

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

FEMALE FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS: WHO THEY ARE, WHY THEY GO, AND  
WHAT THEY EXPECT WHEN JOINING ISIS

KATHERINE M. KIELCESKI  
SPRING 2016

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in Political Science and Global and International Studies  
with honors in Political Science

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Peter Kent Forster  
Senior Lecturer of Information Science Technologies  
Thesis Supervisor

Matthew Golder  
Associate Professor of Political Science  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## ABSTRACT

Along with the rise of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State comes the growing phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), individuals who depart their country of residence to participate in terror campaigns abroad (UN Resolution 2178). Even more noteworthy is the rapid rise in the number of women FTFs seeking to participate in extremism. This paper analyzes the backgrounds, motivations, radicalization, expectations, and realizations of four women, two American and two French who have traveled to Syria to join to Islamic State. The thesis addresses similarities and differences between the biographical details of the cases and the radicalization process for each of the women. The paper examines the factors, progressions, and transformations that drive individuals to the point at which they decide to flee their homes leaving their lives and families behind. The study finds that face-to-face contact, the use of social media for inclusion and isolation, the presence of a supportive family or husband, and flexible tools of recruitment are crucial factors to consider when identifying an individual's likelihood of becoming a FTF. The findings of this thesis may serve as a valuable tool for governments and policy makers to better understand the individual, female FTF and what drives her to depart from her country in favor of joining a terror campaign. The research may allow for early detection of FTFs before they go abroad and/or the prevention of the radicalization process entirely.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	4
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	10
Chapter 4 Case Studies .....	12
Chapter 5 Motivations and Radicalization.....	18
Chapter 6 Expectations and Realizations.....	26
Chapter 7 Analysis .....	32
Chapter 8 Conclusion.....	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	42

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Hoda Muthana Path to FTF .....	21
Figure 2: Yusra Ismail Path to FTF .....	22
Figure 3: Emilie Koenig Path to FTF.....	24
Figure 4: Sophie Kasiki Path to FTF .....	25

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Biographical Data of Cases.....	12
Table 2: Results.....	26

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Forster for all of his insight and guidance over the past year and a half. I never ceased to be amazed by his abilities to assure me that everything would work out and leave me more relaxed after our weekly meetings than when I arrived. I am so grateful to have worked with someone so knowledgeable and enthusiastic throughout this process. Secondly, I extend my thanks to Dr. Michael Berkman and Dr. Gretchen Casper for their words of wisdom, helpful advice, and unique perspectives that enabled me to develop my project further. This thesis certainly would not have taken in its current shape without their valuable assistance. Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my loving family and friends for their unwavering support of my endeavors and pursuits. Without this extraordinary team behind me, I would certainly not be where I am today.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

War, violence, and bloodshed have permeated human history. Man has continuously battled his fellow man over land, food, water, wealth, power, and religion. The phenomenon of man fighting his fellow man to defend his homeland or armies of men traveling to faraway places to wage war is not new, but as old as man himself. The modern world is no exception, filled with conflicting beliefs and intolerance. But the way these battles are fought has changed dramatically. Gone are the days when thousands of men charged across a field toward each other and settled disputes with swords and hand-to-hand combat. Today's conflicts are characterized by asymmetry, fought by bands of fighters shrouded in secrecy who prey on fear and seek to intimidate their enemies with violence. This asymmetric battlefield extends across the globe and the soldiers have become increasingly difficult to identify, fighting without uniforms or uniformity.

Terrorism is certainly not a new or unique phenomenon. The modern term "terrorism" was first used in the late 1700s during the French Revolution to describe the government's use of fear and violence to threaten its people (Srikanth 2015 pg.228). However, the practice of using fear and violence for political gain can be traced back to the ancient Roman Empire to the Zealots, known as the *sicarii* or dagger men, who prowled the streets of Jerusalem and Rome stabbing enemies in broad daylight (Horsely 1975, pg. 437). Unfortunately, the trend of using terror as a means to establish recognition for cause, revenge for an act, or engender a reaction by a political entity has continued. In recent years, news of terrorist attacks have dominated

headlines, shaped policies of governments, and frightened the citizens of nations far and wide, from West to East. But this premise upon which terrorism is based, fear and violence, is far from new.

What is new, however, is a generation of women who travel thousands of miles from their families and their homes to join a cause that espouses violence, death to dissenters, and beheads enemies on the Internet. What is new is the 20 year-old girl dropping out of college and using the refund from her classes to buy a plane ticket to Syria unbeknownst to her family and friends. New entirely is the young woman who establishes a radical alter ego through a Twitter account, acquires thousands of followers, and promotes death to Americans while appearing to be the same quiet and reserved student she has always been. New is the mother who lies to her husband and takes her toddler away from their quiet life in the suburbs to one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

How does this happen? What is it about these terrorist organizations that attract people and how do they go about recruiting these individuals? In the current political climate, the Islamic State (ISIS) has drawn the world's attention due to the devastating attacks it has carried out and the vicious brutalities it has committed in the name of Islam. How is such an organization attracting women from the West to join its cause? Why are so many mothers and educated young women leaving their worlds behind to fight for a campaign like ISIS? What events in their pasts, their upbringings, or their family life could lead them to a place where abandoning all they know about the world seems like the best option?

Discovering the answers to these questions can no longer be simply a matter of curiosity. Understanding whom these FTFs are and what drives them to go abroad has become a matter of national and international security. Whether or not the governments of the world understand



these matters could be the difference between lives saved or lost.

This paper aims to shed light upon this matter by conducting a qualitative case study of four female FTFs. Who are these women who travel to become FTFs, what do they have in common with each other, what are the differences between their expectations that emerge with the radicalization process, and their reactions to the reality of their situations abroad? In order to examine these questions, the study begins with the literature surrounding the motivations of terrorism and how our understanding of this concept has changed over time. This review provides the basis for the development of the methodology for the study. It opens by offering an explanation for the use of a qualitative case analysis then proceeds to a detailed explanation of the criteria for selecting the cases. It concludes with a definition of the variables that will be used to compare the cases after establishing the process by which the cases will be analyzed.

The analysis of the cases will include an examination the backgrounds of the women and an in-depth look into their motivations for becoming a FTF. The study will answer the following research questions:

- How were they radicalized?
- What were their expectations upon arriving in-country?
- What actually occurred when they arrived?
- How did they react to this realization?

The responses to these questions form the basis of the research that permits a comparison of similarities and differences, a consideration of common trends, and an analysis of alternate outcomes. The study concludes with a discussion of the findings and how the research may serve as a tool for governments and policy makers to increase prevention and/or detection of FTFs before they depart from their home nations.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The question of “why do people join terror campaigns abroad” is one that has risen to more prominence recently due to the growing focus on foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who have gone to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS and other groups. There are multiple variables or motivations that entice people to leave their home countries to pursue terrorism abroad. It is essential to recognize the motivations for joining terrorist organizations generally, then dig deeper into the literature to discover if these motivations are the same for FTFs or more importantly what unique variables may influence these individuals.

Acts of and participation in terrorism are such unique concepts that it is not surprising that researchers from a variety of fields have tried to understand and explain its causes. Throughout the history of terrorism research, numerous theories have analyzed what causes a person to join a terror campaign including psychological factors and socioeconomic factors.

Older theories suggest that terrorists can be categorized by their psychological states. They were thought to have mental illnesses or disorders ranging from depression to extreme narcissism, paranoia to clinical psychopathy (Silke 2003). Even today, there is still a widespread belief in this theory across American society to explain incidents such as the attacks on 9/11 (Silke 2003). Yet in the last several decades, there has been a dramatic shift from the psychological explanation of motivation towards other causes and explanations.

Martha Crenshaw was one of the first to dismiss the idea that terrorists were motivated to join campaigns because of psychological disorders. In her 1981 article, “The Causes of Terrorism,” she dismisses the idea that terrorists categorically have psychological disorders by studying a number of different cases and referencing Franco Venturi’s work on the Narodnaya

Volya in 1960 (Crenshaw 1981 pg. 390). Instead of the adhering to the concept that terrorists are ill, she suggests that they are just normal people bound together by a cause and a sense of camaraderie. John Horgan also supports this claim that a terrorist psychological identity does not exist (Horgan 2005). Instead, he suggests that scholars should attempt to “identify the factors that maintain involvement and sustain behavior, and eventually contribute to the commissions of acts of terrorism” (Horgan 2005).

Over time, socioeconomic factors replaced psychological explanations for terrorism as an explanation for why people became terrorists. Categories such as poverty and/or level of education became factors in explaining terrorism just as they are used for explaining a person’s role in other criminal activities (Ehrlich 1973). Yet these theories were dismantled as well by researchers who found no links between these factors and terrorist involvement. Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova conducted both quantitative and qualitative studies on people in the West Bank of Gaza and Hezbollah militants. In both cases, they disprove the theory that poverty and low education levels motivate people to become terrorists. On the contrary, some of the cases indicate that many of the terrorists were from middle to upper class families and had received education past the high school level (Krueger and Maleckova 2003). James Piazza’s 2006 study reaches the same conclusion. Using a series of multiple regression analyses of terror activities in 96 countries from 1986 to 2002, he finds no link between poverty and terrorism (Piazza 2006).

