



Union du Maghreb Arabe  
اتحاد المغرب العربي

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**



**STIFTUNG**  
Bureau Tunisie

# RETURN OF MAGHREBIAN WOMEN FROM THE HOTBEDS OF TENSION



# **RETURN OF MAGHREBIAN WOMEN FROM THE HOTBEDS OF TENSION**

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## FOREWORD

The Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union has taken the decision to talk overtly about a very sensible topic: the return of women from hotbeds of tension. As a matter of fact, the situation of women is often more complex than for men in this matter. Some of them have returned from war zones with their young children, born into unions of “sexual jihad”. Whether they were attracted by money or whether they were simply convinced to be “jihadists”, women have participated in armed fights in countries that were not theirs. They became part of terrorist organisations that claimed to form an Islamic state.

After participating in a reflection workshop organised with the assistance of the German foundation Friedrich-Ebert, we convened a group of researchers in the field of social sciences, coming from the five Maghreb countries. We agreed on a methodology of work and of field research, in prisons or elsewhere, in order to understand these women’s complex reality. Many questions were thus raised:

- Considering the crimes that they committed, does bringing them to justice and imprisoning them represent an adequate response?
- To what extent do repentance and apology make their reintegration into society possible?
- Which guarantees do societies have that some of them will not commit new terrorist crimes?
- How can we best deal with children raised in the middle of weapons, combats, violence and extremism?

It is not easy to find convincing answers to these questions. It has therefore been decided that these studies would be presented during a workshop with experts, researchers, representatives of policy makers and of civil society organisations. We do hope that this



initiative will lead to the development of common strategies throughout the Maghreb, in order to solve social, psychological and security issues. These solutions, in turn, should support policy makers in finding adequate responses, or at least responses representing the lesser evil. Approaches should always take into consideration humanitarian and psychological aspects. However, where relevant, rehabilitation should not deprive any society of its right to security, nor make the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism of any kind less of a priority.

**Prof. Taieb BACCOUCHE**

**Secretary-General of the UMA**

## **A FEW WORDS FROM THE FRIEDRICH EBERT FOUNDATION**

**Dear readers,**

The end of wars, conflicts and revolutions does not mean that continuing dangers do not exist anymore.

This is a tragic reality. The brutalities caused during wars create immense collateral damages that are difficult to assess.

For every society, dealing with individuals returning from war zones is a huge challenge. From persecution to punishment, control to surveillance, pardon to social reintegration, societies are struggling to deal with them adequately.

How can deradicalization processes succeed? For generations, researchers and policy makers have been considering this question. They are all very aware of the tremendous consequences that could come with failure to address the issues. The debate over persons returning from war zones is sensitive and forces us all to ask ourselves unpleasant questions related to the very foundations of our society.

However, whether we like it or not: At the end of a conflict, we need to consider how to deal with individuals directly or indirectly involved in fights.

This study focuses on an even more sensitive topic, that is the return of women from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. While the important role of “foreign fighters” in the establishment of what was called the “Islamic State” is generally known in public debates, the role of female fighters has been less focussed on.

I hope that this study will adequately shed light on this particular aspect of this region’s recent history. While designing the study, we

have tried to tackle the subject in a way that is neither alarmist, nor comforting, and neither desperate, nor naive.

I let the readers judge the pertinence of the contributions made by various authors and experts for this publication. In the name of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) for granting us their trust. In my own name, I would also like to thank in particular S.E. M Taieb Baccouche, Secretary-General of the AMU and longstanding partner of the FES, for the excellent cooperation. Finally, I thank the authors and all of those who contributed to the creation of this work.

*May the people and this region find the peace they are looking for...*

**Henrik MEYER**

**Resident Representative**

## FOREWORD

Much has been written as an attempt to analyse the status and motivation of women that opted for jihad. Are they “victims” of a patriarchal system that transcends and subjugates them or are they “accomplice” agents of a divine mission?

The idea of undergoing a Maghrebian study on “Women returning from conflict zones” sprung out of a joint reflection between the Arab Maghreb Union and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. A work method was therefore developed to carry out this demanding task.

It was first necessary to measure the extent of the difficulties to be faced- mainly in terms of access to information- and to reflect upon the relevance of such an issue, in the light of the politico-socio-economic context of each of the five countries of the Arab Maghreb.

This study has scientific, operational, as well as political objectives. Starting from the observation that the “jihadist literature” is almost exclusively devoted to examining the profile of the Mouğāhidīn, it analyses that of female combatants.

This multidisciplinary and gender focused study attempts to apprehend the phenomenon of “jihad” feminization, beyond prejudice- which is now obsolete- that assimilates women to passive and non violent beings and Ġihādiyyāt to deviant and defeminized ones.

The holistic approach that the study adopts, broadens its historical framework as well as its geographical scope, and dissects the present situation through the past lens.

That is how Mohamed Ould Saleck established a correlation between the return of Afghan jihadists to their home country and that of Maghrebians:



*“If the return of Afghan war veterans or ‘Arab Afghans’ had sown the seeds of violent extremism in their countries of origin, what could we expect today, with the return<sup>1</sup> of Maghrebian ‘jihadists’, coming back from hotbeds of unrest? But more specifically, what could the ‘return of female jihadists’ mean to the Maghreb countries?”*

The paradigmatic added value that this publication provides is the indispensable necessity that must cover Gender in the implementation of public policies. This is the cornerstone on which the State must lean to raise awareness in the society and among the families about the dangers of radicalization.

It would therefore be a question of acquiring an effective tool that would avoid the exploitation of the status of women and that would contribute as well to the prevention of the process of radicalization and improve the support for those who are under its control.

Just like a propaedeutic, the different contributions firstly state work hypotheses.

They pave the ground by seeking to evaluate the type of threat that the “foreign terrorist fighters” generally present, and particularly the female Maghrebian jihadists to their countries of origin. They also try to determine the view that the society has on former female fighters and to delve into the answers and policies that the State intends to adopt in the wake of the rise of this phenomenon.

The team: This work- translated into three international languages- would have been impossible to achieve without the constitution of a multidisciplinary team of researchers/experts, of which each member has undertaken a case study, except Algeria that doesn’t

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) Foreign terrorist fighters are “individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict”.

address the issue of the “return” of women in the same terms and thus was not approached in the framework of this research.

This team was led by the A.M.U. and the F.E.S. at the regional level through a task-force that undertook the management and coordination of the study in its Maghrebian version. Other persons were consulted for advice, reference, orientation, etc.

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# **RETURN OF MAGHREBIAN WOMEN BELONGING TO VIOLENT AND EXTREMIST GROUPS FROM THE HOTBEDS OF TENSION<sup>1</sup>**

**By Amel GRAMI**

## **Preamble to the study**

Since 2012, many terms, concepts and attributes have been widely used in terrorism, violent extremism, security and media-related studies such as: migration, youth deportation to the conflicting zones and hotbeds of tension, foreign fighters, immigrants and jihadists who opted to join ISIS. Semantically speaking, these terms, concepts and attributes support the meaning of a movement forward towards the center which means “the Levant” which was represented as “Caliphate state” the destination of “Real Muslims”.

However, upon the decision of the Global Coalition to launch the first attack operations against the “Caliphate State”, different mass media started to break the news of the “fleeing men and women” and to follow up on news reporting the arrest and detention, of many members, in prisons or in camps. A group of those expressed their will for repatriation after they considered their country of origin as “non-believers land”. Immediately, new concepts emerged such as Returnees, Removed persons, Former Fighters, People stuck in camps, Foreign Fighters, Former Jihadists, Detained or Deported and People in watch list... Those terms are attributed to the group which decided to repatriate or forced to deport after the

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<sup>1</sup> This title look more objective as not all returnees are jihadists

collapse of the Caliphate State and they could no longer stay in the lands retrieved by its owners.

Based on this terminological and semantic shift, a vetting in the terms used in narratives and studies dealing with violent extremism becomes necessary in addition to the careful selection of words and the vigilant distinction between Jihadists, ISIS members<sup>1</sup>, members of extremist groups, returnees and deported. An objective study requires awareness in the clear difference between the forced and voluntarily deportation and between fighters returning from Afghanistan and the category of fighters belonging to “Caliphate State Organization”. Vetting in these issues is an attempt to shun away from issuing judgments against the returnees who still have their cases pending in courts.

However, the subject of the returning jihadists or ISIS members did not only pose lexical issues or a terminological distortion, confusion and misunderstanding but it also raised many issues related to the lack of field studies in Arabic countries in comparison with the research conducted in Europe, Asia and other countries elsewhere. Researches are scarce mainly in Maghreb countries in particular<sup>2</sup> added to the absence of accurate statistics and the difficulty to identify types of return (individual-collective-organized, unorganized...), when did the first returning waves started and how hard is to determine the identities of the returnees and their classification together with the absence of the analytical approach etc.

In addition to the mentioned obstacles, scholars agree unanimously that this subject has drawn the interest of researchers, decision makers and policymakers is the returning of “fighters”, “jihadists”

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<sup>1</sup> We adopt a gender attitude according to a gender-based language and establish at the same time an inclusive word for both sexes: he and she

Daniel Elmiger, “For or against the inclusive writing: unfair place?”, Rewritten Genra No. 4, GLAD ! [Online], 05 2018 released online on 15 December 2018, consulted on 06 December 2019. URL: <https://www.revue-glad.org/1417>

<sup>2</sup> As proven by the study of Tunisian, Mauritanian and other situations

or “ISIS members” as many books dealing with this subject matter were recently released on one hand. On the other hand, articles and studies dealing with the returning girls, women and children settled before in the “Caliphate State” were scarce mainly in the Arab world and in the Maghreb region in particular.

Knowing that many studies and books carries within its papers the aspects of violent extremism at the local and regional levels (USA, Europe, Indonesia, etc.) it’s worth mentioning that the phenomenon of “Extremist women from Maghreb region” haven’t had the chance to be the subject of deepened studies or comparative research which urged the Arab Maghreb Union in cooperation with the German institution “Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung” to choose this study in order to examine the return of Maghrebian women from hotbeds of tension. The fact-finding of the returning process characteristics of women belonging, geographically, to the Maghreb region is an attempt to overcome the marginalization and to replenish and fill the gaps of knowledge and research.

Considering that regional integration<sup>1</sup> is a key factor to face the common challenges and risks, a group of researchers from Maghreb countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania came together to conduct this study which is actually a reflection of their common will and a confirmation to their shared desire for collective work and intensification of efforts in order to set appropriate strategies to contain the violent extremism phenomenon in the region, to rehabilitate the female returnees and to achieve sustainable development and peace building.

Marginalization of the subject of female returnees, lack of documentation and belittlement of deepened study of that phenomenon led us to give a high interest to the female returnees involved in violent extremism (active members) or those forced to accompany their husbands or families (victims) for the following reasons:

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<sup>1</sup> The Libyan study

1- The “Caliphate State Organization” has realized the importance of girls and women in their land and gave them a conspicuous propaganda and tried to recruit them from all over the world. It allocated to them leading roles, addressed them with polyglot specific messages, welcomed the heroism of a group of them and promised to take revenge. Research centers specialized in the analysis of violent extremism causes have admitted that the “Caliphate State Organization” adopted the women “empowerment” policy and succeeded to recruit the females looking for better living conditions and for changing their lifestyle<sup>1</sup>. Then, if it was the case with an extremist group known for its gender based frustration, interest with the statements of the female returnees and the analysis of the experiences of women who adopted the extremist ideology shall be in the top priorities of the researchers as the different experiences lived by women and girls there can help us understand the phenomenon of violent extremism and examine the contexts that led to the rise of the said phenomenon in the Maghreb region.

2- The propaganda made by the “Caliphate State” (from 2014 to 2018) together with the testimonies given by some female returnees revealed that woman is in charge of exhorting people to embrace Islam, disseminating the right Islamic teachings, raising the future generations “Juniors of the Caliphate State” who will be responsible for the continuity of the latter. Based on the services provided by women<sup>2</sup> and their success in performing the roles allocated to them taking into consideration that female jihadists leaders represented the “Future of ISIS” to ensure the persistence

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, (Report Part Title: Women and Children) Published by: Soufan Group (2017). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10782.7> (accessed 30-9-2019) / Quilliam Foundation 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Note that many attacks were named after women's names such as Om-Alrabab Revolution in Fellujah in 2010.

of the ideology<sup>1</sup>, their return raises many concerns mainly when we realize that a group of them believe that the Caliphate State is “extending more and more” and that extremist groups like “Bait Elmakdess” in Sinai and “Ansar Alshariaa” in Libya looking forward to resuming the project of “Caliphate State”. Then, we think that reluctance in conducting researches, prevention of completion of studies about the female returnees or refusing the establishment of rehabilitation and reintegration programs will definitely lead a group of those female returnees to join again the extremist groups settled in closest geographical areas.

3- Reports confirm that the subject of female returnees has an important financial, political and social cost<sup>2</sup> and raises many psychological, social, legal and security issues at the same time. The sidelining of this subject will inevitably lead to difficulties in drafting habilitation and integration programs and in setting the appropriate policies to counter violent extremism<sup>3</sup>. Previous experiences proved that many countries did not take it seriously with women involved in terrorism/extremism cases as they weren't subjected to a real trial before courts or to rehabilitation and reintegration programs which resulted in getting them exposed to

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<sup>1</sup> Note that magazines of the “Caliphate State” (Dabuk, Roumia, Dar-Al -Islam, Chamikha-Hafidat Al-Khansaa) discussed the importance of women's roles as many women were tasked to motivate the others for Jihad like Muna Bent Salah Charkaoui: “It's your turn women now that men are asleep”. For more reference, you can refer back to the author Amel Grami's *Women and Terrorism: a Gender Approach* (with the participation of Monia Arfaoui), Mesculiani, Tunis, 2017. <http://www.jihadica.com/umayma-al-zawahiri-on-women%E2%80%99s-role-in-jihad/> (February 26, 2010, accessed 12-12-2019). Issue of Nabaa Magazine in 2017 was dedicated to raise the awareness of women about their responsibility after the collapse of “ISIS”.

<sup>2</sup> *Violent Islamist Extremism: A Global Problem*, 2018, The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change; Cook, Joana, and Gina Vale; “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State”, Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, 2017, “The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State”, *CTC Sentinel*, 10:7, 23-28; Devorah Margolin, “The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups”, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/files/zaxdzs2191> (accessed 12-12-2019).

<sup>3</sup> The study of Mauritanian case highlighted the absence of a theoretical framework and a body to supervise the drafting of policies to counter violent extremism in Maghrebian countries.



relapse risks and being nostalgic to the extremist ideology or even rejoining the violent extremist groups.

4- This subject has political, social, psychological and security repercussions in addition to implications on social stability, and on achieving security and peace building. Female returnees mostly face the social stigmatization and rejection which opens their appetite for reaction through violent act and to seek revenge from society. Usually, the latter were used as excuses to commit bloodier acts than before. Based on this situation, strategy and policy makers<sup>1</sup> should seriously think about comprehensive programs based on the respect of accountable and integrative citizenship principle.

5- Identification of the processes and the reasons behind their return fraught with risks together with many other factors deemed necessary as girls and women detained in Iraqi and Libyan prisons or in Syrian camps can't be summed up in numbers<sup>2</sup>, but they shall be considered as human entities and we have to be fair in dealing with them. So, we can give them an opportunity to tell their experiences same as we do with male returnees. Taking the female samples lightly in studies is considered a form of discrimination and a sign of gender biased studies. It's worth mentioning in this context that female returnees do not represent a typical model or a consistent group since they have different stories and ways of life. Also, their identities were subject to many shifts that should be analyzed accurately by the specialists in order to study the authority-based gender relationships, social relationships and ways of roles distribution...together with the lessons learned.

6- Many researchers realized that underestimation of the sudden shifts in women's roles in violent extremist organizations and irrelevance of gender dynamics in the recruitment process within those groups has created a gap in the policies countering

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<sup>1</sup> See the chapter related to the proposed Maghrebian Strategies.

<sup>2</sup> Researchers estimated that the rate of female returnees from hotbeds of tension is 4% from the total returnees rate.

violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism. As awareness about this latter rose, researchers insisted to adopt gender -based analysis in order to whittle away at the current understanding in security agencies in particular, which consider that controlling male returnees is a must as they represent the violent and active part. However, when it comes to female returnees, controlling is not important in the eyes of security staff, considering that women weren't active and they're victims, weak, subjective and just family caretakers ...<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the fact that this study is focusing on Maghreb girls and women returnees in particular, it's not detached from the general and international framework. On the contrary, this study falls within the context of Maghreb countries commitments with the resolution No. 2242 in 2015 and No. 2395 in 2017 of the Security Council tasking the Executive Directorate of the Countering Terrorism Committee to conduct studies and gather researches which are gender-sensitive in analyzing the motivations of violent extremism for women.

### **1- Returning of Maghrebian females: research difficulties**

Returning of Arab fighters from Afghanistan to their countries of origin was not a subject worth for research and exploration. Consequently, security agencies in different Maghrebian countries did not realize how dangerous is the situation to jail people convicted of joining Taliban together with other prisoners in the same cell. Reports spotting the way of dealing with the returning of "Arab Afghans" revealed that security authorities weren't observing the wives of the "Arab fighters in Afghanistan" or even their daughters as a source of danger and didn't even bother themselves with investigations or fact-finding.

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<sup>1</sup> Idfrisso Abdulaziz, "Women and countering violent extremism", 2017.

However, the new historical and political context (2011-2019) imposed on the security authorities in all Arab countries to conduct inquiries and enhance control and urged the researchers to seek testimonies of the female returnees from hotbeds of tension and to examine their stories in scrutiny driven by propaganda in media.

Tunisian and Moroccan specialists were more interested than Mauritians in researches spotting female returnees from hotbeds of tension justified by the increase of the number of girls and women supporting extremist groups and others who joined the Caliphate State. Difference of interest in studying the subject of female returnees by the researchers did not impede all the members of the Maghreb team regardless of their specialties and belongings from agreeing unanimously that there are many obstacles hindering them from getting the required information<sup>1</sup> such as absence of cooperation between local security agencies and researchers and refusal of many Ministries to let researchers interview the prisoners. A further example will be lack of awareness of the officials about the seriousness of the situation or insistence by the government to keep it secret to avoid responses from civil society in addition to its consideration that the security circumstances did not pave the way for field researches. Political and ideological considerations in the Tunisian case represented an impediment to the researchers mainly after accusing Ennahdha political party with facilitation of deportation of youth which had an impact on field researches, particularly after the information gathered from some prisoners which pinned the accusation on it.

Another impeding fact or that cannot be overlooked is the hesitation and reluctance of female interviewees to answer the questions addressed to them or to give their testimonies as going through what happened to them may cause suffer and trauma<sup>2</sup>. Knowing that most of the female returnees decided to keep silent and desired to wipe away this experience from memory; in addition

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in the study of Mauritania, Tunisia and Libya.

<sup>2</sup> Tunisian study confirmed the difficulty in interviewing female returnees.

to their fear from the security agencies conducting surveillance to their movement and the pressure exerted by the family members, it is not easy to the researcher to provide accurate and deep additional findings.

Based on this reality that does not create appropriate conditions for field researches in most of the Maghrebian countries, looking for female returnees was like a precarious trip interspersed with frustration and despair...However, determination of researchers to overcome the difficulties made them able to find alternatives. Since meeting with a large number of female returnees and understanding the reasons that made them leave their countries to join extremist groups seemed unachievable, researchers resorted to the videos about female returnees on YouTube and to articles spotting violent extremism in general as a procedural solution to fill the gap.

Researchers from Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania succeeded to conduct field researches according to their available resources and the permissible context. But, one can recognize that the situation in Libya imposed a different way to deal with field researches. Difficult security situation and violent clashes between the different factions precluded any direct meeting with returnees escaping from extremist groups and seeking deradicalization. Therefore, the collected information were scarce in comparison with Tunisia and Morocco.

In Algeria, joining hotbeds of tension did not scuple girls, youth or adults due to the trauma left in Algerians hearts as an after effect of the “Black decade of terrorism” on one hand, and to the success of security and military authorities in setting the policies to counter terrorism, deradicalization of extremists and their reintegration in society on the other hand. Despite of the fact that those efforts decreased the number of extremists, the terrorist activity committed by “Jund Al-Khilafa” under the tutelage of “Caliphate

State Organization” cannot be condoned starting from 2014<sup>1</sup>. Many Algerians succeeded to form coalitions with Tunisian, Mauritanian and Libyan extremist groups<sup>2</sup>, and commit terrorist activities on Tunisian territories planned by Algerian leaders. With regard to the particular Algerian context, it was not worth to mention the Algerian female returnees from hotbeds of tension as there was no reference in studies, as far as we know, for “Migration of Algerian women to the Levant”. What can a researcher find is the list of girls and women who have an Algerian origin and joined “Caliphate State Organization” from Europe or even participated in terrorist activities<sup>3</sup>.

## **2- Relevance of the gender based approach:**

### *Male and female returnees approach*

Dealing with testimonies of male and female returnees together with investigations conducted with a group of them has undoubtedly required a certain selection of appropriate approaches for analysis. In this regard, some research centers and a number of researchers selected the psycho-social approach while other researchers opted for the implementation of the historical approach which dealt with fighters returning from Afghanistan, as an example, after the collapse of Al-Qaida. Other experts tended to combine many approaches (security, legal, social, religious and historical...) in order to draft a comprehensive approach. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Dalia Ghanemyazbeck, “Obstacles to ISIS Expansion”, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/africa/obstacles-to-isis-expansion#.V8fEyP9AEgM> (September 1, 2016, accessed 15-12-2019).

<sup>2</sup> Ammar Garnoud, “Algeria, the terrorist Mukhtar Belmukhtar caused a disagreement between Algeria and Mauritania”, <http://www.kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2017/04/15/> (15 April 2017, seen on 12-12-2019).

<sup>3</sup> For further information, please refer to the introduction dedicated to the subject of “Extremism of Maghrebian people pretending to be Muslims”, pp. 291-302 and “Princess of terrorism from a Maghrebian origin”, pp. 303-330 (Munia Alarfauoui) mentioned in our author Amel Grami’s *Women and Terrorism: a Gender Approach*

other researchers adopted a multidisciplinary approach (social, psychological, anthropological and historical...). On the contrary, many researchers defended the humanitarian approach in the last few years (2017-2019).

While western research centers specialized in this subject gave importance to the theoretical part and while most researchers revealed their methodological attitudes subject to review for modification purposes; a researcher who is knowledgeable with researches and studies in Arabic, albeit few, will realize that the Arabic library did not include works that you can rely on in terms of methodology. Researchers are usually starting by the analysis of extremism reasons and the roles played by “Jihadists” without revealing the approach used in the study.

Although researchers took lightly the subject of female returnees in general, the scarcity of information and confusion of the methodology, a knowledgeable person is still interested in researches and studies mainly the ones spotting the returning of Maghrebian fighters. Usually Maghreb countries are associated with the “Middle East” which can be captured in many examples like “violent extremism in Middle East and North Africa” which erased the socio-cultural specificities in their search process to the common ground which gives Maghrebian peoples a better understanding of their reality.

We find in the literature focusing on terrorism/violent extremism phenomenon that most of the studies determined the rate of women who travelled to the conflicting zones “MENA” to 6% but the researcher did not provide accurate information about the number of women involved in violent extremism according to each country.

With regard to these methodological discrepancies and awareness of researchers, looking for Maghreb female returnees is more difficult than male returnees, supervisors of this study tended to adopt a multidisciplinary approach focusing mainly on the gender-based establishing that gender difference is an outcome of social, cultural and historical accumulation that's to say “a fabric” as Al-Jahudh”

calls it. Hence, culture is shaping the standard femininity and masculinity features, set the order and gender limitations and attribute characteristics to both women and men, distribute roles and architect spaces and ask them all to comply with the standard model and to be subjected to social control and restraints<sup>1</sup>.

This selection of methodology was mandatory as gender approach is an important introduction to understand the structure of relationships, authority dynamism and analysis of religious and social representations and how politics have an impact in shaping identities added to the care allocated to socio-cultural determinants for each sex. Taking lightly the relationships of girls and women from Maghreb region with ideology, extremism, intolerance, violence and other issues perceived by Maghrebian people mainly when they were struck, during the last years, with information wiping out what they perceived in relation to women and disrupt their representations of femininity /masculinity and to the gender-based roles, etc.

### *Importance of gender approach*

Individual cases of fighters of the “Caliphate state Organization”, since the first years of foundation, decided to flee and repatriate did not represent, in the eyes of researchers, a subject worth of analysis or a phenomenon requiring examination with scrutiny mainly with

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, please refer back to:

Amel Grami, *Difference in the Arab Islamic culture. A Gender approach*, Beirut, Dar Elmadar Al-Islami, 2007.

Amel Grami, “Women’s jihad or terrorizme among females”, *Political perspectives handbook*, Issue 19, July 2015, Arab Center for Research and Studies, Cairo 2015, pp. 6-18.

Amel Grami, *Women and Terrorism: a Gender Approach*, a mentioned reference.

Azza Charara Baidhoun, *Gender, what do you say?*, Dar Alsaki, Beirut, 2012.

Essmat Mohamed Husso, *Gender: Social and Cultural dimensions*, Dar Achuruk for publications, Oman, 2009.

- SCOTT, J. W., 1986, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, *The American Historical Review*, 91.

the increasing number of those willing to settle in the “Caliphate Land”.

However, indications to the collapse of “ISIS” had motivated some of them to prepare for their return. Testimonies provided by some of them revealed the truth at that time and uncovered the absurdity of the extremist groups’ narratives

Based on their testimonies, researchers in the last few years were able to publish a number of articles, researches and books spotting the dimensions of the returnees and the consequential effects.

A knowledgeable reader about the literature related to returnees from the “Caliphate State Organization” will quickly realize the masculinity based bias. Male returnees was considered a worthy subject for research and analysis as books, studies and researches released in the last few years witnessed a significant increase<sup>1</sup>. However, only some scattered paragraphs or book chapters mentioned the female returnees in general and Maghreb female returnees in particular.

The latest releases about women and violent extremism or returnees from conflicting zones are not only biases to males but also proved a misunderstanding of the gender approach. Some thought that focusing on studying women’s roles is an implementation of the approach while the difference is obvious between approaches and theories related to women studies field, or emanating from gender studies based on studying the authority and dominance based gender relationship, added to identity shaping and other issues where gender other paradigms like age, social class and ethnicity intersect. Due to the fact that International Organizations and bodies imposed on countering terrorism/violent extremism policymakers in most of the countries the implementation of the gender based approach as a prerequisite for

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<sup>1</sup> Note that studying the reasons behind the involvement of girls and women in terrorist activities was not an important subject for Arab researchers. We provided details about the backgrounds behind this attitude in the section “Terrorism and gender” in our book *Gender study*, a mentioned reference, pp. 39-45.



receiving funding, many researchers started to interfere in the gender based studies and contributed to the creation of a mess in the analysis and terms used in their researches.

With regard to this status of knowledge, the “Arab Maghreb Union” and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Tunisia to analyze this study of “returning Maghreb females” from conflicting zones according to a gender approach. It’s clear that that kind of studies made women a focal point looking for their relationship with extremist groups and the reasons behind their departure to the conflicting zones in addition to the roles tasked to them.

However, those studies did not neglect female returnees’ relationship with men before they left or during their residence in the “Caliphate land” or even upon their return. The gender perspective<sup>1</sup> requires firstly to analyze gender relationships which were mostly based on hegemony and dominance<sup>2</sup>, secondly to observe the dynamics governing the relationships structure and thirdly to examine with scrutiny how roles are distributed differently according to the gender and the spatial architecture method based on separation between the two sexes according the public/private space. By implementing the gender approach, one can note the relationship between the position of women in the patriarchy society and forms of submission to the male authority added to her acquiescence to men’s decision to forcibly move to the hotbeds of tension as he is considered the superior and responsible to protect his family.

Moreover, the gender approach used in this study allows us to identify the aspects of returnees from conflicting zones and shows the social, demographic, educational and psychological situations ... to observe their souvenirs and conceptions and to inquire about

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Stenger and Jacqui True, “Female foreign fighters and the need for a gendered approach to countering violent extremism”, *The Strategist*, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au> (March 7, 2019, accessed 25-12-2019).

<sup>2</sup> Lahoud (N) (2018), “Empowerment or Subjugation: A Gendered Analysis of ISIL Messaging”, UN Women.

their degree of awareness with what they committed and the nature of risk that may be caused by Tunisian, Moroccan, Mauritanian females ...We think that information provided by this study will develop the discussion about conditions, reasons and routes of return together with its legal framework, rehabilitation and reintegration programs draft for the returnees, etc.

### **3- Types and connotations of Return**

#### *Definition of return*

If dictionaries and lexicons defined the returnee as someone who came back to the point of departure, “Returning” in Penal Code is the legal description of the person who came back to commit crimes after being convicted with a previous on-appealable judgment. So when this person insisted to continue in criminality, heavier penalties should apply. Based on those two definitions we can deduce two hypotheses: either he/she’ll come to his/her senses and relinquish his/her ideas and thus, he/she’ll be good and that’s an “extraordinary” or he/she’ll be back to criminality as if he/she didn’t grasp the lesson from the previous penal sanction against him/her.

However, what draws the attention is the different semantic meaning of the word “Return” in the Algerian experience in comparison with the meaning used in Tunisian, Moroccan and Mauritanian studies. In Algeria, “Return” does not mean returning from conflicting zones but returning to one’s senses and cut-off with the extremist ideology together with a decision to deradicalize, to leave the zones under the control of extremist groups towards cities and to integrate with society. Similar to the Algerian experience, studies conducted in Libya revealed that “Return” means to cut-off with extremist groups and escaping (of women) to the relatively safe areas or going back to their tribes after being with their husbands in cities controlled by pro-ISIS groups. Therefore, these

women were either victims of a gender-based regime imposing obedience of women to their husbands or of a limited religious culture which made them believe what leaders say about religion and Shariaa.

If “Return” means linguistically “coming back”, two questions shall be addressed within this context “Does returning to one’s country of origin means that he/she came back to his/her senses and took the decision to deradicalize?” Then, “To what extent returnees would accept rehabilitation and reintegration programs?”

### *Types of return*

According to reports and researches, returning of people belonging to the extremist groups differ based on its context, time and framework. Firstly, coerced return shall be considered for youth prevented by security authorities to travel to Turkey or Libya killing their dreams to join Jihad land. Secondly, there was an actual return before the collapse of ISIS, and thirdly, the return after the defeat of “Caliphate State”. A willful return is also noted for those who organized their escape themselves compared to those forced to repatriate. Hence, we can make a difference between official organized return and unofficial return and between collective and individual return. Security and judicial authorities, in turn, are making difference between those who surrendered directly upon their return and those who crossed the borders illegally and caught in searching campaigns.

Furthermore, return can be quick and directly to the country of origin in comparison with a return through different and haul roads and take a longer period (Syria, Turkey, Libya then to Tunisia) for the returnee to reach home. There is also a circumstantial return when the person is lurking, looking to seize the first opportunity to rejoin extremism groups elsewhere: Libya, Sinai ...

Studying the subject of the returnees from extremist violent groups based on gender approach demonstrated that return is categorized

based on gender (male/female), age (child, teenager, adult, elderly), social class (high, middle, low...), socio-legal status (single, married, divorced, widow, mother ....) and the educational level (illiterate, educated holder of a diploma, holder of a high school diploma, holder of a university diploma...). Undoubtedly, these information can help researchers and policymakers to understand the return from a geographical perspective and to develop a reintegration and rehabilitation programs consistent with each group if there's a difference between those who relinquished their extremist ideas and those who are willing to rejoin other hot beds of tension in Libya or in the coastal areas. There is no difference between a returnee who came back to act as a lone wolf or one who is ready for revenge from those precluding them from achieving their interests.

It appears that recorded testimonies and interviews conducted made the difference between female returnees who showed signs of remorse, admitted their misjudgment and appeared aware about the risk in joining violent extremist groups and, subsequently, accept the punishment and the reintegration program on one hand; and women who declare that they're convinced about the establishment of the "Caliphate State", praise the lifestyle under the leaders' command and dream about reviving the Caliphate once again in different areas. Some women still educate their children the teachings of the "Caliphate State" hoping that they may become one day a "Caliphate".

#### **4- Identity of female returnees from hotbeds of tension:**

It's well established that data, reports and studies didn't care enough about studying the number of female travellers to countries which were under the control of extremist and violent groups. Therefore, there were no accurate demographic data or statistics except in seldom researches. However in relation to the exact number of the Maghrebian female returnees, available information is not accurate due to many reasons such as "the nature" of this subject because it's considered a "very sensitive" one in addition to

the reaction of citizens with it. Tunisians for example, considered the male and female returnees a risk to the stability of the country and a threat to its stability. This perception pushed many associations to exert pressure on the political officials through the organization of many protest marches leading the government to adopt an attitude with regard to secrecy and confidentiality conditions. However, the situation in Morocco and Mauritania was different as the issue of the terrorist returnees did not raise a crisis just because the ruling Islamist political parties were different from that in Tunisia accused with facilitation of deportation of youth to the hot beds of tension and empowerment of some charitable associations with activities that lead to the recruitment of many Tunisian man and women.

Regardless of the different attitudes towards female returnees, it's certain that the latter do not represent a harmonized group. Researchers were content to classify them according to the degree of extremism they adopt and distinguished them based on the roles allocated to them: they made the difference between activists in social media, women tasked with important and leadership roles (battalion leader, in charge of advertisement ...), supporters of jihadists, women assisting the violent and extremist groups, singles, wives and sisters obliged to travel with their husbands or brothers or family members and discovered within a short span of time that they had to live in Iraq, Syria or Libya.

If we observe the number of male and female returnees from a gender perspective, it appears that the rate of girls and women returnees is low compared to male returnees explained, from a gender approach, by the vulnerable situation of women. Knowing that both men and women were required to waive their passports upon their arrival to the "Caliphate land"; women didn't dare mostly to return via unofficial routes. Women believed that missing official documents represented an impediment for them when a group of men crossed the borders and succeeded to enter to their countries of origin.

In addition to fear, the decrease of the number of girls and women returnees is was due to their socialization that shaped their identities. Generally, a girl was raised on compliance with customs, traditions and social norms. She was also subjected to laws and orders and raised on fear from punishment, convinced that she's weak, coward and cannot rely on herself. Based on these characteristics attributed by culture to women and men, identities are shaped and roles and actions are allocated. It's not strange that women did not dare to escape without companion /male escort mainly mothers or widows having children. Financial resources to organize for the return cannot be, also, condoned as usually human traffickers took advantage from women's need to return and asked them for high amounts of money hardly ever possessed by girls or women.

Obviously, the social structure and the prevailing values in society together with customs and traditions controlling the situations of girls and women impede them from deciding to take unofficial routes for their return and material and psychological readiness to embark on an adventure mainly when she is a mother and the sole responsible of her children. However, the responsibility of governments to reduce the number of returnees via official routes shall be noted. Some countries gave priority to children and facilitated their return claiming that they weren't involved in violent extremism but refused at the same time to receive women<sup>1</sup>.

Despite of all these impediments to get accurate Information about the identities of female returnees and standards of their categorization, participants in this study tried to look for samples to prove to what extent Tunisian, Moroccan, Libyan, Mauritanian and Algerian women were involved in violent extremist groups. Researchers were striving to explore news about female returnees, looking for samples and analyzing information in addition to

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<sup>1</sup> Research colloquium made by the Executive Directorate of Countering Terrorism and UN Women on 18 June 2018. Attention shall be given here that there is no study related to the extradited women.

testimonies mentioned in some researches and books in an attempt to draw a map of the Maghrebian women returnees already involved in violent extremism, to study the features of this phenomenon and to understand the reasons behind their belonging to extremist groups.

Considering that the analysis of the violent extremist women returnees' phenomenon from conflicting zones requires an understanding of the Maghreb situation and the general environment that urged those women to leave their countries. Researchers had to provide information related to the date of establishment of extremist jihadist groups<sup>1</sup>, and when its major leaders appeared. Moreover; they had to mention the reasons that pushed them to join extremism groups and find out the motives for travelling to the conflicting zones. Hence, we can identify convergences and divergences between different Maghrebian countries. The research and analysis process enabled to examine the motives that made the "migrants" to become "returnees" and came back home either voluntarily or compulsorily.

## **5- A reading about the motives of travelling then returning from a gender perspective**

### *The reasons of travelling to hotbeds of tension*

The study indicates that there are common factors between the countries of the Maghreb, including: the high rates of unemployment, the poverty, the lack of opportunities, and the feeling of frustration and marginalization. Besides, there are the effects of experiencing psychological fragility within different social classes in addition to other factors that facilitated the spread of jihadist salafisme. The jihadist salafism represented a magnet for young men and a group of young women, and this trend was

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<sup>1</sup> The Moroccan study highlighted the date when women started to involve in terrorist activities and identified the criminal situation of female returnees to Morocco.

supposed to be a “call for reform”. While previous research<sup>1</sup> highlighted these motives, adopting of gender analysis allows us to pay attention to other reasons though, such as the absence of social justice and the wide gender gap. The unemployment rate in Tunisia reached 33.4% in 2014, which is the year that marked the start of the wave of travelling to countries of tension, added to that the educational level was limited and there were few opportunities for training. The unemployment rate among girls attained 32.4%. Nevertheless, the media, the political leaders from the opposition, and most associations continued to draw attention to the problems created by youth unemployment that should be 'productive and effective'. As a result, the male bias neglects the repercussions of poverty, emptiness, marginalization, and unemployment... for girls, especially those who are degree holders, on the economic, social and psychological levels.

One sign of this patriarchal bias is the hierarchy. Although the prevailing discourse in Tunisia was supportive for women's rights, men took the lead in the training and the employment programs. On the other hand, women were of a least concern when setting employment policies. A group of girls joining the 'jihadist' groups was due to the economic factors and marginalization from the point of view of the studied group. When a person feels marginalized, excluded and emptied, it would be hard for him to achieve his ambitions and he becomes more attached to the group that secures his belonging, recognizes and includes him. Hence, travelling to Libya or Syria, on the pretext of participating in building a “caliphate state”, becomes understandable.

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<sup>1</sup> Fahmi (G.) & Meddeb (H), October 2015, *Market for Jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia*, Washington DC. Carnegie Middle East Center.

Bresillon (T.), 7 April 2015, “why do young Tunisians engage in Jihad?”, *Economic Alternatives*.

Ayari (M. B.) & Merone (F.) 2014, “Ansar al-charia Tunisia: An institutionalization at a crossroads”, in: Camau, M. & Vairel, F. (eds.) *Uprisings and political re-compositions in the Arab world*, Montréal University Press.

Samuel Hall, 2017, “The mobility and migrations in violent extremism in Mauritania”. [www.nigermigrationresponse.org](http://www.nigermigrationresponse.org)



It is inevitable to state that gender serves as a thermometer showing the dominant group in society, its role in regulating male / female identities, and its contribution to define the roles and the structure of relationships. Based on testimonies, investigations, and dialogues, it was possible to analyze a group of dominant social, cultural and religious representations, the most important of which consider women to be peaceful, weak and coward<sup>1</sup> and unable to participate in terrorist actions that are harmful for humans. However, these representations were quickly confused after the change in the political context, as the leaders of the 'caliphate state' had to change their policies and formulate fatwas that motivated girls and women to travel to the Levant to support Islam and Muslims. Thus, for polarizers, women are no longer weak, unable to travel adventure and manage. Immigration has become a test of the degree of faith for a 'just cause'. As a result of all these changes<sup>2</sup>, girls and women are more self-confident and most of them feel superior. Are the true Muslim women, immigrant and jihadist for Islam similar to female companions?

Not surprisingly, studying the structure of gender relations helps clarifying the hidden side especially at the level of relationships based on hegemony and power or the role distribution. People often believe that a woman is driven behind her husband's desires and ambitions, and she is legally and morally required to obey him and socially compelled to support him. Indeed, in most studies it has been rumored that women joining hotbeds of tension following an instruction from a husband, close friend, or brother. In such a case, the woman was only a victim of the value system and foremost obedience that compelled her to submit.

However, some samples included in the studies confirmed that a number of men joined the extremist groups in response to the pressure of the wife who adopted the extremist ideology. This was

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<sup>1</sup> The Moroccan study.

<sup>2</sup> Devorah Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups", <https://extremism.gwu.edu>.

the case of one of the Tunisians involved in the 2015 Bengerdan terrorist attempt that was forced to travel to Libya accompanied by his wife and children due to the wife's planning and daily pressure. She joined the extremist groups, put on the veil, and then insisted on serving the Islamic project. The husband was initially able to join the training camps in Libya and then return months later to Tunisia and attempt the terrorist plot<sup>1</sup> this example gave evidence of the presence of influential women who adopt the ideology, support the project, and defend the dominant male model. Such mode was represented by the leaders and the brutal masculinity represented by fighters, law enforcers, those who behead and shop hands and others.

Gender analysis enables us to understand the difference between genders. This difference can be at the level of status, role, perception, or violence representation and the way to accept it. The warrior masculinity requires that soldiers undergo many tests in order to confirm themselves, prove their manhood, and obtain martyrdom. Meanwhile, there is a group of women that has been exposed to violence which is shown in several forms, including: Among the factors that motivated some girls and women who were subject to violence to make the decision to join a religious group were the marital violence, violence against women from addicted fathers or those who left them<sup>2</sup>. These religious groups claimed to protect the oppressed females and protect them from abuse. Hence, the link between violence against women on the basis of gender and their escape to join groups became essential in the studies of violent

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women and Oxfam, Terms of reference for the study "Research on women and violent extremism in Tunisia between security challenges and gender justice", 2016, Final Report - November 2018; Study-think-the-kind-in-the-answers-violent lextremisme-en-2018-1.pdf.

<sup>2</sup> The Tunisian study. Amel Grami, *Women and Terrorism: A Gender study*, mentioned reference. UN Women and Oxfam, Terms of reference for the study "Research on women and violent extremism in Tunisia between security challenges and gender justice", 2016, *op. cit.*

extremism. These groups were perceived (by women) to be applying true Islam.

If we compare the conditions of women in different countries of the Maghreb, it becomes clear that Tunisian women differ in their status in terms of the rate of schooling and demanding rights, and the consolidation of gains and the assumption of important positions in various sectors, which makes them in the collective vision, 'protected' from violent extremism and immune from polarization processes. However, the study demonstrated that the attraction to extremist thought is not subject to clear considerations, as individual motives and psychological fragility may be behind the radical transformation that some girls undergo, moving from a 'liberal' and 'modern' lifestyle or from addiction and deviation to another pattern that shocks parents and surroundings. This pattern imposes commitment to the provisions of Sharia, submission, subordination, dissolution of the community, and sacrifice in order to 'build the caliphate'.

Tunisia and Morocco have been considered among the most countries that have known an active feminist movement. These movements have been able to raise awareness among women and change some gender roles, representations, etc. However, the gender analysis of studied testimonies established evidence of an important intellectual factor that contributed to girls' acceptance of extremist rhetoric. The fundamentalist discourse throughout the last decade<sup>1</sup>, thanks to the spread of advocacy (Da`wah) satellite channels, the feminist discourse has shifted to be more attractive and persuasive for girls looking for solutions to get them out of crises and confusion. This leads us to ask: Is it the desire to be free from feminist and libertarian discourse<sup>2</sup> and the struggle and resistance that drive girls and women to be part of groups that impose male guardianship and protection, enabling these people the

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<sup>1</sup> Amel Grami, "Media Jihad in Islam and the West: Encounters and conflicts", (collective work, ed. Yolande de Crussol), *Studia Arabica IX*, Paris Editions, 2008, pp. 131-151.

Amel Grami, *Women and Terrorism: A Gender Study*, mentioned reference.

opportunity to depend on 'comfort' and benefit from a situation in which it is under the trusteeship of the 'caliphate state'?

Among the signs of consolidating the difference between the genders and its essence are the emergence of intellectual and religious leaders and theorists in the ranks of Tunisians, Moroccans and others in exchange for the presence of women at the level of ideological controversy, a matter that catches the eye if we consider that professors of Sharia from Syria, Saudi Arabia and others have interacted with the decisions issued by male leaders. And they expressed their rejection with supporters from within the religious texts<sup>1</sup>.

Referring to the diversity, intertwining and intersection of motives, we insist that the path of extremism is non-linear and is not the product of a purely rational decision: It is a path in which the individual is linked to the collective, and the ideological, political, social and economic. Hence, the interpretation of the motives for travelling to conflict countries from a gender perspective appears to be subject to other approaches and procedures that demonstrate that the justifications for belonging to extremist groups or travelling to countries of conflict are more complicated than we think. They are associated with ambitions and fear, refraction, hatred, revenge, frustration and the desire to go on adventures, search for meaning, eagerness to change the situation and paradox of crises, and create a different path added to other factors<sup>2</sup>. No matter how many reasons for joining extremist groups or travelling to countries of conflict, the individual remains responsible for his decisions, and he must bear the consequences, including the difficult return.

### *Distributing roles and create the illusion of women's empowerment*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Alison Pargeter, "Radicalization in Tunisia" in *Islamist Radicalization in North Africa: Politics and Process*, George Joffe ed., Abingdon: Routledge Books, 2011.

One of the paradoxes revealed by the studies that dealt with the phenomenon of violent extremism in the Maghreb countries, but with varying degrees, was the eagerness of society in general, girls and women belonging to extremist groups to preserve gender borders, establish gender identities, stereotypes of roles, and establishes hierarchy that perpetuates gender differences. Among the common points between Tunisian and Moroccan women, is that they play important roles within the organizations (Fatima Al-Zwaghi in Tunisia) and the women's brigades affiliated with the 'Caliphate State', something that calls attention to the dynamics recorded at the level of identities, which are linked to the influence of schooling and feminist movements.

However, assigning leadership roles to a group of women was not the rule. Among the most important samples confirmed in Tunisia are the existence of the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of women<sup>1</sup> within violent extremist groups, and the distinction of leaders among women based on the degree of kinship, beauty, race, education, etc. The Emir's wife was treated favorably with her husband's status. As for the others, they are employed for all forms of service, including providing sexual service to the 'jihadists', which confirms the inferior view facing women who believed that Islam honored them<sup>2</sup> and support, at the same time, the 'marriage of jihad' and the prevailing perception that considers the woman who escapes from her family to join the extremist group perverted<sup>3</sup> and not in compliance with customs and traditions.

It is worth noting in these testimonials the awareness of some girls that they were subject to a plot that has been made by a number of men looking for their privileges. The most important is the sexual

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<sup>1</sup> The Tunisian study.

<sup>2</sup> The Tunisian study.

<sup>3</sup> Nouria (I.), 2015. "The mother of the terrorists Rahma and Ghofrane Chikhaoui: My daughter will return to attempt for an attack in Tunisia!", September 16, 2015, Business News <http://www.businessnews.com.tn/la-mere-des-terroristes-rahma-et-ghofrane-chikhaoui-ma-fille-reviendra-pour-faire-un-attentat-en-tunisie>

pleasure, as well as the manipulation of a group of 'princes' with people's minds, which accelerated the decision to return.

### *Motives to return*

The most important catalysts for leaving the unstable homelands were family considerations such as the absence of the father or mother, the disintegration of family, the absence of social cohesion, and political, psychological, economic, social and cultural factors. However, the thought and plan of returning was linked to a fundamental event, which is the shock, as a number of those enrolled in the organization of the 'caliphate state' discovered that what they pictured in their minds did not match what they saw. And what they expected is inconsistent with what they experienced. Being aware of all these paradoxes and facts revealed the deception and falsity and resulted in the decision to go back and start looking for a way out. However, those who decided to return, faced difficulty in the execution when 'ISIS' was at its top. Because, if the leaders saw that everyone who decided to escape from ISIS will be considered an apostate and will be subject to Apostasy rules. Indeed, some testimonies prove that a number of those executed were trying to escape, and here we explain the small number of women who considered returning earlier from fear of punishment.

Once the "caliphate state" was defeated, the families, led by women, escaped quickly. Putting them in prisons or camps is only a circumstantial phase, waiting for their deportation to their countries. However, the videos and media coverage of some channels of what is happening inside the camps prove that a group of women do not want to return. And as if they dreamed of reestablishing the caliphate state somewhere, which has multiplied the countries' fears and made them reluctant about the return of women.

Whatever the reason for the return: The fall of the caliphate, regaining awareness, or the intervention and pressure of the family.

We are certainly facing transformations in building identities, the path of shaping femininity and the representation system. These transformations require extensive study.

### *After returning*

The found cases prove that the path of return contributed to the emergence of a set of problems, including those related to the relationship of the returnee to the family, as some of the girls fled without informing her parents or her husband And some of them cut off their relationship with her family and changed her lifestyle, She arranged her relationship on different basis And family relationship does no longer mean anything to her, because according to her, belonging to the extremist group is more important than family belonging. Consequently, the opposite path was complicated and the process of rebuilding family relations was difficult. It is not easy to forget the past, and a way of life in which the leadership held control through instructions and monitoring systems. It is not easy to adopt a behavior, standards and values outside the frameworks of the extremist groups' members. The Tunisian study proved the difficulty of reconciling with the body and moving from the stage of wearing niqab to wearing the veil or wearing the kamis and not cutting the hair or shaving the beard to a different stage which contradicts with the convictions. Every costume and outfit reflects a self-perceptions, life, and the universe, and drawing gender boundaries according to a system of values (obedience, stewardship, chastity...) and adaptation with provisions, standards, and perceptions regulating an individual's life.

In some cases, the returnee expressed their desire for psychological treatment and her eagerness to look for a new belonging, represented in the Tunisian case, in the women's associations that provide support. But in exchange, insisting to break with the past, some testimonies indicated that some girls tried to return to the familiar lifestyle before belonging to extremist groups.

Furthermore, some of them sought to replace the code name or nickname with a pseudonym, and to build a new identity that cut with the identity of 'jihadist'. In contrast to these groups who are ready to fix themselves, some returnees have found it difficult to recognize the new reality. This reality is characterized by repulsion, condemnation and stigmatization. Some women found it difficult to adapt to the new situation, and to accept forced return or its consequences.

After the 'purification' from immorality and debauchery through the Islamization of speech, appearance, change of name (Umm Amara, Umm Hudhayfah...), behavior and perceptions... The search for ways to help the returnee to replace hatred (the other / themselves...) with love, and to integrate into their family and social environment, became necessary. And after feeling superiority, pride, and self-esteem, then recognition of feeling broken and fragile became inevitable. In addition, after considering the group a sign of belonging and righteousness distancing one from mixing with polarized groups and frequenting familiar spaces (mosque, Quran School, religious classes...). This represents a sign of cutting with the past and the burden of belonging to the extremist group<sup>1</sup>.

The return process shows the different experiences of the returnees. Among which, those who reviewed his decisions and ideas and reconsidered his experience from a different perspective, whoever adheres to his beliefs and opinions and insists on completing the march individually and revenge on society. There is a distance that must be taken into account when developing rehabilitation programs, so how can confidence be built in correctional and prison institutions, the state and society. In fact, this individual is considered to be the 'true Muslim' who has to live with 'Tyrants'?

One of the signs of the difference in the post-return process is that we find families doing everything they can to help a son who was

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<sup>1</sup> The Tunisian study



lost or a girl whose delusions have changed her life to return to adulthood and erase painful experiences from memory. Contrarily to the positive interaction of a number of families, we found someone who cuts ties with a daughter thinking she brought shame to her family or a young man who committed a crime against innocent people, and those who refused to visit a relative who had been imprisoned, since his return, because of his involvement in terrorism. The stories of returnees draw attention to the dynamic recorded at the level of the relationships network: the family, gender and social relationships, the relationship with himself, and the other... and there are relations between compliance with familiar norms and rebellion against customs and traditions.

## **6- Handling the female returnees' file**

How can the female returnees' file be handled? What are the policies to be taken by countries and what are the strategies to be considered? Do these countries have a special perspective for Maghreb? The research team had to ask such questions and make some suggestions, thus creating a suggestion force that is able to go beyond description and analysis to present alternatives. Given our preoccupation with a gender perspective, the strategy section reflects how gender dimensions influence programs and policies.

The study revealed the division of the Tunisian and Libyan societies over the 'repentance and return of jihadists', and how to deal with the male and female returnees. While Rachid Ghannouchi stated that repentance is possible. The evil society and political and cultural elites have refused to use this religious concept related to compassionate repentance. She called for the application of accountability and accountability and the prosecution of this group that damaged the innocent. Reflecting on the various reactions, a hard line was adopted by the various components of civil society and expressed by the various media outlets, as one group went to download the harshest penalties on the proceeds carried over, while another group saw that it is not acceptable to accept The return of

'fighters' and female prisoners 'terrorists' and relationships. The convulsive reactions are due to the failure to open a national debate on the issue of return and to educate people about the various strategies adopted and the social, security, political and other consequences that will result from the position of the returnees' rejection.

The justifications for those who refuse to return from joining the 'organization of the caliphate' lie in the unstable security situation (Libya), the lack of financial capabilities (Tunisia), the lack of experience, the failure of most prison institutions to undergo structural reform, the marginalization of the human dimension and the human approach to dealing with prisoners on the background of belonging to Militant groups. We can that it was legal security engagement that imposed itself in the context of societies seeking to impose a legal culture that transcends political or ideological vision.

In return for this rigor in the management of the female returnees' file, we found the Mauritanian community and the Libyan one more flexible in dealing with women who are considered victims of ignorance, religious illiteracy, and family structures. On this basis, the position of the families was not often strict, as the tribe has its customs, balances and interests that impose special treatment for women, mothers and widows.

The study confirmed the availability of a legal framework to combat terrorism, and strategies in most Maghreb countries that attempt to manage the return file, but it has several weaknesses. Therefore, the team charged with this Maghreb study had to present a vision of a strategy appropriate for the countries of the Maghreb. At the same time, it adheres to the international agreements and the plans set by the United Nations in combating violent extremism, organizing return, and applying the best practices in relation to rehabilitation and integration programs.

## **Guidance Notes**

-The joint Maghreb studies on terrorism and violent extremism are considered a new topic, and then this experience confirmed the need to enhance such initiatives and provide them with other research projects related to other types of topics (The situation of children after returning, rehabilitation and the legal system...). In order to achieve continuity and accumulate knowledge. Achieving such a goal can only be possible with the participation of all the specialists, and those with field experience dealing with the returnees; the practitioners. This type of research requires the joined efforts of all talents, and the supervisors of studies and research to distance themselves from the practice of exclusion and the replacement of some intruders on the field with specialists, which is the criticism mostly directed to the studies that were completed in the Arab countries.

-Surveying samples, conducting dialogues with returnees and returnees, analyzing the causes of female extremism, and distributing their roles mostly, focus on theoretical background, hypotheses presented by Western sources and studies written in French and English. However, post-colonial studies warn that researchers need to take care of what is produced in the local culture with regard to the issue of returnees and returns, since it is not acceptable to ignore the works done in the center. This matter should be taken into account, especially as researchers belonging to the Maghreb can monitor and evaluate the publications in Arabic. So that we do not remain in a 'follower' position says Spivak, relying on what the others produce regarding extremism in our countries<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> - Alaa Adel, *The Returning Jihadists: The Roots, Reality, and the Future*, Egyptian Institute of Studies, December 6, 2018, <https://eipsseg.org/%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9>

- Mondher Dhiyafi, "The Return of the ISIS members", February 26, 2018, <https://arb.majalla.com/2018/02/article55263909/>

- Mondher Dhiyafi, "The return of fighters from the hotbeds of tension: The Tunisian case", in *The Return of the Fighters from Hotbeds of Tension, Challenges and Capabilities*, Al-Masbar Center for Research and Studies, Issue, 127 Dubai, pp. 141-162.

- The study emphasized that efforts must be intensified in order to convince all the authorities of the importance of conducting joint research, and to facilitate the work of researchers, as the region after the recent regional transformations seems more exposed than before to terrorist operations, a prediction indicated by a group of studies specialized in combating violent extremism<sup>1</sup>.

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- Mondher Dhiyafi, "Tunisia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy", in *Counter-Terrorism Concepts - Strategies - Models*, Book of Al-Masbar Center for Studies and Research, Dubai, June 2015, pp. 138-130.
  - Belhoul Nessim, "The Return of the Maghreb fighters from Iraq and Syria and the New Security Equation in North Africa", *ibid.*, pp. 289-303.
  - Idris Kereni, "Fighters Return from Crisis Hotbeds: The Moroccan Case", *ibid.*, pp. 317-331.
  - Ikram Adnani, "The behavior of young fighters returning from hotbeds of tension and its implications", *ibid.*, pp. 95-108.
  - Ahmed Nazif, *Tourist Guns: Tunisians in the global jihad networks*, Publications of the Tunisian Institute of International Relations, Tunisia 2016.
  - Olfa Lemloum, "Notes on 'jihadists' in Tunisia", 2015-08-06, <http://assafirarabi.com/en/4361/2015/08/06/>
  - Ammar Ben Hamouda, "From the 'jihadists' dreams to the nightmares of the returnees", March 2019, <https://www.mominoun.com/articles/%D9%85%D9%86-9>
  - Mohammed Al-Tayeb, "Tunisian fears about the return of ISIS members to their country", Rasif website, June 2017 <https://raseef22.com/article/73331>
  - Amel Grami, "The file of the return of those involved in violent extremism: From shock to crisis management", *Al-Maghrib* newspaper, (15-11-2019), <https://ar.lemaghreb.tn/%D8%B3%D9%8->
  - Amel Grami, "The return of female pro-ISIS: Attitudes surprising international opinion", Sawab al-Rai website, 24-9-2019, <https://sawaab-arrai.com/index.php/ar/wdt>
  - The same website: "Tunisia and the 'Returnees' from Hotbeds of Tension" file, 25-9-2019.
  - Obeid Khelifi, "The return of jihadists from hotbeds of tension in Tunisia as a model", <https://www.academia.edu/30700952/>
  - An interview with Algerian researcher on extremism, Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, on jihadist women, the roots of violent extremism, and the most successful antidote to terrorism committed in the name of religion, 2018, <https://ar.qantara.de/content/>
  - Stories of regret and tragedy of Moroccans returning from the areas of fighting with terrorists, 15-4-2018 <https://www.dw.com/en/>

<sup>1</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Jacob Zenn, and Nathaniel Barr, "Islamic State 2021: Possible Futures in North and West Africa", Foundation for Defense of Democracies, February 2017, [http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/022017\\_DGR\\_ISIL\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/022017_DGR_ISIL_Report.pdf)

The study concluded that it is necessary to study the relationship between the various extremist groups present in the countries of the Maghreb<sup>1</sup>, and the groups settled in Africa, Which have common interests and influence<sup>2</sup> in the Maghreb and use it in programs of disengagement from violent extremism, rehabilitation and reintegration. Conducting comparative research on the African continent is of a great importance In order to draw lessons and examine successful experiences in countering violent extremism, and the best practices adopted in rehabilitation programs, especially those led by women's associations.

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Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda's Resurrection", Council on Foreign Relations, March 6, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/alqaedas-resurrection>.

Aaron Y. Zelin, *Your Sons are at your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad*, New York City: Columbia University Press.

<sup>1</sup> We refer to the fact that most of the studies that have been concerned with Tunisian jihadism focused on Ansar al-Sharia, and the roles of women in it. On the other hand, there was less interest in studying the Uqba bin Nafeh Battalion and its link to Al Qaeda and other groups, as well as looking for the relationship of women with this battalion. For more information about the Aqaba battalion website in the "Tunisian jihadism", see:

- Aaron Y. Zelin, "Not Gonna be Able to Do it: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks", *Perspectives on Terrorism* (2-2019), Volume 13, Issue 1, p. 65.

- Amira Masrour, "Circumstances of Death Arise after Algerian Border Attack", Tunisia Live, December 11, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121223020906/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/11/circumstances-of-death-arise-after-algerian-borderattack>;

- Amira Masrour, "National Guard in Pursuit of Suspects in Algerian Border Attack", Tunisia Live, December 12, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121223100733/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/2012/national-guard-in-pursuit-of-suspectsin-algerian-border-attack>;

- "Tunisia arrests 11 after deadly border attack", AFP, December 12, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60382/World/Region/Tunisia-arrests-after-deadly-border-attack.aspx>.

-Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Note 45, January 2018.

-Jonathan Schnitt, "ISIS in Libya - Exploitation and Governance of Areas of Limited Statehood", published by: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) (2015) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09477.10> (accessed on 23-12-2019).

<sup>2</sup> Noureldine al-Fridi, "Tunisian Jihadists May Be Training in Mali", May 18, 2013, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/05/tunisian-jihadists-training-mali.html>. We refer to the Libyan study, and a number of Egyptians, Tunisians, Iraqis, and others held important positions at the head of extremist groups.

-The study demonstrated that the countries of the Maghreb are required to adopt a gender approach, and to establish gender awareness among officials and participants in determining plans to combat violent extremism. Added to that, there were the programs of establishing security and peace building, since women are researchers or peace makers<sup>1</sup>, that can contribute from the position of citizenship and participatory democracy to act in reality, and change it for the best.

-The issue of the return of the members of extremist groups (males/females) presents a set of challenges and risks that cannot be underestimated. Through conducting a set of field research and studies, it is available to all (researchers, policy makers and strategies, activists and specialists who communicate with the returnees in order to disengage them from extremism, security personnel, etc.) Understand the relation of women with violent extremism<sup>2</sup>, and the perception of different gender dimensions and its impact on individuals, groups and organizations either at the level of polarization or building paths of extremism or defining roles and activities, rebuilding relationships, setting legal sanctions, and litigation, then formulating reintegration and rehabilitation programs<sup>3</sup>. However, there is no political will in the Maghreb countries currently, as these countries have been late in formulating their vision for rehabilitation and integration programs, and have

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<sup>1</sup> Kista London Couture, "A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism", <https://www.brookings.edu/uploads/2016/06/Wo>

<sup>2</sup> Audrey Alexander, "Key Considerations: Forward Thinking about Women, Gender, and Violent Extremism", in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender and Violent Extremism*, Edited by: Audrey Alexander, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/files/zaxdzs2191> (February 2019, accessed (6-11-2019)).

<sup>3</sup> Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann, "Women and Islamic-State Terrorism An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices", in *Security Challenges*, Vol. 14, Special Issue. *Celebrating and Interrogating Women and National Security* (2018), pp. 53-83.

not been keen to integrate gender awareness in the security institutions<sup>1</sup>.

Jihadist ideology cannot be analyzed in isolation from the study of gender ideology and the dismantling of the structures of domination and the foundations of masculine ideology. These ideologies interact and influence each other and control the relational structure and collective imagination.

- The female experts who specialize in gender studies realize that gender analysis first assumes a focus on the relationship between: Male / female, female / male, and various gender identities<sup>2</sup> that have undergone transformations that Arab scholars rarely consider. Therefore, we consider the use of masculine and male studies<sup>3</sup> in parallel with gender studies in formulating the holistic and multidisciplinary approach to study the phenomenon of violent extremism and the issue of return. In order to formulate the rehabilitation and integration programs will inevitably lead to important results that achieve the desired added value. We link the method of building a gender identity, the position that belongs to

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Watanabe, "The management of jihadists returning to North Africa", *Security policy: analysis of CSS*, Num 222, March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> We refer to a chapter in our book *Women and Terrorism*.

<sup>3</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "Globalization and its mal (e) contents: the gendered moral and political economy of terrorism", *International Sociology*, 18: 3, Sept. (2003), pp. 461-463; D. 603-20;

Paul Kirby and Marsha Henry, "Rethinking masculinity and practices of violence in conflict settings", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14: 4, 2012, pp. 445-449.

It is worth noting that we are interested in this approach for years:

Amel Grami, "Cracked the structure of dominant masculinity and attempts to save it among the Islamic groups", *Bahathat Magazine*, twelfth book 2006, 2007, Beirut, pp. 100-125; Amel Grami, "The Tunisian Revolution and the Manhood Tests", *The Other Writing, The Book of the Revolution 2: Tunisian Signs*, Second Edition, Issue 3, August 2012-Cairo, pp. 111-117; Amel Grami, "Representations of manhood in Tunisia after the revolution on January 14", *Works dedicated to Mr. Abdel Majid Charfi*, Tunisia 2014; Amel Grami, "ISIS Carnival", *Al-Faisal Magazine*, July 8, 2017 [https://issuu.com/yanalisak/docs/489\\_490\\_low\\_](https://issuu.com/yanalisak/docs/489_490_low_); Amel Grami, "Male Identity Crisis", in *D + C, Development and Cooperation, International Journal*, V. 40, June 2013, pp. 260-261; Amel GRAMI, "Violent Extremism and Masculinity in Tunisia", Wilton Park Conference: *Gender dynamics in violent extremism*, November 28, 2018.

each gender, and gender privileges will help us to explain the reasons for belonging to extremist and violent groups, and break down dominant representations of femininity and masculinity, and monitor the ways in which extremist groups manipulate gender categories, values and others.

-Violent extremism and peace building studies point to the importance of delving into discriminatory structures and policies leading to marginalization. The study showed the effects of gender inequality on the lives of a group of women who were involved in terrorism. Based on this, the strategists have to pay attention to these factors and work to bridge the gap if it is at the level of amending legislation or establishing criminal justice system or adopting best practices.

- The United Nation institutions insist on the need to adopt inclusive strategies that involve all actors (such as actors in the religious sector, collective activists, and creative individuals...) and do not distinguish between government agencies and civil society, especially women. The study<sup>1</sup>concluded that families should be aware of their duty towards their children, especially after researchers are aware of the phenomenon of family resignation and the absence of role models, and the educational function that could provide an immune system that protects children from the risk of extremism. The research on the role of the family in protecting against the threat of extremism, and participating in rehabilitation processes and integration programs Women's Family Activism: is a new field in the Maghreb.

- While several studies insist on the necessity of adopting a developmental approach and providing an atmosphere in which gender justice can be achieved, and governments succeed in programs for empowering girls and women, the study showed that fragility does not only concern women, and then empowering vulnerable groups is essential regardless of gender, age and race...

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<sup>1</sup> The Tunisian study.



The study concluded that the strategies adopted for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees must take into account the needs of each group, as the needs of women and mothers in general differ from those of men and the same for children and people with disabilities. In this same context, it is necessary to think about the programs that concern the returnees and their families' social stigma and joint action to prevent society from extremism.

- The study indicated that it is not possible to think of formulating returnee rehabilitation programs without considering setting sustainable development policies. The commitment of governments to implement governance and reduce the factors that lead to extremism such as social marginalization, corruption, exclusion, and discriminatory practices on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sect, religion, age, low level of educational and educational institutions, and weak content provided by cultural and media institutions.

We conclude: Our interest in the topic of returnees, and our eagerness to complete the course of research, is an attempt to understand the experiences of those involved in terrorism or who have lived in areas controlled by extremist groups. We are aware that these are experiences, speeches, narratives, and tales in which reality mixes with imagination, honesty mixed with lies, spontaneity with manipulation and employment, shock with awareness, and pain in hate... But the study focus on adults cannot limit our cognitive curiosity. There is a desire to investigate the conditions of adolescents who have returned and children, who have been stigmatized, cursed and have no choice. There is an incentive for us to search for the testimonies of those stranded by those who were rejected by their countries and left alone because they bear their burden in deteriorating health and security conditions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Serafettin Pektas and Johan Leman, *Militant Jihad: Today and Tomorrow*, Leuven University Press, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvq2vzmt.7>

# **THE MAGHREBI STRATEGY OF COMBATING AND PREVENTING THE PHENOMENON OF THE RETURN OF MAGHREBI WOMEN FROM CONFLICT ZONES**

**By Hafida BENCHEHIDA & Mohamed KERROU**

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## **Introduction: the phenomenon of the return of jihadists from conflict zones to their countries of origin**

The return of jihadists to their countries of origin is part of a double geostrategic perspective: on the one hand, the military defeat of the Organization of the Islamic State (“Daesh”) in Syria and Iraq and, on the other, the decision of the international and regional powers to repatriate jihadist fighters from the conflict zones to their countries of origin.

After its exit from Iraq, where it had seized in 2014 nearly a third of the national territory which it had administered for three years, the Daesh Caliphate was militarily neutralized in Syria, where it also had occupied vast areas which it lost thanks to the alliance of local Arab and Kurdish forces, supported by the international powers.

However, the military collapse of the Islamic state in March 2019, with the fall of the last bastion, which is the small Syrian city of Al-Baghuz, does not imply either an ideological defeat or the neutralization of the 'sleepers cells'.

In Iraq, Daesh, formed solely of Sunni combatants, owes its *raison d'être* to the sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites at the regional level and to the inability of the states in place to welcome, on a civic basis, the movement of emancipation of the Shiite communities of the Arab world<sup>1</sup>.

