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An Analysis of The Factors of Malaysian Women's Involvement in The Movement of Religious Extremism

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Abstract

The issue of religious violence is indeed the biggest problem that Muslims must face to this date. It has damaged the image of Islam in the eyes of the world. The development of this movement is driven by various factors whether internal or external. In addition, it also involves women as combatants as well as victims of war. In this regard, this study will discuss the factors of Malaysian women's involvement in the movement of religious extremism, in particular involving Malaysian women's participation in the ISIS movement in Syria and Iraq. Usually, it involves various factors whether it is internal or external that causes them to be easily influenced by this movement. In order to achieve these objectives, this qualitative study was conducted through library approach and interviews with the deradicalization experts, case witnesses and police authorities. The data collected were analysed inductively to formulate the findings. The findings show that Malaysian women's involvement in religious extremism is driven by a variety of factors, including ignorance and extreme bigotry, but are tricked by sweet promises such as heavenly reward and marriage with the male fighter. They are easily exploited and manipulated by the male fighters. Therefore, women's involvement in extremist groups should be constrained accordingly.

Keywords: Religious Extremism, Women Fighters, Jihad, Security.

Introduction

In general, religious extremism refers to extreme ideas that affiliate the acts of violence with Islam in spite of the fact that it is contrary to Islamic law itself. Now and then the world has begun to be occupied by groups of modern religious extremist like Daesh and begins to attract young generations, including women, and is moving underground. If it is not dealt using the right approach, it will be highly likely to be contagious in the Islamic society and creates a dissonance situation in Malaysia and worldwide. Along with the aspiration of the National Security Policy 2017 which emphasizes on sovereignty, security and harmony from terrorist

threats in Malaysia, this study analysed factors of women's involvement in Daesh extremists group. By combining library and field study methods, this study analysed the data obtained from written materials as well as the interview data. Six authorized informants were interviewed, those comprising of the deradicalist panel of experts, witnesses and high-ranking police officers in-charged of religious extremism issues.

The Scenario of Malaysian Women Engagement in Daesh Group

The participation of women in the Daesh group globally by 2015 was about 30% (Speckhard, 2015). In a study by The International Center for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) in 2016 found that, according to the report of countries with citizens involved in Daesh group, the involvement of foreign women was about 6% to 30% (Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016). Meanwhile, a study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in 2017 stipulated that the number of women involved in the Daesh group was 6,200 out of 31,000 fighters of the Daesh group (Patel, 2017). The record released by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization in mid-2018 totalled 4,761 women from 41,490 fighters of the Daesh group (Cook & Vale, 2018). This huge amount of engagement is said to be a new phenomenon of the world, especially to the Western world.

Spencer (2016: 81-84) stated that his study of 72 people involved with the Daesh group found that women in the Daesh group played a very important role either as wives and mothers of fighters, recruiters of new members through social media, doctors, social workers, skilled workers, students and moral polices (Bridged al-Khansa). The Royal Malaysia Police also acknowledged that the IS women and girls play roles in spreading propaganda, recruiting and disseminating ideology, as well as producing the second generation or successors towards achieving their aim of creating the 'Islamic State' (Zubaidah, 2015). In addition, as the Briged al-Khansa developed, women were reported to be participated in combat (Doost, 2016: 23-24). An incident has witnessed active involvement of women in the Daesh group which has reached the Southeast Asia when a women was arrested by Indonesian authorities for allegedly planning to commit suicide bombings in the country (Daily metro, 2016). On May 13 and 14, 2018, there were three bomb attacks in Surabaya, Indonesia involving a family including his wife and two children (Abi Sarwanto, 2018). These developments prove a new trend of women's active involvement in bomb attacks outside conflicting areas. Militant groups such as the IS are interested in targeting women's involvement in their agenda as women are not regarded as a threat (Almira, 2011: 27-36; Agara, 2015: 115-125).

In 2014, the first court case of women's involvement in Daesh group in Malaysia was the case of Umami Kalsom Bahak, 25, who was arrested and charged with an attempt to support IS by taking a flight to Brunei and then to Turkey to marry a Daesh warrior she met through social media (Utusan Malaysia, 2014). There was also a Doctor from Malaysia reportedly involved with the Daesh group when she migrated to Syria and marry a Daesh fighter from Morocco (Yutim, 2014). In another case in 2015, a former student of the Selangor International Islamic University College (KUIS), Syamimi Faiqah Sulaiman had left for Syria to participate in the Daesh group. The student was discontinued from study before she was found to be involved with the activity due to the failure of achieving required Cumulative Grade Average (CGPA). She was reportedly fled to Syria to marry a Daesh fighters known as Aquil Zainal, whom she knew through Facebook (Zamihan, 2017). A popular case once reported in March 2016 by the media was a case involving a former University of Malaya

student named Siti Noor Aishah Atam, 30, who was sentenced to five years in prison, after being found guilty of having 12 books on terrorist groups (Farah Marshita, 2017). In the previous trial, Siti Noor Aishah, who was dismissed by the University of Malaya in January 2014, threatened to commit suicide if her desire for jihad in Syria was prevented. She had also been invited to escape to Thailand by a man named Muammar Gadafie (Ahmad Johari, 2017).