More commonly, scholars have abandoned the concepts of both psychological and socio-economical motivations and focused on more tangible explanations. Despite a background in psychology and sociology, Rex Hudson warns of the dangers in studying motivation and participation in terrorism from only these perspectives. He claims that a multitude of factors including external influences like political and social ones play a significant role and should be

considered in any multi-causal analysis. In his 1999 article, Hudson shies away from the idea of “terrorist profiling” and focuses on the process of how people join a terror campaign (Hudson 1999 pg. 43-46). He explains that merely being motivated to join is not enough, emphasizing the importance of having the opportunity to join a campaign (Hudson 1999 pg. 24). Toward the end of his article, he abandons the idea of identifying a “single terrorist personality” altogether (Hudson 1999 pg. 60). He claims that people are too diverse to categorize and that “terrorist profiling based on personality, physical, or sociological traits would not appear to be particularly useful,” (Hudson 1999 pg. 63).

Other current theories behind the motivations and causes of terrorism align with Hudson by focusing more on the process and less on the definable characteristics of the individual. Researchers are focusing on explanation that extend beyond the individual terrorist. Clark McCauley and Sofia Moskalenko discuss the path to radicalization by devising a 12-step progression explaining the mechanisms through which individuals, groups, or masses are motivated to partake in various levels of terroristic activity (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). While this research is rooted in psychology, it avoids defining the steps as all-inclusive or even applicable to every situation (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). On a similar note, many other studies have discussed radicalization and the various ways it can occur in modernity, such as via the Internet. In 2006, Gabriel Weimann scanned the entire Web in order to understand how terrorist organizations are using this tool to their advantage (Weimann 2006). Robin Thompson recently studied social media and correlated terrorist activities to the number of Internet users in that respective country to understand how organizations recruit in specific parts of the world. He finds that due to its effectiveness, the use of social media by terrorist organizations is unlikely to

decrease in the near future and advises governments to devote time and attention to understanding applications such as Facebook and Twitter (Thompson 2011).

In addition to studying why individuals are motivated to join terror campaigns, researchers also seek to understand narrower facets of this large field. Specifically, why do women participate in terrorism? Mia Bloom studies this topic and points out that women are often looked-over in the war against terror, as they are assumed to be inherently nonviolent (Bloom 2012 pg. 233). From her case studies in her book “Bombshell,” she determines that most women are motivated to become terrorists by one of the Four R’s: revenge, redemption, relationship, or respect (Bloom 2012 pg. 235). Bloom acknowledges that men may also be motivated by these factors, but men have other opportunities to display their self worth when often, women do not. In addition to the Four R’s, Bloom suggests that rape, structural conditions such as occupation by enemy troops, and abuse of the female population can also influence women to join terror campaigns (Bloom 2012 pg. 236-239).

Clearly there has been a shift in perspective amongst researchers since the early days of studying the motivations behind terrorism. However, many theories are still highly debated. Historically, terrorism and related areas of study have been difficult to analyze scientifically and empirically, as the field of play often changes and shifts rapidly and the number of events that may be characterized as similar are few. Recently, a new and startling phenomenon has begun to spread around the world, one that has not been widely studied and is of increased concern to governments across the globe: foreign terrorist fighters.

While the research is limited on FTFs, it is still worth exploring to see whether this rather unique subset of terrorists are motivated by different issues than ones who engage in terrorism in their home countries. FTFs, as defined by UN Resolution 2178, are “individuals who travel to a

State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.” These FTFs travel far and wide leaving their families and lives behind to fight for a cause in which they believe. One of the biggest current beneficiaries of the FTF movement has been ISIS, drawing supporters to their affiliates in Syria and Iraq from around the world. While the FTF is not a new concept, the literature remains limited.

In their 2015 book, “ISIS: The State of Terror,” Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger devote a chapter to exploring the limited information about these FTFs that existed at the time of publication, such as who they are, what countries they leave to join campaigns, how many FTFs are currently fighting, and how they are recruited and convinced to join. Throughout the book, the authors profile a wide variety of FTFs, including American citizens.

Stern and Berger seek a number of answers, inquiring into the number of FTFs currently fighting for ISIS, why they joined, who the foreigners are who participate, and the inner-workings of the women’s brigade. Ultimately, Stern and Berger are unable to draw conclusions or answer many of the questions they pose. When discussing who FTFs are and why they join, the authors explain that “there is no single pathway, no common socioeconomic background, not even a common religious upbringing among individuals attracted to foreign [terrorist] fighting... ]” (Stern and Berger 2015 pg. 81). Regarding estimates and reports outlining the number of FTFs, Stern and Berger cannot identify a legitimate source of motivation or even make an estimate. They explain many of the problems, such as “In general, foreign [terrorist] fighter estimates from both government sources and news reports are often unclear as to whether fighters were affiliated with ISIS and whether the estimates pertain only to Syria or to Iraq and

Syria.” (Stern and Berger 2015 pg. 79). In his book “Jihad Joe,” J.M. Berger confidently estimated that at least 1,400 Americans had taken part in military jihad in the last 30 years based on hundreds of interviews and hours of research on thousands of court documents (Berger 2011). But resources like this are not readily available yet for the current situation regarding ISIS.

Despite all the research, expertise, and study devoted to understanding terrorism and the individuals behind it, we still have a lot to learn about FTFs and how their role in new campaigns are changing the frontlines of terrorism. In order to erode ISIS’s and other groups’ recruitment campaigns, stop domestic attacks by inspired lone wolves, and make our world safer, we first need to better understand those among us who sympathize with and support these campaigns, those who are willing to leave their families and friends behind to wage war half a world away.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

Because the phenomenon of female FTFs is so new and information not readily or widely available, a large, quantitative study was impractical. Therefore, the case study approach was taken and provides a number of advantages and valuable insight, often proving to be more beneficial and persuasive than empirical data (Siggelkow 2007 pg. 22-23). According to the United States Army Training Handbook regarding case studies, a powerful argument for the use of case analyses in the field of terrorism is the ability to acquire close knowledge of one's enemy (United States Army Training...2007 pg. 2). An intimate look into the background, lifestyle, and motivations of a specific individual can enlighten the audience in ways that numbers and quantifications are unable to do. It also important to recognize that case studies do not have clearly defined solutions or specific endpoints. However, the new information gained through the case study can be applied to additional cases, used to shape a greater narrative, and further investigation and discovery (United States Army Training...2007 pg. 3).

Similarly, Siggelkow suggests that the case study approach aligns closely with the theoretical concepts behind the project by providing tangible, real-life examples. This project aims to understand the story of each individual, understand her beliefs and goals, and search for commonalities across the range of cases. While accepting the premise that a single generalizable terrorist profile does not exist, it is still worth analyzing similarities in terrorists' motivations, radicalizations, expectations, and the results of their unique endeavors in order to better understand the phenomenon and hopefully find similar qualities or characteristics across the sample.



This paper conducts a qualitative case study profiling female FTFs who have successfully completed their travels to Syria. For the purposes of this paper, “successful travel” is defined as arrival in the country where the individual sought to travel, in this case, Syria. The cases were selected primarily based on this successful travel and arrival in-country; cases of women who were stopped before boarding an airplane, during a layover, or at customs were excluded. Additionally, the cases were chosen based on similar background information such as the presence of family or spouse in their lives prior to departure, being practicing members of the Muslim faith, and residing in the United States or France. All of the women in this study fall are young adults and fall in the age range of 19 to 34 years old.

The study first begins by introducing the women through relevant background information such as where each is from, her level of education, her ethnic and religious background, etc. Next, an analytic comparison of each woman’s individual experience aims to assess the similarities and differences between the cases and search for common trends. Each woman will be assessed based on who she is, what motivated her to become a FTF, how she was radicalized, and what sort of expectations she held regarding her experience in-country.

Further, the study analyzes the results once each woman arrived in-country, if she was satisfied with her situation, if she sought to return home and if she was successful in that endeavor. Comparing these situations and results to the women’s experiences beforehand may lead to a deeper understanding of their situations and contributions to the field of terrorism studies.

## Chapter 4

### Case Studies

Before it is possible to uncover the motivations that drive young women to leave their homes to join ISIS, it is necessary to examine who they are and from where they come. This section provides background information on each of the cases. First, this paper examines the backgrounds of the two women from the United States, Hoda Muthana and Yusra Ismail. Then, the paper profiles the women who departed from France, Emilie Koenig and Sophie Kasiki. The subjects of the cases share certain similarities. They are all female, are young adults, practice Islam, live in the West, and departed without sharing this information with their families or loved ones. Only after becoming familiarized with these FTFs and their stories it is possible to progress to reasons for leaving their worlds behind, their expectations of being part of ISIS, the realities of their experiences, whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied, and what actions they took. Table 1 outlines the biographical data below.