Such a historicist interpretation seems to be limited to the Iraqi case and does not take into account there, as elsewhere, the complexity of the phenomenon of 'violent extremism'<sup>2</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Louis Luizard, *The Daesh Trap, The Islamic State or the Return of History*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> For the United Nations (UN), violent extremism tends to lead to terrorism. Despite its multifaceted nature and the lack of a clear definition, violent extremism is neither a new phenomenon nor specific to any particular region, nationality or religion. It is the prerogative of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (EIIL), al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, which claim territories for themselves and use the Internet to disseminate messages conveying ideas of intolerance, threatening the values of peace,

emerges in relation to situations of social marginalization and with policies favoring security at the expense of democratization and the fight against poverty.

It is in contexts of exclusion and discrimination that the threat of jihadism is an attraction for young people who are revolted by social, regional and community injustice. Like other forms of violent extremism, jihadism, which has an Islamic identity, has the ability to operate on different scales - local, national and international - by constituting itself as a global and disseminated phenomenon, making use of the new Internet-based social networks, to the “civil hinterland”, to a propaganda discourse combining a return to the founding era - prophetic and caliphal - and to anti-imperialism<sup>1</sup> and extreme violence fed by a culture of death<sup>2</sup>.

We are thus in the presence of a complex phenomenon where the local and the global, the individual and the communitarian, and the singular and the universal intersect, hence its constitutive force and the challenges it poses to the nation-states that are inward looking and to the regional blocs that are in the process of being formed.

Despite the hard blow dealt to the Organization with the death of its Caliph, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, killed in an attack carried out on 27 October 2019 by American commandos in Berisha near the town of Idlib in Syria, Daesh's defeat is not definitively acquired either inside or outside its former territory.

The Turkish offensive against the Syrian northeast in October 2019 revived the issue of the transfer of some 2, 000 jihadist fighters held in prisons under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

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justice and dignity. See United Nations General Assembly, *Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism*, 2015. [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674&Lang=E)

<sup>1</sup> Jenny Raflik, *Terrorism and globalization. Historical Approaches*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016, pp. 81-95.

<sup>2</sup> Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death*, Paris, Seuil, 2016.

287 jihadis, including women and children, were transferred to Turkey before the announcement of their repatriation to their countries of origin in November. The repatriation movement has already begun and a country like France received 11 jihadists of French origin<sup>1</sup> in December 2019.

From January 2019, Washington's policy opted for the withdrawal from Syria and the repatriation of the jihadists to their countries of origin to avoid their return to the battlefields. Trapped in the Northeast of Syria, under the intensity of the bombardments, several thousand families of jihadists went to the Kurds asking to return to their countries.

Urged by the US administration to welcome their nationals who have joined the Middle East conflict zones, EU countries are divided and have not been able to find a common position on a return that threatens their security, apart from the issue of the return of children, estimated at 700 and advocated by MEPs.

With regard to the Maghreb, security instability in Libya, the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the economic and political crisis that has been raging for more than a decade, and which was exacerbated by the emergence of the “Arab Spring” are conducive to the expansion of terrorism in relation to the twin organizations Daesh and AQIM - the regional subsidiary linked to the al-Qaeda parent organization.

The dilemma posed by the return of the jihadists to the Maghreb countries divides both powers and opinions, between those who are against the reception of what they describe as a 'real time bomb' threatening stability, and those who are in favor of welcoming them by means of security and judicial solutions as well as psychological and social care, hence enshrining constitutional rights and the universal principles of a differentiated and inclusive society.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/28/onze-djihadistes-francais-detenus-en-turquie-seront-renvoyes-en-france-au-debut-de-decembre\\_6020866\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/28/onze-djihadistes-francais-detenus-en-turquie-seront-renvoyes-en-france-au-debut-de-decembre_6020866_3210.html)

## **I. For a gendered and a global methodological approach to the phenomenon of the return of Maghrebi women from conflict zones**

The main objective of this study is to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for the return and redeployment of combatants, particularly women and children born in combat camps and detention centers<sup>1</sup>.

This strategic study requires a methodological framework resulting from a knowledge of the existing literature on returnees - both men and women - and a conceptual refinement of the gender issue.

First, it is important to distinguish between the terms “terrorism”, “jihadism” and “violent extremism”, which are often used interchangeably although they have different meanings.

The term terrorism refers to the indiscriminate use of terror against civilians, including deadly violence, for political, ideological or religious purposes. It is usually carried out by individuals or groups of individuals fighting against a political regime. It may also constitute a form of government by terror, in which case it is referred to as state terrorism. Terrorism can take different forms (individual, organized, economic, political, computerized, etc.) and is difficult to define in a rigorous manner, since some acts of terror may be due to a legitimate cause even if it is not legal, such as a war of national emancipation against colonization or a revolution against a dictatorial regime. In addition, the designation and labelling of terrorist individuals or groups serves as a weapon of

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<sup>1</sup> According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), 1, 000 women and 2, 000 children of 46 nationalities are currently detained in prison camps in northeastern Syria and Libya. There would be approximately 200 children of former combatants of the Islamic State army with nearly 100 Tunisian women detained in prison camps in Syria, Iraq and Libya. Noting insufficient efforts to repatriate these children, HRW urges the Tunisian government to facilitate their return and reintegration into society. <https://www.hrw.org/fr/video-photos/video/2019/02/12/tunisie-des-enfants-de-membres-de-lei-detenus-letranger>

delegitimization and reduces the scope for security responses. Thus, it presents the risk of amalgamating “leaders”, “actors”, “supporters” and “sympathizers” to the point of pushing the latter to the point of further radicalization.

Violent extremism refers to dogmatic thinking that advocates violent modes of action. The radicalization that underlies violent extremism does not necessarily lead to violence. Radicalization refers to the process by which a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology with political, social or religious content is adopted.

The sources of violent extremism are deprivation and marginalization accentuated by weak government. An African study of 495 volunteer recruits to violent organizations, such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabab, reveals that acts of violence or alleged abuses of power by the state are the trigger for the decision to join an extremist group<sup>1</sup>.

Jihadism is a contemporary politico-religious doctrine that advocates violence to achieve its political ends in order to establish the Caliphate regime through a millenarian utopia. It has its roots in radical Islamism and emerged in Afghanistan in the 1970s and then in the Sahel-Saharan zone in Algeria in the 1980s with the emirs of AQIM. The birth of the State of Daesh in Iraq prolonged the jihadist phenomenon while constituting a break in the organization and conception as well as in the practices.

This is why it is important, each time, to contextualize the different radical movements with very different *modus operandi*<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to conceptual clarifications, it is worth noting the variations and contradictions in the statistics relating to the number of jihadists, both upon departure and return.

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<sup>1</sup> See UNDP Africa, *Pathways to Violent Extremism in Africa. Drivers, Dynamics and Triggers*, 2017. Link: [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674&referer=/english/&Lang=F](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674&referer=/english/&Lang=F)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/1601\\_Violent-Extremism.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/1601_Violent-Extremism.pdf)

In fact, the various sources, which are the States of origin, the UN, NGOs, research centers and valuation firms in the field of terrorism, provide figures that are so different that it is impossible to know exactly what the situation is in terms of state control of the national territory and collaboration between States and the various intelligence services. Thus, there is a vagueness about departures and arrivals, including those who were arrested and identified as such (i. e. the “returnees”).

It is true that the phenomenon of violent extremism leading to terrorism is, considering its natural link to globalization, fluid and eminently dynamic. It escapes the logic of unitary States and regional groups, which have no systematic control over the flow of human movement, arms and goods across porous borders, through informal and clandestine networks governed by mafia-like groups.

Apart from the fact that the number depends on the source (official, unofficial) and the period (year, month), the problem of statistics remains unresolved, bearing in mind that there is a tendency for states to reduce the number of terrorists and a counter-trend to inflate these figures by NGOs seeking to alert public opinion and raise the awareness of the authorities.

Moreover, the United Nations considers that there are no reliable statistics to tell us why radicalization<sup>1</sup> is taking place. Admittedly, the same is not true of the phenomena of departure to and return from conflict zones, which are quantified by estimates that are more or less close to reality. Nevertheless, the statistics remain to be put into perspective and relayed to the qualitative understanding of the phenomenon, i. e. the motives, consequences and structural trends as well as the individual trajectories of the phenomenon of radicalization/ deradicalization, in both directions (outward/ inward).

This is why we will limit ourselves here to quoting the collected and communicated figures, and indicating their sources, without

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *infra*, p. 24.



discussing their truthfulness or untruthfulness, all the more so as the object of our study is the return of jihadist women to the Maghreb countries, which is a phenomenon that is minimal in terms of figures but crucial in terms of the actual and potential threat, as well as the strategy for preventing and combating terrorism.

### **I. 1. A literature review on “returnees”**

In terms of the knowledge needed for action, the return of jihadists is the subject of recent and interesting studies, calling for practical solutions to be found to a new phenomenon - that of “returnees” - which has repercussions on the security of the Maghreb region and neighboring Europe, as well as on the capacity of Maghreb states and societies to convert violence into civil peace.

Among the recent studies, it is worth mentioning first and foremost that undertaken in March 2018 by the Center for Security Studies in Zurich, entitled “The Next Steps of North Africa's Foreign Fighters”<sup>1</sup>.

Unlike other investigations that have a general scope - international or continental - this specific study directly addresses the subject of “returnees”, men and women from the Maghreb.

Written by Lisa Watanabee, the study tackles the issue of combatants from the Maghreb who have left for Iraq and Syria from the perspective of departure and return, with what these two movements imply in terms of security and political deployment.

While providing statistical estimates about returning jihadists, i. e. 800 Tunisians, 220 Moroccans and 87 Algerians (see diagram below)<sup>2</sup>, in the absence of precise and reliable official counts, the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse222-FR.pdf>

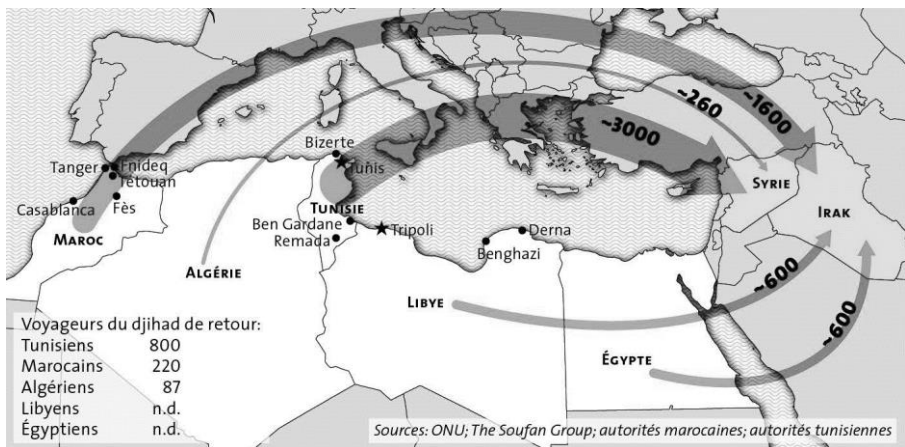
<sup>2</sup> The study by the “Center for Security Studies” in Zurich states that among the “returnees”, after the military defeat of Daesh, there are between 1350 and 4000 fighters who returned to Libya, the majority of whom are Tunisian, estimated at between 1000

author of the study points to the failure of local Maghreb policies to deal with 'returnees', despite the development of legal and strategic measures.

For the Maghreb authorities, the main approach consists in arresting and detaining men, whereas “female returnees” are paradoxically considered, according to a commonplace, as harmless victims.

For the author of the report, deradicalization and reintegration measures, however limited they may be, can only work if the people concerned do not feel that they are still in the same conditions that led them to leave.

Moreover, the Libyan refuge for returnees remains to be resolved, and national policies require regional coordination and international cooperation.



The second study, which is important to mention in this literature review to develop a methodological framework and to identify the

and 1500. The study does not provide any figures on the number of women “returnees” and is limited to the initial statistics, namely 700 Tunisian women and 275 Moroccan women (i. e. approximately 23% and 17% of the foreign combatants in the Levant). As for the Maghrebi women who joined Libya, they are essentially Tunisian women, estimated at 300 on the field, i. e. 20% to 30% of the foreign combatants.

profile of jihadists, concerns women and resistance to radicalization<sup>1</sup>.

Directed by Fatima Saddiki and Helmut Reifeld and published in 2017, this collective study aims primarily at combating extremism and radicalization, ensuring peace and the protection of women's rights.

The various contributions are divided into three areas: facts and contextualizations, resistance strategies and gender transformations. All of them are part of a feminist approach aimed at rehabilitating women's rights, reconciling old and new types of activism and proposing methodological and theoretical instruments that ensure a way out of violence against women and the societies in the South.

Among the contributions relating to the Maghreb<sup>2</sup>, there are those dealing with jihadist women, victims or innocent civilians (Nabila Hamza), proposals to combat the radicalization of young people (Moha Ennaji) and Islamist political activism (Hanane Darhour). These are all ways of countering violent extremism, based on theoretical knowledge and empirical field experience.

From these contributions, it follows essentially for the subject of women jihadists that the phenomenon is complex and that there is no standard profile of radicalized people in general. It is true that jihadist women are predominantly young, aged between 15 and 29, generally from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a fairly high level of education, even if their knowledge of Islam is rudimentary and will be improved under the Caliphate. They are bearers of a strong jihadist conviction or belief, married or looking for a jihadist

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<sup>1</sup> *Women and Resistance to Radicalization*, edited by Fatma Sadiqi & Helmut Reifeld, Rabat, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung/ Centre ISIS pour Femmes et Développement, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In most of the studies conducted on the Maghreb, the general tendency is to take into consideration the countries of the "Central Maghreb" that were colonized or protected by France, namely Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. The deplorable result is that the other two Maghreb countries, Mauritania and Libya, which are full members of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), are forgotten and misunderstood.

husband who is preferably promoted to martyrdom. Jihadist women are fragile persons, at odds with their environment of origin, in search of identity references and identification with a transnational Muslim community, the “Ummah”, with a virtual ascendancy of representations and practices, ensured by the Internet and communication techniques. They generally leave alone and find their suitor on the spot, directly or through the mediation of another person or a marriage agency created for this purpose. Through the full veil, they cut themselves off from the old world and enter a new world where the individual is overwhelmed by the community of faith, a community that substitutes itself for the authority of the father and provides each one with a specific identity.

With regard to status and roles, Nabila Hamza<sup>1</sup> shows, based on studies of jihadist women, that the majority have a domestic vocation and a minority provide logistical support to men. In both cases, they are sexually exploited and subjected to male domination, despite the rise of female power as evidenced by their role as jihad fighters. As a result, traditional gender assignments are being challenged and there is a trend towards the involvement of women in combat and field actions, as evidenced by their participation in individual armed attacks known as kamikazes<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. her article, “Femmes Djihadistes: Victimes ou ‘Impossibles Coupables’”, in Fatima Sadiqi & Helmut Reifeld (ed.), *Women and Resistance to Radicalization*, Rabat, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung/Centre Isis pour Femmes et Développement, 2017, pp. 41-62.

<sup>2</sup> Kamikaze - an ancient Japanese word meaning “divine winds”, reused during the Second World War to refer to Japanese military pilots trained to sacrifice themselves to destroy their targets - it refers to the perpetrators of suicide bombings or suicide martyrs committed during terrorist acts.

With regard to female jihadist suicide bombers, see El Gharbi Iqbal, “From Female Kamikaze to Sex Jihad: A War on Women's Bodies”. Link:

<http://womeninwar.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Beirut/7/Iqbal%20Al-Gharbi%20-%20De%20la%20femme%20kamikaze%20au%20Djihad%20du%20sexe.pdf>  
For the case of jihadist Tunisian women, see the interview of Amel Grami by Lilia Blaise, “There is a specificity of Tunisian women who choose jihad”, *Middle East Eye*, December 19, 2018. Link: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/entretiens/amel-grami-il-y-une-specificite-des-tunisiennes-qui-choisissent-le-djihad>

This was the case, for example, in Tunis, during the attack of October 29, 2018, where a 30-year-old girl set off an improvised explosive device near a police vehicle, causing about twenty injuries.

With jihadist women, we are dealing with “social actors” in their own right, or almost. Hence the importance of the gender approach to illuminate the process of radicalization leading to violence against women, since such an approach takes into account the tension between the old mechanisms of subordination and the new female aspirations for self-assertion.

The radicalization process of thousands of young people in the Maghreb by terrorist groups such as Daesh is, according to Moha Ennaji, essentially driven by economic and personal motives, while religion seems secondary to visions of adventure or combat heroism. Interviews with jihadists “returning” from Syria and Iraq show that there are several facets of radicalization, and therefore there is no single possibility of these young people's deradicalization.

Beyond the material and economic motivations, i. e. better salary and standard of living being one of the most important criteria for the recruitment of jihadists, there is a personalization of the contact with and conversion to jihadism. This is why the comprehensive approach is important in analyzing the subjective motivations of young jihadists. In the same way, dialogue, through the family and psychologists, is supposed to be favored to ensure their social reintegration, even if the official approach often leans towards surveillance and repression.

One of the fruitful avenues adopted in Morocco and Europe seems to be that of religious dialogue through imams and mosques, with the aim of rehabilitating trust and communication between young people and adults, and the governed and the governing.

Of course, the path of religious, educational and communicational dialogue cannot replace political solutions, local and regional development and institutional governance.

Following the example of the act of radicalization, it is the combination of actions and strategies of security and judicial control, and the “soft” handling of “returnees” that is capable of reversing the trend of radicalization and violent extremism.

Women have been at the heart of Morocco's strategy to respond to extremism through post-2011 personal status reforms and Islamic political activism. The reinterpretation of religious texts and Islamic jurisprudence (“fiqh”) is one of the innovative orientations of this activism, where feminism combines with tradition and human rights with the evolution of the family to produce a counter-strategy at both media and popular levels, leading to greater participation of women and a democratization of the public sphere.

To stay in Morocco, Abdelhak Bassou's study on the phenomenon of the “returnees” (2017) deserves attention. Such a return is linked, as we know, to the defeat of terrorist organizations and poses problems for many host countries. More important than the treatment that will be given to them is whether the conditions that had led to their radicalization have changed or whether the “returnees” will live again in the same environment that favored their departure and, if so, not only will their reintegration be difficult, but it will also give more arguments for the radicalization of the younger ones<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of practical solutions, the report advocates a combination of public policies of repression and social reintegration of jihadists - divided into three possible strata: armed forces, missionaries and counter-propagandists - as well as the involvement of families for successful reintegration.

The security issues associated with the return of foreign terrorists were also the subject of a study by the IEMed (European Institute

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<sup>1</sup> Abdelhak Bassou, *Foreign Combatants: Time for Returns*, Rabat: OCP Policy Center, 2017, pp. 19-20.

of the Mediterranean) in Barcelona, based on a Euro-Med survey of experts and actors<sup>1</sup>.

A cartography of the return of foreign terrorist fighters shows that there are three possibilities for their return: going to one's country of origin, going to another conflict zone (e. g. Sinai or Libya), or going to a third country (e. g. Turkey).

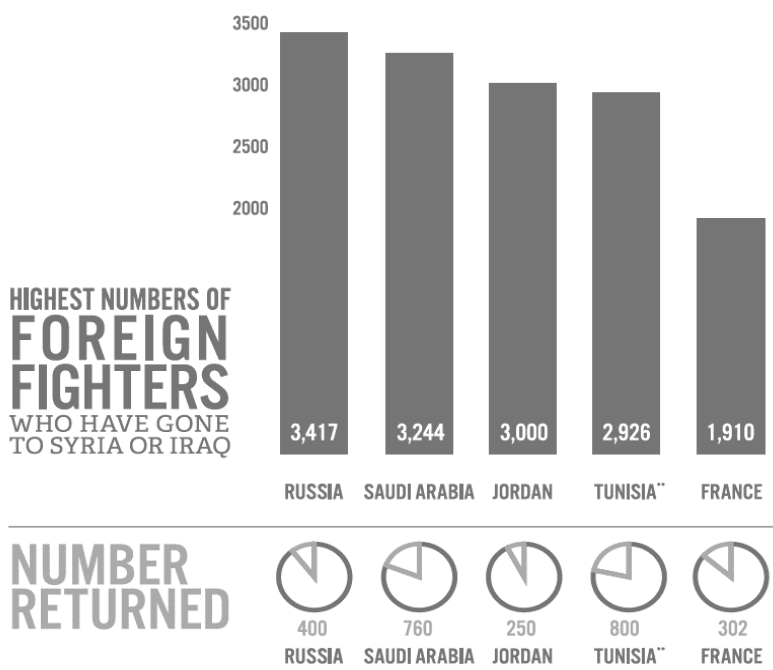
These return routes were evaluated by the Soufan<sup>2</sup> Group in October 2017 at 4594 citizens or residents of 35 countries, out of a group of combatants estimated at 42 000 foreigners from 120 countries. The largest number of returnees from the Maghreb is from Tunisia (800), followed by Morocco (236) and Algeria (87).

Some countries such as Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, France and Russia provided more departures to combat zones than others, and also more returns of combatants.

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<sup>1</sup> Eman Ragab, "Violent Extremism. Security issues associated with the return of foreign terrorists", *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2018, pp. 93-100. See also, "Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors: Violent Extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean Region", European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, December 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Richard Barrett, *Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, The Soufan Center, October 2017.



\*These figures are an approximation based on available sources.

\*\*Tunisia's Foreign Fighters number was officially changed by the Tunisian government reflecting approximately half of the numbers originally reported.

Among the “returnees” are men and also women and children. While the men are all combatants, the majority of the women ensure a normal life for the combatants, while the children are used as informants to ensure the Islamic state's control over society. This does not exclude the possibility of a number of women and children serving as combatants and suicide bombers. For this reason, it should not be excluded that “women returning to their countries of origin may pose a threat if they decide to carry out attacks there or to enlist recruits”<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to note from this study that combatants do not leave conflict areas alone but with their families, unless the father has been killed in action. In the event of a family return, there would be a double challenge for the authorities of the host country:

<sup>1</sup> Eman Ragab, *op. cit.*, p. 96.



to establish the paternity and nationality of children born in the combat zones, and to prove the responsibility of women and children as well as men in terrorist actions and ideological indoctrination.

Moreover, *The Children of Islamic State*<sup>1</sup>, the study made by the London think tank Quilliam and undertaken by Noman Benotman and Nikita Malik in 2016, pointed to the tendency to use child soldiers and Daesh's ideological and organizational strategy of creating a new generation of jihadists, raised and conditioned to serve the Islamic State, stating that 31, 000 women were pregnant and that several children born of rape were abducted from their mothers and entrusted to training centers to become soldiers. These “lion cubs of the Islamic State” (“achbal addawla al-islamiyya”), forming a battalion (“katiba”) and regrouping other channels of recruitment, voluntary and forced, had participated, between August 2015 and February 2016, in 254 operations, including a dozen executions in which they acted as executioners. The study concludes that there is a need to create re-education cells aimed at deradicalizing these child soldiers.

Another recent and important investigation to be familiar with concerning women jihadists is the final report of Oxfam/ONU Women entitled “Thinking Gender in Response to Violent Extremism in Tunisia. Conceptual stakes, state of play, courses of action”<sup>2</sup>, published in November 2018.

Written by Samuel Hall, it focuses on the role of women in violent extremism in Tunisia, using an approach based on a critical analysis of gender relations, while integrating the impact of public policies relating to the prevention and fight against violent extremism on women's rights.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/files/2016/04/the-children-of-islam-ic-state.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://maghreb.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20maghreb/documents/publications/2018/12/etude%20%20penser%20le%20genre%20dans%20les%20rponses%20%20lextremisme%20violent%20en%20tunisie%20%202018.pdf?la=fr&vs=5324>

It questions social stereotypes, such as the common idea of the submissive jihadist woman in order to understand how social constructions of gender, i. e. gender relations, influence involvement with violent extremist groups.

Security and preventive approaches are also submitted for reflection in order to grasp women's political choices and positions in society.

In addition, it appears that it is the aggregation of several factors related to age, poverty, marginalization, and social and cultural norms that explain engagement in jihadist networks.

Through a psychosocial methodology centered on representations formulated through individual interviews and group discussions as well as restitution workshops with young people, experts and officials, the study was carried out despite the absence of jihadists' testimonies and of direct observation of those concerned.

Among the study's recommendations are the launching of a consultation and communication plan on gender relations and the adoption of practical measures for the integration of women, psychosocial support and the strengthening of community support mechanisms.

The question is whether the mechanisms for combating violent extremism with a focus on integration and development, as designed by UN agencies and NGOs, are really effective.

This question raises, upstream, the question of the actions planned by the authorities and, downstream, the question of the appropriateness of the definition of violent extremism and the concrete evidence - legal, political and moral - to prove its existence publicly.

While everyone agrees that it is important to address as a matter of priority the inequalities and injustices that lead to violent extremism, it is clear that the failure of governance and the lack of

prospects lead many young people to despair and violence<sup>1</sup>, not to mention the illegitimate violence of the state and the corruption that plagues the administration.

To conclude this brief literature review on “returnees” (men and women), it is appropriate to refer to two successive studies produced by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) at King's College, London, by Joana Cook and Gina Vale.

The first (I) is entitled *From Daesh to Diaspora: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State* (2018).

The second (II) is *From Daesh to Diaspora II. The Challenges posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate* (2019).

Together with the two documents that provide a detailed picture of the women and children of jihadists, pointing out the present challenges posed by these distinct populations<sup>2</sup>, we have a comprehensive picture that reveals the following figures: of the 52, 808 foreign jihadists, there are 6, 902 women and 6, 577 children, 60% of whom were born in Daesh territory.

The number of returnees to their countries of origin is 8202, and 8% of whom are women and 20% are children.

In July 2018, when the first study was written, the database compiled by the authors revealed that the women of Daesh, from 80 countries, were 4761 or 13% and minors made up 4640 or 12% of all jihadists who had moved to the conflict zones or were born there.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/fr/dermi%C3%A8re-heure/les-programmes-de-lutte-contre-l%E2%80%99extr%C3%A9misme-violent-sont-ils-efficaces>

<sup>2</sup> To access these two documents, please consult the following links: <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>

<https://icsr.info/2019/07/26/from-daesh-to-diaspora-ii-the-challenges-posed-by-women-and-minors-after-the-fall-of-the-caliphate/>

For a summary of both documents: <https://icsr.info/2019/07/26/from-daesh-to-diaspora-ii-the-challenges-posed-by-women-and-minors-after-the-fall-of-the-caliphate/>

It is true that at that time only 26 states had published reliable statistics.

As for North Africa, there were 870 Tunisian, 87 Algerian and 236 to 300 Moroccan men, women and children returnees.

Women and children “returnees” each make up less than 1% of the initial workforce.

With the fall of the Daesh Caliphate, three trends emerged in relation to the status of affiliated women and minors.

Firstly, the number of children born to women who had settled in Daesh over the years has been steadily increasing, as shown by reliable statistics for 10 countries, giving 44 to 60% of children born there.

Secondly, a significant number of women remained until the fall of the Islamic state in Al-Baghuz. Some are devotees and seasoned fighters, while others want to turn the page on this tragic adventure. All of them are waiting for answers from their countries of origin.

Thirdly, given the tens of thousands of jihadists killed in the fighting, the proportion of women and children is higher than ever and is at the heart of the reflections and solutions to be found for the issue of jihadists.

## **I. 2. The “returnees” gender issue**

According to sociologist Farhad Khosorokhavar, the process of radicalization of jihadists is protean. Indeed, radicalization renews and adapts itself to each new context by trying to neutralize the struggle led by the state and security apparatus against its logistical and ideological manifestations.

In fact, the repressive arsenal could not overcome this extreme violence without a psychological and theological understanding of and providing care for radicalized fighters. For the new trends of violent extremism, of which jihadism is currently the dominant

form, are the expression of a deep social malaise in the contemporary world.

For Khosrokhavar, male and female radicalization seems to proceed from the same logic - humiliation, resentment, capacity to act and humiliate the humiliator while acquiring a heroic status and a place in paradise - even if, in the case of Islamic jihadism, female radicalization has a strong minority status<sup>1</sup>.

This is not the point of view of the study on terrorism analyzed from a gender perspective, published by Amel Grami and Monia Arfaoui<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to the collection of documents and testimonies from female Internet recruiters, female combatants and members of their families - mothers, sisters, wives - the membership of women in terrorist organizations is analyzed in relation to men and the process of identity construction, both individual and collective. It thus appears that the axial justification for women's membership in these organizations is the search for meaning, based on the need to feel useful and to live out their lives in society in a meaningful way.

The reasons for belonging (age, religion, psychosocial situation, social class) are related to the methodology of feminist and gender orientation, favoring a critical and individualistic vision that records and analyses jihadist narratives where a Salafist vision of the past and a dogmatic reading of the present interfere, hence the claim by terrorists of the attribute of "terrorists aspiring to terrorize the enemies of God".

The gender approach makes it possible to get rid of the commonplace according to which the Muslim woman is submissive and her status is subordinate. In contrast to such representations, jihadist engagement illustrates the active role of women and the propensity for equality and the sharing of power and responsibility through spectacular actions, such as suicide martyrdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Radicalisation*, Paris, éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, pp. 57-61 et pp. 181-185.

<sup>2</sup> Amel Grami & Monia Arfaoui, *Women and Terrorism. Gender Study* (in Arabic), Tunis, Miskiliani, 2017.

Women's roles within extremist groups are extremely varied, combining the traditional roles of wife and mother and the new roles of fighter and martyr, with a sexualization of jihadism, which remains male at the leadership level while welcoming the incursion of certain atypical female activists, such as the Tunisian Fatma Zouaghi, a virtuoso of the “Ansar al-chariâ” organization, whose actions show the emergence of a female “empowerment” that breaks with Islamic tradition.

The individual portraits of jihadist women, particularly the Moroccan and Tunisian ones, show different types ranging from “princesses of terrorism” to female fighters of the Organization of the Islamic State and “shadow jihadists”. In all cases, Sharia-related and religious justifications are less important than the financial, sexual and fictitious motives of the Caliphate reconciling Muslims with a faith lived in an imaginary way.

Specialists who have been in contact with women fighters in Europe and the Middle East have not hesitated to highlight sexuality as an explanatory element of female jihadism. This jihadism presents three types: the expandable, the domestic and the secretary, all of which correspond to similar roles in society<sup>1</sup>.

Religion is only the façade of female jihadism, which has as its subjective purview the search for love and it covers, at the organizational level, a vast network of sex and prostitution<sup>2</sup>. Such a reading clearly fails to consider the driving force of jihadism that underlies the recruitment and deployment of the Islamic Caliphate of Daesh, namely the ideological element that structures political, social and sexual representations and practices.

Taking into account all the references cited, a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of the return of jihadist women is

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Christine Sixte Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad. The Role of Islam in Female Terrorism*, North Carolina, Lexington Books, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Van San, *Kalifaatonvlichters*, Amsterdam, Promotheus, 2019. Cf. review of this Dutch book, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/28/le-sexe-argument-de-recrutement-des-djihadistes-de-l-etat-islamique\\_6020793\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/11/28/le-sexe-argument-de-recrutement-des-djihadistes-de-l-etat-islamique_6020793_3210.html)

essential insofar as such an approach considers the phenomenon under study in all its dimensions: historical and geographical, individual and collective. It takes into consideration the political, economic, social and cultural causes of the situations experienced, taking into account resources, forces and social and symbolic links.

The global reading of the phenomenon of the return of jihadist women to their countries of origin encompasses structural and relational aspects. In other words, individual subjectivity is embedded in the social, economic, cultural and geopolitical contexts. It is in this sense that the identities of the female “returnees” would benefit from being grasped through a global approach, and of a relational and dialogical<sup>1</sup> nature, between the individual and her plural environment.

Since the strategy is aimed at jihadist women returning from combat zones, the gender approach is essential, especially since the Islamic State organization “Daesh” welcomes men and women, as well as children, who live in particular family, economic, political and ideological conditions. It is these relations between men and women that need to be analyzed, taking into account the material and immaterial conditions in which jihadists evolve, in order to perceive their specificities and differences.

While several contributions have highlighted the role of women in violent extremism, the new approaches bring nuances to the understanding of gender relations and the relationship of men and women to radicalization<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, jihadist women constitute a diverse and not a compact group whose roles and functions oscillate between supporters, facilitators, fighters and suicide bombers. Their marital status also

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Global Approach. Context and Issues. Reflections of a Collective of Authors*, Québec, ROC03, 2012, p. 24 ff.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council. Counter terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), *Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Research Perspectives*, CTED Trends Report, February 2019. [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb\\_2019\\_CTED\\_Trends\\_Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb_2019_CTED_Trends_Report.pdf)

varies between several statuses: wife, mother, widow or even concubine, i. e. the object of “*jihad nikah*”<sup>1</sup>, which is not inconsistent with either ideological jihad - the role of recruiter and of moral supervisor in the field - or with armed jihad.

In view of the small number of jihadist women and the greater number of female “returnees” from combat zones, jihadist masculinity is massive both statistically and ideologically. The prevalence of the macho ideology of gender domination within jihadism stems from a majority in numbers - for example, 87% of European jihadists are men - and from a traditional division of labor in which women assume support roles and men operational leadership and command roles.

In terrorism, women's involvement is special and is only used as a “propaganda tool or as last resort”<sup>2</sup>, as women have generally not been trained to handle weapons and intervene on the ground.

Given that radicalization is a massively male phenomenon, the participation of women in violent actions indicates an important evolution within jihadism that is comparable to that of left-wing terrorist groups, without changing the profound dynamics, which remain fundamentally masculine and misogynistic.

On the other hand, analyzing terrorism from a gender perspective could provide a better understanding of the process of de-radicalization, since conversion to terrorism refers to a failure or a difficult passage to adulthood, working on masculinities and men's peaceful paths to fulfilment would help to defuse the violence that threatens them in situations of psychological difficulty.

In sum, we can say that while the global analysis helps to understand the relationship between the unity and diversity of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Amel Grami, “Narrating Jihad Nikah in post-revolutionary Tunisia”, <https://www.boundary2.org/2018/07/amel-grami-narrating-jihad-al-nikah-in-post-revolution-tunisia-french/>

<sup>2</sup> Annelise Pauwels, “Terrorism and Masculinity”, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 6 May 2019. <https://eerradicalization.com/fr/3775/>



jihadism at the international level, the gender component helps to understand gender relations within jihadism and to grasp how women are both a target of jihadist propaganda and proactive actors, without being the driving force behind violent extremism in its jihadist version.

## **II. Legal and regulatory frameworks of Maghrebi counter-terrorism policies and strategies**

We propose to present, firstly, the legislation and strategies for combating terrorism in the five Maghreb countries and, secondly, those of Europe and the United States of America, as well as the relevant UN documents.

### **II. 1. The strategies of the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia)**

With the exception of Libya, where the state collapsed in 2011 with the fall of the Gaddafi regime to make way for a “power vacuum”<sup>1</sup> occupied by tribes, armed militias and two governments - one in Tripoli and the other in Benghazi - the other Maghreb countries have managed to ensure some political stability by adopting laws and strategies to combat terrorism.

It is important to mention here the legal and regulatory frameworks for preventing and combating terrorism, before presenting the strategies adopted and outlining at the end, in a comprehensive and comparative perspective, those of Europe and the United States of America, which have a considerable influence on the North African and Middle East region, which is the preferred location of jihadism.

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<sup>1</sup> Asif Majid, “Is there a Center to hold? The Problem of Transition in Post-Qaddafi Libya”, in *The African Renaissance and The Afro-Arab Spring. A Season of Rebirth*, Georgetown University Press, 2015.

### *In Algeria*

In the face of radicalization leading to extremism and terrorism, Algeria's strategy has five pillars: military, security, religious, prison and legal-political.

At the legal level, there was first the adoption of Act No. 05-01 of 6 February 2005 on the prevention of and fight against money laundering and the financing of terrorism<sup>1</sup>. This Act was subsequently amended and substantiated<sup>2</sup> by Act 15-06 of 15 February 2015.

In these two legal texts, the Algerian State implements the UN recommendations by establishing a link between money laundering and financing of terrorism, while implementing protection mechanisms against criminal acts of national and global scope.

The financing of terrorism is classified as a terrorist act for anyone who provides funds intended for that purpose; Algerian courts have jurisdiction in that regard, including for transactions taking place abroad; financial institutions are subject to supervision and the procedures for freezing funds are carried out by the magistrate, who may authorize the person whose assets were frozen to use part of the funds for their personal needs or those of their family and other persons of concern.

The 2015 amendment reinforces the preventive measures of financial institutions, in particular the FATF, broadens the powers of national courts and consolidates the procedures for freezing of funds intended for terrorism by the judge.

Politically, three reconciliation and appeasement mechanisms have largely defused the phenomenon of radicalization leading to terrorism; a phenomenon which observers link to the cancellation of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.droit-afrique.com/upload/doc/algerie/Algerie-Loi-2005-01-lutte-blanchiment-terrorisme.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.commerce.gov.dz/reglementation/loi-n-deg-15-06>

the electoral process that led to the victory of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in January 1992. Such a halt was at the root of the civil war that had caused tens of thousands of deaths in the 1990s - the infamous “black decade”.

The three remedial mechanisms<sup>1</sup> that led to national reconciliation are:

- The Law of Clemency (“Rahma”)<sup>2</sup> from 1995 to 1998.
- The Civil Concordance Law<sup>3</sup> of 1999.
- The Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation<sup>4</sup> of 2006.

*The Law of Clemency*, proposed by President Liamine Zeroual, had made it possible to reintegrate repentant young people involved in the armed Islamist movement, by proposing commuted sentences and playing on the contradictions between the GIS (Islamic Salvation Group) and the AIS (Islamic Salvation Army/the armed branch of the FIS).

*The Civil Concord Law*, which was approved by referendum the day after President Abdelaziz Bouteflika came to power, aimed to reintegrate into social life those who renounced armed violence and to grant amnesty to those who were involved in networks supporting terrorist groups during the black decade of the Algerian civil war.

Six years after the adoption of the Civil Concord Law, a new referendum was held on the *Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation*. This Charter provided for the dropping of charges against Islamists who renounced the bearing of arms and terrorists not involved in blood crimes, rapes and attacks. As a result, more than 6, 000 fighters were reportedly released from the maquis to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sirp.pt/assets/files/pdf/Desafios%20aos%20Estados%20numa%20Perspectiva%20do%20Sul%20COR%20Mohammed%20Benzerga.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ajouadmemoire.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/loi-rahma-1995.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://algeria-watch.org/?p=55415>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.interieur.gov.dz/index.php/fr/dossiers/168-la-charte-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-nationale.html>

return to their families and more than 2, 000 prisoners accused of terrorist acts were released.

Only one armed group in dissent from the GIA, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), rejected the offer of amnesty and continued to act in allegiance to the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, while based in the border areas in the East, West and the Great South.

### *In Libya,*

The elected and internationally recognized parliament had adopted anti-terrorism legislation: Act No. 3-2014 in Tobruk on 14 September 2014. Composed of 4 chapters and 30 articles, this law defines terrorism and stipulates a life sentence for perpetrators of terrorist crimes<sup>1</sup>. However, it poses the double problem of respect for human rights, as pointed out by Human Rights Watch<sup>2</sup>, and of effective application<sup>3</sup> in a context dominated by assassinations perpetrated by militias who impose their diktat - terror and slavery - on Libyans and Sub-Saharan.

Already, on August 24, 2014, the Libyan parliament had considered the organizations “Ansar al Sharia” and “Fajr Libya” as terrorist organizations. Apart from this, Libya has been in the grip of violence and anarchy exacerbated since the return of the Daesh fighters from Syria, with the majority of Maghrebi men and women accompanied by children.

An open war has been waged in recent years between the Benghazi government led by Marshal Haftar and the Tripoli government led by Faez Sarraj, and dominated by “Fajr Libya” - a coalition of

<sup>1</sup> [https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/1355-Law%20No.%20%283%29%20of%202014\\_ORG.pdf](https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/1355-Law%20No.%20%283%29%20of%202014_ORG.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2015/05/13/269933>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.essahafa.tn/wordpress/2014/09/20/%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7D9%86%D9%8%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8/>

Islamist militias and other militias from the Misrata region, east of the capital Tripoli.

### *In Morocco*

Morocco's counter-terrorism strategy is based on five pillars: the religious pillar, the security and legal pillar, the socio-economic pillar, the strengthening of human rights and the rule of law, and the pillar of international cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

Morocco's strategy is based on combating radicalization by adopting a proactive and multidimensional approach that includes the security, political, institutional, economic, cultural and religious pillars.

In terms of the number of combatants who left for Syria, which is estimated at some 1, 500 persons in 2015, the Cherifian Kingdom is one of the main exporters of jihadists<sup>2</sup> in the Maghreb, after Tunisia which is the leading country in the region in terms of the number of jihadists who left for conflict zones.

Between 2015 and 2017, Moroccan police arrested 550 suspected terrorists who had formed 40 cells. In 2016, more than 40% of the existing cells had links to Daesh, including an all-female cell composed of 10 young women who were preparing to commit attacks<sup>3</sup>. They have just been pardoned<sup>4</sup> by the King on January 11, 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/PCVE/Morocco.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2015C46\\_msb.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2015C46_msb.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/10/3/morocco-arrests-all-female-islamic-state-cell>, Quoted by Alexandra Fokina, "Morocco's counter-terrorism policy and its blind spots", *Orient* 21, 2 May 2019. See also, for a documented analysis: El Mostafa Rezrazi, "Reflections on the Moroccan approach in the CVE/PVE/Deradicalization", *Al Irfan Magazine*, Mohamed V University, February 2019. Link: <http://alirfan.ma/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/R%C3%A9flexions-sur-l%E2%80%99approche-marocaine-dans-la-CVE-PVE-D%C3%A9radicalisation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank El Mostafa Rezrazi for providing me with this information and for reading the text carefully, making pertinent remarks which I have tried, as far as possible, to take advantage of. My thanks also go to Leyla Hassen, Human Rights/Women's Rights

Two attacks have been decisive in the orientation of the counter-terrorism strategy, namely the attack in Casablanca in 2003, which killed 42 people, including 11 suicide bombers, with more than 100 wounded, and the attack in Marrakech in 2011, killing 17 and wounding 20.

The deadly attack in Casablanca, consisting of five attacks on 16 May, led to the unanimous vote in parliament on the Anti-Terrorism Law<sup>1</sup>, adopted on 28 May 2003 - even though it was, a few months before its adoption, contested and suspected of human rights violations.

Title I of the said Law concerns the criminal provisions with a clarification of terrorist acts, while Title II deals with the provisions of criminal procedures. Title IV concerns the procedure relating to the financing of terrorism and, notwithstanding the rules on jurisdiction provided for in the Criminal Code, the Rabat Court of Appeal has jurisdiction to prosecute, investigate and try acts constituting terrorist offences.

Subsequently, there was Act No. 86-14 of 20 May 2015 amending and supplementing certain provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure relating to the fight against terrorism.

Act No. 03-03 on combating terrorism was perceived by international organizations, such as Amnesty International and IFHR, as highly repressive and sacrificing the human rights of Islamist detainees<sup>2</sup>.

The same was true for all Maghreb anti-terrorist legislation, whether it be the Tunisian law of 10 December 2003, the Moroccan law of 28 May 2003 or the Algerian law of 6 February 2005, as all of

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and Governance Program Officer in the Tunis office of the F. Ebert Foundation, for reading the text and for her remarks, which have been incorporated in its final version.

<sup>1</sup> <http://adala.justice.gov.ma/production/legislation/fr/penal/luttecontreterrorisme.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.memoireonline.com/07/08/1414/la-loi-marocaine-antiterroriste-epreuve-nouvelles-menaces-maroc.html>

them express the ambivalence of democratization and the fight against terrorism<sup>1</sup>.

In Morocco, the memorandum of the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) on the provisions of criminal legislation relating to the fight against terrorism concerns Law No. 86-14 of 2014<sup>2</sup>. This memorandum points out the limits of Moroccan legislation and proposes recommendations in order to protect the rights of accused persons and detainees, and to ensure alternative sentences<sup>3</sup>.

Morocco's approach to preventing and combating violent extremism, which is formulated in terms of experience rather than strategy, is both multidimensional and integrated, as it is based on the pillars of religion, security and law, socio-economics, human rights and rule of law, and international cooperation<sup>4</sup>.

The restructuring of the religious field is carried out through the reform of curricula and the creation of appropriate institutions, such as the Higher Council of Ulama and the Mohamed VI Institute for the Training of Imams and “morshidat” (female religious counsellors).

Moreover, 40% of the students of this Institute are women. At this level, the strategy emphasizes the role of religious leaders in the open interpretation of texts and the orientation of jihad towards quietist, ethical and peaceful objectives.

With regard to security, in March 2015 Morocco established a Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations in charge of dealing with cases of terrorism, under the supervision of the Public Prosecutor's Office and within the framework of a participatory approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Philippe Bras, “The Maghreb in the war against terrorism: legal and political stakes of 'anti-terrorist' legislation”, *L'Année du Maghreb*, II-2005-2006, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cndh.org.ma/fr/memorandums/avis-sur-le-projet-de-loi-ndeg-86-14-modifiant-et-completant-les-dispositions-du-code>

<sup>3</sup> [https://cndh.ma/sites/default/files/memorandum\\_code\\_terror\\_fr\\_0.pdf](https://cndh.ma/sites/default/files/memorandum_code_terror_fr_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/PCVE/Morocco.pdf>

Moroccan legislation has gradually been supplemented by a Law on the Financing of Terrorism (2003), a Law against Money Laundering (2007), and a Financial Intelligence Unit (2009).

In 2015, a Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) was established, which acts in conjunction with the General Directorate for Surveillance of the National Territory (DGST) to dismantle terrorist cells and ensure stability and security.

All this led to neutralizing hundreds of terrorist cells on national territory, in cooperation with foreign services. According to the statistics of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation cited by El Mostafa Rezrazi<sup>1</sup>, since 2014, among the dismantled cells, those linked to the Islamic State are about 51 and the number of people arrested is 902 including 14 women and 29 minors.

At the socio-economic level, the national initiative for human development has made it possible to finance projects in various sectors to provide vocational training and to create jobs for young people in precarious situations.

Since 2016, Morocco had adopted rehabilitation programs, including the *Mosalaha* (“Reconciliation”) program, to contain the spread of violent extremism. This program, aimed at convicted terrorists in prisons, has six pillars: religious education, human rights seminars, legal training, vocational training, testimonies by terrorists and group discussions<sup>2</sup>.

As far as human rights and the rule of law are concerned, the 2011 Constitution is intended to be a genuine national charter for the protection of rights and freedoms, and good governance. Morocco's

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<sup>1</sup> [https://jeunes-ihedn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018175932\\_cr-conference-anaj-marocue.pdf](https://jeunes-ihedn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018175932_cr-conference-anaj-marocue.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi, “Insights into Morocco’s Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism”, 2018. Link: [https://books.google.tn/books?id=u2tvDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA91&lpg=PA91&dq=maroc+programme+mosalaha&source=bl&ots=\\_d8NgMUjoF&sig=ACfU3U1EZ22o7Ebc0qgD6pPYUeymVv8Hg&hl=ar&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjIxuCHqYXnAhVLuqQKHTsiBdoQ6AEwA3oECAoQAAQ#v=onepage&q=maroc%20programme%20mosalaha&f=false](https://books.google.tn/books?id=u2tvDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA91&lpg=PA91&dq=maroc+programme+mosalaha&source=bl&ots=_d8NgMUjoF&sig=ACfU3U1EZ22o7Ebc0qgD6pPYUeymVv8Hg&hl=ar&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjIxuCHqYXnAhVLuqQKHTsiBdoQ6AEwA3oECAoQAAQ#v=onepage&q=maroc%20programme%20mosalaha&f=false)



strategy to combat terrorism and maintain stability aims to combine the strengthening of internal security with the fight against poverty and religious reforms. As a result, the Moroccan approach is intended to be balanced and comprehensive.

That being said, for Morocco<sup>1</sup>, as for the other Maghreb countries, national and international human rights organizations recommend revising the penal code and the code of criminal procedure, and providing for alternative penalties, while drawing attention, in the context of the fight against terrorism, to the need to strengthen the legal protection of persons in police custody, to review the regime for establishing evidence and the conditions for extradition, and to repeal the death penalty definitively and immediately.

### *In Mauritania*

The Act No. 2010-035 of 21 July 2010 abrogated and replaced Act No. 2005-047 of 26 July 2005 on the fight against terrorism<sup>2</sup>.

This new State law defines terrorist acts (Title I), penalties (Title II), jurisdiction and procedure (Title III) and final provisions (Title IV).

The death penalty is provided for in cases where, as a result of the acts committed, one or more persons die (Article 17), but minors are punishable by half the penalty for adults and their sentence may not exceed 12 years of imprisonment in any case (Article 18).

The Law also provides for the establishment of an anti-terrorist investigation unit and a judicial one, both of which are staffed by prosecuting magistrates.

The new amended Law came at a time of crisis marked by attacks and kidnappings carried out by the AQIM. For their part, human rights organizations and the opposition expressed reservations

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<sup>1</sup> [https://cndh.ma/sites/default/files/memorandum\\_code\\_terror\\_fr\\_0.pdf](https://cndh.ma/sites/default/files/memorandum_code_terror_fr_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bcm.mr/IMG/pdf/loi\\_2005\\_048.pdf](https://www.bcm.mr/IMG/pdf/loi_2005_048.pdf) ; [http://www.vertic.org/media/National%20Legislation/Mauritania/MR\\_Loi\\_Terrorisme.pdf](http://www.vertic.org/media/National%20Legislation/Mauritania/MR_Loi_Terrorisme.pdf)

about the violations of freedoms consisting, *inter alia*, of telephone tapping and house searches.

Mauritania has also amended certain provisions of its anti-money-laundering legislation since the new Act 2016-013 abrogated articles 2, 3, 49 and 50 bis of Act 2005-048 of 27 July 2005 on combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Recently, on October 31, 2019, the Government Council approved a decree on the organization and functioning of a National Committee to Combat Terrorism and Money Laundering, pursuant to Article 48 of Law 2019-017, which includes the fight against money laundering and financing of terrorism<sup>1</sup>.

The counter-terrorism strategy is based on three pillars: legal, security and political. This national strategy to combat terrorism and transnational<sup>2</sup>crime was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in April 2012. The result is a 30-page document divided into three parts: a study of the national and regional environment - the Sahel -, a typology of terrorism in Mauritania and a presentation of the national counter-terrorism mechanism, more specifically its axes and tools and the principles governing its implementation.

Because of its geostrategic position in the Sahelo-Saharan region, Mauritania is exposed to conflicts and disputes in neighboring countries and border areas (Western Sahara, Casamance, Tuareg rebellion) where insecurity prevails, especially since the national territory is rich in natural resources.

In the typology of terrorism faced by Mauritania, two components appear to be fundamentally linked: that of global terrorism and that of criminal enterprise established in a Sahelian environment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://senalioune.com/mauritanie-decret-sur-une-loi-de-blanchissement-dargent-creation-dune-liste-de-terroriste/>  
[https://www.bcm.mr/IMG/pdf/loi\\_no\\_2019-017\\_relative\\_a\\_la\\_lutte\\_contre\\_blanciment\\_de\\_capitaux\\_et\\_le\\_financement\\_du\\_torrerisme.pdf](https://www.bcm.mr/IMG/pdf/loi_no_2019-017_relative_a_la_lutte_contre_blanciment_de_capitaux_et_le_financement_du_torrerisme.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.caon.gov.mr/IMG/pdf/Strategie\\_lutte\\_contre\\_le\\_terrorisme.pdf](http://www.caon.gov.mr/IMG/pdf/Strategie_lutte_contre_le_terrorisme.pdf)

The first consists of three constituent elements: a radical and violent Islamist discourse; *modus operandi* inspired by global terrorism; and active use of new information and communication technologies.

The second is, in turn, based on profit-making mafia activity carried out under an Islamist guise, with implications for criminal cross-border trafficking and reasons for internal dissension with the emergence of new dissident jihadist groups. In addition, there is an area of settlement outside the national territory, and advantageous mobility and security factors.

Mauritania's fight against terrorism is part of a global vision, integrating the legal and security foundations as well as the political and geostrategic ones.

The legal foundations include strengthening prevention and repression in order to achieve, through national legislation and international cooperation, the elimination of terrorism at the organizational, material, human and financial levels.

The defense and security forces are at the heart of the mechanism for combating terrorism through the dual use of intelligence and the synergy between the army and the security forces.

Beyond the legal and security aspects, the Mauritanian strategy favors a political approach by consolidating the rule of law and a diplomacy geared towards crisis resolution, while trying to satisfy the economic and social demands of the citizens.

In this respect, the active support of the citizens is considered to be essential to eradicating terrorism. It is a matter of winning the battle of ideas against radical Islamism by giving priority to education and culture and the promotion of Islam. Similarly, instituting, since 2011, a study and a prospecting tool, and in this case, the Mauritanian Institute for Strategic Studies (IMES), is considered to be a tool for political decision-making in the fields of stability, defense and security.

### *In Tunisia*

After the bloody and unprecedented attacks on the Bardo Museum (March 25, 2015; 24 dead and 45 wounded) and the Imperial Hotel in Sousse (June 26, 2015; 39 dead and 39 wounded), which constitute “a radical turning point”<sup>1</sup>, **Tunisia** promulgated Organic Law No. 26-2015 on the fight against terrorism and the suppression of money laundering<sup>2</sup>.

Previously, Tunisia had adopted Law No. 75-2003 relating to support for international efforts to combat terrorism and the suppression of money laundering<sup>3</sup>. Criticized for its overly broad definition of terrorism and for the lack of details in the texts incriminating the encouragement and the glorification of terrorism<sup>4</sup>, it was reformed by a Law of August 12, 2009, and then replaced, after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, by Law No. 26-2015.

In addition to the general provisions stipulating that in the case of terrorist acts, the death penalty or life imprisonment is replaced by a term of imprisonment of twenty years, the new Law No. 26 of 25 July 2015 details the penalties according to the acts committed, setting out the powers of the Judicial Pole for Combating Terrorism, which is a body responsible for terrorist and terrorism-related offenses. The Pole is made up of representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, investigating judges, indictments division judges, and criminal and correctional chambers of trial and appeal courts' judges.

The Act also provides for the establishment of a National Counter-Terrorism Commission under the Office of the President of the Government to monitor and evaluate United Nations resolutions on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2015/06/27/strategie-terroriste-tunisie-propagande-immersion/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.tn/sites/default/files/news/tf2015261.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.imolin.org/doc/amliid/Tunisia/Tunisia\\_Loi\\_No.\\_2003-75\\_relative\\_au\\_soutien\\_des\\_efforts\\_internationaux\\_de\\_lutte\\_contre\\_le\\_terrorisme\\_et\\_a\\_la\\_repression\\_du\\_blanchiment\\_dargent.pdf](https://www.imolin.org/doc/amliid/Tunisia/Tunisia_Loi_No._2003-75_relative_au_soutien_des_efforts_internationaux_de_lutte_contre_le_terrorisme_et_a_la_repression_du_blanchiment_dargent.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.omct-tunisie.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/PressRelease/Commentaire%20projet%20de%20loi%20contre%20terrorisme\\_201408\\_fr.pdf](http://www.omct-tunisie.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/PressRelease/Commentaire%20projet%20de%20loi%20contre%20terrorisme_201408_fr.pdf)

the fight against terrorism<sup>1</sup>, propose the necessary measures to be taken with regard to persons and organizations involved in terrorist acts, conduct specialized studies and training, provide opinions on legal texts relating to terrorism, and communicate and disseminate moral awareness among citizens.

Organic Law 2015-26 was amended and supplemented<sup>2</sup> by organic Law 2019-9 of 23 January 2019. Several articles of the organic Law of 2015 were thus amended, in particular those that entailed risks in terms of the right to a fair trial for all citizens and the public liberties guaranteed by the Constitution<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, commitments have been made by the Tunisian legislature to the Financial Action Task Force (GAFI) concerning the fight against terrorism and money laundering.

In addition to the prohibition of armament and weapons of mass destruction, the new Act provides for special treatment by the Judicial Anti-Terrorism Pole for children involved in terrorist acts, taking into account the specificities of this age group.

As for the death penalty for terrorist offences, it is provided for only in the case of the crime of rape (article 29, fourth new paragraph).

Article 40 (second new paragraph) states that the judicial body responsible for combating terrorism is made up of representatives of the public prosecutor's office, investigating judges, indictments division judges, and criminal and correctional chambers of trial and appeal courts' judges. It also includes representatives of the department of public prosecutions, investigating judges, judges of

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<sup>1</sup> Government Decree No. 2018-1 of 4 January 2018 on the procedures for implementing the resolutions adopted by the competent United Nations bodies relating to the suppression of the financing of terrorism; Government Decree No. 72-2019 of 1 February 2019 setting out the procedures for implementing the decisions of the competent international bodies relating to the prohibition of the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

<sup>2</sup> <https://legislation-securite.tn/fr/node/104480>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.asf.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ASF\\_TUN\\_RapportTerrorisme\\_201702\\_FR.pdf](https://www.asf.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ASF_TUN_RapportTerrorisme_201702_FR.pdf)

the indictments division, a juvenile judge and juvenile court judges at the trial and appeal levels specializing in juvenile cases.

In July 2016, Tunisia adopted a national strategy to combat extremism and terrorism<sup>1</sup>. This strategy is built around four fundamental pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and response<sup>2</sup>.

The first pillar is to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of terrorists by depriving them of the means to act. Secondly, it is important to protect citizens, infrastructures and sensitive targets by strengthening the security of borders, transport and critical infrastructures. Prosecution is ensured by developing and strengthening the State's capacity to hamper the ability of terrorists to plan and commit acts, by neutralizing them and bringing them to justice. As for the response, it consists of dealing with the consequences of a terrorist attack and mitigating its repercussions, essentially by setting up a national crisis management body that is capable of acting and managing intelligence, communication and cooperation, and assisting victims and respecting human rights. In addition to all this, there is the work of monitoring and evaluation, in accordance with the evolution of terrorism.

Despite the existence of this strategy, which provides a coherent vision, there is still a high risk of security loopholes and slippage. The security apparatus is seeking autonomy, while at the same time it needs genuine internal reform in order to guarantee functional adaptation to changes in society, politics and terrorism<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cnlet.tn/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/strat%C3%A9gie-nationale-2016-FI-NALE-2-8-sept-2016-pdf.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Tunisian strategy is clearly inspired by the European one, which is based on four pillars: prevention, protection, pursuit and reaction. Cf. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/fight-against-terrorism/eu-strategy/#>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/reform-and-security-strategy-tunisia>

The two terrorist organizations that threaten the stability of Tunisia the most are “Ansar al Sharia”, which is based in Libya, and “Katibat Okba Ibn Nafaa”, which took refuge in the mountains of Chambi and Semmama in the western region of Kasserine, on the border with Algeria.

“Ansar al sharia” was founded at the end of 2011 by Seif Allah Ben Hassine, nicknamed Abu Iyadh, who was amnestied after the revolution while serving a heavy prison sentence. His clandestine organization, of Salafist Jihadist ideology, is considered responsible for the political assassination of left-wing opponents Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi, and for the bloody attacks in Bardo and Sousse.

“Katibat Okba Ibn Nafâa”, a brigade linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is a terrorist group responsible for several attacks against soldiers of the Tunisian army. It has a group of mobile jihadists along the Tunisian-Algerian border and has an electronic portal “Ifriqiya lil amam” (“Africa Forward”) and a Twitter account.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) organization was created in 2007 and has as its ancestor the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which rallied Al-Qaeda under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar and is located in Algeria, Tunisia and the Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger), with several hundred jihadists in its ranks. It is currently facing a generally efficient strategy developed by the national security forces. Nevertheless, this strategy and the methods of managing the prevention and combating of terrorism are the subject of criticism by human rights organizations.

At the end of this section devoted to the regulations and strategies of the Maghreb countries, it would be useful to review those that influence the geopolitical context of the Maghreb, in this case the

European strategy, the American strategy and the UN strategy in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

## **II. 2. The strategies of the European Union, the United States of America and the United Nations (UN)**

The **European** strategy on combating terrorism, money laundering and the financing of terrorism was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2005. The strategy is based on four pillars<sup>1</sup>: prevention, protection, prosecution and response.

With regard to prevention, the priority is to tackle the causes of radicalization. That is why, in 2008, the Council of Europe adopted a strategy to combat radicalization and recruitment of terrorists.

The second European priority is the protection of citizens and infrastructure, and reducing their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. To this end, in 2016 the Council adopted a directive on the sharing of data from the personal files of passengers on board of airplanes in order to investigate and prevent the risk of attacks.

The aim of the prosecution is to hamper the ability of terrorists to plan actions and the possibility of bringing them to justice. Hence, the adoption of new rules to prevent money laundering and financing of terrorism by the European Council and Parliament in May 2015.

The aim of the response is to prepare for, manage and reduce the consequences of a terrorist attack by developing measures for crisis coordination, civil protection, risk analysis and assistance to victims of terrorism.

The European strategy is deployed regionally and internationally, in particular with neighboring countries, especially those in North Africa and the Middle East, where the areas of tension that produce and breed jihadism are located.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/fight-against-terrorism/eu-strategy/#https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14469-2005-REV-4/fr/pdf>



The 2005 European strategy was revised in June 2014 in relation to new trends in terrorism, such as the emergence of the phenomenon of “lone wolves”, the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the use of social media by terrorist networks.

In 2018, the Council of Europe took stock<sup>1</sup> of the action plan against terrorism followed between 2015 and 2017. This action plan had a twofold objective: on the one hand, to strengthen the legal framework against violent extremism and terrorism and, on the other hand, to prevent and combat violent radicalization through concrete measures in schools, prisons and the Internet.

There are two important points to reflect on with the possibility to draw lessons from them for all countries: working to build inclusive societies and banning hate speech from media and public spheres.

This shows how European counter-terrorism legislation and strategy is dynamic and evolving, and adapting to the changes occurring in terrorism, and how it has influenced, within the framework of international cooperation, Maghrebi legislation and strategies against radicalization and violent extremism leading to terrorism.

The new US “National Strategy for Counter Terrorism of the USA”, proposed by President Trump, is based on the principle that the United States of America is a “Nation at War” and that the main enemy to be defeated is Islamic jihadism<sup>2</sup>.

It is an extension of the old strategy of the “war on terror” launched by President Bush in response to the attacks of 11 September 2001, except that it is a response to a mobile and radical form of terrorism that requires a concerted and global war.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/sg-inf-2018-7-lutte-contre-l-extremisme-violent-et-la-radicalisation-c/16807c0d4c>

<sup>2</sup> The White House, National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the USA, Washington, October 2018. Link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>

The guiding principle of the US strategy to combat terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is “America First”, referring to the nationalism and unilateralism of a foreign policy governed by Washington and followed by NATO and the international partnership, within the framework of relations of hegemony and influence.

The main objective of the new American strategy is to overcome violent extremism and defeat terrorism by drying up its sources of funding, its capacity to recruit and radicalize, and by adopting a policy of prevention and protection against its actions.

The approach to the terrorist threat, identified mainly in Daesh and other violent extremist groups, is to neutralize their threats at the level of territorial, logistical and financial sources.

At the same time, a counter-terrorism strategy has been launched with several dimensions: security, legal, political and communicational.

US counter-terrorism is deployed along national and international borders in order to ensure security against terrorist threats and to develop appropriate policies for the protection of infrastructures and the strengthening of citizens' confidence. Hence, the role of civil society and media in the fight against extremist ideology, at the same time as the strategy adopted aims at reintegrating detained combatants and welcoming their families into their communities<sup>1</sup>.

Established in 2011, the **United Nations** Counter-Terrorism Centre is dedicated to assisting Member States in building capacity and implementing counter-terrorism projects around the world according to the four pillars of the global strategy.

The four pillars are as follows:

- eliminating conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
- prevent and fight terrorism

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

- strengthen the means available to States to prevent and combat terrorism, and enhance the role of the United Nations in this regard
- ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law in the fight against terrorism.

This strategy was established in 2006 and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 60/288.

On the tenth anniversary of the resolution, an action plan for the prevention of violent extremism was adopted in order to fill the gaps in the strategy that are essentially the first and fourth pillars, which have been neglected until now, hence the crucial importance of prevention and respect for human rights in order not to accentuate the hold and spread of terrorism.

The action plan proposes a concrete approach to combating and preventing terrorism and religious extremism. These two concepts, which are different and interrelated, are to be defined and clarified by each State, in accordance with international human rights law<sup>1</sup>.

According to the action plan, the two concepts are not to be confused, as on the one hand, violent extremism has other forms of manifestations than terrorism. On the other hand, anti-terrorist measures must not be directed against non-terrorist expressions, such as social or emancipation movements.

Violent extremism recruits on a global scale and has serious political consequences that undermine peace and security, law and sustainable development, hence the need for a collective action oriented towards international cooperation.

As for the situations and factors conducive to its spread, they are multiple and complex. Indeed, two main categories of factors that emerge from qualitative interview surveys can be distinguished, bearing in mind that according to the United Nations, there are no

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/fr/counterterrorism/>

reliable statistical data that can provide us with information on the reasons for radicalization.

The two main categories of factors are, on the one hand, the structural and cyclical situation that pushes towards violent extremism and, on the other hand, the individual background and personal motivations that attract and play a decisive role in the transition from discontent to violent action.

In June 2018, a high-level United Nations Conference on counter-terrorism was held at the New York headquarters, with the aim of strengthening international cooperation against a constantly evolving phenomenon.

It turns out that sixteen United Nations entities are implementing more than 270 projects on violent extremism in 84 countries around the world that have requested<sup>1</sup> them, and one of the largest among them is the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project on the prevention of violent extremism.

This strategic framework, developed in March 2016 and revised in February 2017, aims to prevent violent extremism through the promotion of inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity.

In September 2017, the UNDP published a study entitled “On the Paths to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Dynamics and Triggers” that was based on interviews with 718 individuals from Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

The UNDP also conducted an #ExtremeLives Facebook campaign to show the facets of extremism in Asia through a series of directly broadcast interviews. Topics covered included radicalization, methods of recruiting extremists, women's plight in the context of extremism, in addition to what ordinary people can do to counter extremist propaganda.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/fr/counterterrorism/hlc/prevention-of-violent-extremism-as-conducive-to-terrorism.shtml>

For its part, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is engaged in a multisectoral effort to empower young women and men to realize their potential as agents of change. As part of its “Education for Global Citizenship” strategy, it seeks to assist countries in implementing programs aimed at empowering young people, integrating them and reducing their vulnerability to extremist discourse.

Among the numerous and valuable UN documents, two are of particular interest to us for the elaboration of the Maghreb strategy, namely the UN SG's 8<sup>th</sup> report published in February 2018 on the threat posed by Daesh and the study published in 2019 by the Counter-Terrorism Committee on “Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Terrorists Fighters: Research Perspectives”.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> report of the UN SG on the Daesh's threat to world peace and security, the structures and actions of the extremist organization are pointed out in the different regions. It also mentions the problems of returning through the trilogy “prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration”<sup>1</sup>.

Contrary to the practice resulting from the strategies developed by the States, it is recommended that the three components, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, should not be separated and that the age and gender of men, women and children should be taken into account.

The approach should be multi-institutional, integrated and appropriate to ensure that terrorist acts do not go unpunished, while facilitating the reintegration of former members of terrorist groups into their communities.

In addition to criminal justice systems that are strained by the return of combatants, including women and children, judicial authorities are called upon to respect international standards and

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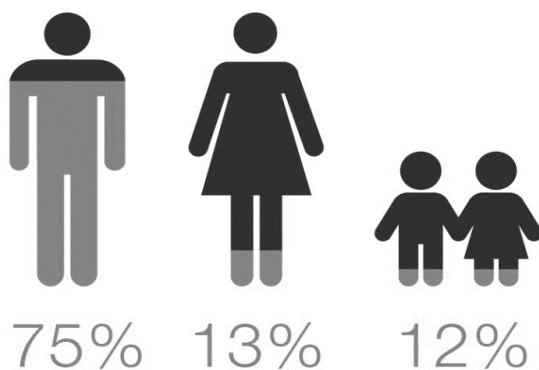
<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/N1901938\\_FR.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/N1901938_FR.pdf)

procedures of impartiality. It is also clearly stated that the risks of radicalization may be exacerbated if the treatment and conditions of detention undermine human rights and dignity.

The important study on “Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Research Perspectives”<sup>1</sup> was published in February 2019 by the Counter-Terrorism Committee - Executive Directorate (CTED) of the United Nations Security Council. This study provides us with basic data on women who have travelled to conflict zones in Iraq and Syria, including countries of origin and demographic indicators.

The researchers estimate that only 4% of the “returnees” from Iraq and Syria are women, who account for 5% of those who have travelled to the conflict zones.