The following are official data provided by the Assistant Director of Anti-Terrorism, Special Branch (E8), Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay to researchers on July 16, 2018:

Table 1

Statistics on Women Arrested As Associated to the Daesh Group in Malaysia

Year	Number of Women Arrested
2013	2
2014	14
2015	8
2016	10
2017	5
2018	4
Total	43

Source: PDRM

Table 2

Action Taken towards Arrested Women

Year	Number of Women Arrested
Convicted	13
POCA	6
POTA	1
Expelled	9
Released	13
Others	1

Source: PDRM

Table 3

Women Arrested based on Citizenship

Citizenship	No. of Women Arrested
Malaysian	32
Foreigners	11

Source: PDRM

As referred to Malaysians' involvement in Syria, the statistics released by Malaysian Research Institute of Strategic Studies (MyRISS) as published in May 2017 reported that 53 Malaysians have become members of the Daesh group, involving 12 women, 17 children and 24 men. The data are still in line with the data verified by PDRM until February 26, 2018.

While the involvement of women in the Daesh groups in Syria and Iraq is still under control, developing functions or roles of women in Daesh extremists group are something of a concern (Farabi, 2017). Furthermore, there has been no recent statistical data on the effectiveness of deradicalization programs conducted on the ex-detainees linked to religious beliefs and religious extremism since the abolishment of the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 2013

(Zamihan, 2017). Even worse, recent development in Malaysia shows that a 51-year-old woman was arrested by PDRM for allegedly planning a bomb attack against Chinese voters on the day of the 14th General Election. She was believed to be the leader of the Daesh group Cells also having role in recruiting new members of women and men via Facebook and WhatsApp (Khan, 2018; Hanis, 2018). It should be an alarm that by neglecting these potential women extremists would put the country at high risk.

Factors of Malaysian Women's Engagement in Group of Religious Extremism: An Analysis

In this qualitative study, researchers have combined library research and interview method to collect data. Library research is essential in this research as it helps to clarify the background of each contributing factor, identify the factors of women's involvement worldwide in general and specifically explain the factors of Malaysian women's involvement through previous court cases. From the finding, it is decided that these factors can be divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors refer to the root of the extreme ideology believed by the individual himself as ignorant, obsessed, old-fashioned and hard-hearted. While external factors refer to the external elements that influence general practices of extremism, namely political, social, and economical influences, the mass media and the influence of marriage or romance. However, these factors are in fact related to each other.

A) The Internal Factors of Women's Involvement in Groups of Religious Extremism

This study has found that there are three factors which have led to the involvement of Malaysian women in extremism activities, including; the state of ignorance, the feelings of sympathy and empathy, obsession and fanaticism, as well as harshness and punitive attitudes.

i) State of Ignorance

Religious extremism, when is traced back to its root, it will direct us towards the state of ignorance. According to al-Luwaihiq (1999), religious extremism can occur as a result of religious ignorance pertaining to the Quran, al-Sunnah, *manhaj salafussoleh*, *maqasid al-shari'ah*, *sunnatullah*, the essence of *iman* and its practice, types of laws, types of human, the style of Arabic language, also Muslims history. Sihabudin Afroni, in explaining the study done by al-Luwaihiq on the root of extremism justified that human ignorance of the true nature of religion has indeed lead to the rise of extreme ideology. They believe in their understanding of religion to be true, yet they neglect the true teachings of Islam (Sihabuddin, 2016: 74-75). As a result of this ignorance, these group of people are exploited by the spirit of revenge against the infidels, also the Muslims who are considered apostates due to different perspective of regarding other people have gone astray (Fumerton, 2016).

