffering further, as services are restricted, leaving women neither comfortable nor dignified.¹⁶⁰ These women have assumed leadership roles in their households and are accountable for the health and well-being of their children. They lack livelihood opportunities, which adds to their distress and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.¹⁶¹

The social projection of these women in particular has subjugated them to an additional range of human rights violations. For example, guards do not permit women in the Annex to leave the camp unless they are led out for medical emergencies, such as surgery that is not offered at the camp facilities. Other women in the camps are allowed to leave as they please. Additionally, the Annex receives less assistance from donors, and residents must wait for armed guards to transport them to the camp market, doctors, and food distribution centers, which Syrian and Iraqi women may easily access.¹⁶²

Moreover, the three field hospitals located in the main campsites are understaffed and under-resourced, putting women's rights to health and an adequate standard of living at

¹⁵⁸ Alexia Cervello, “Ayse Lokmangolou Zoom Interview,” April 3, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “Al-Hold Situation Report,” *United Nations Population Fund, Update Number 4* (2019): 1-6.

¹⁶⁰ UNFPA, “Al-Hold Situation Report,” 1.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Dire Conditions for ISIS Suspects’ Families Countries Should Support Citizens’ Returns, Increase Aid,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 23, 2019.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch, “Syria.”

risk.¹⁶³ In addition to the challenges accessing basic services in the main camp areas, virtually all the women in the Annex reported they had no means to acquire fresh food for their children or to supplement their rations. Furthermore, by the time they reach the food distribution stations, the rations are often gone and they have to return the next day even though they waited in above 100° F heat.¹⁶⁴

There is no sanitation, and the majority of the camp is immersed in mud, littered with puddles of dirty rain water, trash, and human waste. Tents are consequently constructed in close proximity to puddles of trash, rain, and excrement, and many of the tents frequently collapse due to rain and inadequate infrastructure.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, it is not unusual to see children playing in these puddles or drinking water from them, as water availability is quite limited.

Moreover, some ISIS women allege that guards threatened them, telling them to "wait until the Americans leave, and then we'll do to you what ISIS did to the Yazidi women."¹⁶⁶ Under ISIS reign, Yazidi women were exploited as sex slaves and were frequently subjected to sexual, emotional, and physical violence at the hands of their captors. This threat instills anxiety among women in the Annex, since they know firsthand what guards are capable of doing to them and many will be powerless to defend themselves.

International law also guarantees everyone the right to return to their place of origin, and subjecting individuals to indefinite detention without prosecution would only exacerbate the situation.¹⁶⁷ When women in the Annex were questioned about their legal status, they provided a brief written statement in which they stated that when women and children fled ISIS-held

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch, "Syria."

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Syria."

¹⁶⁵ Dylan Welch, Suzanne Dredge, "Death, disease and Islamic State's moral police stalk Syria's al-Hawl refugee camp," *ABC News*, April 16, 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Welch, "Death, disease and Islamic State."

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Syria."

territories, they were "transferred to al-Hol to work on reintegrating them with their governments."¹⁶⁸ However this has not occurred, needless to say, foreign women in the camp are legally stranded.

Similarly, international law prohibits torture and cruel or degrading treatment of any human being in any circumstance. States that do not recognize ISIS women as their own nations are choosing to subject them to a range of human rights violations tantamount to torture. Evidently, this is explicitly stated in the ICCPR's sections 7, 9 and 10. According to Article 7, "no one should be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment." Articles 9 and 10 similarly highlight the notions of detention, liberty, and dignity.¹⁶⁹ International anti-terrorist treaties, as well as UNSC and UNGA resolutions, stipulate that these rights also apply to individuals deprived of their liberty as a result of their affiliation with terrorism. This is reinforced further in the UN's *Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders*, often referred to as the 'Bangkok Rules'.

The Bangkok Rules were created to address the unique needs of women detained and to guarantee the principle of non-discrimination.¹⁷⁰ The regulations acknowledge the need for a gendered approach to managing women in detention facilities and clarify how these measures should be implemented to women in detention camps.¹⁷¹ Authorities should acknowledge the circumstances in which these women find themselves and increase their access to

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Syria."

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner* (1966): 1-26.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, "Handbook on Gender Dimensions of criminal justice responses to terrorism," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (2019): 1-201.

¹⁷¹ United Nations, "Handbook on Gender Dimensions," 92.

deradicalization initiatives. At the moment, these women face prejudice because they lack access to the same deradicalization programs as men.

Correspondingly, Article 25 of the UDHR asserts that "everyone has the right to a standard of living that is suitable for his or her health and well-being, including food, clothing, shelter, and medical treatment."¹⁷² This article and its provisions are blatantly violated, since women in the camps, particularly in the Annex, lack access to healthcare, an adequate standard of living, and food and shelter. There is no trade-off between policing these women and human rights, and there never will be.