**Figure 1: Number of foreign ISIL affiliates in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic**



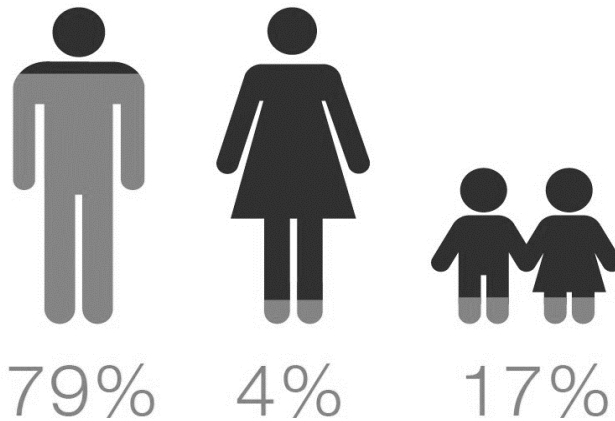
Total foreign IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 37,497 – 41,490

Foreign female IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 4,162 – 4,761

Foreign minor IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 3,704 – 4,640

Confirmed children born in Iraq and Syria: 730

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb\\_2019\\_CTED\\_Trends\\_Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb_2019_CTED_Trends_Report.pdf)

**Figure 2: Number of returnees to countries of departure**

Total returnees from Iraq and Syria: 7,145–7,366

Female returnees from Iraq and Syria: 256

Minor returnees from Iraq and Syria: 411–1,180

These statistics encourage us to study the reasons why few women return to their countries of origin, thinking about the possibility of helping them to return in humane conditions and to face the ordeal of return for those who have already come back. That being said, there is little research on women whose experiences, involvement and plight in conflict zones, in times of war and in times of forced peace, are unknown.

What is remarkable in the case of the Maghrebi “returnees” is that, despite their small numbers, Tunisian women are in the majority followed by Moroccan women, whereas, according to official sources, there are no Algerian women. The explanatory element could be the pacification and defusing of the terrorist threat in this

country, which for two decades had learned the lesson of the “black decade” and provided solutions to the action and departure of combatants to conflict zones, particularly Afghanistan, where women followed their husbands engaged in jihad with the Al-Qaeda. There is nothing of the sort for Algerian women, who would no longer be interested in the jihadist cause run mainly, in recent years, by the Islamic state Daesh, hence their absence from the statistics and the analyses of the phenomenon of violent extremism, from a gender perspective. Only 87 Algerian male jihadists have returned from Syria and Iraq, compared with 800 Tunisians and 220 Moroccans, according to figures provided by the Zurich study conducted by Lisa Watanabee.

While several studies have focused on gender, new research is probing masculinities in order to have a better understanding of gender practices and the relationship of men and women to radicalization leading to violence for the simple reason that “unpacking gender dynamics and power structures would open a path for future research”.

Gender influences terrorist recruitment and women are prone to recruitment on social networks rather than elsewhere. The courts are inclined to be more tolerant of women because of the preconceived notion that women have less power than men do, and as a result, there is less interest in rehabilitating and reintegrating them, which reduces the possibility of de-radicalization and increases the risk of relapse into violent extremism.

### **III. The foundations of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism, and the return of jihadist women from conflict zones**

In the light of the methodological framework developed in the first part and the Maghrebi, European, American and UN legislation and strategies presented in the second part, we propose to *outline a*



*Maghrebi strategy, common to the five member countries of the Maghreb Union.*

It should be noted that each Maghreb country has a legislation and a strategy that we will take into account in order to find unifying elements within the Maghreb strategy, which needs to be adapted to the regional and international context as well as to changes in terrorism and globalization.

The development of a strategy presupposes a frame of reference articulated to a context as well as strategic orientations or axes articulated according to objectives that are themselves defined according to an action plan with a mission, a vision and shared values.

In order to be effective, the strategy can only mobilize the will and energies of all actors: State institutions, civil society and all citizens.

The issue that arises, in the form of a series of questions, is the following:

*What stance should be taken with regard to the “returnees”, men, women and children? How should we deal with radicalized individuals? Is it possible to de-radicalize them and reintegrate them into society? How can they be reintegrated into professional, educational, family and public life? How can we rebuild a social bond with them in an inclusive way?*

In other words, the problem of the study is that of citizenship becoming confronted with the challenge of returning jihadists. In other words, it is a question of building a citizenship that is no longer a vertical one granted by the State, nor obstinately sought by violence directed against the State, but one that is participatory and inclusive.

The reference framework of the strategy to combat and prevent the phenomenon of the return of women from combat zones to the Maghreb countries has as its focal point *deradicalization*, given that the women in question, as well as the men and children

accompanying them, were radicalized before departure and/or throughout their stay in the areas of tension.

The return of these jihadists is about bringing those who were and remain involved in jihadism back to a break with jihadism and to real reintegration into society.

This is why it is necessary to first clarify the path of radicalization and then to set the contours of deradicalization, which is the aim of the strategic plan of fight and prevention with regard to the return of Maghrebi women from conflict zones.

Radicalization means “the process by which an individual or a group adopts a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology with political, social or religious content that challenges the established political, social or cultural order”<sup>1</sup>.

While radicalization takes many forms in different contexts and historical periods, jihadism constitutes “the privileged transposition of the new radicalization in the West and in the Muslim world”<sup>2</sup>.

Jihadism is naught but the Islamist version of violent extremism. It is legitimized in the name of Islam, read and reviewed by radical Salafism, which opposes Islam to the West, according to a dichotomous and reductive vision of a war of civilizations.

After the “Arab Spring”, which broke out in 2011 and was accompanied by a crisis of the State, there was both the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate 'Daesh' and the reconstitution of the Al-Qaeda Organization in a decentralized and localized manner (Syria, Sinai, Libya, the Tunisian-Algerian borders, the Sahel, etc.).

Taking into account geostrategy, among other elements, violent extremism, of which jihadism is the dominant form, appears to be an indication of a profound social and cultural malaise, combined with economic exclusion in a profoundly egalitarian mass culture

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<sup>1</sup> Khosrokhavar, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

and a context of globalization leading to a loss of identity and a deep sense of oppression and frustration<sup>1</sup>.

Radicalization is a complex process in which economic, political, social, ideological and identity-related issues are intertwined in a world where the nation-state is increasingly competing with and overtaken by the logics of globalization.

Concretely, for radicalization to occur within an individual or among a group of individuals, it would require the conjunction of four determining factors, namely:

- The need for recognition among any Muslim who feels oppressed as one, and marginalized at the socio-economic and cultural-civilizational level in an increasingly globalized world with blurred identity contours.
- The jihadist ideology permeates the imagination of “converts” by anchoring them to utopia, so that the early past of Islam - prophetic and caliphal - becomes the major narrative reference, oriented as it is towards the glorification of one's own religion and intolerance towards other believers and non-believers, by means of “takfirism” or excommunication (an ecclesiastical term designating the expelling from the community).
- The culture of death that drives the jihadist to kill and be killed, in order to exist and live again in the afterlife as a martyr of Islam, and to be promoted to heroism and eternity in paradise.
- The social network as a means of communication, dissemination, visibility and building radical and fluid leadership for individuals who convert to jihadism.

According to UNDP experts, the drivers of radicalization consist of push and pull factors, i. e. on the one hand the conditions and structural contexts leading to violent extremism, and on the other hand, the individual motivations and processes that transform ideas into violent action.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

The conditions and contexts that push towards violent extremism are lack of economic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance and human rights violations, unresolved conflicts and radicalization in prisons.

Individual motivations and processes that drive radicalization include grievances and victimization induced by domination, subjugation to an external power, radical ideologies and interpretations of religion, cultural and ethnic differences, and leadership sought through social networks.

More specifically, the Action Plan proposed by UNDP identifies five drivers of violent extremism<sup>1</sup>:

- Lack of economic opportunities
- Marginalization and discrimination
- Poor governance and human rights violations
- Protracted and unresolved conflicts
- Radicalization in prisons

What then of deradicalization as an antidote to violent extremism?

Deradicalization is “a type of action designed to bring those who have engaged in jihadism back to a 'normality' defined by the renunciation of violence as a solution to the ills of society”<sup>2</sup>.

Like radicalization, deradicalization differs in different societies and state policies in such a way that the one that prevails in authoritarian societies is not the same as that in democratic societies.

As a result, the types of action can be assessed in terms of respect or lack of respect for human rights (torture, blackmail, psychological pressure on detainees) and also in terms of the collaboration of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

different services (police, ministries, municipalities, experts, neighborhood groups, etc.).

In short, it is about respecting the conscience of individuals and human rights, which encompass everyone, including those involved in acts of violent extremism, bearing in mind that radicalization is the result of a failure of the State at several levels: economic, political, legal, cultural and communicational.

The security solution that is absolutely necessary for the protection of the state and society against terrorist violence is not a panacea but one of the components of a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. Indeed, the whole security issue is responsible for the outbreak of terrorism, which feeds on economic frustration and repressive policies.

Given that violent extremism is a complex and global phenomenon, multidimensional and internationalized in its practices, the fight against it, which is at the heart of the battle against terrorism, can only be global and gendered.

In other words, the strategy to combat violent extremism must take account of the gender/children/gender relationship, while focusing on the return of women jihadists from conflict zones to the Maghreb countries.

This is why we propose a twofold strategy in this contribution: a general one for the “returnees” and a specific one for the “female returnees”.

The two strategies are obviously to be merged within a general Maghreb strategy, integrating the different dimensions of religious extremism and gender relations.

### **III.1. The general strategy for the “returnees” (jihadist men, women and children)**

The general strategy to combat terrorism and violent extremism in the Maghreb is based on a number of strategic axes or pillars that

underpin it in terms of purpose and value, i. e. in terms of effectiveness - adapting the ends to the means of combating them - and in terms of life ethos - based on an ultimate value, which is inclusive citizenship.

For it is not only a matter of preventing and combating radicalization and violent extremism, but also of social rehabilitation and reintegration of women, men and children returning from combat zones to the Maghreb countries.

These lines of action are, in fact, recommendations for decision-makers, experts and national, regional and international civil society actors.

***- The first axis of the Maghreb strategy is the promotion of knowledge and access to existing best practices at the regional, continental and international levels.***

The general observation in the Maghreb is the lack of access to available information and the difficulties of investigation in jihadist circles, both in prisons and in public life. This lack of documentation concerning statistics, personal records and representations, as well as the practices of radicalized people, is an obstacle to the understanding of the phenomenon, which, in order to be controlled and combated, requires detailed knowledge, apart from security fears, which no longer have any reason to exist in the connected world of global communication, i. e. that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It would be in the interest of the Maghreb authorities to establish and make public statistics and data on the departure and return of jihadists.

The tendency to minimize and reduce the number of jihadists leaving and returning - hence the discrepancies between national and international statistics - does not resolve the question of the danger of the phenomenon. On the contrary, it leads citizens to

doubt official information, succumb to rumors and seek information elsewhere.

The popularization and dissemination of existing knowledge to governments and public opinion would help to understand the phenomenon, to debate it and to provide appropriate preventive responses. Documentation-based information is essential indeed.

By facilitating empirical investigations through bringing together researchers and jihadists - whether in detention or at large - public administrations, including the Ministries of the Interior and Justice, could collect qualitative data in addition to the information obtained by the security apparatus.

In addition to the statistics and qualitative surveys that are necessary to understand the phenomenon of the return of jihadists, men, women and children, a number of good practices would benefit from being identified and shared among public authorities, national civil society organizations, as well as international partners that have the material and intellectual resources for information and communication.

Beyond this shared knowledge, it is essential for the Maghreb countries to develop their own knowledge and accounts of the reasons and “drivers” that led to the emergence and spread of the phenomenon of the departure and return of jihadists.

In this regard, the creation of a Maghrebi Centre for the Prevention and Fight against Radicalization and Violent Extremism is urgently needed in order to produce “endogenous” studies, conclusions and recommendations that could be put at the service of decision-makers.

In addition to its documentation and scientific research functions, the Centre would take charge of the training of personnel specialized in de-radicalization, by organizing periodic sessions by Maghreb and international experts.

This documentation, research and training Centre would benefit from being established by the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and

designed according to a mobile and flexible structure made possible by the launching of a Maghrebi Network of Researchers Specialized in Terrorism that contributes to scientific knowledge through the exchange and sharing of information, studies and best practices via a website updated according to data collected at the national, regional and international levels.

Cooperation between the Maghrebi Centre and the international centers for documentation, research and training on terrorism is necessary for better knowledge and an effective and coordinated fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

***- The second axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is military-to-security with what it implies in terms of coordination at the regional and international levels.***

Since terrorism is a scourge that threatens the stability and security of States and civilians, it is necessary and urgent to combat it on the security and military levels by confronting it on the military field and monitoring, through intelligence services, its real and virtual movements on the ground and also on social communication networks.

Being a global phenomenon that transcends national borders, even if it takes root and develops at the local level like al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or Daesh in Iraq and Syria, terrorism requires a global fight, by all nations and international organizations.

Since terrorism is not a static phenomenon, it evolves according to the context and changes occurring in the organization and to globalization, hence the challenges posed to the fight against terrorism, which is itself called upon to evolve in order to prevent and combat terrorism.

Prevention consists in compressing the “flash to bang”, the more or less short period between the transition from radicalization to



violent extremism, in other words from ideological embrace to terrorist act.

Three tasks seem to be necessary for preventive and effective security: first, the enhancement of intelligence through continuous and intelligent monitoring of social networks, and interception of telephone tapping and spying on terrorist cells; second, the surveillance of borders, which are by definition porous because of their maritime, mountainous or Saharan nature; third, the training, restructuring and re-equipping of the armed forces with ultra-modern tools, so that they would not only be able to defend themselves against targeted attacks, but also to deal blows to terrorist organizations, dismantling them and neutralizing their dangerous members.

Of course, effectively securing the Maghreb regional area involves two major risks: on the one hand, an increase in the budget for security and for the army would be at the expense of the key sectors of education, health and culture. On the other hand, human rights violations may result from the arrest, interrogation and imprisonment of returning jihadists and all those directly involved in violent extremist acts.

That is why the dogma of “total security” should be abandoned and consideration should be given to non-repressive measures to prevent and combat religious extremism, such as programs for the disengagement and rehabilitation of violent extremists.

The other practical measure that would make security effective would be **the creation of an autonomous Intelligence Agency** modelled on the FBI and the CIA. This structure would be responsible for collecting information, cross-referencing it on the basis of detailed studies and making it available to national and regional authorities, in cooperation with foreign services engaged in preventing and combating terrorism and religious extremism.

***- The third axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is the fight against economic, social and regional marginality.***

Terrorism and violent extremism cannot be fought only by the force of arms and the genius of security, but also by prevention directed at the breeding ground that produces and reproduces violence: in this case the economic and social environment, with its spatial and regional dimensions, where inequalities and injustices take shape.

Therefore, the fight against terrorism must be a long-term one, with immediate solutions that make it possible to reduce, as far as possible, unemployment, poverty, exclusion and marginality, which are the sources of terrorism and religious extremism. It is true that these alarming and dangerous phenomena are not due solely to poverty and marginality, but to the interplay of multiple causes, including frustration and indignation at social and regional inequalities and discrimination, as well as personal histories of anomie and delinquency.

This is why it is necessary to take concrete measures, such as the administrative and civil care of the peripheries that have been long marginalized and underdeveloped - especially the poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of the big cities and in the interior regions - through positive discrimination in order to include them in the economic and social development plans of the Maghreb countries.

Consequently, the fundamental fight against terrorism is being waged through preventive governance and the implementation of socially oriented public policies that promote solidarity and not just the market and economic liberalism.

The fight against poverty and inequality contributes to the fight against terrorism and violent extremism by overcoming the governance deficit that characterizes many countries of the South. Such a deficit is the result of several factors, including the hiatus

that exists between the ruling elites and the masses to the extent that the relationship between the State and society is characterized by exteriority and leads to social inequality with feelings of exclusion and frustration felt by all citizens, especially young people attending school.

The solution lies in changing the development model and the relationship between the leaders and the governed in order to build a public policy that promotes the development of inclusive societies.

On this basis, it is imperative to undertake legal, economic and social reforms in order to reduce social and spatial inequalities as well as the discrimination and marginalization induced by the authoritarian policies of the States formed in the aftermath of national independence.

That being said, the approach to (mal)development and marginalization should not be conceived only at the State and national levels, but also at the micro-social one, especially since we know that the factors of radicalization are not only economic and social, but also relate to psychological vulnerabilities, both individual and collective.

This is why family and social support, through a policy of solidarity to be developed from below - civil society - would strengthen the growth and development policy driven by the State.

Both approaches can strengthen the resilience of individuals and collective structures against the risks of radicalization and violent extremism.

At the practical level, political and financial encouragement of citizens in marginalized areas to engage in self-employment activities, such as family farming and the social and solidarity economy, among others, is likely to develop inclusive and participatory citizenship.

***- The fourth axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is the fight against corruption, crime and money laundering.***

The phenomena of terrorism, corruption, crime and money laundering were previously governed by separate legislation. However, since 2001, with the adoption of Resolution 1373, the United Nations Security Council has recognized the link between terrorism and transnational crime.

The trend has accelerated since then to the point where the link has become the norm, especially with the onset of Daesh's defeat in the field of military combat and its increasing tendency to access funds through criminal activities, both associative and individual, and both in financial structures and in prisons where terrorists recruit from among prisoners with a criminal past.

All legislation in the Maghreb countries and elsewhere links the fight against terrorism with the fight against money laundering and crime. Similarly, there are laws against corruption everywhere and an entire administration dedicated to this fight.

Yet corruption remains endemic in relation to lack of transparency and abuse of power, particularly in developing countries and those going through a democratic transition. Moreover, corruption is an integral part of the political and economic systems, infiltrating the administration and establishing itself in the relationship between citizens on the one hand and the authorities on the other, from the local to the national or even international level.

In the discourse of radicalized youth, corruption (“fassad”) is seen as financial and also moral. Moreover, it is seen as being responsible for the deviation of society towards evil and depravity. Corruption is thus the main cause of their rejection of society and their radicalization for jihadist involvement and the use of violence against the state and its representatives.

That is why the fight against corruption and the corollary phenomena of money laundering and crime is fundamental to the strategy to combat terrorism and violent extremism.

In practical terms, corruption can only be combated through the application of laws and the implementation of severe penalties aimed at deterring those responsible for these illegal acts, which undermine the credibility of public and private institutions.

The fight against corruption, money laundering and crime also requires the dissemination of a social and political ethic through which officials - ministers, deputies, directors-general and other civil servants and managers - set an example by complying with property and income declarations and the payment of taxes.

Coordination between the Maghreb countries, those of the Middle East and the countries of Europe where capital flight is taking place from the former two, and particularly the Gulf countries, is necessary in the fight against terrorism.

To this end, it is important to strengthen the capacity of customs and tax administrations, police and investigation services in order to put an end to corruption, money laundering and the illicit traffic of financial flows.

It is also a matter of initiating investigations and building the legal and political capacity to prosecute terrorists and the perpetrators of organized crime. Thus, it is imperative to adapt the legislation in force to cybercrime and to the changes in terrorism, which uses communication flows, and the manipulation of conflicts of interest for money laundering and the financing of militias in areas of tension, such as Libya in the Maghreb and Syria in the Middle East.

***- The fifth axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is the modernization of prisons, the police and the judiciary.***

Numerous surveys have shown the role of prisons in engaging in radicalization and violent extremism. Indeed, prisons are a favorable environment for propaganda with the aim of radicalization, given the loneliness of the inmates and their psychological fragility, which could lead some to seek refuge in religion interpreted in doctrinaire, like the Salafist jihadist ways.

With regard to jihadists, the dilemma of prisons and detention centers is either the mixing with the prisoners of penal law and those detained for criminal offences, among whom there are perpetrators of violent acts and radicalized people tempted by the exercise of violence, or the separate treatment of violent extremists.

In the first case, there is a risk of propaganda and “communicating vessels” between the milieu of delinquency and crime, and jihadists, especially since many jihadists have already been detained for acts of delinquency, particularly in the cases of second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe.

In the second case, the segregation and isolation of jihadists in segregated prisons, following the Guantanamo model, raises the question of violations of human rights prohibited by international and humanitarian law.

The intermediate solution of reserved pavilions for dangerous jihadists, through their involvement in proven acts of terror, could serve as a protection against the spread of violent extremist propaganda, provided that the prisons are modernized.

The modernization of prisons, most of which are dilapidated and overcrowded, requires resolving the issue of the lack of space and the layout of cells in accordance with international standards (4m<sup>2</sup> per prisoner), and working to improve infrastructure and the reception of families and visitors, without neglecting the importance of cultural and sports facilities in humanizing the prison environment.

The management of radicalized persons in prisons is not an easy task and requires the training of specialized staff and the

implementation of civic education programs, with the possibility of reducing the length of detention.

The modernization of the two sectors of the police and justice is the necessary complement to the material and pedagogical upgrading of prisons, since all three sectors come under the system of punishment and prevention of violence.

That is why respect for human rights during arrest and detention, the right of defense during trials and the introduction of alternative civil penalties help to prevent resentment against the authorities, which is at the root of the feeling of injustice and revolt leading to radicalization and violent extremism.

***- The sixth axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is the reform of education, media and culture.***

Religious and political intolerance fueled by jihadist ideology for the radicalization and legitimization of violent extremism often originates in school textbooks.

The media, including social networks and satellite television, also fuel extremist ideology by disseminating messages of hatred towards the other and the authorities by presenting them as ungodly (“kuffar”) deserving divine punishment (“iqâb”) in life and in the hereafter.

Preventing and combating intolerance conveyed by radicalization and violent extremism necessarily involves reforming education, media and culture with a view to raising young people's awareness of human rights, cultural and ethnic diversity, and the coexistence of religions and civilizations.

Obviously, reforms in these sectors are not an easy task because of the resistance of fundamentalist currents that wage war against modernizing ideas presented as “blameworthy innovations”, or

even violations of divine law as recorded in the Koran, read and interpreted according to a dogmatic, Salafist jihadist vision.

This is why the reforms involve a long struggle to raise awareness and the organization of cultural and political debates that require a democratization of public life and an openness to the values of universality within a logic of dialogue with cultural particularities.

***- The seventh axis of the Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat terrorism is the reform of Islam and religious institutions.***

Jihadism sees itself and is presented to public opinion as “true Islam” (“al-Islam al-sah'ih”), that of the origins, and of going back to prophetic and caliphal times, as recorded in the Holy Book. However, this is not the case since it is a mythical and unhistorical conception. In reality, jihadism is an ideological rigorist and dogmatic interpretation. Not only does Muslim jihadism not have a primary warrior vocation, but it rather constitutes a spiritual effort, both individual and collective, to achieve good and eradicate injustice. But in addition, jihadism is in contraction with historical Islam, which has been maintained by scholars and practiced by people for centuries. That Islam, historical Islam, is the best response and refutation to radical temptation and violent extremism.

It is by valuing and rehabilitating historical Islam with its multiple facets - official and spiritual-Sufi, confraternal and popular - that it is possible to combat Islamist jihadism that leads to violence, war and the destruction of culture and civilization, as witnessed by the case of Palmyra ('Tadmur') and, before that, that of Bamiyan in Afghanistan.

In practical terms, the aim is to reform Islam through the modern training of imams and “morshidat” (female religious counsellors), the dissemination of a tolerant religious education and the opening



up of the media and the world of culture to the dialogue of religions and civilizations.

As such, each Maghreb country has a tradition of openness to be strengthened and an experience of religious reform to support. Similarly, certain experiences could be re-evaluated and put to good use at the level of Maghreb strategy, including the Mauritanian reform of the religious field undertaken since 2002, the Moroccan multisectoral approach to restructuring the religious field since 2003 and also, to take a non-Maghreb example, the approach of Geneva, which is intended to be the place for research and initiatives on interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

### **III.2. The specific strategy for “returnees” (jihadist women and children)**

With a view to drawing up a specific strategy for women “returning” from conflict zones to the Maghreb countries, we start from three fundamental observations before setting out the main lines of the strategy.

The first observation, which applies to both men and women, is that there is no standard profile of a jihadist, but there are common and recurrent characteristics.

Among these characteristics are the generational dimension consisting of belonging to the young category - between 18 and 30 years of age on average -, a certain level of education that is more or less high and can lead to a university degree, a break with the father, relative precariousness and residence in a poor neighborhood, psychological fragility, single status or newly married status with one or two children forming a modern family unit with their freely chosen mother, attending a Salafist mosque, using the Internet and visiting jihadist sites, recent radicalization after a “normal” or even “debauched” life, the passage, particularly for second generation male immigrants or the “born again”, through delinquency and prison, etc.

The second observation is the significant increase in the number of women, often very young, recruited by the social networks serving Daesh. They voluntarily adhere to the jihadist project without being under the psychological influence of a man. In fact, women's attraction to jihad is paradoxical in that "their activism and servitude go hand in hand"<sup>1</sup>. Certainly, many women have gone to jihad areas to follow their husbands, learn the Koran and fight the ungodly ("kuffars") and thus gain a place in paradise. However, unlike Al-Qaeda, Daesh encourages family jihad and the formation of a counter-society, which is virtual in the countries of origin and real in the lands of the Caliphate<sup>2</sup>. Thus, despite the servitude of male companions, gender relations are marked by a rise in female power and increased participation of women in public life, in particular through their role as educators, activists, insiders in the handling of weapons, members of women's structures specializing in recruitment, surveillance and *Hisba* or control of women's morals, as well as individual participation in attacks as female suicide bombers.

Consequently, the role of women jihadists is not limited to the family unit. On the contrary, they are "actors in their own right" and are by no means, according to a stereotypical view that is shared by both the public opinion and the authorities, less violent extremists than male jihadists. The experience of the Daesh Caliphate attests to the growing role of women, particularly at the time of the loss of its territory, when the call was made during the battle of Mosul, which was a turning point<sup>3</sup> for female attacks.

The third observation relates to the relationship between jihadism, gender and masculinity, which was already mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death*, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Interview with Alexandra Dier, Gender expert at the United Nations Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Director, November 22, 2019, Link: <https://centrefor-feministforeignpolicy.org/interviews/2019/12/21/aleksandra-dier>

methodological framework of the first part and which we will take up again here, starting with the specific case of female suicide bombers, in order to generalize the hypothesis to the whole phenomenon of violent extremism.

Indeed, the attack of 29 December 2018, carried out in downtown Tunis by a young female suicide bomber who was a university graduate against a police van and resulting in about twenty injured persons has reopened the debate on the status and role of women jihadists. Nevertheless, the comparative study of suicide bombings committed in the name of national emancipation movements - Kurdish, Palestinian, Tamil and others - testifies to the existence of suicidal acts committed by women. Rather than an essentialist interpretation of the link between jihadism and suicide bombing, the tendency of new research is to relativize the relationship between radicality, masculinity and violence<sup>1</sup>.

The gender dimension is important for understanding the phenomenon of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism. Also, the factors that push towards Daeshian radicalization appear to be the same for both men and women. The individual experience is also similar, with the difference that women experience the identity crisis in a dramatic way that leads to wearing the full veil (burqa) and the withdrawal from the public space controlled by men who appear to be the holders of revealed power. In other words, the structural factors of radicalization are common but the specific features are gendered<sup>2</sup>.

The perspective of the new masculinities allows the relationship between gender and religious extremism to be more nuanced. Masculinity refers not only to the identity of men but to practices

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Joseph Alagha & Didier le Roy, "Women suicide bombers, Islam and masculinity in question", Link: <https://www. areion24. news/2019/11/29/les-femmes-kamikazes-islam ite-et-masculinite-en-question/>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Pearson & Emily Winterbotham, "Women Gender and Daesh Radicalization", 2017. Link: [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/women-gender-and-daesh-radicalisation\(537f74d1-7d58-46f0-adeb-104c58d0e133\)/export.html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/women-gender-and-daesh-radicalisation(537f74d1-7d58-46f0-adeb-104c58d0e133)/export.html)

that subordinate women to men. This makes it possible to understand how violent extremism, for both men and women, is affected by internal and structural factors of domination. In this respect, the interest of the study and the attention paid to masculinity is to open up avenues that go beyond the participation of women in violent<sup>1</sup> extremism towards the struggles and contradictions of contemporary societies.

On the basis of these observations, the methodological framework, the good practices advocated by international organizations and other countries, and the inclusive and participatory vision of accepting diversity, we propose the following four axes of the specific strategy for female “returnees” from conflict zones to the Maghreb countries:

*A - Treat “returning” women on a “case-by-case” basis*, depending on the situation, given their very small number and the singularity of the individual paths that each led to radicalization and possibly violent extremism.

Cases of “returnees” are highly variable and their spectrum is wide, ranging from those who have chosen voluntary return, to those who have been arrested, imprisoned and expatriated, those accompanied by children, widows who have lost their husbands, those accompanied by their husbands, those who have participated in violent extremist acts, those whose conviction and enlistment remains jihadist, those who have broken with the organization of the Islamic State and ideological conviction, etc.

The personalized treatment of these “persons at risk” presupposes a separate security investigation, devoted to all female returnees, as

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<sup>1</sup> CTED Trends Report, Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Fighters: Research Perspectives, February 2019. [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb\\_2019\\_CTED\\_Trends\\_Report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Feb_2019_CTED_Trends_Report.pdf)

well as individual psychological care and professional and social reintegration studied by a committee of experts.

The security investigation - police, judiciary, military - is supposed to reveal the involvement or non-involvement of “returnees” in violent extremist acts.

In the case of involvement supported by evidence established by the authorities and whose perpetrators have benefited from judgements by competent courts, female prisoners and those who are also awaiting trial should be isolated in specialized pavilions within women's civilian prisons and, for children, in re-education centers for minors.

After their release, monitoring and reintegration should be followed up in order to avoid the risk of relapse into violent extremism.

***B - Not separating women from the children who accompany them and work towards the professional integration of parents and the social reintegration of families*** so as not to provoke frustration and resentment, and not to push them back towards radicalization, withdrawal and rejection of the other.

With the authorities' attention focused on the jihadi men, the women and children accompanying them were perceived as “invisible” beings. However, special attention should be paid to all “returnees”, especially women and children, considering them as citizens capable of redemption through an inclusive strategy.

Upstream, relatives and friends should be approached to help “returnees” in deradicalization through reintegrating the family and society, as the former environment and the network of neighbors and friends can play a preventive function against violent extremism through the functions of socialization and social integration.

Downstream, there would be an important role for the social services that tackle de-radicalization through listening, dialogue

and psycho-social care, helping the “returnees” to find a school for their children, a job and family housing; in short, to return to a normal life as ordinary citizens.

In this respect, the experience of the Danish city of Aarhus is a reference and, despite the few failures recorded following the return of certain individuals to the combat zones, is an example of good practice. The preferred option is not prison and repression, but rather co-operation and co-ordination between the police and the municipality to ensure prevention against religious extremism. The model comprises two areas of intervention: one aimed at the individuals concerned and the other at the general population. For individuals, there is counselling, mentoring and emergency management for combatants and their families. For the population, there is awareness-raising through presentations and workshops in collaboration with local communities, mosques and cultural societies, for the reintegration of people at risk who are candidates for departure from or arrival in areas of tension.

***C - Ensure the constitution of a professional body specialized in deradicalization made up of women and men trained in the gender and masculinities perspective.***

This specialized body of practitioners will be, after the intervention of the security body, judges and possibly prison staff, the first social contact point for “returnees” as persons at risk.

Preventing and combating radicalization that can lead to violent extremism requires a multisectoral approach by professionals who are trained in the techniques and methods of de-radicalization and who are also able to work in networks with the administration, NGOs and international institutions.

Specialized staff, consisting of both women and men, are expected to foster a positive approach with “returnees” in order to be able to achieve a relationship of trust and a change in the attitudes of those at risk.

To achieve this, the training requires a triple specialization: legal, psychological and sociological, in order to be able to understand and accompany the “returnees” through interviews and personalized and collective follow-up.

Specialized personnel will be selected from among young graduates of higher university training (holders of a master's degree in legal sciences, and social and human sciences, and submitted to a written and oral competition) before undergoing accelerated training of at least one year by national and international experts in deradicalization.

As part of this theoretical and practical training, access to and sharing of information and specialized documentation will be provided by experts and researchers through seminars and internships.

The training given to specialized personnel will focus on the gender approach with its aspect of masculinities, with the aim of transmitting multidisciplinary and global knowledge in a spirit of solidarity and an inclusive and participatory approach.

It is also a matter of working with female returnees to redefine the status and role of men in the process of radicalization and deradicalization. Such a status and role continue to perpetuate the myth of male domination, due to the frustrations experienced by men who are increasingly deprived of authority and the material and symbolic means to remedy it.

### ***D - Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism through Education and Civic Culture***

Specialized programs to prevent and combat religious extremism should be provided for both young people and adults. Just as it is important to prevent violent extremism in schools and educational and cultural centers, it is equally important to design a specialized program for “returnees”, both men and women that takes into account gender similarities and differences.

Such programs are aimed at building the resilience of young people, especially women, to the messages propagated by violent extremism and fostering positive feelings of identity and belonging within the framework of open and inclusive citizenship.

Practical recommendations include organizing discussions and debates among “returnees” on the themes of violent extremism, citizenship and civil engagement in order to break with the culture of hatred and violence.

The use of the Internet could help to spread a counter-culture against violent messages disseminated by the media - old and new - and to build the capacity of “returnees” by promoting the protection of their privacy and fundamental freedoms.

The ultimate goal is to achieve an environment conducive to the empowerment of women and the protection of their rights through education and civic culture, with adequate training in the acquisition of skills to become active and engaged citizens in an open and peaceful society.

Therefore, training courses and cycles in the form of workshops, practical courses and excursions should be provided for “returnees”, women and children, with a view to ensuring their social and cultural integration.

These courses and training cycles will be organized in the framework of cooperation between the administration, civil society organizations, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Arab Institute for Human Rights and international institutions, such as UNDP and UNESCO. The latter has already prepared and disseminated a reference document online entitled: *Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers*<sup>1</sup>.

## Conclusions

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248087>.



At the end of the elaboration of a Maghrebi strategy based on a gendered and global approach to the question of the return of jihadist women from the zones of tension to the Maghreb countries of origin while taking into account national strategies in the Maghreb, Europe and America as well as recent studies, in particular the UN reports, three conclusions can be drawn:

1 - The interest of the gender approach combined with the study of masculinities allows a relevant reading of sociological factors that are useful for understanding violent extremism and developing a strategy to prevent and combat radicalization and violent extremism. It is in the relationships between men and women that the fabric of domination is woven, leading to feelings of frustration, resentment and exclusion. Jihadist women manage the private sphere and are also active in the public sphere as perpetrators of deadly violence and as supporters of violent extremist men. Despite this variety of roles, women are sexually and socially subordinate to male domination, which is the symbolic pivot of jihadism.

2 - Preventing and combating violent extremism is not a “total security” issue, but it is rather global and multisectoral in nature - economic, political, financial, educational, media, communicational, cultural and religious - in that jihadism, the dominant and contemporary form of violent extremism, is itself global and transnational.

3 - The urgent need to develop and implement a Maghrebi strategy to prevent and combat the phenomenon of the “returnees”, in particular women and children, opens the way for reflection and general debate among the various actors - political decision-makers and civil society organizations - on the values of an inclusive and diversified society that welcomes all members, women and men, through the establishment of a civil link and a horizontal and egalitarian citizenship that is open to the globalization of sharing and communication.

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# **STUDY ON THE RETURN OF MAGHREBI WOMEN FROM THE HOTBEDS OF TENSION THE CASE OF MAURITANIA**

**By Mohamed Saleck OULD BRAHIM**

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## FOREWORD

What assessment can we make of the threat that “foreign terrorist fighters”, particularly the *Maghrebi jihadist women*, represent for the countries to which they will return? What attitudes to adopt towards this category of citizens after their return? And what are the States' reactions to this phenomenon of the return of *Maghrebi jihadist women*?

In the case of Mauritania and, given its dual membership in both the Maghreb and the Sahel areas, the threats of insecurity and their direct and indirect impacts combine with the complexity of the structurally fragile geostrategic condition of the country.

The radicalization process in Mauritania was not linear. Rather, there is a constant back and forth between a hardening and a weakening of the relationship to “*organized religiosity*”. We enter and leave the circle of radicalization with a flexibility that blurs the real grasp of the phenomenon and its deviations towards violence per se<sup>1</sup>.

The mastery of religious texts, which is built in culture and / or in identity in this country, has a two-way effect: on the one hand, it works to protect against deviation in certain cases (individuals who are too imbued with dogmatic knowledge to be lured by extremist speeches). However, in other cases, it acts as a foil for the holders of this knowledge so that they get propelled<sup>2</sup> into the spheres of decision and conception of violent extremists.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mauritania National Report: “Radicalization and citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say”, directed by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.

<sup>2</sup> There are several cases, such as that of Abu Hafs El-Mouritani, alias Mahfoudh Ould El-Waled, who was number 3 and mufti of Al-Qaida, personal friend of and religious advisor to Bin Laden, in “The secret history of jihad”, Lemine Ould Mohamed Salem, Flammarion, Paris, 2018.

At any rate, this observation is part of the lessons learned from field research in Mauritania, for which we devoted the third part of the study, which faithfully adopted the methodological scheme initially indicated in the ToR.

The numerous difficulties encountered during the preparation of this part of the study should be pointed out now. Among other things, we had to deal with the novelty of this type of scientific study, and the lack of awareness at the level of social environments and of security relative to the importance of these studies in order to help shed light on the security issues both for the benefit of society and for the continuation of the state in the future.

This state of affairs had made the target persons very reluctant to provide useful information on this ultra-sensitive subject at the outset, in addition to the difficulty of access to these women for the purposes of the study, who are scattered over a wide geographical area across the country. All the more so as they developed a constant fear of disclosing any information that concerns them, and which could harm them. Thus, they moved away from society in general and men in particular.

These target women and their social environments are in a constant state of dread and anxiety resulting from the feeling of being confronted with society and the State as well as with the international community, which gives them the impression of being intransigent in all areas related to issues of extremism and terrorism - which are in fact problems that concern humanity as a whole. However, the major difficulty we encountered in carrying out the field study was the roughness of Mauritanian geography and the immeasurable extent of its territory when we were following in the footsteps of the Mauritanian jihadist women.

After long research and multiple attempts in all directions, we were fortunately able to overcome with perseverance all of these difficulties by persuading the majority of the public authorities concerned to cooperate with us for the success of the study, and to obtain relevant information from the highest levels of Security



Services, starting with the Ministry of Interior, the General Directorate of National Security in Mauritania and State Security, which is the service directly concerned with the case of women associated with jihadist groups.

We have also called upon the journalists, in particular those working in this field, including some friends and colleagues, who have made their contribution not only in terms of in-depth knowledge of target people's sociology, but also in terms of the collection of jihadist literature which is very extensive, in particular that written by Mauritanian jihadists of great renown.

The collaboration of civil society organizations interested in this problem should also be noted with appreciation. However, the greatest impetus for collaboration that we encountered while carrying out the field study came from the families and social circles close to the target women themselves, due to two factors, namely: for one thing, the openness and simplicity that characterize Mauritanian society, and the high level of trust that those responsible for the study enjoy.

I would like to seize this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all who have helped us accomplish this work. I am convinced that without their contribution, it would not have seen the light of day.

I am addressing, most notably, my friends and fellow researchers, academicians, journalists and experts for the quality of their contribution to the completion of this study: Dr. Didi Ould Saleck, Dr. Sid'Amar Ould Cheikhna, Mohamed Mahmoud Abou El Maali, Abdoulaye Mamadou Bâ, Dr. Oum Kelthoum Mint Hamdinou and Mounina Abdoullah.

May they all find here the expression of my appreciation and gratitude.

**Mohamed Saleck OULD BRAHIM**

Mauritanian expert, Responsible for the coordination  
of the Maghreb study. Nouakchott, January 20, 2020

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Since the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, fragile stability in the Maghreb and Sahel regions was severely impacted, namely by the catastrophic effects of the impacts that followed.
2. However, it would be wise to see that the origins of this destabilization rather go back to a much more ancient history. From the 1980s, Libya already maintained guerrilla movements with separatist tendencies in the Sahel, especially in Chad, Mali and Niger, where open or latent conflicts had long survived. Later, transnational criminal activity carried forward by illicit trafficking networks of all factions, which took advantage of the weakness of the Central Authorities' imprint on certain regions in the Sahel, which were often under-controlled and under-administrated or even ignored, was grafted to the residue of these conflicts.
3. It is in this context of instability and precariousness that the “*frustrated return of Maghrebi nationals*”, commonly called “*Arab Afghans*”, had sown the seeds of radicalization and violent extremism in their countries of origin. At the end of the Cold War, which was marked between 1979 and 1989 by an indirect military confrontation in Afghanistan between the USA and the ex-Soviet Union, these ghosts, who were brainwashed and force-fed by “Islamist” propaganda on Jihad<sup>1</sup> that was propagated by Western and Gulf countries' intelligence services, hardened by the fierce fighting in Afghanistan alongside American intelligence against the Red Army under the generic label of “*Moudjahidines*”, had created in their countries of origin the nuclei of the first terrorist organizations, such as the “*Egyptian Islamic Group*”, the “*Algerian Armed Islamic Group*” (GIA), the “*Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*”

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<sup>1</sup> In 1983 Abderrahmane Azzam, had issued a fatwa, which was taken up by Bin Laden, prescribing jihad in Afghanistan for non-Afghans: “If a span of Muslim territory is attacked, jihad is imposed personally on he who lives in this country and on he who is its neighbor. If they are too few, incapable or reluctant, then this duty is imposed on those who are nearby until gaining the whole world”.

(LIFG), the “*Moroccan Islamic Group*” before opting for “*Islamic Fighting Moroccan Group*”, etc.

4. It was first in the arena of “*jihad*”<sup>1</sup> in Afghanistan that a wide range of radicalized scouts was found, from various “*Islamist*” currents, such as the “*Muslim Brotherhood*”, the “*Salafists*” and other movements. It was through these meetings on the battlefield alongside Afghan combatants that these groups first waged a veritable war of polarization between them, the outcome of which had defined the concept and the operating mode of “*jihad*”, which were adopted by the “*Arab Afghans*”, before being largely galvanized during the post-Afghan period.

5. In the Greater Maghreb, especially in Algeria, radicalization had quickly taken on a terrorist dimension after the double frustration of the Algerian “*Islamists*” of the “*Islamic Salvation Front*” (FIS) after the cancellation of the elections the latter won in 1991. This post-electoral crisis had then precipitated the advent of the “*Armed Islamic Group*” (GIA), which was to constitute, after the end of the “*years of fire*” of the Algerian civil war, the embryo of the next terrorist organizations like the Algerian GSPC aka “*Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat*”, founded in 1998 by *Mokhtar Belmokhtar* and *Hassan Hattab* in dissent with the GIA. Since then, the GSPC had popularized violence, weapons and explosives, radicalization and violent extremism throughout the Sahel region, before pledging allegiance in September 2006 to Al-Qaeda after the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 and changing its name to “*Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*” (AQIM<sup>2</sup>).

6. Before and after its conversion, this same Algerian GSPC had given birth to other terrorist organizations, which swarmed and

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<sup>1</sup> The formalization of the classic doctrine of jihad dates back to the Muslim Middle Ages and is based on the fundamental distinction between offensive jihad (jihād al-talab) of armed propagation of the faith, and defensive jihad (jihād al-dafʿ) of protecting the faithful and their territory. Only the caliph or his representatives have the authority to proclaim jihad, with the approval of the doctors of the law (ulama).

<sup>2</sup> Around 2,500 people were affiliated in 2012.

metamorphosed for a long time in the sub-region, including the “Islamist Group for Jihad in Mauritania” (GIPJM), which was affiliated with it, and many other jihadist organizations in the Sahel that have emerged over the years, such as *Mojwa*, *Signatories by Blood*, *Ansar Charia*<sup>1</sup>, *Boko-Haram*, *Ansardine*, *Support Group for Islam and the Muslims*<sup>2</sup> (GSIM) which includes since March 2017 four main jihadist formations namely “*Ansar Dine*”, “*Qatiba Macina*”, “*Al-Mourabitoune*” and a Malian branch of AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) or even the “*Islamic State in the Grand Sahara*”(EIGS), etc.

7. For nearly 30 years, from Al-Qaida to Daesh via AQIM and other terrorist organizations, the dynamics of radicalization and violent extremism had experienced a surprising development, in particular by combining with the phenomena of globalization and cyber-jihadism and cyber-terrorism, but especially with the demonic calculations of geopolitics, especially after September 11, 2001 and, since the revolts of the Arab Spring in 2011.

8. The issue of the territorialisation / deterritorialization of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism has always been at the heart of questioning since the birth of Al-Qaeda, and it has been exacerbated by the Daesh organization or the “*Islamic State*” after its takeover of huge territories in Syria and Iraq.

9. Admittedly, *Daesh* or the “Islamic State” had remarkably succeeded in taking advantage of the polarization it had generated within jihadist movements through its declaration of “succession” or establishment of the “Islamic Caliphate” in response to the attempt made by the iconic leader of *Al-Qaeda* *Ayman al-Zawahiri*, to deprive him of the legitimacy of command in favor of “*Jabhat al-Nusra*” which was the branch of Al-Qaida in Syria. In fact, the “Islamic State” had gained enormously by proclaiming the “caliphate”, attracting thousands of enthusiastic young people and

<sup>1</sup> From 2015, these two organizations came together under the name “Mourabitoune-Al-Qaïda for jihad in West Africa”, then “Al-Mourabitoune-Al-Qaïda for jihad in Africa”.

<sup>2</sup> The leader of this new formation is Iyad Ag Ghaly.

by generating debate - and even disagreement - among the target groups in more than one place on the legitimacy of the group. It also allowed the leaders of the new “*caliphate*” to bypass many of the figures in the jihadist world by categorizing them as “*hostile organizations*” and describing them with descriptions that sometimes amounted to total expiation.

10. However, the Maghreb and Sahel regions have not really witnessed any particular jihadist attraction in terms of territorialization for the benefit of Daesh or the “*Islamic State*” compared to what happened before with Al-Qaeda and AQIM. Apart from a few organizations, such as “*Boko Haram*” in Nigeria, “*Ansar Bait al-Maqdis*” in Egyptian Sinai and “*Majilis Chourab Chabab al-Islam*” in Libya, the timid “*Soldiers of the Caliphate*” in Algeria, “*Ansar al-Charia*” and the “*Okba Ibn Nafaâ Battalion*” in Tunisia, “Daesh” remained poorly represented from a territorial point of view in the Maghreb and the Sahel. Daesh's emergence and territorial expansion is therefore more of an opportunistic perspective taking advantage of the chaos that made possible the creation of a “state” or to reconstitute the caliphate<sup>1</sup> than a thoughtful new strategy. Besides, unlike Al-Qaeda, Daesh did not seek to establish itself in the Maghreb<sup>2</sup>. Its Maghreb networks rather played the role of relay in the recruitment of the combatants attracted by the jihad in Syria and Iraq, and relatively Libya.

11. On the other hand, in terms of mobilization of human resources, recruitment capacity and staff number, Daesh had succeeded in recruiting a higher number of young Maghrebis and Sahelians, regardless of their countries of origin, compared to Al- Qaida, whose workforce was estimated in 2006 by Western intelligence to be around 33, 000 affiliates.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies, 8,000 Maghrebis (3,000 Tunisians, 2,500 Libyans, 1,200 Moroccans, less than a thousand Algerians and a handful of Mauritanians) have committed to jihad in Syria alongside Daesh.

<sup>2</sup> Brahim Oumansour, “The Maghreb facing AQIM and the IS: new threats, new challenges”, January 2, 2019, IRIS, Paris.

12. In fact, *Daesh* had mobilized between April 2013 and June 2018 around 41, 490 foreign affiliates coming from 80 countries, all age and sex combined, including 6, 577 Maghrebis, who represent 34% of the MENA region, but only 15% of the total affiliated population<sup>1</sup>. Of the total foreign workforce, foreign women represent 4, 761, or 13%, while the number of minors is estimated at 3, 700, or 12%. However, the nuance that needs to be made concerns the fact that among the five largest contributing countries in terms of women affiliates, there are two Maghreb countries which are Tunisia (700) and Morocco (293), which rank after Russia (1000), France (382) and China (350)<sup>2</sup>. The major quota of affiliated women comes from Southeast Asia, which represents around 70% of women, then Western Europe with 44% and Eastern Europe with 42%, while women and minors from Middle East and North Africa accounted for only 8% and less than 1% for affiliates in the sub-Saharan Africa region. Of the total Maghrebi affiliates who represent 15% of *Daesh*'s population, women represent only 5%.

13. If we were to compare the two terrorist groups during the creation of the *Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL), it was on the ground that a remarkable difference was made. While *Al Qaeda* emphasized “*global jihad*”<sup>3</sup>, which precedes the proclamation of the long-awaited “*Islam is caliphate*”, *Daesh* gave priority to creating and strengthening the “*caliphate*” State as an immediate and primordial objective, which it achieved on June 29, 2014 through the famous speech of Caliph Ibrahim aka *Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi*. For the leaders of *Daesh*, this objective of caliphate is a matter of survival: “*It is either to establish the Islamic State or to be eliminated*

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<sup>1</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, Report “From *Daesh* to ‘Diaspora’: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State”, King’s College London, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* The quoted report from King’s College London points out that there are significant differences in the actual figures for the number of women affiliated with *Daesh* globally and locally, particularly in the MENA region, and that the totals in this dataset are largely underestimated.

<sup>3</sup> See the statement of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders, by Osama bin Laden and his allies, of February 23, 1998.

by the flood”, also adding “dawlat al-islam baqiya watatamaddad”<sup>1</sup> (“the Islamic State is lasting and expanding”).

14. However, it is often noted that, as much the political demand of the Jihadist groups at the global level aims at a connection to Islam as a distinctive sign of rallying, as much the survival of the individuals who provide the leadership of its movements at the local level depends strictly on their territorial roots and their families, clans and tribal alliances. It is in this sense that an iconic character like *Mokhtar Belmokhtar* represents a textbook case. It is even the most successful example in sub-Saharan Africa since he remained a leader for more than twenty years while jihadist groups changed ties and alliances. This is precisely due to his strong local roots, embodied by several marriages and matrimonial alliances in different Sahelian environments and different local communities.

15. Now, after Daesh's defeat in Syria and Iraq, the Algerian authorities are concerned about the attempts to redeploy its combatants to other areas, such as the Maghreb, and more generally in Africa. Despite the fact that the Islamic State saw its Caliphate fall in Syria and Iraq after years of fighting, it continues to attract new supporters who pledge allegiance to it, especially the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (EIGS).

16. In this perspective and, even if a “sacred union” is not possible in the sub-region between the two extremist organizations because of the tenacious ideological differences between “Al-Qaeda” and “Daesh”, the quality of personal relationships between their leaders and their fighters can avoid a direct confrontation between the two, which makes them more difficult to track down and more dangerous.

17. With the magnitude of the threats that continue to affect the endogenous and exogenous stability of the Maghrebi and Sahelian regions, the destabilizing factors are multiple and accumulate over the years: the structural and cyclical fragility of the States, the

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the second issue of Dabiq, the Daesh propaganda magazine.

extreme poverty of populations, the drought and the degradation of the natural environment, the internal power struggles that gangrene there, the growing militarization of socio-political relations, the strong demographic pressure, regional conflicts, general insecurity and foreign inclinations. Admittedly, with the Libyan chaos and the proliferation of impressive quantities of armaments in the aftermath of the disintegration of this country, the situation has become more complicated<sup>1</sup>.

18. The situation in the Sahel, this “*sea between two shores*”, as described by the great European historian of the Annals Fernand Braudel, calls on the various actors, in particular decision-makers, governments and regional and sub-regional organizations, to adopt a good sense of strategic partnership and to collaborate skillfully to break the cycle of violence and avoid the endless entrenchment of insecurity in the sub-region.

19. It requires a shared perception of common interests and threats, which would make it possible to go beyond strategies, hitherto limited, which clash with or counteract each other, in order to be able to coordinate efforts and manage the means of combating insecurity.

20. Only atypical, concerted, meticulously prepared and executed actions could reverse the situation. It has become essential to introduce new terms of exchange with regard to understanding and analyzing phenomena linked to the evolution of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism, even if these phenomena are currently going through difficult times, because if Daesh was defeated in Syria and Iraq, it is not yet eliminated. ISIS prisoners should not be able to escape<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The dispersal of more than 20 million weapons, which are said to circulate throughout the Sahel, had favored attacks carried out from the north of Mali, in Chad and up to the Central African Republic. The supply of weapons to Libyan opponents by Western and Arab countries has not helped either, the return of peace and stability.

<sup>2</sup> Daesh can only take advantage of the current Turkish offensive in northern Syria, which risks accelerating the invasion and then the redeployment of its prisoners amid the confusion on the ground that is currently prevailing in the sub-region. The predominantly



21. In fact, North Africa in general, the Maghreb and the Sahel in particular, remain two destinations that can be favored by jihadists for their return, for men, women and minors alike. Indeed, several Maghrebi fighters with linguistic and cultural assets that allow them to merge in the local landscape can choose in case of return to continue jihadist action either in the region of “Sinai” in Egypt, which is characterized by its proximity to the Iraqi-Syrian hotbeds where the organization “Ansar Beit Al Maqdis” was already established and which is affiliated with Daesh, or in Libya, where a multitude of terrorist organizations and groups abound, and where the climate is favorable due to the absence of a real state and the persistence of chaos, particularly in the south, where tribal, criminal and terrorist influences mingle.

22. The Sahel region, which is already infested with groups tending to Al-Qaeda and even less with other Daesh-led groups, also offers Maghrebi fighters another opportunity to relocate jihad. The Sahel is an area where the vulnerability of States, due to the insufficient means of fighting, can encourage combatants returning from Syria, especially, to come and take refuge there and continue jihad through a probable change of Allegiance. Maghrebis would opt for this possibility because they can better adapt to groups led largely by Maghrebis or French-speaking Sahelians like *AQIM*, *Al Mourabitoun*, *Ansar Eddine*, etc. The few foreign terrorist fighters from West Africa can also choose this option<sup>1</sup>.

23. Indeed, the “*return of Maghreb women from hotbeds of tension*” to the Maghreb countries or elsewhere poses thorny social, psychological, political and security problems, both in terms of understanding the complexity of this phenomenon in all its aspects and of its management. This attitude reflects the absence of an integrated conceptual framework supposed to be oriented towards a

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Kurdish militia of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), targeted by the Turkish offensive, claimed to detain around 12, 000 Daesh supporters, including 2, 500 to 3, 000 foreigners.

<sup>1</sup> Abdelhak Bassou, “Foreign terrorist fighters: the time of returns”, OCP Policy Center, Rabat, 2017.

common strategy in this area, to serve the countries of the greater Maghreb in order to be able to take care of the social and political implications of the fight against terrorism and the violent extremism in the sub-region.

24. Recently, the UN has noted the perverse effects of “gender bias” such that “women tending to be treated more leniently by the justice system because of often false assumptions about their influences and their limited powers”. Due to this differentiated treatment, these women tend to be left to fend for themselves more often and, thus, to be exposed “to a greater potential risk of recidivism and re-radicalization<sup>1</sup>”.

25. In recent years, women and minors have been actively involved in terrorist attacks. In Nigeria, for example, a report from the US counter-terrorism center (West Point) showed that Boko Haram had employed 244 of the 434 suicide bombers to carry out attacks in the country in 2011 and 2017, or more than 56%.

26. What assessment can be made of the threat that “foreign terrorist fighters” in general, and *Maghrebi jihadist women* in particular, pose to the countries to which they will return? And what attitudes should be taken towards this category of citizens after their return? What is the States' response to this phenomenon?

27. These kinds of questions are increasingly being asked elsewhere, especially in Western countries, but unfortunately, they are still taboo or almost in our sub-region.

28. In the case of Mauritania, and in view of its dual Maghrebi-Sahelian membership, the threats of insecurity and their direct and indirect impact are combined with the complexity of the country's structurally fragile geostrategic condition.

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<sup>1</sup> The eighth report of the Secretary General on the threat posed by ISIL (Daesh) to international peace and security, S/2019/103.

29. In the aftermath of a long series of cascading periods of exception, Mauritania, which remains heavily contingent on the disproportionate gaps between the geography of its history and, the history of its geography, found itself, during the period between 2005 and 2011 inappropriately trapped in the midst of a perilous duel between David and Goliath fighting for control of the Sahel.

30. After about half a century of independence, Mauritania was once again caught in the crossfire of a battle between antagonistic international and sub-regional strategies, even though they were subtly convergent and coordinated. At the time, Franco-American tactical arrangements were converging to make Mauritania the spearhead of their fight against Al-Qaeda in the Sahel region, while the country was fully targeted by AQIM's new survival strategy at the time, which consisted of abandoning the major urban centers in Algeria under the pressure of army fire, and descending further south into the Saharo-Sahelian space.

31. The issue of such returns of foreign terrorist fighters is all the more worrying since statistics from several studies show that one in nine of those returning fighters manages to evade security measures and carry out an attack. This means that out of every 1, 000 combatants who will return over the next two years, 111 will escape the vigilance of the security services and will carry out an attack.

32. King's College London study found that only 256 women had returned home, representing 4% of all returnees and less than 5% of the total Daesh population. Approximately 25% (1080 children) of the minors returned home, representing 17% of all returnees. Western Europe and Central Asia account for most of the areas of return for women and minors, sometimes as many as 50% (especially for minors). African countries and the Middle East do not exceed 1% (23 minors, 21 women).

33. However, the return of these combatants to their countries of origin raises questions that go beyond the question of international

law<sup>1</sup> and the nature of the treatment that must be accorded to them, namely whether, in these countries, the conditions that led them to become radicalized have changed or whether they will return to live in the same environment that had facilitated their departure?

34. In this case, not only would the reintegration and rehabilitation of these jihad veterans be difficult, but it would also give them arguments for radicalizing the younger ones. This is the kind of reflection that every combatant must have when returning to his or her hometown, district or neighborhood. The “treatment” of these radicalized young people on their return to their countries of origin would therefore be all the easier if the conditions that had led to their departure have changed: on the one hand, this would facilitate their reintegration by giving them food for thought and thus encouraging them to rethink their ways; on the other hand, it would deprive the diehards among them, who would be determined to continue indoctrinating the youngest, of the arguments (marginalization and precariousness) that had previously been used to recruit the victims of these hazards.

35. What should the measures to be taken against the threats posed by the return of foreign terrorist fighters be aimed at? Are the measures enacted by international bodies, such as Security Council resolutions<sup>2</sup>, sufficient or should specific measures be devised to deal with the returns? How can the entry of these terrorists through border crossings be detected? Should we opt for intransigence and security? Who should be the actors in the reception and treatment of these stray youths after their return home?

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<sup>1</sup> Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) of 24 September 2014 states in its recommendation No. 2 that the Council “reaffirms that all States shall prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups by effective border controls and controls on issuance of identity papers and travel documents, and through measures for preventing counterfeiting, forgery or fraudulent use of identity papers and travel documents”.

<sup>2</sup> Résolutions n° 2368 (2017), 2178, 1526 (2004), 2253 (2015), S/2016/92, S/2016/501, S/2016/830, S/2017/97, S/2017/467, S/2018/80 and S/2018/770.

36. In fact, on these issues, States must sometimes find it difficult to arbitrate between what is legally correct and the popular inclinations dictated by the subjective and the affective. Opting for automatic and excessive repression cannot be, in the view of several specialists/experts, the appropriate solution.

37. Restrictive and repressive policies discourage fighters who have become aware of their mistakes and who have revolted against the barbaric acts of *Al-Qaeda*, *Daesh*, *Annousra*, etc. from choosing repentance and returning.

38. Such policies also reduce the likelihood that families will encourage their members involved with terrorist organizations to return, lest they be sentenced to heavy penalties without proper study of their cases and without differentiating between those who are diehard and irretrievable, and those who show a desire for repentance. Any exaggeration or automation of repression can only generate injustices, which may in turn be a source of future radicalization and violence.

39. As in the case of the fight against radicalization and violent extremism, the security and repression package does not seem to be gathering favorable opinions either among a large majority of decision-makers, or in the ranks of researchers, analysts and experts; or, of course, among public opinion and human rights defenders.

40. There should also be no automatic amnesty policies on mere declarations of repentance by returnees. This could allow terrorists using the “*Taqia*” technique to hide their games and thus escape the controls that could determine their true intentions.

41. The solution can therefore only come from an intelligent combination of repression and rehabilitation. A report entitled “Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration” explains the dilemma Europeans face in dealing with Foreign

Terrorist Fighters and concludes that a combination of what can be described as a carrot and a stick<sup>1</sup> is needed.

42. Several provisions of the Security Council resolution 2178 on foreign terrorist fighters can serve as inspiration for States in their new measures concerning the return of this category of people. Measures such as those taken at borders to prevent the departure of fighters to Syria and Iraq can also help in detecting returns. However, the issue of returning, which will become more acute over the next two years and which concerns more than half of the world's states, requires a new Security Council resolution.

43. On the one hand, the resolution would encourage states to take the threat seriously and to apprehend it as a global danger that can only be fought or contained through everyone's involvement. On the other hand, the resolution would serve as a guide for the inspiration of common bases for regional, national and even local measures.

44. Foreign terrorist fighters' families, friends and relatives are an important link in the treatment of these persons when they return to their countries of origin. They can even represent, for the countries that want to encourage returns, a tool that can help convince the most recalcitrant among them.

45. Many, if not the majority, of these fighters remained in contact with their families after their departures. Some family members have even provided fruitful information about the lives of their loved ones in Syria and Iraq, as sometimes, in their desperation, those who have joined Daesh confide in their friends or relatives to describe the horrors of their adventures.

46. These same relatives can play an important role in the reintegration of the foreign terrorist fighters who would prove to be "recoverable". This involvement of relatives and friends implies the participation of civil society alongside justice, security, health

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Abdelhak Bassou, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters: The Time of Returns", OCP Policy Center, Rabat, 2017.

services and municipalities in order to organize debates, training, awareness-raising and the collection of ideas on the best way to make the foreign terrorist fighters' families an active player in processing the returns.

47. In Mauritania, it was found that the process of radicalization there was not linear. Rather, there is a constant back and forth movement between a hardening and a weakening of the relationship with “organized” religiosity. One enters and leaves the circle of radicalization with a flexibility that blurs the real grasp of the phenomenon and its deviations towards violence per se.

48. The mastery of religious texts, which is rooted in culture and/or identity in this country, has a two-way effect: on the one hand, it acts as protection against deviation in some cases (individuals too imbued with dogmatic knowledge to be lured by extremist discourse) but, in other ones, it acts as a foil for the holders of this knowledge, so that they can be propelled into the decision-making and conceptual spheres of violent extremists<sup>1</sup>.

## **PART I**

### **CONTEXT, CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS OF THE PHENOMENON, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, ISSUES AND TRENDS**

1. In Mauritania, radicalization and violent extremism have emerged as phenomena coming from “outside”. Until recently, they remained unknown to the public opinion and the security services, as well as to the entire population, namely women.

2. Historically, the beginnings of these phenomena date back to the mid-1980s, with the emergence and then the entrenchment of

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<sup>1</sup> The Mauritania National Report: “Radicalization and citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say”, directed by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.

a political current referring to “*Islamism*”<sup>1</sup>, which later served as a breeding ground for “*Salafism*”<sup>2</sup> as a movement, which was its starting point<sup>3</sup>.

3. Subsequently, the dramatic evolution of the phenomenon had followed three distinct phases: (i) indoctrination through the establishment of theological institutes in Nouakchott and in some towns in the interior regions; (ii) changes in dressing habits observed among men, but especially among women; and (iii) recruitment in *mahadras* and mosques, especially in rural areas.

4. The germ of radicalization had taken more than a decade to move from the hibernation phase to the violent one, which culminated in the emergence of terrorism and violent extremism. The first public announcement of the presence of the jihadist Salafist movement in Mauritania dates back to 1994 with the announcement made public of the dismantling of a “Salafist” group in relation to foreign extremists.

5. The transition from effective radicalization to violence took place through the appearance of the “*Takfirist*”<sup>4</sup> movement, military training in the camps of the Algerian GSPC or “*Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat*”<sup>5</sup>. Shortly before its conversion, the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Larousse, since the 1970s, the term has been used to designate a current of Islam that has made Sharia the sole source of law and the functioning of society with the aim of establishing a Muslim state governed by the religious.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Revue Critique Internationale* 2010/2 (No. 47), “The concept of ‘Salafism’ refers to a current of restoration of the purity of original Islam, as it would have been practiced at the time of the first four caliphs, from 632 to 661, then in the early days of the Umayyad dynasty, established in Damascus between 661 and 7503.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the symposium entitled “The culture of peace and moderation as a means of fighting violent extremism”, (the Mauritanian approach), IMES, April 2012.

<sup>4</sup> An Islamist extremist group born of a split within the “Muslim Brotherhood”, follower of an ultra-violent ideology, namely the takfir which literally means “excommunication”, pronounced against the kâfir (Arabic: كافر, “miscreant, unbeliever, ungrateful, infidel”, plural kouffar, كفار / kuffār), an accusation that justifies killing. The takfirists consider Muslims who do not share their point of view as apostates, which authorizes them - according to their ideology - to legitimately shed their blood.

<sup>5</sup> Founded in 1998 by Hassan Hattab during the Algerian civil war; at that time, he was in dissidence from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). In September 2006, it had pledged



Algerian GSPC even gave birth to an *Islamist Group for Jihad in Mauritania*, which was affiliated to it, in order to introduce a “franchise” Jihad<sup>1</sup> on Mauritanian territory.

6. During this period, a remarkable change was perceived through a striking change in clothing habits, especially among women. Indeed, the black veil (Niqab), which was imposed by radical Islamists, covering the whole body and which was imported from Asian countries, had nothing to do with the (*Abaya*) which was rather a classic accessory<sup>2</sup>.

7. For the first time, Mauritians were confronted with the cruelty of radicalization and violent extremism. On 4 June 2005, a murderous attack was perpetrated against a military unit of the national army based at “*Lemghety*”, a thousand kilometers northeast of Nouakchott, by terrorists claiming to be Algerian GSPC. The shock was very strong and the death toll was very heavy. 15 soldiers died, 17 others were wounded and 2 were missing. This was the concrete beginning of the terrorist threat in Mauritania<sup>3</sup>.

8. Long before this tragedy, strong signs of radicalization have appeared since 1999. They had gradually developed into violent extremism and terrorist activity. Sahelian “smugglers” had robbed

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allegiance to Al-Qaeda and, in September 2006, it became “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” (AQIM).

<sup>1</sup> Although the formalization of the classical doctrine of jihad dates back to the Muslim Middle Ages and is based on the fundamental distinction between offensive jihad (jihad al-talab), the armed propagation of the faith, and defensive jihad (jihad al-daf), the protection of the faithful and their territory, where only the Caliph or his representatives have the authority to proclaim jihad, with the approval of the doctors of the law (ulema), the concept and modus operandi of contemporary “jihad” were adopted by the “Arab Afghans”, before being largely galvanized during the post-Afghan period, in reference to a fatwa issued by Abdullah Azzam in 1983 to encourage the enlistment of young Arabs and Muslims to fight alongside the Americans against the Red Army in Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> Mounina Mint Abdoullah, “Study on the level of integration of human rights and gender in the security sector, in the framework of the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the five countries of the G5 Sahel”, The Mauritania provisional data collection report, UN WOMEN, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed Mahmoud Abou Al Maali, specialist in terrorism matters.

a group of stragglers from the Dakar Rally caravan. In 2000, the threat of the GSPC had been raised by the DGSE and the CIA at the time of the cancellation of the Niger stages of the same rally.

9. In February 2003, the jihadist threat was further confirmed after the kidnapping of 32 German and Austrian tourists in Algeria by *Amara Saifi*, alias *Abderrezak “le Para”*. In January 2004, the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> stages of the Dakar rally, between Néma in Mauritania, Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina and Mopti in Mali, were cancelled under threats from “terrorist” groups operating in the border zone between Algeria, Mauritania and Mali.

10. In July 2004, Mauritania was unofficially declared to be in the line of fire of the “Al-Qaeda”<sup>1</sup> nebula and threatened with reprisals following the publication of a communiqué attributed to *Al-Zarkawi*, former boss of the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda<sup>2</sup>.

11. Violent extremism in Mauritania, even if it has its distant origins in the emergence and entrenchment of the Salafist movement in the years 1983-1993, has remained a new phenomenon for the majority of the Mauritanian population, which is Sunnite, having always rejected excesses and abuses in view of its educational principles based on the values of moderation and tolerance.