In this regard, interview data on cases involving local women exposed the desire to return from a sinful life to a life as prescribed by the religion yet the failure to choose the right teachers and friends has caused local women to affiliate themselves with the wrong group. They have been led to participate in online group discussion, taking *bay'ah*, thus assisting the terrorist groups they considered as real fighters. Nevertheless, educated people who read online materials came out with self-interpretation without cross-referencing with authoritative parties as well as the true *Sunnah wal Jama'ah* scholars. People ignored the culture of knowledge that emphasizes on truth and moral values (Farid, 2017: 115) because their negligence was guided by abundance of sympathy and empathy.

ii) The Feelings of Sympathy and Empathy

The feelings of sympathy and empathy over the sufferings among Muslims in turbulent regions have become among the main reasons which have influenced local women to be part of the Daesh group. By ignoring the truth and the main concern of religion, the nature of sympathy and empathy has been exploited by Daesh group recruits to correspondingly contribute to help their fellow believers. In this case, Informant 2 explained:

"The case involving women should be observed as the same as man. But I can see that women is of more sympathy. The feeling of sympathy towards what is happening in Syria and the conflict arouse, from there it developed. They began to flip over pages, read, see some pictures, and continue reading and so on. So the level of radicalism began to increase. From zero...there are actually six steps involved, from pre radicalization, zero not involved to the second stage, exposure. When being exposed, the exposure, has three possibilities, some rejected, immediately closed, some accepted, immediately confirmed, a number confused, in the process of searching. But in the end, eventually they would reject or accept as well. So, the moment they were exposed, from feeling sympathy they started to seek more, and they became more exposed just like what I have mentioned previously, Syamimi Faiqah, hijrah, jihad, ghuraba', from there they got it."

Finally, they were found willing to migrate to the turbulent state, leaving the family and sacrificing life such as the following case of Atikah as told by Informant 1:

"Atikah was from Kelantan. She was studying in PUSRAWI Nursing College, a third year student of Pharmacy, will be graduated a year after. She was intrigued by the issue of Syria and Iraq, the Daesh group, and then she met a young man, Ustaz Ismail and fell in love with him. The feeling of sympathy towards the issue of ISIS and all related matter to it, had brought their heart together and finally ended with a marriage proposal. However, as they had yet to get married, Ustaz Ismail had fled to Turkey and entered Syria from there. As the Ustaz was there, she needed to be there too. So she sold her Myvi which was bought by her mother for her study to buy the ticket. The day she entered Syria from Turkey, she was detained by the police officers, which lasted for six months, and then extradition to Malaysia."

Mostly, women who had involved with religious extremism as brought by the Daesh group were well-mannered and have strong spirit of Islam. To be fair, the researcher presented an example of the case of a local woman, Siti Noor Aishah Atam as an example to emphasise that the religious extremism of Islam is very dangerous as the woman's appearance may be normal just like others, but deep inside she adheres to such a dangerous ideology. Informant 5 who once taught and witnessed the prosecution against Siti Noor Aishah explained:

"Aishah is good girl. Aishah is a good girl. When I made my report, I tried to look back. I remembered her friends, one by one, then I started to recall her, I could see her face. They were four. She was really nice. Quiet, yet responsive. It means she understood, normal, not that kind of a nerd who knew nothing. She understood

what I taught in class. The other person, she is working with JAWI now, she liked to initiate discussion, and it looked like Aishah can follow, however she did not participate, she was reserved. That kind of politeness... We had the chance to chat once in a while. Looks good "

"If you ask other lecturers, those lecturers also... she is a good girl, with this attitude. Not only that, the police, when I chatted with him, he kept on asking the same question, ustaz, how could a good girl like her chose that path? The police themselves admitted she was nice, polite, as what the police told. And he was Chinese, the investigating officer. Stay in lockup, sit right. Yeah, he didn't know that the girl was doing wirid, reciting Quran. What else can we do when we are locked-up? Compared to other detainees, shouting here and there. She was a nice girl, with good manners. When it's time for the investigation, Aishah answered nicely, as he commented, she wasn't angry, or easily annoyed... Yes, that point, it's an extreme point. Among of the stories the police officer told me, Aishah asked him, if you sir go to Daesh's Dawlah Islamiah, you will be treated nicely as an ahlul dhimmah and so on."

"Hmm, she's already been influenced.. Allahuakbar, what a pity."

iii) **Obsession and Fanaticism**

Besides the failure to understand the foundation of knowledge and current reality, this group of religious extremism is also fanatical with the belief of their group and feel difficult to accept external views (Sihabuddin, 2016: 74-75). This behaviour or fanaticism have determined that the truth does only rely on the understanding of the group, whereas other disparities are rejected (Kamil, 2003: 27). In the term of *usul*, fanatics are known as obsession or *ta'assub* which means "not accepting the truth about the views and opinions of others based on the *syar'i* evidences, because of the tendency of a person to a particular group" (Al-Munjid, 1994). The fanatics have determined that the truth should be based on the group's judgement or understanding, not according to the real judgement as determined by true knowledge because it is difficult for them to accept clashes of opinion (Mohamad Kamil, 2003: 27). The opposite of fanaticism and obsession are *tasamuh* and tolerant; which refers to an open heart, broad-minded and patience (Khader, 2016). In fact, even though Islam is a religion that calls for unification and living in congregation, the exaggeration on glorifying a particular group leads to negative implication.