¹⁷² United Nations, "Universal Declaration," 6.

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear (insert participants name),

I was referred to you by (insert reference's name). (Skip if no one referred to this person)

My name is Alexia Cervello. I am a second year M.A candidate at Columbia University conducting research on rights of women who leave terrorist organizations. More precisely, I'm interested in what happens to these women when they leave the organizations, how they are accepted in the community if allowed to return, and ultimately, the conditions under which women are permitted to return.

I am currently doing interviews and came across your name as a result of (insert reason). Your perspective on this subject would be greatly welcomed.

The interview can take place by Zoom (or any online teleconferencing technology) or by phone, depending on your preference. It will take approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours and, with your permission, may be recorded. Additionally, you will be able to specify the level of attribution you desire (whether it is a direct reference to your name or another preferred identification of your choosing, or a background interview only).

Would you possibly be interested in participating in this interview?

I appreciate your time. Please know that you can contact me by phone (914-656-8200) or by email (a.cervello@columbia.edu) if you have any issues about the research or your involvement.

Best,
Alexia Cervello

Appendix B: Consent form UK/E

Columbia University (New York, New York)
Consent Form UK/EU

Principal Investigator: Julie Rajan (jr3560@columbia.edu)

Hello, my name is Alexia Cervello. I am a second year M.A candidate at Columbia University conducting research on rights of women who leave terrorist organizations. More precisely, I'm interested in what rights do women who have fled ISIS have? What potential human rights violations do these women face following their departure, and why aren't more deradicalization programs directed specifically at women? The interview's results will be incorporated into my M.A. thesis and other potential future research/publications.

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. This means that you are not obligated to participate in the interview unless and until you express an interest. As such, would you mind answering a few questions regarding this topic? The research interview should last anywhere between 30 minutes to two hours.

I appreciate your willingness to participate. If at any point throughout the interview you believe the questions are too difficult or too sensitive, I can terminate the session. You may decline to answer any or all questions and may withdraw your participation at any time. I am sincerely grateful for your time.

As previously said, the goal of my research is to ascertain what rights do women who have fled ISIS have? What potential human rights violations do these women face following their departure, and why aren't more deradicalization programs directed specifically at women?

I will ask you various questions as part of this study. Following the initial interview, you may be contacted for a second interview or questions may be emailed to you. All interviews will take place either online via teleconferencing services such as Zoom or by phone call, as your desire dictates. To the extent feasible, the risks associated with this interview have been minimized. However, participation could be jeopardized by a breach of confidentiality. The IRB and the appropriate federal agency have the right to inspect and copy the recordings. Additionally, some of the questions may make you feel apprehensive; if this is the case, please notify me. You are not required to respond to those questions if you so desire. Likewise, you can pause the interview at any time.

I'm requesting your permission to audio and/or video record your interview in order to verify the study's findings are accurate when written up. If, following the interview, you wish to have the recording file destroyed, you have the right to do so. With that in mind, is it acceptable for me to record our interview on audio/video?

- YES
- NO

Recording

The type of recording utilized will be video recording, however, your camera may be off if you so desire. That is to say, your face does not have to be recorded if you do not agree to it. In the event that you choose to have the camera on, your full face will be recorded unless asked otherwise. In addition, with your permission, your full name will be recorded. If at any point you do not want your name to be mentioned, it will be removed from the recording and any record.

The only people that will have access to the recording is myself (Alexia Cervello), and you (the participant) if you so desire. Each recording will be password protected and encrypted so that no one else will have access to the recording. The recording will be kept indefinitely, unless you'd like them to be destroyed. If so, they will be destroyed upon completion of the project on May 4th, 2022.

The recording will only be used for the purpose of this study and will not be used for any other studies or for any other purpose. It will be purely used for educational purposes to complete the thesis and not for anything else. For more information, please visit [https://research.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/HRPO/Recording_of_Human_Subjects_Policy_102605%20\(3\).pdf](https://research.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/HRPO/Recording_of_Human_Subjects_Policy_102605%20(3).pdf)

Confidentiality

When you participate in this study, Columbia will collect and record personal information you provide to the interviewer. In addition, we will collect and record any sensitive personal information you voluntarily share with the interviewer, such as information about your racial or ethnic origin; political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, and data concerning health, sex life, or sexual orientation. We refer to the information you share with the interviewer as “Your Study Data.”

Your Study Data is protected in the European Economic Area under the EU General Data Protection Regulation (the GDPR). Columbia acts as the Data Controller with respect to Your Study Data. Columbia may disclose Your Study Data for processing for the purposes stated in this form to entities and individuals located in the U.S. or in other countries where the laws do not protect your privacy to the same extent as the laws of the country in which you are located.