12. The anthropology of Mauritanian society shows that, despite the various forms of internal rivalry, latent relations with violence are always “managed” and are not perceived as such by the mass, which presents itself as a pacifist and conciliatory entity.

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<sup>1</sup> Mohamed Saleck Ould Brahim, “Mauritania, Al-Qaeda and the Others”, MULTIPOL - 9 January 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Already in 1999, when Mauritania had established diplomatic relations with Israel, Mauritanian Islamists had taken up the Palestinian cause, which was extremely popular in Mauritania. It was in this context that a young âlim and preacher, Mohamed El Hacen Ould Dedew (born in 1965), emerged on the scene after writing a fatwa (a legal opinion) intended to show that Muslim states are forbidden to maintain diplomatic relations with the State of Israel as it exists.

Society has remained generally cohesive, especially in rural areas where multiple forms of tacit mutual aid exist within families, communities, villages and tribes, despite temporary disputes over the management of water points, pastures, livestock and agricultural land. Cases of conflict that might arise were often managed by traditional and religious chiefdoms. This is why, for some researchers, *“terrorism was not born within the Mauritanian social fabric, it is an external phenomenon that cannot be allowed to be imported and to spread here without firm resistance”*<sup>1</sup>.

13. The phenomena of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism have emerged in Mauritania as the products of an *“external”* socio-economic and geopolitical dynamic, which is often linked to the sub-regional geopolitical situation, both Maghrebi and Sahelian, which characterizes the country's dual affiliation in the two major regions of the Greater Maghreb<sup>2</sup> and sub-Saharan Africa.

14. The syndromes of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism have penetrated Mauritania through the porous borders with its North African and African neighbors. Bridges have been established in the far northern regions of the country with neighboring Algeria, which had experienced a decade of fratricidal civil war, which is also known as the *“years of fire”* between 1991 and 2002. The same scenario also occurred with Mali in the East and in the South, which had also experienced a situation of advanced insecurity, which had degenerated into a guerrilla movement and then into a state of separation of the northern regions from the rest of the country (1992-2015).

15. Two events will mark the beginning of the direct confrontation of this movement with Mauritania<sup>3</sup>: the arrest in

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<sup>1</sup> Ba Abdoulaye, researcher, former Advisor to President Sidi Cheikh Abdallahi, 2007-2008. Interview of 30. 06. 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Between March and April 2005, the authorities had arrested 19 young jihadists who were travelling back and forth between the Algerian GSPC camps and the Mauritanian territory, who had recognized in the conducted interrogations the role of socialization networks in Salafism or neo-fundamentalism.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*.

2005 of a group of 12 members of the GIPJM, who were trained and educated in the GSPC camps in Algeria and who returned to launch an urban guerrilla war in Mauritania. This arrest was followed by the total dismantling of this group. The second event was the attack on a military post in June 2005 in “*Lemghaiti*”, in the north of the country, which resulted in the death of 15 soldiers and 6 members of the GSPC.

16. The confrontation reached its climax in 2007 - 2009, when a series of bloody actions were perpetrated on the national territory. These include attacks on isolated military units, the murder of three Western nationals and two members of the security forces, and the kidnapping of Westerners. These actions were accompanied by the dismantling of several structures affiliated with the terrorist organization and the imprisonment of seventy of its members.

17. Mauritania, which already has unavoidable vulnerabilities linked to its own geography, was ill-prepared politically, economically, socially and security-wise to deal effectively with the development of radicalization, violent extremism and the threat of terrorism.

18. At one point, Al-Qaeda had the strategic ambition to tap into the huge reservoir of political frustration and widespread popular anger in the Maghreb and Sahel regions through exploiting the exacerbation of public opinion against an increasingly radical<sup>1</sup> and perilous American foreign policy in a fast-moving Muslim world in order to entice thousands of young people in need of a living and with no way out on the horizon, other than to be embarked in the dugout canoes of death to reach the other European shore of the Mediterranean.

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<sup>1</sup> In the name of the new world order, the United States wanted to be the “world’s policeman”, or even impose its system of values on the whole world. It had invaded Iraq in 1991 as part of an international coalition known as the “Gulf War”, which had had disastrous consequences: the American presence in the holy places of Islam and the obvious economic and military hegemony of the United States revealed to the whole world that we had indeed moved on to another era in the history of international relations.

19. At the time, the International Islamist movement of Jihad was in the process of relocating its nuisance potential from the Muslim eastern region (Asia and the Arab Mashreq) to find refuge and support in a Sahel that was an ecologically and economically dilapidated and neglected region, seemingly becoming a new “Eldorado” for “terrorism”, where the desert constitutes a veritable sanctuary for the most violent activities, particularly in this no-man's-land in northern and north-eastern Mauritania where the borders of Mauritania, Algeria and Mali are lost immutably in the ruthless immensity of the Sahara, constituting a real Sahelo-Saharan “paradise” for all kinds of smuggling and illicit trafficking: firearms, cigarettes, drugs, etc.

20. As a result, a large proportion of the poor populations of the Sahel, deprived of their rights to human security in the broadest sense of the term, including food security, health security, access to drinking water, etc., had often found themselves forced to pledge allegiance to criminal, rebel and/or terrorist groups in order to either benefit from the fallout from illicit trafficking or to obtain ultimate protection. Added to this are the perverse effects of the establishment of parallel economies built on corruption and racketeering.

21. The ambitious project of the “sanctuarization” of the Sahel region and its Maghreb borders by delocalized terrorist groups, of both old networks and those that have recently been re-created, has never ceased since 1995 to the present day<sup>1</sup>.

22. As part of a survival strategy, operational connections had been forged between terrorist groups in the Sahel, such as the famous Algerian GSPC, which became AQIM in 2006, the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group or GICM, the Libyan GICL and the Tunisian GICT, as well as other small terrorist groups from

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<sup>1</sup> According to Abdelhak Bassou, Senior Fellow at the OCP Policy Center, population is the real issue: “Whoever wins the population wins this war. The jihadists are appreciated in some localities because they work, even if it is a bit Mao-style. On the one hand, we see groups that value the population, and on the other, states that seem to ignore it”.

various Sahelian countries, such as *Ansarou Allah Al Mourabitoune*, those of Mali and Niger, such as the *Mujaou*, *Ansar Dine*, those of Nigeria, such as “*Boko Haram*”, and the criminal and mafia networks, to secure a territorial backbone in order to perpetuate their illicit transnational activities and acquire the necessary means to develop and continue their criminal activities.

23. Having been infiltrated by both the intelligence services of the neighboring countries and international intelligence, the terrorist networks had developed a dynamic that was interwoven with the geopolitical calculations of extremely sensitive and complex regional rivalries. This attitude has continued to fuel the instrumentalization of security as a major issue in the power relations, as well as in the management of conflicts of political, economic and strategic interests at the regional level.

24. In the case of Mauritania, the threats of insecurity in the Sahel and their direct impact combine with the complexity of the country's fragile geostrategic condition. In the aftermath of a long series of cascading periods of exception, Mauritania, which remains heavily dependent on the disproportionate gaps between the geography of its history and the history of its geography, found itself inappropriately trapped in the midst of a perilous duel in the Sahel between the feuds of David and Goliath.

25. Mauritania was caught in the crossfire of a battle between diametrically opposed international and sub-regional strategies even though they often converge, albeit in very subtle ways. At that time, Franco-American tactical arrangements were converging to make Mauritania a spearhead in their “fight” against Al-Qaeda in the Sahel region, while the country was fully targeted by AQIM's new strategy of survival through its descent further south into the Saharo-Sahelian space, especially after the victory of the Algerian government forces with the surrender of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and the adoption of the “Civil Concord” law in Algeria in 1999, which allowed Islamist fighters who were not guilty of

murder or rape to escape prosecution if they decided to surrender, and the defeat of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in 2002.

26. AQIM and its ramifications were obstinately seeking to develop their actions further south as part of an approach that would enable them to control illicit trafficking networks in order to obtain even more funds to finance their activities and, as a result, be more secure from the pursuit that awaited them in urban Algeria.

27. This was how Mauritania's no-man's-land in the far north and east became a prime breeding ground for the potential harmfulness of the various terrorist and smuggling networks delocalized in the Sahel region.

28. Being the largest Atlantic gateway to the Sahel with its 754 km of coastline, its oversized surface area of more than one million km<sup>2</sup>, its difficult and rugged relief, its desert labyrinths with low human density, Mauritania was the most fragile and least controllable Sahelian country par excellence. From then on, the peripheral borders of the North and Northeast of Mauritania, i. e. the borders with its neighbors Algeria and Mali<sup>1</sup>, which were immutably lost in the merciless vastness of the desert, miraculously offered a real paradise for all sorts of illicit trafficking: arms, cigarettes, fuel, drugs, currency, etc.

29. Historically, Mauritania, which had always been an “Islamic state”<sup>2</sup> long before the problematic emergence of this vocabulary, has remained the weakest link in the Sahel region, despite having inherited the grandeur of the Almoravid Empire, (in

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<sup>1</sup> Didi Ould Saleck, “The Mauritanian military intervention in Mali: a national security strategy or the implementation of foreign agendas?”, a note presented on behalf of the Centre d'études stratégiques du Maghreb at the International Forum: *National Defense: Between Sovereign Bonds and Regional Challenges*, Kasidi Merbah University, Ouargla, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Islamic State”, which makes one shudder in international news, is, in the Mauritanian popular unconscious, nothing more or less than a national identity. Mauritania is, after Pakistan and before Iran, one of the forerunners in displaying the religious referent in its official name.

Arabic al-Murābitūn). This Berber dynasty had constituted the largest empire in the Sahel, encompassing the western Sahara, the western part of the Maghreb and much of the Iberian Peninsula in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, after taking over Aoudaghost, which was the main Sahelian trading post of the empire of Ghana in 1054, founding the city of Marrakesh and conquering Spain in 1086. For several centuries, the ancient historical cities of Mauritania, such as Ouadane, Tinigui, Chinguetti, Azougui, Tichit, Oualata, Combi Saleh etc., had shone by their inexorable practice of flourishing trans-Saharan trade and their important geostrategic and military positions.

30. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mauritania had attracted the eye of the French, who had already settled in Saint-Louis in neighboring Senegal and who saw it as a strategic location to control the peripheries of their colonies in North and West Africa and to neutralize nationalist resistance movements.

31. Nevertheless, the geopolitical status of Mauritania today, as well as its economic and military potential, especially before 2014, make the imperial memory of this country more than a shadow of its former self. Confronted with threats of insecurity from all directions, the logic of things and common sense rather call on Mauritania to resign itself inevitably to make the politics of its means even if it does not have the means of its policy.

32. The “*Al-Qaeda's Branch in the Islamic Maghreb*” (BAQMI) needed to acquire a new symbolic legitimacy in the Sahel. While dreaming of a rapid internationalization of the war against it, it called for driving the Americans out of the Sahel region and for curbing their strong military intrusion, which was increasingly noted at the time, in the regions of Gao in Mali, Agadez in Niger and Nema in Mauritania<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Didi Ould Saleck, “Elements of official policy in Mauritania to fight terrorism”, Summary of the text, Fayçal Centre for Islamic Studies and Research, 2015



33. Finally, BAQMI, which became AQMI (AQIM), had succeeded in setting up operational jihadist networks that were sufficiently equipped in terms of weapons and logistics to open a new front against Mauritania, which had suffered several terrorist offensives in several parts of its territory between February 2007 and February 2011, including the center of Nouakchott<sup>1</sup>.

34. On 24 December 2007, 4 French tourists were coldly murdered on Christmas Eve near Aleg. Two days later, three Mauritanian soldiers were killed in the military base of *Al-Ghallaouia*, in the Northeast of the country. The attack was claimed by the Al-Qaeda Brigade in the Islamic Maghreb (BAQMI) - formerly the Algerian GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat). On 5 January 2008, the organizers of the Paris-Dakar decided to cancel the “mythical” race, preferring to follow the directives of the French government, which warned of possible terrorist threats in Mauritania: the country in which most of the events are to be held. On the night of 1 February 2008, the “V.I.P.”, the largest nightclub in Nouakchott, and the Israeli embassy adjoining it, were targeted: six individuals opened fire on the scene, wounding a French woman and two Franco-Mauritanians. The attack was again claimed by Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb.

35. In April 2008, a security forces assault on a terrorist hideout located in the residential area of Nouakchott resulted in three deaths (a police officer and two jihadists) and a chase with heavy exchange of gunfire in the late afternoon.

36. In September 2008, 12 soldiers were killed in an AQIM attack on a patrol stationed in *Tourine*, in the far north of the country (80 kilometers north of the town of Zouérate). Among the attackers were reportedly at least ten Mauritanians<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, “Mauritania: the strategy of a former future weak link”, Website review SciencesPo 7/2013, accessed 3 October 2019, CERI, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> *La Tribune* Newspaper, n°464, of Monday, August 10, 2009.

37. For AQIM, it was undoubtedly a matter of demonstrating that the military junta, which had overthrown the government of “elected” President *Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi* on 6 August 2008, by denouncing its “weakness” in the face of terrorism, could hardly better protect the immense national territory of more than one million km<sup>2</sup>.

38. On June 23, 2009, the Evangelist and humanitarian American national Christopher Legget was murdered near the Ksar market, in the very heart of the capital. The hunt to capture the perpetrators was immediately launched and led to the arrest of several accomplices, some of whom were wearing explosive belts. Subsequently, according to the police, several cells had been dismantled and the number of “Salafist” detainees was set to increase as the investigations progressed.

39. On August 9, 2009, a suicide bomber attack targeted the French Embassy in Nouakchott. It was later claimed, on August 18 2009, by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), via a press release on the Internet.

40. On 29 November 2009, a 15-car convoy of Catalan humanitarian aid workers was attacked in broad daylight on the road between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Three Spanish hostages were kidnapped and taken to the north of Mali. The following December, in the southeast, near the border with Mali, an Italian couple was kidnapped on a major road.

41. In February 2010, Pierre Camate (abducted in Niger) was released in exchange for Mali's release of four AQIM terrorists, including *Hammada Ould*, *Ahmed Khairou*, who later founded the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and *Idris Ould Mohamed Lemine*, who was to commit a car bomb attack in Néma in the far east of Mauritania.

42. From that point on, the war between Mauritania and AQIM had reached a decisive phase, when direct clashes with the army and Western hostage taking became commonplace.

43. In August 2010, two suicide attacks perpetrated by AQIM struck the military camp of Basseknou, near the Malian border. In February 2011, another attack was narrowly thwarted in front of another garrison near Nouakchott.

44. Simply put, the Sahel desert, indomitable but peaceful, which once had had a glorious past with the great medieval Almoravid expeditions and with their Atlantic and Mediterranean cultural and spiritual influence, became at one point a sanctuary that sheltered the regrouping, retreat and training camps for Al-Qaeda recruits.

45. The ideas of the leader of the former GSPC, which became BAQIM then AQIM, and of the Emir of the South of Algeria *Mokhtar Belmokhtar*<sup>1</sup>, known as “Belawar” alias “Khaled Abou Al Abbas”, were clear enough to predict a dramatic evolution of the situation of growing insecurity in our country and in the sub-region.

46. Since the advent of jihadist small groups, the involvement of men and women in these groups, beyond any ideological embodiment<sup>2</sup>, has always provided an outlet for the social,

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<sup>1</sup> After having fought in Afghanistan alongside Ghulb Dine Hekmetyar's Islamic party, he had fought during the “Black Decade” in southern Algeria with the GIA, then with the GSPC. He was one of the main architects of the rallying of Algerian jihadists to Al-Qaeda, which led to the formation of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007. Belmokhtar is also the first leader of AQIM to establish himself outside Algeria in the Sahara and Sahel countries, mainly in Mali. In December 2012, after a conflict with the other AQIM leaders, he created his own movement: “The Signatories by blood”, whose main action was the hostage taking of “Ain Amenas”, in Algeria, in January 2013. In August 2013, his group merged with the “MUJAO” to form “Al-Mourabitoune”, of which he was appointed emir in July 2015. He finally rallies again “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” in December 2015. Since 11 November 2003, he has been on the list of organizations and individuals considered by the United Nations to be close to Al-Qaeda or the Taliban; a list established under Resolution 1267 of 1999 aimed at fighting terrorism.

<sup>2</sup> “To each his own way, and God for all! We [radical movements] do not speak the same language: what the Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood] call 'mousslimin' [Muslims] can be for us moufssidin fil ard [corrupters on earth], so we have the obligation to annihilate them or at least to neutralize them”, (excerpt from the words of a 47-year-old Salafist, Barkéol, the Kiffa region, in the Mauritania National Report: *Radicalization and Citizenship: What*

psychological and political tensions that women, in particular, experienced in their daily lives, and although some of them may have come from the middle classes, they still were affected viscerally by a certain generalized malaise.

47. From 2009 onwards, Mauritania has resolutely committed itself to meeting the major challenges posed by the persistence and scale of the terrorist threat by developing a comprehensive strategy based on firmness and an offensive stance.

48. At present, there are two major terrorist groups coexisting in the Saharan strip: on the one hand Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is part of the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which is locally rooted among Malians, Tuaregs and Fulani, and on the other hand Daesh or the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, led by *Adnane Abou El Walid Sahraoui*, and composed essentially of Fulani members from the Menaka region.

49. These two nebulae's work was made easy by the weakness of the local armies, with soldiers ready to sell their weapons and since the ransom money from the hostage taking was used to buy weapons. Violent terrorism is localized around two main hot spots: Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, which stretches across Lake Chad and spills into Niger and northern Cameroon. The Malian outbreak of AQIM is not isolated from what happened in Algeria and southern Libya.

50. Danger relates to contacts between Daesh and the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), and a possible junction between these organizations to coordinate their actions, which could significantly alter the balance of power<sup>1</sup>.

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800 *Sahelians have to say*, edited by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016.

<sup>1</sup> "The terrorists also have their G5-Sahel. Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, al-Mourabitoune, AQIM, Ansarul Islam and the Islamic State in the Great Sahara make a G5" after the merger of these 5 groups within the framework of the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) formed on 1 March 2017 during the war in Mali.

51. The phenomenon of jihad in the Sahel seems hybrid: it is not only linked to poor local governance and it has regional dimensions. Apart from the Tuareg rebellions, the Malian conflict has its roots in the war in Algeria during the 1990s and then in Libya in 2010, since Gaddafi had accumulated foreign fighters in his legion.

52. The endemic armed groups operate in a franchise rationale: they will claim AQIM or Daesh for international validation, without being subject to a higher command. The leaders of these groups often practice a kind of ritual to 'attach themselves' to religious convictions, as shown by the journey of Iyad Ag Ghali in Mali, who started out from the logic Tuareg independence to acquire a religious aspect<sup>1</sup>.

53. Jihadist groups were not born in the cities, but in the peripheral regions where the State has not been able to impose itself. The response must therefore address the issue of periphery and development, with access to social services in these areas.

54. At present, the attacks of 2007-2011 are almost forgotten. The State seems to have succeeded in driving terrorism out of its borders. However, the danger<sup>2</sup> is still there. The threat of terrorism is always present. Despite this, the perception of radicalism has not changed much in people's minds<sup>3</sup>.

55. Mauritania has not experienced a major terrorist attack on its territory for nearly a decade. While this is a significant change

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<sup>1</sup> Sabine Cessou, "Jihad in the Sahel: retreat or extension?", Blog of the OCP Policy Center, 28 June 2018.

<sup>2</sup> In a May 8, 2018 statement, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) threatened Western companies, French ones in particular, operating in the region extending "from Libya to Mauritania" <https://www.max-security.com/security-blog/aqim-statement-threatening-western-companies-in-area-from-libya-to-mauritania-africa-mena-alert>

<sup>3</sup> "Returning to God is the only way left; the way of God is the only cause that still deserves a fight. There is no more Arab nationalism and no more pan-African solidarity; liberalism has won everywhere. The only way to change things is no longer ideas but action" (comment from a 23-year-old student, the Mauritania National Report: *Radicalization and Citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, edited by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.

from the situation before, especially between 2005 and 2011, it also reveals questions about the sustainability of peace and its cost.

56. De-radicalization<sup>1</sup> initiatives, such as the “dialogue” that was undertaken in January 2010 between the authorities, religious leaders (faghih) and Salafist detainees, and which had led to the repentance of a number of them; had succeeded in defusing part of the glacier. However, there is still a long way to go on the road to de-radicalization, in particular through the grooming of religious texts and the deduction of amalgams in Muslim jurisprudence, in order to prove the false vision that extremists have of Islam and to destroy the basis on which they claim to rely.

57. However, triumphalism must remain vigilant, as the country is still plunged into corruption and poverty. In the periphery and in border regions, which constitute a reservoir for the recruitment of jihadists, there is a great need for urgent development.

58. The recent discovery of offshore gas on the border with Senegal, which has led to an influx of foreign direct investment, could help to revive hopes of improving the population's economic and living conditions. There is cause for concern as to whether the funds will reach the population given the lack of transparency.

## **PART II**

### **DIAGNOSIS OF THE PHENOMENON, STATE OF AFFAIRS, QUALITATIVE DATA, QUANTITATIVE DATA, STATISTICS, QUESTIONS, CAUSES, EFFECTS, INCIDENCES AND IMPACT**

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<sup>1</sup> It is also a matter of handling the “desire for dialogue” among certain extremists within the framework of the action plan for their de-radicalization and integration. 88% of the de-radicalized people have received long-term loans to set up small businesses without any guarantee; support for integration into society and into working life.

1. Women make up the majority of the Mauritanian population with over 51%, compared to about 48% for men. From the 1990s to the present day, issues relating to the status, roles, rights and advancement of women in society and in the State have become increasingly important in the public sphere.
2. Some progress has been made in many areas through the creation of structures and institutions and the establishment of mechanisms to guide and manage public policies relating to gender and human rights. However, they represent only small steps and are still far from bridging the gaps, shortfalls and imbalances that widen the inequality between men and women in several areas of national life.
3. Women's participation in the public sphere has improved significantly since the adoption in 2006 of a law establishing a quota for women (20%) on the lists of candidates for elective office (municipal councilors, deputies and senators). Their accession to elected office or administrative responsibilities, although increasing over the years, had previously been the result of a system of figurativeness rather than real action.
4. Despite their dynamism in the field of political activities, the participation of Mauritanian women in political life has long been confined to a kind of electoral activism. Following the 2006 and 2007 elections, 19% of the seats in both chambers of parliament and 30% of municipal councilors' positions will now be held by women. In the same period, and for the first time since the country's independence, women were being promoted to positions of authority or representation (*walis*, ambassadors, etc.) which had previously been held exclusively by men. The country's first woman magistrate did not appear until 2012<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mounina Mint Abdoullah, *Study on the level of integration of human rights and gender in the security sector, in the framework of the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the 5 countries of the G5 Sahel*, The Mauritania provisional data collection report, UN WOMEN, 2018.

5. Associative life in Mauritania is characterized by the strong involvement of women. Thousands of women's cooperatives are involved in socio-economic activities, and most NGOs and associations are headed or led by women.
6. The visibility of women's economic activities is still somewhat unclear, but various indicators seem to show an increase in their contribution to national wealth. Women are particularly active in the primary sector (31%) and in the informal sector.
7. In the social representation that comes from traditional and conservative backgrounds, the female figure is predominantly symbolic. The presence of women is valued, including in the male assembly. There is a widespread belief that Mauritanian women in general and Moorish women in particular have a margin of freedom, movement and initiative that is quite different from that of women from similar cultures. Among the traditional Moors, women are idealized, as they are the group's exhibited honor, erected as a “great royal” who is dismissive of household chores. Here the term “*weaker sex*” takes on its full meaning... the investment in “weakness” is remarkable. Just as society and the male elements of the group treat the female gender through this “weakness”, as much for the women themselves, this moral and physical trait legitimizes a special management of their status<sup>1</sup>.
8. The inter-gender relationship is not based on clearly displayed male superiority, but rather on an instrumentalization of feminine attributes, which is also fairly conventional. The Saharan space is also decisive, as is the scarcity of income, the nomadic lifestyle and mobility in space, which means that each person has a vital role to play in the very survival of the group, and under such conditions, it is practically impossible to compartmentalize the female members completely separately.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mauritania National Report: *Radicalization and Citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, directed by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.



9. Women have their role to play, which is that of valuing hierarchical representations and the constancy of order, which in exchange is “*sublime*” in a way. What is subtle about the perception of women in Mauritania is the game that places the “*noble*” status of women above everything else in the symbolic, but which otherwise takes up the patriarchal part in a self-restriction managed by women themselves and, in its finality, assigns them in a controllable space to which their right of movement is restricted.

10. Returning to the reference period 2000-2015, during which many Mauritians, swept away by the first waves of radicalization, were enlisted in jihadist groups, it should be noted that their numbers<sup>1</sup> were remarkably limited in terms of the mass of combatants. The radical commitment of the Mauritians was rather concentrated at the intellectual level within the governing bodies, particularly the advisory and judicial ones.

11. Contrary to their infatuation with Al-Qaeda, AQIM and other Sahelo-Saharan groups, Mauritians were virtually the major North African absentees in Daesh. Despite the sentencing in 2014 by a Mauritanian court of a cell of three people who were allegedly affiliated with Daesh, no particular activism was noted among young Mauritians in Daesh's ranks.

12. However, the publication of the Daesh-affiliated magazine “*Dabiq*” of a new map including the whole of Mauritania, reportedly gave strong signals of its intention to win the hearts and minds of young Mauritians, which could make Mauritania a new target for 'Daesh' for possible expansion in the region, despite the defeats suffered by this group recently in Iraq and Syria, especially after the Turkish military intervention in northern Syria and the alleged death of its iconic leader *Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi*.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic Wehrey, *Control and Containment: Islamists in Mauritania and the Strategy against Violent Extremism*, Study, the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Beirut, 2019.

13. Cross-referenced information estimates the number of Mauritanian jihadists at between 600 and 1, 000, of whom only 7% are women. Their profile is characterized by the multi-ethnicity of Mauritanian society. About 75% are said to be Moors, 17% Haratin and 9% Mauritanian Black-Africans. Most of these people were under 30 years of age when they were first recruited. The majority had low and medium incomes. Some also share other experiences linking them to unemployment, delinquency and service or attempted service in the army. Some of them had experienced Salafism in mosques, and then comes recruitment and jihadist training, usually in northern Mali or Algeria. Many of them had received their education in “*Mahdara*” schools, despite the denial of the leaders of these traditional establishments that this was the direct reason for their affiliation with extremism. From 2005, the attendance of these traditional schools by Libyan, Algerian and Malian nationals led the government to make sustained efforts to control their access by foreigners.

14. With regard to the presence of Mauritanian women recruited by jihadist groups in extremist activities, it was found that their numbers have remained very limited. They are probably a few dozen, representing about 7% of the total number of young Mauritians who joined jihadist organizations during the reference period, whose numbers, according to sources in the security services, are more or less known on the security file at one time or another during the period covered by the study.

15. The participation of Mauritanian women in jihadist activities was often confined to secondary roles of support for men. They generally only had access to decision-making roles when it came to recruiting and maintaining the commitment of other women, in addition to their traditional reproductive role, which was often elevated to the rank of strategic task in order to maximize the number of jihadists, which explains the frequency of these women's marriages, before this biological functionality was elevated with Daesh to a sacred mission of “sexual jihad”.

16. Nevertheless, women involved in organized movements of religious reformism are not only a transmission link in the chain of the radicalization process. They are stakeholders, acting at the level of the fluidity of the new concepts and of their mobility.

17. Referring to women living in contexts of extremism, a study entitled “Thinking about gender in the responses to violent extremism in Tunisia”<sup>1</sup> indicates that there is a direct link between gender issues and women's rights, and violent extremism. Indeed, *“terrorist and extremist groups place the subordination of women at the center of their ideology, exploiting gender norms and stereotypes to their advantage to recruit combatants and launch attacks, using sexual and gender-based violence, including trafficking, sexual slavery, forced marriages and forced pregnancies, to terrorize communities and generate income”*.

18. Within Mauritanian society, the social status of women varies considerably depending on whether the environment is urban or rural, but also on the nature of the Moorish and black African communities. While the undermining of the female element is found in all communities, the residue of matriarchy within the Moorish community gives women greater visibility and an active participation in decision-making.

19. In the Moorish milieu, Women are considered as guarantors of the values of society as a whole. In the traditional environment, they were entrusted with primary education.

20. In traditional environments, such as “Zewaya”, whether among the Moors or the black Mauritanian Africans, women were very close to basic religious knowledge, being most often responsible for teaching the Koranic teaching of early childhood and the foundations of the “*Sunna*” and the “*Hadith*”. Certain epistles dealing with religious rituals were sometimes reserved for female learning, in particular all that concerned the life of the

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Women and OXFAM with the support of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, November 2018.

prophet and his companions, and the sections dealing with purification.

21. Over the past 30 years and with the new rise of “*organized religiosity*”, particularly in urban areas, it has been noted that certain categories of women in the big cities, especially the wealthy residential areas of Nouakchott, are working to propagate a “*luxury preaching*” against a backdrop of modernism and higher education.

22. Generally speaking, women are very much present and play a valued role in the dynamics of “social neo-religiosity”, which has characterized the evolution of Mauritanian society over the past 30 years. They act as transmitters in their entourage, but also as reactors within civil society and, finally, as a force of demand or protest in mobilization actions<sup>1</sup>.

23. However, this more or less radiant picture should not embellish the reality of women's marginalization at the level of the majority of decision-making, management and public policy planning mechanisms, both at the traditional social level (tribal or family councils, village committees) and/or modern (administration, justice, security force, media, etc.).

24. Despite certain developments in the area of women's rights and adherence to various international and regional legal standards that protect women's rights, this progress has not put an end to various forms of violence against Mauritanian women, including: excision, which is still widely practiced (72% of women), and early marriage, which persists, with a rate of 19% of women married before the age of 15 and 43% before the age of 18. These constraints contribute to a low level of education and early pregnancies; polygamy affects about 10% of households; and sexual violence persists, even though it is now recognized by Ordinance No. 2005-015 on the criminal protection of children.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in meetings to demand the release of Salafist detainees, door-to-door visits to raise awareness during elections, and so on.

25. Despite certain weaknesses and hesitations on the part of the public authorities, encouraging progress has been made in the area of gender equality at the institutional level (establishment of a legal arsenal, taking account of the gender dimension in the strategy to fight poverty, and the creation of certain structures). However, it should be stressed that although progress has been made at the level of the texts, their application is still awaited.

26. The majority of magistrates are graduates of traditional *mahadra*<sup>1</sup> schools, and are completely ignorant of and disinterested in women's rights and gender-based violence in Mauritania. In general, some of them are often hostile to women's access to justice. The majority of magistrates believe that women are always responsible for what happens to them. The three female magistrates are placed as follows: one in economic crimes and the other in the labor court, hence far from anything that could help their sisters in the fight against GBV.

27. The outdated Mauritanian Penal Code does not contain provisions that protect women against violence, the specific reservations<sup>2</sup> made to CEDAW, the absence of implementing decrees for certain legal texts and the lack of harmonization of domestic laws with ratified conventions are all factors that lead to blockage and regression.

28. Women are almost excluded from the armed forces: only 48 women were recruited in 2004-2005, 90%<sup>3</sup> of whom were assigned to junior positions: sewing, secretarial work and cooking, even though the social service in each corps is responsible for providing housing for families, health coverage and other services.

29. In rural areas, the situation of women remains precarious. It is marked by the prevalence of excision, force-feeding, early marriage, polygamy, divorce, domestic and sexual violence, low

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<sup>1</sup> Aminetou Ely, president AFCE. Interview of June 30, 2019, *idem*, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Art. 16: equality in decision-making in marriage and divorce, and art. 13 (1) on inheritance.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Koné, *idem*, *op. cit.*

awareness of their situation, low participation in decision-making, lack of access to social and legal protection and ignorance of economic and social rights.

30. The unemployment rate is around 47% in rural areas. With women's unemployment rate at almost 20%, it remains higher than men's (10%). In urban areas, the unemployment rate for women, estimated at almost 25%, remains higher than men's (14%). Employment situations are precarious and dominated by the high incidence of collective work without explicit pay, the non-existence of a paid work market and the persistence of different forms of work for others.

31. Rural and semi-rural women live in inadequate, precarious and even deprived material living conditions, especially in high-risk border areas due to the activism of radicalized and extremist groups.

32. The threat of insecurity is compounded by the perverse effects of a massive male rural exodus, which results in increased burdens and constraints on women. Even when they have an opportunity to contribute financially to the family, these long separations (some of which end in abandonment) often have disastrous consequences on family life in general and the stability of the couple in particular. Women therefore take on additional responsibilities and tasks, usually assigned to men. On the one hand, they find themselves powerless in the face of the deterioration of their children's health and education, and on the other hand, they are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, etc.

33. The penetration of imported radical Islamism<sup>1</sup> (including the wearing of the *Niqab*), which is considered different from the non-violent *Maliki* rite of Islam (100% of Mauritaniens were so), but also the worrying link between violent extremism and certain misinterpretations of Islam. This penetration was achieved through

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<sup>1</sup> The Vaghih Hademine Ould Sakeck, a Mosque Imam, 5 May 2019, *op. cit.*

Mauritanian<sup>1</sup> individuals, through constructing and equipping of mosques, *mahadras*, or through the distribution of books.

34. The emergence and entrenchment of the Salafist movement in Mauritania was the starting point during the 1980s<sup>2</sup>. This entrenchment took place in three distinct phases:

35. (i) Indoctrination began with the return of some Mauritanian students from abroad and the establishment of institutes of theological studies in Nouakchott;

36. (ii) The secret installation of a Libyan group in a suburb without the knowledge of the security forces. Groups married and remarried several times to poor women who were subsequently used to convey money and information to the Salafists<sup>3</sup>;

37. (iii) Training and psychological preparation for “*jihad*” was characterized by its praise in sermons and lectures, the funding of *Mahadras* and the creation of charitable NGOs. This led to the emergence of a new class of rich people and new modes of dress.

38. In rural border areas, particularly in eastern Mauritania, women play several roles in the daily lives of radical groups or of simple smugglers, without perceiving it as a crime or participation in any process of violence. Their collaboration is part of the ancestral hospitality and mediation for which they feel socially mandated<sup>4</sup>.

39. As long as there is no visible violence or aggressiveness, they remain available or neutral with a high potential for cooperation,

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<sup>1</sup> IMES 2013, The Scholar Abdullah Ben Boya, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the symposium entitled: *The culture of peace and moderation as a means of fighting violent extremism (the Mauritanian approach)*, IMES, April 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Mounina Mint Abdoullah, *Study on the level of integration of human rights and gender in the security sector, in the framework of the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the five countries of the G5 Sahel*, The Mauritania provisional data collection report, UN WOMEN, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The Mauritania National Report: *Radicalization and citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, edited by Réda Benkirane; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.

depending on whether they feel that their direct interests are threatened or not. Female radical extremists often call upon this group for a number of operations and activities, such as:

40. (i) Facilitation, with the integration of individuals “pledged” to Mali but staying on the Mauritanian side: this involves receiving convoys for one or two days in their homes and providing information on the situation in the village or town. As most of these women living in border areas are bilingual, they are often interpreters. On the Mauritanian side, and especially among the Moors, men use a second language only when necessary and often do not declare the number of spoken dialects. The use of these local languages is more spontaneous among these women and the cultural melting pot is more evident, which reassures the Malian elements more quickly, whether in the camps, on market day or simply when seeking accommodation.

41. (ii) Mediation, with recourse to women, who are essentially mothers respected by all: they may, for example, intercede with the administrative authorities and sometimes with certain leaders of extremist networks for their release, issuing documents, or even to go and propose marriage to a woman when the requester is not from the region and is branded as “Malian combatant”, etc.

42. (iii) Trade, since many traders on the border deal directly with women who own a wholesale business or work as forwarders to the capital. Most often, they deal in dyed textiles, foodstuff (potatoes, yams, shea, etc.), and sometimes smuggled goods (cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, etc.).

43. (iv) Recruitment, which is a somewhat rarer process given the risky nature of the area, as it does not encourage people to join the cause of extremists in northern Mali. However, the promise of a better life for those who manage to reach the big cities, like Bamako, sometimes brings rather young women across the border, who often do not take long to retrace their steps; but for some of



them, once the noose tightens, their path leads to integrating<sup>1</sup> foreign communities.

### PART III

#### FIELD STUDY, INTERPRETATION, SCENARIO, WAYS OUT, SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The national security services are said to have investigated and followed the itineraries of more than 600 young Mauritians who had, at one time or another along their routes, ideologically adhered to “*Al-Qaeda*”, “*AQIM*” and/or other jihadist organizations in different regions of the world during the period 2000-2015. It is very likely that the number of those who joined these organizations during this period would be much higher<sup>2</sup>.
2. According to some estimates, about 400 elements left directly from the Mauritanian territory to different destinations that could be described as “*hotbeds of tension*”, including Algeria, Mali, Libya, Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, etc.
3. However, the security services draw attention to the fact that many young Mauritians who have joined terrorist organizations did not come directly from Mauritanian territory, but are said to have joined these organizations from the territories of other countries, particularly in Africa, where large Mauritanian expatriate communities usually stay.
4. The number of Mauritanian women reported to have joined terrorist organizations in the conflict zones is estimated at 40 women, or about 10% of the total number of Mauritians who

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<sup>1</sup> Collected comments relate cases of abductions and disappearances of young women. Cited in the Mauritania National Report: *Radicalization and citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say*, directed by Réda Benkirane, Center for Humanitarian Dialogue / United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Prior to 2011-2012, Mauritania had not yet had a national civil biometric registry. Thus, civil status documents were easily falsifiable and subject to lucrative trafficking.

reportedly left Mauritania directly to join terrorist organizations outside the country's borders.

5. A total of 26 women are reported to have returned to Mauritania, or about 65% of the group of women who left the country to join terrorist groups in various hotbeds of tension.

6. The field study conducted by the group of Mauritanian experts collected data on the situation of 15 women, or 58% of the group who had returned.

7. The distribution of the destinations from which the 15 Mauritanian women returned shows that Mali was the first place to which the majority of women went because of its geographical proximity and its geographical and human interaction with Mauritania, but which had experienced several cycles of tension and violence, particularly in its northern regions. Then came Afghanistan, which was the second destination, as it was the sanctuary for jihadist movements throughout the world. In third place comes Libya, given the significant size of the resident Mauritanian community before the war there. In Algeria, despite its geographical proximity to Mauritania, the percentage of women who would have gone there was low. Lastly, Burkina Faso was the last destination for Mauritanian women returning from hotbeds of tension.

8. The return of the 15 women who had left the country to join terrorist groups between 2005 and 2015 took place as follows: 6 women returning from Mali, 5 women returning from Afghanistan, 3 women returning from Libya, and only one woman returning from Burkina Faso.

9. The initial geographical attachments of the 15 women returning to Mauritania from the conflict zones are as follows: 7 women from the capital Nouakchott, 4 women from the region of Basseknou (Hodh), 3 women from villages on the outskirts of Aleg, (capital of Wilaya of Brakna), 1 woman from the city of Kaédi, capital of Gorgol.

10. With regard to the reasons for the departure of Mauritanian women for the conflict zones, the reactions collected in the field during interviews with the persons concerned in relation to the question “*why did they leave Mauritania to join terrorist organizations in conflict zones*” yielded the following results: 80% to accompany their husbands; 10% for ideological reasons/religious belief in jihad, 7% in search of marriage, being convinced that marriage with jihadists would be a kind of jihad for God; and 3% for financial or economic reasons, i. e. for financial gain, albeit under an ideological pretext.

11. Concerning the reasons for the return of jihadist women to Mauritania, although the percentage of such women was relatively average (about 58% of the group of women who had left the country), one could think of reasons related to the difficult situation in the host countries, and the difference between social environments in terms of language, culture and values. In fact, these factors were not the main determinants of the return of these jihadist women.

12. Yet, contrary to expectations, the responses showed that the reasons for the return were as follows: 90% due to the death of their husbands in the host country; 6% due to the lack of adaptation to the community in the host country, due to the lack of knowledge of the language and different social values and customs; 3-4% due to pressure from the family, in particular the parents' constant request to ask for the return, and their link with the rights conferred by religion or the children's desire to return to their community, as they often do not adapt to the host community.

13. The diagnosis of the general characteristics of the sample studied revealed the difficulty of understanding and identifying the phenomenon. Despite the complexity of this phenomenon, namely the “*attitudes of women returning from crisis areas, associated with jihadist organizations in general and terrorist organizations in particular*”, first of all, there is an intertwinement of factors and causes that contributed to the creation of the phenomenon and the

difficulty of obtaining all the information from those concerned, who were haunted by a constant sense of fear of the external environment in general.

14. Notwithstanding these constraints, the field study contributed to observing the phenomenon with the help of overt or sometimes hidden questionnaire tools, in order to identify the general characteristics of the phenomenon, which will serve to have a clearer understanding of its complexity and specificities in order to better deal with it. Thus, the study highlighted the following findings:

15. Although Mauritania is a multi-ethnic country, all women returning from conflict zones in Mauritania appear to be of Arab origin, which raises the question of the lack of penetration by jihadist and terrorist groups, particularly among women in non-Arab ethnic groups in Mauritania compared to their intrusion in the Arab group, which represents the majority of the Mauritanian population, noting that terrorist groups in the Sahel region and their penetration of ethnic minorities in the countries of the region is more evident, at the expense of the penetration of the majority, particularly in Mali and Niger.

16. The sample of women returning from conflict zones showed that they belonged to the younger group, as they were between 30 and 50 years of age.

17. The majority of the women in the study sample are educated: from preparatory to university level.

18. The women who were in the conflict zones originally went through lessons in mosques as well as private lessons (pedagogical days) given by groups of jihadi women at home, which requires monitoring the type of sermons in mosques and in private lessons, and to have the competent authorities focus on disseminating the culture of tolerance and anything that promotes religious tolerance.

19. Paradoxically, the majority of women returning from conflict zones did not admit that they had participated in military

operations. Instead, the majority declared being female heads of household, with the exception of only three, who mentioned having been involved in commercial activities.

20. The majority of women returning from conflict areas are from poor communities, which aggravates their and their children's suffering. Extremism in these communities is likely to continue to grow for the near future unless the State or civil society organizations address this problem.

21. All women returning from conflict zones in Mauritania are responsible for between 3 and 7 children.

22. The large number of children is part of the religious belief, following a certain adage “*mate and multiply, I am proud to challenge other nations with you on the day of resurrection*”.

23. The majority of the women in the study sample married more than one man, but only among their jihadist peers, out of ideological conviction.

24. One of the most striking phenomena among the women in the study sample is that the majority have children from different fathers. The phenomenon is due to the fact that these women marry for ideological reasons, i. e., marriage is a religious belief; it is the practice of polygamy; or when the husband of one of these women is killed, often one of his colleagues willingly marries her.

25. According to the replies to the questionnaire, only three women returning from conflict zones in Mauritania were interviewed by the security services and were subsequently released.

26. The integration flexibility of the women returning from the conflict zones to Mauritania and the fact that they are not arrested or imprisoned permanently are due, inter alia, to the simplicity of Mauritanian society and the predominance of tolerance over its religious and social values. The values of Mauritanian society require men to treat women with kindness and respect, and the

Mauritanian security services in their current state are still predominantly male.

27. It has not been shown that women returning from conflict zones around the world were engaged in a purely terrorist activity or in bloodshed.

28. According to the questionnaires, all women returning from conflict zones in Mauritania lead a normal life in their areas of residence and exercise their social and economic lives in a natural way, like before they did before joining the conflict zones, and their children could obtain identity papers and study in public and private schools. These women are distinguished only by keeping the black dresses and the Niqab, unlike the Mauritanian women who mainly dressed in plain or colorful dresses and veils.

29. In conclusion, when the women who have returned from conflict zones were required to evaluate their experience, they all agreed that it was a gross experience and that they no longer think about returning. Using their own words, they consider it was their “*fate and destiny*” and “*a closed chapter in their lives*”.

30. In order to triangulate the findings of the field data collection work carried out by the team of Mauritanian experts in the context of the Maghrebi study, we cross-checked them with answers that had been provided to a similar questionnaire that had been filled in as part of the preparation of a report commissioned by the UNDP entitled “*Radicalization and Citizenship: What 800 Sahelians have to say*”.

31. The questions were asked to 26 mothers who were interviewed in Nouakchott as part of a case study on the “leavers” from armed radicalized or verbally virulent experiences, including mothers of former detainees for “terrorist crimes”, referred to as “former Salafists” by prison officials.

32. The central question was about what it meant to be violent for the interviewees. The other questions asked were as follows: (i) What does being a terrorist (irhabi) mean to you? (ii) Do you

consider your son to be an “*irhabi*”? If not, how do you define your son's action within his organization? (iii) Is your son's experience valued by your family circle?

33. Responses can be summarized around the idea that violent radicalization, even though it is most often disapproved of by families, especially mothers, does not make the person who adheres to it an outlaw, let alone an outcast. On the contrary, by an astonishing process, the incriminated acts are dissociated from the individual, in an understanding according to which a person can go very far in his communion with God, with faith, and put these two supreme values (God and Faith) beyond men who, in turn, could be eliminated, in this perspective, if they ever stray too far from this path...

34. The answers to the questions cited showed that an experience of an armed violent radicalization was not considered criminal. It was only devalued if it was accompanied by embezzlement, theft or any other breach of honor. Taking a weapon in the name of God was not once cited as a criminal act by the mothers of families, but as deviance, spiritual search, or being caught in a spiral, etc., and it was not considered a crime. For the mothers, their sons were not terrorists but were ambiguously portrayed as “people of jihad” (*men ehl al jihad*).

35. Finally, we opted to conclude the field study with a set of recommendations that we consider relevant for decision-makers, public opinion and specialized research centers.

36. It is necessary to direct scientific research towards this type of phenomenon, namely the problem of women returning from conflict zones and, more generally, all the repercussions of extremism and terrorism, in order to properly diagnose and propose appropriate solutions for treating and eliminating them, which pose a threat to the stability of society and the State.

37. Addressing the phenomena of extremism and terrorism cannot be done through the security approach alone. Because of

extremism and terrorism, multiple approaches are needed to address and deal with this complex phenomenon, chiefly: religious, cultural, social, economic and psychological approaches.

38. The need to develop an integrated national strategy to address the problem of women returning from conflict zones and all the effects and repercussions of extremism and terrorism on society and the State in Mauritania.

39. The need to establish institutions to ensure the return of women from conflict zones in order to reintegrate them into the social and economic fabric and to provide them with psychological treatment after the suffering they have endured.

40. Paying attention to all issues concerning women, in particular seeking to involve them in all aspects of public life, making continuous efforts to remove all restrictions that prevent them from achieving full equality with men.

41. Establish specialized institutions in the fields of education and psychology to ensure education and integration into society of the children of the women returning from conflict zones, in addition to their future working life and making sure they do not turn into future terrorists.

42. Refocusing religious discourse on the values of tolerance, recognition of the other, and coexistence, and on the fact that Islam is a religion of mercy that calls for work and land development, as well as for justice, love and all that serves humanity.

43. Centralizing the *fatwa* within a specialized collective, and preventing sermons in mosques that carry an extremist discourse, may take on a hostile tone or call for the atonement of the offender.

44. To retrain all members of scientists' associations and mosque imams in the culture of human rights and to provide them with knowledge and information on the social sciences curriculum.



45. Establish a partnership between State bodies and civil society organizations to combat all phenomena of extremism and terrorism.
46. Encourage civil society organizations to fight all forms of extremism and terrorism and to work for the dissemination of the values of tolerance and of all that is conducive to the establishment of a constitutional state and of the rule of law.
47. Fund all civil society organizations that will contribute to the care of the women returning from conflict zones and of their children in order to integrate them into working life.
48. Educate the security services on human rights and inform them of international conventions in the field of human rights protection.
49. Train the security services in preventive action and surveillance, in order to prevent the spread of such phenomenon and to avoid its effects and repercussions.
50. Train the security services in rehabilitating the women involved in terrorist groups, rather than focusing on punishment.
51. Increase the presence of women in the security services to enable the latter to deal more effectively with women returning from conflict areas.
52. Coordinate with all government agencies concerned with this type of phenomenon in order to unify relevant policies to avoid draining human resources and limited financial possibilities of their nature, and to ensure the effectiveness of such policies.
53. Combat all manifestations of injustice, unfairness and marginalization that are prevailing in Mauritanian society.
54. Sensitize the elites to the creation of the rule of law guaranteeing the values of citizenship, equal opportunities and equality.
55. Involve the media, both audiovisual and readable, in the campaign against all forms of extremism and terrorism, in order to

raise public awareness of the dangers and the consequences of these phenomena.

56. Strengthen regional and international cooperation to combat all phenomena of extremism and terrorism, both locally and internationally.

57. The Mauritanian Government should address the situation of children resulting from the mixed marriage of young Mauritanian women to nationals of tribes in the Azawad region, in northern Mali, who have joined terrorist organizations in Mali, and create a social incubator that would protect them in that region. Apparently, dozens of children who resulted from these mixed marriages have no civil identity. They are virtually stateless and need to assert their belonging to the Mauritanian State, especially after the murder of their parents and becoming orphans. These dozens of young people, unless their problem is solved, could end up becoming terrorists in the future.

## APPENDICES: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES

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- 8- التحقيق في حرمة التحريق - أبو المنذر الشنقيطي.
- 9- دولة الشعارات - أبو المنذر الشنقيطي.
- 10- فتاوي بلا طيار - أبو المنذر الشنقيطي.
- 11- على خطى الشيخ أسامة - أبو المنذر الشنقيطي.
- 12- ملاحظات على خطاب البغدادي - أبو المنذر الشنقيطي.
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 02 إيضاح مزيد من الحق في الرد على أحمد مزيد ولد عبد الحق - أبو عبّدة الشنقيطي.  
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 04 مختصر الكلام في الذب عن الشيخ أبي سفيان - أبو الزبير الشنقيطي.  
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 10 إلى علماء المنارة والرباط اليوم يومكم - أبو يحيى الشنقيطي.  
 11 - الرد على انتقاد أبي بصير على جنود الدولة الإسلامية قطعهم شجرة تعبد من دون الله - أبو الزبير الشنقيطي.  
 12 - أنقذوا أسراكم - أبو يحيى الشنقيطي.



# **VIOLENT EXTREMISM AMONGST WOMEN AND PATHWAYS OF MOROCCANS RETURNING FROM HOTSPOTS**

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## **General Presentation**

General characteristics of Moroccan migrants to hotspots and the issue of managing their return: Jihadi women within the general fabric of Morocco

- The beginnings of women's participation in terrorism in Morocco
- Sharia-based evidence engineering on the necessity of women's jihad in the Arab Maghreb region (cases of Morocco and Tunisia):
- Conference on "the position of the nation's clerics (clerics of al-ummah) concerning events in Syria" held in Cairo
- The Constitutional Document of ISIS and the declaration of the caliphate
- Circular of the All-Women Al-Khansaa Battalion
- Fatwas of jihadist theorists and recruiters
  - Some of the most influential theorists' models in drawing Maghrebian youth to migrate to hotspots (Syria, Iraq, and Libya)

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- Arrangement of Sharia-based provisions in the Maghreb for women to imperatively take part in jihad and join the Syrian battlefield
- Some sources of fatwas and sharia-based arguments regarding women joining hotspots and conditions thereof
- Female Social Media Network for Support, Advocacy and Mobilization
- New Roles of jihadist women within ISIS
- Recruitment of women by Jihadist organizations and push and pull factors
- Recruitment of Moroccan Women Towards Hotspots: Case Studies
  - Husbands hide the intention of immigrating and lure their wives
  - Torn between hesitation and obligations of marital and family life
  - Children as a means of pressuring the wives to join the organization
  - The patriarchal society's attitude towards women
  - Husbands are not the only ones responsible for luring women
  - Deception and swindle to persuade the wife to join
  - N. Umm Saad: My husband lured me
  - L. R: I agreed to join my husband after he had convinced me that I must help the vulnerable
  - Souad (a Dutch of Moroccan descent) I suffer from a mental illness
  - R. R abandons her husband for Jihad in Syria for social and familial reasons
  - ISIS's women: violated rights and absent dignity

- In Syria, children live in fear, terror and deprivation
- Deprivation of education and playing in prison-like homes
- Hamida from Al-Hol camp: my husband's ambition to improve our living conditions led me follow his lead
- The role of wives in persuading husbands to return home and coordinate with smugglers to secure an escape
- Women Trapped in the Refugee Camps
- Diagnosing the model of Al-Hol camp, located in the Syrian countryside of Haska
  - Country security comes first. To hell with others
  - Are those people victim of human trafficking?
  - Linking national security to global security
- Morocco's Approach to Managing Male and Female Returnees
- Post-return Problems and the Need to Activate the Methods of Integration and Accompaniment
  - Preventive programs
  - Rehabilitation Programs Inside the Prisons

## **General Introduction**

Violent extremism and terrorism represent a serious challenge for Maghreb countries, which have been affected in varying degrees by the blight of terrorism and violent extremism. However, the shared traits in the region in terms of geography, culture, and religion have allowed terrorist organizations to cross the sovereign borders of States in the region, thus acting in a dynamic that differs from the dynamic of States in implementing their plans to combat threats to security. Despite the fruitful collaboration efforts amongst countries of the Arab Maghreb, they still remain below the reasonable threshold that provides the reassurance to protect the



peoples of the region from untraditional security threats starting from terrorist activities, human trafficking, and organized crime.

The national authorities of the Arab Maghreb Union countries as well as local, regional, and international organizations have expressed their increasing awareness that better understanding violent extremism dynamics is vital to draft and implement effective strategies to suppress, combat, and prevent terrorism.

In an attempt to understand the development of the violent extremism phenomenon in Morocco in the last three decades, we found that many Moroccan jihadists have departed to hotspots, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sudan etc. during the eighties and nineties. When some of these jihadists returned, they tried to get structured as a pole of jihadist salafist ideology. Some of them even maintained tangible linkages or allegiance to Al-Qaeda or to small jihadist organizations thereof.

Seeing the new wave that coincided with the fragmentation of the concept of country order concept in the jihadist ideology aiming at overthrowing regimes, in addition to the world order concept as seen by Abdullah Azzam followed by Al-Zawahiri and then Osama Bin Laden, the world today witnessed a new generation of jihadist activity that tried to revert back to the concept of a single caliphate based on the mechanisms of central empowerment and succession in conjunction with establishing a network of “emirates” whenever an agreement is reached by the members or loyalists on the management and control of a geographical area across the Islamic world.

However, due to the repeated military strikes against ISIS (known as Daech to the media), analysts and observers lay down several scenarios related to the fate of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq; including those who expect to return and those who are afraid or being redeployed in neighboring hotspots such as Libya, Mali, Tchad, and Yemen as well as other new hotspots in the South-East of Africa and Asia.

Within this general context, Morocco has witnessed a number of isolated terrorist incidents in the period 2003-2011; in Casablanca and Meknes in 2007 and in Marrakesh in 2011.

It is true that the pace of threats has been narrowed down nowadays thanks to increase security vigilance, which is evidenced by the achievements of security agencies in dismantling hundreds of cells that were planning to conduct dangerous terrorist attacks during the last five years. Despite that, threats continue to exist and potentially could inflict economic and human damage. Such threats will linger through terrorist organizations considered as pertaining to Daech, or through cells that emerge, every now and then, considered as pertaining to Al-Qaeda or small local jihadist organizations.

Violent extremism not only goes beyond social, political, national, cultural, geographical, and age limits, but also transcends gender. Even though the frequency of women active in terrorist organizations in the last decade has increased, they actually have been victimized and recruited for decades.

The impression that violent extremism and terrorism were exclusively an interest of men has prevailed for many years. However, due to the recent attacks witnessed by Maghrebian and European countries in addition to the huge number of women migrating from the Maghreb region to hotspots in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and coastal areas, countries have strengthened their awareness on the risks related to terrorists' efforts to recruit and exploit women in conducting and facilitating their terrorist activities.

All available reports and studies to this day indicate that women have emerged as a pivotal element in relation to terrorist threats on three levels:

- First: Women being the most affected category by terrorist activities as a target in terrorist attacks in addition to women being

under the control of terrorist groups and considered to be in the lowest possible social ranks in their political projects.

- Second: Women being the most deluded category in recruitment, as they are subject to the most heinous inhumane and degrading practices.

- Third: Women having a pivotal role in preventing and tackling the blights of violent extremism and terrorism in their families, public places, and schools in addition to working in law enforcement agencies and other executive and legislative institutions.

### **General characteristics of Moroccan migrants to hotspots and the issue of managing their return**

If we attempt to paint a general picture of Moroccan fighters in Syria and Iraq through the data collected on their age groups, social and professional affiliations, and allocated functions, we can come to the following information:

Out of the 1531 Moroccans who have joined conflict zones in Syria and Iraq (according to statistics from 2015), one fourth of them are less than 25 years old (24%) and those who are between 25 and 35 years old represent around 50%, which means that **74% are less than 35 years old**. As for those who are older than 35 years, they only represent one fourth of the total (26%)<sup>1</sup>.

There are 301 children among the Moroccan fighters in Syria and Iraq with ages between 6 months and 17 years in addition to 255 women who have joined the Syrian-Iraqi borders to get to their relatives who had gone to hotspots<sup>2</sup>.

Interestingly, the Moroccan jihadists had stable or semi-stable jobs before becoming fighters as part of jihadist organizations in Syria

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<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism: The Case for Security Cooperation Today*, Gilgamesh publishing House, London, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

and Iraq and they were working full jobs and received salaries. Out of the 1531 Moroccans who went to hotspots in Syria and Iraq, there are 311 workmen, 191 merchants, 184 street vendors, 158 employees in the private sector, and 101 daily workers<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the aforementioned, there are 135 jihadists who are either pupils or students, 179 craftsmen, 4 contractual workers, 4 farmers, and 4 imams. Moreover, there are 187 unemployed jihadists, only two IT specialist, two teachers, and 14 jihadists are Moroccan who lived abroad<sup>2</sup>.

### **Affiliations / allocation of functions**

The allocation of functions / affiliations of Moroccan jihadists reflect a significant part of existing differences between jihadist organizations in Iraq and Syria up to late 2015. ISIS has recruited 733 Moroccans in Iraq and Syria leaving the remaining jihadists scattered over diverse other organizations. It is notable that there is a major propensity of Moroccan fighters to join “Harakat Sham al-Islam” (262 Moroccans). This Movement was led by the Moroccan Ibrahim Benchakroun, formerly detained in Guantanamo Bay and killed in the battlefield in Syria, who then was succeeded by another Moroccan national, Mohammed Mahdi Khalou also known as “Abu Talha”<sup>3</sup>.

It should be noted that following the dissipation of Ahrar al-Sham movement, a large number of Moroccan fighters have joined the ranks of ISIS, with few of them joining Al-Nusra Front. Furthermore, around 437 of them have been killed (376 in Syria and 61 in Iraq), and this number has reached 546 in 2019<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

<sup>2</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

<sup>3</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

<sup>4</sup> An interview with Mohammed Nakkaoui, Regional Brigadier General of the counterterrorism brigade at the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, 11 September 2019, Medil TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoXgWMRcneg>

In 2015, the number of returnees was 176<sup>1</sup> and reached 258 based on the latest statistics of October 2019. The number of returning women, as of October 2019, was 52 in addition to 15 children returnees<sup>2</sup>.

Around 226 jihadists, out of 1531 (in 2015), have been previously imprisoned for terrorism and violent extremism cases<sup>3</sup>.

<b>Affiliations in the ranks of jihadist organizations in Syria and Iraq</b>	<b>Until October 2019</b>	<b>Until December 2015</b>
Harakat Sham al-Islam	100	262
ISIS	931	733
Al-Nusra Front (Jabhat Fatah al-Sham)	50	-
Other organizations	-	-
Killed in Syria and Iraq	546	437
Returned to Morocco	258	176
Previously imprisoned for terrorism and violent extremism cases	225	225

The year 2013 witnessed a sharp increase in the flow of Moroccan fighter, which was the peak of migration pace to hotspots, with 141 and 162 fighters in June and September respectively. However, in early 2014, the migratory flow began to slow down, as only 7 people have left Morocco to go to those areas from the beginning of 2014 up to November 2015. This can be explained by the increased vigilance of security agencies, which activities focused on targeting recruitment networks, border control, airport control, and pursuit of terrorist cells. In fact, from 2013 up to late 2015, around 26 cells

<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

<sup>2</sup> An interview with Mohammed Nakkaoui, Regional Brigadier General of the counterterrorism brigade at the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, 11 September 2019, Medil TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoXgWMRcneg>

<sup>3</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi and others, *Morocco's War on Terrorism*.

have been dismantled in addition to arresting others in airports and border crossings.

### **Jihadist women within the general fabric of Morocco**

#### **The beginnings of women's participation in terrorism in Morocco**

Talking about “feminist terrorism” in Morocco before 2003 was unheard of. It is possible to consider the development of the phenomenon of terrorism as tied to the stereotypical view of the women's role and areas of activities and it is directly related to psychological preparation up until details emerged to reflect the involvement of women in terrorism, namely at the level of suicide attacks aiming at inflicting a huge number of casualties and losses.

Seeing what occurred in Jordan for instance, a lady was in charge of explosions that occurred in a hotel in the capital Amman leading to the death of the international film director Moustapha Al Akkad, who is regarded as one of the top innovators who contributed to spreading the word about the Islamic World through his film “Arrisala” (The Message), which had some of its scenes shot in Morocco. Sajida Arrishawi will face her fate as she would be executed in February 2015 after ISIS killed the Jordanian pilot Muath Al Ksasbeh by burning him to death in the most horrid and barbaric way. Thereafter, the names of other female suicide bombers have emerged in Europe and in hotspots.

Such structural variables have contributed to changing the previous idea about the absence of “female terrorism” from the scene. Indeed, this change is further confirmed by the case of two sisters “S.” and “E. L.”, ex-convicts, who have been recruited by the leader of a terrorist cell active in Rabat. They have been loaded with extremist ideas before being used in conducting terrorist attacks even though they were minors.

Subsequently, recruitment would have other manifestations precisely after three years, as indicated by the case of three women,

“Um Essaad”, an engineer “M. L.”, and a doctor “I. B.”; the available data indicate that these three women, while being fully aware of the intended aims, have contributed in financing the actions of “Ansar Al Mahdi” (Supporters of Al Mahdi) organization and after accepting to leave their homes and join the extremist organization.

These cases not only refute the fact that terrorism is exclusive to men only, but they also refute the economic stability argument in understanding the social reality that drives to despair and grievances given that most of these women have had a comfortable life in terms of social positioning. However, they were drawn to the world of terrorism due to diverse effects. Being abroad for some of them, in Europe particularly, reintroduces issues of identity and cultural alienation both on the intellectual and emotional levels, which sometimes leads to deviance and the adoption of radical ideologies.

Furthermore, the tendency of women to engage in terrorism is shown through the case of the ex-convict “Dh. A.” who has been released on December 3, 2012 after spending three year in jail. She was an intern doctor in one of the northern cities of Morocco. She was engaged in an activity on behalf of Al-Qaeda intending to conduct a suicide attack in Denmark targeting the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard who made the offensive cartoon about Prophet Muhammad, May the Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him. In another case, “N. Sh.” has pledged allegiance to the so-called “Caliph of the Islamic State”, Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi. She was intending to conduct a suicide attack in Syria or Iraq, but she was arrested in December 3, 2014. As for the case of “F. H.”, she had tight relations with prominent officers in the International Organization, and she is presently in Syria, close to the leadership of ISIS.

As previously indicated, and in an interesting precedent, two female minors were joining terrorist activities for the first time ever. They were positioned in a cell that was active in Rabat before

being dismantled in August 2003. The two sisters, “S. L.” and “E. L.”, were part of this 28-person cell and have been arrested along with the others but then were granted amnesty on August 19, 2005. The members of this organization were planning to assassinate a number of prominent figures in the State<sup>1</sup>.

Around three years later, between July and August of 2006, the Moroccan security forces have arrested the “Ansar Al Mahdi” cell members, who have been preparing a strategy for recruitment and coaching with a specific focus on military elements. This organization has issued instructions to its 58 detained followers to depart to hotspots, namely to Afghanistan and Iraq as they are closer to Morocco, where it is aiming to replicate its experiments and expand the spread of jihadist movements. The organization succeeded in recruiting non-commissioned officers from the Royal Armed Forces and the Royal Gendarmerie, police, and four women with affluent backgrounds in Casablanca, who have contributed in financing the organization’s terrorist plots<sup>2</sup>.

In December 2014, the joint coordination between the Moroccan and Spanish authorities led to the dismantlement of a cell specializing in the recruitment of female fighters for ISIS. The leaders of this cell have been apprehended in the city of Al Fnidik (Tetwan district) along with five of their associates, including four women operating in the occupied cities Sebta and Mellila as well as in Barcelona, Spain.

This case revealed the capacities of ISIS’s activists in utilizing social media for propaganda, in collaboration with local partners, in order to recruit female fighters for the organization and to use them in conduction suicide attacks or to be wed to ISIS’s fighters<sup>3</sup>.

Official statistics (up to October 2019) show that around 700 women and children of Moroccan nationality are currently stranded

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<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi et al., *White Book on Terrorism in Morocco*, pp. 124-133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 153-155.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.



in Syria, including 280 Moroccan women and 391 minors. Only 52 women and 15 minors have returned to Morocco:

Number of Moroccan women in Syria	280
Number of returning Moroccan women	52
Number of Moroccan minors in Syria	391
Number of returning Moroccan minors	15

In an attempt to diagnose the civil and social situation of Maghrebian women, including Moroccan women who went to hotspots, the table below shows how women (and their children) are classified:

- Wives having the same nationality as their husbands and whose husbands have been killed	Children accompanying their Maghrebian mothers	- Women who have been sentenced to life in prison in Iraq	- Children who accompanied their fathers and mothers as they joined hotspots
- Wives having the same nationality as their husbands and whose husbands have been arrested	Orphan children whose fathers have been killed. Their fathers were Maghrebian fighters with the same nationality as the wives	- Women and children stranded in some Syrian camps	- Children born in hotspots
- Wives having the same nationality as their husbands and have broken	Children whose fathers have been		

up with their husbands	arrested.		
- Wives of killed foreign fighters	Their fathers are Maghrebian fighters		
- Wives of arrested foreign fighters	Children whose fathers are Maghrebian fighters with foreign wives		
- Wives of foreign fighters that have broken up with their husbands	Children whose mothers are Maghrebian and whose fathers are foreign fighters		
- Unmarried women who went to hotspots	Maghrebian children whose fathers are unknown		
	Maghrebian children whose fathers and mothers have been killed		

In managing the issue of women migrating to Syria, the Moroccan authorities rely on a no-blame approach and they do not even monitor them as they consider that these women would go to the

hotspots merely to join their husbands and not to take part in the fight. Those who have returned to Morocco would receive a special treatment as they receive assistance in order to rehabilitate and reintegrate them socially<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, the Moroccan authorities have arrested a number of women involved in terrorism and violent extremism cases with the national territory of the Kingdom, and then have been brought to justice. According to the statistics of September 2019, prosecutions have been reduced during 2019 as the number of cases was 3 compared to 11 cases back in 2018. The number of cases in 2015 was 7 and then suddenly increased to 32 in 2016. Then once again, the number of cases sharply decreases to 3 cases in 2017. However, the Moroccan judiciary only prosecuted 36 cases out of a total of 56 cases between 2015 and 2019. Imprisonment was pronounced in 16 cases, 15 cases are on remand, one case is still under judicial investigations, 2 under police investigations, and three accused have been acquitted<sup>2</sup>.

*Women prosecuted in relation to terrorism cases over the past five years  
(based on the statistics of September 2019)*

Penal status of involved women	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Number of female suspects	7	32	3	11	3	56
Number of women in custody	2	8	3	6	0	19
Number of women still under investigation	0	0	0	0	1	1
Number of prosecuted women	5	27	0	5	2	36

<sup>1</sup> Abdelhak El Khayyam, Chief of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, during a press conference held to reveal the details of the dismantlement of the terrorist cell, Friday October 25, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Public Prosecution, September 2019

Number of women sentenced to imprisonment	3	11	0	2	0	16
Number of women on remand	2	10	0	3	0	15
Number of women fined only	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of women acquitted	0	3	0	0	0	3
Number of women still in court (first instance)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of women still in the investigation phase	0	0	0	0	2	2

### **Sharia-based evidence engineering on the necessity of women's jihad in the Arab Maghreb region (cases of Morocco and Tunisia):**

The sources of sharia norms, used by ISIS in convincing youth of the obligation to migrate and engage in jihad on their side, include some sources that we consider the most influential in terms of gaining youth's empathy and thus facilitate their recruitment by ISIS, Al Nusra Front, Sham Al Islam. These sources are: 1- ISIS's founding document and the declaration of the caliphate. 2- Al-Khansaa Battalion's circular considered as the workbook of female jihadists. 3- Online propaganda on jihadist websites and social media. 4- Sharia-based fatwas of theorists pertaining to jihadist organizations.