**Table 1: Biographical Data of Cases**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
<b>Hoda Muthana</b>	20	Hoover, AL USA	Muslim	Natural born	Yemeni	Student at UAB
<b>Yusra Ismail</b>	19	St. Paul, MN, USA	Muslim	Naturalized**	Somali	High School
<b>Emilie Koenig</b>	28	Lorient, France	Muslim*	Natural Born	French	High School
<b>Sophie Kasiki</b>	34	Paris, France	Muslim*	Naturalized	Congolese	NA

Note: A single asterisk (\*) denotes the individual converted to Islam in adulthood and was not born into the religion. Two asterisks (\*\*) notes that the individual had begun the process to become a U.S. citizen but had not been granted citizenship.

## I. Hoda Muthana

Mohammed Muthana and his wife fled Yemen to seek a better life in the United States of America and have lived in the US for more than 20 years. They settled in Hoover, Alabama, a quiet suburb approximately 10 miles south of Birmingham that proudly promotes the title of one of the “Top 30 Places to Live,” categorized by low crime rates, high quality of education, and low unemployment rates as well as an image of a quiet, welcoming southern city (“Top 30,” *HooverAlabama.gov*). The community is home to three mosques and boasts a large Muslim population that supports the Birmingham Islamic Society. Within this environment, the Muthana’s raised their five children. Mohammed felt a deep gratitude toward the country that welcomed him while his homeland was ravaged by violence and civil war. According to his interview with *Buzzfeed*, which first broke news of his daughter’s departure and his family’s experience, Mohammed never imagined that his youngest daughter would grow up to hate America and seek to destroy a nation and its people who had given them a home (Hall 2015).

Hoda Muthana, born in the United States, was raised Muslim under her parents’ roof and practiced the religion all her life. As did many within the Hoover Islamic community, the women of her family dressed conservatively, wearing hijab outside of the house, and Hoda was no exception. Her family members identify themselves as devout and traditional Muslims, but exhibit no radical tendencies. Throughout her youth, Hoda was exposed to foundations of Islam and embraced them. As she grew older however, she began to take a deeper interest in her faith, a development that pleased Hoda’s parents (Hall 2015).

Hoda’s transition to adulthood was not unlike most young adults her age. She graduated from Hoover High School in 2013 and enrolled at the University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB) where she studied business (Corcoran 2015). Friends and acquaintances from high school

described her as quiet, reserved, and someone who “kept to herself” (Corcoran 2015). But her time commuting to university was short-lived. Almost immediately after enrolling, Hoda dropped all of her classes, which resulted in the university issuing her a reimbursement check. In November of 2014, Hoda convinced her family that she needed to attend a class trip to Atlanta, Georgia, a three-hour drive away. Initially, her father was resistant and refused to let her attend. But after Hoda convinced him that her grades would suffer if she did not go on the trip, her parents agreed and Hoda boarded a bus to the city. Using the money she had gotten back from her cancelled classes at UAB, she bought a plane ticket to Syria leaving her country and her family behind (Hall 2015).

## **II. Yusra Ismail**

Yusra Ismail was born in Nairobi, Kenya, the eighth of nine children raised by her widowed mother. Her family is Somali and Yusra grew up in Kenya before moving to the United States with her family as a teenager in 2009 (Yuen 2014). Her family settled in St. Paul, Minnesota, a city that is home to the largest concentration of Somali-Americans in the country (Gambino, Trevelyan, and Fitzwater 2014). Throughout her youth, Yusra volunteered at the family’s local mosque in St. Paul and collaborated with community members to maintain a vegetable garden. Yusra graduated in the spring of 2014 from a charter school in Minneapolis with plans to attend nursing school in the future (Yuen 2014). Ahmed Elmi, the current executive director of Yusra’s alma mater, the Lighthouse Academy, remembers Yusra as a kind student, one who was “so respectful...very respectful, but quiet,” (Yuen 2015). As a teen, Yusra did not smoke or party but enjoyed listening to music by Muslim singer Maher Zain on her phone (Yuen 2014). In many ways, Yusra was just like many other young girls her age.

Yusra, a practicing Muslim, is described by her family as a shy and quiet girl they never guessed would abandon her home to participate in terrorism. Her sister reflects upon Yusra's last days at home noting that, "before she left, she never mentioned anything about Syria," (Yuen 2014). In the week before her departure, Yusra seemed to be concerned with matters of her daily life, such as stressing over what to wear to her friend's bridal shower later that week. Yusra usually dressed very modestly in accordance with her faith: loosely fitting hijabs and the more conservative niqab when visiting the mosque. On August 22, 2014, dressed in her new clothes, Yusra bid farewell to her family, claiming to be on her way to the bridal shower. Later that night, she called home to say that she would be staying the night at her friend's apartment. Two days later, Yusra contacted her family and told them she was in Syria (Yuen 2014).

Yusra's departure was startling to her family both emotionally and logistically. First, they saw no warning signs before her departure. But perhaps just as troubling was how she physically ventured to Syria. Because Yusra had not yet completed the process of becoming an American citizen, she did not have proper travel documents such as an American passport. Her family also reported that Yusra also did not have a job to pay for the expense of her travel (Yuen 2014). She used a friend's passport, which the friend claims Yusra took without her friend's knowledge. In her absence, federal prosecutors have charged Yusra Ismail with misuse of a passport and have issued a warrant for her arrest (United States District Court, 2014).

### **III. Emilie Koenig**

In 1984, Emilie Koenig was born in Lorient, France, the fourth child to her mother and policeman father ("Émile König..." 2015). Throughout her youth, Emilie received a standard education in her hometown. She worked at a clothing store in Lorient from which a former

colleague described her as “joyful” and “happy to live” (Duvivier 2014). But as she matured, her enthusiasm dwindled and her psychological stability weakened, leading her to drugs and eventually, her husband (“Émile König...” 2015).

In the mid 2000s, Emilie married an Algerian man who had a history of involvement with drugs and had been previously jailed for drug trafficking. By 2010, she had converted to Islam, was learning Arabic, and changed her first name to Samra. Emilie also began to wear the niqab, the only woman in her small, country town to do so (“Émile König...” 2015). By 2012, Emilie departed France for Turkey and then onward to Syria. She left behind her two sons in the hands of their grandmother (“Émile König...” 2015).

#### **IV. Sophie Kasiki**

Sophie Kasiki<sup>1</sup> was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 1980’s to a devout Catholic family. For the first eight years of her life, Sophie enjoyed a comfortable childhood in a household of “strong, independent women” until her world turned upside down (Willsher 2016). When Sophie was just nine years old, her mother passed away and she went to live with her sister in Paris, France. The loss of her mother, her “guardian angel,” was devastating to young Sophie who fell into childhood depression. This deep sadness and loneliness lasted for decades and throughout adolescence and adulthood, Sophie says she felt a “hole in her heart” (Willsher 2016).

After moving to Paris, Sophie began down a path that would seem to be the story of successful cultural integration. She became a French citizen, got married, and became a social worker (Ferrari 2016). Her work at a local community center primarily involved assisting

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: Sophie Kasiki is a pseudonym. For her personal safety, she refers to herself in this way in the press and for publication purposes.

immigrant families adapt to life in their new country and the Parisian suburbs. It was during this time that Sophie decided to convert to Islam, in search of an inner peace that would help her to fill the void she still felt from the loss of her mother. Although she was married by this time, she neglected to share the news of her conversion with her husband, an atheist (Ferrari 2016).

In February of 2015, Sophie left France for Syria. She told her husband she was traveling to Istanbul where she would be volunteering at an orphanage for a few weeks. Instead, she took her four-year-old son and departed for southern Turkey before making her way to Syria (Ferrari 2016).

## Chapter 5

### Motivations and Radicalization

From simply examining the backgrounds of these women, few remarkable things stand out. They are educated young women with moderate religious beliefs. How did they radicalize and become FTFs? What changed within them or around them that could drive their decision to leave their lives behind and surround themselves with violence? How did Hoda, a quiet and traditional girl from Alabama come to make the decision to flee home? How could Sophie Kasiki willingly take her four-year-old child to one to one of the most volatile cities in our world today?

#### I. Hoda Muthana

Hoda's transformation was rapid. The origin of her radicalization can be traced back to a graduation gift, a newly found accessibility to a world far away, and a blooming interest in her religion that initially made her family proud. Innocent as it may seem, the combination of these developments set her down a route toward Syria.

For her graduation from Hoover High School in 2013, Mohammed Muthana gifted his daughter a smartphone (Hall 2015). None of the children in the Muthana family had phones until after they graduated from high school. Hoda was permitted to use the phone but not without some restrictions. She could not have social media accounts such as Facebook or Twitter, even though Hoda's brothers were allowed to have accounts and post personal information, opinions, and photos of themselves. Hoda also was not permitted to use messaging applications for anything other than communication with family members. These rules applied not just to Hoda



but to all the women in her family (Hall 2015). To ensure that she was following the guidelines, Mohammed would often check Hoda's phone, to which she objected. Hoda claimed that the phone was hers and the content was private. In the interview with *Buzzfeed*, Mohammed reported that his typical response would be, "Yeah you're private, but I am a father. I need to know what you do," (Hall 2015). But he never found anything troubling. Still, Mohammed and his wife worried that Hoda was hiding something from them or was using the phone to talk to boys (Hall 2015).