The data from the interview illustrated the behaviour of obsession and fanaticism among the involved women. Women who have undergone deradicalization were so sensitive when they were asked about their ideology. As the Informant 4 justified:

"From what I saw, they became so sensitive when we talked about their ideology. Especially when we talked about the figure they loved. They became so irritable...easily annoyed."

These people uphold tight to the ideology they believe to be true, until they are willing to make any sacrifice. This is common for the authorities as they acknowledged that the ideology can be the main factor in terrorism activities. As mentioned by Informant 6:

"What drives people to become a suicide bomber? It's ideology. What drives people to kill people, slaughter people? Again, it's ideology. There is no other reason. The ideology is essential. It becomes the main factor for the women to join groups of religious extremists."

In the case of Siti Noor Aishah Atam, as Informant 5 explained, as a result of being influenced by the ideology of extremism she obtained from self-reading and over the internet, her friends had made a complain to her parents of her changing and weird behaviour. Even the police officers were invited to join the '*dawlah*' during her interrogation session. It demonstrated that Siti Noor Aishah was obsessed with her ideology despite the realization of the negative impact that she would encounter later.

iv) **Harshness and Punitive Attitudes**

Excessive ignorance, fanaticism, and obsession can produce severe traits in humans. When punitive attitude in religion is practiced, it also associates negative image to the religion itself. The religion will be labelled as harsh and promotes violence. The fact is, extreme severity has become the reason for religious extremism to exist (Fathi Muhammad, 2005). The difficulty of these people to tolerate diversity of groups in solving the theoretical and practical problem leads to even more misleading actions, the practices of heresy, even worse, legalize killing among Muslims.

The harshness and punitive attitude of the Daesh group can be seen from all aspects of their understanding and behaviour. Starting with the beliefs of self-purification and practising *takfir* (Dabiq 2, 2014: 10), being stringent on interpreting the *shari'ah* and the failure to celebrate the reality (Dabiq 3, 2014: 17), to punishing actions without moral considerations (Dabiq 13, 2016: 3), all of which are attitudes shaped from hard and tight attitude they've been practicing. For women who had joined the Daesh group, although some of them were victims of husband's extreme ideology (Robertson, 2017), their voluntary participation in the group's operations, regardless of their own fate, the family or other person who may be victims illustrated harshness and punitive attitude. It has set aside all true femininity that is highly preserved by the true teachings of Islam.

The examples of harshness and punitive attitude among local women are demonstrated in the following interview

"There was a woman, I'd been following her, for two years. She closed her Facebook account several times. Her Facebook was a martyred, she called it martyr, yeah that's the term she used. The term "My Facebook account has martyred". She was referring to being hacked. It was several times, when it was closed, she created new one. She was a hard-core, that's really her passion."

"I do not know how did everyone meet her, but when I first met her, she was very aggressive, she refused to cooperate. She kept silent, she refused to talk. She was aggressive, she was hostile, and we were looked as enemies. But, when we talked, we persuaded, we read the verses, and gradually she became soft-hearted and started talking." (Informant 2).

"From what I saw, they became so sensitive when we talked about their ideology. Especially when we talked about the figure they loved. They became so irritable...easily annoyed."

"When the prisoner had family with her, I didn't see any extremism, meaning we won't see the girl's extreme behaviour. She did not lift any weapon. But we can see from her support. We can see her as a supporter on the vision of her partner's fight." (Informant 4)

"Indeed those who were involved in this extremism, they were influenced by the harsh views of Islam." (Informant 5).

"The girl was hard, her spirit was high. When she said A, then it's an A. She was rather aggressive, not that aggressive (outside), but strongly from inside. Not that aggressive from the physical aspect but strong from inside." (Informant 6).