### **Conference on "the position of the nation's clerics (clerics of al-ummah) concerning events in Syria" held in Cairo**

A conference on "the position of the nation's clerics (clerics of al-ummah) concerning events in Syria" was held in Cairo in June

2013. This conference was broadcast live on the Qatari TV channel “Al Jazeera Mubasher” as well as on other TV channels, including the final statement read out by Sheikh Mohamed Hassan, which contained an explicit call “of the necessity of engaging in jihad to ensure the victory of our brothers, in Syria, be it with money, weapons, and all forms of jihad” and “cease division amongst Muslims generally and Syrian rebels particularly, and foster the primacy of the public interest over the private one” and “condemn classifying and accusing some revolutionary factions of terrorism”<sup>1</sup>.

We found out, through our field study, that the impact of this call has played a major role in encouraging young people to migrate to Syria under the pretext of “supporting the vulnerable people towards victory”. Even though the participants have disavowed the substantive results of the conference, the subsequent media impact has been extensive. Nonetheless, following the emergence of ISIS, the clerics’ sense of responsibility in combatting the phenomenon of recruitment has increased, as the message of giving support to the Syrian people has been twisted into a call for a general mobilization to join armed organizations<sup>2</sup>.

In Morocco, a number of clerics have had an important role in tackling ISIS’s ideology; they are former “salafist jihadist sheikhs” who have previously announced their “ideological overhaul”, spearheaded by Mohamed Fizazi, Mohamed Abdelwahab Rafiki aka “Abi Fahs”, Hassan Kettani, Omar Hadouchi, and Abdelkrim Chedili. However, it seems like the developed propaganda and recruitment machine used by the new generation of jihadist organizations is much stronger and more effective.

Moreover, ISIS and other associated terrorist organizations wages a series of fierce campaigns against these sheikhs and not only in Morocco, but also in a number of other Arab and Islamic countries. Hence, ISIS was not reluctant in targeting them and incited to kill

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2Qj0SBc>

<sup>2</sup> Al Fazazi: What has been said in Cairo’s conference by the nation’s clerics and has not been published, June 16, 2013: <https://www.hespress.com/orbites/81821.html>

them through a video clip mentioning the clerics' names and showing their pictures, including the Moroccan Sheikh Mohamed Fizazi<sup>1</sup>.

### **The Constitutional/Founding Document of ISIS and the declaration of the caliphate**

On June 29 of 2014, the leaderships of ISIS declared "the caliphate" in areas under their control.

ISIS relied on a simplified publicity of the concept of empowerment and succession, which are the two principles endorsed by ISIS to distinguish itself from other jihadist organizations, namely Al-Qaeda. ISIS was recruiting jihadists willing to provide lands to the jihadist group in order to establish "the Rashidun Caliphate based on the prophetic approach" and to attract migrants willing to populate the new "caliphate land". This engineering envisaged in restructuring ISIS's jihadist discourse is the reason that expediated the birth of a new generation of jihadists, who are not required to be educated or have combat abilities and who are, instead, willing to attract all advocates from the local population or male or female migrants willing to populate the "caliphate base" (Dar Al-Khilafa).

ISIS's basic perception and discourse in regards to women are twofold; first, the perception of women's position and role in its "new State", which is laid out in the "city document". Second, the recruitment discourse inciting and encouraging women to migrate to regions in Syria that are under the control of ISIS, which will be dealt with later on in the document titled "women in the Islamic State" issued by the all-women Al-Khansaa Battalion.

The "City Document" issued by ISIS through its media office in "Nineveh Governorate", where ISIS addresses affiliated women specifically in paragraph 14 of the document titled "Best practices for the women of the State of caliphate" and stipulated that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.presshes.com/articles/6278>

“virtuous and gracious women are described as follows: Oh, they have much decency and are well covered wearing loose robes and they stay at home and avoid going out unless they needed something; these are the mothers of believers and dignified companions, May Allah Bless them all”<sup>1</sup>. If we recognize that the “City Document” is considered as a founding/constitutional document for the general parameters of the “State of Caliphate”, it would seem clear that ISIS acknowledges, in its sharia-based perception, that women are inherently supposed to stay at home except for necessities or specific needs. Similarly, ISIS calls women to commit to wearing robes in public spaces<sup>2</sup>.

### **The all-women Al Khansaa Battalion Circular**

The document “Women in the Islamic State”, issued by the all-women Al Khansaa media company within ISIS on 23 January 2015, represents the second most important document showcasing ISIS’s perception of women’s role within the organization and its project, i. e. establishment and “empowerment” the “State of Caliphate”. This document explicitly calls upon women to engage fully and unconditionally in the project to establish the “State of Caliphate”<sup>3</sup>.

<b>Engineering of Al-Khansaa’s document on women within the Islamic State</b>		
<b>Sections</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
Introduction	A diagnosis of the current reality of the nation and	- Western colonization, ending the Islamic caliphate regime, and the creation of local dependent regimes are the causes and ailments behind

<sup>1</sup> ISIS, “City document” (Medina document), Nineveh Governorate, 14 Shaban 1435 H/12 June 2014, Number 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Al Khansaa media company, “Women in the Islamic State: Message and Report”, See: [https://justpaste.it/almarah\\_resalh](https://justpaste.it/almarah_resalh)

	<p>particularly the situation of Muslim women</p>	<p>the regression of Islam and Muslims' position across the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Salvation project: with the return of the caliphate, some element will come to an end, namely "this stranding witnessed by Muslim generation for long decades. The time of Western superiority and imposed ways and styles of life is long gone".</li> <li>- The alternative: the baseline of ISIS's view of women (Quran and Sunnah) "far from all that is wrong with these lagging times that manipulated women's instinct and religion until we all forgot the reason for women's existence and our own existence on earth".</li> </ul>
Section I	<p>About the message of Muslims in life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Muslim stands out as "a person characterized by striving to achieve monotheism on earth without being disputed by any of the intentions of the mortal world, unlike other people with false ideas".</li> <li>- Description of the desired ideal Islamic community project.</li> <li>- Emphasis on the fact that, in life, women and men are subject to sharia-based standards and divine baseline.</li> <li>- Diagnosis of the deficiencies in the lives of modern women who do not find themselves affiliated to their real function in line with their nature and instinct.</li> </ul>



		<p>- Diagnosis of the Western baseline of liberated women, under the heading “failure of the Western model of women”.</p> <p>- Women veering off the origins of staying at home, the concept of “work” has been twisted, and the concept of “beauty” has been manipulated.</p> <p><b>First conclusion:</b> The main function of a woman is to stay at home with her husband and children and only to leave it out of necessity; first, to serve the Muslim community in several cases: Due jihad i. e. when enemies attack her homeland and where the number of men is insufficient. Secondly, to seek knowledge and particularly in terms of religion. Thirdly, a female doctor or teacher can go out of her home for the benefit of other women</p> <p><b>Second conclusion:</b> “Thorns are the only things women reaped from the myth of ‘equality’ to men”.</p>
Section II	Description of women’s life within the “State of Caliphate and its governorates”	<p>- A radical change in women’s reality since the era of colonization and what came after it; the unjust crusade conquest followed by the hegemony of Shia over power in Iraq, and the hegemony of Nusayris (Alawites) over power in the Levant.</p> <p>- A radical change in all other</p>

		<p>countries with the manifestation of “injustice and oppression practiced against female Muslims in the name of freedom, humanity, and equality”.</p> <p>Introduction of women’s main issues related to rights and duties, including the issue of women and hijab, which is the origin of rights and identity basis and as a retrieved right previously prevented by colonization.</p> <p>- Discussion on women and security as an attempt to firmly establish an “Islamic” perspective of the agenda of women, security, and peace.</p>
Section III	Comparison between the reality of women in current Islamic countries (model State: Saudi Arabia) and women in the Islamic State	<p>- A Comparison between the reality of women in current Islamic countries (model State: Saudi Arabia) and women in the Islamic State.</p> <p>- A focus on Saudi Arabia described as the State of Salul based on the hypothesis that breaking down and criticizing the Saudi model of the State is the highest threshold to show the strength of the caliphate State project that ISIS is calling for.</p> <p>- A focus on the theme of fear and women: Apprehension, torture, and threatening women, and the “unjust Saudi courts”.</p> <p>- A focus on the theme of women and westernization in Saudi Arabia’s policies. Description of not allowing women to “drive cars” as not</p>

		<p>stemming from religious reasons, but rather from “security” considerations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A focus on the theme of westernization through education and educational missions abroad and support of rotten satellite TV channels disseminating vice.</li> <li>- A focus on the theme of women and poverty: the document discusses the fact that the wealthy oil State is full of poor neighborhoods as criticism of its social care system.</li> </ul>
Messages	Guidance messages for women under the authority of ISIS	
	Incitement messages for women outside ISIS’s control	
	Threatening messages for the enemies of ISIS	
General Summary	<b>Outline of women’s roles within ISIS’s structures: Combat and non-combat missions</b>	
General Spirit of the document	A female religious identity different from the views of secular rhetoric on women	

*Al Khansaa document stipulates that it was published for three objectives*

- First, in order to academically articulate the role of Muslim women and “the desired life they have to live to be happy in this life and in the afterlife”<sup>1</sup>.
- Second, in order to realistically articulate “the good and decent life of women within the Islamic State in Iraq and the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

Levant” and to refute “the suspicions, among other things, raised about stifling based on relevant evidence and testimonies of some female Muslims living there”<sup>1</sup>.

- Third, “expose the fraudulent monotheism in the Arab Peninsula claiming to be the only entity that protects women and preserves their religion and rights”<sup>2</sup>.

The document is comprised of an introduction and three sections. The introduction focuses on initial theoretical norms diagnosing what the document refers to as “a status of weakness and languish in the Islamic World”. The document lists the causes and ailments behind the regression of Islam and Muslims’ position across the world and refers to three historical milestones: western colonization, termination of the Islamic caliphate regime, and post-colonial restructuration of national States, which are described as dependent local regimes<sup>3</sup>.

“The real Islamic community -that knows the concept of this mortal life, abides by divine orders and worships Allah[And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me] - has been gone since the Ottoman Caliphate fell and then replaced by Arab and foreign regimes puppets to the enemies of religion. Then, the pure Islamic ideology based on Quran and Sunnah has been alienated and far from the reality and life of peoples. Afterwards, the western colonization has been able to disseminate its foul culture and atheist materialistic ideology in the ranks of Muslims across the globe”<sup>4</sup>.

Following this diagnosis, the document concludes that the **Project of Salvation** depends on the return of the Caliphate to “put an end to this stranding witnessed by Muslim generation for long decades.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

The time of Western superiority and imposed ways and styles of life is long gone”<sup>1</sup>.

The document points out that the baselines of ISIS’s view of women are Quran and Sunnah “far from all that is wrong with these lagging times that manipulated women’s instinct and religion until we all forgot the reason for women’s existence and our own existence on earth”<sup>2</sup>.

Section One titled “The Message of Muslims in Life” portrays the Muslim as a savior being “a person characterized by striving to achieve monotheism on earth without being disputed by any of the intentions of the mortal world, unlike other people with false ideas”.

Moreover, this part describes the project of the desired ideal Islamic community as “the ideal Islamic community is not intended to probe the depths of matters, discover the secrets of nature, and to attain the highest levels of architectural civilization. Rather, it is intended to achieve monotheism with regards to graves and palaces, to establish Sharia, spread Islam on earth, and bring people out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of faith. This does not mean in any way neglecting the worldly necessary sciences without which human life would not exist, such as agriculture, medicine, construction, etc., but these sciences are only absorbed to the extent that suffices the people's needs and allows for Muslims to live decently”.

Within this theoretical engineering of the new Islamic community project, the document emphasizes on the fact that, in life, women and men are subject to sharia-based standards and divine baseline and that their message in life is one; this message is ‘the woman has been created, just like the man, to rebuild the earth, but as Allah Almighty wanted, He created her from Adam and for Adam, so

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

after she fulfills her necessary duties towards her Creator, there is no greater right than her husband's right over her"<sup>1</sup>.

The document diagnoses the deficiencies in the life of the modern woman "who does not find herself affiliated to her real function in line with her nature and instinct for a good reason, as she finds herself faced with the image of a man and not a real man. In spite of this, Muslim women must be disciplined and educate their daughters as per what Allah, their Creator, wants in order to establish the Muslim Home and then the community of Muslims for the Lord of the Worlds. "The main function of the woman and her right place in the community is that calm home amongst her children and family. She must educate, preserve, and care for generations and this cannot be true if she is illiterate and ignorant. Islam does not approve neither the prohibition of education not the prevention of culture for women"<sup>2</sup>.

The document's diagnosis of the Western baseline for women stipulates that "failure of the Western model of women" and considers that the model of liberated women who leave their homes has led to their misery: "Satan's soldiers nowadays would like to send Adam's daughters from the paradise at home with their husbands to drudgery and exhaustion through their "development", "advancement" and "culture". Satan's soldiers have succeeded in some of that by twisting four concepts thus manipulating the emotions and hacking into the minds of Muslim women"<sup>3</sup>.

With great intelligence aiming at infiltrating the conscience of targeted women, the West bombards the social empowerment of women in modern communities leading to its failure by changing their relations with public spaces (women veering off the origins of staying at home). Second, through the issue of balancing working women's dual commitments i. e. their jobs and their families

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

(twisting the concept of “work” by separating house work and work outside home). Third, through focusing on modern education instead of sharia sciences in contemporary schools (distortion of the concept of “science” by limiting it to worldly sciences devoid of sharia sciences). Finally, through the difference in the value of the concept of beauty between the Western references and the Islamic ones (manipulation of the concept of “beauty” by denigrating well-covered and decent wear versus embellishing exposed and lewd wear).

*The document concludes* that the main function of a woman is to stay at home with her husband and children and only to leave out of necessity; first, to serve the Muslim community in several cases: Due jihad i. e. when enemies attack her homeland and where the number of men is insufficient. Secondly, to seek knowledge and particularly in terms of religion. Thirdly, a female doctor or teacher can go out of her home for the benefit of other women<sup>1</sup>.

Section Two titled “Description of women’s life within the ‘State of Caliphate and its governorates’”, the document describes the changes affecting the function and status of women since the era of colonization and what came after it; “the unjust crusade conquest followed by the hegemony of Shia over power in Iraq, and the hegemony of Nusayris (Alawites) over power in the Levant.

Description of women’s life within the “State of Caliphate and its governorates” - A radical change in women’s reality since the era of colonization and what came after it; the unjust crusade conquest followed by the hegemony of Shia over power in Iraq, and the hegemony of Nusayris (Alawites) over power in the Levant. Other changes are seen all other countries with the manifestation of “injustice and oppression practiced against female Muslims in the name of freedom, humanity, and equality”. Then, ***the document returns to introducing women’s main issues related to rights and duties*** and how affected and changed they were, namely the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

issue of “women and hijab, which is the origin of rights and identity basis and as a retrieved right previously prevented by colonization”<sup>1</sup>.

It’s noteworthy that the document does not hesitate to discuss the topic of *women and security* as an attempt to *firmly establish an “Islamic” perspective of the agenda of women, security, and peace*. In fact, the document deals with two subjects; first, *the suffering of Sunni women*, throughout the duration of war, from abduction, captivity, torture, defilement, and death in many cases”. Second, a diagnosis of the existing reality is presented ***on the subject of women and justice***, with the absence of fair courts before the caliphate was in power because sharia rulings have been disrupted in relation to the cases of women and livelihood”<sup>2</sup>.

Section Three introduces a comparison between the reality of women in current Islamic countries (model State: Saudi Arabia) and women in the Islamic State. The document focuses on Saudi Arabia (described as the State of Salul) based on the hypothesis that breaking down and criticizing the Saudi model of the State is the highest threshold to show the strength of the “caliphate State” project that ISIS is calling for. Indeed, the document focused on Saudi Arabia given the fact that it founds its legislative philosophy on the application of sharia with the reference being the Salafist Wahhabi doctrine. The document expressed the following as a warning: “We would like to expose this deceiving model and show people its fake claims and false communication in several aspects concerning women”.

The document criticizes the situation of women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as different from the “correct” media perspective, and focuses on four themes:

- The theme of fear and women: Apprehension, torture, and threatening women, and the “unjust Saudi courts”.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



- The theme of women and westernization in Saudi Arabia's policies, where women are not allowed to "drive cars" as not stemming from religious reasons, but rather from "security" considerations.
- The theme of westernization through education and educational missions abroad and support of rotten satellite TV channels disseminating vice.
- The theme of women and poverty: the document discusses the fact that the wealthy oil State is full of poor neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>.

*Guidance messages for women under the authority of ISIS:* "To our sisters bestowed by the rule of Allah under the umbrella of the caliphate, fear Allah and fulfill your duties towards your country, and beware of harming it in any way. Seize the initiative to raise the sons of the caliphate on sincere monotheism and raise the daughters of the caliphate on purity and decency. Just know that you are the hope of this nation; you are the ones who raise the guardians of creed and protectors of land and honor, may Allah bless you and rewarded you for your patience, you are part of us and we are part of you<sup>2</sup>.

The document ends with three messages to be conveyed:

- *Incitement messages for women outside ISIS's control:* Particularly to those who jealously defend their nation, we let you know that the nation of Muhammad, may Allah bless and bring peace upon him, will not arise without your contribution, so do not let down the caliphate, and serve it even with a word. May your children be rocks or building blocks in the edifice of glory and beacons of the State of Islam, May Allah bless you and reward you for your patience, you are part of us and we are part of you<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

- *Threatening messages for the enemies of ISIS*: “to the enemies of chastity and purity, the secularists and the liberals”, our girls have reembraced their robes, and our women have decided to live in their homes. Throw your spittle-like culture, civilization, and ideology in the sea, Allah will combat you, you are not part of our people we are not part of your people”<sup>1</sup>.
- *Defining the roles of women within the structures of the Islamic State*:
  - 1- Non-combat missions: media, education, sharia research, female police agents, services, health, and all non-combat activities.
  - 2- Combat missions: “But this will not prevent women from carrying out combat activities if necessary or if they were mobilized, or if they wish to request martyrdom”<sup>2</sup>.

### **Fatwas of jihadist theorists and recruiters:**

The literature of Salafist jihadist groups from the first generation of Al-Qaeda or other organizations was keen on keeping women out of field jihadist issues, including migration, combat, and suicide attacks. The reservations of this generation were based on moral principles, related to the general perception of women as weak beings, whose task is caring for their homes and education. Moreover, the Islamic trend was critical of women's participation in left-wing radical organizations; women's participation in left-wing organizations was linked to their liberal perceptions of women. Therefore, Al-Qaeda's theorists found in the jurisprudence of Islamic movements a rich theoretical material to restrict women's participation. Women affiliated with Al-Qaeda did not participate in suicide attacks until later when the leaders of the organization in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Iraq, headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, called on women to carry out suicide attacks.

However, the new generation of jihadist organizations, especially ISIS, have coined what they call the “necessity jurisprudence”, which alleviates restrictions based on the rule of priorities. ISIS used a smart approach by investing in all the jihadist literature that establishes the obligation of the jihad of financing, including literature from dissenting organizations, namely Al-Qaeda.

*Some models of the most influential theorists in incentivizing the Maghrebian youth to migrate to hotspots (Syria, Iraq, and Libya)*

Extremist youth have relied on several sources of sharia to migrate to Syria, Iraq, or Libya, including the aforementioned global fatwas of jihadist organizations’ leaders as well as domestic fatwas linked to some theorists and sheikhs active on a national scale. Such fatwas have been circulated through social media and incubators of violent extremist ideology.

A number of young people -who migrated to Syria, Iraq, or other regions such as Libya and coastal areas- looked into the sharia-based argument for their decision before migrating. Whereas others were determined to migrate and then use the sharia-based argument as a retroactive mechanism to justify their decision to migrate and their desire to fight.

However, things were more complicated in relation to the migration of women towards areas of jihad due to the social status of women in the Middle East and North Africa in general, whether in terms of the lack of social independence and cultural perceptions restricting women, especially the principles of guardianship and mahram (male guardian), even though these two conditions are precluded as a legal limitation in legislations and daily social behavior of most of the Maghreb countries.

*Identification of sharia rules, in the Arab Maghreb, in relation to the obligation of jihad for women and their departure to join the Syrian battlefield*

In a general evaluation of the available literature about the rule on women migrating to places of jihad, and based on a number of interviews conducted with some of the returnees from Syria, especially those who held important positions in the bodies of Hasiba and justice, it would appear that the content of most sharia-based and movement-related roots support the mobilization and pitting speech, mixed with tempting offers as well as material or moral incentives, which aim at encouraging youth from the Arab Maghreb countries to join the militant organizations in hotspots, and specifically joining ISIS in Syria. We notice that these references and theoretical authorities differ in terms of titles and literary theory. They also differ in terms of the geographical field and movement-related context in each of the Maghreb countries. We also find that the motives of male jihadists differ from those female jihadists in joining up the fight in general. In some cases, we even sense a disparity between the nature and strength of motives to join hotspots amongst women, including those who bear a jihadist ideology and others who are obliged to accompany their husbands for sharia-related, cultural, social, or economic reasons. In fact, these women are in different situations, including those married, divorced, and single women along with those leaving their husbands behind, those who migrate without their husbands, but receive a recommendation or sponsorship from them. Hence, there is a multitude of incentives and motives based on varying convictions, and different social status.

The approach related to the nature and content of endorsed fatwas, which are old fatwas adapted to the context:

- Sharia-based fatwas issued by sharia theorists pertaining to global jihadist organizations
- Fatwas of Al-Qaeda theorists used by ISIS
- Fatwas of sharia theorists pertaining to ISIS

- Sharia-based fatwas issued by domestic sharia theorists
- Fatwas on the obligation or non-obligation of jihad
- Fatwas on dropping the general permission granted by the guardian
- Fatwas to adapt the condition of the direct guardian's permission

As for the adaptation of the content of fatwas and rules related to jihad and how legitimate are the jihad and migration of women to hotspots, they have been adopted on several situations and bases, including:

- Reliance on claiming that the general guardian is Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi since he's "the caliph of Muslims" and therefore the condition of getting permission from the general guardian is null and void.
- Tendency to bypass the role of the fatwa in regards to women joining places of jihad with the justification of being in a state of war and under duress.
- Reliance on fatwa in regards to the conditions of migration, including the guardian's permission and followed by that of mahram (male guardian), without referring to fatwas on the obligation or non-obligation of jihad.
- Circumventing fatwas by adapting Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's invitation, as permission from the guardian to migrate, and then agreeing with one of the migrants residing there in Syria to marry the woman in question (through the phrase "I hereby make you my husband"), under the pretext of the intention to marry to make the permission to migrate without a mahram consistent with sharia.
- Circumventing fatwas by obtaining the permission of a jihadist husband, father, or brother, who have already migrated, or obtain the permission of the imprisoned jihadist for his wife to migrate to Syria.

- Justify the non-conditionality of mahram in the case of mass migration of a number of women.
- Justify the non-conditionality of mahram because there is no illegitimate retreat with men in airports, until the migrant woman arrives at the reception houses (guest houses) on the Syrian-Turkish border, where discipline shall start in regards to the sharia rules related to being left alone with men as well as the separation between men and women.
- Relying on female fatwas, based on a gender perception, that refuses to treat women as weak and less capable beings compared to men.
- Rejecting the fatwas of the “Al-Qa’idin” clerics and not taking the sources of the fatwa and jihadist guidance except from the official sources of ISIS media, and by reference to its official documents, as expressed by Muhammad Al-Adnani, by saying: “Whoever wants equity, let Allah protect and judge us through our statements, publications, and letters”<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, he says in another statement: “He who wants to know the state's approach, policy, and fatwas should refer to its leaders, statements, letters, and sources”<sup>2</sup>.

*Some sources of fatwa and sharia-based arguments regarding women joining hotspots and conditions thereof:*

In order to determine the main sources relied on in the Arab Maghreb region, we looked into a number of elements, including monographic research we carried out on the perceptions of extremist groups on the position of women in regards to the call for mobilization towards the land of “jihad”, surveys on a number of male and female returnees on the most important sources adopted

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Adnani, Statement titled: *Allah will protect you O aggrieved State*, Al-Furkan Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Adnani, Statement titled: *I preach one to you*, Al-Furkan Foundation, <http://iswy.co/el7gva>

in our Maghreb region to persuade women to travel and join hotspots, and the merits of setting restrictions and conditions related to the departure to hotspots. Hence, we found that the most circulating main sources were as follows:

**Yussef Bin Saleh Al-Ayiri:** Saudi national (known as Al-Battar), born on April 23, 1974, is the founder of the Saudi branch of Al-Qaeda who was known as the Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula and continued as a leader of the organization in Saudi Arabia until being killed on June 2, 2003. Despite his affiliation with Al-Qaeda, ISIS's activists promoted his fatwa among the youth, with the aim of attracting them to Iraq and Syria.

Perhaps it may be said that Al-Ayiri's fatwa on women<sup>1</sup> was the most prevalent among young people in Tunisia and Morocco. Al-Ayiri formulated in his fatwa a smart encounter of the personality of the retired Mujahid, the man who loves life (and the woman is part of it), leaving jihad, and the enemies dominate him (giving up manhood), versus building a parallel image of women as responsible for all developments in reality being the central actor capable of disrupting or stimulating jihad.

**Ahmed Ben Omar Al-Hazmi:** is a Saudi theorist, who came into fame after ISIS was founded and after establishing his Hazmite movement in mid-2014, which is based on the rule that "ignorance is not an excuse, deny all and deny those who do not deny us". It appears that the influence of Al-Hazmi in the Maghrebian region is due to the fact that Ahmed Al-Hazmi had previously visited Tunisia in the end of 2011, during which he stayed for a period of time and met a large number of supporters salafist jihadist movement. Additionally, he gave many lectures, lessons, and scientific courses in mosques and gatherings, which had a major

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<sup>1</sup> Yussef Al-Ayiri, *On the role of women in jihad against enemies*.

impact on a number of young people who have embraced his ideological and dogmatic perceptions.

**Turki Al-Binali / Abu Hammam Al-Athari:** A Bahraini national born in 1984. He used several nicknames or pseudonyms such as “Abu Hammam Al-Athari”, “Abu Sufyan Al-Saleem”, and “Abu Hudhaifa Al-Bahraini”. Al-Binali was active on websites and social media as he was writing answers to questions asked and participating in debates and fatwas. He is the author of several letters and booklets, most of which are written in his name and others under pseudonyms, namely a letter authorizing and legitimizing suicide attacks. He also wrote a letter titled “Extending Hands to support allegiance to Al-Baghdadi” and another one titled “Informing comers and goers of Some of Al-Baghdadi's virtues”.

Al-Binali's name gained wide acclaim after he announced his pledge of allegiance to ISIS in 2014 and assumed the position of Sharia Board General for the organization. Al-Binali is also considered as one of the most prominent leaders of the Islamic State in the Libyan city of Sirte, where he used to give lectures in mosques to members of the organization in preparation for courses on sharia.

The popularity of Turki Al-Binali's fatwas in the jihadi circles in Libya, Tunisia and, Morocco, along with his frequent visits to these countries, is one of the reasons for his influence in attracting and persuading jihadists in the Arab Maghreb with ISIS's project. He also permitted women to migrate join ISIS in Syria.

Al-Binali indulged the legitimacy of women going to jihad without getting a permission from the guardian based on the rule stating that “Who is the guardian to be obeyed?”, where he advised that all Mujahideen derive the legitimacy of their migration and jihad from “the Commander of the Faithful, Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi”, ISIS's leader. However, at the beginning, he was stringent about the obligation of a mahram being present as a condition for permitting a woman to leave her home, whether for



Hajj (pilgrimage) or for jihad. After joining ISIS as the head of the Sharia Board and Emir of Research and fatwas, he stated in a fatwa that women must join the caliphate and if their husbands refused, they must leave without any permission.

**Abu Mondher Al-Shanqeeti:** Although Abu Mondher Al-Shanqeeti was keen on the condition of a mahram accompanying a woman in her travel, he was fervent to invite Muslim women who wished to join up by saying: “Then we say to the honorable sister: if you want to go to jihad then a mahram must accompany you on your journey to jihad... You can seek to marry a Muslim who wants to engage in jihad... And when you want to leave the lands of blasphemy, then you would not be required to have a mahram, as you can leave whenever you are able to do so”<sup>1</sup>.

**Sheikh Muhammad Al-Arefi**, who was attributed the fatwa of the marriage jihad despite denying having issued the fatwa. Al-Arifi was a frequent visitor to Morocco, as he was apprenticed to Moroccan scholars as is the case in obtaining a recent license from the Moroccan supportive Sheikh, Muhammad Bin Al-Amin Boukhabza. Although the man is not considered to be part of the first line of jihadi theorists, the general path of his Wahhabi thinking has contributed to nurturing the extremist ideology among a number of young men.

However, it is noteworthy that the uproar caused by the fatwa of marriage jihad, attributed to him, has taken him out of the picture. This was followed by security problems after being arrested by the Saudi security authorities. Later on, there was an uproar made by several Moroccan civil activities against his participation in a meeting in Morocco.

According to some testimonies, one of the counterproductive results on the ground, due to the promotion and exploitation of the fatwa

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Mondher Al-Shanqeeti, “Answer to the question: what are the conditions of women going out for jihad?” Question No. 5096.

of marriage jihad in the mediatic war against ISIS, was the resentment of the leaders of the organization and their development of plans that work to change the management of the matter in a way that serves the image of the organization on the one hand, and aims to secure its military field operations on the other hand. This has manifested itself in three trends:

The first trend: which is related to the inclusion of women in combat activities like what happened during the years 2015-2014 through encouraging the participation of women in retaliatory terrorist attacks in several European countries and then preparing a group of girls to fight to carry out operations against the Iraqi security forces. A number of these girls have been arrested by security forces.

The second trend: which was about the creation of special all-women combat units, such as Al Khansaa and Umm Al-Rayyan battalions.

The third trend: at the beginning of 2018, this trend began by restructuring the roles of women and integrating them into combat activities, as in the operations of February 2018 in eastern Deir Ezzor, to fill the shortfall that afflicted the organization after the killing of thousands of its fighters by means of air strikes waged by the joint forces. Others have been arrested by the Syrian and Iraqi forces in addition to many others fleeing.

### **Abu Muslim Al-Jaza'ery: Fatwa on the rule regarding women's jihad in Tunisia**

Abu Muslim Al-Jaza'ery gave successive and repeated responses on the forum of questions within the platform of monotheism and jihad to two questions related to the rule regarding jihad in Tunisia. The question was related veiled Muslim woman in Tunisia and what should they do if prevented from wearing their hijab (veil) or niqab. His answer was: "in Tunisia, like other Islamic countries that are governed by laws that hamper and obstruct the sharia of Allah, wearing the hijab or niqab is considered as 'fard ayn'

(compulsory for all sane and mature Muslims)". However, he sets conditions for the declaration of jihad; foremost of which is preparation. "What must be known is that the statement of the hypothesis of jihad does not require beginning to carry it out without preparation. Therefore, this jihad must be preceded by preparation except for one case, which is when the enemy forces Muslims to battle such as in the case of invasion of our land. Hence, we cannot delay the jihad until preparation is complete, but in this case the preparation must occur in parallel to jihad". He concluded in regards to this rule that "even if jihad is *fard ayn* in Tunisia, its ground is unsuitable for it". Afterwards, Abu Muslim Al-Jaza'ery gave instruction for mobilization to enter other cities and other regions. "Thus, the capable and honest people should resort to the nearby lands of jihad, firstly to prepare themselves and secondly to assist their brothers. The closest land for our brothers in Tunisia is Algeria. Allah has bestowed upon the people of the Islamic Maghreb (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania) the presence of Al-Qaeda, which is characterized by a clear methodology and clean flag...<sup>1</sup>".

Proceeding from this structure inciting to join the ranks of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic West, the fatwa is directed to portray women in public life in Tunisia as infidels and contrary to Islamic values hence placing them in front of options that would spark a chain reaction: being patient, not leaving the house, and ultimately migration<sup>2</sup>.

"What a Muslim woman must do if she is prevented from wearing hijab and niqab? Our sister has to be patient, persevere, and cling to her hijab and niqab, no matter how much harm attains her"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Muslim Al-Jaza'ery, "The rule regarding women's jihad in Tunisia", monotheism and jihad platform.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

“I recommended our sisters not to leave their homes except for an urgent need so that they will not be exposed to temptation, harm, and the things mentioned in the question”<sup>1</sup>.

“A woman’s mahram, who adheres to the sharia of Allah, must consider migration to a place where his wife can show the rites of her religion and abide by the orders of her Lord. This migration does not necessarily have to be outside Tunisia, because there may be regions in Tunisia itself where our sister can show the rites of her religion. Perhaps the situation in some villages is better than in the cities”<sup>2</sup>.

**Abu Saad Al Amili:** A jihadi ideologue who chose to live in the virtual world, however the Yemeni-Saudi military and police coordination since 2011, against Al-Qaeda hotbeds in Yemen and on the Yemeni-Saudi border, led, in 2013, to partially reveal the identity of Abu Saad Al Amili as being close to Al-Qaeda in Yemen<sup>3</sup>.

Al Amili is considered as one of the most active new ideologues for the jihadi movements following the death of Ossama Ben Laden<sup>4</sup>, in addition to his role for incitement and orientation during the post “Arab Spring” period<sup>5</sup>, as he wrote “Highlights and legitimate data about the Syrian and Libyan revolutions”<sup>6</sup>, and “Warnings and recommendations for the Sunnis in Bahrain”<sup>7</sup>, and “Role of supporters and jihadis in the stability of the Islamic State of Iraq and its continuity”<sup>8</sup>, in addition to numerous writings about Jihadi

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sahafah.net/show1029084.html> (02/04/2013).

<sup>4</sup> Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*. JHU Press, 2011. P 110.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Abu Saad Al Amili, “Highlights and legitimate data about the Syrian and Libyan revolutions”.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Saad Al Amili, “Warnings and recommendations for the Sunnis in Bahrain”.

<sup>8</sup> Abu Saad Al Amili, “Role of supporters and jihadis in the stability of the Islamic State of Iraq and its continuity”.

organizations in the Maghreb and in particular in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Morocco.

Al Amili participated through his numerous fatwas in encouraging young people to heed the call for Jihad, men and women, in many parts of his books and internet replies. He also established the following rule “Jihad in these times is one of the highest duties, second to the Unity of Allah, for there is no greater task, after faith, than to fight the enemies of religion and life”. Indeed, in some of his writings, he even absolves immigrants from their responsibility towards their families in order to join the jihad. “If due Jihad is aimed at keeping harm away...”

"فإن كان الجهاد المتعين لدفع الضرر كما إذا حضره العدو أو حضر الصف قدم على وفاء الدين كالنفقة وأولى وإن كان استنفار فقضاء الدين أولى إذ الإمام لا ينبغي له استنفار المدين مع الاستغناء عنه"<sup>1</sup>. "ولذلك قلت لو ضاق المال عن إطعام جياح والجهاد الذي يتضرر بتركه قدمنا الجهاد وإن مات الجياح كما في مسألة التترس"<sup>2</sup>.

**Abu Jaafar Hattab Al-Tunisi:** He was a member of the Sharia Committee for Ansar Sharia in Tunisia (Katibat Uqba Ibn Nafa'a), however, after the raids on the leaders of the jihadi Salafist movement in Tunisia following the attack on the American Embassy in 2012, the pursuit of Seif Allah Bin Hussein the Emir of the organization AKA Abou Yadh and some leaders from Ansar Sharia, the ban of the Ansar Sharia annual congress in May 2013 in Kairouan concurrent with the extension of the Islamic State in Syria and the proclamation of the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant”, Abu Jaafar Hattab joining the organization in Syria, where he was appointed within the Sharia and Al-Iftaa Committee for IS which included in the beginning Othman al-Nezeh, Nasser Thukayl, Ahmed Raïs, Salah al-Hadhif, Abu Bilal al-Harbi,

<sup>1</sup> Abu Saad Al Amili, “Positions and guidelines on questions related to the movement and the jihad”, *The exhaustive and extensive book* (Collection of replies from the Sheikh to questions addressed to His Eminence during the encounter of the Sheikh with the Glory of Islam Network and the Forums of Fallujah and the “Islamic Challenge” Network).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Abdelaziz Omar, Ali Jebali, Omar al-Kahtani, Abu Jaafar Hattab Al Tunisi and Ibrahim Sultan AKA Ali Najdi. The discourse of Hattab to Tunisian youth became a call to join, a statement of the obligation to migrate to the land of the Caliphate, and absolving women from the obligation to receive permission from their guardians. The Fatwa issued by Abu Jaafar Hattab had an important impact on female recruitment as Hattab made Jihad mandatory for women in his Fatwas by issuing “Provisions of migration and jihad for women”<sup>1</sup>, where he called on women to migrate and depart from: “the land of the infidels to the land of Islam, even without a guardian...”<sup>2</sup>. He also authorized “travel without a guardian, and he considered women combatants equal to men confirming their share of spoils”<sup>3</sup>.

**Abu Abdul Qahar al-Hassani al-Jazairi**, he's one of the signatories of the statement of obedience to the organization, known as “Scientific beacons in the obedience of the Islamic Caliphate State”, a letter that played an important role in the support of the Islamic State from many Al-Qaeda supporters in the Islamic Maghreb, after the letter established the mandatory call: “and this is the collective obligation; has been accomplished by the combatants - with God’s help and grace - in Iraq and the Levant; thus they declared the announcement of the Islamic State in the area they control, and they established the rule of the religion by applying the Sharia of Allah. Sometime later, they announced the Caliphate and they appointed their leader as the Emir of the Islamic State, Caliph. The Ummah was thus absolved of its sins, praise be to Allah for lifting this burden. We therefore urge the children of the Islamic Ummah and the organizations that aspire to apply Sharia to pledge allegiance to the Imam, support the Islamic State, fight the enemies of religion with its Imam with words, life and money. Any

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Jaafar Hattab, “Provisions of migration and jihad for women”.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

act or word which could delay the union of Muslims under one Imam is sinful and we do not reprove disobeying those who do not pledge allegiance. We urge all who can migrate to the land of the Islamic State to do so without delay, in order to take part in building the Ummah and fight the enemies of the faith”.

**Abu Bakr al-Athari**, Head of the Sharia Council in the Center in the “former” Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb. He is also one of the signatories of the statement of obedience to the organization known as “Scientific beacons in the obedience of the Islamic Caliphate State”. He also wrote many articles and fatwas on the obligation of Jihad and combat, including women in pledging allegiance as it appears clearly in his letter: “The advocates of Salafism, women with turbans and beards”. He also states: “I will not speak in this message about the longing of the mothers of the believers and the women of the Companions for jihad, nor about their engagement in the fight in the arena of war and jihad, as talking about this will be long. Those who want to learn and benefit from these stories, should read the book of our sheikh Yusef al-Ayeri may God have mercy on him and accept him as a martyr, under the title “The role of women in fighting the enemies”, or read the writings of Mahmud Tumah Halabi under the title “The first hundred female companions of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace” or other books on this subject. But we will talk about men who menstruate and no surprise! Yes, I mean those who postpone! Those who declared that jihad is sinful, and it breaks families! “The so-called men and no-men, with the dreams of children, and the minds of housewives!”

**Abu Maram al-Jaza'iri**, an Algerian from Boudouaou in the Wilaya of Boumerdes, he joined the Islamic State in summer 2014, where he joined the Method Committee. He was famous for expiating any ISIS operative who fled from areas under ISIS's control for any reason and authorizing their killing. But in the end, he fled from his

family to save his life, without informing the organization of his flight, after his affiliation to the Hazami movement was discovered. He used to urge Algerian youth, before he travelled to Syria, to join the Islamic State in its main strongholds in Syria and Iraq, or its branch in Algeria “Jund al-Khilafah” under the leadership of Abdelmalek Gouri AKA “Khaled Abu Suleiman”. It is believed he was married to a jihadi from the Islamic State “Sheikha Abu Ahmed”, considered as one of the Sharia references for women in the Islamic State. She was known for expiating women from the organization for any violation of one of the orders of the organization. It is said she was the cause for imprisoning a great number of women in Syria, in particular those who disagreed with her fatwas regarding the Niqab, not leaving the house and others.

**Al Maghrebi Al Marzouki Ajha:** Moroccan Jihadi from Bab Bard in the district of Chefchaouen in the north of Morocco. However, he was active in Tetouan and Tangiers and other northern cities. He was arrested for the first time in 2003 and sentenced to three years in jail for his association with the activities of Salafi Jihadism, loyal to Al Qaeda. He had strong relations with Turki al-Binali, especially during his visits to Morocco. He pledged his allegiance to the Islamic State publicly and was arrested by security forces at the Mohammed V International Airport, on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, as he was trying to join the Islamic State in Syria.

He was attributed a Tweet, saying: “Those for whom the land of the Levant is far and long travel stands between them, they may go to Libya, as it is also the land of Caliphate, in particular Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco and Mauritania”.

Ajha was important in the promotion of the Islamic State ideology through his membership and activity within the Joint Committee for the Defense of Islamic Detainees. He was known for his support for the migration of volunteer fighters. He is also credited for maintaining contact with Umm Adam / Fatiha Majjeti, who joined



the Islamic State before him, and held leadership positions in female circles within the organization.

In order to understand the general development of the legitimization of women's participation in jihadi organizations through fatwas, the analysis and monitoring unit from the Observatory for Monitoring Takfiri Fatwas and Extremist Ideologies at Dar al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah tracked the content of a number of writings and pamphlets relating to women's issues and rulings, according to the vision of IS through the analysis of the content of (8) books issued by the Islamic State's "Fatwa Council, Maktaba Hima", in addition to several oral fatwas issued by "Albayan Radio", the official radio of IS, and some articles written by the leaders of the organization in the "al Naba" magazine<sup>1</sup>.

The Analysis Unit of the Observatory concluded that the organization's views on women confirmed its ignorance of the rights and duties of women in Islam, and that "the vision of IS of women" is characterized by the domination of "radical sexual instincts to the point of sexual obsession and violent sadism in the mentality of IS members in their dealings with women". Most of the organization's writings despise women and rob them of their human existence, as a human who enjoys rights and duties, because it sees women as nothing more than a sexual object<sup>2</sup>.

The Analysis Unit of the Observatory also pointed out that the terrorist organization has issued a Fatwa of apostasy and Takfir for Muslim women "who do not submit to its rule, in fact the organization expanded the use of this term to justify the kidnapping of a very large number of women in its areas of influence, as evidenced by the incidents of the organization in Syria in the region of As Suwayda<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Media Center of the Dar Al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 15-12-2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The Analysis Unit of the Observatory also revealed that the texts of IS imposed guardianship on women in its dress, by confirming the need for women to wear the Niqab and issuing multiple Fatwas banning the wearing of any other type of clothing other than the Niqab. It also banned mixity of women with men and insisted on the ban on women leaving their houses other than for necessity, and not travelling without a *muhram*/guardian.

The Analysis Unit of the Observatory confirmed at the end of its study/research that IS texts and books that it had analyzed and studied showed the existence of much contradiction, bankruptcy and ignorance of Sharia by the members of the organization, regarding women, and the areas of contradiction and bankruptcy are multiple in texts such as the following<sup>1</sup>:

- The absence of any written text by the organization or by the “Dar Al-Iftaa” of the organization which works mainly on setting provisions for the direct participation of women in combat operations.
- The existence of contradictory Fatwas on the reality of the participation of women in combat operations, whether in the Al Naba magazine which authorized the participation of women in combat, and the Fatwas by the IS radio Al Bayan which rejected the participation of women in combat, and they are also in contradiction with the content of the brochure on “The duty to cover women” issued by the organization.
- Contradiction between the female Fatwas of the organization and the reality on the ground, as some of the visual publications of the organization showed the use of women in direct combat operations, the organization also authorized female members to show their faces despite banning that in operations, also there was mixity between the women and the men of the organization

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

during and after the execution of operations, despite the ban on “mixity”<sup>1</sup>.

The Global Fatwa Index (GFI) by the Dar Al-Iftaa Al-Massriyah, confirmed that the subjects of “Women Fatwas” represent 25% of total Fatwas subjects worldwide. This was part of an analysis by the Index of over 5 thousand Fatwas related to women at the global level generally, and more specifically Ramadan Fatwas<sup>2</sup>.

According to the GFI, IS, Al Qaeda and Hizb Ettahrir are the leaders for women Fatwas by terrorist organizations<sup>3</sup>.

The GFI analyzed women Fatwas by terrorist organizations, showing that the terrorist Islamic State held 50% of the total Fatwas by extremist organizations, the GFI explains this high rate/ratio by the multiple channels and mechanisms for publishing the Fatwas by IS, which were varied such as audiovisual publications, for example: “Al Naba and Al Anfal”, Radio Al Bayan part of which was dedicated to women Fatwas<sup>4</sup>.

The GFI confirmed in an earlier analysis on the use of the “weapon of Fatwas” by terrorist organizations, to give religious legitimacy which imposes on women to participate in battles and Jihad, through wrongful explanations of the concept of Jihad in Islam, the Index demonstrated this through the appearance of women in audiovisual publications issued by IS throughout 2018 for a rate of 30%, after they used to work in silence behind the scenes. The most important of these publications were: “From Inside 7” and the “Ghazouat Athaar Lil Afefaat”<sup>5</sup>.

The GFI confirmed the variation in Sharia rules used by terrorist organizations in their Fatwas depending on their interests and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

objectives, especially IS, where 90% of its Fatwas came to serve its terrorist operations<sup>1</sup>.

The ruling for the “Obligation of participation of women in Jihad and battles” represents 60% of IS’s Fatwas in 2018, after it used to vary between “obligation, permissible and banned” prior to 2018<sup>2</sup>.

### **Female Social Media Network for Support, Advocacy and Mobilization:**

Female aliases were at the forefront of the net, through their radicalization and recruitment activity, through detailed objectives which were mainly to gain support for jihadi organizations (mainly IS and Al Qaeda) and to mobilize to support it and strengthen it, then attract those who were hesitating still, as well as naming and shaming those who were inactive and lagging behind, in addition to the role of encouraging fighters and inciting them during and before combat.

#### **Examples of female war names/aliases on social media**

<b>Nadabaat of Al Qaeda</b>	<b>Al Mutatarifa / The Radical</b>	<b>Uum Al Kaada</b>	<b>Bint El Sham</b>	<b>Mujahida / Fighter</b>
Ibnt Shahid Al Jazira	Rabibat Assilah	Nafiir Nadaa Moudh	Mudawiya	<b>Al Barikaa</b>
Uukht Jalibi	Barikaat Essuyuf	The White Widow	Shabah Al Riim	<b>Al Haraar</b>
Salafiyat Kelibia	Bint Ussama	Uum Rayan	Uum Umara	<b>Al Khanssaa</b>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Terrorist and proud of it	Hafidat Uum Umara	Rafiqaat Al Jinan	Fedayah	<b>Kuwaitya Mouwahada</b>
Janeh Essalem	Durub Sunnya	Hafidat Aisha	Hafidat Omar Ibnou Al Khattab	<b>Al Faizaat</b>

However, the question remains of whether the problem of women's appetite for violence should be addressed as a sociological diagnosis of the development of women's social and political role, or is it identified by researchers as a weakness of women in the search for reasons for her appetite for an activity that does not fit her "femininity"?

Despite the prevalence of the traditional and "passive" attitude towards women's participation in combat, and despite the existence of a series of conditions set in the various Fatwas that allow women to migrate and mobilize for Jihad for combat purposes or in a supporting capacity (guardian, mahram, niqab, taafuf, non-dangerous roles...). The development on the field of the new generation of Jihadi activism, led to a new gender awareness among "jihadi" women of the need to be empowered in terms of legal and Fatwa matters regarding their affairs as women.

This was a strong feature in the emergence of a group of women who issued a statement under the name of "Rafeeqat Al Jinan" to support the position of "Uukht Jalibib" in her mobilization. The six sisters, namely; Fedayah, Kuwaitya Mouwahada, Hafidat Aisha, Durub Sunnya, Hafidat Omar Ibnou Al Khattab, and Janeh Essalem Dorrat Bihijabi, stated that: "Mobilization of a Muslim woman to the Levant is a private matter and she is free to embark on it as long as it is without disobedience".

"Rafeeqat Al Jinan" took on the task of issuing Fatwas on the ruling on the migration/hijra of a woman with her mahram to jihad, in their statement: "If Jihad is a sufficient duty, it is not obligatory for a woman to participate in it. If she does go out, it is

permissible for her to do so and she shall be rewarded for, and her departure will be to treat the wounded, provide them with water and similar". Then came the requests of the women supporting Nafiraa Nada, at the end of their statement or rather their Fatwa: "Man should not give himself the right to speak of things that he does not know the Sharia basis for, Muslims shall not speak of Sharia matters, to permit, prohibit, and rule on matters that they do not know, so beware of speaking in matters of religion and overtalking in it without knowledge".

They also created social media accounts such as the Twitter handle/account ([https://twitter.com/\\_in16](https://twitter.com/_in16)), created in December 2013, it is still active<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the Voice of Jihad website had published a message entitled "Women your role is... as men have fallen asleep" by the Moroccan born Jihadi "Mona Salah Al-Sharqawi" who was affiliated to Al-Qaeda, where she calls on women by saying: "O God bless you and raise your destiny. Do not despise any *Maarouf*, so you hesitate and wait for the role of men to support your religion and you are missing in its service. More specifically, such duties are no different, there is no difference between men and women in that. Do not give up and think with me about the bitter reality of our Ummah and how most of its men have failed it at a time where Muslims are suffering some of the worse torture"<sup>2</sup>.

Further analysis may be needed to investigate the reasons for the increase in the ratio of women in Jihadi organizations, and the backing off by Jihadi theoreticians from restricting women's *hijra* to conflict areas or participation in combat.

It can be stated that Salafi Jihadi doctrine in general has witnessed a shift on the issue of accepting women in Jihadi activity, even if it came in stages and by category, between those who limit women

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<sup>1</sup> His last visit was on 08 Nov 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Mona Salah Sharkawi, "A call to women to not hesitate to support religion, and not to rely on men".

participation to support work (nursing, raising children, moral support, etc.), and those who refuse her participation in armed combat, and those who use the jurisprudence of necessities to allow women's participation in combat. If we were to limit the analysis to the case of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and travel/hijra by women to conflict areas, over the past ten years, we can observe that the inclusion of women in Jihadi activity began to grow with the arrival of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi to run the Al Qaeda branch in Iraq, and who encouraged women to join the organization, participate in suicide operations, by using the incentive of avenging honor and supporting the weakest. In fact, there is a general phenomenon spreading in various areas of conflict in the world, its main feature is the recruitment and encouragement of women to fight alongside men in combat action. This may lead us to believe that the acceptance of female presence in military activities both in regular armies and illegal ones, has become a fundamental issue today in the global analysis and understanding of the phenomenon. As it was not limited to Jihadi groups, but spread to include various fighting groups in conflict areas as is shown in the following examples:

<b>Examples of regional variations/changes in conflict areas</b>		
Creation by the Syrian regime of the "Lionesses" brigades for national defense in May 2012	Creation of the brigade of the "Daughters of Ibn El Walid" against the Syrian regime in Homs in 2012	<b>Creation of the brigades of "Zeynabiyet" in early 2018</b>
In 2014 the popular Mobilization Unit in Iraq created the Zeynabiyet brigade of the PMU	Formation by the Free Syrian Army of the "Umuna Aish" in 2013	<b>Rafiqaat el Jinane Brigade part of Al Qaeda</b>

The Israeli brigade with a female majority known as Brigade 33 or Karakal גדוד קרקל or the desert cats (since 2009)	Kurdish women protection units or Yekîneyên Parastina Jin in 2014	Formation of two female brigades by ISIS: “Al Khansaa” and “Um Rayane” in the governorate of Raqqah in 2014
	Daughters of the Sun brigade, a Yazidi brigade created to fight ISIS (2015)	
International changes		
Western women joining conflict areas	The UN promoting the inclusion of women in the sectors of peace and security	

### New roles for Jihadi women in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

Traditional roles approved in Jihadi ethics before ISIS	Operational application of these roles in the ISIS experience
<b>Motherhood role</b>	A noble role in protecting your own and raising the demographics for the Caliphate
<b>Attending to the family</b>	To accompany the <i>Mujahid</i> husband
<b>Raising children</b>	Raising the cubs of the Caliphate and the fighters of the future
<b>Support role in times of combat</b>	Relief, spying, inciting the public, media communication, security roles such as searching women, monitoring the role of widows and female specific accommodation, and female cells
<b>Logistical support role</b>	Medical treatment, nursing, teaching,



	services for women and children
<b>Supporting Jihadis</b>	Transport weapons, combat, suicide operations

The slogans of succession and empowerment were central in building the capacity of the Islamic State to attract women, and consequently to the changes to the phenomenon of “Female Jihadism”. Whereas the organization did not change the traditional Muslim representation restricting women's roles to maternity, family, and raising children, but transformed these roles into avant-garde roles through very dynamic interviews, strongly loaded which give radicalized women a new legal consideration/status which satisfies their self-representation and gives them a self-satisfaction not provided by traditional society.

In its view of women's roles, the Islamic State paired the traditional, conservative view of women limited to family and motherhood, raising the next generation of the caliphate, with combat roles to raise the profile for their self-promotion/recruitment, after war started taking its toll on them, whether through targeted raids, or desertion of a number of fighters. Initially, the organization was keen to present a deal where the rights of Muslim women, as guaranteed by Islam, were protected, and stating that women within its ranks should not fear repression as long as they performed their duties.

As part of their awareness of the demographics of their members, and their social, economic and educational levels, ISIS reinforced its appeal with the promise of education and religious courses in home economics, writing and numeracy, corresponding to the type of women targeted by their recruitment campaigns, who are often women lacking higher education and who cannot get good jobs.

However, ISIS similarly to other Jihadi theories, gave women a future position of prestige given that she will raise the “cubs of the Caliphate” and “Carry the flag of the Caliphate in the future” and

the “Guardians of the faith and protectors of the earth that will emerge from it”.

“Dear sister in religion, in reality, I see our Ummah as a body made up of various parts, but the part that works more than all others and which is the **most efficient** in raising a Muslim generation is the part of the educating mother”<sup>1</sup>.

However, the organization was dynamic (or as religious scholars would put it; inconsistent) in adapting its Fatwas to the developments on the ground, for example when its fight with other factions intensified, it used the voice of women to wage war within the families of fighters from other organizations. Where we find, for example, in the tenth issue of *Dabiq* magazine, a writer called “Umm Sumaya Al Muhajireh”, in an article published in English, under the title “They are not Hallal for them and neither are they Hallal to the women”, where she accuses the wives of fighters from the Al-Nusra Front and other factions of adultery, “with every conjugal relationship they have with their husbands, on the pretext that they are apostates”<sup>2</sup>.

She goes on to say: “Advising and directing the wives of the Awakeners, {forgiveness be to God, and may they fear”, and the wives of the “secular” Awakeners who clearly or implicitly state the arbitration of democracy, the sovereignty of the people, or the transfer of power, God Almighty said: {no one shall doubt His rule}, and the wives of the Awakened who are holding on to Islam, who unlike their “secular” brothers, set their sights and support it with everything they have and their souls over the Almohads, God Almighty said: {And whoever takes over from you, is from them}”<sup>3</sup>.

To conclude with “You are not permitted, to remain under the same roof with he who removed the bond of Islam from his

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<sup>1</sup> Issue 11 of *Dabiq* Magazine.

<sup>2</sup> Issue 10 of *Dabiq* Magazine

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

shoulders, and that the marriage contract between you and him was annulled the moment he renounced the religion of God, and he is from that moment on not legal for you to be with and you can no longer be with him in the way a husband and wife can be together, because you have become a stranger to him, until he repents and converts to Islam again. Thus, any relationship between you and him is a forbidden relationship according to Sharia, in fact it is simply adultery, so beware”. And she tells them “that if she fears the brutality of her husband, or if all of her family are of the same belief as he is, then she must migrate to the land of the Caliphate”, according to her statement<sup>1</sup>.

Realistically, the imperatives of military confrontation and empowerment to establish the alleged State of the Caliphate, required the organization to rely on the assistance of all groups such as women and children, the elderly and people with disabilities. However, the inclusion of women was used as a propaganda tool for the media marketing for the Jihadi project, in its two integrated aspects: terrorizing public opinion and gaining the admiration of young men.

Given that women have a bigger capacity to mobilize crowds and stir up emotions by using the notions of honor and shame, and calling on men to protect the vulnerable and be the defenders of the nation, Jihadi media platforms were full of this method, the organization also singled out a group of women to work on mobilizing by inciting against religious scholars, as they deemed that they were being used by the “Crusaders” to reach their goals and serve their interests, and at the same time warning young Muslims of deception by self-serving religious scholars protecting their own interests, desires and pleasures, as they do not protect the Ummah and religion.

Several studies and media reports on the Islamic State, show that the mission of female recruits in the Islamic State expanded in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

period following 2016, to include body searching women for fear of a repeat of the attacks carried out by the Syrian regime fighters who had dressed in women's clothing and had surprised the fighters. However, the state was keen on selecting members of these brigades by age, where the age of the woman ranges between 18 and 25 years, whether they were married or single, while undergoing military and Sharia training courses.

Given developments on the field, during the early stages of the Syrian crisis, IS recruitment/mobilization of women was not limited just to Syrian women but opened the door wide open to girls coming from all countries of the world who received a warm welcome.

In addition, at a later stage, ISIS women were assigned tasks related to intelligence work, smuggling letters and money, weapons, transporting radio equipment, and carrying out some operations, as well as collecting donations, spreading radical thought, and harboring/hosting recruits. Collected data indicates that only a limited number of Moroccan and Tunisian women were active in managing women accommodation, in addition to supplies management and media promotion/propaganda. Among the Moroccan women we can name: Fatiha Muhammad Taher Al-Hassani / Al-Majati / Umm Adam, Malika Al-Aroud / Umm Ubaida, Umm Khalid Al-Wahaji, Hasna Aya Polshan, called Umm Aisha and who was married to a Jihadi, who had requested that she does not return to Morocco in the event of his death and had nominated one of his companions to marry after his death.

The Observatory of Takfiri Fatwas and Radical Views of Dar Al-Ifta Al-Missriyyah issued a report at the end of 2018, where it discussed the role of women in reviving recruitment operations for Islamic State, after the defeats it suffered in Syria and Iraq, and the desertion of many of its members and the execution of many of its fighters recently<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Media Center of the Dar Al-Iftaa Al-Missriyyah, 05-11-2018.

The report showed that the Islamic State is considered as one of the most successful terror groups in attracting female members and to use them in recruitment/radicalization operations and recruitment of new fighters, through social media networks and presenting a discourse and media content that call for the “protecting Islam and Muslims” through the call for the State of the “Caliphate”<sup>1</sup>.

In his report, the Observatory mentioned that ISIS followed Al Qaeda’s strategy of using women to disseminate their extremist “intellectual ideology” among other female individuals. Women were also used as a tool to advocate ISIS’ personal belief in the concept of the “Caliphate”. In fact, since late 2017, ISIS has announced that “Jihad against enemies” is an obligation to women, and has produced promotional photos of women fighting in its battles. Those announcements have had an important effect on the role of women in the Islamic State, since 2018; Fatwas advocating the contribution of women in the Islamic State reached 60%, insisting that female participation in the victory of the “Caliphate”<sup>2</sup> nation is mandatory.

The report stated that multiple reasons explain ISIS’s resort to women for recruitment purposes, the most important of which is women’s ability to move without security restrictions that could hinder her from executing terrorist attacks, especially that terrorist organizations’ dependence on women for terrorist operations had been unknown for a long time. Another reason is that women are more capable of spreading extremist ideologies, leading to the revival of the concept of “Family Terrorism”, which ultimately results in the expansion of the organization through recruiting more and more individuals<sup>3</sup>.

In 2018, the phenomenon has become clearer as the organization aimed at gaining and soldiering new female sympathizers as well as

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

compensating for the losses caused by the increasing number of male casualties as well as fleeing members and dissidents<sup>1</sup>.

### **Recruitment of women by Jihadist organizations and push and pull factors:**

Multiple methods were utilized to attract women towards hotspots. Those methods include direct means of recruitment, mainly the family, the neighborhood, the school, the workplace, and real or virtual friends of both genders. The organization has also focused on strengthening its method of recruitment via social media, especially through women-oriented chat groups. The process that those chat groups follow involves getting to know one another, then luring, seduction, building intimate relationships followed by commitment, and ultimately, mental coercion or pressure.

It is important to note that marriage proposals usually end up with one of the following scenarios: the first is to follow along with the relationship, which is the starting point of moving to the ISIS-controlled areas. The process starts with transferring money for travel preparations, and then moving to Turkey, then to reception stations, and finally entering Syria through the Turkish borders. The second is to back down or refuse to join, and such decisions result in multiple consequences. For example, other ISIS members residing in the victim's country could threaten to kill the victim. They could also leak the chat conversations in which the victim had made risky confessions that result in custodial sentences -as a form of treachery. In addition to these methods, the polarizer may threaten to share intimate photos that he had asked for or taken himself in the midst of an online affair with the victim. This dangerous blackmailing technique leaves no option for the victim but agree and adhere to the polarizer, for moral and social considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

- Not only do the terrorist organizations opt for recruitment, they also resort to precautionary measures that aim at assessing the behavior of the new followers, protecting their secret relationship with the organization, and securing their relocation to the ISIS-based territories. In fact, multiple Jihadist organizations use the internet to promote their identities and clarify their visions and objectives. They also record their most exciting battles and narrate the biographies of their leaders, fighters, and martyrs. They update the organization's most recent activities, come up with inciting chants, and stream the relevant data, speeches, videos, and voice recordings. Members of the organization, who specialize in media, work on improving their methods of attraction and recruitment. The role of the media in the organization is to recruit members through the internet, placing a heavy focus on 10 main categories:
- Members and supporters: through providing them with support, encouragement, and assurance.
- Young people: in order to attract them and convince them of the duty of support, immigration, and encouragement.
- Married women
- Divorced women and widows
- Single women
- Wives of members belonging to opposing groups/organizations
- Minors and adolescents: through special content, such as video games, children's stories, and songs.
- Members of opposing groups/organizations: through sharing offensive data that aim at neutralizing the opposing groups and limiting their influence on ISIS' members.
- Opposing religious scholars: who are attacked in the same way, and are accused of treachery and complicity.
- The public opinion: the Organization either lures the public opinion to win its support or threatens and frightens it. This

strategy is known as “bestiality management”, which considers intimidating the public opinion an effective Jihadist act.

### **Push and pull factors:**

As an attempt to identify the main motives behind the immigration of many women to hotspots, we managed to analyze thirty (30) websites and thirty (30) social media accounts belonging to *women from Tunisia, Morocco, and France. The findings are as follows:*

- Identity: 3
- Enticement and deception: 4
- Joining the husband: 10
- Other familial relations (the father, the brother, the cousin): 5
- Fascination with the extremist discourse: 3
- Desire for revenge: 1
- Economic vulnerability: 4

However, statistics overlap, as many of them cover non-independent factors. For instance, if we analyze the case of women who followed their husbands, we find that one (1) of them had an identity crisis (a French of Moroccan origin). Two (2) other ones were deceived by their husbands who convinced them that they were traveling, but not to Syria. Only two (2) of the women were convinced of the extremist ideology. However, six (6) others were in a vulnerable situation because they feared poverty in the absence of their husbands, especially that five (5) of the wives had children.

### **Extrapolation of the reasons behind joining ISIS through the analysis of websites and 80 women’s social media profiles**

Repetiti on Rate	Ide ntit y	Incite ment and decept ion	Joini ng the husb and	Other familia l relatio ns (the	Fascin ation with the extre	Desi re for reve nge	Econom ic vulnera bility
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				father, the brother, the cousin)	mist discourse		
Identity	3	1	1	0	1		2
Incitement and deception	1	4	2	0	0	0	2
Joining the husband	1	2	10	2	2	0	6
Other familial relations (the father, the brother, the cousin)	0	0	2	5	1	0	2
Fascination with the extremist discourse	1	0	2	1	3	0	2
Desire for revenge			0			1	1

Econom ic vulnera bility	2	2	2	2	2	1	4
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However, these statistics were not different from the following conclusions, which we reached after interviewing the individuals as part of this research:

<b>Some of the reasons behind immigration- as explained by 10 female returnees, 5 returnees' husbands, and 8 returnees' relatives- during the interview</b>	
Family Ties	Influence/co-dependence/ recruitment of the husband, the father or the brother
Marriage	Whether in real life or through online dating, women were emotionally attached to the potential "immigrant" husband or a husband who plans to immigrate.  Marriage through social media based on the "I hereby make you my husband" rule.
Unemployment and vulnerability	The desire to improve one's economic and social conditions, especially for those who suffer from unemployment, live in dysfunctional families, have been divorced, dropped out of school, etc.
Desire to be wealthy and improve the current economic conditions	Yielding to the propaganda that promotes ISIS-owned lands as the Promised Land of wealth, luxury, and high salaries.

adventure	Wanting to take risks and go on an adventure
Desire for revenge	Wanting to punish one's self/society after going through painful or deceptive experience
Loneliness and boredom	Existential crises resulting from extreme loneliness or boredom from daily life, introverts or socially isolated individuals are more likely to feel so.
Identity crisis	Resulting from a feeling of dissatisfaction with the environment that represents an obstacle to religious, racial, and linguistic freedom (as well as other identity components).
Fascination with the extremist discourse	By having access to the Organization's written data, sound recordings, and videos
Helping the weak	Wanting to immigrate in order to provide the victims with material or moral support or do humanitarian work
Living in the land of "Caliphate"	Through the propaganda which paints life in ISIS lands as comfortable, peaceful, wealthy, and a combination of "a satisfactory earthly life and Allah's blessings".
Divine rewarding	Jihadist media aims at dispelling the fears of actual and potential immigrants. They convince the female immigrants that Allah will generously reward the hardships they endure for the sake of building the Caliphate nation.

Multiple are the pull factors that led a number of married and single women to accept the Jihadist offer. However, the familial relationships, especially the marital ones, are the top-ranking factors. Other pull factors include:

*Emotional relationships:* Social media platforms have allowed single women to engage in emotional relationships. Some testimonies showed that a number of women decided to join Daesh because they were attracted to young men who embodied the stereotypical image of the ideal brave/heroic man. When they communicated with those men, they realized that happiness equals meeting the lover/potential partner in Syria. It was clear that the (female) adolescents' psychological vulnerability was an encouraging contributor to recruitment.

*Personal emotional and psychological reasons:* Vulnerability, trauma, and a desire to repent and fix past sins. Those factors were especially visible in the cases of some women from the Maghreb and Europe. Their main deep motivation behind joining ISIS was the accumulation of guilt, which is related to past traumatic events.

*Poverty and vulnerability:* Economic and social conditions played a crucial role in convincing women (as much as they convinced men) with the ideal of the Caliphate nation, especially when the Organization pays for the traveling fees, and promises a monthly salary if they serve the "New Country". ISIS promises to build a fair society based on equitable distribution of wealth and sharing collective happiness in Utopia, as promoted by the social media platforms of the terrorist organization.

*Dual salvation:* Women wanted to break free from a patriarchal society that does not respect women and thinks of them as inferior. They also wanted to help the weak and contribute in the building of an ideal society, which makes them feel appreciated for their positive contributions in the Jihadist society.

*Financial motivators, travel facilities, and immigration:* As mentioned earlier, the Organization was selling a project, and was

offering financial support to secure the preparation and travel procedures to the ISIS-controlled regions.

*The promised luxurious lifestyle in the Caliphate nation:* A number of testimonies indicates that some women were influenced by the luxurious lifestyle that the Jihadists seemed to enjoy as shown on their websites or videos.

*The desire to prove one's self:* Women wanted to identify with men and break the local patriarchal customs.

*The desire to identify with historical figures:* Women wanted to identify with female historical figures, ranging from Sahabis to followers. Female Jihadists preferred to be called certain nicknames that they had themselves carefully chosen even prior to their immigration as a way to demonstrate their new, autonomous identity. Some of them opted for nicknames such as Omm Zubair, Al Khansa'a, Hafidat Omar, Omm Mosa'ab Al-Mujahida, Om Oways, Om Al-Bara' Al-Salafiya, or Ashiqat Al-Jihad. Some other ones preferred to be called with reference to their children, especially male (Om Omar, Om Khaleel, etc.)

*Dramatic representation of the Sunni/Shiite enmity:* Through the duality of Sunnah/ Rejectionists: women also fell into the trap of the Organization's hostile representation of the Shiite as a threat to the Ummah. They believed that this threat can only be eliminated with the help of women, as they teach the new generation about the dangers of the Shiite ideology and the importance of combatting it.