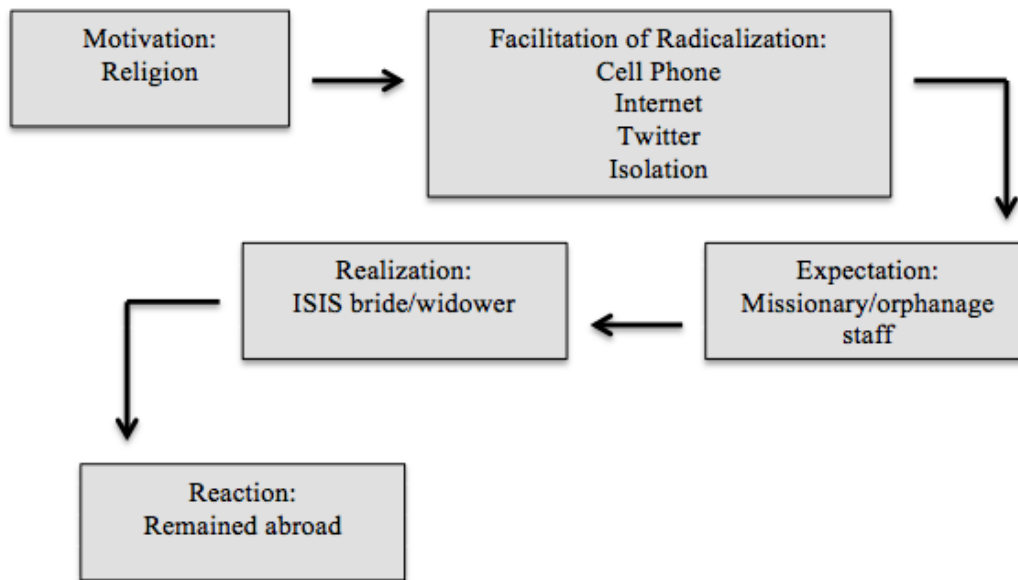
Hoda did use her phone to download a variety of Islamic applications (apps) with electronic versions of the Qur'an, hadiths, and suras. As Hoda used the Islamic apps, she greatly expanded her knowledge of her faith. In the year and a half before she left for Syria, Hoda became much more devout in appearance and critical of her face-to-face Islamic community. Hoda began using YouTube to watch lectures about Islam and listen to a range of scholars' ideas about the Muslim faith. She felt more connected to these intellectuals than the religious people in her life and felt that they were influencing her in ways she had never experienced before (Hall 2015). Hoda memorized entire passages of the Qur'an and would copy out long sections in English into journals. At first, this was pleasing to her family. Her parents were proud of her new commitment and dedication to her religion (Hall 2015). They had no way of knowing how Hoda's devotion would quickly morph into something much more sinister.

As she began to learn more and connect more deeply with her faith, Hoda made significant changes in her life. She began to dress more modestly, became unsatisfied with her situation and "didn't like [her] Islamic community far too much" (Hall 2015). Hoda also explains how she learned to behave more modestly, and how Islam helped mute her temper and make her a "better person" (Hall 2015).

Hoda's transformation took a pivotal turn in the fall of 2013 when she secretly joined Twitter and began not only consuming information, but also disseminating radical and conservative Islamic views. Before long, Hoda's various accounts gained thousands of followers, resulting in an increased pressure to continue producing extreme ideas. Hoda began to promote violence and hate, criticized other Muslims, especially Muslim women, and spoke ill of various nationalities (Hall 2015). Via Twitter, Hoda developed lines of communication with members of ISIS and others who had become FTFs. They influenced her thinking and enabled her to further develop an online alter ego, promoting ideas and practices she herself did not follow in real life (Hall 2015).

*Buzzfeed* spoke to Hoda's classmate, but not a close friend, and inquired about her knowledge of Hoda's Twitter presence. Immediately, the classmate assumed that Hoda had become a FTF for ISIS saying "I just kind of expected it from her" (Hall 2015). And while she agreed that Hoda's Twitter personality did not match her outward persona, if Hoda's classmate could draw this conclusion without really knowing Hoda or considering her to be a close friend, how could the Muthana family have missed this? Could her departure have been prevented? Figure 1 below illustrates Hoda's path to becoming and ultimately leaving the role as a FTF.

**Figure 1: Hoda Muthana Path to FTF**



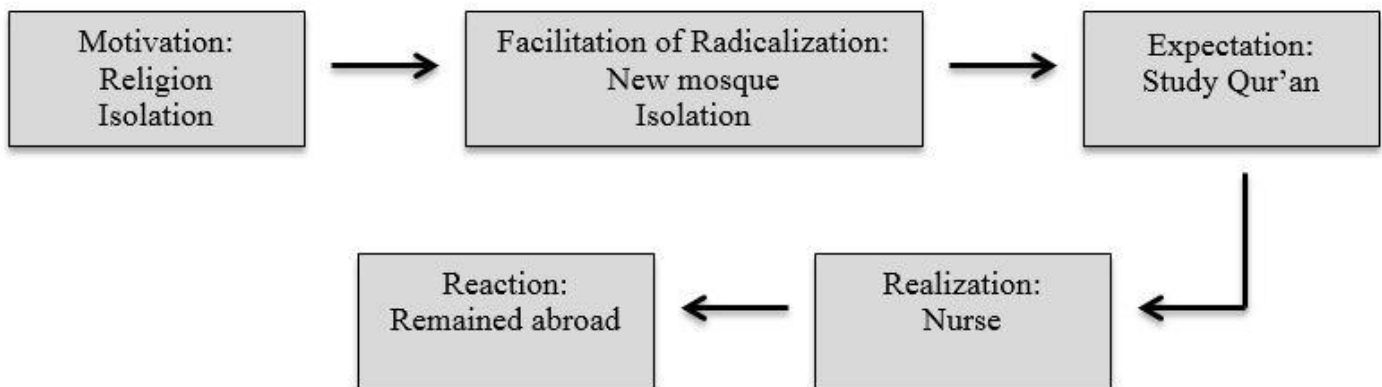
## II. Yusra Ismail

In the months and years leading up to Yusra’s departure for Syria, her family noticed changes in her behaviors and daily routine that concerned them. She expressed interest in furthering and deepening her faith but quickly became fixated on studying and memorizing the Qur’an, to the point that her family feared she was taking things “too far” (Yuen 2014). Further, Yusra began to consciously isolate herself. She stopped attending the mosque her family frequented and began visiting one where she knew less attendees so there would be “fewer friends to distract her” (Yuen 2014). Yusra stopped participating in activities with her family because she felt it was a waste of time and distracted her from her studies. Additionally, she deactivated her Facebook account (Yuen 2014).

As these events transpired, Yusra’s family recognized the signs and lack of balance in her life (Yuen 2014). However, they reasoned that she was not in harm’s way as she still lived at

home and had no fathomable way of doing anything drastic. Her family was comforted by the fact that she never seemed to follow world news and certainly never spoke of Syria prior to her departure, according to her sister (Yuen 2014). No one in her life saw her to be “in danger of being radicalized” (Yuen 2015). When Yusra’s family realized what was really going on in her life, it was too late. Figure 2 below illustrates Yusra’s path to becoming a FTF and beyond, including her expectations, her reality, and reaction to her situation .

