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# The Calypso Caliphate: How Trinidad Became a Recruiting Ground for ISIS

## Abstract

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), a small twin-Island republic in the Caribbean, has one of the highest rates of foreign fighter radicalization in the western hemisphere. According to official estimates, around 130 Trinidadian nationals migrated to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq between 2013 and 2016. This article seeks to make sense of these migrations, placing them in the broader historical and social context in which they occurred. Drawing on a range of quantitative and qualitative primary source-material, the article finds, contrary to expectation, that the archetypal adult ISIS traveller from T&T is not a marginalized, youthful and mostly male city dweller who radicalized outside of a mosque, but is in fact as likely to be female as male, who is in his or her mid-30s, married, has children, attends a mosque, lives in a rural area, and has suffered neither the pains of economic hardship nor the ill-effects of marginalization from the wider society because of his or her Muslim identity. As well as emphasizing the intersection between the local and the global in jihadist foreign traveller mobilizations, the article also demonstrates the importance of personal connections in the migrations of Trinidadians to Syria and Iraq, lending further support to research on the centrality of social networks in facilitating radicalization and foreign fighter mobilizations.

## Introduction

In 2016, when ISIS or the so-called Islamic State still controlled vast areas of territory in Syria and Iraq, the group published issue 15 of its online magazine *Dabiq*.<sup>1</sup> Titled “Break the Cross”, it was full of violent condemnations and warnings against multiple enemies, with a particular focus on “pagan Christians”. It also contained, in what had become a standard feature, an interview with an ISIS foreign fighter. “When I was around twenty years old I would come to accept the religion of truth, Islam”,<sup>2</sup> said Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad, recalling how he had turned away from the Christian faith he was born into. At-Trinidad, as his nom de guerra or kunya suggests, was from T&T, a country more readily associated with calypso and carnival than the “caliphate”. Asked if he had a message for “the Muslims of Trinidad”, he castigated his co-religionists at home for remaining in “a place where you have no honor and are forced to live in humiliation, subjugated by the disbelievers”.<sup>3</sup>

This message was aimed not just at T&T’s East Indian Muslim population, who make up the majority of Muslims in the country, but also at Black-Afro Trinidadian Muslim “reverts”, particularly those associated with the *Jamaat al Muslimeen* (JAM), a fringe group which tried to overthrow the government of T&T in July 1990.<sup>4</sup>

More chillingly, Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad urged Muslims in T&T to wage jihad against their fellow citizens: “Terrify the disbelievers in their own homes and make their streets run with their blood.”<sup>5</sup>

Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad’s real name was Shane Crawford, a former criminal with a history of violence. Before the interview with *Dabiq* only a few Trinidadians had heard of him, but after it he became badge of a national shame in Trinidad. It also made him a marked man, and in February 2017 he succumbed to his wounds from a U.S. drone strike. Crawford’s legacy, however, remains: he was one of the first Trinidadian nationals to join ISIS in Syria. By the

time the U.S. State Department added him to its list of “Specially Designated Global Terrorists” in March 2017<sup>6</sup> at least 130 of his fellow nationals had migrated to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq.

This article aims to map and make sense of these migrations. How was a nascent, self-proclaimed Islamic State, situated around 10,000 kilometres from a relatively prosperous western democracy at the southernmost point of the Caribbean archipelago, able to capture the hearts and minds of a small number of citizens of that democratic country, prompting them to desert it for a new life in the so-called caliphate? What combination of attractions (to do with the newly emergent caliphate in 2014-2015) and repulsions (to do with Trinidad) propelled them, and what were the enabling conditions that facilitated their moral and physical journeys? The article suggests that the the genesis of the 2013-16 migrations can be traced to a social network of around 350 like-minded individuals located in three geographic areas of T&T: Chaguanas, in west-central Trinidad, Diego Martin in the north-west and Rio Claro in the south-east. At the heart of this network is the Umar Ibn Khattab mosque, located in Boos Village, Rio Claro, where Nazim Mohammed is the imam. For many years, Mohammed’s network was able to operate in Trinidad with almost total impunity, not only spreading its hardcore salafi beliefs across the country but also implementing a parallel-system of sharia law in Rio Claro.

The article is divided into four parts. The first gives an overview of the academic literature on western ISIS-affiliated foreign fighters. The second presents data on the biographical profiles of Trinidadian ISIS migrants (TIMs). The third provides an account of the genesis of the 2013 and 2016 migrations, while the fourth and concluding part of the article addresses the specificities of the ISIS foreign traveller phenomenon in Trinidad.

## **Methodological Note**

This article is based on more than 50 semi-structured interviews conducted during the course of 8 two-week-long fieldtrips to Trinidad between February 2016 and August 2018. I interviewed key figures in the Islamic/Islamist milieu in T&T, including Imam Nazim Mohammed (head of the Umar Ibn Khattab mosque) Umar Abdullah (head of the Waajihatul Islaamiyyah (The Islamic Front)), Kwesi Atiba (a former JAM member and imam at the Islamic Resource Center), Intiaz Mohammed (President of the Islamic Missionaries Guild), Hasan Anyabwile (a London-based sheikh and former member of the JAM), Fuad Abu Bakr (the son of the JAM’s leader Yasin Abu Bakr) and Inshan Ishmael (head of the Muslim Social and Cultural Foundation). I visited several mosques in Trinidad, where I interviewed worshippers and imams and participated in Eid celebrations. I also interviewed an undercover police officer; a homicide police detective; the head of the T&T Police Service’s (TTPS) Special Branch division, as well as several former members of that division; three local journalists who have written widely about TIMs; a former Minister of National Security (Gary Griffith) who was in office when the first cohort of TIMs left for Syria and Iraq; a local criminologist who is an expert on jihadist discourse (Daurius Figueira); and several family members and friends of TIMs, including the mother of Shane Crawford.

Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and many interviewees were interviewed more than once. Unfortunately I was not able to interview any TIMs (when I first started conducting interviews in early 2016 most of the adult male TIMs had been killed).

In addition to the interviews, the article also draws on two sources of data on the demographic profiles of TIMs: a T&T Guardian news story on a leaked police file containing information on 102 TIMs and a comprehensive database of 70 TIMs who departed from Trinidad between November 2013 and March 2015. In compiling this database I was helped by an anonymous T&T police source, two local journalists and several members of T&T’s Muslim

communities. I also conducted a year-long investigation into the social media activities of pro-ISIS supporters in T&T, including those of 12 TIMs.

Map of Trinidad:



## What Do We Know About Western ISIS Foreign Fighters?<sup>7</sup>

The short answer to this question is quite a bit, although not a vast amount. We have a very rough idea of how many people joined ISIS, which countries they came from and in what numbers, and how many returned to their countries of origin.<sup>8</sup> We have a decent picture of the profiles of ISIS foreign fighters from Europe and North America,<sup>9</sup> although we don't have any reliable data on those from Middle Eastern countries. We know far less about the activities and roles of foreign fighters once they migrated to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, and we possess little in the way of rich qualitative data on the subjectivities and life-histories of foreign fighters.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Soufan Group, between 27,000 and 31,000 people traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and other violent extremist groups from at least 86 countries.<sup>11</sup> Among countries in western Europe, France has the highest number (1,700), followed by Germany (760), the United Kingdom (760), and Belgium (470),<sup>12</sup> which, according to authors of the report, “top[s] the poll for the highest number of fighters per capita”.<sup>13</sup>

In a more recent study, based on 33,815 foreign fighters from 103 countries, Elena Pokalova estimates that the preeminent exporters of ISIS foreign fighters, per capita, are, in first place, Tunisia, followed by Maldives, Jordan, Lebanon, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, T&T, Libya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>14</sup>

Joana Cook and Gina Vale, in the most up-to-date report on ISIS migrants, provide another layer of nuance by disaggregating the number of foreign men, women and minors who travelled to, or were born in, ISIS-controlled territory.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on figures reported between April 2013 and June 2018,<sup>16</sup> they find that among the 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries who became affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria, up to 4,761 (13%) were women, while 4,640 (12%) were minors;<sup>17</sup> 75% were men.<sup>18</sup>

There is a growing literature on the demographic profiles of ISIS foreign fighters from western Europe and North America.<sup>19</sup> All of the main studies echo what has now become a cliché in both scholarly and popular discourses on ISIS foreign fighters: namely, that there is no single profile of an ISIS foreign fighter.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, most of the studies testify to an emergent pattern: western ISIS foreign fighters are typically young (early to mid-20s), lower-class, second-generation Muslim males from urban areas.<sup>21</sup>

A particularly striking finding across the literature is the disproportionate number of converts and former criminals.<sup>22</sup> Many studies also find that western ISIS foreign fighters tend to be poorly educated and had radicalized in social scenes outside of mosques.<sup>23</sup>

What explains the phenomenon of western ISIS foreign fighters? The literature on this can be divided into three levels of analysis: micro, meso and macro. Some studies combine all three levels of analysis.