It can be concluded from these statements that Malaysian women arrested for engaging with the Daesh group were more to passive aggressive due to strong ideological impact. The values of Malay culture were still observed despite of upholding to the ideology of extremism. According to Informant 1:

"They are different in the form of attitude and approach. Ideology is the same. Because we can say that women have less information, little knowledge, therefore the approach is rather aggressive, than men. When we delivered the narrative-counter ideology, she just remained silent if she disagreed. Men would hit the table, insulted us, barua, government's dog, dajjal, toghut, munafiq, they outraged. It was different from women who just ignored it. We acknowledged that. That's the difference in the form of attitude and approach. After all, the women were Malays, grew up in courtesy, even involved with extremism, and yet were still courteous."

Based on these explanations, it can be concluded that the internal factors of the involvement of some Muslims in the religious extremism group were due to the ignorance of true religious knowledge but they are highly spirited. In addition, this group of religious extremists did not recognize the diversity of knowledge other from what they've learned from their group leaders or scholars because they were too obsessed with their own groups. As a result of ignorance and fanaticism, their understandings and actions became harsh and violent regardless of the impact towards the people, the state, or the image of the entire religion of Islam.

B) The External Factors of Women's Involvement in Groups of Religious Extremism

Other than the internal factors, this study also has found four factors which have led to the involvement of Malaysian women in extremism activities, including; local and international politics, the society/ social, the media and marriage.

i) Local and International Politics

Tracking to the early history of religious extremism groups, the existence of the Khawarijs was the political evidence playing a key role in helping the emergence of such groups. The interpretation of the tyranny based on the Khawarijs' incomprehensive understanding against the political situation had clearly led to the symptoms of extremism. The interpretation on religious texts began to be arbitrary and did not follow the discipline of its knowledge and ultimately led to the existence of *takfir* and the acts of violence that deviated far from the true teachings of Islam (Imran, 2018: 2454-2472).

In today's context, researchers of this study have found at least four political and geopolitical aspects contributing to religious extremism; first, the discrimination of rulers of the Islamic state against their own people. Second, the occupation of Western powers over Muslim countries (Hanif Yusabra, t.t. Townsend, 2006). Third, Western discrimination against the Muslim community (Twenge, 2001: 1058-1069) and fourth, external funding support. These four aspects have spawned natural spontaneous reactions among some Muslims to oppose 'tyranny' (Maszlee, 2016). On the basis of a strong Islamic brotherhood, some Muslims choose violence as a resort to respond to such a tyranny (Awan, 2007: 2-21). Levesque (2011) further explains, all the continuing injustices of the Western world have given rise to the sense of threat, hence the feelings of hate and anger that ultimately produced a reaction of violence among Muslims. Self-threats or feeling threatened makes one easy to get caught up with extremism.

Therefore, political issues have proven to directly influence Muslim individuals including women to engage with groups considered to be true religious fighters although regarded as extreme by the vast majority of Muslims. This assumption is in line with the findings retrieved from the interview data conducted by researchers. One of the main reasons that influenced the involvement of individuals in the extremists group was due to the influence of politics in particular reported oppression on Muslims in turbulent countries. Their feeling of sympathy has been exploited by extremist groups for the sake of their struggle through special modus operandi. This matter can be explained through the following interview

"There are many factors. First of all, ideological factors; Islamic state, jihad, martyrdom, world's end war, affecting them. Second is sympathy and empathy. They saw Muslims in Syria were shot, murdered, bombed, women were raped, children were enslaved, their right towards commodities like home, food, clothing, place to stay were denied. They felt sympathy then they helped." (Informant 1).

"The case involving women should be observed as the same as man. But I can see that women is of more sympathy. The feeling of sympathy towards what is happening in Syria and the conflict arouse, from there it developed. They began to flip over pages, read, see some pictures, and continue reading and so on. So the level of radicalism began to increase." (Informant 2)

"She sought out, anyone can be influenced, either man or woman. The first issue on Syria emerged in 2012, people did not know much, but at the end of 2012 to early 2013, the world have begun to capture the cruelty of Bustar regime and so

on. So, that's what had driven her to know more. And when she wanted to know more they referred to Facebook. Facebook or other social media."(Informant 6).

Clearly, it can be concluded from the interview that political developments in the Muslim countries, particularly in Iraq and Syria, have generated sympathy and empathy for women who eventually stimulated them to join in striving for the fight (*jihad*) based on the ideology they embraced. Furthermore, the media also actually has supported the widespread of this feeling of sympathy through the quick and open dissemination of information. The role of media will be discussed further in this paper.

ii) **Society/ Social**

The researcher found that the factor of society or social life also influenced the involvement of women in the Daesh group. Studies in Western countries have found that social networking between communities has played a significant role. Based on the evidence of a study revealed that terrorists in Europe consisted of those with similar backgrounds in terms of demographics such as ethnicity, age, place, neighbourhood and recruitment methods (Bakker, 2015). It is also found that these people came from poor backgrounds of socioeconomic, whether financially, educationally or place of living, connected them with one another (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). As a result, the spread of extremism has occurred among those who have the same background. This fact is seen to coincide with the theory of social network equations that have created the same personal qualities and beliefs.