**Figure 2: Yusra Ismail Path to FTF**

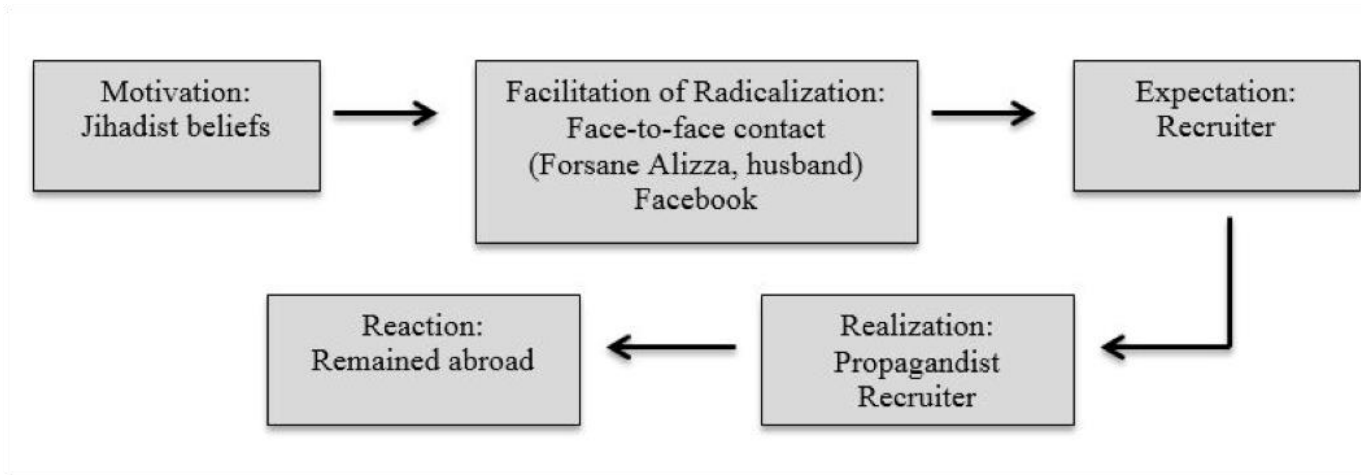


### III. Emilie Koenig

Emilie Koenig’s motivations are slightly less clear than some of the other cases, however her radicalization process is perhaps the most severe. After meeting her Algerian husband, Emilie converted to Islam and rapidly became radicalized. It is unclear whether Emilie’s husband influenced her decision to convert to Islam or assisted with the process in any way, although it is believed he was a practicing Muslim at the time of her conversion. Very shortly after beginning her conversion process, Emilie became affiliated with the Islamic group *Forsane Alizza Nantes*,

also known as the “knights of pride” (“Daughter of French Cop” 2015). This connection, established through her contacts in the Muslim community, amplified her radicalization. Emilie began to dress fully veiled whenever she left the house and started participating in activities and demonstrations organized by *Forsane Alizza* (“Émile König...” 2015). Emilie frequently distributed leaflets and handouts outside the mosque in Lorient promoting jihad and was often seen in Paris participating in protests there (“Daughter of French Cop” 2015). In 2012, Emilie Koenig was summoned to court in Lorient for her involvement with *Forsane Alizza*, which the French government considered a private militia. During her appearance, she was involved in an altercation with a guard over being asked to remove her veil (Duviver 2014). She refused and posted footage of the dispute on YouTube, citing the incident as an example of discrimination against Muslims in France and calling for action (“Émile König...” 2015).

Shortly after this incident, the French government disbanded *Forsane Alizza* and Emilie initiated her presence on social media setting up a number of Facebook accounts. These pages promoted radical ideas and called for holy war to be waged by Muslims (“Émile König...” 2015). French authorities also believed that Emilie was aiding in the radicalization of other young women in southern France at this time (“Daughter of French Cop” 2015). In the summer of 2012, the French Ministry of Economy and Finance issued an order prohibiting “any movement or transfer of funds to benefit” Emilie, who they believed would inevitably be visiting a combat zone in the near future “to carry out the armed jihad” (Duviver 2014). Almost immediately after, she voyaged through Turkey to Syria, joining her husband among the early stages of ISIS. Figure 3 below illustrates Emilie’s path to becoming a FTF, her expectations, realizations upon arrival, and reaction to her reality.

**Figure 3: Emilie Koenig Path to FTF**

#### IV. Sophie Kasiki

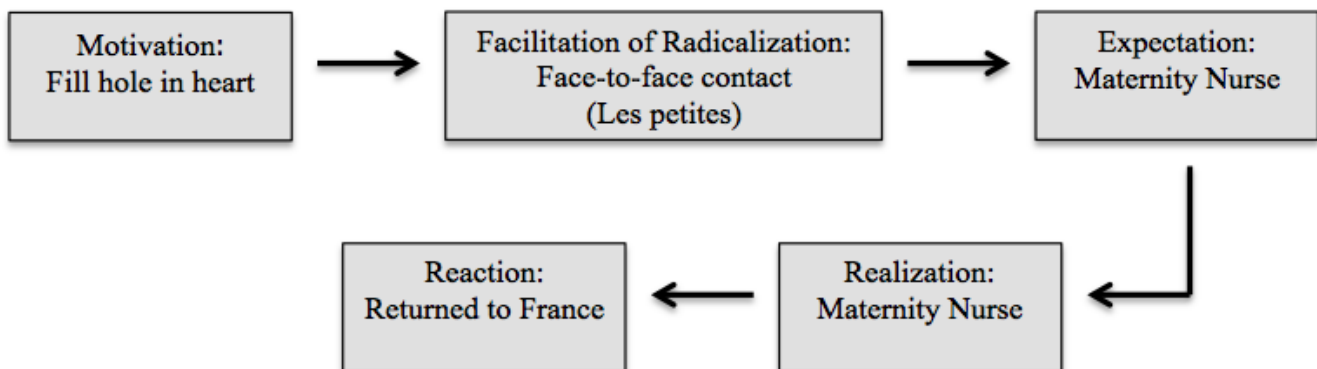
To understand Sophie's path to traveling to Syria, one must return to her conversion to Islam. Unbeknownst to her atheist husband, Sophie had begun studying and practicing Islam, hoping that the faith would both give her purpose and fill the deep void she still felt from the loss of her mother (Ferrari 2016). Through her new faith, she met three Muslim men to whom she quickly grew close and developed a deep sense of trust. They were ten years younger than Sophie and became like brothers to her, leading her to nickname them "les petites" or "the little ones" (Willsher 2016). "Les petites" helped Sophie feel comfortable in her new environment but just as quickly as the men came into her life, they disappeared. Sophie lost contact with "les petites" in September of 2014 until they reached out to her, from Syria (Willsher 2016).

Instinctively, Sophie's motherly reaction was to encourage the young men to return home and to end their dangerous adventure. She spoke with them daily and urged them to think of their families and mothers, believing this emotional appeal would persuade them to get on the "next plane home" (Willsher 2016). But they explained to Sophie that they were not in Syria to

become extremists, simply to do humanitarian work. While Sophie disagreed with their decisions, she helped “les petites,” conveying messages between them and their families (Ferrari 2016). But before she realized what was happening, the focus of their conversations shifted from the men’s return to France to Sophie’s departure for Syria.

Subtly but strongly, they began encouraging Sophie to travel to Syria to work in a maternity hospital where, she too could make a difference. “Les petites” told her she could shine light into a dark situation and help people in need; never did they mention their involvement with ISIS (Ferrari 2016). Within five months, “les petites” convinced Sophie to leave France for Syria. In February of 2015, she and her son crossed the border into Syria. Figure 4 below illustrates Sophie’s path to becoming a FTF from her motivations through her reaction to her situation after arriving in Syria.

**Figure 4: Sophie Kasiki Path to FTF**



## Chapter 6

### Expectations and Realizations

In order to fully understand these cases, it is crucial to consider each woman's expectations when traveling to Syria and the actual role she found herself filling once she arrived. These final pieces of information enable the cases to be compared holistically and identify themes, trends, and signs which will be discussed in Chapter 8. Table 2 below outlines the findings of the previous chapter and the current chapter.

**Table 2: Results**

Name	Motivation	Expectation	Realization	Reaction
<b>Hoda Muthana</b>	Radicalization, isolation	Missionary, orphanage staff	ISIS bride/widower	Believed remained
<b>Yusra Ismail</b>	Radicalization, isolation	To study Qur'an	Nurse	Believed remained
<b>Emilie Koenig</b>	Radicalization, jihadist beliefs	Recruit, spread Islam	Propagandist, recruiter	Believed remained
<b>Sophie Kasiki</b>	Fill void	Maternity Nurse	Maternity nurse	Returned to France

#### I. Hoda Muthana

Hoda's family was shocked when they discovered she had left the United States. Their first contact came when Hoda called her sister from Turkey saying that she was en route to Syria. The next day, Mohammed called Hoda. During the conversation, she told her family that her travels to Syria were to become a missionary. She reported that she would be helping widows and orphans and promised her father that she did not come to Syria to join ISIS. Hoda told



Mohammed she was still “the kind of girl” that he raised and that she “wasn’t going to do anything wrong” (Hall 2015).

But these words did not remotely represent Hoda’s true feelings and expectations for her journey. In her first tweet from Syria, Hoda mentioned burning her American passport at a bonfire because she no longer had any use for the document (Hall 2015). Shortly thereafter, she tweeted about the low number of U.S. citizens in Syria, stated that Americans are cowards, and suggested that American ISIS supporters back at home should “terrorize” Muslims in the United States (Hall 2015).

Yet Hoda continued to hide these sentiments from her family even after her departure. After one month in Syria, Hoda called her father and told him she wanted to return home because she was facing pressure to marry an ISIS fighter. Hoda asked her father for \$2,500 to assist with her escape to Turkey and to acquire travel documents (Hall 2015). Mohammed offered to help but inquired about the details of her plan. Eventually, Hoda stopped responding to his messages and Mohammed realized she had been deceiving him. In her conversation with *Buzzfeed*, Hoda admitted that the story was fraudulent saying “It would never cross my mind to come back. I wanted to see if he would help me out during troubling times. It was just a test. I knew he wouldn’t send me anything anyway” (Hall 2015).