The micro-level focuses on the subjective motivational states of ISIS foreign fighters.<sup>24</sup> The question at issue is, “what drove them to join ISIS?” Often, the answer is framed in terms of “push” and “pull” factors, making a distinction between what is attractive or felt to be attractive about ISIS that “pulls” people to join it and what is prohibitive or felt to be prohibitive about the joiners own society that “pushes” them to search for radical alternatives. “Pulls” include sharia implementation, the privileging of martial and “heroic” values, moral absolutism, spiritual salvation, solidarity, the prohibition on free mixing of the sexes, and zero tolerance of same-sex relationships, whereas “pushes” encompass “militant” secularism, “soulless” materialism, sexual permissiveness, racial discrimination and other perceived injustices, multiculturalism, moral relativism, feminism, military intervention in Muslim majority countries, democracy and boredom. The literature has yet to produce a consensus, and is divided on the question of how causally salient religion (i.e. Islam) is in the cocktail of motivational states that lie behind the ISIS foreign fighter phenomenon.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas micro-level studies look at the internal world of western ISIS foreign fighters, meso-level scholarship focuses on the social networks to which they belong or belonged.<sup>26</sup> The question it seeks to answer is, “what or who facilitated their recruitment to ISIS?” This research is also divided: between studies that emphasize the role of “top-down” recruitment dynamics, whereby potential recruits are brought into the fold by influential activists and clerics, and those which emphasize “bottom-up” recruitment dynamics, whereby the initiative and curiosity of the recruit propels them toward radical networks.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to both micro- and meso-levels of analysis, the macro focuses on the deeper structural conditions that created not only the networks that facilitated recruitment to ISIS, but also served to generate the motivational states that made joining the group seem like an attractive or necessary choice for those who joined. The question it seeks to answer is, “what are the root causes or key drivers of the western ISIS foreign fighter phenomenon?” Broadly speaking, there are 3 key competing explanatory models here: economic, cultural and existential. The first posits that economic inequality within Muslim diaspora communities in the west creates a reservoir of frustration and resentment on which violent extremism thrives; joining ISIS, from this perspective, is form of rebellion against a systematically unfair society that offers few opportunities for success and betterment.<sup>28</sup> The second (and related) model focuses on the disaffections of second and third generation Muslims in the west, portraying contemporary western societies as increasingly hostile and discriminatory toward Muslim

minorities and Islam; joining ISIS, from this perspective, is rooted in alienation from the west and reflects a keenly felt need for belonging, respect and recognition.<sup>29</sup> And the third explanatory model shifts the focus towards the decline of grand narratives – particularly masculinist notions of honor and martial prowess – in late-modern societies; joining ISIS, from this perspective, is borne out of a profound disillusionment with a secular liberal society devoid of moral direction and distinction, as well as a longing for ultimate meaning rooted in total and violent self-sacrifice to a sacred cause.<sup>30</sup>

## **What Do We Know About ISIS Foreign Fighters and Migrants From Trinidad and Tobago?**

### **The Leaked Police File**

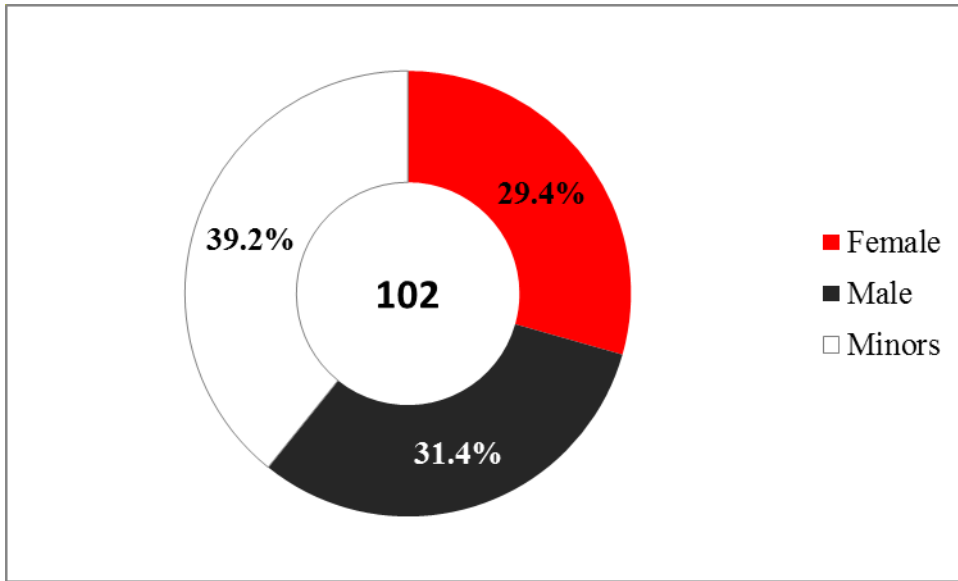
The official number of Trinidadian nationals who journeyed to Syria and Iraq between 2013 and 2016 is around 130.<sup>31</sup> This may well be a conservative estimate, although it seems unlikely to be as high as 400, as one opposition Member of Parliament claimed in April 2016.<sup>32</sup> One hundred-and-thirty may seem like a trifling number, but it easily places T&T, with a population of 1.3 million,<sup>33</sup> including 104,000 Muslims,<sup>34</sup> top of the list of western countries with the highest rates of foreign-fighter radicalization. As John McCoy and Andy Knight explain in a 2016 paper on violent extremism in T&T:

If the high end of the estimate [approx. 130] is accurate, this would equate into a rate of 96 individuals (per million) - a rate that is roughly double that of Belgium, which, according to data collected from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), experiences the highest per capita rate of 'foreign fighters' in the Western world.<sup>35</sup>

Who are these 130 Trinidadian nationals? McCoy and Knight's paper, though excellent as an overview of the radical Islamist scene in T&T, provides no hard data on the demographic profiles of those who left Trinidad to join ISIS. But a T&T Guardian news story, published after McCoy and Knight's article went to press, sheds some light on who they are.<sup>36</sup> The Guardian story is based on a 50-page leaked police file on 102 individuals who left Trinidad between 2013 and mid-2015.<sup>37</sup> Thirty-one percent are males between the ages of 30 and 50, 29% are females between the ages of 30 and 40, and 39% are minors are between the ages of 2 and 16. Among the 102 are 20 families (see Figure 1). Most are affiliated to mosques in Rio Claro and Enterprise (in Chaguanas).