### **Recruitment of Moroccan Women Towards Hotspots: Case Studies:**

Most reports and field studies about the issue of Moroccan women leaving for Jihad note that the Moroccan women who join ISIS or contribute in Jihadist acts do so under the influence of the family, especially the husband, the brother, or the father. Identifying with a feminist idol, however, is almost never a reason, except for few

cases such as Om Adam's (Fathia Mjati<sup>1</sup>) who was a former member of Afghanistan's organization and a top-ranked terrorist in Morocco. Other women used to be active on social media. Malika Aroud (of Belgian or Moroccan origins), for example, advocated for Jihad in Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, and Lebanon. She was also looking forward to women leading better positions in a male-dominated Jihad. It is an important evolution that mirrors the ambitions of Jihadist feminism, which will later on have a tremendous impact on the international Jihadist feminist movement<sup>2</sup>.

Following a survey that we conducted on ten female returnees, we found that most Moroccan women who joined ISIS had learned the Fatwa from their husbands or brothers. Some of them also joined the Organization with their fathers, which confirms the fact that most Moroccan immigrants were forced or followed the decisions of their husbands, brothers, or fathers. Women have no choice but to be submissive to her guardian, as they are required to respect parental authority. However, those cultural and social aspects are being adopted and applied in real life, and they are based on the circulating Fatwas in the Jihadist environment, especially Youssef Ayiiri's Fatwa on the Jihad of Muslim women<sup>3</sup>.

When ISIS first appeared, Iraqi women were the first to join the organization. Then, some European women started immigrating to Syria. However, after the organization expanded in Syria and Iraq, Al Baghdadi began to invite, in his famous speech, all Muslims to come to the land of Caliphate. Al-Adnani did the same, which further increased the conviction and enthusiasm of Moroccan Jihadists, as they started bringing with them their wives, sisters,

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<sup>1</sup> Tarek Ben Had, "The Baghdadi's State celebrates Fatiha Mjati's "immigration" to Iraq", <https://www.hespress.com/orbites/235746.html>

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Shafi'i, "Malika, the Face of Soft Extremism", <https://www.hespress.com/societe/11223.html>

<sup>3</sup> Youssef Ayiiri, "The Role of Women in Jihad" *Research and Sharia Studies*, Series No 7.

daughters, and even mothers sometimes. As for those who had already joined the organization, they urged women to join them.

One of the motivators of this behavior was the belief that the ISIS land was that of salvation, and that the project of the new nation really is that of Caliphate and empowerment. This project also implied potential adherence to the Jihadist Fatwas calling for unquestionable obedience to “Amir Al-Mo’meneen”. One of the returners declared “what we believed to be a media war against the brutality and violence of Jihadist organizations was actually interpreted in the Jihadist environments as a strong evidence indicating the continuity of the organization’s rule as well as a secure, peaceful, and stable lifestyle within the organization”.

Considering the Moroccans who chose to stay with Al Qaeda or join Ibrahim Ben Shakroun (Abu Ahmad Al Maghribi) in the (Sham Al-Islam) movement, they obeyed Abu Ahmad Al Maghribi’s orders of not bringing women into combat zones, and only few women joined the organization. This is indicative of Ben Shakroun’s awareness that the battle is not yet settled in favor of Jihadists in Syria. In fact, ISIS Jihadists might fail altogether, “which will have harmful implications on women and the movement, and those implications will be difficult to fix”. One of Ben Shakroun’s former followers stated that Ben Shakroun learned from the Afghanistan experience, and is, therefore; well aware of the outcomes of the failure of the Jihadist experience. Others, on the other hand, thought that planting the seeds of Caliphate is the main starting point of the adventure.

In one of the testimonies regarding the local Fatwa, the returnee believed that: “the only godfathers who lit ISIS’s path were the active Jihadist cells. They were infiltrating the (Joint Commission for the Defense of Islamic Prisoners), which was responsible for distributing publications and coordinating with the wives of the fighters to join their husbands, as well as raising funding for its internal and external parties”. Other testimonies confirmed that creating favorable conditions for the reception of those women,

about which they were definitely misled and lied to as they were given a perfectly idealized image of Jihad (a five-star rating) as being that of luxury and affluence, was certainly an important pull factor. “Men living in ISIS territories mislead their wives through falsifying the harsh realities so that they wouldn’t be accused of heresy and apostasy for residing in Morocco”. Husbands’ efforts to bring their wives to ISIS territories are doubled<sup>1</sup> especially if they had been brainwashed during religious meetings and have developed radical extremist stances and demonization attitudes. “As for the Jihadist who had already taken his family with him, he would also undergo the same process of brainwashing and reality falsification so that he would be reassured of his reckless choice and feel no guilt of forcing his wife or sister to immigrate”<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to these multiple and interrelated factors, husbands tend to follow other methods. Some of them force the wife to join them, while some others lie to their wives and tell them that they would be traveling to Turkey. Once the wives believe the lie, they find themselves trapped, and find no option other than adhering to their husbands and entering the Syrian soil<sup>3</sup>.

*Husbands hide the intention of immigrating and lure their wives:*

F. A. told us: “I had never imagined that there would come a day when I would leave the country, especially to hotspots, let alone during the so-called ‘Arab Spring’”.

F. A got married in late 2011. During the contract period, which lasted for nearly a year, her husband had never discussed the issue of Syria. “Even after our marriage, he did not address the issue of Syria in the first few months. Sometime later, however; (they had a child by then), he started telling me about Syria and its issues. He also told me about all nationalities, including Moroccan, who had migrated there, and who live a happy life with their wives and

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<sup>1</sup> A testimony of one of the returnees from Syria, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



children. He insisted that Islam was applied correctly, that I would not face any obstacles for wearing a niqab, and that I would achieve the religious education I want and learn Quran by heart, etc.”

*Torn between hesitation and obligations of marital and family life*

Few were the wives who responded quickly to their husbands' immigration offers. What they had in common was the dilemma between the constraints of social life, the responsibility of raising children, and the economic constraints on the one hand, and obeying the husband on the other. It is worth noting that only two out of ten women admitted having joined the husband out of obedience. F. A. continues: “At first, I was very hesitant about the idea of immigration because I would never want to cause misery and sadness to my family, but since my husband was determined to immigrate even without me, I joined him nevertheless. I could not live far away from him, and my love for him is great. I could not accept the idea that my child, who was still a toddler, would be an orphan. My husband was also the only breadwinner in the family, and even my parents are suffering from a financial crisis, so how could I add to their suffering? I would be alone because my family lives in Europe. This was one of the most important reasons why I immigrated to Syria with my husband”.

As for Th. Z., her husband immigrated before her, and then asked her to join him. She explained: “In the beginning, my husband, my daughter and I lived a simple and peaceful life in my father's house—may Allah have mercy on him—my husband worked as (the profession was deleted to protect privacy) and I am a housewife. The tragedy started when my husband immigrated to Syria, and my child and I were left alone with no financial support whatsoever. I found myself bearing the living costs alone. The psychological suffering started from the first day my husband left, so, my material and social situations kept getting worse afterwards”.

*Children as a means of pressuring the wives to join the organization*

Th. Z. continues talking about the coercions she underwent: “I had been thinking day and night about the future of my marriage as it had become unstable, and I had been unable to make any decisions regarding immigration. My daughter had been repeatedly asking questions about her father, which increased my suffering. She had been greatly affected by his absence given the fact that she was attached to him. She would express how much she missed him through her simple drawings, as she used to draw us together. We became a shattered family”.

*The patriarchal society’s attitude towards women*

A. S. who later joined her husband states that: “The most important thing that made me join my husband was my social status. I assume that you already know how much the woman whose husband is absent suffers. I would be constantly asked questions about my husband from anyone and everyone. I suffered financially, as I had no job, and the only breadwinner in the family was my husband. Since I could no longer provide for my five-year-old daughter, who used to be spoiled by her father. Added to that, my family could barely provide for her under these circumstances, so I had no choice but to join my husband. I had heard that there were several women who joined their husbands as well”<sup>1</sup>.

*Husbands are not the only ones responsible for luring women*

One of the former jihadists who did not join ISIS, but wedded his sister to a jihadi who joined the organization, tells how he was responsible for the suffering of his sisters: “when I was a Salafi, I wedded my sisters to Jihadist Salafists. One of my sisters’ husband was killed in one of the battles of ISIS, but his wife is still here. Alhamdulillah. As for my second sister, her husband is an ISIS

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted on 20. 04. 2019.

Jihadist member known as Abu Elias Al-Maghribi. He is now a Prince of a border region in the Islamic State”<sup>1</sup>.

*Deception and swindle to persuade the wife to join*

“He began to persuade his wife, who is my little sister, to join him in Turkey so that he could see her and the children, so she went Turkey, but since they were in control of the border areas at that time, he forced her to go to Syria and trapped her and her children there. He burned all her documents. Recently, my sister was able to escape due to the bombings and fled along with a group of Syrian refugees to Turkey. She had no documents proving her identity and the identity of her children”<sup>2</sup>.

*N. Umm Saad: My husband lured me*

Umm Saad, a young Moroccan woman in her thirties from Tetouan. She says that “nothing can make her regret her presence in the Syrian hotspots”. She adds that she was a “victim of swindle” with her husband, who is still in the Syrian regime’s prisons. She did not know that she would travel with her husband J to “hotspots”, where the Islamic State and militant factions ruled. Her husband used to work in a popular cafe in Malaga, a Spanish city. In summer 2015, he suggested to immigrate to Turkey in order to settle and work there.

At first, I hesitated to travel to Turkey, since I did not want to live away from my family and my husband's family. Eventually, though, I accepted because of my admiration of the Turkish community. Also, the new job that was offered to my husband in Turkey had an attractive salary (more than 1000 euros)<sup>3</sup>.

*L. R: I agreed to join my husband after he had convinced me that I must help the vulnerable.* “I decided to travel with my husband to

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted on 15. 04. 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The survey was conducted on 18. 04. 2019.

join forces with Jabhat al-Nusra. My husband was deeply convinced that helping the vulnerable was a religious duty”<sup>1</sup>.

*Souad (a Dutch of Moroccan descent) I suffer from a mental illness*

“Souad” says that she suffers from an acute mental illness, and confirms that she escaped ISIS, and abandoned her husband who stayed there, by handing herself to the Syrian opposition, which in turn handed her over to the “Europol” device (European Police). She was then handed over to the Dutch authorities. After two and half years of her return from Syria, Souad says that she does not wish to “remember the past... all I want to do now is finish my education in the Netherlands and be able to gradually erase the memories of death”<sup>2</sup>.

*R. R abandons her husband for Jihad in Syria for social and familial reasons*

This is an exciting story of a young Moroccan man who was abandoned by his wife after a marriage that had lasted about ten years. His wife left him for Jihad in Syria, which is another type of feminism that women from the Maghreb follow. Such behavior is more likely to appear within communities where religious authority is not as powerful, resulting in the weakening of the husband’s authority over his wife<sup>3</sup>.

The husband, who suffered from foot and hand paralysis, and was working as a street vendor, stated that his wife: “was not very educated or knowledgeable of religion. However, she often volunteered to teach the illiterate to read Qur’an at one of the Kottabs”. After about 8 and half years of Marriage, Mr. A. H had

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted on 18. 04. 2019

<sup>2</sup> Tales of Regret and Sorrows of Moroccans who Returned from Areas of Tension, <https://bit.ly/2tn0zfF>

<sup>3</sup> Al-Hayhout, “A Story of a Moroccan Whose Wife Left Him for Jihad in Syria”, <https://www.hespress.com/societe/252821.html>

made it clear to his wife that he intended to marry another woman in order to have children<sup>1</sup>.

The husband continues, “My wife was sick and could not have children, so, once I regained some of my health, I thought of marrying another woman because I wanted to have children, but she refused”<sup>2</sup>.

The Moroccan law on polygamy requires that there must be a reasonable “exceptional objective justification”, such as the wife's illness. Also, the husband had to “inform both wives about his marriage in order to achieve satisfaction between the two parties”<sup>3</sup>.

“After a short period of talking to her about my second marriage, she started asking me to leave Morocco and go to Syria, but I refused to leave for the unknown, and I told her that I did not want to leave my family and my country”. The wife informed the husband during a phone call that she had arranged her travel with her friends and left Morocco to an indirect trip to Syria later, to join ISIS<sup>4</sup>.

“I thought she had traveled to see her family because she was angry, but after I called them, I realized that they didn't know anything about her, so I went to the police”<sup>5</sup>.

Three weeks later, my wife called me from Syria, and I was shocked when I heard her say that she was in Syria. I really did not expect her to travel without my consent despite her previous attempts to persuade me to go there<sup>6</sup>.

“She apologized to me and admitted that she had traveled after being convinced of a fatwa permitting women to travel for Jihad without needing the guardian or the husband's consent”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

“When she called me, she gave me two options: either to join her in Syria, or to divorce her”<sup>1</sup>.

The husband reported his ex-wife’s offer: “The State will give you 2, 000 dirhams because all the disabled do not work here but still get paid”. She insisted that she could not return to Morocco, so I must either join her or divorce her. I chose the second option and told her that she was divorced”<sup>2</sup>.

After divorcing his wife over the phone, he found himself facing a legal problem, as the court did not respond to her divorce request. I was informed that she already got married in Syria, and I in turn want to marry and have children, but I cannot do anything before the court decides on it. She has no official location, so the court cannot communicate with her, and therefore cannot decide on the divorce request. As a result, the procedures are greatly delayed”<sup>3</sup>.

### *ISIS’s women: violated rights and absent dignity*

One of the interrogators paints a bleak picture of life in ISIS-controlled areas. It is truly similar to that of criminality and human trafficking. “Muslim women there have no rights at all. All they do is wait for relief because their rights, which are guaranteed by Islam, are non-existent. The suffering of widows in particular is great, as they are frequently abused by officers. They remain trapped in the Office of the Martyrs’ Wives and prohibited from leaving it until the waiting period is over, no matter what the reason is. No one checks on them or their children, and no one cares about their needs. If someone ever checks on them, it is often because they need something. Once the waiting period ends, the woman is kicked out of her home and taken to the cells where everything is scarce. The cells are dirty and full of lice. Women and children share rooms, and families share one sponge and one cover. There is a shameful lack of privacy in the bathroom, as one must

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

wait for their turn to use the toilet. There is no electricity and no gas. It is as if women have been taken back to primitive life. Their freedom is restricted, and they can only leave the prison if they get married. Not to mention moral decadence and prostitution that take place in those cells. As to health, I personally experienced lack of adequate healthcare because I needed a surgery, but I could not find any doctors who could help. I resorted to some medications and eventually recovered thanks to God. In addition to all of this, women suffer from isolation and longing for the family, the country, and the prosperous, peaceful life<sup>1</sup>.

*In Syria, children live in fear, terror and deprivation*

D. D, who is one of the returnees, says, “Children who live in Syria are robbed of their childhood and innocence. They live in fear, terror and deprivation. They live in constant terror, especially during bombings. Adults and children alike tremble in fear at the sound of planes and bombings. Children’s life is nothing like childhood. They have no right to play, as there are no parks. Even if parks existed, they are completely destroyed. Kids are not allowed to go outdoors because the bombing is everywhere. They are also deprived of education, since there is no established educational structure. They grow illiterate and unhealthy, considering that there are almost no doctors, only ignorant and boastful people who pretend to be doctor”<sup>2</sup>.

D. D talks about the experience of her illness: “I witnessed all that with my daughter who was born there. She was sick, and all the sick of all ages were told one thing: ‘it’s an inflammation.’ If you ask them for further explanation, nobody answers. They injected my daughter God knows what useless medication it might be. Adult medication was also given to children. As for the hospital infrastructure, it was an utter catastrophe. Even basic needs such as children milk is almost non-existent, and if you ever find some, it

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted on 02/04/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Survey conducted on 09/04/2019.

is certainly expired. There is no medical supervision there. If you search for yogurt or the so-called Danone for children, you would find nothing. The most basic element, which is potable water, is non-existent, because they adopt a system of tanks, which are extremely filthy and rusty. They get the water from the river and serve it as is, unfiltered. This explains why diseases such as cholera are so widely spread. This explains why children die.”<sup>1</sup>

*Deprivation of education and playing in prison-like homes*

F. G describes how the illusion of castles and luxurious life in Caliphate land proved to be nothing more than a prison. “My daughter lived a prisoner’s life. She had no friends to play with and no school to educate her. She had no right to play, go out for walks, and enjoy nature. Going out was a rare activity for us because all what we saw was bleak buildings and unpleasant scenery. When my daughter got sick, I could rarely get her some medication. Anyone can pretend to be a doctor there. What I described to you is nothing but a drop in the ocean. No language can describe the real suffering”<sup>2</sup>.

*Hamida from Al-Hol camp: my husband's ambition to improve our living conditions led me follow his lead*

Hamida (a pseudonym chosen for her by the journalist who interviewed her in a lengthy dialogue published by a Moroccan newspaper in late December of 2019). Hamida, who is one of the Moroccan women stuck in a Syrian northern camp, explains her reasons for joining ISIS. She says that she loved her husband so much that she decided to join him in Syria. Her husband had responded to the call of ISIS’s former leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and joined the Caliphate State in late December 2014<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey conducted on 09/04/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Survey was conducted on 24/04/2019.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewed by Tawfik Slimani, Today’s News, December 27th 2019, p. 2.



“In January of 2015, Hamida arrived to Raqqa (an ISIS controlled region) with her husband and two children”. She was 28 years old at the time. Her husband was 33, and her two children were only 10 years old<sup>1</sup>.

In 2008, Hamida's husband was killed during the International Alliance Forces' air strikes. She was then detained by the Turks. Her husband had been an educated young man, holding a baccalaureate and a diploma in information management from one of the institutes of Tetouan (northern Morocco)<sup>2</sup>.

Hamida was not educated, as she had left school at an early age after completing her primary education. Nevertheless, she read often. Hamida said that her relationship with her mother was inconsistent because she was controlling. As a result, she got married to her now deceased husband shortly after she had met him<sup>3</sup>.

Hamida recalls that her relationship with her husband, her great love for him, and her willingness to protect her family's cohesion were the primary reasons for her agreement to join him in Syria. Today, however; she accuses him of “deceiving her” because: “The more I told him about my security concerns, the more he insisted that women were never supervised or held accountable. In the end, he died and got what he wanted, but here I am now, carrying the burden of the heaviest accusation in the world: terrorism. It is all my responsibility now. It ruined my life and my future. I was a puppet in my husband's hands. He laughed at me, and so did ISIS who deceived me with the illusions”<sup>4</sup>.

Interestingly, Hamida mentioned that she decided not to have children during her stay in the ISIS-controlled areas. “When we

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

entered the ISIS swamp and saw its dark facet, we decided not to have children because we did not want to bear a new sin”<sup>1</sup>.

Shocked still, Hamida, who is still trapped in the camp with her two children, talks about how psychologically devastated she feels: “I did not realize the value of my country until I left it. I am now past the stage of regret. I am almost alive. I can’t even bear to look at my face in the mirror”<sup>2</sup>.

*The role of wives in persuading husbands to return home and coordinate with smugglers to secure an escape*

It seems that the wives who had accompanied their husbands to hotspots, especially Syria, are the same ones who encouraged them to go back home. Several husbands admitted that the plan of returning home began with the wives urging them to return home. The wives also coordinated with their families and with the smugglers. The reason why women would take such responsibility is that women were not under strict supervision by the organization’s guards. The organization started to apply stricter supervision and control over fighters because of the lack of soldiers, as many of them escaped or deserted.

Returnee J. P says: “we made our wives carry many burdens. We were the ones who had brought them to Syria under various pretexts. It was only later that we discovered the bitter reality. Our wives were the ones who took the risks of coordination with the smugglers. They analyzed the routes and the several options of movement from Turkey to our country. We were under constant observation from the security services, which is why many of us entrusted our wives to coordinate with one other. They were communicating with our families and managing connections with some Syrian or Turkish smugglers under humanitarian pretexts

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

(illness, hospitalization, transfer of a family member from the Turkish borders to ISIS territories...)”

One of the returnees did not hesitate to explain the suffering of his wife: “I tricked my wife into coming to the land of death, and she endured all the suffering and harassment, but she did not hesitate to take the risk of planning our escape. She built a connection with a Syrian family who lived on the border, then with one of the wives of the smugglers as well as with other young wives. I cannot describe my feelings towards my wife and children today. No matter what I do for my family, I owe my life to my wife because she saved me from ISIS, its hellish lies, and its terrible crimes. I could have been of them, and I could have turned into a criminal”.

Such cases attest to the double suffering of many migrant wives. Some women arrange their return in coordination with their husbands who were unable to escape. Some others plan their own escape after the death of their husbands or after they realized their husbands did not intend to escape. Some were trapped in the ISIS territory. Some other ones found themselves in refugee camps, while other women still intend to support the Islamic State despite its downfall.

### *Women Trapped in the Refugee Camps*

While all the countries of the Arab Maghreb are struggling to manage their citizens’ return from hotspots in Syria and Iraq, especially after the announcement of the fall of the Islamic State, complications increase concerning those who are stuck in those areas. This requires urgent measures, especially in relation to minors because the longer they remain there, the more deteriorated their psychological conditions become, and the more they lack safety, education, healthcare, and appropriate clothing and food.

### Diagnosing the model of Al-Hol camp, located in the Syrian countryside of Haska

<b>Distribution by Country</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	30875 Iraqi men and women, including children
<b>Syria</b>	30593 Syrian men and women, including children
<b>Russia</b>	2010 women with their children
<b>Central Asia</b>	2320 women with their children
<b>European countries</b>	1200 women with their children
<b>Morocco (The total number of Moroccan women and children in hotspots is estimated to be 280 Moroccans, accompanied by 391 children)</b>	582 women with their children
<b>Egypt</b>	377 women with their children
<b>Tunisia</b>	251 women with their children
<b>Algeria</b>	98 women with their children
<b>Somalia</b>	56
<b>Lebanon</b>	29
<b>Sudan</b>	24
<b>Libya</b>	11
<b>Palestine</b>	8
<b>Yemen</b>	8
<b>Other countries</b>	9

Statistics extracted from the article: “A Dark Past and an Unknown Future” (09 December 2019)<sup>1</sup>.

Today, the number of refugees living in Al-Hol camp is approximately between 68, 000 and 79, 000, according to the statistics of the second quarter of 2019. Most of the refugees are distributed among 19, 000<sup>2</sup> families. 45% of them are Iraqis, and 35% are Syrian refugees<sup>3</sup>, with women and children making about 97% of all refugees<sup>4</sup>. People aged less than five make about 20, 000 of the total population, which means that they were born after ISIS had announced the establishment of the alleged Caliphate State<sup>5</sup>.

There are about 11, 000 foreign women and children (non-Iraqi/ Syrian) originating from 62 countries<sup>6</sup>, with their 7000 sons and daughter<sup>7</sup>. As for those aged below 12 years old, they make 65%<sup>1</sup>, compared to 25% aged below 5 years old<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Maha Aqil, “The Female ISIS Members, A Dark Past and an Unknown Future”, *Middle East*, December 9th 2019.

<sup>2</sup> “North East Syria: Al Hol camp service mapping snap-shot-as of 29 September 2019”, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, September 29, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/north-east-syria-al-hol-camp-service-mapping-snapshot-29-september-2019>.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Tsurkov, “First Person: Uncertainty, Violence, and the Fear of Fostering Extremism in Syria’s al-Hol Camp”, *The New Humanitarian*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2019/08/27/violence-fear-extremism-Syria-al-hol-camp>.

<sup>4</sup> “North East Syria: Al Hol camp service mapping snap-shot-as of 29 September 2019”.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Wright, “The Kids of the Islamic State”, *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/03/the-kids-of-the-islamic-state-al-hol-refugees-isis/>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Birnbaum, “Months After the Fall of ISIS, Europe Has Done Little to Take Back Its Fighters”, *Washington Post*, June 20, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/after-caliphate-collapsed-europe-has-done-little-to-take-back-those-who-joinedisis/2019/06/20/4bab9cc2-8bc4-11e9-b6f4-033356502dce\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.bcc57f-dac60d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/after-caliphate-collapsed-europe-has-done-little-to-take-back-those-who-joinedisis/2019/06/20/4bab9cc2-8bc4-11e9-b6f4-033356502dce_story.html?utm_term=.bcc57f-dac60d); Joanne Stocker, “A Ticking Time Bomb Meeting the ISIS Women of al-Hol”, *The Defense Post*, August 3, 2019. <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/08/03/isis-women-al-hol>

<sup>7</sup> Eric Tlozek, “Islamic State’s Foreign Exiles Receiving Worst Medical Care in Syria’s al-Hawl Camp”, ABC News Australia, May 26, 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-27/hundreds-of-children-dead-in-islamic-state-camp-in-syria/11110958>

There are about 3500 children<sup>3</sup> with no birth certificates. In September 2019, around 1,400 women and children had been sent back to their home country<sup>4</sup>.

While the number of European women and children was 1200, the number of women and children from the Arab Maghreb was about 940; 582 of them were from Morocco, 251 from Tunisia, 98 from Algeria, 11 from Libya, and 377 from Egypt. As for non-Maghrebi individuals, 56 were from Somalia, 29 from Lebanon, 24 from Sudan, and 8 from Yemen and 8 Palestinian citizenship holders.

Complications arise when it comes to the management of these groups. There are wives who do not know the real names of their husbands and only know their organizational nicknames. Such situations increase the administrative complications related to proving the marital relationship or the paternity suit of children born within these marital relationships.

Another problem that affects women who have been married during their stay in ISIS-controlled areas is the legal value of the marriage contract. In those cases, those contracts are documented by a “private” body (in international law terms), that is described as terrorist. Countries find it difficult to accept a marriage contract or birth certificates issued by a terrorist organization that claims to be “legitimate”, which drives a number of countries to make exceptional rules, such as accepting verbal marital approval and/or “certificates of scroll and re-enrollment”.

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<sup>1</sup> Nisan Ahmado, “Kids of IS Fighters, Syrian Mothers Face Uncertainty”, *Voice of America*, April 26, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/kids-fighters-syrian-mothers-face-uncertainty>

<sup>2</sup> Wright, “The Dangerous Dregs”, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-dangerous-dregs-of-isis>

<sup>3</sup> “Hindered Fate of Foreign ISIS Fighters’ Children in Syria”, *Enab Baladi*, September 26, 2019, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/09/hindered-fate-of-foreign-isis-fighters-children-in-syria>.

<sup>4</sup> North East Syria: Al Hol Camp as of 29 September 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/north-east-syria-al-hol-camp-service-mapping-snapshot-29-september-2019>

Such cases are often discarded for being illegal documents issued by terrorist organizations. However, countries may resort to judicial jurisprudence and take into consideration cases of coercion and other exceptions. Jurisprudence, in this case, aims at protecting families from shattering, especially in the presence of children whose descent has been denied, or who hold the right to proven descent.

### **Return Problems and Measures Regarding the Female Returnees:**

The issue of the return of youth, women and minors from hotspots tend to provoke public opinions, the severity and rationality of which vary according to countries and societies, as well as according to security, legal, or humanitarian viewpoints.

### **Country security comes first. To hell with others:**

Many opinion makers in Europe and in our Maghreb region openly express their concern about security procedures regarding the ISIS returnees. Such fears are related to the skill of arms bearing that those returnees have acquired. Others refer to the returnees' involvement in combat operations, which may sometimes be difficult to verify or deny. Some other reasons relate to the absence of effective and balanced security coordination between countries, or the lack of judicial agreements and cooperation between countries. It may be also difficult to turn intelligence evidence into judicial evidence. It is worth noting that proponents of such viewpoints do not exclude women from the precautions procedures' scenario under the pretext of their weakness or femininity, especially since they proved, on several occasions, that their ability to actively engage and manage terrorist attacks is no different from men's.

Holders of such viewpoints developed a trend that was propagated within the public opinion. This trend developed populist European tendencies that call for depriving male and female European fighters of Arab or Islamic countries descent from their nationality.

They also demanded that those fighters must not be welcomed back. This trend is clearly indifferent to the danger of denationalization, as it could contribute to the globalization of terrorism and push these fighters to redeploy in new hotspots in other regions of the world<sup>1</sup>. These measures favor local security at the expense of international security. In addition to being an exclusionary approach, the aforementioned trend does not respect the rules of citizenship and nationality, which guarantee civil and human rights.

### **Are those people victim of human trafficking?**

In February 18, 2015, a letter was addressed from the Chairperson of the Security Council Committee to the President of the Security Council in accordance with Resolution 1373 (2001)<sup>2</sup> on combating terrorism. The letter assesses the roles of member states in managing the “foreign fighters” phenomenon. It also outlines the multiple challenges that legal proceedings face regarding “foreign fighters”, including minors and women who joined the organization for non-combat reasons. The letter explains that the rational management of all challenges presupposes rational targeting of terrorism. It also presupposes establishing security and protecting society, accompanying returnees and individuals under the auspices of criminal justice and reintegration programs, and examining special cases in holistic ways. Finally, management must indeed ensure security protection, law enforcement and care for people’s needs based on the rule of public interest.

We attempted to read the entirety of the resolutions of the Security Council issued since 2001. We found that the resolutions of the Council, in linking terrorism with some human trafficking crimes,

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<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi, “Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Combating Threats and Managing Resilience”, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/5-OCP-Pr--sentation-UNSC-l-short-version.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Security Council Committee, document No 123/2015/5, February 25th 2015.



were not directed towards describing the fate of foreign fighters, whom the various UN resolutions and reports consider as the source of ISIS in the last decade.

With reference to national legislations of the Arab Maghreb countries, it is clear that considering female ISIS members as victims of human trafficking is extremely unlikely, even if they have been exposed to it or had joined the organization for non-combat reasons to start with.

The fact that female returnees may be considered as victims of human trafficking - as they have “voluntarily” joined the terrorist organization - presents four main problems:

*First:* The legal interpretation of the concept of ‘will’ in relation to joining hotspots may question the relevance of the issue of human trafficking when women make the decision to move to those areas. Talking about women's (voluntary) consent and desire to join the terrorist organizations, which is nationally and internationally criminalized (to various extents), is problematic. It leads us to question whether some returnees from Syria and Iraq, who had willingly joined the terrorist organizations, can be considered victims. In other words, those women who had been polarized, deceived, and exploited for the purpose of carrying out combat missions, joined hotspots despite their prior knowledge that joining them is banned internationally.

In the Moroccan case, this issue may offer the option of taking into consideration women who had joined ISIS for non-combat purposes. This was before the amendments to Terrorism Act that criminalized the act of enrollment, which was not clear in the previous law 03-03.

*Second:* Not prosecuting human trafficking victims remains the general rule in most national and international legislations, including Moroccan legislation. Therefore, the law does not hesitate to protect the victim and deny the criminality of their act. The law

states that: “The victim of human trafficking is not criminally or civilly responsible for any act he/she carried out under threat”. Unless the returnee willingly committed a criminal act, he/she remains a victim of human trafficking.

“Most international legislations recognize that victims of human trafficking should not be held responsible for the crimes that result from trafficking. Likewise, since many individuals were obliged to carry out terrorist or offensive acts, the law does not criminalize them for it”<sup>1</sup>.

However, the problem of interpreting the threat situation, which may affect the moral and material conditions of the victim, in addition to the duration and the context of threat, is important for reducing the sanctions without breaking the rule of protection for human trafficking victims.

Some researchers refer to the case of the Belgian citizen and trained lawyer (Van der Müsselle), who filed a case against his country. The reason being that the European Court of Human Rights (judgement of November 23, 1983, Series A No. 70, paragraph 37) ruled that the criterion of the pre-act consent is irrelevant, as the case needs to be analyzed as a whole, not as a separate act. The Court estimated that an individual could not be considered to have “agreed in advance to perform criminal acts willingly and voluntarily”. Therefore, the validity of the consent must be evaluated in the light of all the circumstances surrounding the case, and any follow-up against the offender, if proven to be a victim of human trafficking, is to be dropped<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UNODC Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, *Non-punishment and non-prosecution of victims of trafficking in persons: administrative and judicial approaches to offences committed in the process of such trafficking*, Vienna, 27-29 January 2010 CTOC/COP/WG. 4/2010/4.

<sup>2</sup> Bahija Jamal, *Convergence in Moroccan Politics for Anti-Terrorism and Human Trafficking: A reading of the issue through the case of female Moroccans in terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria (Daesh)*, *The Arab Journal of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights*, First Edition, December 2018, pp. 65-132.

*Third:* it is related to the adequacy of the position of women, who have joined hotspots, for the crime of human trafficking in the national legislation. The articles 448 to 14-448 of Law 27. 14 of the national legislation relating to combatting human trafficking<sup>1</sup> clarify the bases of criminalization and punishment in Moroccan criminal legislation. The Moroccan legislator distinguishes between the criminal behavior and the criminal result, and explains the causal relationship between them. It also clarifies the concept of criminal behavior and identifies the elements of human trafficking as shown below:

- *The act of recruiting*, adapting people and using them as a negotiable commodity in contravention of international laws and norms. The purpose of such act is to exploit the victims and make profit by any means, whether legally or illegally, inside or outside the country<sup>2</sup>.
- *The act of enticement* and resorting to means of seduction, deceit or pressure to use them for unlawful ends, which causes the victim to follow the perpetrator without the need for coercion or solicitation.
- *The act of transportation*: This includes the transfer of persons from one place to another within and across national borders using illegal methods<sup>3</sup>. The act of transfer may involve the consent of both the victim and the one who has authority over them. If done with

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<sup>1</sup> Law Number 14. 27 about combatting human trafficking, issued by Royal Decree Number 1. 16. 127 dated August 25th 2016 of the *Official Gazette* Publication Number 6501 dated September 19th 2016, page 6644. It is possible to review the research of Fathia Jeklou on: The Human Trafficking Crime in the Moroccan Legislation. *The Legal Information*.

<sup>2</sup> Ikram Mokhtari, "The Legal Confrontation of Human Trafficking Crimes (a Study of the New Criminal Code and International Codes)", *Milaff Journal*, Edition 23, November 2015, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Fethia Mohammad Kourari, "The Legal Confrontation of Human Trafficking Crimes. A Study of Comparative UAE Law", Research published in the *Sharia and Law Journal*, Edition 40, 2009, page 192.

coercion, it is called deportation. The transportation of victims takes two main patterns: spatial and professional<sup>1</sup>.

- *The act of transfer*: is about giving in one's agency to another person who is powerful enough to exercise coercion. Man cannot be owned by nature. He can neither be exploited nor sold because he is not a commodity and possesses basic rights. Those basic rights are part of him, and therefore cannot be traded, sold or exploited<sup>2</sup>.

- *The act of accommodation*: and arranging a safe place for the victims, either within the state concerned or in the destination country. Some of life basics, such as food and water, are provided to the victims in preparation for their exploitation as a last stage<sup>3</sup>.

- *The act of reception*: in this context, reception means receiving the person who has been transferred within or across national borders. The offender meets the victim upon his/her arrival from the point of departure. This may be followed by providing the victim with accommodation<sup>4</sup>.

- *The act of mediation*: it is the process that organized and unorganized criminal groups or individuals follow in order to facilitate the process of transportation and mediation between victims and other groups, whether in the same country or in foreign countries, in exchange for money<sup>5</sup>.

Law 27. 14 on human trafficking crimes in Morocco, as detailed above, has attempted to make its definition of human trafficking go hand-in-hand with Article 3 of the Protocol supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized

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<sup>1</sup> Sibouker Abdennour, "Human Trafficking Crimes and Combat Methods", an introduction to a Master's Thesis Research on Criminal Code, Qasdi Merbah University-Warqla, Faculty of Law and Political Science 2016/2017, page 141.

<sup>2</sup> Khaled Mostafa Fahmi, *The Legal System of Anti-Human Trafficking Crimes*, Dar Al-Fekr Al-Jameyia, Alexandria, 2010, page 167.

<sup>3</sup> Fathia Jeblou, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad Abdul Kader Khalaf Mahmoud, "Criminal Confrontation of Human Trafficking Crimes in Syrian legislation", *Damascus Journal of Economic and Legal Sciences*, Volume 28, n° 2, 2012, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Fathia Jeblou, *op. cit.*

Crime. The definition covers three elements constituting the act of human trafficking, its method and its purpose. It also includes recruiting, soliciting, transferring, receiving or mediating a person by threatening or using various forms of coercion, such as kidnapping, fraud, deception, abuse of authority, position, influence, exploitation of a state of weakness or exploitation of the victim's financial vulnerability. They may involve giving or receiving money, or using authority over the victim so that they (the victim) could carry out criminal acts or participate in armed conflicts.

Law 27. 14 also affirms that this exploitation is only possible if it results in "depriving the person of their will, depriving them of the freedom to change their status and humiliating them by any means, even if the victim is financially compensated for it".

The Moroccan legislator has reservations on classifying cases in which the victim joins hotspots under temptation, solicitation and deception under the category of human trafficking. The reason being is the difficulty of measuring "deprivation of liberty" and the issues it raises. Some of those issues are related to the interpretation and measurement of the state of deprivation and also concern the identification of the perpetrator in case we decided to categorize women as human trafficking victims. If we recognize that the women and minors who decide to join terrorist organizations are victims of human trafficking, the difficulty of identification weakens the legal procedures and makes the prosecution of the perpetrator difficult. The perpetrator can be a moral body, such as a terrorist organization operating on combat lands, or a hypothetical body, such as an unidentifiable terrorist who is active in the virtual world. Some other reasons are related to the possible damage that might affect the public interest, especially in the case of wives who join their husbands for cultural or family reasons, or simply because they trust their husbands (and not because of violence or deception, as those elements indicate human trafficking).

- *Fourth*: in several countries, legislations tend to distinguish between the act of joining, which is criminalized under national and international laws, and the act of falling into the trap of terrorist organizations and ending up as a human trafficking victim during or after the process of joining them. Given the specificity of counter-terrorism legislations, the legislator tends to take into consideration the public interest. They also attempt to keep terrorist threats at bay and work on prosecuting “foreign fighters”. Finding solutions comes last, as it is always favorable to identify solutions in the same criminal philosophy with respect to special cases, such as women and children who joined for non-combatant purposes or to accompany their families.

### *Linking national security to global security*

This opinion holds that it is necessary to link national security to global security in evaluating the risks of the returnees. It also insists that states should receive their citizens and bring them to justice, as it is the only solution to prevent the violation of the citizens’ constitutional rights. Taking into consideration the case of female returnees is favorable *due to four considerations*:

1. *The first consideration* assumes that most of the women who went to hotspots were forced to leave by their husbands or one of their family members. Such pressure reflects the concept of guardianship and obedience as promoted by the Arab Islamic culture. Men use this concept as an excuse to pressure women and compel them to accompany them to hotspots.

2. *The second consideration* relates to the hypothesis that a large number of women immigrate to hotspots under false temptation and solicitation. Most of these women find out, upon reaching the Promised Land, that their real roles are limited to pleasuring men, marriage, childbearing and doing household chores, such as cooking and cleaning. Additionally, these women are not allowed to change

their condition and are confined in closed shelters while the terrorist organization keeps a watchful eye over them.

3. *The third consideration* many women are associated with innocent minors, which complicates dealing with their cases separately.

4. *The fourth consideration* relates to the overlap between the precautionary security measures with the judicial measures that are set against suspected individuals who possibly represent a threat to national and international security. This opinion insists that it is vital to carefully tell female offenders from those who were not involved in killings and terrorist activities.

*It is also crucial to separate between the act of joining hotspots (criminal), and the reasons for the enrollment, its circumstances and its causes (which could help mitigate or aggravate judicial penalties).*

Those considerations reflect the urgent need to deal with the phenomenon in two ways, both individually and legally. The former is based on a case-by-case analysis in order to enable an accurate, fair and strategic assessment of the risks. This assessment could address any potential terrorist breakthrough under the pretext of gendered humanitarianism, which demands respecting the requirements of international law as well UN resolutions on combatting terrorism and violent extremism. As for the latter, it holds on the fact that the issue also imposes the expansion of legal consideration, given the fact that the problem of managing the returnees is related to a preventive-judicial measure that goes beyond the national concern. In fact, it relates to the need to re-establish global, regional and national security all at the same time.

### **Morocco's Approach to Managing Male and Female Returnees**

Morocco's approach to managing the case of the returning women and children is one that relies on careful investigations as well as judicial and intelligence operations. Those measures aim at distinguishing between two cases: the first is the case of individuals who have been involved in criminal operations (in reference to the

Moroccan law). The second case is that of women who had immigrated to hotspots for non-combat purposes (i. e, to accompany their husbands, etc.).

Those attempts had several outputs. Morocco has prepared a strategy to recover Moroccan women and children from hotspots. The first part of the strategy adopts the approach of “special treatment for these women because they are not terrorists, as they had not moved to hotspots for jihad purposes”<sup>1</sup>, and therefore; “cannot be blamed for anything”<sup>2</sup>. Afterwards, the strategy secures psychological and social guidance programs for these women and children<sup>3</sup>.

This decision was issued as proof of the awareness of the Moroccan legislator that preliminary investigations are necessary for law enforcement agencies. The reason being is that exceptional “humanitarian / preventive” measures are only implemented if it’s proven that the immigration / affiliation of women with ISIS is a result of a coercive treatment by the husband or a family member while the women themselves do not have any intention of fighting.

Despite the fact that most women who join hotspots fall prey to the humiliating practices of terrorist organizations (especially ISIS), and which may even qualify as human trafficking crimes (due to the availability of recruitment components, as well as false temptation, transfer and transportation, exploitation, enslavement, coercion, etc). However, the legislator is faced with a number of legal problems that would not consider the process of people’s immigration to hotspots and settling in them (and perhaps taking part in terrorist activities) as actions falling under the crime of human trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Abd Al Haq Al Khayyam, Director of the Central Judicial Research Office, during an interview that he organized to reveal details of dismantling a terrorist cell on Friday October 25 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



In this sense, three acts can be problematic: the first is the act of joining hotspots, which is subject to the requirements of the Moroccan Code, especially Chapter 1-1-218. The chapter criminalizes<sup>1</sup> the act of “individually or collectively joining or attempting to join terrorist entities, organizations, or groups, regardless of their form, target, or location, even if the terrorist acts are not aimed at harming the Kingdom of Morocco or its interests<sup>2</sup>.”

The second act is that of settling in the regions that are under the control of terrorist organizations. This act implies two possibilities: the first relates to voluntary enrollment and participation in terrorist activities. The second refers to coercive enrollment, i. e. cases of accompanying or joining the husband. Extreme cases may involve being subject to degrading practices from the part of the terrorist organization, such as exploitation, enslavement and coercion.

The third act is that of returning, which can take two forms: the first is a voluntary return to the homeland and the second is a coercive return through extradition, for example.

Hence, it seems that good practices lie in an approach that is rational-judicial and educational. Ideally, this approach includes taking all precautions against any possible threat that male and female returnees could represent. It also includes non-judicial follow-up, as well as mitigation and care for women who had been forced to accompany their husbands or families under the pretext

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Morocco's commitment to implement the requirements of the International Law and the Resolutions of the Security Council as signed by the Kingdom, especially the Security Council's Resolutions Number 2170 (2014) and Number 2161 (2014), as well as Number 2178 (2014), which urge the Member States to work on preventing the financing and immigration of individuals to areas of tension to join terrorist organizations. The Hague-Marrakesh Memorandum (2014) issues the same requirements, and so does the Security Council's Resolutions number 2396 (2017) and the General Assembly's Resolution number 284-72 (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Criminal Code Group- Edition edited in March 25 2019- Royal Decree Number 1. 59. 413 issued in 28 Jumadah Thaniya 1382 (November 26th 1962) by ratifying the Criminal Code Group.

of kinship and guardianship (as promoted by the Arabic Islamic culture, for example).

From a legal point of view, the Moroccan legislator distinguishes in its definition of criminal responsibility between free will, incomplete will and defective will. The legislator identifies the elements that make up the act of committing a criminal offence, whether out of free will, non-existent will or defective will (due to the absence of external motives that result in breaking the law, such as coercion).

It may be rational that the judicial authority relies on an adequate follow-up rule, whereby the legislator authorizes the Public Prosecutor's Office/ General Prosecutor to activate an appropriate follow-up rule. This follow-up rule would manage revenue files, which would allow for the protection of rights and freedoms, as well as providing precautionary guarantees against impunity (in case new evidence calling for the activation of a judiciary follow-up appears).

It is desirable that the arrangement of returning occurs under a dual security-judicial supervision, allowing the release of female returnees while preserving the judicial follow-up file. This will help achieve two goals: reparation of social and humanitarian harm, and taking the necessary security precautions.

### **Post-return Problems and the Need to Activate the Methods of Integration and Accompaniment**

Women are no less exposed to social stigma than men. If reintegration is particularly meant for men because of social stereotypes (as they are perceived as ex-terrorists/extremists, ex-prisoners, etc.), which complicates socio-professional methods, female returnees' situation is no better, as they encounter special problems.

Some of them are single girls, others return home divorced or widowed, some are single mothers, and others were abandoned by their husbands without being able to divorce. All those cases make

legal, social, and familial problems overlap; in addition to the issue of managing their financial needs especially that most of the women come from poor backgrounds.

Even though the women who return home with their husbands are the least affected by stereotypes, as they are often prepared for the possibility of the husband being sentenced in prison. However, their families usually pressure them to seek divorce and dissociate themselves from the arrested husband.

There are cases that are even more complicated: some families are ready to re-marry their daughters to extremist men, as they consider former extremist female prisoners or returnees as the perfect match for extremist males. They argue that those women are good Jihadists who lived in distress for the sake of Allah. Therefore, they should be proud of them.

Another aspect that has been observed in the dynamics of family interaction with some extremist women is the reinforcement of the “Collective Denial / Déni Collectif” mechanism of the stigmatized image of those female returnees. This collective denial transforms the negative image through identification with the status of the daughter, sister, or returning mother as a defense mechanism against society. A situation similar to contagion leads towards more extremism and isolationism, as well as a collective sense of victory for extremist ideologies within the family itself.

Such aspects result in an urgent need to prepare programs of accompaniment and psychological rehabilitation for female returnees, their children and their husbands. Morocco launched preventive and rehabilitative programs for both male and female returnees, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration programs for the judicially prosecuted individuals.

### *Preventive programs*

These programs are based on preventive measures and activities that aim at spreading tolerant thought in order to put an end to all

forms of violent extremism in society. Civil society plays a major role in those measures. Some public institutions also contribute in those humanitarian actions. Examples include: Al Muhammadiyah League of Scholars, the National Council for Human Rights and other institutions such as the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Reintegration of Former Prisoners.

Local organizations, especially in northern Morocco, play pioneering roles in escorting male and female returnees in order to help them reintegrate into society.

Within this dynamic, the Moroccan Observatory on Extremism and Violence implemented the 2019 plan. The plan aimed at organizing field visits to the families of male and female returnees, especially women and minors, in coordination with other specialized activities in order to guarantee those returnees a secure social and psychological care.

### *Rehabilitation Programs Inside the Prisons*

Morocco has made several rehabilitation and reintegration attempts as part of the rehabilitation program. The General Commission for Prisons Administration prepared a rehabilitation and accompanying program in prisons. It has also launched a specialized program called “reconciliation”, which was directed towards the returnees who are legally prosecuted for terrorism and violent extremism.

The program had allocated its fifth session to ten women (most of whom are minors). The General Commission for Prisons Administration ensured specialized and continuous assistance for them.

To describe the reconciliation program, we can say that it is a program based on an integrative approach, which includes training in Sharia and religious sciences, applying a dialectic methodology of dismantling the extremist and violent discourses. Afterwards, the rehabilitation process of the participating returnees begins in order

to develop critical thinking and legal reasoning from the Ash'ari faith, as well as Moderate Malikis. The program also includes training courses in the legal and judicial fields, and training and communication classes on international and domestic criminal codes. Additionally, the program dedicates an important section for enhancing the economic and social skills of prisoners, which can be achieved through training and rehabilitative workshops. Such workshops aim at enhancing the returnees' cognitive and technical competencies in managing socio-economic integration. They also aim at developing their experiences in honest earning by acquiring the skills of contracting management. Indeed, this training was implemented in addition to a specialized psychological accompaniment throughout the program<sup>1</sup>.

What is special about this program is the way it was engineered, which responds to the privacy of this particular group of returnees, and to the cultural, intellectual, religious and social climate that they associate with. The program also respects all international decisions and practices, including the Rome Memorandum on the reintegration of prisoners for cases of violent extremism and terrorism. The Rome Memorandum is one of the main references and provides the best recommendations. It establishes good practices to rehabilitate violent extremists and to reintegrate them into societies. The Marrakesh-Hague Memorandum is as important, and so is the Rabat Memorandum, which urges prisons to prevent “any other extremist actions from prisoners and terrorist activities that are directed or promoted within prisons, in addition to working on the eradication of extremism and reintegration of prisoners into society wherever it is possible, and thus reduction of cases of recidivism”. The team that designed this program has reviewed previous experiences and examined the positive and negative elements in each of them. This makes the Moroccan

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<sup>1</sup> El Mostafa Rezrazi, “Insights into Morocco’s Approach to Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE/PVE)”, in *De-radicalisation in the Mediterranean*, ISPI Report, Italy, 2018.

reconciliation program create an advanced generation of rehabilitation and accompanying programs<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

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# **WOMEN RETURNING FROM AREAS OF TENSION**

## **TUNISIAN CASE**

**By Khaoula MATRI**

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## 1. Introduction

The case of Tunisian society triggers several question on the involvement of its young people in radicalization. In addition, Tunisian women who are considered to be the most “emancipated” in terms of rights and legal achievements seem to be the most involved in conflict zones at the level of the Maghreb scope.

Sociologically, radicalization could be defined as “*a process of sectarian rupture with the original socio-cultural group: from the family to the territory or the country, as well as the community*”. Radicalism is the refusal and the rejection of the societal lifestyle. From a political perspective, the concept of radicalization “*embraces the shape of rupture and/or opposition to the national, subnational or supranational political order*” is synonyms, in a first phase, to self-isolation provoking the followers’ rupture with their own society which leads them to perceive as their groups and individuals as “enemies” being outside of the sectarian political organization or as having a different attitude to the one they adopted. (Rebah, unpublished paper).

Jihadist radicalization stems from the will to replace democracy by a theory based on Islamic law (sharia) while imposing it with violence and arms. “It therefore assumes the adoption of an ideology which provides a framework for and benchmarks/guids orienting all behaviors. Radicalized people split men and women in two categories: those who subscribe to their cause and those who do not subscribe to it, and the latter are, as such, entailed to die”. (Rebah Nabli, unpublished paper).

In post Tunisia 2010, religious radicalism is represented, according to Mr Ayari, by the Salafist jihadist perceiving violence as “legitimate means to provide the conditions for the establishment

of an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East and in North Africa, governed by the strict enforcement of the Islamic law”<sup>1</sup>.

Several radical-religious groups are settled on Tunisian territory in the forest and mountainous areas of the country such as Ansar El Sharia, Ahlou El Sunna wal Jama and Oukba Ibn Nafa and Jund El Caliphat armed groups. In addition, Tunisians are among leaders of violent radicalism in the Iraqi-Syrian zone.

Press conferences, journalistic reports and articles reveal disturbing figures of Tunisian youth involved in terrorist groups, compared to the Maghreb<sup>2</sup> region. Some researchers consider jihadism the substitute of other political movements. “The Islam of Muslim Brotherhood in the 80s and 90s, then the 2000-2001 jihadism have, in a certain way, taken over from Arab nationalism and leftism”<sup>3</sup>.

According to several sources, Tunisians are the most represented category in Daesh. Tunisian authorities estimate the number of departures to conflict zones between 1200 and 1300 jihadists. During the aftermath of the revolution, the destination of men and women who have left for conflict zones is mainly Syria and Libya.

The *involvement rate* of Tunisian men and women in religious-radical groups or in terrorist acts is alarming. However, even at the level of conducted studies, published figures are never the same. The estimate of the number of Tunisians who left for areas of tension can be construed according to the organization or institution.

In 2017, the Tunisian Ministry of Interior estimated that 3000 Tunisian citizens were members in jihadist groups in conflict zones (Libya, Syria and Iraq). Following an official visit by a UN Task

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, *Analytical review: the factors favoring violent extremism in Tunisia in the 2010s*, Tunis, November 2017, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See Nabila Hamza's report: *Jihadist women, full-fledged actresses or mere victims?* accessed April 29, 2019. File: ///C:/Users/ynes/Documents/Femmes%20jihadistes.pdf

<sup>3</sup> Michaël Ayari, *The price of the political engagement in authoritarian Tunisia, leftists and Islamists under Bourguiba and Ben Ali (1959-2011)*, IRMC-Karthala, 2017.

Force, the Ministry/this body published this figure as preliminary results.

In July 8, 201, Tunisian mercenaries who made it to areas of tension are as follows: 400 Tunisian fighters in Syria, between 1000 and 1500 in Libya, 200 in Iraq, 60 in Mai and 50 in Yemen”.

Unlike the official statement of the Ministry of Interior, declaring, in December 2015 that: 3000 Tunisians citizens are in Syria, 600 returned to the country and 800 killed in the fighting, “*estimates of the US State Department and “Soufan Ggroup” NGO concur on 6000 Tunisian nationals in Syria at the end of 2015*”<sup>1</sup>.

At the beginning of 2019, an article published by *Jeune Afrique* reports that Aaron Y. Zelin’s estimate, attached to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, that “the number of Tunisian fighters in the Iraquo-Syrian zone is 2900 Tunisians, while other sources claim the number of 6000 since the start of the conflict, out of a total of 30 000 attempts”<sup>2</sup>.

As for the female number estimate, women are less involved in armed conflict zones. Regardless of the announced figures and the reliability of sources, the number of Tunisians women who joined Daesh or another terrorist group is proportionally limited. According to the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors, “*they count around 700 Tunisian involved in jihadists networks operating in Syria*”<sup>3</sup>.

For the returnees back to Tunisia, “the number of returnees is estimated between 100 and 1200 people which equals to 20% to 25%, 3% to 4% of which are pregnant and others are mothers for one or more children”<sup>4</sup>.

Violent extremis is still a masculine phenomenon, whether in terms of mobilization or in terms of involvement in terrorist acts or of

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Jeune Afrique*, January 7, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of an actor belonging to the Ministry of the Interior.

ideological propaganda. Women involvement is a recent fact and is linked to terrorist groups structures after 2010 and the invention of the Islamic State known as Daesh. Typically, female visibility and participation is often very low in the political landscape of radical Islam. According to this ideology, women are subject to control and submission. The radical religious groups structure has so far been a threat which further implies male roles and identities.

Quantitatively, women's number involved in groups classified as terrorist is relatively negligible according to the report on terrorism in Tunisia and based on judicial records, "*the terrorist phenomenon in Tunisia is mainly based on male recruitment since the 95% accused persons are males. Women have for a long time ensured only a subordinate-traditional role, then gradually started to occupy, with the evolution of the phenomenon, more and more executive positions/positions of responsibility*"<sup>1</sup>.

Against the peril of radicalism and violent extremism, the Tunisian State has strengthened its legal arsenal adopting a new "ant-terrorism" act in July 2015 after numerous terrorist attacks, in particular, after baring heavy repercussions of the Bardo and Sousse attacks. The government response to the seriously disastrous danger in many grounds was reflected in the strengthening of security means "of the police, the legislature, the army and the intelligence services"<sup>2</sup>. This security approach to fighting religious radicalism was not accompanied by a deep reflection of the root causes; the underlying causes of the phenomenon.

Pursuant to a report analyzing the phenomenon of violent extremism, "*the majority of people brought before specialized investigation services, in preventive detention/detained on remand or sentenced by the judiciary, have not taken part in violence action. Only*

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<sup>1</sup> Report, "Terrorism in Tunisia based on judicial records", Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Tunis, 2016, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

*a small minority have been convicted to numerous action on Tunisian territory. Hundreds of Tunisians returning from conflict zones have been sentenced to between 5 and 8 years of prison (5 years for membership of a terrorist organization, plus 2 to 3 years for military training). Yet, most of the individuals tried and sentenced since 2011 (between 1000 and 1500 people) had “the intention to leave”, “did not denounce their neighbor who left”, maintained contact with a family member in the a conflict zone, or engaged in jihadist proselytism. Since the promulgation of the anti-terrorist law in summer 2015, a simple propaganda activity on social networks or the possession of jihadist literature is enough to provide evidence justifying preventive detention or a conviction”<sup>1</sup>.*

Academic research and other types of research devoted to radicalization are rare, much less scientific work dealing with female radicalism. In contrast, women membership to radical groups raises many questions about their roles, the female gender investment in violent extremism and in particular the impact of female affiliation on future generations and society.

Moreover, and contrary to the hypotheses linking radicalism and economic and social marginality, recent reports as well as our field work confirm that the socio-economic indicator is not the only variable which explains the flow of radicalization among young Tunisians.

## **2. Working Methodology**

To identify the factors promoting violent extremism and especially to prevent and urge public authorities to fight against terrorism, produced reports propose diverse approaches. The majority of carried out studies on violent extremism causes provide individual, social, and ideological factors according to the contexts and jihadists' profiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 42.

The analysis of violent extremism, new forms of jihadism (translated into the establishment of a structure similar to a State) is especially based on the interdisciplinarity and the intersection of social (macrosociological) and individual (microsociological and psychoanalytical) dimensions. The different approaches take into consideration the objective of the institutions and the usefulness of the study on a pragmatic level. *“Institutions which favor preventive activities will insist more on the underlying causes of this phenomenon, unlike the security-based organizations which will emphasize the importance of situation/circumstantial factor, e. g. the presence of recruitment networks and structured groups disseminating their propaganda”*<sup>1</sup>.

Analyzing violent extremism from a gender perspective is very recent and brings a change in theoretical ground. The main questions in these studies depict terrorist groups' strategies and the reversal of the women's position in acts of terror. Have they become actresses of violence and extremism in terrorist organizations? Or are they, always, manipulated victims? What roles can they play within terrorist organizations? To what extent can we apprehend women's status in radical-violent groups? Do they belong to a single category or several ones? Are they more “intelligible” for the purpose of projects and deradicalization projects as well as for the propagation of peace?

### *Field Difficulties*

On one hand, access to women and men returnees from zones of tension is quite difficult for a different reasons. On the other hand, the majority of them are under high police surveillance and had been interrogated as well as arrested for a good period of time on several occasions. Furthermore, some people want to break away from their experiences, or from a phase of their lives, and erase the scares of experienced trauma.

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 16.

Returnees from conflict zones develop a great distrust of foreign individuals from their restricted circle of acquaintances. In addition, lawyers and psychologists as well as other trades, in charge of returned *jihadists*' cases, contribute to increasing the vigilance and distrust of these "male and female actors" judged as terrorists. Under the pretext of confidentiality and protection of their patients or clients, the interveners (doctors, judges, lawyers, police, etc.) refuse to talk in their turn.

Moreover, the political change of the State concerning these who left changed turned the table. The approved law in 2015 on the criminalization of those who made it to the zones of tension has guided the subjects strategies. Total and absolute denial (of having carried arms, or of having taking part in combats or killing people) is the attitude of the majority of relaxed, captured, kidnapped people or even those who surrendered to police authorities in order to return.

The stakes of subjects (returnees from areas of tension) have first of all a security nature. Media coverage of the so-called Islamic State's terrors increases their distrust of being judged or stigmatized.

On the media level, several reporting and documentaries were produced during the period of Daesh's decline. And only journalists of certain television stations had had access to detainees by Daesh. Regardless of the editorial line, carried out interviews are oriented to more police interrogations. In fact, people captured by journalists after Daesh's defeat or people in detention camps in Libya are over-mediatised and interviewed.

Thus imposes another difficulty, including to know the respondents' pre-made answers.

Consequently the transition from the indulgence of religious radical groups' activities to criminalization deserves to be taken into account in the process of understanding the actors' reluctance (stakeholders in this cases, relevant subjects). "The stranglehold of terrorist organizations, particularly Ansar Al Sharia on place of

worship can be explained by multiple factors, including permissiveness of the security services and the distribution/spreading of influential leaders across the country”<sup>1</sup>. It is a strategy (taqiya) that returnees from areas of tension use in order to avoid further repression. Indeed, the matter of returnees from areas of tension is handled with a lot of vagueness and hesitation.

At the same time, the used strategies to fight terrorism and prevent violent religious radicalism still stumble between political and security challenges as well as the socio-economic context. According to an official, the reintegration and the deradicalization of members, even kidnapped ones, remain an objective to be achieved, given the lack of financial and human means.

### *Fieldwork*

Explaining the context aims at highlighting the difficulties to approach the issue of women returnees from areas of tension. Indeed, carrying out direct interviews only with the concerned people was almost unfeasible. This is the reason why we have resorted to other types of testimonies taking into account people that rubbed shoulders with and worked on this community/population. Several trades, executive authorities, members of the judiciary, doctors, lawyers and journalist were interviewed.

The distrust and scarcity of information shared was remarkable and can be explained by the sensitivity of their positions and the interests or prescriptions imposed on them. Consequently, we will not unveil the statutes of witnesses out of respect for the ethical rules, as well as their insistence and concerns on this particular.

Other testimonies collected from the close entourage of the target population (sister, friend, neighbor, etc.). We interviewed, at

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<sup>1</sup> Report “Terrorism in Tunisia based on legal records”, p. 63.



many times, two pro-Daeash “Salafists”, (they declare themselves as such), and a third one who has completely deradicalized. Each one of them testified pursuant to his current attitude (in favor/against the Islamic State), on the experience of individuals around them they went to do the jihad (deceased/returnees). Two deradicalized women who returned from Syria were interviewed, but only answered a few questions, alleging they are not ready to relive the trauma.

Subjects on which we were able to gather information or directly investigate do not constitute a homogeneous category and this from two different perspectives: the socio-economic level is varied as well as the educational level. Interviewed men were much open in speaking.

We equally came across reporting made on the same issue to make up “the gaps” found in the interviewed people’s answers.

The combination of data collected and published in other reports and journalistic reporting aims at restore the reality of the phenomenon of Tunisians’ departure to areas of tension or what they call *hijra*.

We opt for an analysis that takes into consideration the individual and social dimension of violent extremism, in particular women returnees, while bearing in mind the socio-political and judicial context.

### **3. Concepts and terms used**

The use of terminologies appearing in reports, legal texts and definitions of the sociology is important in order to define our approach and also to identify actors’ profiles involved in the movements or in “jihadist” groups. If we want to identify the women returnees’ profiles from areas of tension, namely Syria and Libya, it would necessary to clarify the adopted definitions and to explain the uses without, however, judging the interviewed male and female actors.

## Jihad

*Jihad* has several meanings: “when military significance tends to prevail, the meaning is rather “a war ordered by God”. Where do this term arise from? The root of the word *jhd* (effort) means “zeal”, “application” in a broadest sens, including war; in the verbal form, *jahada*, it evokes the idea for a person to “combat”, “to fight for”, “deploy efforts”, “accomplish a *tak*”, “leaning to surpass oneself” in view of “good deedé (*ihsan*). For the believers, it is about to gather all his energy in order to invest them in a noble aim. That is to say the semantic range of the term *jihad*, a fight against others (minor *jihad*), fight against oneself (major *jihad*). We can understand that the concept is still under discussion, while being enriched thought the fourteen centuries of Muslim history”<sup>1</sup>.

Violent extremism is defined as “the willingness to use violence or threats of violence by non-state actors and/or groups to promote a social, political or ideological change”<sup>2</sup>. This extremism adopts violence as its goal and method. This ideology uses violence to achieve objectives “generally of social, radical, religious, and/or political nature”<sup>3</sup>.

## Terrorism

Considered as “ideology, terrorism is understood as one of the tactics of the process of violent extremism, it “is a political strategy of terror”

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<sup>1</sup> Abderrahim Lamchichi, “Jihad. A fight against which adversary?”, *Words. The Languages of Politics*, N° 79, 2005, p. 23. posted on May 28, 2008, accessed November 01, 2019. URL: <http://mots.revues.org/1302>; DOI: 10. 4000 / words. 1302.

<sup>2</sup> Seran De Leede, 2016 “Women’s Rights Initiatives in Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism”; Internal Report: Women on the Frontline (WoF), in *Penser le genre dans les réponses à l’extrémisme violent en Tunisie : Enjeux conceptuels, Etat des lieux, pistes d’action*, ONU Femmes, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Jason-Leigh Striegher, 2015, “Violent Extremism: An Examination of Definition Dilemma”, Australian Security and Intelligence Conférence, in *Penser le genre dans les réponses à l’extrémisme violent en Tunisie : Enjeux conceptuels, Etat des lieux, pistes d’action*, ONU Femmes, 2018, p. 8.

*targeting civilians as well as representatives of the State and seeking to provoke an emotional response within affected populations”<sup>1</sup>.*

Tunisian anti-terrorism law defines terrorist acts without giving the definition of the concept terrorism itself. The terrorist offense “*is an individual or collective undertaking that aims, by its nature or its context, to spread terror among inhabitants and unduly force a State or an international organization to do what it is not required to do or to refrain from doing what the organization is bound to do*”<sup>2</sup>.

#### **4. Context of radicalization in Tunisia after 2011: Security conditions and post-revolution context**

According to several studies, mass regimentation in Tunisia is one of the effects of the revolution. Radical Islamists were the first to benefit from the revolution. In the first instance, the country security conditions, during this period from 12-14 January 2011, allowed prisoners to flee, including terrorists executives and leaders. Sentenced terrorists found refuge in the outskirts of popular neighborhoods. Other Salafist benefited from the general amnesty a few months later. Pursuant to the report *Terrorism in Tunisia through different judicial cases*, the majority of radical Islamists “*have gathered around Seifallah Hassine, alias Abou Iyadh, released in March 2011 et living in Tunis to establish the first founding leadership of the organization Ansar Al Sharia*”<sup>3</sup>.

Freedom of expression, fragile security conditions, release of the main leaders, return of exiled Islamist and control of most of the mosques represent the general conjuncture of radical Islam restructuring. The massive investment of different social spaces, the spectacular visibility of Salafist demonstrations, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women, *Thinking about gender in responses to violent extremism in Tunisia: Conceptual issues, current situation, courses of action*, 2018, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Article 17 of the Law on the Fight of Terrorism and Preventing Money Laundering.

<sup>3</sup> Report “Terrorism in Tunisia through judicial files”, Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Tunis, 2016, p. 26.

promoted the expansion of this movement and the relative “familiarization” of society with its existence.

These groups adopted an attractive strategy by mainstreaming into the social fabric through charity caravans and proselytizing tents widespread in all Tunisian cities.

The places of worship grip on through the management of mosques and the imposition of their imams by force is one of the adopted political strategies to gain social legitimization on the ground. Indoctrination and recruitment of new adherents targeted first marginalized and poor people in the neighborhoods. “*After Ben Ali’s departure, young people from peri-urban areas felt for the first time represented by a radical political organization, Ansar Al Sharia which was free to move from 2011 to 2013*”<sup>1</sup>.

Even if radical Islamist groups found their cradle “incubator” in neighborhoods call popular and underprivileged and marginalized cities, the indoctrinated individuals do not only belong to theses peri-urban or neglected areas.

The strategic advantage of these areas consists essentially in the marginalization and week monitoring by authorities. The notion of State is almost nonexistent. Admittedly, the so-called neighborhoods represent an anchor point since indoctrinment is based on community culture. The “houma” youth permanently present in the outskirts of the neighborhoods and knowing the recruiters facilitated indoctrination. The free time and the neighborhood young people’s lack of financial means for entertainment increase the degree of boredom and shortage of options and consolidate, at the same time, the belonging to “*wled al houma*” gang or to the sons of the neighborhood. This was confirmed by the interviewed individuals for this survey.

The legitimization not to say the involvement of political parties in power, namely the Troïka at that time is confirmed according to

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 22.

numerous reports. The various Islamists movements encouraged young people to leave in the name of support and solidarity with the Muslims repressed by dictatorship. A head of a state institution confirms that “*there were trips organized by agencies between 2013/2014*”.

Mr. Ayari highlights the facilitated departure context between 2011 and 2013: “*The Tunisian government did not firmly oppose its nationals’ departure, particularly towards Syria. Many leaks from the commission of parliamentary investigation on “the recruitment channels” of Tunisians for benefit of jihadist organizations attest circulating rumors between 2011 and 2012. A significant part of Tunisians’ departure for Syria would have been organized in a methodical way (recruitments in prison, scheduled flights to Turkey, logistics handled by Islamic charities funded by Qatar, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait). Criminal networks of illegal migration had also played a role*”<sup>1</sup>.