Less than a month after Hoda arrived in Syria she married a fellow jihadist and FTF, an Australian named Suhan Abdul Rahman (Corcoran 2015). But the marriage was brief: Rahman was killed only 87 days after the wedding (Hall 2015). Hoda sent a photo of his dead body to her father and tweeted it to her followers. In response to her father’s concerned messages, Hoda wrote in Arabic, “I am not going to come back. This is the right place for me to live and I am

really ready to die, to meet my god as a true Muslim” (Hall 2015). Hoda later denied these exact words, but admits that she is willing to sacrifice everything if need be.

Hoda Muthana claimed she was going to Syria to serve as a missionary. But the explanation given to her family does not align with her tweets to her followers. She remains in Syria, a widow, projecting radical statements on the Internet. From a now suspended account (@ZumarJannah), Hoda wrote the following on March 19, 2015 according to *Buzzfeed*:

“Americans wake up! Men and women altogether. You have much to do while you live under our greatest enemy, enough of your sleeping! Go on drive-bys, and spill all of their blood, or rent a big truck and drive all over them. Veterans, Patriot, Memorial etc Day parades..go on drive-bys + spill all of their blood or rent a big truck n drive all over them. Kill them.”

Her commitment to ISIS and jihadism appears to remain undeterred. Hoda is believed to still be in Syria, although her whereabouts are unknown. Her personal, although not expressed, expectations seem to have been met by the reality that set in upon her arrival in Syria. At present, Hoda has not taken action to return to the United States.

## **II. Yusra Ismail**

When Yusra arrived in Syria, she called her family in Minnesota and assured them she was only planning to study the Qur’an while she was away. In the short period following her arrival, Yusra telephoned her family three times. Her sister said that each time, Yusra sounded “content” (Yuen 2015). During the third call, Yusra told her family she was pleased with her situation. She described her housing, living with other girls from around the world. Her high

spirits were most evident in her discussions of the warm weather and she teased her family for “putting up with” the Minnesota winters (Yuen 2015).

Yusra’s exact role within the ISIS community is uncertain although her family suspects due to her previously expressed interests, she may be serving as a nurse. This has not been confirmed. No recent contact with Yusra has been reported and the passport she used to travel to Syria has not been used to try to re-enter the United States. While Yusra’s family beings to accept they may never see their daughter again, the hope that she returns remains. Her sister spoke for the family saying, “We hope she pops up randomly and tells us it was a prank” (Yuen 2015).

### **III. Emilie Koenig**

The details of her personal life are largely unknown as Emilie has not spoken with media or issued public statements on her own behalf since traveling to Syria. Emilie was not allowed to engage in combat, not unlike the other female members who joined ISIS at this time. However, after arriving in Syria, Emilie appeared in propagandist videos, filling largely the same role as she did back home in France and serving as a tool in ISIS’s recruitment campaign . She has appeared holding a shotgun while promoting radical and violent ideas (“Daughter of a French Cop” 2015). On at least one occasion, Emilie was filmed specifically addressing her children back in France who are now banned from leaving the country (Duviver 2014). She said, “Remember that you are Muslim. Jihad will not stop as long as there are enemies to fight” (Émile König...” 2015).

In 2012, the United Nations placed Emilie Koenig on a terrorist watch list, citing that she “incites violent activities against France” (“Security Council...” 2014). French intelligence

supported this claim having traced calls from Emilie to contacts still in France during which Emilie encouraged her contacts to “mount attacks against French institutions” (Émile König...” 2015) Emilie is believed to still be in Syria working and recruiting for ISIS although her identity has not been confirmed in published propaganda or videos since 2013 (Émile König...” 2015).

#### **IV. Sophie Kasiki**

Before she left France, Sophie’s friends, “les petites” spoke to her about life in Raqqa, Syria as if it was a “paradise” she could not dare to miss (Willsher 2016). When she and her son traveled to ISIS’s capital city, Sophie believed she would be serving as a maternity nurse helping new mothers and children. Upon reaching Raqqa, Sophie was greeted by “les petites” and did begin working in a maternity hospital. But the hospital was an ISIS-run hospital in unspeakably poor condition. The facilities were unsanitary and patients were treated unjustly and disrespectfully (Ferrari 2016). Sophie and her son were placed in a dismal apartment and instructed not to leave unaccompanied. When she did leave, she must be covered from head to toe. Her passport was taken and she was warned not to contact her family back in France (Willsher 2016).

In the first ten days, Sophie realized her grave error and desperately began to develop a plan for returning to France. Initially, Sophie asked to be let go and to return to her husband. She was threatened with stoning and death, as a woman with a child was not permitted to go out alone (Willsher 2016). Sophie was beaten trying to defend her son from being taken to mosque by other FTFs. She fought back and as punishment, was taken to a madaffa, or guesthouse, where dozens of other women were being held (Willsher 2016). The women and children there cheered ISIS’s violence and brutality as they watched gruesome videos broadcast on the

television. Sophie discovered that the only way a woman left the madaffa was by marrying a jihadist . She knew she had no choice but to escape, for her own sake and for her that of her son (Willsher 2016).

In the days following, one of the exterior doors of the madaffa was left unlocked and Sophie saw her fleeting chance. After a seemingly unbelievable ordeal and the help of kind Syrians along the way, Sophie and her son made contact with the Syrian Freedom Fighters. Sophie's husband arranged for the transfer of funds to ensure her safe transport to the Turkish border (Willsher 2016). In the dead of night, a young Syrian drove Sophie and her son, who was hiding her under her niqab, across the border into Turkey knowing full well if they were caught, all would be killed (Ferrari 2016). Sophie and her son returned to France physically unharmed.

Upon arriving back in France, Sophie faced interrogation by French intelligence regarding her time in Syria and her intentions upon her return. Subsequently, Sophie was jailed for two months and then released (Ferrari 2016). Since her return, Sophie and her husband have reconciled but she still may face kidnapping charges for taking her son with her to Syria without her husband's knowledge (Willsher 2016). Sophie continues to express her deep remorse and regret, speaking out against ISIS and publicly discouraging others from making the same mistakes she made. In a recent interview, Sophie expressed her intentions, saying "Now I must prevent other people being drawn into this horror. What can I say? Don't go," (Ferrari 2016).

## Chapter 7

### Analysis

These cases provide a great deal of insight into the personal lives of the female FTFs flocking to Syria. Although the sample size is limited, the details of these cases and the information presented in them are not to be dismissed. A number of trends, themes, and signs can be gleaned from studying the paths of these four women. The primary findings include the value of face-to-face contact, the importance of social media as a tool for both inclusion and isolation, the influence of a supportive family or husband, and the variability of satisfaction in relation to outcome. Also worth noting is ISIS's apparent ability to appeal to various desires and exploit expectations during the recruitment process.

One of the most notable findings of this study is the importance that face-to-face contact still plays in the recruitment process of FTFs, despite the great amount of attention focused on ISIS's social media and Internet campaigns. Two of the four women studied experienced intimate personal interactions with individuals who held radical beliefs similar to those of ISIS or had gone to fight for the cause themselves. For Emilie Koenig, her husband witnessed her conversion to Islam and departed for Syria himself, possibly causing Emilie to be less hesitant about beginning life in a new country. Additionally, Emilie's involvement with the *Forsane Alizza Nantes* exposed her to a close-knit and closed-minded community where she was exposed to members' radical ideas, which helped shape her own views and beliefs. Emilie's situation is an excellent example of some of the claims social psychologists make when explaining the dynamics of extremists and terrorist organizations or collectives.

A great deal of research has been conducted to suggest that group settings cultivate extreme attitudes (Borum 2011). In other words, the median opinion shifts towards the most

extreme in a subconscious attempt to keep the group in agreement. This phenomenon can cause the collective and the individuals within it to make less rational decisions than they would otherwise reach on their own. From the information available, it appears that Emilie's views and certainly her level of outspokenness for the cause become more extreme after she became an active member of *Forsane Alizza*. Her case legitimizes and exemplifies hypotheses and theories presented by a number of scholars regarding social psychology and it proves the significant role that membership in a group can play regarding an individual's radicalization.

Sophie Kasiki was also influenced by face-to-face contact but in a much more intimate way than Emilie Koenig. Sophie became very close, very quickly with the men she called "les petites." They developed a deep sense of trust and apparent understanding of each other that clouded Sophie's judgment and allowed her to be persuaded to travel to Syria. A significant distinction to draw between Sophie's story and the details of the other women's paths is that Sophie does not appear to have been religiously radicalized in the same way as the others. Sophie was not an active member of any organization with extreme views prior to her departure for Syria. She did not boast a strong social media presence on Facebook or Twitter as some of the other women in this study did. Sophie did convert to Islam, but there were fewer outward signs of her developing faith than the three other women showed.