Figure 1

Distribution of females, males and minors in sample of 102 TIMs

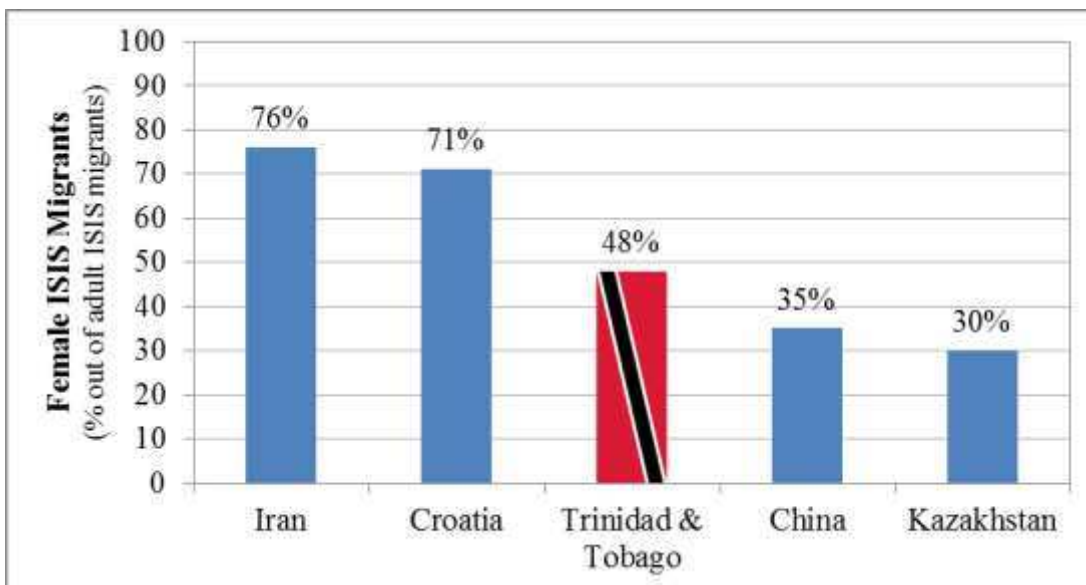


(Source: T&T Guardian)

The article discloses few other details on the profiles of those listed in the police document. But the little it does relay is striking enough. This is for two reasons. First, the percentage of women is remarkable, with a 1:1 ratio of women to men. This places T&T third in the top 5 countries with the highest proportion of female ISIS travelers (see Figure 2).<sup>38</sup>

Figure 2

Top 5 countries with the highest proportion of female ISIS travellers

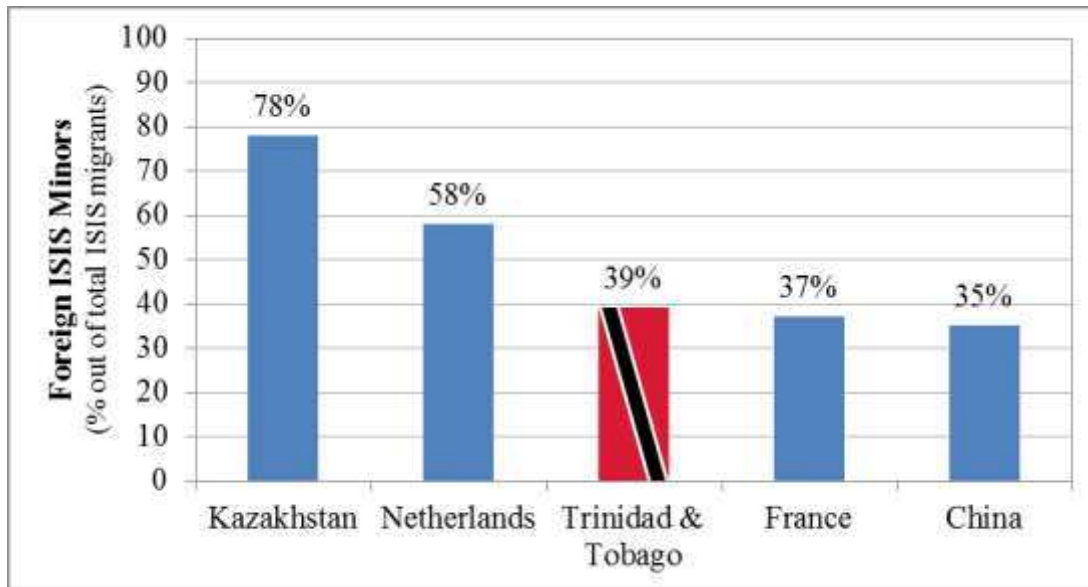


(Source: Cook and Vale, “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’”, and T&T Guardian; the maximum of the range for Croatia and Kazakhstan was used)

Second, the percentage of Trinidadian minors going to Syria and Iraq – almost 40% - is similarly very high, placing T&T third in the top 5 countries with the highest proportion of foreign ISIS minors (see Figure 3).<sup>39</sup>

Figure 3

Top 5 countries with the highest proportion of foreign ISIS minors



(Source: Cook and Vale, “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’”, and T&T Guardian; the maximum of the range for Kazakhstan and France was used)

## The Database of 70 TIMs

A far more detailed picture of the demographic profiles of TIMs emerges from a database of 70 TIMs compiled by the author. It relates to the first wave which departed between November 2013 and March 2015, and provides statistical information on the following variables: full names and kunyas; age; gender; date of departure from T&T; level of education; occupation; socio-economic background; marital status; number of converts; criminal record; place of residence; mosque affiliation; number of individuals killed; and number of returnees.

### Age and Gender

Of the 70 individuals in the database, 34% are male, 23% are female, 9% are teenagers in the 13-15 age bracket and 34% are children under the age of 13. Hence the total percentage of minors is 43%, while the ratio of men to women is 3:2, which still places T&T at the top of the list of western countries with the highest proportion of female ISIS travelers (40%).

The average age for the 40 adults is 34 at the time of departure. The average age for males is 35, while the average age for females is 33. These averages are unusual compared to those found for other western ISIS contingents. Bibi van Ginkel and Eva Entenmann estimate that the majority of British foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq are aged between 18 and 30.<sup>40</sup> Estimates for the average age of their German, Swedish, Dutch, Belgian and American



counterparts are (respectively) 26.5,<sup>41</sup> 26,<sup>42</sup> 23.2,<sup>43</sup> 23.8<sup>44</sup> and 26.9.<sup>45</sup> In other words, adult TIMs are on average nearly a decade older than their European and American counterparts. It is not clear what explains this discrepancy, although it is possible that the financial costs of travelling from Trinidad to Syria or Iraq – a trip that would cost around \$2,300 - may have prevented pro-ISIS supporters from a younger demographic in the country from going. Regardless, the relative maturity of most adult TIMs suggests that however one is to understand the meaning and appeal of the ISIS subculture in Trinidad it is unlikely to be illuminated by viewing it primarily as a youth revolt.<sup>46</sup>

#### Date of Departure

Four Trinidadians left Trinidad for Syria in 2013: Shane Crawford and his wife, Milton Algernon and Stuart Mohamed. Between January 2014 and July 2014 none left, but from August 2014 to December 2014 a total of 30 adults departed. The remainder of adults left between January 2015 and March 2015. It is likely that the spike in departures between August 2014 and December 2014 owed to the historic declaration of caliphate in late June 2014 by ISIS's chief spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani,<sup>47</sup> as well as to the huge international exposure ISIS had attracted throughout the summer of 2014.

#### Level of Education

Regarding the level of education of adult TIMs, 65% graduated from secondary school; and 7 – 18% - graduated from a tertiary-level institution (including 2 who had attended the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia). To put this into context, the World Bank estimates, based on data collected in 2010, that the percentage of the population in T&T aged 30-34 with a completed secondary education was 68%,<sup>48</sup> while in 2001, when the average adult TIM would have been in their late teens, the participation rate in tertiary education in T&T was just 7%.<sup>49</sup> By local standards, then, the educational level of adult TIMs in the database is not out the ordinary, and well above the national average for tertiary-level education.

#### Occupation

The majority of adults (55%) are unskilled. This number includes most of the females, who were homemakers in T&T, as well as self-employed males, who earned their living farming or plying vehicles for hire. Twenty percent are skilled, 15% semi/mixed skilled and 10% professional. Just one TIM was unemployed at the time of his departure to Syria or Iraq. Occupations at the time of departure were startlingly diverse: a secondary school teacher, a truck driver, an agricultural laborer, an auto mechanic, an offshore welder, a marine safety technician, a taxi driver, a building contractor, a cell-phone store owner, a professional footballer, a debt collector, a car salesman, a seaman and a farm owner.

#### Socio-Economic Background

The vast majority of adults - 90% - can be categorized as middle-class, while 10% can be categorized as lower-class.<sup>50</sup> None of the TIMs were economically impoverished and quite a few were indeed from the higher echelons of Trinidadian society: two in the database were lawyers, one was a doctor, and another was the son of an extremely wealthy East Indian family. Whatever is driving the foreign fighter phenomenon in T&T it is not economic marginalization.