As the engagement of Malaysian women in religious extremism, there are two social aspects contributed to the reason to join a religious extremists group or engaged in violence. First, a broken family system. This was stated by Informant 2 and Informant 6 as follow:

"Family problem, is common. Women involved, majority, and I can say 100% of them have family problems. They have problem with their problem, so they have problem. Like Syamimi Faiqah, there was a gap in the relationship with her family. She was more willing to leave her family here to go there. Limkokwing's student, family problem. That wife to Zulkarnain Gas, she was also the same. Aishah Atam too. Jeslina the police as well." (Informant 2)

"Second, there were also women who came from broken families. A divorcee. So the husband was indeterminate. Facebook, all Facebook. Got to know a guy. They talked about the problem, she shared her problem. So, to overcome this problem let's go to Syria. If we die, we move out." (Informant 6).

A family system that did not work well has resulted of women's involvement in social problems (Haris, 2004: 62). After quite sometimes, the moment they realized of what they have done, they began to find a way of repentance. This was when they were exposed to the propagation of the religious extremists group. According to informant 1 and Infromant 3:

"There was one case, I keep her name secret. Just pretend she is Siti. She was a stewardess, used to wear skirt, blown hair, and she felt empty, she was rich, a rich person, but when she felt socially empty, she became aware on the need to feel guilty for the sins she had committed, she became closer to religion, with unlimited

access from the internet, then an Arabian man approached her, they fell in love, got marriage through...what was it? It was....an online marriage...the Skynet. Even her father did not know, she thought the marriage was legal, and she bought tickets to Turkey, from Turkey she entered Syria. But she did not manage to pass the border as she was detained by the police, and she started to share the story when I met her in the prison.” (Informant 1).

“Ok, when it comes to those who were in this deradicalization circle, usually a woman was one of the factors, in fact the man too. It was when she started to be wild, her social life, with clubbing, not covering the aurah. So when she started to realize, maybe something had happened. Maybe someone she knew had suddenly died. So, she got that awareness, she felt like, oh life is not forever. So, that was a critical moment. If she joined the knowledge circle, that might be ok. But choosing not to attend the knowledge circle, she was influenced via online for example, she had chosen to perform jihad, and it was like a shortcut. I’m sinful, how can I purify myself, there you go jihad.” (Informant 3).

Secondly, it is the attitude of the community who have taken lightly on the involvement of woman in the activities of religious extremism. For that reason, little attention is given and it contributes to statistical increase on the involvement of Malaysian women in the Daesh group every year and the modus operandi of violence is seen increasingly extreme. This is explained by Informant 6 as follows:

“The moment we caught Aishah Atam, that UM student, everybody was clamorous. Why did we catch this girl? What she had was only a book, only for her research. It was not for research, we knew it. She had established a relationship with Dr. Mahmud Ahmad and so on. And she was planning to go to Syria. And we were aware of Malaysian’s perception, if a woman, covered in veil, is impossible to get involved, it is impossible for her to strike. But what’ had happened in Surabaya was clear, it can happen in Malaysia too.”

In conclusion, the society plays an important role in influencing the involvement of women in the Daesh group. The weakness of the family institution is identified as a driving force for local women as well as the attitude of the society who underestimate the role of women in the Daesh group that allows the activities and the risk of violence to continue.

iii) Social Media

Recent technological developments have led to the operation of spreading ideology, especially from religious extremist groups, misleading information becomes more complex and difficult to withstand. Globalization or the world beyond border, has led to the rapid development of extremism in Islam (Imran, 2018). Previously, the media has limited role regarding this issue, yet nowadays we are witnessing that social media sites and apps such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs and so on have become essential mediums to disseminate ideologies related to the extremist group (Sauffiyan, 2016: 381-404). Investigators of extremism have mutual agreement that the extremist groups have successfully used social media to attract support and recruit new members, especially among IT-literate young people (Hizam & Zamihan, 2016).

The findings from the interview have also shown the same result that social media has played an important role in spreading ideology and recruiting new members of the Daesh group, including among Malaysian women. Here are the examples of the statements:

"It's an easy access to the group they formed. Like I said, Katibah Nusantara, they have group, they surveyed through social media, Facebook, email, what they think it can be easily attracted. So it's easy for them to recruit." (Informant 1).