This socio-political context is accompanied by preaching and publications on social networks which legitimize jihad and support those who left. In addition, “*identification to a persecuted group belonging to Islam encourages the adoption of violent extremism on an individual level*”<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, there was another fact which eased the financing of terrorist acts and departure for areas of tension. According to Mr. Ayari, “*Access to finance sources is a fundamental situational factor. Without funding, violent extremist groups lose their military and logistic capacity as well as most of their appeal. Especially since the Desperados are much less driven by ideological motivations than the militants/fighters. Recruitment networks for conflict zones also depend on this funding. Access to the latter was relatively easy between 2011 and 2013. Significant amounts of money were transferred especially through charity associations. Small sums of money from Western*

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> WANA Institute, *Understanding radicalisation, A Literature review of models and drivers*, 2016, p. 21.

*Europe and Gulf countries are said to be monthly distributed to jihadists-Salafists via money transfer operators like Money gram*"<sup>1</sup>.

However, men and women's profiles recruited for departure to areas of tension are quite varied. Individuals from so-called privileged spheres or those belonging to the middle class are not excluded from indoctrination, nevertheless their recruitment relies on other factors especially those who demonstrate psychological or social issues (conflictual relationship with one of their parents, remnants of emotional or social failure). Women are more affected by these factors, especially those who had not a reassuring parental presence. A majority of those women left for areas of tension were from single-parent families. It is not a determining factor, but rather important, according to testimonies.

Even if the adopted approach is not part of a psychological perspective it is important to remember that the works and studies carried out (Khosrokavar, Ben Slema, etc.) so far affirm that the majority of people involved in religious extremism suffer from psychological vulnerability and a lack of meaning in their daily lives.

The hypothesis that we can advance with regard to indoctrination and subsequently to recruitment as for departure is particularly linked to social recognition. For followers, the radical-religious group is transformed into a reference/model-social bonding group, where interconnection and recognition are fundamental as is a substitute's social capital. In the indoctrination process, radical group members invest in the personal and intimate sphere of young people (men/women) in order to bridge the gaps in their social capital and replace the usual social ties by belonging to a more global and valued reference which is the Umma.

In line with jihadits' ideology, women's role remain secondary and not very influential. The woman's status is of subordination whatever the nature of her mission is. On Tunisian territory, "*their*

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 47.

role remained restricted to secondary missions of liaison, information transmission or family assistance missions”<sup>1</sup>. The young terrorist Fatma Zouaghi was in charge of the management and administration of propaganda on social networks, she was directly coordinating with the leader of Anssar Al Sharia about terrorist acts/operations”<sup>2</sup>.

## 5. Radicalized people's profiles:

Mr. Ayari set up two categories of violent extremism profiles, in particular for men: *“fighters and Desperados (whom I consider to be the most numerous in Tunisia) belong to a group involved in a political activity of which individual and social logics are a priori comparable with those highlighted by the sociology of political engagement as well as social movements, in other contexts. The word Desperados designates people whose backgrounds cannot be analyzed in terms of fighting/activism, who live on the fringe of the law, “ready for anything”, including engaging in violent and desperate undertakings/endeavors. It covers both the “mercenary” and the “lone wolf”, to which is added the “nihilist” stressed by political scientists like Oliver Roy”*.

The socio-demographic profile of Salafist jihadists is focused upon the age group below 34 years. Single men represent 97%<sup>3</sup>. The category of young academic level people is the most affected by religious radicalism. According to the same report, and out of 36% of accused people's cases (1000 cases as a sample), those who clearly answered on their educational level *“40% have a college degree or an academic educational level, 33% have a secondary*

<sup>1</sup> Terrorism in Tunisia, 2016, 59.

<sup>2</sup> See the article on the Al Masdir website, 10/17/2014. <https://ar.webmanagercenter.com/2014/10/17/53507/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84/>

<sup>3</sup> Report on “Terrorism in Tunisia through judicial files”, Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Tunis, 2016.

*education level, 13% have vocational training diplomas and 4% have the baccalaureate certificate”<sup>1</sup>.*

For his part, Mr. Ayari insists on the importance of the category of student and considers that *“Salafism-jihadism was very popular in high schools, between Ben Ali’s departure in 2011 and its criminalization in 2013, and historically in Tunisia, revolutionary ideas circulate essentially in universities, thus favoring/nurturing students’ fighting vocations”<sup>2</sup>.*

Indoctrination process goes through multiple phases, depending of situations and personal stories. Besides, *“A first characteristic concerns the age of women recruited by Daesh’s terrorists. They are mostly young, aged between to 29 years old. Sometimes, they are only teenagers the youngest are 14 years old. The oldest are in their thirties. Oliver Roy equally qualifies Jihadism as a “generational phenomenon”<sup>3</sup>.*

## **6. Radicalization process: gender relations and relationships with others**

We analyze women’s radicalization process through the “training” of the body which occurs over fairly long periods, but at varying paces depending on social context. Women’s indoctrination happens first on the body and the break with the social environment where religion and prophetic tradition become the only benchmarks/references for the followers.

Indoctrination process starts with *“disaffiliation, reaffiliation and belonging”, passing by infringing traditional landmarks and a succession of breaks-up with friends, entertainment activities, school or work, in short, everything that socially insert a person”<sup>4</sup>.* The new

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<sup>1</sup> Report, “Terrorism in Tunisia based on legal records”, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 6.



moral pattern (with rigorous and literal interpretations of the Koran) is represented as the ideal with which women must identify themselves for a better future.

According to F. Héritier “the body is the anchor point of thought and social order”<sup>1</sup>. The body and the relationship with oneself constitutes the first lever through which we give meaning to our existence and we decide how to understand the world. Indeed, religious radicalism begins with questioning the men and women’s appearance by inviting them to gradually change the way they dress. According to Donia Bouzar, “*girls’ depersonalization involves phasing out the individual outline/contour. Clothing is the first identification and demarcation accessory*”.

Recruitment begins with the transformation of appearance and rhythmic religious practices. Praying is the first hook. Religious rituals are not only a practice of faith, but a daily way of life applied to the letter in the most careful and innocuous details. This learning is incrementally transmitted to the new female and male indoctrinated.

Women’s guilt tripping is first initiated with the criticism of their lifestyle. Whereas any resemblance to the West will have terrible consequences in the life of the hereafter. The speech addressed to women is a continuous reminder of the Arab-Muslim identity deemed faded from the cultural features of Tunisian society.

At the same time, the rewards attributed to those who apply Islamic rules is a classical content in the ideology of political Islam of all tendencies. Veiling the body and concealing the face is a sign of extreme purification and virtue according to those who adopt it.

Thus, “the candidates of Jihad find in the radical ideology a set of value, a cognitive and structuring framework which they have not

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<sup>1</sup> Françoise Héritier, “A symbolic anthropology of the body”, in *Journal des africanistes*, 2003, tome 73, Issue 2, (page 9), pp. 9-26; doi: <https://doi.org/10.3406/jafr.2003.1339> [https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr\\_0399-0346\\_2003\\_num\\_73\\_2\\_1339](https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr_0399-0346_2003_num_73_2_1339)

managed to find elsewhere and which gives them the feeling of adhering to a just cause and, by extension, to be someone”<sup>1</sup>.

## 7. Identity Vanishment: the Full Veil

*“The face is certainly the strongest matrix of the feeling of identity”*, according to Davide Le Breton. Regardless of the “degree” of indoctrination, the so-called “committed” women begin by “phasing out” this identity in the name of virtue and discipline. Whatever the adopted name is, *hijab shari*, *niqab* or *sitar*, the full veil carries a quite dense meaning with regard to the women’s relationship with their body and the otherness. It is used to distinguish from other women and to rigorously draw the boundaries between male and female words. The women’s body is loaded with contrasts and contradictions. It is sometimes a sign of valorization and sometimes a sign of demonization and contempt.

Pursuant to this rationale, the women who adopt the full veil and those who (men/women) who defend it, *niqab* is the uniform of pious women in Islam. The female body embodies the senses of seduction then punishment, thus it can only be valued through its complement concealment. On the one hand covering the body and dedicating it on the other hand to a unique man (the husband) is considered as the woman’s purification and the only believer’s salvation at the time of the Last Judgment/Judgement Day.

According to Salafists women and men ideology discourse, believers and particularly female believers must begin with the jihad of oneself (ennafs/spirit/soul° often seduced by Satan, first declared enemy if pious. Besides, contemporary era is illusory, hence the “good male and female”, the “true male and female” Muslims men and women must fight to maintain their faith and resist against all temptations.

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<sup>1</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

In the ideology of religious extremism, good believers (men and women) are in charge with mission and must accomplish their commitment to benefit from eternal life. The new strategy of this religious radicalism involves women and among others families to guarantee the continuity and transmission of ideas in order to settle in the structures of societies. Women, in particular, can facilitate this objective by their ability of propaganda and dissemination in social environments inaccessible to men. In fact, women are responsible for educational missions and recruitment of new followers. Numerous Koranic schools or kindergartens are owned by young ladies known as committed sisters.

Generally, singles are responsible for teaching the recitation of the Koran and the stories of the Sunnah, accompanied by religious rituals based on sharia. This process follows a transcendent and evolutionary track. Mothers are less involved in this process and take care in particular of their own children; they are entailed to obey to the “instructions” of the spouse deemed as the example.

It is the case of a woman who married under Islamic rules, in Tunisian and was accompanied by her husband and her two daughters to Syria, without notifying her family. According to her, the husband, who died in Syria, is the head of the family who decides what is good and the good wife must respond to God’s messages embodied in the word of man.

The second main role is to satisfy the sexual impulses of man. In some women’s speech, those who refuse their husband’s sexual request would be insulted and rejected by the angles. Moreover, young women who made it to the countries of areas of tension were whether prepared or forced to satisfy jihadits’ sexual needs under the prescription of sharia, customary marriage known as *sharii*. A young student who went to Libya for an educational mission (teaching Arabic to non-Arabic Muslims) had repeatedly been subjected to forced sex with several men under the so-called Islamic rules.

In return, men are asked to protect their families, to make their wives and children obey the prescriptions of Sharia law. Ensuring economic need and managing family home are the fundamental components of male's role. Doing jihad and fighting those are considered to be the enemies of Islam is the ultimate duty of any believer in this ideology. In addition, taking caring of widows by marrying them and adopting children is a duty through which solidarity and cohesion are preserved.

### **8. "Engaged" Men's Profile**

This is added to the men's religious practices and alignment with the prescriptions of Sharia in the most ordinary acts, including style of speaking, manner of dressing and approaching other men and women, etc. Muslim man is asked to manage his home and monitor his relatives' behavior. In the first instance, he shall follow the jama' recommendations while being faithful to the Islamic requirement which impose, as an example, separating the sexes and condemning/diabolizing gender mixity as a tradition inherited by the West which is likely to harm Muslims' morals.

The management of sexuality and relationships with others are the heart of the system imposed on "the true Muslim". Controlling sexual impulses necessarily involves marriage. Indeed, in order to follow the good path pf the prophet and his companions, the "committed" Muslim must marry young to complete half of his religions and to devote himself entirely to his religion.

The overestimation of male heterosexuality is part of the encouragement to the early marriage and the founding of a family in conformity with religious rules. Moreover, it is an approach used by certain groups to consolidate their internal links. Whether for men or women, it is the jama' who propose a spouse whose fundamental criterion is to share the same convictions.

For example, Kais married at 20 years old with a woman younger than him and who already wears niqab. His membership to an

Islamic- radical group for two years, rushed him to marry with the help of people around him to avoid sin and found a family according to divine requirements, as he said. The marriage rituals took place pursuant to sharia law and following the companions/sahaba 's steps, based on what he said. *“No music, no dancing or sexual mixity, no sins, a Tunisian wedding like everyone else, but according to the rules of sharia”*.

A young woman returning from Syria experienced the same ritual of marriage, out of respect for Sharia law and out of complicity with her husband. Despite the refusal of her family (her mother and her sisters) the alliance family imposed what is called the ritual of the sunnah.

## 9. “Engaged” Muslims Women’s Profile

Unlike men handling “heavy” missions, jihad, namely the advocacy/defense of religion and the preservation of his money and honor, women are asked to obey their husbands’ orders, since obedience to their spouses (including fathers and brothers also) is part of obedience to God. As for sexuality, their mission is to satisfy their husbands, to get pregnant and to educate their children following religious prescriptions. *“The virtuous woman is the one who protects/preserves her vagina and correctly maintains her veil, who obeys her husband and raises her children in conformity with Islamic rules”*<sup>1</sup>.

Gender performance is built on a quite strange opposition where men and women complement each other in their roles and in the social attributes that can serve the fantasised *Umma*’ project. The features of femininity are focused of the dimension pf procreation and the children education. All roles and actions deriving from them are strictly linked to the physical performance and tightly correlated to their biological nature.

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<sup>1</sup> See as reference: *Wearing the veil in the Maghreb* by Khaoula Matri, 2015.

Independently of the missions allocated to them in the light of circumstances, according to their intellectual levels for those who handled the mediation and jihadists' movement or recruitment of new candidates, etc. the main role is linked to their fertility and their educational ability.

Hierarchy between women is set up based on their intellectual skills to learn sharia and the teaching they can give to others. Training next generation through transmission to their own children is the minimum threshold that an engaged woman is required to ensure. The most ambitious and "enthusiastic" benefited from the function of training their entourage or benefited from the recruitment in children and women koranic schools.

Those who intended "armed jihad"<sup>1</sup> were disappointed by the reality of the conditions in temptation areas. Tunisian teenagers' testimonies who left for Libya for example to contribute to "the sacred war" were reduced to their traditional role of "woman" who sacrifices herself to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband or other fighters and to do household chores.

Indoctrination goes through the idealization of complementarity between sexes and essentialization of biological traits. In fact, for some this relationship between the sexes soothes their anguish as it is determined by a divine force.

In contrast to men's roles, who must maintain social order starting by their closest entourage, women must subjugate themselves to men in order to achieve the ultimate project of a society based on the rules of sharia.

In all cases, symbolic violence is embodied in the ideology of pacifist religious radicalism. It is the pillar on which gender relationship is built. For all women who lived this experience, symbolic violence and submission to authority is eminently undertaken and desirable.

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<sup>1</sup> See a documentary dedicated to young women who left for Libya.

## 10. Appearance and Ideology of Radicalism

Women who adhere to wearing *niqab*, regardless of their involvement in violent behaviors or not, are different to those who wear the hijab. They are, *prima face*, of two types: a peaceful commitment which is limited to preaching, others went beyond this commitment. They are generally in break with other women's social and cultural habits.

These women introduce themselves as “committed sisters”, of which the mission is to promote “true Islam” and follow the women's footsteps of the companions of the prophet. Their perception of religion and their vision of the world are grounded in a binary strictly opposing the right and the wrong, the allowed and the prohibited for Muslims, and in particular for Muslim women.

This perception is applied to all spheres of daily life and mingles with the smallest details of women's behavior and their relation with the social environment. In addition, the religious register constitutes the only reference on which women relay and get their source of inspiration.

Falling back on *niqab* or *hijab* so-called *chari'* is a whole process requiring that converted have to come off from the usual social world and to be part of a new logic where Tunisian women lifestyle and manners are revoked/challenged. Besides, there are a lot of rationales/reasons supporting converted women during different phases. Surahs and hadiths are shaped in this direction so as to assist and encourage them.

Isolation is part of mobilization or recruitment process, where “candidates” cross over a mandatory step comprising a certain number of religious and social rituals.

The real and symbolic separation between sexes is at the heart of the process. The first conviction is pertaining to the relationship with sex: men and women are not equal and cannot in any case compare to each other. Invention and/or recourse to prophetic traditions and nostalgia for the golden age of Islam is the

background of all demands of gendered and sexual roles and statutes. Indeed, woman is the subordinate, under the tutelage of man and must obey to his orders because she would earn eternal life only by respecting this hierarchical order and by admitting her social role based on the biological aspect.

Even if the power relationship is unbalanced and deprives them of their civic rights as citizens, these women are in a logic that draws the relationship of sexes' contours as complementary. For those women, the refusal of the legal status based on gender equality is rewarded by thawabs in the life beyond.

Indoctrination reset gender hierarchies by enhancing men and women differentiated statuses. The focus on the woman's body and the overvaluation of her behavior and her relationship with man is reflected in everyday practices. It is a form of hypnotization of the way of being and doing.

It is about the discovery of another life and meaning perception that allowed young people to give life to their common project and to project themselves in the future. Maher and his group of friends, who found out religious forums on internet, at the age of 17, became fanatic after a few months. His regular prayers at the mosque, especially that of Fajr (sunrise) was the first attachment hook. Fascinated by lectures on Sunnah and the Prophet's story in particular, discussions between peers turn into debates on the exegesis of Ibn Taymia and Tabari.

Gradually, this same group named *Ahl Al Sunnah Wa Al Jama'* starts organizing debate clubs in mosque to discuss political and social issues. After the revolution, this group stretched and became more organized as well as recognized by the entourage (small town of Sahel region), according to him.

Washed away by the socio-political context of the revolution, these young people are starting to act in common public spaces and to become more interested in politics. Leaving to Syria was a controversial debate between those who consider Tunisian territory



as a land of jihad and those who champion the idea that support Muslims in Sham land (Syria and Iraq). According to him, the majority of his group closest members left with the help of an intermediary. Recruitment is carried out by a former prisoner at the time of Ben Ali.

For Kais, the trigger was a simple advice given by pious and reliable people in his neighborhood. His break with delirium and disbelief (alcohol consumption) took place thanks to his membership in the group of *Ahl Al Sunnah Wel Jama'*. His discovery to the "good path/right way of salvation" was possible thanks to his discipline and the solidarity of his group. While advocating Daesh's cause, (till now), he told us about his failed attempts to leave. Several men around him left including his brother-in-law. For him, women have to obey the husband's will if he wants to leave.

## 11. A Global Response with a Circumstantial Discourse

The methodology of indoctrination follows a progressive and pedagogical way by shifting the marginalization of the individual to overvaluation and transforming vulnerability to force. The factors that can attract young people to convert to a religious radicality is first of all the coherent discourse which offers solutions to all anxieties experienced by this category.

Actually, religious discourse does not only provides a "sure/specific" and "definitive" response considered as absolute truth, but also an overvaluation of people who commit in the socio-political process of radicalism. In this regard, several studies have proved the importance of social recognition and the making of a new identity which offenders found in religious extremism. This salvation has shifted/transposed the hate they used against them to the other (Khosrokhavard, 2015).

For those (3 men, one woman) who answered our questions, Islam becomes a way of life which is present in all acts of daily life

inseparable from the most ordinary practices. The rhythm of prayer, recitation of the Koran, learning and training courses on mosque are the men's chores. "*For years, I get up every morning to pray at the mosque, and I don't miss any prayer...that's the least*", said Kais.

As for women, they are not affected by the frequency of going to the mosque, except Friday for the common prayer. Lessons (*dourous*) of *fiqh* and *Sunnah* take place in private spaces, generally at the most pious and the most trained person's place. Some women said that they were taking sharia lessons at the women of a *seikh* who was trained in Afghanistan"<sup>1</sup>.

Men and women relationship to sacred spaces (mosque) is the not the same and is governed by the rules of sharia. Mosque is a space managed and appropriated by men where meetings and lessons circles (*halaqat*) are carried out in these places according to content and objective. Women's presence in religious spaces is punctual and is limited to Friday preaching. Women's training and commitment to enforce sharia begins with respecting the threshold of the boundaries between the male and female worlds (principles reported by the interviewees). It is the female Quranic schools "madaris" that are responsible for transmitting religious knowledge (recitation of Koran, lessons of *Sunnah*, *Fiqh* of women, etc.).

Compared with men who develop certain skills such as physical strength, discipline and a meaning of leadership: Maher<sup>2</sup> testifies about his experience: "*The good Muslim must also be physically strong*".

Exhibiting signs of virility, in particular in popular neighborhoods may allure needy girls with a comforting figure. Moreover, jihadists' figures participating in the second war of Iraq were involved in several terrorist attacks in Tunisia and elsewhere. This

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<sup>1</sup> Interview carried out in 2012 as part of a research on the question of the veil.

<sup>2</sup> 28 years old, de-radicalized for years, told us about his experience in a radical religious group that lasted more than 4 years.

generation of terrorist has inspired the most marginalized youth. Recruitment of young people was largely ensured by Ansar Al Sharia that had free access to different regions of the country. *“In his propaganda videos and press releases, Okba Ibn Nafa regularly evokes the shooting of Oued Ellil (October 2014) triggered after a house search during which four jihadist fighters were killed while shooting the national guard forces. In addition, a growing number of women are involved in sleep cell coordination activities. These perceive, of course, their jihadist engagement as a choice”*<sup>1</sup>.

The *houma* represents the shield protecting delinquent groups when the police comes to arrest them. Elderly women are equally a protective and safety belt for those wanted. *“Women’s strategies are out loud shouting, which intimidates cops and gives time to wanted people time to flee and find a safer refuge”*, said Kais.

In his neighborhood, the Salafists released after the revolution were welcomed as heroes, while gaining charisma and respect. Regarded as leaders, no girl or family could refuse the alliance with “a real man. They were able to protect anyone among us, what if the girl were supposed to be his wife or her family”, as he said. Still, according to him, inhabitants have imposed their law against the police which is not able to access the neighborhood without back up. Neighborhood and knowing each other are quite valued as long as they confer solidarity of the group against any external threat. Women rather embody a relationship based on submission and obedience. The most staged feminine traits are more moral.

## 12. Candidates Recruitment Phase

The “real” conversion in the jama’a sense is the abandonment of all practices that resemble Westerners, in particular when it comes to women. Second, it is done by changing the lifestyle while imitating Mohamed’s companions. Besides, membership in the group is done

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 27.

according to the discretion of faithful and candidates' social entourage in order to avoid disrupting their faith

Young men and women's mobilization begins to increase when guarantying that the new followers are adequately convinced by the imparted lessons. The example is the participation in demonstrations or protests against Tunisians considered to be disbelievers.

The feeling of belonging to the group of "religious" is accentuated by the regularity of religious lessons and the reading of distributed books. In fact, the jama'a definitively replaces the other social ties, in particular when the entourage is resistant or refuses converted women and men's change.

"Regained" social recognition for indoctrinated individuals is reflected based on the profile, that is to say those men and women who, for example, had the feeling of stigma, guilt, marginalization, disappointment, etc. feel overvalued especially as they repair their failures by sacrificing life for *religion* or *love of God*.

For example, those who internalize the feeling of being a "failed" person rejected par the school system, or labeled as "alcoholic", "thug/bandit" in their close entourage (family and close group of belonging) consider that the conversion to sharia restores self-image by breaking with a "shameful" past. Indeed, this was confirmed in Kais' comments when he said "*you feel that you are well, purified and well organized...you do what God asks you to do, you satisfy it while being proud of yourself*".

According to the published report based on court records, "*the first signs reflecting the transition from mere intellectual beliefs to terrorist indoctrination for a change in society are essentially: allegiance, adoption of an alias. The integration of military training in "Ribat" camps (requisition of permanent "garrison"). Integration of outgoing networks to confrontation zones*"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Terrorism in Tunisia" report, p. 75.

Recruitment goes through several stages (after passing multiple tests):

- The regularity of religious practices, especially prayer. Meeting in places of worship is mainly for men, especially during the prayer of *al fajr*. The importance of regularity is to infuse religious commitment into followers' daily activities. Best "pupils" are awarded by extending their training in regions.
- Incremental then final abandonment of the circle of friends and family environment considered as disbelieving is one of the compulsory step
- Intensification of *dourous feqh* on religion, Koran, sunnah and history of Islam, etc. in restrained circles.
- Religious practices are increasing and accelerating over days and months or even over years. Enforcing sunnah and getting closer to the prophet's *sira* (behavior) are growing day after day through the encouragement of the group and personal motivations.

### 13. Relationship with the social environment/entourage

Belonging to the *jama'a* drives conflicting relationships with usual social environment, especially if the family shows resistance to the change. Ties with the religious group develop and reinforce over time to the point it becomes the only form of belonging.

Adherence to religious extremism is explained by the generational conflict also between parents/children and between mother and daughter. It is the case of a young business student who chose to go with her friend to fully live her religion far from her mother's delirium. Daughter of a doctor, separated parents, and lives in the northern suburbs of Tunis. She chose to leave while being convinced that she was making the right choice, especially since the mother refuses to give up habits against Islam. For others,

particularly those from so-called modernist families, opposition to Western behavior and conduct is a test of religious conviction approved by the reference religious group. Thus, a young baccalaureate graduate disappeared and informed her family that she was in Syria after having married a religious man, engaged like her.

Young radicalized women are trying “*to impose their standards to their families and their entourage. It is a question here to claim and assert one’s belonging to a counter-model which opposes traditional figures of authority. At this point, in the mind of the radicalized, group authority is substituting parental and institutional authority, in a process of asserting a new identity*”<sup>1</sup>.

Religious commitment<sup>2</sup> of the youngest, recently converted, fundamentally changes their vision of the world. Any opposition to their beliefs means opposition to truth, said one the interviewee. Application of Islamic rules on a daily basis within the family is a test of skill and a potential for the group. Learning and practicing lessons on Islamic rules is becoming a form of competition and rivalry between pairs, according to Maher.

From a young interviewee, “religion is advice” and applying sunnah is a duty which every Muslim woman must fulfill whether in her family, with the closet friends or even with parents.

The absence of the authority of the father of the positive male figure in the socialization of the majority of women (who left) is remarkable. Numerous cases illustrate young women pursuit for an idealized father figure (three are from separated parents, two of them have one deceased parent and the other one has not seen her father since childhood). “*The shortage of paternal authority can be caused by a gender traditional benchmarks blurring; a father’s time-consuming professional activity which plays differently depending on social background. It can also be linked to generational conflicts driven*

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<sup>1</sup> Nabila Hamza, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>We use the term religious engagement (*al iltizâm adîni*) as a process for departure.

*by the rapid transformation of societies or by the weak associative fabric as well as the failure of national socialization bodies reflecting this lack of authority of the father in the absence of child's supervision, etc."*<sup>1</sup>.

#### 14. Relationship with the State Institutions

Representation of the law enforcement agencies nicknamed snakes "hnousha" before the revolution is transformed in jihadists' speech as "taghout". Kais confirms the solidarity of the whole district during the police raid. *"As soon as the police arrives in the neighborhood, women start to shout very loudly, especially since the cops do no respect people, not even the women and the children...on several occasions, women's shouts and their staging disrupted officers and allowed the wanted person to flee quietly"*.

Jihadism is an expression that challenges Power. The feeling of living on the fringes of the State, in particular in popular neighborhood increases hatred and relentlessness against public authorities. In recounting young people's stories, Mohamed considers the clashes the only way to thwart a corrupt authority that does not respect citizens' dignity.

*"Between 2011 and 2013, young people used to daily violence, particularly during confrontations with police, respected the Ansar Al Sharia's instructions when the latter put forward the identity of their neighborhood, including its violent codes underlying in its delinquent culture. This jihadist Salafist group which had decided not to use violence on Tunisian territory found itself overwhelmed by its social base. Thus, it resorted to increasingly robust vigilantism activities and to rioting on several occasions. These modes of action were more an expression of the violence these young people than the product of a political strategy"*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 25

<sup>2</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 31.

In short, Islamic extremism explains the regression of Muslim societies by the loss of authentic religious values. The idealization of the doctrine represented as supreme and the unique salvation motivate one and the other.

According to the ideology, men and women who are invested in this project are considered as to be those elected for a good cause. Fighting the disbelievers is the ultimate objective to regain eternal life, but also to have a social status described as “superior” compared to pairs.

All those who do not share the same beliefs are considered as enemies. Even if Westerns are the target to which all defeats and failures are referred, political powers are the first targets to be fought as *toughat* since they do not enforce shariah. Deemed as militias of the “kafir” Western, radicals first attack the political and social institutions of society to impose new values. Two interviewees defended this idea, saying that Islamic community revival can only fulfilled by the enforcement of early Islam during the Prophet’s time.

In addition, adversaries are prioritized according to circumstances and contexts. The repression of the law enforcement agencies increase the conviction and the relentlessness of the believers, pursuant to an interviewee. These retaliations were among the reasons given by the jihadists groups, thus encouraging the faithful to the *hijra*, and mobilizing young people to fully live in “land of Islam” in Syria and Iraq, within the state said *Khilafah*.

## 15. Experiences and Stories in Areas of Tension

Several categories of women /men returned to Tunisia:

- Women/men that chose to return voluntarily after discovering a different reality from the image of the so-called Islamic State and are recovered again by jihadist groups. The return circuit and the escape of the organization of the State so-called Islamic is ensured with the Turkish and Syrian smuggling groups;



- -Women/men who made the round trip in the neighboring country without being spotted by the law enforcement agencies. Some of them have reintegrated into society in their communities by camouflaging their identity. They are mainly returnees from Libya.
- Women/men who returned after parents' intervention and were arrested and then released and started a process of deradicalization but at different levels;
- Those who returned and are actually detained in prisons (sentenced to years in prison), and
- Other Tunisian women are tarpped in detention camps like that of *Houl* in Syria ou those kidanpped with their children in Libya.

## 16. Genesis of *Hijra* to “Land of Islam”

In the called religious literature and fatwa<sup>1</sup>, there are two types of conditioned and determined hijra. The first type is a duty or an obligation and the second is preferable. In both cases, Muslims have to travel from a land of disbelief to a land of Islam to flee sins and crimes (alcohol consumption, adultery, female nudity, offensive practices to Islamic rules, etc.) in order to fully practice their religion.

These are the main reasons for the departure of Tunisian women and men, as reported by interviewees.

## 17. A religious conviction/paid commitment?

According to two interviewees, who attempted to make it to Syria, Tunisia is considered as a land of *kofr*, where true Muslims are persecuted and oppressed in their religious practices. Moreover, the “true Muslim” must be committed in the propaganda and promoting project of Islamic shariah law wherever he/she is.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example this link: <https://majles.alukah.net/t140608/>

The notion of *hijra* appears in the discourse of the interviewed individuals as a necessity and a reported element carried out over the prophet's history. A rationale/An explanation "*pursuant to which Muslims are attacked as an international scale is an essential part of Salafist-jihadist discourse*"<sup>1</sup>.

This emotional reason motivates everyone and drives them to leave. In addition to the favorable atmosphere in terms of mobility and religious groups organization, received training and indoctrination are handled through steps. Candidates' recruitment for jihad is carried out in neighborhoods and mosques in particular, by peers. According to the testimony of a 25-year-old, who attempted to emigrate to the Syrian conflict zone, the young people of his neighborhood in Sousse succeeded in their mission and died as martyrs in the land of Islam.

The fantasy of the State applying Islamic rules is considered possible in conflict zones. The project seems feasible for the followers of the ideology. This explains the recruitment and the commitment of many people with a high educational level or are qualified employees. The establishment of the State, (according to shared videos by Daesh's communication service) is based on divine justice and protection of the poor.

Mr. Ayari's approach offers an explanation of the political and historical project of building and reunifying MENA Region. "*Salafism-jihadisme is, for the time being, the ideological movement which embodies this historic political project of unity. Before losing lots of its territory in 2016, the Organization of the Islamic State (OIS) used violence and terrorism in the service of the construction of a new state (considered more viable) with a modern dimension (management, a kind of implicit social contract) as well as a community dimension (religion). This has helped to its popularity, especially among*

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 22

*individuals with a certain theological and political culture, and will encourage some of them to become fighters”<sup>1</sup>.*

### **18.Socio-Economic Factors**

A senior official confirmed that the majority of dissidents who made it to Syria represent “mercenaries” or people recruited to work in the so-called Islamic State. “One of the deportees portrayed himself as a victim of conspiracy, he insisted that he had never carried a gun and said that he had left to work as a cook for 4000 dollars per month”<sup>2</sup>.

A 28-year-old young man, deradicalized, confirms that he was not convinced to leave between 2012/2013 to the jihad, considering that the fight must be ignited on the Tunisian territory. Nevertheless, other young people of his neighborhood, even those who joined the *Ahl Al Sunah Wal Jama’a* Group, had made it to Syria. An intermediary, known by his delinquency before the revolution, facilitated their departure one after the other. The majority, among them, died on Syrian fighting field, he said.

In fact, “*Young people in the broad meaning comprise a social group more receptive to violent extremism because, first of all, of their greater social and economic exclusion, (unemployment, extreme poverty, lack of inclusion in public life)*”<sup>3</sup>. This observation is confirmed in cases of recruitment in peri-urban neighborhoods, whether in Tunis or in the city of Sousse. An interviewee’s testimony illustrates used mechanisms by recruiters to mobilize young people to leave,

Libya seems to be for the jihadist candidates like a land of “stopover” for training and departure for Syria. For others, it is easier and less painful. Many have managed to get a decent job in Libya or Syria. They have especially earned their eternal life

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<sup>1</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Testimony of the person in charge.

<sup>3</sup> Michaël Ayari, 2017, p. 28

despite reprisals from the Tunisian authorities, according to collected testimonies.

Libya remains the first destination of Tunisian terrorists for political or historical reasons and proximity with a 60% rate, according to the report of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Syria is ranked second with a rate of 22%. “ *From August 2011 to 2016, the camps in Libya had continued to host Tunisian terrorist, particularly those who pledged allegiance to Seifallah Ben Hassine. However, some of them had been reoriented to the Syrian front after proper preparation*”<sup>1</sup>.

The choice of departure in areas of tension depends on various factors:

The stranglehold of places of worship by Salafist-jihadist groups, the proliferation of preaching tents and activism on internet are fundamental elements for ideologically convinced people. (Confirmed during interviews and produced reporting). Besides, there was a core network in each city, facilitating jihadist candidates’ departure.

These specialized groups establish links with smugglers to cross the Tunisian-Libyan borders. Passport forgery is carried out on Libyan territory where

For Kais, hijra is like any migration process where men particularly seek their livelihood. But, women must be accompanied par a *muhrim* or have a very specific mission in order to leave alone.

Salwa is another young woman<sup>2</sup> from a poor family. She left with her husband in Libya without having a prior religious culture. After her first return, she radically changes her behavior. The husband landed well-paying work in Libya after long periods of unemployment. He quits the consumption of alcohol and his wife aligns herself with his request and wears *niqab*.

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<sup>1</sup> Report “Terrorism in Tunisia”, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Married at the age of 17, with separated parents and of basic educational level, she became mother of two children at the age of 20.

As for the departure to Libya, the circuit is similar to illegal migration. Generally, initial departure strategy is to remain vigilant and not inform the family. From testimonies, it is important that those (men/women) who prepare themselves for *hijra* keep total discretion and behave naturally with their family circle.

To lay low, some of them slacken their religious practices and calculate their outings. The majority of women left accompanied by their husband or spouse (in customary marriage) or accompanied by men who know the circuit.

In a first phase, migration to the Syrian conflict zone aims to support the Syrian people against the dictatorship. The classic circuit is the trip to Turkey, without visa for Tunisians. Then, they cross the Turkish-Syrian borders with the help of groups that facilitate their movement.

In a second phase, the objective is rather to strengthen Daesh State structures and to live in the land of Islam. However, the ban on young people travel (under 35, by decree) forced them to change their strategy and go through Libya or Algeria to reach the Turkish territory.

The Tunisian (couple) travel circuit goes through Algeria to Turkey of Libya to Turkey. Then, they cross the borders of Tal Labyadh.

*Khadouja Homri's*<sup>1</sup> testimony, who joined her husband in Syria and who belongs to Daesh, is striking. The latter left to do jihad with the free army “al jayesh al hor” and “katibet al nosra”. The couple went through several cities depending on the conditions and the fighting situations. They ended up setting in Reqa. After the death of her husband, she found herself in a *madhafa*. She spent there 4 months and 10 days, from what she said. It is a strict rule applied for all unmarried women. The young student couple, mentioned above, had the same fate upon their arrival.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported by a journalist from the *Elmayaddine* channel.

Madhafa is like a family pension, a rest home dedicated to women. In that premises, women are badly treated and are subjected to violence by the manager of this place.

According to *Khadouja Homri*, this woman was very abused and suffered physical assaults from the woman chief. To get by, she had to marry to another fighter. She lived with her second husband more than 3 years. Then, the latter decided to give up the so-called Islamic State “*because it is a state of disbelievers and not of Muslims, but it was very difficult to leave because they had murdered many Tunisians and others*”, she reported. They managed to leave reqa towards Mayaddine through smugglers. She is currently in *Ain Issa* camp with her daughters and Tunisian women.

## **Women Back From Areas of Tension**

### *Varied women profiles returned from conflict zones*

We find a diversity of women's profiles returning from areas of tension whether from Libya or Syria. The most representative age group is between 20-30 years. Their education level is rather university (3 students), two women have a secondary level of education (baccalaureate level) and the last one did not go beyond basic education. Some women belong to a poor socio-economic category, while others coming from middle-class and have a comfortable economic level.

None of them belong to a jihadist family circle. Only one returnee belongs to a family by alliance and shares its ideology. In general, women who accompany their husbands or those who made it alone do not inform their families. Decision-making and time of leaving remain secret.

The reasons for leaving can be summed up in two main reasons: to accompany the husband in the land of jihad and/or live in sacred land under the aegis of the Islamic State to fully enforce the rules of

shariah. Other reasons, including economic reasons, are secondary for women.

Although the majority regret their experience, these women were indirectly indoctrinated by Salafist-jihadist groups or through their spouses. They were convinced when they left by jihadism Salafism ideology.

*Hijra* does not have the same meaning nor the same expectations for everyone. The objective of **women who left as couple** or those who joined their husbands was to live in a territory that applies shariah law. Furthermore, obedience to a spouse is part of obedience to God.

**Young single women** had rather other objectives: those who went to Libya had the mission of teaching the Arabic language for non-Arabic speakers Muslims. Those who went to Syria had the goal to marry jihadists and live in the land of Islam.

Two of them gave birth in Syria. The first left with her husband and two daughters (the first was two years old and the second less than a year old). She gave birth to her son in Syria after the death of her husband. The second, remarried when she arrived to Syria with a Tunisian jihadist. The third one came back pregnant and gave birth in Tunisia. She decided to comeback after her husband's death.

For some women married to Salafist-jihadist, the first cause of return is linked to the death of the husband in fighting and their refusal to remarry. No one of them remarried a second time in areas of tension.

The time spent in areas of tension varies between a few months and a few years (two and a half years). All of those who wanted to return as soon as they arrived did not get the chance for multiple reasons (control of law enforcement agencies of the state/arms of the so-called Islamic State, fear to be tortured or condemned, etc.).

Almost all of the returned women from areas of tension, with or without children, surrendered to Tunisian authorities to comeback.

Except for one woman who crossed the Tunisian-Libyan border without being intercepted by the police. All the others were arrested for a few less.

Even after their release, areas of tension income were under constant surveillance, at least during the first period of their return. Families in turn are arrested by the security services,

The intervention of the family was decisive for the majority of woman returnees. For those who are back from Syria, family members intervened to facilitate the return. In particular, in the case of a military general's son who went to Syria with his fiancé. Both parents settled in Turkey until their son returned. The father had to resign from his position to go to Turkey and save him. They refused to come back without their unique son. By going back and forth between Tunisia and Turkey and by cooperating with the Tunisian diplomacy, the young couple was able to escape from Daesh brigade and to go to Turkey before being expelled.

Families of returning women from areas of tension in Syria intervened, among other things, on an emotional level. They supported their daughters, encouraged them and remotely accompanied them until their return.

For Sahar's case, she refused to return after the death of her husband. The first period, she wanted to stay despite the insistence of her family, especially her mother. The negotiations lasted for months and her mother, who never lost hope, continued to urge her return. Though, her mother-in-law specially moved to accompany her for the birth, she encouraged her to stay and to raise her children there.

Only in the case of the student Asma, who returned from Libya, since she was rejected by her family. Considered by her father as a source of shame and dishonor, this young woman found support only from an association.



## 20. Coaching after Return/Accompanying after Return

The family is the first structure that helps women to reintegrate. In the majority of cases, mothers and their children were assisted by their families. But, family solidarity does not mean abandoning radical thinking. With varying degrees, family members accompany returnees women from areas of tension in legal proceedings and bear the cost until their release.

The first period of return is just as difficult for the women who returned as for their families. Generally, the closest people to these women accompany them psychologically and financially. This kind of protection seems necessary for reintegration. The majority of women returned from areas of tension found refuge with their families.

Sahar, returned in 2014 with her three children, chose to reside at the first instance with her (Salafist) family-in-law to raise her children following the rules of shariah. Visits to her family were punctual and controlled by his mother-in-law. After a while, she decided to move in with her mother and settles permanently with her and her three children.

Then followed by a psychologist, she gradually took up her old habits and her rhythm of life before. Thanks to the therapy and treatment sessions she had, he succeeded to overcome the phase of depression and the suffering she experienced when she returned. The whole family has moved to settle down in the Ezzouhour neighborhood.

## 21. Various Life Paths After the Return

- *A young woman returned from Libya with HIV*

Asma is a young student, specialized in Arab civilization, made it to Libya for knowledge-based jihad. Her mission was to teach Muslims non-Arabic speakers established in Libya. Born in 1994, originally from Kasserine and living Al Aouina in Sousse with her

family. She decided to go to Libya in 2015, convinced that she was accomplishing a religious mission. After 6 months, she returned to Tunisia following her expulsion from the jihadists in Libya. She tells her story to psychologists and listeners of an association based in Sousse.

The process of her indoctrination began on internet in so-called religious groups under the name “*asshab al da’wa wal tabligh*”. In a few months, she wore niqab and accelerates the pace of her religious practices. While attending the mosque of one of the neighborhoods of Sousse, she met her peers during prayer of *tahajud*. She subsequently was recruited by a religious extremist group which disappeared after her return to Tunisia. Her mission was to teach and train non-Arabic speakers Muslims foreigners on Koran and Sunnah. She made the trip without warning or informing her parents. The travel procedures were carried out by a group of people who used pseudonyms. When she arrived at the jihadist camp in Libya, she discovered that her mission was different. In fact, she was obliged to satisfy the sexual needs of the jihadists on the spot, under threats and sexual assaults.

According to the narrator (a woman member of an association and a listener), Samah did not identify the military camp in which she landed and could not in no case flee or save herself, since the surveillance was very tough. At the same time, she was always afraid to identify the people who treated her badly. Under the trauma of sexual abuse and physical as well as psychological torture inflicted to her, she was in perpetual pain. She could not identify or count her sexual partners because they were so many and of different nationalities: Tunisians, Europeans and others. One of the main aggressor, who most marked her, was a Chechen who asked her “*bizarre*” sexual services, from what she said.

The daily life of this young woman was strictly shaped and imposed by the community: cleaning, cooking, etc. in parallel with religious practices. The night she was exhibited, like other girls on the spot, to satisfy the *jihadists*’ desires and wishes who choose them

depending on their mood and fantasies. Each sexual intercourse was justified by a so-called religious ritual in the name of temporary marriage or marriage of pleasure. According to her, all the women were servants obliged to obey all orders in the name of religion. The only one who had authority and a margin of freedom was the spouse of the *amir*.

When she talked about the organization, she described it as a very well organized state with all the services comprising highly qualified people such as computer science engineers (who work on encryption). In this military jihadist camp, there were doctors who examined women who were there and it was they who detected that she was carrying HIV virus. Due to her illness, she was rejected outside the camp not far from the borders. After this desperate situation, the young woman presented herself to the Tunisian authorities and was arrested 3 months by Boushousha police for the interrogation.

It is a doctor (woman) from the public services who sent her to the association, confirms the witness. Her psychological and physical state was deplorable: post-trauma situation, stripped of any physical strength with several scars of cigarette burn everywhere in her body. It is only after multiple listening and follow up sessions that the victim of this torture begins to speak up. She felt doubled betrayed, since she could not find any trace of the group that recruited her. The therapy sessions and the empathy of the associative group that accompanied her assisted to overcome the crisis phase.

Asma has gradually started to pull away from ideas and discourse of jihadism by putting it in its perspective. She ended up by getting rid of her niqab. She started a whole therapy, but after one year she cut ties completely with the association members.

- *A widow woman deradicalized and reintegrated through art*

It is a young woman who is 25 years old, widow and mother of a child who is almost 4 years old. Coming from a middle class family

and living in Al Manzah, her mother died and her father is a public servant. The young woman did not get her baccalaureate and dropped out of secondary school. At the same time, she was attending religious classes at the mosque and began to rub shoulders with people “committed” to religion, from what she said. The shariah courses, mainly on Sunnah and religious prescriptions for women, are based on books and texts that she read to consolidate her faith. The new social relationships allowed her to integrate into a group of radical people who wanted to go to Syria. Then, she decided to go to “the land of Islam” with the man she adored without the knowledge of her family. There, they got married and integrated Daesh camp. A few months later, her husband was killed and she was alone expecting a baby from him. Shocked by what happened there and feeling betrayed, she contacted her family again and tried to return. Her father traveled to Turkey to pick her up. She has been going through a difficult and traumatic period, especially after giving birth.

She has been in therapy for years to get out of the trauma experienced. She has decided to get rid off her veil and to come back to her lifestyle before indoctrination. She is currently taking acting lessons.

- *A divorced woman: from one underground/clandestinity to another*

Coming from a poor family and separated parents, with a father that abandoned them (three children), she lived with her mother who works as a cleaning woman. The girl dropped out of school very early at the age of 14. She got married at the age of 17 and a few months with a violent and alcoholic man with whom she has two daughters. In 2014, her husband began to frequent a Salafist group and to pray regularly in the mosque. He leaves for Libya alone the first time where he stayed for a few months without giving any news. When he returned, he forced his wife to go with him with their two daughters. Thus, she was absent for a few

months, keeping in touch with her mother. The latter reported that her son-in-law worked in smuggling then with Libyans in jihadist training camps.

Due to the violence inflicted by her husband and the living conditions described as dangerous, she returned to Tunisia and asks for divorce. Her husband's round trip between Tunisia and Libya did not discourage her. Moreover, despite the husband's arguments and threats, Nadia persisted continued the divorce proceedings et filed a complaint against him. He was already being chased and wanted by the police, he has completely disappeared and never returned.

Nadia returned to live with her mother with her two daughters. As soon as she got divorce, she started looking for a job. In the meantime, she has got rid off the full veil, imposed by her ex-husband, to then take off the entire scare and gradually resumes her daily pace she was used to before the marriage. For a good period of time, hardly bared, she isolated herself at home and cut all ties with her family-in-law, who treated her badly.

To afford her needs and those of her two daughters, she agrees to work as a seasonal worker in restaurants and hotels. She ends up landing a night job in a nightclub in Sousse. Night outings, behavior and clothing were the subject of argument and conflict with her mother. Fired after a few months, she worked in several nightclubs. She ended up traveling illegally to Italy, leaving her children in the care of her mother.

## **22. Who are the women who have not yet returned?**

### *Those detained in Syria*

Based on testimonies shared from journalists<sup>1</sup>, jihadist women detained in the Al Houli camp are quite violent and ferocious, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpM8d7GurPA>, added on YouTube on April 16, 2019.

refuse to return to their country. Detained by Syrian democratic forces, the *mouhajirates* are considered to be the most violent and continue to apply Daesh law inside the camp.

They declared that they are ready to sacrifice themselves until the last breath on behalf of the Islamic State. According to the broadcasted reporting by France 24, some interviewed women confirmed that “*they continue to believe in Daesh and that it is a State following the prophetic way, where they lived in peace and prosperity*”.

A Tunisian jihadist answered the journalist with pride, saying “*we fought the disbelievers and the apostates*”. Adding that she does not want to return to Tunisia which is for her a country of atheism. She has been leaving since 2012 and plans to stay the rest of her life.

Convinced of their eternal mission as jihadist in the name of Islam, these women are determined by their choice towards the Islamic State and do not regret their belonging to this organization. The same Tunisian woman depicts the methods of killing (those are considered in their eyes as disbelievers and apostates) by beheadings or bullets, etc. as an obligation to any Muslim who enforces the precepts of Koran and Sunnah.

A majority of them are mothers of two or more daughters and they have been married more than once. Some justify, by an offensive act, *jihad of nikah* as an antonym to prostitution. This kind of sexual practice only concerns non-free women called *sabaya*, that it is to say all women who do not belong to the organization of the so-called Islamic State.

They consider that the mouhajirat must necessarily be under the tutelage of a man since they are far from their family and their country. The most orthodox believe that they are lucky to have a martyred husband, which means that they will join him in paradise.

Always according to them, Muslim women, namely those who belong to Daesh (all the others are disbelievers), were chosen in order to enforce shariah even in the refugee camp. Applying the

*hisba*<sup>1</sup>, that is to say to continue to control obligations of Islam practicing such a “*al amr bil maarouf wal nahiy an al monkar*”, was one of their roles. Among them were suicide bombers who denoted themselves during confrontation with the Syrian law enforcement agencies, based on a Syrian soldier testimony.

### *Those detained in Libya*

- *Derna* and *Sirt* are the two Libyan cities occupied by Deash. According to some reporting, women and children are used as suicide bombers in combat strategies.

So far, 22 children and 14 women are detained in Libya since 2016.

- One of them states that she does not regret having followed her husband and that she remains proud to have worn *niqab*.
- Their reason for leaving: to join their husband prosecuted by the authority because of his religious convictions

## **23. Conclusion**

Women's involvement in violent extremism is a very complex social and scientific phenomenon.

The process of deradicalization requires taking into account the personal story of each woman in order to provide favorable conditions for the subjective reconciliation of each, at the first instance and then for a gradual social reintegration.

The psychological and social care of indoctrinated children is one of the imperatives to fight against violent radicalization.

As for reinstatement procedures, they are more delicate, in particular for women because indoctrination calls into their being (submission to male authority too) and relies on guilt. If the rhythm and the process of adhering to radicalism depends on

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<sup>1</sup> Concept of *hisba* is defined in this link: <http://saaaid.net/alsafinh/48.htm>; <http://saaaid.net/female/0298.htm>

followers' personal stories and the socio-political context (the margin of freedom and mobility of "recruiters" and preachers according to the period). Deradicalization requires several procedures to follow in legal, security and social terms.

A religious/political counter-discourse based on universal human values of tolerance and acceptance of difference seems to be fundamental.

The involvement and the support of indoctrinated people's families are factors that accompany them in the process of getting rid off of the ideology of salafism-jihadism.

Consequently, it is important to develop a public policy on social and economic justice between regions, classes and sexes.



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## Reporting Links

### Useful Links

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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z9rv9YZGrY> Femmes en Libye ; 2018.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGFSXSojuGQ> Daech à Riqaa, 2017, témoignages de personnes sauvées.
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# THE LIBYAN CASE

By Nagia AYAD ELATRAG

## Introduction

After the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the military intervention in Northern Syria and the developments in the region, the return of Jihadists from conflict zones has become a disconcerting scenario, one that requires increased efforts to reintegrate these women and to redeem them from extremist ideologies. In fact, Libya was only a temporary host for non-Libyan returnees for purposes of training and passage. As to the Libyan returnee female Jihadists, their return to Libya causes tensions and a violent controversy, if we weren't to call it a sterile debate that divided Libya into two camps: a camp that completely refuses their return and another camp that addresses the issue from the perspective of 'repentance and forgiveness'. The issue of the return of female Jihadists from conflict zones in itself is dangerous considering its repercussions which extend beyond the national level relative to the regional and international arrangements, the changing international strategy and the field developments in Syria, Iraq and Yemen on the one hand, and relative to the international Jihadist project outlined by the Jihadi movement senior theorists on the other hand.

The developments in the Maghrebi region require a joint conceptualization of shared threats and interests as well as establishing a strategy that enables a better coordination of efforts and a better management of means of combating insecurity in the sub-region with unconventional and coordinated measures.

In this context falls the initiative of the partnership of UMA general secretariat with the office of the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation in Tunis, to realize a Maghrebi study that focuses on the topic of 'the Return of Maghrebi Jihadists from Hotbeds of Tension'.

This regional complementarity and integration of efforts is an essential gateway into collective action and an imperative to confronting the challenges that face the region, considering that integration of efforts allows us to overcome factors of weakness, as many countries lack the constituents of stability due to their circumstances and geographical space which impose limitations on the capabilities of these countries and their social, economic and political abilities.

### **Problematic of the study**

This study raises a very important problematic which is the return of female Jihadists from conflict zones in the Maghreb countries including Libya. Unfortunately, this issue remains something of a taboo, so what positions should be adopted towards this category of citizens after their return? And what is the reaction of the people of Maghreb towards this phenomenon?

This problematic is divided into the following question:

- How are female Jihadists defined in the countries of the Maghreb?
- What is the concept of return and is it defined in the same way in all five Maghreb countries?
- What are the reasons that drive the women of the Maghreb (for instance Libyan women) to join terrorist organizations?
- What sort of legal, social and psychological support should be offered to female Jihadists (in Libya for instance) in order to guarantee their reintegration in their countries?

### **Significance of the Study**

The topic of this study is of great importance in the sense that it attempts to examine

the situation of female jihadists who returned from conflict zones from a Maghrebi perspective. This study will also reflect the depth of the Maghrebi struggle and will portray compatibility and rapprochement between the five Maghrebi countries. In fact, we are in dire need of such collective studies that examine shared challenges among the countries in light of an international environment that is marked by the emergence of economic forces that act through the wheel and mechanisms of economic globalization. While the Maghrebi countries remain dispersed in light of these variables, the emerging risks are too great to be borne by one individual country. This is what gives this topic its significance in that it addresses one of the most important shared problems in the Arab region, specifically in North Africa. This is an attempt to define the facts behind his problem and to identify the real factors and challenges that impede its resolution. The significance of this topic also lies in the fact that it includes future aspirations and prospects to solve this problem by establishing a joint strategy.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are summarized as follows:

1. This study is a practical attempt to clarify the concepts related to the phenomenon of the return of Jihadists from hotbeds of tension.
2. This topic still occupies a rather humble spot in the literature of research conducted about ‘Jihadists’ which usually focuses on the historical and political development of this phenomenon as well as its violent ideology and the social and psychological features of the men involved in it.

3. A deeper, more comprehensive and independent analysis of the phenomenon of ‘female Jihadists’, transcending some of the biases that portray women as passive and not necessarily violent actors.
4. Establish an appropriate theoretical framework to explain the smooth progress towards integration in the Maghreb region.
5. An attempt to obtain a maximum amount of information and data about Jihadists as they are formed and trained, and the start of their involvement in the terrorist organization and the phases of their involvement, in addition to obtaining information about the main challenges that they face and the most important materials and available resources that help them become involved in a terrorist organization.
6. Enrich the libraries of Arab universities with regard to one of the most important topics: The issue of the return of Jihadists from hotbeds of tension, and the relative academic and practical issues concerning the spread of this phenomenon at the international level.

### **To conduct this Maghreb study**

The World Federation of Trade Unions and FES organization tasked a team of researchers/experts from different disciplines with preparing a case study in each of the relevant countries.

On the regional level, this team is supervised by a task force who is responsible for directing, coordinating and drafting the study in a joint Maghrebi version written and translated into three languages.

## Part One

### The conceptual and organizational framework of ISIS in Libya

The outbreak of the Syrian crisis enhanced the Libyan youth involvement in ISIS as many Libyans went to Syria in order to join the fight against the Syrian regime under different organizations most prominent of which is ISIS. In 2012, a group of Libyan fighters in Syria announced the creation of ‘Al-Batar Brigade’ which fights under the banner of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. In the spring of 2014, more than 300 fighters from this militia returned to Libya. And in Derna, a new faction called The Islamic Youth Shura Council, was established and started recruiting fighters from other local militias. This faction announced its allegiance to ISIS marking the start of the actual presence of ISIS in Libya. In this chapter we will address the establishment of this organization in Libya, including its creation and the Jihadist leadership in Libya.

#### Concept

Jihadism is a small group of people who seek to express social or political frustrations. The spontaneous nature of these groups, drawn from extremist minorities in Islamic societies, makes them unpredictable and probably dangerous.

Jihadism could also be considered as a sociopolitical expression of the desperation of people who feel oppressed, and who find in a simple extremist discourse that is now widely accessible online, what feeds a feeling of not belonging to their societies, a feeling that could amount to the creation of a small ‘spontaneous’ terrorist group.

**In Libya**, extremist terrorist groups took control due to the security and political vacuum in the country, which is an appropriate climate for these groups. It allowed them to take advantage of the chaos that the country has witnessed since 2011 in an attempt to

tighten their control over the state under different names and slogans in appearance, but actually with the same content, which falls within what is known as the political Islam mainstream. This paved the way for the presence of various terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, Ansar al-Sharia, and Shura Councils, and the Islamic State (ISIS) which is considered one of the most prominent terrorist organizations in the Libyan scene over the past few years. It was able to control many areas and to commit the most heinous crimes inside and outside of Libya until it amounted to being a regional and international concern. So, the question is: When and how did this terrorist organization appear in Libya?

## Foundation

*October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014*<sup>1</sup>: The first announcement of the presence of ISIS in Libya was made through a video tape that was published online and that showed a group of armed individuals belonging to 'Islamic Youth Shura Council' declaring their allegiance to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, in the coastal city Derna.

*October 5<sup>th</sup> 2014*: Islamic Youth Shura Council joins ISIS terrorist organization in the coastal city of Derna (1340 km east of Tripoli).

*November 10<sup>th</sup> 2014*: ISIS in Derna organizes the first open military parade in the city and calls residents to hurry and announce their allegiance to the emir of ISIS 'Al Baghdadi' in order to create the first ISIS principality outside Syria and Iraq.

*November 13<sup>th</sup> 2014*: Abu Bakr Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, issued a voice record in which he declared that he accepts allegiance of his supporters in 5 countries including Libya and he declared the establishment of three ISIS provinces in Libya, Cyrenaica in the east; Fezzan in the south and Tripoli in the west<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rémy Ardan "Derna, Libya, the first ISIS province outside the borders of the 'caliphate'", *Le Monde*. Review also Abd El Baset Ghbara, "ISIS Libya Chronology", *Africa Weekly Bulletin*, Thursday 9 November 2017, Issue 2, page 22.

<sup>2</sup> Obe Map, ISIS Galaxy (archive), written by Sara Dafla.

*December 2014/January 2015:* ISIS claims responsibility for bombing a number of Arabic and foreign embassies in Tripoli.

*January 27<sup>th</sup> 2015:* ISIS claims responsibility for the attack on Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli which housed the head of Government of National Salvation, Omar Alhassi.

*February 2015:* The first public appearance of ISIS in Sirte city (450 km east of Tripoli).

*Middle February 2015:* ISIS publishes a video showing the decapitation of 21 Egyptian Coptic individuals. A few hours later, the Egyptian forces respond by air strikes on the strongholds of the terrorist organization in Derna.

*February 19<sup>th</sup> 2016:* An American air strike on a house where ISIS operatives were located on the outskirts of the city of Sabratha (170 km west of Tripoli), killing 50 members, the majority of whom are Tunisians and Libyans. The Military Council of Sabratha, with the support of the “Libya Dawn” militia, was able to drive out sleeping cells affiliated with ISIS from the city.

*March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016:* The Tunisian army kills 5 armed ISIS members in the outskirts of Bengerdan city on the Libyan borders.

*March 7<sup>th</sup> 2016:* The Tunisian army stops a major attack by ISIS operatives on Bengerdan. It kills 55 of its operatives and arrests another 11. These ISIS operatives have escaped from Sabratha in Libya and tried to establish a princedom in Bengerden.

### **The Battle of Sirte**

*April 12<sup>th</sup> 2016:* The presidential council of the Government of National Accord in Libya started a large military operation to free the coastal city of Sirte from the grip of ISIS terrorist organization, they called the operation ‘Al Bunyan Al Marsoos’. In December 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, the media office of the ‘Bunyan Al Marsoos’ forces confirmed



that field officers in the fighting zones declared complete control of the last ISIS strongholds in the city of Sirte<sup>1</sup>.

Currently, the presence of ISIS is limited to some specific neighborhoods in Benghazi as well as sleeping cells in Tripoli and in Bani Walid (Southeast Tripoli) and in the Southwest of Libya.

### **Most prominent leaders of ISIS in Libya**

Most of the ISIS new members in Libyan soil are not new to acts of terrorism and war, they are leaders of Al-Qaeda terrorist organization founded by Osama bin Laden and his assistant Ayman al-Zawahiri. Some of them were previously arrested in Libya while others managed to flee and escape to Iraq to join the terrorist organization there. With the strikes that ISIS has received in various cities of the country from the Libyan National Army in the east and west or from the forces of the Presidential Council, ISIS database was gradually revealed which identified its most prominent local and foreign leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Philippe Remi, "ISIS confirms its presence in Libya with blood", *Le Monde*.

"Thousands of Egyptians escape Libya" (archive) *Le Monde* with the *AFP*;

"Libya": Terrorists commit suicide bombing in a hotel in Tripoli" (archive), *Le Point*, 27 January 2015;

"Violence in Libya: ISIS attack kills 40 people in 'El Kobba'", *BBC* 20 February 2015, read online (archive);

"ISIS kills 28 Christians in Libya", *Le Monde* (archive);

"ISIS publishes a video of an execution of Ethiopian Christians in Libya" (archive) (video) *France 24*;

"What is ISIS's position on Christians? Explanations" (archive) *France 24*;

"Explosion of a loaded truck kills around 50 people in Libyan Police Academy", *Reuters*, January 7th 2016, (read online, archive);

"An explosive loaded truck in Libya targets police officers recruited in Zlitan", *BBC News*, January 7th 2016 (read online, archive);

"Dozens killed in a bomb attack on the Libyan Police Academy", *Al Jazeera*, January 7th 2016 (read online, archive);

"More than 50 deaths in an explosion in Libyan Police Academy", *Daily Mail*, January 7th 2016 (read online, archive);

Refer also to Abdelhaset Ghbara, "ISIS Libya Chronology", *Africa Weekly Bulletin*, Thursday, November 9th 2017, issue 2, page 23-26.

*The following are the most important and influential leaders of ISIS*

- **Turki Al-Binali:** He is considered one of the prominent figures in ISIS. His Bahraini nationality was revoked at the end of January 2013 when he represented ISIS in the negotiations that the United States held in order to release Peter Kassig who was kidnapped by ISIS and executed subsequently. In February 2015, some ISIS affiliated Twitter accounts indicated that the Bahraini Turki Al-Binali arrived in Libya as an ISIS delegate. He was considered one of its most important spiritual figures.
- **Hassan Karami:** Also known as Abu Qatada Al-Ansari, is the mufti of ISIS in Sirte and is one of the terrorist organization's most prominent figures in the city. He was one of the founders of Ansar al-Sharia organization before joining ISIS, and he is accused of participating in the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi in September 2012, which resulted in the killing of the American ambassador Christopher Stevens. Al-Karami assumed his position as Mufti of ISIS in Sirte in 2013. He also appeared in propaganda records of the organization, and became the preacher at the main mosque in the city, where he urged people to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi, and instigated violence and expiation of opponents.
- **Muhammad Abdullah,** also known as Abu Al-Bara Sharm Al-Azdi: He is a fighter who joined the Islamic State Organization in Yemen and a member of ISIS in Syria in mid-November 2014 acting as a religious preacher. He became renown when Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi appointed him in June 2015 as Emir of the city of Derna in Libya.
- **Wissam Najm Abd Zaid Al-Zubaidi,** known as Abu Nabil or Abu Al-Mugheera Al-Qahtani: He is an Iraqi citizen who was for a long time a member of Al-Qaeda organization. He carried out several operations in Fallujah and Ramadi from 2004 to 2010 under the banner of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. He was also a member of the

Islamic State delegation that was sent from Iraq to Libya in September 2014 to collect allegiance pledges for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

- **Abu Musa Al-Tunisi:** He is a prince in the Harawa region west of Sirte, who successfully escaped ISIS with the company of approximately 25 Tunisian terrorists after he became aware of the intention of some terrorists in ISIS to assassinate him following disagreements between Tunisian terrorists and other fighters, according to the Tunisian newspaper *Al-Sarih* 18 June 2016. The newspaper said that Abu Musa al-Tunisi escaped with a huge amount of money in dollars and Libyan dinars, and that his destination is still unknown, which made the Tunisian army and security forces on alert on the border strip with Libya.
- **Muhammad Saad al-Tajouri:** also known as (Abu Sulaiman), is considered the leader of ISIS in Sabratha. He was appointed by the leaders of the terrorist organization in the city of Sirte. He was arrested in February 2016 by the Special Deterrence Force of the Ministry in the government affiliated to Libya Dawn (not recognized internationally) along with his assistant Salem Al-Ammari, known as (Abu Zaid), and Ahmad Dahim, also known as Abu Hamza Al-Tajouri) who was a coordinator hosting them and transporting them to Sabratha, inside a house on the outskirts of Tajura, east of the Libyan capital, Tripoli.
- **Radwan Al- Barnawi:** The second in power in ISIS. He was killed in August 2015 during confrontations with the special forces Al- Saiqa in Souk El-Hout area.
- **Abu Al-Walid Al-Jazrawi:** The Saudi leader in ISIS organization in Sirte. He was responsible for the organization's stationing and patrols in Sirte. He was killed, along with other members of the organization, in August 2016 during the confrontations with Bonyan al-Marsous forces in the third residential area in central Sirte.

- **Jalal Al-Din Al-Tunisi:** He was appointed as the head of ISIS Libya by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of the terrorist organization ISIS, as a replacement of Saudi Abu Amer Al-Jazrawi, due to the succession of defeats undergone by the Organization. He is considered one of the oldest terrorist operatives that were active in Iraq.
- **Abu Islam al-Sharifi,** also known as Abu Islam al-Libi, is the chief military official of ISIS in the city of Sirte. Libyan news reports confirmed his death in clashes in the Bukhari axis west of Sirte, where he was directly targeted by the Banyan al-Marsus forces.
- **Moaz al-Fazani,** also known as Abu Naseem, is one of the most prominent leaders of ISIS in Libya. He was a former detainee in the famous American Bagram prison in Afghanistan before he was transferred to Italy in 2009 where he appeared before a court in Rome on charges of carrying out terrorist operations inside Europe. He was acquitted for lack of evidence. In 2016, he was arrested by Libyan security forces while trying to flee to Tunisia from Sirte.
- **Hassan Ali Al-Safrani:** The Emir of ISIS Police in Sirte, a resident of the city of Sirte who is originally from Zliten. He worked in the Security Committee in Sirte before joining Ansar al-Sharia. Then joined ISIS with his two brothers. The three of them became leaders in the organization. He died in a suicide bombing with a car he was driving; he detonated the car shortly before it arrived at Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous forces.
- **Fawzi Muhammad al-Ayyat,** also known as Abu Islam: a resident of Sirte who is a prominent leader, and the legal official and judge of the Islamic Court of ISIS. Al-Ayyat joined the Sirte Thuwar Brigade, then joined the security committee before joining Ansar al-Sharia and finally ISIS. He was killed in November 2016 during the clashes in Giza marine district in the city of Sirte.
- **Mahmoud Al-Barasi:** One of the most important field leaders of the terrorist organization ISIS. He announced the expiation of

all state workers on the screen of a Libyan satellite channel in 2013. After that there was no news about him. In April 2016, Libyan activists circulated on Facebook pages the news of his death following an air strike by the Libyan Air Force targeting a terrorist hideout at the Al-Hout and Al-Sabri hub in Benghazi.

- **Ahmad Al-Ruwaisi:** also known as Abu Zakariaa Al-Tounsi, a Tunisian jihadist and one of the most wanted persons in the security and judicial departments in Tunisia as he was accused of the assassination of Muhammad Brahmi and Shukri Belaid. He was killed in March 2015 in an armed clash between the Islamic State to which he belongs and the Libya Dawn militia, 70 km from the city of Sirte.
- **Merhi Salih Al-Hatak,** also known as Abu Hafs Al-Libi. He is wanted by the United States in the case of the attack on the American consulate in 2012 in Benghazi. He is considered one of the most wanted persons by the Libyan security authorities for his involvement in numerous terrorist acts, including the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, the attempt to assassinate the Italian consul in Libya, and the attack on the British consulate headquarters in Benghazi. He was killed on July 27, 2016 in the Qawarsha area of Benghazi during an air strike by the Libyan Air Force.
- **Libyan Leader Abu Dujana:** He worked at 'Diwan Al-Hisbah' and participated in the kidnapping and killing of many civilians in Sirte in late 2015. He surrendered in November 2016 to Al-Bunyan Al-Marsoos forces.
- **Hamed Zlitni:** He is one of the senior leaders of ISIS and an official in 'Diwan Al-Hisbah' in Sirte, Libya. He was killed in June 2016 in confrontations with the Banyan al-Marsoos forces on the outskirts of the city and was mourned by the organization inside the city.
- **Salem Al-Qubaili,** also known as Bunokta: a resident of the eastern Shiha region. He was one of the most prominent leaders of

the organization in the city, and a trainer for terrorist groups. He used his own farm in the Ras al-Hilal forests as a training camp after they left the Bukhari camp in the Boomsafer Forest. He was killed in October 2016 in confrontations with the forces of Al-Bunyan Al-Marsoos.