## Marital Status

The database contains information on the marital status of 22 males and 15 females. Of the 22 males, 77% were married at the time of their departure to Syria or Iraq, whereas of the 15 females, all but one (93%) were married at the time of their departure and travelled with their husband. The sole woman who was not married was the 18 year-old daughter of a male TIM who took his entire family of 8 to Syria. In other words, no woman in the database travelled independently or alone to Syria and Iraq.

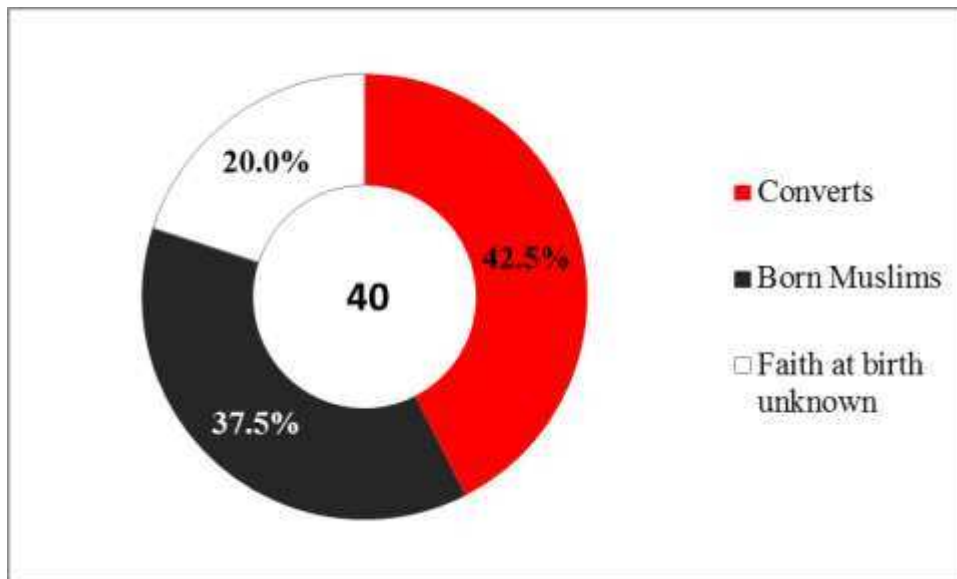
In the European context, by contrast, large numbers of unmarried males travelled to Syria and Iraq, often together, and in not a few cases, unmarried teenage girls and women also travelled alone or together. Van Ginkel and Entenmann observe that “information from five [European] countries indicates that around half [of all departed foreign fighters – men and women] are married”.<sup>51</sup> Thus the clichéd and much derided notion of the “jihadi bride”<sup>52</sup> is singularly ill-suited to T&T, since all the adult TIMs in the database – with the exception of an 18 year-old daughter who was taken to Syria against her will - were already married. And while it cannot be conclusively ruled out the male TIMs were not motivated in part by the desire to marry additional women in Syria/Iraq or to acquire for themselves a sex slave it seems that for the majority of those who took their wives and children these considerations would have been far from their minds.

## Number of Converts

In his Dabiq interview Shane Crawford, who himself was a convert to Islam, speculated that “about 60% of the mujahidin from Trinidad here in the lands of the Caliphate come from Muslim families, with the remaining 40% or so being converts”.<sup>53</sup> The database supports this line of speculation. Of the 40 TIMs, 43% are converts, while 38% were born into the faith; information on faith at birth for the remaining 20.0% was not available (see Figure 4). This reflects an established pattern in foreign fighter cohorts from other western countries, which is that converts, constituting just a tiny percentage of the total population of Muslims in those countries, are substantially overrepresented.<sup>54</sup> Van Ginkel and Entenmann estimate that for European countries with higher numbers of foreign fighters, between 6% and 23% are converts.<sup>55</sup> Yet no other country comes even close to the percentage of converts seen in the T&T case. However, it should be noted that while converts are estimated at around 1%-2% of the total Muslim population in most European countries, in T&T they constitute around 28% of the total Muslim population.<sup>56</sup>

Figure 4

Percentage of converts in sample of 40 TIMs



The overrepresentation of converts in the TIM contingent lends support to the view that converts are particularly vulnerable to radicalization, due to either their lack of grounding in Islam, or because, due to their marginality from both the new faith community into which they converted and the former community out of which they moved they are susceptible to the recruitment pitches of radical preachers offering belonging and righteous authenticity.<sup>57</sup>

#### Criminal Record

Thirty per cent had a criminal record or were involved in criminal activities prior to their departure, while the majority – 70% - did not. This is broadly in line with research on European foreign fighters: roughly 20% of Belgian and Dutch foreign fighters were suspected of criminal activity prior to leaving for Syria/Iraq,<sup>58</sup> while for Italy 21% of foreign fighters had a criminal record,<sup>59</sup> and for Spain one-third did.<sup>60</sup>

The majority of TIMs with a criminal record or suspected involvement in criminal enterprises were men (83%). The seriousness of the offences for which they were charged varies, ranging from common assault to drug dealing and murder. The two women with criminal records were jointly charged with their husbands for possession of illegal arms and ammunition. It is striking that the first cohort of Trinidadians which left for Syria in December 2013 were all (with the exception of Crawford's wife) fugitives who faced murder charges in T&T.

#### Place of Residence and Mosque Affiliation

In the main, TIMs come from three areas in Trinidad: Rio Claro, Chaguanas and Diego Martin. The majority – nearly 70% - lived in Rio Claro before they mobilized for Syria/Iraq, on or near the Boos Settlement Muslim community led by Nazim Mohammed.

All TIMs attended salafi mosques: Masjid Umar Ibn Khattab in Rio Claro, Masjid Ul Khaleefah in Longdenville (Chaguanas), Enterprise Community Masjid (Chaguanas) and Masjid Us Sunnah in Barataria (in the north-west). Some were affiliated with more than one mosque. Milton Algernon and Anthony Hamlet, for example, frequented both Masjid Umar Ibn Khattab and Enterprise Community Masjid (Chaguanas), while Zaid Abdul Hamid, who was recently captured in Syria,<sup>61</sup> attended both Enterprise Community Masjid and Masjid Ul Kahleefah.

This high degree of geographic clustering is mirrored in ISIS mobilizations elsewhere<sup>62</sup> and lends further support to the thesis that the key to understanding radicalization and foreign fighter mobilizations lies in tracing the social networks that bind violent extremists together. At the same time, it also lends further support to skeptical voices which challenge the wisdom of focusing so much research attention on online radicalization and extremist “virtual spaces”, not because these spaces are unimportant, but because the relationships that matter most in violent radicalization are conducted in physical spaces in or near to social settings where people live.<sup>63</sup>

### Number of Individuals Killed and Number of Returnees

According to an anonymous source from within the T&T Ministry of National Security, as of January 2018, a total of 30 male TIMs have been killed in Syria and Iraq. As far as I know, no adult male TIM has yet returned to T&T. (Cook and Vale estimate that 793 males have returned to western Europe from Syria and Iraq.<sup>64</sup>) The former Minister of National Security Gary Griffith told me, “At no time have I ever received such data to believe that fighters from Trinidad have returned.”<sup>65</sup> There is no indication that this has changed since Griffith’s departure from office in 2015.

Among the female contingent, one woman and her two teenage step-daughters have returned to Trinidad.<sup>66</sup> According to T&T’s Counter Trafficking Unit, this woman was duped by her husband into going to Syria: she thought she was going on a family vacation. Her husband and his three boys remained in Syria.<sup>67</sup> This was in 2014.

In December 2015 it was reported that four Trinidadian males were among 961 persons held at the Turkish border by Turkish authorities.<sup>68</sup> And in January 2018, Edmund Dillon disclosed to the T&T parliament that, following ISIS’s territorial defeats in Mosul and Raqqa, a group of Trinis were being held at a detention camp in Iraq.<sup>69</sup> Aneesa Waheed, the daughter of Nazim Mohammed, and her husband Daud Waheed were among this group. In May 2018 Aneesa Waheed was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a court in Baghdad.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to the 130 or so Trinidadians who traveled to Syria and Iraq, there is an unknown number who tried to go, but failed and remain in T&T. Among these are the 12 Trinidadian nationals who were captured trying to cross the border into Syria by the Turkish authorities in July 2016. They were deported back to T&T in April 2017.<sup>71</sup> There are probably many more who wanted to leave, but for whatever reason couldn’t or chose not to do so.