"That's right. Social media plays an important role in the recruitment process of Malaysians. The Study of the Malaysian Youth Research Institute (IYRES) in 2016 found that 80% of Malaysians under 40 were recruited via social media." (Informant 2).

"So what I see now is through social media. From the social media then they reach you through personal contact." (Informant 3).

According to Weimann (2016), there are at least three major reasons for choosing social media as medium of terrorism, which are; i) social media is the most popular media today and have the ability to put their organization ahead in the mainstream, ii) social media is user-friendly and free, iii) social media is capable of delivering messages directly to targets. By using only mobile phones, any message can be communicated to targets around the world and is clearly more effective and safe in the context of their group movement. Through the technology of digital magazine manufacturing such as Inspire, Dabiq and videos spread through channels like Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and so on, propaganda and message to the world community has proven to be more effective. The extremist groups use various forms of approach such as first-person acquaintances, persuading, flirting, using a special 'hashtag', producing dramatic, sentimental videos and other approaches, capable of disseminating extremism ideology through the media (Hizam & Zamihan, 2016).

Obviously, the internet has become the field of propagation for extreme ideology and it has greater chances to directly influence the Muslim women (Sanchez, 2014). The phenomenon of women participation in the jihad of the Daesh group, especially from the West, is something new in the world history, witnessing major influence of the internet (Archetti, 2014). According to the study of Mah Rukh-Ali (2016), women who joined the Daesh group were found to be influenced by the propaganda of living wonderfully with the fighters either as a wife or aides promoted by the Daesh group over the internet. Faiz Rafiq & Nikita Malik (2015) further clarifies that the Daesh group are deceiving women through media propaganda by offering four major deals, namely; a happy life along with the fighters, freedom from the oppressive worlds, active involvement behind the veil and achieving the state of *taqwa* in religion. All of these propaganda have clearly influenced the statistical increase of women's involvement in the extremist group.

The finding also revealed that PDRM also are aware of the use of social media as a medium of recruitment, yet it seems to be different from the former militant groups such as *Jama'ah Islamiah* (JI). Informant 6 mentioned:

"Almost 95% comes from social media. They won't directly contact you, it's everything through the social media. As a matter of fact, they are eager to use

Facebook, Aquil Zainal... or anyone, then they make friends, from WhatsApp to Telegram, social media. That's the difference between IS and the Jama'ah Islamiah."

His statement was also supported by other deradicalization experts. For example, that Informant 4 as well as Informant 2 had mentioned:

"If in JI, previously, there was a unit of da'wah. Before the unit recruited a person, an usrah was held beforehand. But when it comes to ISIS, they would prefer to use the social media." (Informant 4).

"The external factor is the social media. It is the top ranking as a medium in the process of radicalization. In this social media process, she started with being innocent, scrolling bit by bit, then it continued with more attention given to the detail, questions arose, why people keep on sharing it? From there, she started to become interested, she began to have more reading. Continued to the next step. Contacted the members of the group, hey what's next? Then they would pm, so, you are interested too?" (Informant 2).

In the case like Siti Noor Aishah Atam, she was found to be influenced with a radical group through her friends when she connected online with Muammar Gaddafi. Informant 5 mentioned:

"She was in the second semester of pursuing her Master degree, yet she was broke. Even her father couldn't support her study. So, she was looking for a job, it's either in Negeri Sembilan or Malacca, I'm not sure. That time she was working as a teacher then she started surfing the internet, using Facebook, got to know a person, what's the name, the boy's name was Muammar Gaddafi."

The following police report made by his father had also related the role of the internet in changing the attitude of his daughter.

"The informant stated

On 29/1/2014 at about 9.00 pm my son Ahmad Anwari bin Atam was at home as in the address mentioned above, was surfing Facebook and found the name of Siti Noor Aishah binti Atam No. KP: 870727-11-5386 is involving in a misguided teaching of Khalid Al-Walid ".

In can be concluded that media, especially social media, is indeed the most important factor in the spread of religious extremism at the global and local levels, including in recruiting extremists among women. The openness of the Internet has been taken advantage by extremist groups such as IS to convey their political ideas and extremism to attract the support from those who are sympathetic and easily influenced. The modes of recruitment of Daesh group members using certain social media and properly planned also make it difficult for the authorities to control and monitor.

iv) Marriage

Unlike other factors identified from the finding of this study, marriage can be considered as a special factor for a women to participate in the Daesh group. The facts of women's involvement from Western and local countries agrees with the desire of these women or who had already become a wife to the Daesh fighters (Saltman, 2016). However, it is not surprising as one of the aims for the Daesh group fighters is to have women as a wife, as a support, and then the mothers who give birth to more members of the group in the future (Strommen, 2017). For this matter, it is important to highlight the factors that have attracted women to join the Daesh group, even if they had to embrace huge risks.