However, Columbia strives to protect the confidentiality of Your Study Data. The researchers will use reasonable and appropriate measures to protect any electronic or written notes that contain Your Study Data against unauthorized access or use. In addition, we will not record your name in our study notes and will not publish your name in our final research products and publications.

The GDPR gives you certain rights with respect to Your Study Data. You have the right to request access to, changes to, or deletion of, Your Study Data. You also have the right to object to or restrict our use or disclosure of Your Study Data. Finally, you have a right to request that we move, copy, or transfer Your Study Data to another organization. In order to make any such requests, please contact the Principal Investigator identified at the top of this form.

Your Study Data may be used or processed for the following purposes:

- To determine whether you meet the eligibility criteria for this study;

- To invite you to participate in this study;
- To carry out this study and other purposes for which you indicated your consent in the Consent section below;
- To monitor whether this study complies with applicable laws as well as best practices developed by the research community; and
- To comply with legal requirements under applicable domestic, U.S., or other foreign laws and regulations.

The following individuals and organizations may process Your Study Data in connection with the Study:

- Columbia as the Study Institution;
- The Principal Investigator and the researcher, as well as any individuals that support the researcher; and Columbia’s Institutional Review Board, which provides ethical oversight of this study for Columbia and is organized to review, approve, and oversee research involving human subjects.

Please review each statement below and place a check mark in the box that corresponds to your response. By checking a “Yes” box, you are indicating your consent to Columbia, including the researcher, using Your Study Data for the purpose described in the left-hand column.

You permit Columbia to collect and use Your Study Data for the purpose of carrying out this study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES • NO
You permit the researcher to take written notes of your interview. The researcher will not record your name in the written interview notes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES • NO
You permit the researcher to quote your interview or describe the information you provide in the interview final research products and publications. The researcher will not record your name in the final research products and publications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES • NO

You may withdraw the consent you provide through this form at any time. If you withdraw your consent, it will not affect the lawfulness of Columbia collecting, using, and sharing Your Study Data up to the point in time that you withdraw your consent. To withdraw your consent, please contact the **Principal Investigator identified at the top of this form.**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights under the GDPR or Columbia’s privacy practices, please contact **the Principal Investigator identified at the top of this form.** You also have the right to file a complaint with an EU Data Protection Authority (DPA) regarding Columbia’s privacy practices. Find your DPA at https://edpb.europa.eu/about-edpb/board/members_en.

Your participation as an interview subject is entirely up to you. I'm going to go over four questions and would appreciate it if you could answer yes or no.

1. Can I, as the researcher, cite your interview and credit you by name. This means that if appropriate, the final study output may feature your name. Kindly indicate yes or no.
 - YES
 - NO
1. Can I, as the researcher, identify you as an academic, a journalist, an activist, an attorney, or an expert in counterterrorism? Kindly indicate yes or no. If yes, how would you wish to be known by?
 - YES
 - NO
 - Known by:
1. Would you rather stay anonymous for the duration of the interview? If yes, do you have an alias that I may use to refer to you?
 - YES
 - NO
 - Alias:
1. Would you prefer that I, the researcher, utilize this interview solely for background purposes and nothing more?
 - YES
 - NO

Please keep in mind that there are no financial incentives for participation in this study. I would like to emphasize once again that participation in this research is purely voluntary. You may withdraw from participation or decline to participate at any moment. I reserve the right to terminate your participation at my professional discretion.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this research, you may contact Columbia's Morningside Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (212) 305-5883 or at askirb@columbia.edu.

Except as expressly required by law, no information collected from this research project that personally identifies you will be willingly distributed or disclosed without your approval. It is entirely up to you whether or not to participate in this study. You may withdraw from or discontinue participation in the study at any time for any reason.

Are there any questions you have for me at the moment? Please keep in mind that if you have any questions about the research or your participation, you can reach out to me by phone (914) 656-8200 or by email a.cervello@columbia.edu.

Do you give me permission to start asking you questions?

- YES
- NO

Please fill out your answer or highlight it

Appendix C: Consent form U.S

Columbia University (New York, New York) Consent Form

Hello, my name is Alexia Cervello. I am a second year M.A candidate at Columbia University conducting research on rights of women who leave terrorist organizations. More precisely, I'm interested in what rights do women who have fled ISIS have? What potential human rights violations do these women face following their departure, and why aren't more deradicalization programs directed specifically at women? The interview's results will be incorporated into my M.A. thesis and other potential future research/publications.

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. This means that you are not obligated to participate in the interview unless and until you express an interest. As such, would you mind answering a few questions regarding this topic? The research interview should last anywhere between 30 minutes to two hours.