Given the severe methodological difficulties of recovering the motives of deceased foreign fighters, the database contains no information on the motives of TIMs.

In summary: While in western Europe and North America the median ISIS traveller is an urban, unmarried lower-class Muslim male in his early to mid-twenties and of immigrant background, in T&T he or she is a married Muslim male or female in his or her mid-thirties, who is a parent, who is financially stable, who is of Trinidadian background, and who comes from a rural area and belongs to a mosque.

### **The Genesis of the 2013-2016 Migrations**

One of the most striking features about the entire cohort of TIMs is just how networked - indeed incestuous - it was. Everyone in it was connected to everyone else. They all knew each other, either because they were friends or were related. It was mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives. And when the men started getting killed in Syria and Iraq their widows married the remaining male Trinidadian fighters.

In all, at least 26 Trinidadian families went to live in the caliphate. Of these, the biggest was the Mohammed family, headed by Imam Nazim. Reports vary, but it is likely that some 15 members of his family left.

It is difficult to know how each TIM radicalized or what motivated them to go to Syria or Iraq, given that so much about them remains hidden or unknown. But the crucial, transformative moment in their life-stories was their exposure to the pro-ISIS network in Trinidad, which would have provided them with the social, ideological and material support for embracing ISIS's worldview and journeying to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq.<sup>72</sup> And the node at the center of the network was the imam himself: Nazim Mohammed. Not only was he a leading spiritual authority within the network, as well as a revered and feared veteran of the attempted 1990 coup in T&T; he also presided over his own quasi mini-caliphate on the settlement he owns in the rural town of Rio Claro in the south-east of the country. It was from here that the majority of TIMs came or spent some time.

The evolution of Nazim Mohammed's network over the past twenty years remains somewhat of a mystery, given how secretive it is and that very little has been written about it. But its origins are fairly easy to specify: it emerged out of the break-up of the JAM after the failed coup of 1990.

On 27 July of that fateful year in T&T's history the JAM stormed into the nation's Parliament in the capital city of Port of Spain and attempted to overthrow the government, shooting then-Prime Minister Arthur Robinson and taking members of his cabinet hostage.<sup>73</sup> The coup - the first insurrection in the west with an Islamist face - lasted six days, after which the JAM surrendered and the government regained control.

According to the criminologist Daurius Figueira, the JAM started to unravel as soon as its leaders were arrested and put into custody. The divisions had always been there, he told me, but the pains and solitude of imprisonment brought them right out into the open. The core dispute, between Yasin Abu Bakr and the other leaders in the JAM, most notably Bilaal Abdullah, was over the future direction of the group. By the summer of 1992, when the JAM were given a pardon (this was negotiated as a condition of its surrender during the siege) and released from prison, the group was violently and irremediably split. Abdullah left and created his own group; he was to leave Trinidad for China not long after. And Nazim Mohammed, too, left, establishing his own community in Rio Claro. When I interviewed him in September 2018, Mohammed told me: "We started as a little group and became part of the JAM [in 1983], he [Yasin Abu Bakr] became our leader, but part of the agreement that we made with them is that, for we to be with you, Number 1, you, as imam, must lead a five-daily prayer. And Number 2, we don't get involved in no politics or political parties." According to Mohammed, Bakr breached both of these conditions: "After the coup, when he came out of prison, he [Bakr] stopped establishing the prayer, he stopped coming to the masjid [in Mucurapo on the outskirts of Port of Spain] and leading the prayer. We told him about it, he said he'd address it, he didn't address it, and we called a meeting here [in Rio Claro] and I told him, 'listen, we can never carry on with you under this condition', because in Islam the leader have to lead a 5 daily prayer...This is why we left them [the JAM]." Nazim also made it explicit that he disapproved of Bakr's flirtation with the major political parties in Trinidad (Bakr and his group campaigned for the United National Congress - one of the country's main political parties - in the 1995 General Election). And he was "suspicious", he said, about Bakr's links with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, who helped arm and train members of the JAM.

A former long-time associate of Mohammed corroborated this. "He [Mohammed] wanted to promote true Islam, according to his view, which is Wahhabi, and he felt very strongly that Yasin Abu Bakr and his group were more concerned with worldly matters than with dawah, so that's why they broke". In a paper on the JAM, published in the British Journal of

Criminology, the sociologist Cynthia Mahabir describes how the JAM, after 1990, transformed itself from an idealistic social movement - “a fraternity of ‘revolutionary men of Allah’” - into a criminal enterprise.<sup>74</sup> According to the analyst Chris Zambelis, the JAM, from at least the mid-1990s on, became embroiled in “gangland-style slayings, narcotics and arms trafficking, money laundering, extortion, kidnapping, and political corruption”.<sup>75</sup> Commenting on the “criminal elements” within of the JAM, the former associate told me that Mohammed wanted nothing to do with this and so split from Bakr.

In a revealing comment in his Dabiq interview, Crawford alluded to “a faction of Muslims in Trinidad” who “attempted to overthrow the disbelieving government but quickly surrendered, apostatized, and participated in the religion of democracy, demonstrating that they weren’t upon the correct methodology of jihad”.<sup>76</sup> In T&T the JAM is widely regarded (and still feared) as a militant group, yet Crawford condemns it for not being militant enough, and for not practicing the right kind of Islam. Even more telling is that Crawford used to frequent Nazim Mohammed’s mosque, where he would have listened to the imam’s fiery sermons condemning democracy and calling for a purification of the faith.

Consisting of around 350 like-minded individuals,<sup>77</sup> the pro-ISIS network in T&T is located in three geographic areas: Diego Martin in the north-west, Enterprise and Longdenville in Chaguanas in the central west and Rio Claro in the south-east. At the center of the network were the 40 or more “bunches of guys”<sup>78</sup> who migrated to Syria and Iraq, taking their wives and children with them. The majority were members of Nazim Mohammed’s mosque in Rio Claro. According to an anonymous police source, “The main link to Dawla [Islamic State] and Trinidad is Boos Masjid in Rio.” “Richplain [in Diego Martin] is the subgroup of Boos, but Rio is the main hub,” he added. Another source, who personally knows worshipers at the mosque, told me: “Nazim is the main man. It’s no secret. Everyone who I know that left to go [to Syria and Iraq] went to Rio to spend some time there first. Nazim is the main pivot man for ISIS.”

For his own part, Mohammed has strenuously denied any association with ISIS, despite acknowledging that several members of his family travelled to Syria and Iraq in support of the caliphate. “I am hearing that I am a recruiter,” he told the Trinidad and Tobago Sunday Express.<sup>79</sup> “But I am not sending anyone there. Perhaps they think I am a recruiter because I am outspoken, you see, but I am not recruiting anyone.”<sup>80</sup> He reiterated the same denial when I interviewed him.

Is Mohammed an ISIS recruiter? It is hard to know, but based on what several anonymous police sources told me he was certainly sympathetic toward the group’s ideological vision, defending the legitimacy of the caliphate in his sermons. This of course is not the same as saying he was selecting and then “grooming” would-be foreign fighters, but he helped lay the ideological ground for the migrations of scores of his followers to Syria and Iraq, many of whom lived under his patronage at the Boos settlement in Rio Claro.

According to Fuad Abu Bakr (the son of the JAM leader), the idea that there is an ISIS recruiter in Trinidad is a myth. On the contrary, Fuad insisted, ISIS recruitment in T&T is bottom-up. “Listen,” he said, “there are facilitators, people who are there [in Syria and Iraq], they communicate to friends. Trinidad is small and the Muslim community is even smaller, so it’s basically friends, people you know, who are saying to you, “you know, do you want to come?” No big, bad recruiter.”<sup>81</sup> This seems plausible enough, but it doesn’t explain why so many TIMs clustered around Rio Claro, where Mohammed operates. Hence the question of whether recruitment to ISIS in T&T was “bottom-up” or “top down” remains unresolved at this point.