From the literature review and the finding of this study, marriage has become a key factor, which is so essential to make it as a centre of attraction when we discuss about women's involvement in the Daesh group. The reasons can be divided as follow:

- i. The original status as the wife of the man who became the fighter of Daesh. As far as this study is concerned, the involvement of Malaysian women in Syria is 12 in number and all are believed to be the wife of Daesh fighters (PDRM, 2018).
- ii. The love story among women with the members of the Daesh group. For example the case of Ummi Kalsom Bahak who was reported planning to marry Aqief Huessin who was the Daesh fighter there. Similarly, other cases like Shams and Siti Noor Aishah, Syamimi Faiqah Sulaiman who also wanted to do the same because of the love relationship that has been established among them. The following interview explains more about the relevance of love and women's involvement:

"Second, the love made up by the recruiter, by the recruiter of Daesh himself, especially in Syria. He's a cyber recruiter... he will upload pictures of a handsome Arab man, macho, with beard, and so on, it will be easily to influence these women."

"We should also take a look at the effect of love factor between Nur Syamimi Faiqah and Aquil Zainal. Aquil Zainal was a former Ukays band drummer. He realized and became aware of the sins he had committed, when this Daesh issue started to emerge, he became so narcissistic, with the spirit to become a hero. So, it was the time for him to perform jihad, as he thought, with the hope to purify his soul, yet unfortunately when he reached there, he didn't actually involve in jihad. He became a cyber recruiter, influencing our kids. One of the victim was Nur Syamimi Faiqah. She was studying in KUIS, the one who failed her study, fell in love with Aquil Zainal, and finally went straight to Syria with Aquil Zainal. And Aquil Zainal himself, he left his wife for jihad. So we would say that Aquil Zainal was an escapism factor, the factor of deleting sin, purifying sin. Nur Faiqah Syamimi was the love factor for that Aquil Zainal." (Informant 1).

- iii. Influenced by the social media propaganda that offers a wonderful life in the 'Islamic State' with the Daesh group, including being the wife of handsome and attractive fighters. The deradicalization panel informants who agreed with this fact mentioned: *"But it is true, I might say as a joke, but the fact is that when the online Dabiq magazine*

was published, they also uploaded mujahidin, indeed they are so handsome, that's one of the attractions" (Informant 6).

"The handsome faces of the Middle East have been made as attraction." (Informant 4).

- iv. Influenced by extreme reading materials. Again, Siti Noor Aishah Atam is an example, who was sentenced to five years in jail, after found guilty of having 12 books on terrorist groups. It can be understood through the following Informant 1 statement:

"Aishah is here (Kajang Prison). Aishah was really involved. However, she made a claim that that 12 books were read for her the master thesis. How much does she want to study, she has yet got a title. She was only in the second semester. Just in the second semester, she has yet to finish her coursework. How was she going to start doing research? After all, all those books were published by the Daesh group, yet translated from Indonesian, smuggled into Malaysia. That book consisted of Daesh elements, I wanted to analyse the book, to give a testimony as an expert witness in court. The lawyer was silent, didn't argue, the judge also didn't argue, I testified, I analysed the book. I read from line to line, line to line, nop. Ha, it was not a regular book you'll find in the market. Even Al-Qaeda 2020 strategic plan was available. The Declaration of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was also written. All inside in those 12 books".

- v. The offer to gain reward when spreading kindness. As Informant 6 explained:
"They promise everything, when you go there, you'll get married, allowance, house, wifi, salary, a handsome husband, everything is there. Everybody will fall for it. If that person is narrow minded, a nerdy, she will then do."

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the factors involved in women's participation in Daesh groups are derived from the internal and external factors. Consistent findings show that women are so influenced by their surroundings as well as internal problems which have great influence on their decision to join and continue with the Daesh group. Obviously, women have been used by the Daesh group for their political interests and thus changing the future of women's safety. Hence, early stages of prevention should be taken so that women are not constantly exploited in the name of religion.

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Interviews

- Informant 1. The interview was made on 4th December 2017.
- Informant 2. The interview was made on 8th March and 26 Mei 2018.
- Informant 3. The interview was made on 14th December 2017.
- Informant 4. The interview was made on 13th July 2018.
- Informant 5. The interview was made on 27th July 2018.
- Informant 6. The interview was made on 16th July 2018.