I appreciate your willingness to participate. If at any point throughout the interview you believe the questions are too difficult or too sensitive, I can terminate the session. You may decline to answer any or all questions and may withdraw your participation at any time. I am sincerely grateful for your time.

As previously said, the goal of my research is to ascertain what rights do women who have fled ISIS have? What potential human rights violations do these women face following their departure, and why aren't more deradicalization programs directed specifically at women?

I will ask you various questions as part of this study. Following the initial interview, you may be contacted for a second interview or questions may be emailed to you. All interviews will take place either online via teleconferencing services such as Zoom or by phone call, as your desire dictates. To the extent feasible, the risks associated with this interview have been minimized. However, participation could be jeopardized by a breach of confidentiality. The IRB and the appropriate federal agency have the right to inspect and copy the recordings. Additionally, some of the questions may make you feel apprehensive; if this is the case, please notify me. You are not required to respond to those questions if you so desire. Likewise, you can pause the interview at any time.

I'm requesting your permission to audio and/or video record your interview in order to verify the study's findings are accurate when written up. If, following the interview, you wish to have the recording file destroyed, you have the right to do so. With that in mind, is it acceptable for me to record our interview on audio/video?

- YES
- NO

Recording

The type of recording utilized will be video recording, however, your camera may be off if you so desire. That is to say, your face does not have to be recorded if you do not agree to it. In the

event that you choose to have the camera on, your full face will be recorded unless asked otherwise. In addition, with your permission, your full name will be recorded. If at any point you do not want your name to be mentioned, it will be removed from the recording and any record.

The only people that will have access to the recording is myself (Alexia Cervello), and you (the participant) if you so desire. Each recording will be password protected and encrypted so that no one else will have access to the recording. The recording will be kept indefinitely, unless you'd like them to be destroyed. If so, they will be destroyed upon completion of the project on May 4th, 2022.

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Your participation as an interview subject is entirely up to you. I'm going to go over four questions and would appreciate it if you could answer yes or no.

1. Can I, as the researcher, cite your interview and credit you by name. This means that if appropriate, the final study output may feature your name. Kindly indicate yes or no.
 - YES
 - NO
1. Can I, as the researcher, identify you as an academic, a journalist, an activist, an attorney, or an expert in counterterrorism? Kindly indicate yes or no. If yes, how would you wish to be known by?
 - YES
 - NO
 - Known by:
1. Would you rather stay anonymous for the duration of the interview? If yes, do you have an alias that I may use to refer to you?
 - YES
 - NO
 - Alias:
1. Would you prefer that I, the researcher, utilize this interview solely for background purposes and nothing more?
 - YES
 - NO

Please keep in mind that there are no financial incentives for participation in this study. I would like to emphasize once again that participation in this research is purely voluntary. You may withdraw from participation or decline to participate at any moment. I reserve the right to terminate your participation at my professional discretion.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in this research, you may contact Columbia's Morningside Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (212) 305-5883 or at askirb@columbia.edu.

Except as expressly required by law, no information collected from this research project that personally identifies you will be willingly distributed or disclosed without your approval. It is entirely up to you whether or not to participate in this study. You may withdraw from or discontinue participation in the study at any time for any reason.

Are there any questions you have for me at the moment? Please keep in mind that if you have any questions about the research or your participation, you can reach out to me by phone (914) 656-8200 or by email a.cervello@columbia.edu.

Do you give me permission to start asking you questions?

- YES
- NO

Please fill out your answer or highlight it

Appendix D: Questionnaire

Columbia University (New York, New York) Questionnaire

Population: Academics, Attorneys, Journalists, Activists and Counterterrorism specialists working in the field of terrorism and women's rights.

1. What are the primary issues you work on within the field?
2. What motivates women to join terrorist organizations?
3. What are the roles of women within terrorist organizations?
4. Why do you believe a woman might leave a terrorist organization after joining?
5. What becomes of these women once they leave the organization?
6. Have you interacted with or are you familiar with women who were previously associated with terrorism?
 0. If so, how did you become familiar with them? In what capacity are you connected with them?
 1. If not, do you believe there is a reason behind this?
7. Can you speak about the safety of former terrorist women in the refugee camps where they are being housed? What is the primary cause of concern for them?
8. How did these women end up in refugee camps in the first place? How were they discovered to be in refugee camps?
9. What rights do you believe these women have within the camps?
10. Why do you believe governments may decide to revoke their citizenship after joining a terrorist organization?
11. What rights do these women have if they are denied citizenship?
12. Most deradicalization efforts appear to be geared toward men rather than women. Do you believe these programs contain a sexist element?
13. Do you know of any female-targeted deradicalization programs?
14. Do you believe that these women will ever be permitted to return to their home countries?
15. Do you believe that these women can reclaim their rights/achieve their full rights again

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