The second key contextual thread for understanding the origins of the 2013-16 migrations to Syria and Iraq is the growth, since the 1990s, of salafi fundamentalism in T&T. According to

Figueira, it is impossible to understand the migrations without placing them into this broader ideological context:

It is the by-product of years of work done by the House of Saud financing a program of indoctrination into Wahhabi Islam in Trinidad and Tobago. They've spent money and brought in all of these Wahhabi scholars from Mecca, they've passed on the doctrine, then they've started to take the young males and send them to Mecca, and then they came back indoctrinated and they continue, so now you don't even need to send missionaries again.<sup>82</sup>

The former T&T politician Nafeesa Mohammed, in a recent talk at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad, echoed a similar concern about the radicalizing impact of Saudi-funded Wahhabism on T&T Muslim communities:

There is a discernable turning point in our country from the days when we were basically a traditional moderate Muslim society with three or four main Muslim organisations to a point where now, there has been a rise of fundamentalism and...now have about 50 groups and organisations, and a great measure of disunity and discord within the Muslim community...I have tried to link it to my own personal experiences at our Masjid and I can trace it to the day when Saudi Arabia became so very wealthy in the 1990s with the oil money that they started to pump money into the Western world, and a lot of the foreign ideologies then started to seep into our Masjid.<sup>83</sup>

Many Muslims I interviewed in T&T relayed the same observation, most notably an imam in the south of the country who fought for many months against a salafi takeover of his mosque. The T&T state has watched this development with relative indifference, probably out of a principled commitment to religious freedom that that is enshrined in the country's constitution and a mixture of apathy and tolerance that are endemic in the culture of T&T.

It is scarcely an accident, then, that one of most prominent Trinidadians who joined ISIS was a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Ashmead Choate, a former principal of the Darul Quran Wal Hadith Islamic School, in central-west Trinidad, was in his late 50s when he departed from Trinidad. In his Dabiq interview Crawford credited him with furthering his path to jihad: "By Allah's grace, there was a man of sound knowledge who I was able to refer to and who would answer any questions I had. His name was Shaykh Ashmead Choate and he had studied hadith and graduated from one of the Islamic colleges in the Middle East. He made hijrah [migration] to the Islamic State and attained martyrdom fighting in Ramadi."<sup>84</sup>

It is hard to gauge the degree of Choate's influence on the radical Islamist milieu in T&T, since the circles in which he moved are so secretive and closed to outsiders. Darius Figueira suspects that Choate, with his extensive contacts in the Middle East, was not only an ideological mentor to Crawford and his associates but also the crucial link between TIMs and ISIS in Syria and Iraq. A relative of Choate told me, "Some days it seemed that his entire day was on a phone. What I can say was that he knew practically all of the men who left for Syria."<sup>85</sup>

Another ideological figure that looms large over the radical Islamist scene in T&T is Abdullah el-Faisal, a pro-ISIS Jamaican cleric who is currently facing charges in the U.S. for allegedly acting as a facilitator for ISIS.<sup>86</sup> El-Faisal is believed to have acted as a mentor to the Jamaican-born British national Jermaine Lindsay, who detonated a bomb on a Tube train near King's Cross, killing 26 passengers, in the 7 July 2005 London bombings.<sup>87</sup>

Umar Abdullah, head of the Waajihatul Islaamiyyah and former flatmate of Milton Algernon, where they lived together on the Boos settlement in Rio Claro, described to me not only how the caliphate declaration in 2014 electrified many of Nazim Mohammed's followers, but also how their prior immersion in the thinking of el-Faisal had primed that response. "We used to get a copy of every lecture he [el-Faisal] gave," Abdullah said, "because he had a close relationship with Imam Nazim. And we used to listen to those lectures over and over. And in those lectures there was a lot of radical rhetoric...A lot of brothers were radicalized as a result of listening to his lectures."<sup>88</sup>

It also seems likely that el-Faisal had a relationship with Sean Parson, helping him marry (over Skype) a 32 year-old Philadelphia-based American woman named Keonna Thomas.<sup>89</sup> Whether or not el-Faisal radicalized Parson is unclear.

In 2009 Nazim Mohammed came under the radar of the FBI, when agents visited his mosque prior to the Fifth Summit of the Americas, which took place that year in Port of Spain. "They came here, right here in this masjid. They said their President (Barack Obama) was coming here and wanted to determine whether I was a threat. Very sophisticated men. Spoke Arabic," Mohammed said.<sup>90</sup> The authorities in T&T would have known about this visit, just as they would have known about Mohammed's proselytizing. Yet it seems they were not sufficiently worried to do anything about it. This is puzzling, especially given the dark history of Islamist activism in T&T – and Nazim's own participation in the 1990 attempted coup.

## Conclusion

Several implications follow from the data presented in this article. One is to do with the genuinely global reach of ISIS and its ability to appeal to a dizzyingly diverse range of actors from countries that differ markedly from one another. However fringe ISIS was and remains within the wider Islamic world, it nevertheless succeeded in framing its grievances and ambitions in a way that was understood across many different countries and cultures.

Another implication is to do with the intersection between the local and the global in jihadist foreign traveller mobilizations. For all the global reach of ISIS, its ability to attract devotees and foreign labor-power is shaped profoundly by the local circumstances of the countries in which its message finds a receptive audience, however small. But these circumstances differ from place to place, and any attempt to understand the vicissitudes of ISIS recruitment in each must attend to the specificities of the local circumstances in question. For example, any adequate macro-explanation of ISIS recruitment in western Europe must arguably address the blunt human reality of Muslim immigration and what it means to be a second generation Muslim in a secular and largely homogenous society<sup>91</sup> which offers them few opportunities for economic advancement.<sup>92</sup> However, such a focus is unlikely to offer much promise for explaining ISIS radicalization and recruitment in T&T, an ethnically diverse country where there are no diasporic Muslim communities, where there has been no secularist push-back against religious values or Muslims, and where the majority of pro-ISIS supporters are from economically stable indigenous Muslim families in rural areas.

In the T&T context the question that needs answering is not why alienated young men in their early twenties with little to lose would be willing to leave their home nations to join ISIS, but why men and women in their mid-thirties, many with decent jobs and young families, would be willing to leave their settled and rooted lives in T&T to join ISIS.

To answer this is well beyond the scope of this article, but the T&T case does serve to highlight just how culturally bounded western radicalization discourse is, with its characteristic narrative focus on poor, rootless, angry young Muslims lurking in the shadows of a strange and hostile urban landscape.



As we have seen, experts on foreign fighter radicalization make a distinction between “push” and “pull” factors:<sup>93</sup> between the positive things about a radical group that attracts people to it – the “pull” factors - and the negative things about a group that alienates people from it and makes them seek out radical alternatives - the “push” factors. If the TIMs were “pushed”, what were the relevant pushing mechanisms? And if they were “pulled”, what were the relevant points of attraction? No doubt there was a combination of both pushes and pulls. But poverty, rootlessness, anti-Muslim bigotry and sexual repression do not seem to be among them. Most were married. Most were financially secure. And none had experienced the difficulties of adapting to a host society that routinely demanded and questioned their loyalty. Above all, the data in the article resoundingly supports a growing body of research that emphasizes the crucial role of social networks in facilitating radicalization and foreign fighter mobilizations. Everyone in T&T who left for Syria and Iraq was part of the same network. No one self-radicalized and no one left for Syria without the support of the network. Moreover, the origins of this network long predated ISIS and can be traced to the fracturing, in the mid-1990s, of another militant Islamist group – the JAM.

There is still much that we do not know about this network, including who helped finance it and who helped connect TIMs with the relevant ISIS contacts in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Nazim Mohammed’s extended family was clearly a central node but it remains to be seen who within it was most active both in proselytizing for ISIS and in organizing its migration – and perhaps that of other families - to Syria and Iraq. We also know very little about the role played by women in the network. At least two women insist that they were deceived by their husbands into going to Syria.<sup>94</sup> Yet many others, based on their social media accounts, were aggressive proponents of the ISIS project. Further research is needed to address these questions.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All links below were last accessed on October 11, 2018.