Sophie is perhaps the only one of the four women who was not radicalized and, not indirectly related, she is the only woman who returned home. Despite being influenced to go abroad by face-to-face contact with "les petites," Sophie's departure to Syria was rooted in the concept that she would be performing humanitarian aid and helping individuals in a war-torn area. Almost immediately, once she recognized that the "paradise" she had been promised did not exist, she began looking for a way to undo her decision. These details would suggest that her

lack of deeply religious motivation for going abroad made it easier for her to disengage and disassociate altogether.

After assessing the case of Sophie Kasiki, it is questionable if she should be labeled as a FTF at all. She did not go to Syria with the intention of joining ISIS or waging war in the name of Islam. Yet she left home under suspicious circumstances and was dishonest about the intentions of her travel to her husband. And regardless of her intentions, she still traveled to one of the most hostile areas in the world today. From the outside, Sophie Kasiki falls neatly into the category of female FTF. Yet a closer look reveals that perhaps she should not be grouped with the other women assessed in this study. This revelation raises an important distinction for those studying this topic and governments looking to prevent people from going abroad to join terror campaigns. Individuals may be traveling to Syria for reasons other than radical religious beliefs or jihadist intentions, possibly having altruistic intentions altogether. A discovery such as this further complicates the process of identifying individuals before they go abroad, as Sophie Kasiki's lack of religious radicalization would not have set her apart as a likely candidate to become a FTF.

Before moving on from this concept, it is important to note that the two women who were influenced by primarily face-to-face contact are also the oldest of the four women analyzed in this study. In the modern day, people of all ages have become acquainted and quite proficient in their use of technology, the Internet, and social media. An argument that Emilie and Sophie were incapable of accessing the same information and making the same contacts as Hoda and Yusra would be a shaky argument, at best. All generations of people now use the Internet and all it has to offer in a vast array of ways. It is plausible to suggest that Emilie and Sophie would be less likely to be influenced by Facebook and Twitter due to their age and their adaption to the use of



these platforms rather than having grown up with them like members of the younger generations such as Hoda and Yusra.

Yet one must not forget that Emilie was the facilitator of a number of Facebook accounts prior to her departure for Syria. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that Emilie was also suspected of attempting to recruit other young women from southern France to become FTFs themselves. This example could be used to support the aforementioned theory that slightly older adults have the capacity to access the same tools as the student generation, but the student generation is more susceptible to the material offered there.

Alternatively, the difference in the importance of face-to-face contact versus social media use between the American women and the French women could be viewed in an entirely different context. Perhaps the prevalence of face-to-face contact in France is rooted in greater availability due a much larger Muslim population in France than in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center's most recent population estimates, in 2010, 4.7 million Muslims lived in France compared to 2.7 million in the United States (Pew Research Center 2015). More significant than the total number of Muslims in each country is the percentage of Muslims as part of the total population. Muslims consisted of 0.9% of the United States population, while French Muslims made up 7.5% of the population (Pew Research Center 2015). Emilie and Sophie's exposure to face-to-face contacts may simply have arisen due to a much larger proportion of Muslims in their country than in the United States. And with a larger population of Muslims, it is logical to presume France would support a larger population of Muslims with radical and extreme views than in the United States making contact more easily attainable.

Next, the study examines the role of social media in the cases of the younger women, Hoda and Yusra. In these two examples, social media affected the women's paths in very

different ways. Hoda used social media to collect information and radicalize her views while Yusra consciously removed herself from social media in an effort to become more isolated from her present lifestyle and the people it. Hoda used social media to accumulate information about Islam, about radical ideas, and new concepts. The Internet was Hoda's primary source of radicalization and most directly influenced her path to Syria. Then, once she became more aware of the ideas and concepts that existed, she adopted and flaunted them, even if it was only online and not in her daily routines.

By consuming and exuding social media, Hoda became included in a community of extremism. At first, this was by choice, as she had to pursue the community and integrate herself into it. But once Hoda found the community she was looking for, she felt part of it and welcomed by it, making contacts and accumulating followers. Hoda used social media to as her introduction to extremism and her outlet for it.

Quite the opposite is true for Yusra who deactivated her Facebook account months before her departure for Syria. By doing so, she closed herself off from her family and friends and prevented them from seeing inside her life. In this way, she used social media, or the lack thereof, to isolate herself from the community around her, one that she was no longer satisfied with. Although both Hoda and Yusra experienced social media in different ways, each woman's decision to use or withdraw from the platforms furthered their radicalization process.

To relate the current topic of social media to a previous point of analysis surrounding face-to-face contact, social media and the online community serve as a breeding ground for the same sort of social psychological theories discussed above in regard to collectives. From the details provided about Hoda's use of Twitter and the increasing radicalization of the subject matter, it is likely that she experienced radicalization of her ideas due to the views of those she

interacted with online. While this form of interaction is certainly less personal than the face-to-face method mentioned above, recent research has begun to explore how the anonymity of an online profile can embolden the user to say things that they might not when their comments and contributions online are paired with their name or identity (Huang, Hong, and Burtch 2015).

This study dispels some of the traditional characteristics that are used to identify terrorists and FTFs. Most notable is the idea that people who become FTFs are loners from troubled backgrounds, with no families or friends to support them. From this study and the histories of the four women, it is clear this aloneness should not be viewed as a prerequisite for becoming a FTF. Hoda Muthana and Yusra Ismail both lived with their parents and siblings in close-knit families. Emilie Koenig, from a small French city, was raised by a mother and father, the latter a man of the law who served his country. Sophie Kasiki, although suffering the loss of her mother at a young age, lived with relatives in Paris and developed friends and acquaintances during her time in the capital city.

Another worthy comparison can be drawn between the spousal involvement in the cases of Emilie Koenig and Sophie Kasiki. Emilie's husband traveled to Syria and became an ISIS FTF before Emilie made the journey, perhaps prompting her to make the trip altogether. Sophie, on the other hand, traveled to Syria in secrecy, leading her atheist husband to believe she would be spending time in Turkey working at an orphanage. This detail regarding the involvement of a husband in a woman's path to becoming a FTF is significant in terms of face-to-face contact and familial support. Emilie's husband, regardless of the role he played in her conversion to Islam, likely influenced her decision to travel to Syria based on their relationship as husband and wife and the inherent bond associated with that connection. The husband served both as a contact within the radical Muslim community and a member of Emilie's support network. Alternatively,

Sophie experienced neither of these phenomena. Sophie ensured that her husband was unaware of her religious affiliations or intentions when leaving France. This distinction may help explain why Emilie is believed to still be in Syria while Sophie returned almost immediately to France. Sophie's husband sent her emails with family photos attempting to convince her to come home (Willsher 2016). Emilie joined her husband in Syria and fought in ISIS's campaign alongside him.

The study also considers the differences between how women are recruited to join ISIS compared to men who become FTFs. Media coverage discusses ISIS's tools for recruitment such as the videos of beheadings and graphic clips posted online and on Twitter. Through this research, it is evident that an entirely separate layer of propaganda is at work when persuading women. Two women, Hoda and Sophie, claimed they traveled to Syria to become missionaries and nurses, respectively. At least initially, they were attracted by a sense of opportunity, an altruistic notion of making a difference in the company of those who shared similar beliefs. This perspective is in sharp contrast to the stereotypical ideas of FTFs, thrill-seeking young men with firearms looking for danger and eager for adventure. Hoda may have had more violent intentions than Sophie, but she expressed interest in aiding women and girls. Yusra contradicts the norm as well, traveling to Syria in order to study the Qur'an more deeply and expand her faith.

Emilie Koenig's case appears to be more comparable to men's recruitment. She promoted violence and bloodshed and took up arms, even if it was only to create promotional material. Additionally, Emilie held the most extreme views of the four women studied, perhaps indicating that the modes of recruitment are considered on a spectrum based on an individual's level of radicalization. Those who are believers of Islam but not violent can be persuaded to become FTFs by appealing to their morals or sense of duty to help others, while those who are

radicalized extremists can be attracted by the violent and most conservative interpretations of Islam.

Emilie Koenig's case in conjunction with the other three women's stories make an important characteristic of ISIS very clear: the group's ability to appeal to the various desires of potential FTFs and exploit the expectations these individuals have about life as a FTF. The motivations for leaving their homes in the United States and France varied widely from case to case. Hoda felt it was her religious duty to fight against the non-believers. Yusra wanted to further study her faith. Emilie sought to recruit others to join in ISIS's campaign. Sophie saw a chance to lend a helping hand in a war-ravaged country. These reasons for traveling to Syria could not be more diverse yet each of these women was persuaded to flee her home. All four of these women saw an opportunity to accomplish something by traveling to Syria. ISIS and its supporters were successful in bringing these four very different women from diverse backgrounds with distinct backgrounds halfway around the world to join their cause. Acknowledging ISIS's sophisticated ability to adapt to its audience and provide whatever propaganda or messages necessary to recruit FTFs is an important step to developing tools to combat the recruitment process.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

A study of such a small scale does not claim to be generalizable or applicable to every individual in relevant question. These research findings are not definitive. The individual experiences of the four women profiled in this paper may be entirely unique to these four women, with no further application to other FTFs. However, based on the findings and the notable similarities of the four cases, this interpretation is unlikely to be true. In other words, the trends and commonalities of the four very different women studied are not insignificant. But, if this study's analysis was voided and its findings discredited theoretically or methodologically, a very important point remains valid. Even if the conclusions of this paper are specific and relevant only to the four cases presented here and not applicable on a broader scale, that would then classify these four cases as "exceptions." And if this project was able to find four "exceptions," cases that did not fit the traditional model of who a female FTF is and why she may choose to go abroad, it is only logical to presume then that more exceptions exist. So even if the findings of this study are too specific to be useful to the broader field of terrorism, the study is not without worth. Further, if these cases are can be labeled as exceptions, this begs the question, "Who is not the exception?" Are the similarities in these cases enough to identify new standards for who is likely to become a FTF? This question requires further research based upon the findings of this study. Overall, the study reveals that researchers, governments, and policy makers must expand their ideas and preconceptions about who is becoming a FTF and why she is doing so.