“Interview: Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad”, Dabiq 15, 31 July 2016: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/the-islamic-state-e2809cdacc84biq-magazine-1522.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> According to the national census conducted in 2011, East Indians and Africans are the largest ethnic groups at 35.4 percent and 34.2 percent, respectively; more than 22% of the population is identified as “mixed”. (Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, “Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census Demographic Report” (Port-of-Spain: Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011), [http://www.tt.undp.org/content/trinidad\\_tobago/en/home/library/crisis\\_prevention\\_and\\_recovery/publication\\_1.html](http://www.tt.undp.org/content/trinidad_tobago/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/publication_1.html), p. 15). Muslims represent about 8% of the population (see “Islam in Trinidad and Tobago”, in John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, [http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2400?\\_hi=0&\\_pos=14](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2400?_hi=0&_pos=14)).

<sup>5</sup> “Interview: Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad”, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> See “Individuals and Entities Designated by the State Department Under E.O. 13224”, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/143210.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> By “Western ISIS Foreign Fighter” I specifically refer to those who joined and fought for ISIS from western European countries and North America, including the Caribbean. On the foreign fighter concept, see esp. Thomas Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad,” *International Security* 35/3 (2010/2011), pp. 57–

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58; and David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that these questions are not contested: see, for example, Hassan Hassan, “ISIL and the numbers game: what exactly is the size of its army?”, *The National*, 25 October 2017, available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/isil-and-the-numbers-game-what-exactly-is-the-size-of-its-army-1.670132>.

<sup>9</sup> Curiously however, we still lack any comprehensive data on the biographies of jihadists from Britain.

<sup>10</sup> See esp. Graeme Wood, “What We Still Don’t Know About the Islamic State’s Foreign Fighters”, *The Atlantic*, 19 August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/isis-foreign-fighters/537279/>.

<sup>11</sup> The Soufan Group, “Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment”, 2 December 2015, [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Elena Pokalova “Driving Factors behind Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1427842 (2018), pp. 7, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’”, *ICSR*, 2018, [https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Women-in-ISIS-report\\_20180719\\_web.pdf](https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Women-in-ISIS-report_20180719_web.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> See Daniel H. Heinke and Jan Raudszus, “German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *CTC Sentinel*, 8/1, January 2015; Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa, Program on Extremism, December 2015, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>; Bibi van Ginkel and Eva Entenmann, “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies”, *ICCT Research Paper April 2016*, [https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report\\_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU\\_1-April-2016\\_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf](https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf); Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont, “Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, Motivations, and Roles in the War in Syria and Iraq”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27:5 (2016), pp. 837-857; Pieter Van Ostaeyen, “February 2016: A new statistical update on Belgian fighters in Syria and Iraq”, 2 February 2016, <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2016/02/02/february-2016-a-new-statistical-update-on-belgian-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq/>; Sean C. Reynolds and Mohammed M. Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017), DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1272456; Reinier Bergema and Marion van San, “Waves of the Black Banner: An Exploratory Study on the Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighter Contingent in Syria and Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2017), DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2017.1404004; Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp, “Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *Swedish Defence University*, 2017, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; Pieter Van Ostaeyen and Guy Van Vlierden, “Citizenship and Ancestry of Belgian Foreign Fighters”, *ICCT Policy Brief*, May 2018, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ICCT-Van-Ostaeyen-Van-Vlierden-Belgian-Foreign-Fighters-June2018.pdf>; Amir Rostami et al, “The Swedish Mujahideen: An Exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Iraq and Syria”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2018), DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1463615; Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes and Bennett Clifford, “The Travelers: American Jihadists in

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Syria and Iraq”, Program on Extremism, February 2018, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>; and M. Peirce, “Mobilization To Violence (Terrorism) Research - key findings”, 5 February 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/mobilization-to-violence-terrorism-research-key-findings.html>.

<sup>20</sup> See Thomas Hegghammer, “Revisiting the poverty-terrorism link in European jihadism”, Paper presented at the Society for Terrorism Research Annual Conference, Leiden, 8 November, 2016, [http://hegghammer.com/files/Hegghammer\\_-\\_poverty.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/files/Hegghammer_-_poverty.pdf), p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> See esp. Rostami et al, “The Swedish Mujahideen”, p. 3; Bakker and de Bont, “Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015)”, pp. 840-843; and Reynolds and Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, pp. 8-12.

<sup>22</sup> On the crime-terror nexus, see esp. Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Past, Terrorist Futures”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (December 2016) (10/6), pp. 25-40. On the relationship between conversion and violent extremism, see Bart Schuurman, Peter Grol, and Scott Flower, “Converts and Islamist Terrorism,” ICCT Policy Brief, June 2016, <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ICCT-Schuurman-Grol-Flower-Converts-June-2016.pdf>, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> See Scott Atran, “Youth, Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace”, 25 April 2015, <https://blogs.plos.org/neuroanthropology/2015/04/25/scott-atran-on-youth-violent-extremism-and-promoting-peace/>.

<sup>24</sup> Bakker and de Bont, “Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015)”, pp. 845-847; Marion van San, “Lost Souls Searching for Answers? Belgian and Dutch Converts Joining the Islamic State”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9/5 (2015); Edwin Bakker and Peter Grol, “Motives and Considerations of Potential Foreign Fighters from the Netherlands,” ICCT Policy Brief, July 2015, <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ICCT-Bakker-Grol-Motives-and-Considerations-of-Potential-Foreign-Fighters-from-the-Netherlands-July2015.pdf>; Jakob Sheikh, “‘I Just Said It. The State’: Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10/6 (December 2016), pp. 59-67; Rik Coolsaet, “Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave: What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic State? Insights from the Belgian Case”, *The Royal Institute for International Relations*, March 2016, [http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2016/02/egmont.papers.81\\_online-versie.pdf?type=pdf](http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2016/02/egmont.papers.81_online-versie.pdf?type=pdf), pp. 21, 35-36; Lasse Lindekilde, Preben Bertelsen, and Michael Stohl, “Who Goes, Why, and With What Effects: The Problem of Foreign Fighters from Europe,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 27/5 (2016), pp. 858–877; Randy Borum and Robert Fein, “The Psychology of Foreign Fighters”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40(3) (2017), pp. 250-253; Hamed el-Said and Richard Barrett, “Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria”, *United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism*, July 2017, [http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report\\_Final\\_20170727.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/img/Report_Final_20170727.pdf), pp. 33-41; and Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, “Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40 (3) (2017), pp. 191-210.

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent discussion of the conflicting viewpoints, see Dawson and Amarasingam, “Talking to Foreign Fighters”; see also Wood, “What We Still Don’t Know About the Islamic State’s Foreign Fighters”.

<sup>26</sup> See, notably, Reynolds and Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”; Amir Rostami et al, “The Swedish Mujahideen”; Bergema and van San, “Waves of the Black Banner”; Van Ostaeyen and Van Vlierden, “Citizenship and Ancestry of Belgian Foreign Fighters”; Timothy Holman, “‘Gonna Get Myself Connected’: The Role of

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Facilitation in Foreign Fighter Mobilizations”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10/2 (2016), pp. 2-23; and Stefan Malthaner, “Spaces, Ties, and Agency: The Formation of Radical Networks”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12/2 (2018), pp. 32-43.

<sup>27</sup> On the “top-down”-“bottom-up” distinction, see Borum and Fein, “The Psychology of Foreign Fighters”, pp. 254-255.

<sup>28</sup> See Coolsaet, “Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave”, pp. 3, 27, 30-31, 35; and Mo-amen Gouda and Marcus Marktanner Muslim Youth Unemployment and Expat Jihadism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018): DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1431316, esp. at pp. 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> See esp. Chris Meserole, “Radicalization, Laïcité, and the Islamic Veil”, 25 April 2016, <https://religion.org/2016/04/25/french-connection-part-ii-radicalization-laicite-and-the-islamic-veil/>. For an earlier version of this argument in respect to radicalization more broadly, see Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006); and Basia Spalek, “Disconnection and Exclusion: Pathways to Radicalisation”, in Tahir Abbas (ed.), *Islamic Political Radicalism A European Perspective* Edited (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> See esp. Scott Atran, “ISIS is a Revolution”, Aeon, 15 December 2015, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>; Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, “Terrorist (E)motives”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34/12 (2011), pp. 963-986; and Dawson and Amarasingam, “Talking to Foreign Fighters”.

<sup>31</sup> See Gail Alexander, “Media tracks Isis fighters from T&T”, *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 5 February 2017, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2017-02-06/media-tracks-isis-fighters-tt>.

<sup>32</sup> See Gail Alexander, “Serious threat to T&T”, *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 16 April 2016, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2016-04-15/serious-threat-tt>.

<sup>33</sup> <http://cso.gov.tt/>.

<sup>34</sup> “Islam in Trinidad and Tobago”.

<sup>35</sup> John McCoy and W. Andy Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40/4 (2017), pp. 267-299, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1206734.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander, “Serious threat to T&T”.

<sup>37</sup> The article does not specify the exact period in months.

<sup>38</sup> This estimate is drawn from data collected by Cook and Vale: “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’”. Cook and Vale report that the top 5 countries with the highest proportion of females, in terms of female to male ratios, are Iran (76%), Croatia (57-71%), China (35%), Kazakhstan (25-30%) and Netherlands (27%) (p. 22). But this is based on an underestimate of the number of Trinidadian female ISIS travellers, which is in fact at least double the figure used by Cook and Vale (p. 71). Of the total number of adults among the 102 TIMs reported on in the T&T Guardian, 30 – i.e. 48% - are female, while 32 – i.e. 52% - are male.

<sup>39</sup> This estimate also draws from Cook and Vale’s report cited above.

<sup>40</sup> Van Ginkel and Entenmann, “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union”, p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> Heinke and Raudszus, “German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Gustafsson and Ranstorp, “Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, pp. 5, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Bakker and de Bont, “Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015)”, p. 841.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes and Clifford, “The Travelers”, p. 17.

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<sup>46</sup> See esp. Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst, 2017), p. 2; Coolsaet, “Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave”, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> See esp. Aaron Zelin, “ISIS Is Dead, Long Live the Islamic State”, *Foreign Policy*, 30 June 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/30/isis-is-dead-long-live-the-islamic-state/>.

<sup>48</sup> See <https://tradingeconomics.com/trinidad-and-tobago/barro-lee-percentage-of-population-age-30-34-with-secondary-schooling-completed-secondary-wb-data.html>.

<sup>49</sup> See “Trinidad and Tobago’s education system is multi-faceted and well funded”, Oxford Business Group, 2015, <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/trinidad-and-tobagos-education-system-multi-faceted-and-well-funded>.

<sup>50</sup> This is based on the World Bank’s definition of class, according to which the middle class income bracket in Latin America and the Caribbean is between U.S.\$10-U.S.\$50 per capita per day (see F.H.G. Ferreira et al, “Economic Mobility and the Rise of the Latin American Middle Class”, The World Bank, 2013, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/11858/9780821396346.pdf?%20sequence=5>, p. 2).

<sup>51</sup> Ginkel and Entenmann, “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union”, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> See Simon Cottee, “What ISIS Women Want”, *Foreign Policy*, 17 May 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/17/what-isis-women-want-gendered-jihad/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Interview: Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad”, p. 68.

<sup>54</sup> See Schuurman, Grol, and Flower, “Converts and Islamist Terrorism”.

<sup>55</sup> Van Ginkel and Entenmann, “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union”, pp. 4, 52.

<sup>56</sup> This number is calculated on the basis of the estimates provided in McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago”, p. 272.

<sup>57</sup> See Simon Cottee, “Reborn Into Terrorism”, *The Atlantic*, 25 January 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/isis-criminals-converts/426822/>.

<sup>58</sup> Bakker and de Bont, “Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015)”, p. 844.

<sup>59</sup> Gustafsson and Ranstorp, “Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Rukmini Callimachi. “American ISIS Member Caught on Syrian Battlefield, Militia Says”, *The New York Times*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/06/world/middleeast/isis-syria-warren-christopher-clark.html>.

<sup>62</sup> See esp. Reynolds and Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”.

<sup>63</sup> For a particularly vivid statement of this point, see Wood, *The Way of the Strangers*, pp. 91-99.

<sup>64</sup> Cook and Vale, “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’”, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Email, 5 January, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> See Gail Alexander, “Serious threat to T&T”.

<sup>67</sup> Personal correspondence, 24 July, 2017.

<sup>68</sup> See Naline Seelal, “4 Trini ISIS fighters held”, *Trinidad and Tobago NEWSDAY*, 19 January 2016, <http://archives.newsday.co.tt/2016/01/19/4-trini-isis-fighters-held/>.

<sup>69</sup> See “Trinis detained at Iraqi camp”, *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 13 January 2018, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2018-01-12/trinis-detained-iraqi-camp>.

<sup>70</sup> See Josie Ensor, “Foreign wives and widows face conveyor-belt justice in Iraqi courts after the defeat of Islamic State”, *The Telegraph*, 1 May 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/01/islamic-state-wives-widows-face-reckoning-iraqi-courts/>.

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<sup>71</sup> See “Trinis deported from Turkey under probe”, Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 30 April 2017, <http://www.guardian.co.tt/news/2017-04-29/trinis-deported-turkey-under-probe>.

<sup>72</sup> In emphasizing the importance of opportunities, organizing structures, and cultural frames this article is indebted to the social movement literature (see esp. Doug McAdam et al, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>73</sup> See esp. Ramesh Deosaran, *A Society under Siege* (St. Augustine, University of the West Indies Press, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Cynthia Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago”, *British Journal of Criminology*, 53 (2012), pp. 59-73.

<sup>75</sup> Chris Zambelis, “Jamaat al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago”, *Terrorism Monitor*, 7 (23), 30 July, 2009: <https://jamestown.org/program/jamaat-al-muslimeen-the-growth-and-decline-of-islamist-militancy-in-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Interview: Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad”, p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> The Prime Minister of T&T Keith Rowley has publicly stated that there are approximately 200 ISIS sympathizers in T&T (see “Rowley quizzed on ISIS, Venezuelans at CARICOM conference”, *The Loop*, 28 February 2018, available at: <http://www.looptt.com/content/rowley-quizzed-isis-venezuelans-caricom-conference>). This figure seems about right and may even be conservative, based on the number of pro ISIS social accounts in T&T. In addition to this are the 130 who migrated to Syria and Iraq.

<sup>78</sup> This is Marc Sageman’s terminology (from *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 66).

<sup>79</sup> See “I’M NO ISIS POINT MAN”, Trinidad and Tobago Sunday Express, October 17, 2014, <http://web.trinidadexpress.com/news/IM-NO-ISIS--POINT-MAN-279688692.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Interview, 3 March 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 25 February 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Joan Rampersad, “Nafeesa condemns Wahabi movement”, Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 19 October 2018, <https://newsday.co.tt/2018/10/18/nafeesa-condemns-wahabi-movement-wants-meaningful-dialogue-on-tt-families-in-syria/>.

<sup>84</sup> Interview: Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad”, p. 65.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 29 August 2018.

<sup>86</sup> See Adam Goldman and Scott Shane, “A Long-Pursued ISIS Preacher Is Finally Charged in New York”, *New York Times*, 1 September 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/us/abdullah-faisal-al-qaeda.html>.

<sup>87</sup> See “Profile: Germaine Lindsay”, *BBC News*, 2 March 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12621385>.

<sup>88</sup> Interview, 6 March 2016.

<sup>89</sup> See Jeremy Roebuck, “Facing sentencing, N. Philly mom married to Islamic State soldier is no aberration”, *The Inquirer*, 4 September 2017, <http://www2.philly.com/philly/news/pennsylvania/philadelphia/facing-sentencing-n-philly-mom-married-to-isis-soldier-is-no-aberration-20170905.html>. In 2017 Thomas was found guilty of providing material support to a terrorist organization ISIS.

<sup>90</sup> “I’M NO ISIS POINT MAN”.

<sup>91</sup> Efraim Benmelech & Esteban F. Klor, “What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (2018): DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2018.1482214, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Hegghammer, “Revisiting the poverty-terrorism link in European jihadism”.

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<sup>93</sup> See esp. Dawson and Amarasingam, “Talking to Foreign Fighters”.

<sup>94</sup> See Naline Seelal, “Trinis Flee ISIS”, T&T Newsday, 1 November, 2014, <https://archives.newsday.co.tt/2014/11/01/trinis-flee-isis/>; and Azard Ali, “ISIS Beauty Queen”, T&T Newsday, 15 January, 2019, <https://newsday.co.tt/2019/01/15/isis-beauty-queen/>.