In addition to the analyzing the similarities between and trends across the four cases, the study identifies key moments when these young women could have been stopped or redirected along their paths. When Yusra changed mosques and her family grew concerned about

her withdrawal into herself, her family and the Muslim community in St. Paul, Minnesota could have stepped in and embraced her back into the fold. Yusra was trying so hard to isolate herself yet it does not appear that anyone in her life tried to reel her back into herself. If the path to becoming a FTF is visualized as a highway, these pivotal moments can be considered as exit ramps or opportunities for disengagement. Instead of governments focusing on surveillance and attempting to identify radicalism via social media or association, perhaps religious communities should be educated about the path to becoming a FTF and instructed about how to recognize these exit ramps before the individual gets too far down the path.

Terrorism and the collective known as ISIS are not threats our world will likely see the end of in the near future. It is imperative that our leaders, governments, and researchers dedicate the time and the resources to combatting these issues and understanding the struggle we are facing. This study may serve as a tool or a first step toward understanding those among us who sympathize with and are vulnerable to the messages that these radical groups disperse. Understanding the individual FTF may be the necessary step to putting an end to ISIS and halting the growing support it is gaining around the world. A larger study of this type with more examples and more exceptions may prove to be the key in the fight against terror.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berger, J.M. "Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Terrorism." Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011. Print.

Bloom, Mia. "Bombshell: Women and Terrorism." University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Print.

Borum, Randy. "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of the Social Sciences Theories." *Journal of Strategic Securities*, No. 4, Vol. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 7-36. Web. 4 March 2016.

Corcoran, Kieran. "Revealed: The Alabama student who tricked her parents and fled to Syria to become an ISIS bride. Now she's radicalizing other Americans into carrying out 'drive-by' terror attacks on U.S. soil." *DailyMail.com*. Daily Mail, 20 April 2015. Web. 13 January 2016.

Crenshaw, Martha. "The Causes of Terrorism." *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4. (July 1981), pp. 379-399. Web. 27 December 2015.

"Daughter of French Cop Becomes Hunted Jihadist." *TheLocalFr*. The Local Group AB. 30 September 2015. Web. 22 January 2016.

Duvivier, Yvan. "Emilie, la Bretonne devenue combattante." *OuestFrance*. Ouest-France, 15 March 2014. Web. 19 January 2016.

Ehrlich, Isaac. "Participation in Illegitimate Activities: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation." *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (May 1973), pp. 521-565. Web. 27 December 2015.



“Émile König, une djihadiste française inscrite sur la liste noire des terrorists par les États-Unis.”

*LeFigaro*. Le Figaro, 10 January 2015. Web. 20 January 2016.

Ferrari, Bianca. “Sophie Kasiki: The Woman Who Came Back from ISIS.” *RoosterGNN*. Global News Network, 19 January 2016. Web. 21 January 2016.

Gambino, Christine P., Edward N. Trevelyan, and John Thomas Fitzwater. “The Foreign Born Population from Africa: 2008-2012.” *United States Census Bureau*, 1 October 2014. Web. 20 January 2016.

Hall, Ellie. “Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS.” *BuzzfeedNews*. Buzzfeed, 17 April 2015. Web. 13 January 2016.

Horgan, John. “Becoming a Terrorist.” *Psychology of Terrorism*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Horsley, Richard A. “The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish "terrorists"”. *The Journal of Religion* 59.4 (1979), 435–458. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

Huang, Ni, Yili Hong, and Gordon Burtch. “Digital Social Visibility, Anonymity, and User Content Generation: Evidence from Natural Experiments.” *NETinst.org*. Net Institute. September 2015. Web. 4 March 2016.

Hudson, Rex A. “The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?” Washington, D.C: Library of Congress. 1999. Print.

Krueger, Alan B. and Jitka Malečková. “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 119-144. Web. 27 December 2015.

- McCauley, Clark and Sophia Moskalenko. "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2008), pp. 415-433. Web. 29 December 2015.
- Pew Research Center. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." *PewForum.org*. 2 April 2015. Web. 3 March 2016.
- Piazza, James A. "Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2006), pp. 159-177. Web. 27 December 2015.
- "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Fourteen Individuals and Two Entities to Its Sanctions List." *UN.org*. United Nations. 23 September 2014. Web. 12 February 2016.
- Siggelkow, Nicolaj. "Persuasion with Case Studies." *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1. (2007), pp. 20-24. Web. 20 January 2016.
- Silke, Andrew "Becoming a Terrorist," in Andrew Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences*. (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2003). Web. 29 December 2015.
- Srikanth, Rajini. "Terrorism". *Keywords for Asian American Studies*. Ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and K. Scott Wong. NYU Press, 2015. 228–232. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.
- Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger. "ISIS: The State of Terror." New York: HarperCollins, 2015. Print.
- Thompson, Robin L. "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media." *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 167-190. Web. 27 December 2015.
- "Top 30." *HooverAlabama.gov*. Hoover City Hall, n.d. Web. 24 March 2016.

United Nations Security Council, 7272<sup>nd</sup> Meeting. "Resolution 2178". 24 September 2014. Web.

29 December 2015.

United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. "Terror Operations: Case Studies in

Terrorism." *TRADOC G2 Handbook No. 1.01*. 25 July 2007. Web. 12 February 2016.

United States District Court for the District of Minnesota. "United States of America v. Yusra

Ismail: Criminal Complaint." *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, 2 December 2014.

Web. 15 March, 2016.

Weimann, Gabriel. "Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges." US Institute

of Peace Press, 2006. Print.

Willsher, Kim. "I went to join Isis in Syria, taking my four-year-old. It was a journey into

hell." *TheGuardian*. The Guardian, 9 January 2016. Web. 20 January 2016.

Yuen, Laura. "Gone to Syria: Family fears woman latest Minnesotan drawn to war-torn region."

*MPRNews*. Minnesota Public Radio, 11 September 2014. Web. 15 January 2016.

Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian. "From MN suburbs, they set out to join

ISIS." *MPRNews*. Minnesota Public Radio, 25 March 2015. Web. 15 January 2016.

## ACADEMIC VITA

# KATHERINE M. KIELCESKI

kkielceski@gmail.com

---

### EDUCATION

**The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA

Schreyer Honors College

B.A. Political Science, B.S. Global and International Studies, Minor in Italian

**The Umbra Institute**, Perugia Italy

January-April 2015

### RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

**Penn State Office of Study Abroad**

*Education Abroad Peer Adviser*

**University Park, PA**

*Aug. 2015-Present*

Serves as a student representative for the Office of Study Abroad. Duties include holding regular office hours, responding to student and parent emails, answering phone inquiries, assisting with Education Abroad Fairs and information sessions, and leading workshops and campus outreach programs

**The Bouroumand Foundation for Human Rights in Iran**

*Research Intern*

**Washington, DC**

*Jun.-Aug. 2015*

Collaborated with ABF employees to conduct research and write reports regarding international penal codes and the use of capital punishment. Additional duties included drafting opinion pieces, updating ABF's online memorial, and managing social media profiles including Facebook and Twitter.

**PA State Rep. Sandra Major District Office**

*Legislative Intern*

**Montrose, PA**

*May-Jul. 2014*

Duties included planning constituent outreach programs, aiding constituents in-office and over the phone, maintaining accurate and up-to-date records on the PA House online database, preparing for the opening of a new district office, and assisting Rep. Major and staff members.

### LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

**Springfield Benefitting THON, Donor/Alumni Relations Executive Chair**

Penn State Dance Marathon Donor/Alumni Relations Committee Member

Italian Student Society Member

Human Rights Global Brigade Member

Mar. 2015-Mar. 2016

Oct. 2014-Feb. 2015

Aug. 2014-May 2015

Aug. 2013-Mar. 2014

### HONORS

**Schreyer Honors College Academic Excellence Scholarship**

Phi Beta Kappa, National Honors Society

Gamma Kappa Alpha, Italian National Honors Society

Pi Sigma Alpha, Political Science National Honors Society

Aug. 2012-Present

May 2015-Present

May 2015-Present

Aug. 2015-Present