- **Walid al-Farajani**, also known as Abida al-Athbaji: a prominent leader of ISIS. He is responsible for the Islamic Court in Sirte and was recommended by the Bahraini leader of ISIS, Turki al-Binali, to be the legal official of the terrorist organization in what they call the Tripoli province. He was killed in August 2016 in a raid by a US plane.

- **Abu Abdullah Al-Masri**: He was the Emir of ‘Diwan Al\_Hisbah’ in Sirte, and he personally supervised collecting citizens’ royalties for ISIS. He also carried out many executions and hand amputations against civilians who did not obey ISIS’s orders there. Al-Masri was killed during the battle to liberate the residential neighborhood N1 in Sirte.

- **Abu Al-Bara Al-Masri**: He is one of the leaders of the Immigrant Brigade that carried out an attack on the Libyan Oil Crescent in January 2016. He was killed in October 2016 in the Giza Marine district of Sirte, by the Bunyan Al-Marsous forces.

- **Abu Maryam Al-Masry**: He is the head of ‘Diwan Al-Hisba and Zakat’ in the terrorist organization. Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous forces announced his death in August 2016 and posted a picture of him on their Facebook page.

- **Abu Omar Al-Muhajir**: An Egyptian national, who assumed administrative, financial and tax management responsibility in the so-called ‘Diwan Al-Hesbah’. He was notorious for his brutality with regard to his victims, whether by financial extortion of violators of the rules of the ISIS among the residents of Sirte or during the executions that he used to attend and read the rulings of their implementation. He was killed in August 2016 during clashes

with the al-Butnyan al-Marsous forces on the outskirts of neighborhood No. 3.

- **Abu Omar Al-Tunisi:** The second man in ISIS, Sirte. He acted as the so-called Emir of the courts in ISIS. He was killed by the Al-Bunyan Al-Marsoos forces in neighborhood No. 3 in central Sirte in August 2016.
- **Abu Zeinab Al-Tunisi:** He was in charge of the prison of ISIS's so-called 'Diwan Al-Hesbah'. He was killed in July 2016 while Al-Bunyan forces were imposing control on the Seven Hundred residential neighborhood of Sirte and the buildings of the Electricity Company near the control center.
- **Nour El-Din Shoushan:** He originates from the Tunisian province of Sidi Bouzid. He was a field commander with ISIS and a dangerous terrorist who was wanted by the Tunisian security services for his involvement in the attack on the Bardo Museum on March 18, 2015. The attack killed 22 people, including 21 foreign tourists and a Tunisian police officer. He was killed in an American bombing of an ISIS training camp in the Libyan city of Sabratha.
- **Ayoub Al-Tunisi:** Known as the Emir of ISIS terrorist organization in Benghazi. He was killed in June 2016 in confrontations with the Libyan army, in the Qar Younis clashes area.
- **Mirghani Badawi Al-Bashir,** also known as "Abu Al-Hareth": a Sudanese national of the region The Eastern Dayum in the capital, Khartoum. He was one of the most prominent preachers and promoters of ISIS who are known as the "ISIS advocates". He is considered one of the leaders of ISIS in Libya. He was killed in a drone strike by the Italian air force that targeted a gathering location for ISIS forces in June 2016, as confirmed by the

London-based Al-Hayat newspaper in its Friday, July 8, 2016 edition<sup>1</sup>.

### **Prominent Libyan Leaders Advocating for Jihadism**

- **Al-Sadiq Al-Gharyani:** He is the Mufti of Libya and holds a PhD from Exeter University. He is one of the leaders of Scientific Salafism and one of the most influential figures in the Islamic spectrum since the February 17 revolution. However, some of the fatwas he issued sparked great controversy. On the day before the General National Congress elections, Gharyani announced that voting for Mahmoud Gebril's party in the National Forces Alliance was un-Islamic, claiming that the party was intending to restrict the scope of Sharia.

Al-Gharyani's fatwas related to women drew a lot of attention. For example, Al-Gharyani said that female teachers in schools and colleges should cover their faces when teaching males who have reached puberty. He also called on the government to prevent Libyan women from marrying non-Libyans to avoid the perceived risk of Shiism infiltrating into Libya from Syria.

The Mufti has expressed on more than one occasion that he does not trust the United Nations-led peace process. When the peace agreement was signed, Gharyani announced that any government that resulted in the agreement would be a government that serves the West and targets the rebels of the “Altnasah” Libya.

Later, Al Gharyani repeatedly criticized the National Accord government by using the satellite channel of the Ifta House to express his concerns that the National Accord government would work against the Sharia. Recently, based on the Mufti's statements, the Benghazi Defense Brigades, which is headed by General Mustafa Al-Sharkasi and which includes many senior members of

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed Al-Tayeb, “ISIS Heads”, *Weekly Bulletin in Africa News Portal*, Thursday, November 9th 2017, Issue 2, page 19-20-22.



the hardline Islamic battalions in Benghazi such as (Ismail Al Sallabi), launched an operation to liberate Benghazi from the control of General Haftar. A week later, specifically during the month of Ramadan 2016, Rabih Al-Madkhali issued a statement saying that all Salafists in Libya must fight against the mufti.

During celebration of the New Hijri year, Al-Gharyani claimed in front of the media that there was a symmetry between the migrants who migrated from Mecca to Medina to escape the persecution of the infidels of Quraish on the one hand and those who fled from Benghazi because they opposed ‘Operation Dignity’ headed by Haftar on the other hand. The Mufti urged Tripoli citizens to honor these people.

- **Ali Al-Salabi:** Ali al-Salabi is a prominent religious scholar and Islamist politician. He was born in Benghazi in 1963 and joined the Muslim Brotherhood at an early age, which caused him to be imprisoned in Gaddafi prison in Tripoli for eight years. After he was released, Al-Salabi obtained a bachelor’s degree from the Islamic University of Medina, then a Master’s degree and a PhD from Omdurman Islamic University in Sudan. Al-Salabi wrote books on Hadith and on Islam in his beginnings, and he spent a number of years in Yemen before settling in Qatar. He then visited Libya to launch efforts to defuse extremism, and facilitated negotiations between the Qaddafi regime and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

Al-Salabi was also associated with the Benghazi-based brigades, known as the February 17 Martyrs' Brigade, which was commanded by his brother Ismail al-Salabi, who had close ties to Abdelhakim Belhadj. Al-Salabi had originally proposed forming a political coalition that included the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists.

- **Abdelhakim Belhadj:** Abdelhakim Belhadj is a jihadist who fought in Afghanistan, then returned to Libya and helped found the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. As the Qaddafi regime

managed to suppress the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Belhadj and other Libyan Islamic Fighting Group leaders moved to Sudan in the mid-1990s, where they were welcomed by Osama bin Laden and others.

In 2004, Belhadj was arrested in Malaysia and placed in the custody of the Central Intelligence Agency, who took him to Libya where he spent the next seven years in Abu Salim Prison.

Belhadj played a prominent role in the fighting during the revolution, as he led the Fighting Group. Shortly after the overthrow of Gaddafi, he was appointed head the Military Council in Tripoli with the aim of uniting the brigades fighting in the capital and controlling Tripoli.

Belhadj was accused of being the channel through which Qatari funds were channelled to the armed revolutionaries, which raised concerns within the transitional government that his party had an unfair advantage compared to the other parties.

Belhadj resigned from his position as head of the Military Council in Tripoli in May 2012. As mentioned earlier, he sought to have a political role, so he joined the National Rally for Freedom, Justice and Development. However, Belhaj did not only join the party but became its president<sup>1</sup>.

## Part Two

### Scenarios (Interviews with female Jihadists in Libyan prisons)

Conducting interviews with samples of jihadist women detained in Libyan prisons in Tripoli and Misrata is considered a difficult undertake due to the security situation in Libya at the time of preparation of the study. The researcher has faced the following difficulties:

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<sup>1</sup> Belouchet Lana Kaker and Al-Zahra Lanqi, *Libya's Religious Sector and Peacebuilding Efforts*, a report issued by USIP, 2017, pages 32-33.

- Correspondence with the Attorney General to obtain an interview permit to no avail
- Correspondence with the head of the Judicial Police in Tripoli to obtain a visit permit to no avail

Despite these difficulties, in order to support the study on the return of female jihadists from hotbeds of tension, the researcher contacted a number of entities and individuals to obtain the following information:

### The years 2016/ 2017/ 2018

Date	Source of Information	Place of Detention	Nationality	Number
24 December 2016	Libya 24 Channel  Misrata prison warden	Air Force Academy prison in Misrata	Most detainees are Libyan in addition to women from Tunisia, Iraq, Chad, Syria, Eritrea, Niger and a medical staff from Philippines.	<b>132 detainees including 35 women</b>
19 April 2017	The Libyan 'Marsad' Newspaper	Tripoli Mitiga Correctional Institution	Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan	<b>14 Female detainees accompanied by 22 children</b>

### **Regarding the interview with female returnees from conflict zones to learn about their situation**

To conduct this study, we relied on interviews that were conducted by some media channels to obtain information about these women during the years 2017-2018. These channels are: Al-Aan Channel - 2018 News Channel - and the journalist Rabiaa Habbas (Libyan investigative journalist).

### **Interviews from Misrata Prison**

In 2017, Al-Aan channel, during a program (Witnesses to the crimes ISIS), broadcasted at exactly 20:16 a report submitted by Mr. Jamal Al-Araimi, in which he reviews the most significant interviews with women affiliated with ISIS in the Libyan prison in Misrata, and they are as follows.

- Umm Abd al-Rahman: a Tunisian national who was enticed by her husband to join ISIS. She came to the city of Sabratha and then moved to the city of Sirte. She entered Libya through smuggling without identification documents. She was arrested by Al-Bunyan Al Marsoos forces after her husband died, then she was placed in a detention center with migrants. She regrets her involvement in ISIS.
- Umm Hudhaifa: A Tunisian Libyan who joined ISIS in Sirte. She affirmed that most of the women were surprised that the alleged ISIS state revolved around cheating, harassment, sex, and theft, and that ISIS operatives considered women who refused to marry them as “apostates” meaning that they were deserving of death. Umm Hudhaifa adds that ISIS operatives kidnapped women migrating to Europe and considered them ‘sabaya’ (women captives at war).

### **Interview from Mitiga prison in Tripoli**

**Libya Al-Aan channel** conducted interviews with women involved in ISIS in a program called (Confessions) on 26 June 2018. These women are:

- **Umm Al-Ayna:** A Libyan national who was enticed to join ISIS through social media, namely Facebook.
- **Umm Layth:** a Libyan national born at 1990, she joined ISIS through social media network 'Facebook'.
- **Umm Amir:** An Egyptian national. She is a widower who was enticed by her husband to join ISIS.

**Channel 218 News:** Published a documentary called 'Women in ISIS' that highlighted the dark image of this terrorist organization, and how its operatives used women to satisfy their sexual desires before they let them face their doomed fate from the moment these women are 'brain washed' until they are moved to 'ISIS provinces' and then they are arrested or killed.

Al Bonyan Al Marsoos Forces sought to help women and children to escape the fighting zones. However, in many occasions these women did not respond to these calls and they ended up either dead or arrested. The women involved in ISIS that were arrested became like a 'sole witness' to the humiliating life that they lead under ISIS. After Sirte was freed, many of these women were transferred to prisons and detention centers of Al Bonyan Almarsoos where they started telling incredible stories of suffering that amounted to burning some women alive to get rid of them.

A number of women were interviewed. These women are Umm Hamza and Umm Omar who are both Tunisians, as well as Umm Hudhaifa who is Tunisian Libyan. Through these interviews, the women unveiled:

- The dark image of ISIS and how the operatives of this terrorist organization used women to satisfy their sexual desires before they let them face their doomed fate, from the moment these

women are ‘brain washed’ until they are moved to ‘ISIS provinces’ and then they are arrested or killed.

- When ISIS controlled Sirte, there were more women from Tunisia than any other nationality amongst the women of ISIS. Also, Tunisians and Egyptian women received special treatment while Libyan women were grouped with women from Nigeria and Sudan.

### **The interviews concluded the following**

- Umm Hamza is one of the inmates in the correctional facilities revealed to 218 News that when ISIS controlled Sirte, there were more women from Tunisia than any other nationality amongst the women of ISIS. Also, Tunisians and Egyptian women received special treatment while Libyan women were grouped with women from Nigeria and Sudan.

Filled with regrets and anguish, Umm Hamza says that she did not imagine that ISIS would be this brutal. The men abandoned women and left them facing shelling and bullets, they even burned women and children in order to get rid of them. She adds that some women were influenced by men’s mindset. She tells the story of one dark-skinned woman who was wearing an explosive belt and whom she had to beg not to detonate it close to her.

- Umm Omar, a Tunisian, one of the girls who were recruited online and joined ISIS in Sirte. She confirms that she was in contact with a woman whose nationality she did not know. This woman talked to her about the importance of wearing the Burqa and going somewhere safe to keep it knowing that the family of Umm Omar did not support her wearing the Burqa.

Umm Omar said that she drove a car to Bengerdane in Tunisia. She said that it was a city where women are gathered before they are illegally smuggled to Sabratha. She said that once in Sabratha, she shared a house with other women. They proposed to her to marry one of the fighters in ISIS which she refused. Consequently, they

started treating her differently and ISIS declared her an ‘apostate’. She adds that she was transported to Sirte in a car and there she got married to a man with a marriage contract stamped by ISIS.

By looking at the marriage contracts that were found in Sirte, it appears that the dowries varied between reading the interpretation of the Qur’an, providing weapons, explosive belts, or gold.

**In 2019, the researcher did the following**

- Make a phone call with the head of the Red Cross organization in Misrata and obtained information about the number of Women and children affiliated with ISIS and detained (135). The head of the Red Cross organization refused to provide more information and stopped answering phone calls subsequently.
- An interview with the investigative journalist called Rabiaa Ammar who managed in 2018 to enter Mitiga prison and to conduct interviews and to collect information on ISIS affiliated women. Rabiaa confirms that the prison facility hosts a number of ISIS affiliated women from different nationalities, but mostly from Tunisia.

Among the detainees who were interviewed is a Libyan girl from a region called Warshefana. This girl joined ISIS through the social media platform Facebook through a person who was dating her for marriage and who was a takfiri (lit: excommunicational). The journalist Rabiaa also affirmed that all the female detainees were arrested by the Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous forces in Sirte and they were escorted to Mitiga prison in Tripoli, while others were held in Misurata in the Air Force Academy prison. Ammar confirmed also that a large number of women detainees still adopted takfirism as they believe that their husbands who were killed by the forces of Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous are martyrs.

**The analysis of the interviews yields the following observations**

- 1- The geographical distribution of the locations from which women came shows that Libya was their destination due to its geographical proximity and the human interaction between their countries of origin and Libya.
- 2- The Number of Tunisian women that joined ISIS in Libya reached 300 since 2011. There are women from other nationalities as well such as Australia, Eritrea, Morocco, Egypt, Niger and Chad.
- 3- In Libyan prisons, all women returnees from conflict zones in Libya are from foreign nationalities, with around 22 children.
- 4- The field work conducted by a number of Libyan experts led to the collection of data about the situation of female jihadists in Libyan prisons. There were 35 women in Misrata prison and about 14 women in Tripoli prison.
- 5- The sample of female returnees from conflict zones showed that they belong to an age group that varies between 30 and 50 years, like the Filipina nurse 'Firn' who married Abu Alaa Attounisi when she was 33 years old.
- 6- Most of the women in the sample of this study have attended university.
- 7- Most of the women claimed that they joined the terrorist organization in Libya because of Facebook or their husbands:
  - Umm Al Ayn, a Libyan citizen who was arrested for joining ISIS through social media platform 'Facebook'.
  - Umm Layth, a Libyan citizen born in 1990. She joined ISIS through social media platform Facebook (Interviews of Mitiga prison in Tripoli, 'Confessions' TV program. Libya Al Aan channel conducted interviews with two women from ISIS in June 26<sup>th</sup> 2018).
  - Umm Abdul Rahman, a Tunisian woman who was persuaded to join ISIS by her husband. She came to Sabratha then



moved to Sirte. She entered Libya illegally without her ID and she regrets her involvement in ISIS.

- 8- Ironically, most female returnees from conflict zones did not confess to participating in the military operations; most of them were housewives.
- 9- Most female returnees from conflict zones belong to poor communities which increases their suffering and the suffering of their children. It is probable that extremism will continue to spread in these communities and maybe develop further in the future unless the government and civil society organizations take action to solve this issue.
- 10- Most female returnees from conflict zones are Tunisians who have children in their care.
- 11- Most of the women in the study sample were married to more than one man, but these marriages to jihadists were only driven by ideological beliefs.
- 12- One of the most intriguing phenomena among the women in the study sample is the fact that most of them have children from different fathers. This could be explained by the fact that these women marry for ideological reasons, that is for them marriage is a religious practice, or because of polygamy or the fact that when one woman's husband is killed, usually one of his colleagues is willing to marry the newly widowed woman.
- 13- The female returnees from conflict zones were not proven guilty of conducting terrorist activities and they committed no murders.
- 14- According to the interview, all female returnees from conflict zones were leading normal lives in their communities and indulged in normal social and economic activities.
- 15- With regard to the reasons of these women's departure towards conflict zones, the answers that were collected from

interviews with individuals concerned with the question “why did they leave their countries to join terrorist organizations in conflict areas?” are: to accompany their husbands, for ideological reasons, religious conviction of jihadism, or looking for a husband believing that marrying jihadists will be in some sort of an act of jihadism, or for financial or economic reasons, that is making financial profit under a religious pretext.

- 16- Unexpectedly, responses showed that the motives for their return are either the death of the husband in the host country, lack of adjustment with society in the host country due to lack of knowledge of the language and the values and traditions of the host country or because of pressure from the family.
- 17- In conclusion, when female returnees from conflict zones where asked ‘how do you value this experience?’, they all admitted that it was grave and that they are not thinking of going back there again. These women consider it as destiny and fate.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the aforementioned, it became clear to us that ISIS organization in Sirte, Libya, had strong networks and external relations working on attracting and bringing in women. ISIS established a women's network whose specific mission is to bring in the largest number of “immigrants” by any means or costs as long as they had a maximum number of people announcing their allegiance to ISIS. We have noticed that the Organization in Sirte was working to bring two or more members of the same family, i. e. they worked on a different pace compared to Syria and Iraq. The objective, for instance was to bring two sisters together or a woman and her nieces or nephews or a mother and her daughters, etc.

ISIS also assigns women from different age groups and using fake names such as ‘Umm Baraa’, ‘Umm Al-Walid’, ‘Umm Hamza’, etc., the task of bringing in women who suffer from family or economic problems, or women who are suffering from psychological issues, widowed, divorced, extremist or prosecuted women.

What caught our attention during the interview conducted with the investigative journalist was that ISIS mostly focused through its network on bringing in prostitutes, that is, those who work in brothels. They offer these women repentance in exchange for providing them with a sum of money and housing. However, there is no much difference between their work in Sirte with ISIS and the work they used to do in prostitution. As they are tasked with providing “sexual comfort” to ISIS fighters as soon as they join ISIS; thus, they turn into captives that have daily sexual intercourse with several men inside women-only places called “mathafat”!

The journalist pointed to a dangerous information that she discovered through her visit to Mitiga prison in Tripoli, which is that most of the women involved in ISIS from the Arab Maghreb countries were not actually deceived; as they were aware that they were going to end up practicing “sexual jihad” or perhaps marrying an ISIS operative. They were also aware of stories about women committing suicide attacks using explosive belts, and about training women on firing arms, and about men treating them as sexual objects.

Moreover, many women, especially Tunisians, were tasked with wearing explosive bells and committing suicide attacks killing themselves along with surrendering women as soon as they get to the army check points.

Consequently:

**On the local level**, and in light of the lack of legislations in Libya, especially the Law on Combating Terrorism No. 3/2014, which punishes by prison for a period no less than 10 years anyone who

joined purposefully a terrorist organization whether inside or outside the Libyan territory, without addressing the issue of the return of female jihadists from conflict zones. Adding to the fact that correctional facilities (prisons) still operate with outdated methods that do not take into consideration rehabilitation or correction or any considerations for social reintegration, which makes these female returnees maintain their jihadism ideology and attempt to recruit other prisoners.

**We recommend:**

- Establishing a strategic plan composed of three separate but interrelated programs (guidance, rehabilitation and integration) that aim to deter women from indulging in extremism, and to encourage rehabilitation of ISIS women and providing them with recovery programs that facilitate their reintegration in society after they are released.
- Providing institutional support to help female returnees to reintegrate in society. This effort should be done by a committee composed of religious men, psychologists, sociologists, and researchers. These members are in charge of assessing the social situation of female returnees, under the oversight of different governmental institutions including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Islamic affairs and Awqaf.
- Establishing a fund that grants loans that allow released female returnees to start their own businesses.
- Establishing training programs in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental institutions in view of helping female returnees to find employment. Other non-governmental organizations help female returnees and their families by providing food and clothing etc.
- Spreading awareness among society to accept female returnees and to treat them as victims of terrorism and not as culprits.

- Adopting new concepts and legislations, or amending the legislation in place in view of receiving returnees after subjecting them to the rule of law and reintegrating and rehabilitating them.

**On the regional and international level, we recommend:**

- Cooperation between countries, joining efforts and signing conventions to adopt a regional approach to counter radicalization.
- The importance of exchange of information between countries on the number of female returnees from hotbeds of tension and ways of dealing with them.
- Establishing measures and mechanisms to ensure that sleeping cells are not able to travel between countries without being detected.

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## Appendices

### Appendice n° 1: Libyan Law No. 3/2014 on Combating Terrorism

Upon review of:

- The interim Constitutional Declaration issued on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2011 and the amendments thereof;
- Law No. 10/2014 on the election of a House of Representatives in the transitional period and the amendments thereof;
- Law No 6/2006 on the Judiciary System and the amendments thereof;
- The Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedures and the amendments and supplementary laws thereof;
- Law No. 11/2014 on the creation of the National Anti-Corruption Commission;
- The international treaties concluded between Libya and other states;
- Law No. 7 of 2012 on the establishment of the Libyan Intelligence Service;
- What was presented by the Caretaker government;

- The conclusions reached by the General National Congress in its ordinary 21<sup>st</sup> session held on Tuesday 09/09/2014.
- Issued the following law:

## **Chapter One: Terrorist Acts**

### **Article 1**

For the application of the provisions of this law, each of the following words and expressions shall bear the meaning indicated next to them:

- A. **Terrorist:** Any natural person who commits or attempts to commit a terrorist crime by any direct or indirect means, or participates or contributes to the activities of a terrorist organization.
- B. **A terrorist Organization:** An organizational group comprised of three or more persons formed for any period of time and operating in a concerted manner with the intent to commit any of the terrorist crimes set forth in this law on Libyan soil or abroad.
- C. **Funding Terrorism:** Any act of collection or direct or indirect provision of funds, weapons, ammunition, explosives, missions, equipment, information or other, in order to be used in the perpetration of any terrorist crime whether by an individual terrorist or by a terrorist organization.
- D. **Funds:** National currency or circulating foreign currencies, financial instruments, negotiable instruments, and any assets or property whether material or moral, movable, and all rights related to them as well as bonds and fixed deeds for all afore mentioned items including in electronic and digital format.
- E. **Conventional Weapons:** Weapons, ammunition and explosives stipulated by the law.
- F. **Non-conventional weapons:** Chemical or biological weapons.
- G. **Aircraft in-flight:** An airplane is considered in-flight from the moment all its external doors are shut after boarding the plane, until the moment one of these doors are opened to allow passengers to get off the plane. In case of emergency landing, a plane is considered in-flight until competent authorities assume responsibility for the aircraft and the passengers and cargo on board.
- H. **Aircraft in Service:** An aircraft is considered in service from the start of the aircraft preparation before the flight by ground services personnel or by the flight crew before a specific flight until twenty-four hours after any landing of that aircraft.

- I. Persons enjoying international protection: The following people when they are in a foreign country:
- The head of state or a member of any entity performing the duties of the head of state by virtue of the constitution of that specific country as well as their accompanying family members.
  - The prime minister or the minister of foreign affairs and the individuals accompanying them.
  - Any representative of state, employee or a person working with an international governmental organization as well as their family members and the persons accompanying them.
  - Freezing assets: imposing a temporary ban on the referral, exchange, disposal or transfer of funds, or subjecting the funds to temporary guardianship or control based on an order by a court of law or any other competent authority.

## **Article 2**

Any use of force, violence, threat, or advocacy with the aim of gravely infringing the public order or endangering the safety, interests, or security of the community; harming individuals and terrorizing them; jeopardizing their lives, freedoms, or their public rights or security; damaging the environment, natural resources, antiquities, money, buildings, public or private properties, or the exploitation or seizure thereof; preventing or impeding public authorities, government interests, local authorities, diplomatic and consular missions, regional and international organizations and bodies in Libya from exercising all or some aspects of their activities, or preventing or obstructing institutions or houses of worship or academic institutions from carrying out their work or disrupting the application of any of the provisions of the Constitution, laws and regulations; as well as all behavior that may harm communications, information systems, financial or banking systems, national economy, energy reserves or security stock of goods, food, and water, or their integrity.

## **Article 3: Terrorist Crime**

Any offense stipulated in this Law, and any felony committed with the intent to realize an objective of a terrorist act or to finance the terrorist acts as stipulated in this law.

## **Article 4**

Without prejudice to the laws in force and to any severer penalty, the provisions of this law shall apply to acts criminalized in these laws, and stipulated in the provisions of this law.

## **Article 5**



Any attempt to commit any felony or misdemeanor or serious or minor terrorist crime shall be punished by the same penalty prescribed for the completed offense.

#### **Article 6**

The participation in committing of one of the crimes stipulated in this Law shall be punished by the same penalty prescribed for the main offender even if the participation does not produce an effect.

### **Chapter Two: Terrorist Crimes, Penalties and Precautionary Measures**

#### **Article 7: Terrorist crimes, penalties and precautionary measures.**

Without prejudice to any other, severer penalty, any person who commits a terrorist act under the provisions of this Law shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

#### **Article 8**

Any person who, establishes, founds, organizes, or manages a terrorist organization, or assumes command or leadership thereof shall be punished by life imprisonment, as well as the confiscation of funds, weapons, tools, documents, instruments, and other things that have been used or prepared for use in terrorist crimes or in meetings of the organization. The court shall rule the confiscation of the organization's funds, as well as the money obtained from terrorist crimes or allocated for spending on the terrorist organization, and shall require that the organization be dissolved and its headquarters or locations closed, domestically and abroad.

#### **Article 9**

Any person who intentionally joins any terrorist organization whether inside or outside the territory of the Libyan state with the intent to commit one of the terrorist crimes stipulated in this Law, shall be punished by no less than ten years imprisonment with hard labor. The penalty shall be aggravated for those who receive any security or military training domestically or abroad and for anyone who is a member of the police or military force, they shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of no less than twenty years.

#### **Article 10**

A penalty of life imprisonment or imprisonment with hard labor for a period of no less than twenty years shall be sentenced to:

- 1- Any person who funds a terrorist or a terrorist act knowing the purpose of the funding.
- 2- Any person who provides a terrorist organization, one of its chiefs, directors, members, or a terrorist with housing or shelter to use in meetings or to

prepare terrorist acts, or other facilities, knowing the purpose in which the housing, shelter, place or facilities are to be used.

- 3- Any person who hides things prepared to be used use in committing a terrorist crime knowingly.

#### **Article 11**

Any person who intentionally commits one of the following acts shall be punished as an accomplice in a terrorist crime:

- 1- Provision, by any means, of weapons, explosives, ammunition, and other materials, equipment, means of transport, facilities, or supplies for the benefit of a terrorist organization or persons related to the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law.
- 2- To make talents or expertise available to a terrorist organization or persons related to the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law.
- 3- Disclosure, provision of information, directly or indirectly, to a terrorist organization or persons related to the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law.
- 4- Create or fabricate a national identification card, passport, or other licenses or certificates for the benefit of a terrorist organization or persons related to the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law.
- 5- Concealment or facilitation of concealing things that were used in committing a terrorist crime or obtained from such crimes, knowingly.
- 6- Anyone who knowingly destroys, misappropriates or conceals a document or a paper that enables the detection of a crime or the establishment of evidence against a perpetrator or his punishment. In all cases, the court shall rule for the confiscation of funds and objects related to the crime.
- 7- Everyone who aided the perpetrator in a terrorist crime, even if by refusal, or enabled the perpetrator to escape, whether before or after his elimination.

#### **Article 12**

Any person who deliberately commits one of the following acts shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of twenty years.

- 1- The kidnapping of a person enjoying international protection.
- 2- Arrest, detain, imprisonment, or hold captive a person enjoying international protection without legal permission.
- 3- Damage official buildings, private residential areas, or means of transportation for bodies or persons enjoying international protection in a way that would endanger their lives and freedom, or the lives of the people residing with them or their freedom.

- 4- Arrest, detain, imprison, or hold captive a person without legal permission, if these acts are accompanied by a threat to kill or harm the hostage or to extend her detention in order to compel a third party, whether it is a state or an intergovernmental organization or a natural or moral person or group of persons to conduct a certain act or to refrain from conducting a certain action as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of that hostage.

### **Article 13**

Any person who deliberately commits one of the following acts shall be punished with life imprisonment:

1. Control or seizure of an aircraft in service by any means
2. Assault on a person on board an aircraft in flight if such assault would endanger the safety of the aircraft.
3. Destroy a civil aviation aircraft in service or damage it in a way that renders it unfit for flight or endangers its safety while flying.
4. Place or causes to be placed on an aircraft in service, by any means, devices or materials which is likely to cause destroy the aircraft or cause damage to it, or render it unfit for flight or endanger its safety while flying.
5. Destroy, damage or disrupt air navigation facilities, which would endanger aircraft safety while flying.
6. Using a plane in service for the purpose of causing serious physical injury or serious damage to property or the environment.

The same penalty shall apply if the subject of the crime is a commercial vessel or an oil tank or a public or private land transport for the purpose of achieving demands.

### **Article 14**

Any person who intentionally commits one of the following acts shall be punished by life imprisonment:

1. Forceful entry to the headquarters of a diplomatic or consular mission or the headquarters of one of the international or regional bodies or organizations in Libya or through resisting the competent authorities therein with the aim of committing a terrorist act.
2. Any person who approaches a foreign country or an association, body, organization, group or gang that is based outside Libya or to an organization or organization or group or gang that is based inside Libya or to any of those working for the benefit of that country or any of the aforementioned bodies with the intent to cooperate with that country or entity to carry out a terrorist act in or outside Libya, or against any of its citizens, interests, or

property, or the headquarters and offices of its diplomatic or consular missions, or any of its entities abroad, or against any of the employees in the above mentioned institutions, or against any persons enjoying international protection.

3. Commit any acts of aggression that harm the national unity.
4. Form courts outside the judicial system in force in the country.
5. Disrupt the implementation of the provisions of the constitution or the laws and infringe public freedoms and rights guaranteed by virtue of the constitution.
6. Blackmail the Libyan state or any other state from the Libyan territories to achieve demands.
7. Recruitment outside the authority of the state to form armed groups other than the army and the police.
8. Impose a mode of government on a part of the Libyan region in violation of the legal political system of the state.
9. Control of the state's economic resources, damage the environment or natural resources, communications, information systems, financial or banking systems, the national economy, energy reserves, or security stocks of goods, food, or water, or emergency services in disasters and crises. or the safety thereof.
10. Obstruct the electoral process and referendums with the intent to impose ideas or opinions by force.
11. Any Libyan who cooperates, without the written permission of the competent authority, with the armed forces of a foreign country, or any armed groups, associations, bodies, or organizations of any sort that are located outside Libya with the aim of committing terrorist acts, even if their actions are not directed at Libya.

## **Article 15**

Any person who publicizes, promotes or misinforms with the intent to carry out a terrorist act, whether by in words or in writing, or by any means of broadcasting or publishing, or by means of messages or websites that others can access shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period no less than five years and not exceeding ten years. The penalty shall be increased to imprisonment for a period not exceeding fifteen years if such acts are committed inside places of worship, among the armed forces or the police, or in the places allocated to these forces.

**Article 16**

Anyone who uses or enables the use of state institutions or equipment owned by the state, impersonates a public official, or wears an official uniform of any state institution with the intent to use it to commit any terrorist act, shall be punished with imprisonment with hard labor.

**Article 17**

Any person who knowingly contributes directly or indirectly to the manufacture or training on the manufacture or use of conventional or unconventional weapons, tools, equipment, wire and wireless means, as well as electronic items, and any material having the ability to take lives or cause serious physical injuries or severe material damage by any means, shall be punished with life imprisonment. Including the release or spread of toxic chemical products, biological agents, radiations, and radioactive materials, for use in committing any terrorist act.

**Article 18**

The penalty for terrorist crimes shall be aggravated or shall deny the application of mitigation conditions for juveniles if:

1. The crime was committed by those who were entrusted by virtue of law with the task of investigating crimes and arresting the criminals, whether they were main perpetrators or accomplices.
2. The crime was committed by those who are entrusted with managing or guarding vital state establishments, institutions, and facilities or by an employee of those entities whether they were the main perpetrators or accomplices.
3. The crime was committed by exploiting juveniles.
4. The crime was committed by someone who has precedents in committing terrorist crimes or by a preacher.
5. The crime is committed during the state of emergency and the exceptional circumstances that the state is going through.

**Article 19**

Any person who unwarrantedly collects information about any individual tasked with the implementation of the provisions of this law with the intent to use the information to threaten them or to harm them or their interests or to inflict any sort of abuse on them or any member of their family or one of their assets or affiliates.

**Article 20**

Any person who has information about a terrorist crime, or about preparation for a terrorist crime, and fails to inform the competent authorities, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period of no less than two years.

**Article 21**

Any person who provides the competent authorities with information or guidance on a multiple perpetrator terrorist crime that lead to thwart the implementation of such crime shall be exempt from penalty. The court may rule of such exemption if the notification occurred after the crime was discovered and if it enabled the authorities to arrest the rest of the perpetrators or avoid that the crime committed leads loss of life.

**Article 22**

Courts may, in a judgment of conviction in one of the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law, issue one or more of the following measures:

1. Remove a foreigner from Libyan soil and prevent them from entering Libyan territory for a period of ten years if they are convicted of a misdemeanor, and for life if they are convicted of a felony.
2. Prohibition of residency in a specific place or region.
3. Prohibition of frequency of certain places or stores.
4. Obligation to reside in a specific place.
5. Prohibition of work in specific places or in specific fields of activities.
6. Prohibition of the possession or use of certain means of communication.
7. Commitment to participate in anti-terrorism rehabilitation sessions.

**Chapter Three: Procedural Provisions****Article 23**

The procedures for collecting evidence and investigating terrorist crimes shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions established in the Criminal Procedure Law, with exceptions provided in the following articles.

**Article 24**

A special prosecution office for terrorism crimes shall be established in the Public Prosecution as a specialized office for this type of crimes within the existing judicial system in the country.

**Article 25**

One or more criminal court departments shall be designated to look into terrorist crimes within the framework of the country's existing judicial system.

**Article 26**

Neither criminal proceeding for terrorist crimes nor pronounced penalties shall be subject to any statute of limitations.

**Chapter Four: Judicial Assistance****Article 27**

International assistance in combating terrorism in the form of exchange of information, assistance, letters rogatory, receipt and extradition of criminals, transfer of convicts, recovery of funds and the implementation of judgments, as well as other forms of international assistance shall be conducted pursuant to bilateral and international agreements to which Libya is a party.

**Article 28**

In applying the provisions of international cooperation, the terrorist crimes stipulated in this law are not considered political or financial crimes, or crimes related to a political or financial felony.

**Article 29**

A national counter-terrorism committee called the "Libyan Committee to Combat Terrorism" shall be established and shall consist of a judge with the rank of an advisor in the courts of appeal who shall be "Chairman of the Committee" and a representative of the Prime Ministry acting as "Deputy chairman" as well as experts from several ministries "Justice - Interior - Defense - Foreign Affairs - Social Affairs - Finance - Transportation - Communications - Health - an expert in negotiations - the Ministry of Awqaf - and General Intelligence Service. "This committee shall undertake several tasks:

1. Prepare a national study that diagnoses the phenomenon of terrorism, its funding and the phenomena associated with it, with the aim of identifying its characteristics and causes, assessing its risks, proposing ways to combat it, and determining national priorities in addressing this phenomenon.
2. Coordination with all agencies to assist victims of terrorism and to provide physical and psychological treatment to victims who need it.
3. Provide the required protection to witnesses and informants in such crimes.
4. Prepare an annual report on the committee's activities that includes its proposals to develop national mechanisms to combat terrorism.
5. Enhance cooperation with counterparts in foreign countries within the framework of ratified bilateral, regional and international agreements. This cooperation is based on the principle of reciprocity, and the commitment of the counterparts in foreign countries to the legislations regulating their work

and adhering to professional secrecy by not referring the information gathered to another party and using it for purposes other than combating the crimes stipulated in this law.

6. Working to implement the resolutions of the United Nations specialized agencies related to combating terrorism within the framework of fulfilling Libya's international commitments.
7. Propose the necessary measures that should be adopted in relation to organizations or persons related to terrorist crimes.
8. Support the international effort to combat terrorism and help to develop programs and policies aimed at preventing terrorism and proposing mechanisms to implement them.
9. Facilitate communication between the various relevant ministries, coordinate their efforts and represent them whenever necessary, nationally and internationally, and cooperate with non-governmental organizations concerned with combating terrorism and assist them in implementing their programs in this field.
10. Spread social awareness of the dangers of terrorism through organizing campaigns, holding conferences, seminars and trainings in the field of combating terrorism.
11. Contribute to the promotion of research and studies to update the legislation regulating areas related to terrorism in order to achieve the implementation of state programs addressing this phenomenon.

### **Article 30**

The provisions of this law shall be enforced from the date of its issuance, and any ruling that violates it shall be canceled. It shall be published in the Official Gazette.

Issued in the city of Tobruk, in 09/19/2014 AD

### **Appendice n° 2: Main conventions ratified by Libya to combat terrorism**

- *The International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing*, (a United Nations treaty of 1997 designed to criminalize terrorist bombings).

The Convention on Terrorist Bombings describes the unlawful and intentional use of explosives in public places with the intent of killing, injuring or causing massive destruction to compel a government or an international organization to do or refrain from doing some act.



The convention also seeks to strengthen police and judicial cooperation to prevent, investigate and punish such acts. As of February 2014, the convention has been ratified by 168 countries.

- *The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism*, a 1999 United Nations treaty that aims at criminalizing terrorist financing acts. The convention also seeks to strengthen the police and judicial cooperation to prevent, investigate and punish the financing of such acts. As of August 2013, the treaty has been ratified by 186 countries. In terms of inclusiveness, it is one of the most successful counter-terrorism treaties in history.

### **Appendice n° 3: Among the local mechanisms**

#### *Establishment of the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism:*

Chaired by Mr. / Al-Siddiq Omar Al-Kabeer, Chairman of the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism, and includes members and representatives of the / General Intelligence Service, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Customs Authority, Tax Authority, and the Audit Bureau.

# **INFORMATION MONITORING (VIDEOS, TV REPORTS, DOCUMENTARIES), IN RELATION TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN ZONES OF TENSION**

**By Nesrine Rebai**

Audiovisual references: nowadays, testimonies, documentaries and field reports represent a considerable asset in scientific research. In the case of terrorist movements, new technologies (particularly social networks) are a real tool for “recruitment” and “propaganda”. In this sense, the internet has certainly been an “amplifier” for Daesh, the terrorist organization that has a perfect command of strategic communication on the internet. It should be noted that the first organization to use the internet to disseminate its instructions and messages to the public through the Egyptian site “Al Djihad” was Al-Qaeda in 1997<sup>1</sup>.

The exploitation of videos on the Internet for terrorist purposes has become very important. It must be mentioned that Daesh has succeeded in recruiting a certain number of people that are very gifted in the use of new technologies with an almost cinematographic technical mastery and great knowledge of manipulating emotional intelligence. It is in this sense that a study entitled “social networks, societal changes, politics and terrorism”, carried out by Ichrak ben Ishak and presented in October 2019 to the Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies (ITES) which revealed that in 2015, the organization of the Islamic State succeeded in attracting 80% of its members via the Internet. “That is to say

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<sup>1</sup> Study of ITES, “Social networks, societal mutations, politics and terrorism”, Ichrak Ben Ishak.

more than 30, 000 soldiers from a hundred nationalities joined this terrorist movement through social networks...” As such, Daesh has been able to create more than 90, 000 Facebook accounts in Arabic, and more than 40, 000 accounts in foreign languages, in just one year.

In this part of the study, we have tried to make a selection of the different videos that focus on women and children in areas of tension. It’s a tricky situation for them. Throughout the years, their situations and their functions have evolved into a crescendo. They are given different names “the sisters of jihad”, “the Jihadists of nikah or Sex Slaves” and different functions. They are members of the Islamic police (the hisba), and have the occupations of nurses, teachers or are “quite simply” “spouses of jihadists”. The stories vary from unique to similar to different from each other.

At first, we will try to present answers to the following questions through different media (TV reports, documentaries) and testimonies: How did they find themselves in areas of tension? Are they observers, victims or real actresses? How do they see the question of coming back home? How do they see things after Daesh?

In a second step, we will also focus on a more delicate question relating to the “children of Daesh” whose fate is much more complex. Some call them “the cubs of the caliphate” due to their potential to ensure the continuity of the “terrible” machine of terrorism, others see them as “victims”. They are recruited by radicalized parents, kidnapped or born there. They sometimes live in prisons with their mothers in disastrous health conditions and traumatic situations. It is in this context that the videos will pave a way for potential answers to these questions: What will the fate of these thousands of children be? How should they be supported? Should we bring them back? What’s in store for these “victims”?

Lots of chilling stories show the scale of the phenomenon and its complexity which raises concerns about the fate of the women and children of the Islamic State.



(fr)  
« Dans un camp d'internement de femmes jihadistes d'EI en Syrie »  
Reportage France 24 - 9 février 2019

Temps de visionnage 7:10

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzIATx1zCiE>



(ar) « Jihad Nikah à Daesch »  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00EtGx8eyiY>

Temps de visionnage 4:10

Témoignage- 7 septembre 2016



الفيلم الوثائقي - شريعة ضد الشرع - جهاد النكاح في سوريا /

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1waYYiwgXQ>

Temps de visionnage 30:10

Témoignages de femmes et d'hommes autour du « jihad al nikah » en Syrie 11 Août 2013



فرانس 24 تلتقي جهاديات من ألمانيا والسويد وفرنسا وتونس في الجيب الأخير لـ"داعش" في سوريا

Témoignages de femmes

Visionnage :28 :55

<https://www.youtube.com/wa>

فرانس 24 تلتقي جهاديات من ألمانيا والسويد وفرنسا وتونس في الجيب الأخير لـ"داعش" في سوريا



tch?v=I2NKJ7GNYAk&has\_verified=1

تونسيات يجولون على الإرهابيين في سورية للجهاد بالنكاح

Reportage Sama TV

Temps de visionnage 30:10

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYK9qOpENx8>



Reportage BBC

Temps de visionnage : 18 :32  
Août 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAxNJTic3AM>



Témoignage d'une mère de « jihadiste »

Reportage Tunisie « al SIYASSI »

Temps de visionnage 3:50

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_s7FxNFapuE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_s7FxNFapuE)



« La prison ou la mort pour les femmes jihadistes en Syrie »

9 mars 2019

Reportage France 24

Temps de visionnage 31 :05

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcZHiwwFrw&t=81s>



« Dans un camp d'internement de femmes jihadistes »

9 février 2019

Reportage France 24

Temps de visionnage 7 :11

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzIATxlzCiE>



« Le sort incertain des femmes jihadistes »

Euronews

26 septembre 2019

Reportage France 24

Temps de visionnage 4:18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcYJzdPqFjA>



« Les sœurs, les femmes cachées du Jihad »

France 24

Visionnage 39 :08

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gFU672rxSk&t=731s>



« Djihadistes : et s'ils rentraient ? »

France 5

Visionnage : 1 :03 :43

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSuoGqWJP4M>



Retour des jihadistes : ces mères veulent rentrer en France

L'express

Temps de visionnage 2 :25

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfOjvdf\\_NWo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfOjvdf_NWo)



« Femme de Daesh, l'impossible retour »

France 2

Temps de visionnage 12 :23

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7gS0fsq8oA>



« Des anciennes esclaves sexuelles de Daesh racontent »

Reportage BFM TV

Septembre 2015

Visionnage 2 :00

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKt8JJgg\\_N4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKt8JJgg_N4)



Un série de plusieurs épisodes sur les « Sœurs du Jihad »  
Embrigadement,  
recrutement, formation, retour  
, propagande  
Juin 2017

Episode 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq6aSN1PXDc&t=1s>

Episode 2 :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3684ezJ2l9k>

Episode 3 :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmQfhTLKI2I>

Episode 4:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI8ibhNu4ps>

Episode 5 :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UzOTEzE2pc>

Episode 6 :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UzOTEzE2pc>

Episode 7 :

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_bMqvMZIGE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_bMqvMZIGE)

« Djihad au féminin, des mères face à la radicalisation »

France 24

Décembre 2015

Visionnage : A partir de la 2 :56

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wJwyPgb6Us&t=1s>





« Enfants de djihadistes »  
Reportage chaine suisse  
Visionnage 13 :25  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alwUB9ATb5I>



« Irak : les enfants soldats de Daech »  
« les lionceaux du califat »  
Reportage l'effet papillon  
Temps de visionnage 16 :04  
Mai 2015  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7RnpDLiqoM>



« Femmes djihadistes : nouveau vivier de combattant »  
Octobre 2016  
Temps de visionnage 11 :59  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1oCBZ1ISwU>



Femmes Djihadistes en Syrie :Extrait des escadrons du Djihad »  
Juin 2018  
Temps de visionnage 3 :15  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2PaOBkGXvc>



## Les enfants perdus du Califat Décembre 2018

Reportage visionnage 44 :44

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2PaOBkGXvc>



حلقة كاملة / تصوير حصري معز  
وجاتو اطفال داعش ما لم تشاهدوا قبل  
معركة موصل

Documentaire

Temps de visionnage 55 :55

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmR\\_4UeoThw&has\\_verified=1&bpctr=1582675094](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmR_4UeoThw&has_verified=1&bpctr=1582675094)



نساء "الخلافة": السجن أو الموت

Visionnage 30 :55

France 24

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sct5XNH7H7U>

أحصري فرانس 24، نساء "الخلافة": السجن أو الموت



صناعة الموت | "براعم متفجرة" .. شاهد قصة أطفال داعش

صناعة الموت | "براعم متفجرة" .. شاهد قصة أطفال داعش

Visionnage 19 :44

Al Arabia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nripyc7IgHY>



من الأرض | 14-11-2019 | الرقة: أثر داعش - أشبال الخلافة: قتيل موقوتة أم ضحايا؟

من الأرض | 14-11-2019 | الرقة:  
أثر داعش - أشبال الخلافة.. قنابل  
موقوتة أم ضحايا؟

Visionnage 49 :47

Reportage

Al Mayadin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQXfDCugOhk>



تجنيد النساء في داعش

تجنيد النساء في داعش

Visionnage : 2 :13

Al Arabia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPxBpuhdtro>



أول توثيق لحالات اغتصاب من عناصر  
داعش لنساء في الموصل

Visionnage 5 :56

Al Arabiya

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ukm7tfpqv-4>



دراسة بريطانية تقرير تحذر من خطورة  
نساء داعش العائدات إلى بلدانهم

Visionnage 1 :20

Al Arabiya

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hy5pFZWOWxw>



"مهمة خاصة" | نساء "داعش" تركة  
ثقيلة

Visionnage : 18 :30

reportage

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMToQGwLF6w>



ما لم تره وتسمعه عن الداعشيات

Avril 2019

Visionnage 54 :54

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpM8d7GurPA>



عرائس داعش.. بين ماضيهم في التنظيم وحاضرهن الخاسر

عرائس داعش.. بين ماضيهم في التنظيم  
وحاضرهن الخاسر

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLgRq4WbWME>  
Visionnage 2 :15  
Euronews



زوجات دواعش يكشفن عن خبايا الزواج والسبي داخل التنظيم

زوجات دواعش يكشفن عن خبايا  
الزواج والسبي داخل التنظيم

Rt Arabic  
Visionnage 4 :13  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opRT9Riw5s8>



الهاربات من داعش

TV IraQ  
Visionnage 43 :41  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=si-ZKqoOakw>



داعش والإيزيديات حكاية ترويع  
واغتصاب واسترقاق

Skynews Arabic  
Visionnage 43 :44  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIMgaMj0LDs>





"البلاد" نتائج التحقيقات حول داعش



Libye - Les cadavres oubliés de l'État islamique



"...ذ. مصطفى الزراري/المغرب - المؤتمر الدولي : "ما بعد داعش" التحديات المستقبلية في مواجهة التطرف"



أي حصيلة لمل المكتب المركزي للتحقيقات القضائية

## البلاد "نتائج التحقيقات حول داعش"

## Reportage Daech en Lybie

Février 2020

Visionnage 45 :46

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0HKZMsCVxU>

## Libye - Les cadavres oubliés de l'État islamique

Visionnage 1:40

Novembre 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3kSuXviH08>

مصطفى الزراري / المغرب -  
المؤتمر الدولي : "ما بعد  
داعش:التحديات المستقبلية في مواجهة  
التطرف"...

Visionnage 19 :29

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBTC\\_pzACxQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBTC_pzACxQ)

أي حصيلة لعمل المكتب المركزي  
للأبحاث القضائية؟

Visionnage 5 :01

قناة ميدي

Autour du retour -Septembre  
2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoXgWMRcneg>



Les jihadistes du Sahel  
annoncent leur union dans  
une nouvelle formation -  
Sommet du jihadisme Mali  
Visionnage 3 :45  
2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQbOiBgl-p0>



Comment l'Algérie a identifié les jihadistes de Jound al-Khilafa ?

Comment l'Algérie a identifié  
les jihadistes de Jound al-  
Khilafa ?

Visionnage 3 :05

Octobre 2014

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMJWHWAZbP8>

## BIOGRAPHIES



### Taieb BACCOUCHE

*Taieb Baccouche, the current Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union<sup>1</sup> (U.M.A.), was born in Jemmel (Tunisia) in 1944. He is an associative actor, human rights activist<sup>2</sup> while being a trade unionist<sup>3</sup>. He is a brilliant academic, a writer, but also a statesman. Taieb Baccouche is also a fine tactician, a confirmed strategist and a wise diplomat. These are talents that he has successfully put to good use being Minister of Foreign Affairs<sup>4</sup> and National Education, spokesperson for the Council of Ministers in the post-revolutionary transitional government (from January 17<sup>th</sup> to December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011) and as head of the secretariat of Nida Tunis<sup>5</sup> party.*

With a state doctorate in general and applied linguistics and an Aggregation in teaching Arabic<sup>6</sup>, he has held several academic

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<sup>1</sup> He is still holding this position since August 1, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> He is a founding member of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights (1976). He was among others, the President of the Arab Institute for Human Rights (from 1998 to 2011) and is currently its Honorary President. He was also director of the Arab Court of Human Rights (1996 - 2011) and is a member of the Francophone Association of Human Rights Commissions.

<sup>3</sup> He is figurehead of the Central Syndicate U.G.T.T., where he was its Secretary General from 1981 to 1984 and the director of its body "Echaab" (as in; The People) from 1981 to 1985. He was also a member and S.G. of F.E.N. and SNESup in the 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> From February 2015 to January 2016

<sup>5</sup> He is one of the founding members of the party (as in; Nidaa Tunis), its secretary general from 2012 to 2015 and its vice-president from March 2015 to January 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Borrowing and linguistic tracings in Tunisian Arabic: literal and dialectal*, under the supervision of André Martinet, Paris Descartes University, 1980. It was in 1968 that he



positions. He has been a professor and researcher at the University of Tunis (since 1969) and a university professor (from 1984<sup>1</sup>). He was also a member of the Scientific Council of the Normal Superior School (ENS) then of that of the Higher Institute of Languages of Tunis (ISLT), a member of the Board of Directors of the University of Tunis, a member of the jury for the Arabic language aggregation, and president and member of several juries of state Doctorates and recruitment theses at all grades of higher education.

He is a man of networks<sup>2</sup> and an involved citizen. He is a member/founder of several associations<sup>3</sup> and organizations<sup>4</sup> and the leader of numerous research groups<sup>5</sup>. He is, among others, a member and a coordinator of several Joint Committees for University Cooperation (CMCU) and at the initiative of several scientific meetings and symposia, as is the case for the Tunisian Association of Linguistics - of which he was the President from 1995 to 2002 - and of the Mediterranean Linguistic Meetings, of which he is the Secretary General, since 1998.

Finally, he has contributed in several publications, specialized works and scientific articles -counting more than a hundred-dealing almost exclusively with linguistics<sup>6</sup> and human rights<sup>7</sup>, published in international journals and encyclopedias.

passed the aggregation exam. He also holds a Degree in French Language and Literature (1964) and a Degree in Ancient History and Archeology (1963).

<sup>1</sup> He taught until 2004.

<sup>2</sup> He is a member of the Lexicology Terminology Translation Network (L.T.T.) / Francophonie University agencies (A.U.F.).

<sup>3</sup> Participated in Maghreb meetings of, the Association Free Thought (1989), the Association for Scientific Research for Development (January 2011) of which he is currently its honorary president.

<sup>4</sup> He is an advisory member of the International Organization of Francophonie (O.I.F.).

<sup>5</sup> He is the leader of two research projects "Linguistic Atlas of Tunisia: from literal to dialect" and "Arabic ornithological terminology".

<sup>6</sup> See "Grammatical norm and linguistic description: the case of Arabic", T. Baccouche, S. Mejri, *Langages*, 2007/3 (n° 167), pp. 27-37.

<sup>7</sup> See "Polysemy and terminology of human rights", T. Baccouche, J. Alouini, *Syntaxe et sémantique*, 2004/1 (number 5), pp. 143-152.



## **Besma SOUDANI**

*A strong woman, a lobbyist, a feminist and a political activist, Basma Soudani is a creator of links, a networker<sup>1</sup> and an incubator who knows how to develop ideas that may benefit her society. She is an activist with a thirst for change. In 2011, when the flames of the Tunisian Revolution had barely been extinguished, she co-founded “The Third Voice” -a free forum to discuss the “new Tunisia”- and formed the League of Tunisian Women Voters (L.E.T<sup>2</sup>), an association whose main objective is the effective participation of women in Tunisian political life.*

She is Head of Cabinet and Director of Political Affairs and Information in the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)<sup>3</sup>, and the representative of the Tunisian civil society abroad. In addition, she plays an important role in strengthening cultural, economic and political cooperation between Tunisia and certain African (Senegal) and European countries (Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Portugal, the Netherlands, etc.).

She also holds a diploma in General Linguistics<sup>4</sup> and a Master's degree in Arabic Language and Civilization<sup>5</sup>. She has held several positions in high schools and higher education. She has also been a professor at the American Diplomatic Institute (F.S.I), the National Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology (I.N.S.A.T.), the International University of Tunis (U.I.T.) and the German Business School (G.B.S.)

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, she has been a member of the FemWise-Africa network, African Union (Peace & Security).

<sup>2</sup> Basma Soudani is its founder and President.

<sup>3</sup> She has been holding this position since 2016.

<sup>4</sup> At the Higher Institute of Languages of Tunis.

<sup>5</sup> Obtained from the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of Tunis.

She is an expert consultant trainer<sup>1</sup> in Gender & Security and an Advisor to national institutions and international foundations and organizations (U.M.A., African Union, U.N.D.P., Konrad Adenauer Foundation, etc.). Her fields of intervention are diverse and include, in particular, the following:

- The promotion of human rights and women's rights.
- Security and peace-building issues.
- Gender mainstreaming and institutionalization.
- Women's leadership and entrepreneurship.
- The fight against discrimination and inequality.
- Democracy and the electoral process.

As a member of numerous associations<sup>2</sup> and a renowned lecturer<sup>3</sup>, she has participated in a multitude of seminars on gender, equality, social and political affairs and human rights.

She is well-versed in public affairs and has been, among others, assigned a mission by the Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, she is in charge of relations between the Parliament, Constitutional bodies, international NGOs and Civil Society (2015).

As an experienced leader, Basma Soudani was notably at the head of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (Tunisia's Regional Program) in 2014 and the manager in charge of "Civil Society" Grants<sup>4</sup> by the American Regional Office "Middle East Partnership Initiative" (M.E.P.I.) for ten years.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2015, She was the adviser of Taïeb Baccouche, the Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> She is the co-founder, in 2017, of the U.N.E.S.C.O. Ariana (Tunis) and the AED-IHEDN Association (Institute of Higher National Defense Studies).

<sup>3</sup> See "The political participation of Tunisian women and civil society in the Tunisian Democratic Process", International Conference, within the framework of the *Centenary of Women's Political Participation and the right to vote in Denmark*, in partnership with the Danish organization K.V.I.N.F.O.

<sup>4</sup> As part of the regional program Middle East North Africa (M.E.N.A.).



## Amel GRAMI

*A woman of many talents, Amel Grami is not only a human rights activist and a committed feminist, but also an educator, author, distinguished lecturer, Islamologist and a passionate ecumenist<sup>1</sup>.*

After her doctoral thesis titled “Apostasy in Islamic Thought<sup>2</sup>”, (1993), she obtained her PhD on “The phenomenon of difference in Islamic civilization<sup>3</sup>” (2004).

She is currently a gender studies professor at the Faculty of Letters Arts and Humanities of Manouba and a member in many dialogue and research groups<sup>4</sup>, N.G.O. and women’s issues networks<sup>5</sup>.

Mastering different languages, she never hesitates to travel across the globe, participating in seminars, conferences and meetings about countering violent extremism, prevention and peace building in several countries.

As an Islamologist and a specialist in gender and women’s studies, her research fields and publishing domains are diverse, and they are mainly focused on comparative religion, women’s status in the three Maghreb countries in particular, and in the Arab-Muslim

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<sup>1</sup> She is a member of the G.R.I.C. (Islamic-Christian group) since 1998, of the Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights “Karamah” since 2003 and of the GeFem since 2004 and a visiting member at the Faculty of Religious Sciences, Saint-Joseph University in Beirut, where she gives lectures on dialogue, conviviality and the right to be different.

<sup>2</sup> A thesis that was published in 1996 in Arabic: *Qaḍīyat al-riddah fī al-fikr al-islāmī al-ḥadīth* by Dar al-Janūb, translated into French in 2017 and published by Nirvana: *La question de l’apostasie dans la pensée islamique*, then translated into English in 2018 with the title *Apostasy in Contemporary Islamic Thought* at Cenatra.

<sup>3</sup> A doctorate which also resulted in the publishing of a book in Arabic: *Al-Iḥtīlāf fī at-ṭaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya al-ʿislāmiyya* (*The Difference in Arab-Muslim Culture: A Gender Study*), ed. Dar Al Madar Al Islami, Bierut, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> She is the coordinator of the literary and philosophical works translation program at the Tunis Translation Institute.

<sup>5</sup> She is a member of the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (W.A.S.L.).

region in general, feminist extremism and on the analysis of media's treatment of religious discourse.

She is the author of many monographs and studies<sup>1</sup> among which are *Freedom of conscience in Islam*<sup>2</sup> (1997), *Mary in the Islamic imagination*<sup>3</sup> (2003), *Islam in Asia*<sup>4</sup> (2006) and *Women and Terrorism: A Gender Study*<sup>5</sup> (2017).

Last but not least, she has numerous articles<sup>6</sup> (including electronic ones<sup>7</sup>) and book chapters to her credit and is the co-author of the script for "*To the Mirage*"<sup>8</sup>, a fictional documentary which describes the mechanisms of conversion to jihadism.

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<sup>1</sup> "*Women, Knowledge and Power*" (ar.), under the direction of Amel Grami, col. Gender lens, n°1, ed. Dar Arrafidayn Tunis, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Ḥurriya-t al-Mu'taqad fī al-'Islām?*, Preface Mohamed Talbi, ed. Le Fennec, Casablanca, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> *Maryam fī al-mutaḥayyal al-islāmī*, ed. Al Mashreq, Beirut, (2003)

<sup>4</sup> *Al-'Islām al-'Āssyawī*, ed. Dar Attalia, Beirut, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *Annisā' wa al-'rhāb*, Dirāsa ġendariyya, with the collaboration of journalist Monia Arfaoui, ed. Dar Meskaliani Tunis, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> "The marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men, between Islamic Fiqh and Tunisian law", Proceedings of the conference *The Muslim throughout history*, ed. of the University of Manouba.

<sup>7</sup> Grami Amel, "Coverage and treatment of terrorist acts and crises by the Arab media (Charlie Hebdo as a model in Tunisia and Egypt)", in *Media treatment of the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism*, Proceedings of the workshop of April 7 & 8, 2015, Chap. 2, pp. 79-103, Journal of the Arab Radio Federation, available in Arabic at <http://www.asbu.net/ar/publications/download/id/1/label/n-a>, accessed 11/13/2020. See also "Narrating 'Jihad al Nikah' in post-revolutionary Tunisia", available at <https://www.boundary2.org/2018/07/amel-grami-narrating-jihad-al-nikah-in-post-revolution-tunisia-arabic/>, accessed 13/11/2020.

<sup>8</sup> "*Naḥwa as-sarāb*" is a fictional documentary produced in 2018 by the Ministry in charge of relations with constitutional bodies, in partnership with the Beder association and Great Britain. Duration 30'.



### Didi OULD SALEK

*Didi Ould Salek is a political activist, research fellow, lecturer and expert with national and international organizations<sup>1</sup> all at once. He is well-known in the media scene and on the web<sup>2</sup>, through numerous specialized articles and editorials. He is involved in North African civil society and a strong supporter of Arab unification; he participated in numerous social forums<sup>3</sup>.*

With a rich and varied academic background, crowned by a thesis on “The Arab regional system and the imperatives of the new world order”<sup>4</sup>, he held various positions during his academic career. After having been an Associate Researcher at the Center for Arab Research and Studies (Beirut), he was Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Tunis, then Senior Lecturer at the Maghreb University<sup>5</sup> and at the Faculty of Sharia and Law Al-Asmariya (Libya). He is currently a Professor at the Higher Institute of Islamic Studies and Research in Nouakchott.

As a specialist in strategic studies and a security expert, his fields of investigation and areas of publication are diverse and they relate in

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<sup>1</sup>He has been an expert consultant to the P.N.U.D., the League of Arab Nations and the Arab Maghreb Union since 2008, etc.

<sup>2</sup> He is one of the contributors to Dune Voices, as a “Security in the Sahara” specialist, Media Diversity Institute (M.D.I.).

<sup>3</sup> He was also one of the founding members of the “Forum Maghrebien” (Casablanca, 2009) and is a member of the Instance for Maghreb Action (Marrakech, 2010) and the Association of International Studies (Tunis), as well as Mauritania Perspectives.

<sup>4</sup> *An-niẓām al-‘iqḷmī al-‘arabī wa mutaḡallibāt an-niẓām al-‘ālamī al-ġadīd*, defended in 2001, at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Tunis, under the direction of Slim HABIB, and for which he in 2000 benefited from an international mobility aid grant (I.R.M.C.)

<sup>5</sup> El Maghreb University Law School.

particular to security issues in the Sahel, democratic transitions in the Arab world, participatory democracy and jihadist excesses. Moreover, he is the President of the Maghreb Center for Strategic Studies and as president he collaborates with numerous specialist journals<sup>1</sup>.

He is the co-organizer of numerous national and international<sup>2</sup> conferences and the moderator of numerous round tables<sup>3</sup> and debates. He is also the author of several scientific<sup>4</sup> articles and studies<sup>5</sup>.

He is an expert on the Libyan crisis. He has led several seminars to shed light on geostrategic issues, including “The Libyan crisis: its challenges and prospects” and “The Libyan crisis and its impact on the Maghreb” (2011).

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<sup>1</sup> *Algerian review of security and military studies, Italian review of strategic studies, Review of strategic and military studies of the Arab World Center for Democratic Development*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See “Crisis of the integration of the national state and the security crisis in the Sahel: what links?”, in *Repercussions of the security crisis in the Sahel on the Maghreb countries*, Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation and The Maghreb Center for Strategic Studies, 6-7 November 2013. See also “Mauritania between the legacy of injustices and the problems of the application of transitional justice”, in *Transitional justice and democratization. Experiences of the Maghreb countries*, Cadi Ayyad University of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences, Group of research and international studies on crisis management, in partnership with the Hans Seidel Foundation, 21-22 November 2014, Morocco. Read also “Mauritania and the Malian crisis”, in *The issues of security in the Mediterranean*, The Center for Mediterranean and International Studies And The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, with the support of the EuroMESCo network, 2-3 May 2013, Tunis. And finally, “Consequences of African mutations on Maghreb integration: Strategic vision” (in Ar.), in *The African strategic depth of the Maghreb: challenges, implications and issues of integration*, Cadi Ayyad University, June 28th and 29th, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Among other round tables; “Arab youth facing current challenges”, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Nouakchott. March 10, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Many of his articles have been published in the *University Review of Al Asmariya al-Islamiyya*, as well as in the *Review of Al-mustaqbel al-‘arabi* and can be viewed on the Center for Arab Unity Studies website.

<sup>5</sup> “The state integration crisis and the security crisis in the Sahel: what relationship?”, in *The security crisis in the Sahel. What repercussions on the Arab Maghreb countries?*, Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation and The Maghreb Center for Strategic Studies, p. 11-36, 2015.



## **El Mostafa REZRAZI**

*Dr El Mostafa Rezrazi is a professor of Crisis Management, and Security Studies and a Senior Fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, previously known as OCP Policy Center, who focuses on Terrorism, Security and East Asia studies. His area of Expertise covers Afro-Asian Affairs, Strategic & Security Studies, Terrorism,*

*Extremism and Deradicalization, mainly from the view of Criminal; Legal and Forensic Psychology.*

He got his Ph.D. in Regional & International Affairs from the University of Tokyo in 1998, and later a Doctorate from the University of Mohammed V on the Psychological dynamisms of Suicide Bombers (2014).

He is the executive director of the Moroccan Observatory on Extremism and Violence, Director of the African Center for Asian Studies, Rabat. Currently, he is Visiting Professor at the University Mohammed V Rabat, Affiliated Professor at the University Polytechnic Mohammed VI in Bengire, and at the Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane.

In 2017, was appointed a Co-coordinator of the OBOR China-Morocco Research Group, and a member of the Advisory Board of The Euro-African Studies Institute, Hanyang University Seoul, South Korea.

Rezrazi is the president for the second term of the Moroccan Association for Asian Studies. Dr Rezrazi has served in the past as a distinguished professor in the school of law of Sapporo Gakuin University (Japan), a professor & Deputy Director of the Institute of International Relations in Haboromo University in Osaka (Japan). A political Analyst at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abou Dhabi, and was also a Visiting Fellow in Princeton University, USA.







## Hafida Ben CHEHIDA

*A woman of many talents and countless facets, Hafida Benchehida is both the leader and the mediator, the politician and diplomat as well as the international interpreter. Lobbyist and networker, she has made the most of the causes she defends and the values*

*in which she believes, her expertise, all her energy and her incredible ability to convince.*

Member of the Algerian Senate since 2013, where she sat on the Foreign Affairs Commission until 2015, she has been vice-president of the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Commission since January 2016 and is also a member of the Foreign Affairs Commission and the Political Commission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), responsible for human rights and security issues.

A renowned performer and a true polyglot, she translated alongside the late Bouteflika, the words of illustrious personalities, during diplomatic trips or in Algeria, as well as at international conferences (Summits of Non-Aligned Countries, Groups of 77, 15, 8, etc.)

An active member of numerous networks, she is executive director and one of the founders of the Arab Women Parliamentarians Network and the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network. She is also a member of the International Civil Action Network “International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons” (I.C.A.N.)<sup>1</sup> As well as the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (W.A.S.L.)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. For Women’s Rights, Peace and Security.

<sup>2</sup> The Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership.

Human rights specialist and security expert - intervening with national, international and UN agencies, funds and institutions (O.T.A.N.<sup>1</sup>, U.N. Women, U.N.I.D.O., U.N.E.P., A.U., E.U., I.M.F., O.P.E.C., Union for the Mediterranean, O.S.C.E., W.B., A.D.B., O.C.I., etc.) - its fields of investigation and areas of intervention are diverse and relate mainly to:

- Mediation<sup>2</sup>, peace and security,
- Prevention, the fight against violent extremism, especially female extremism, (P.V.E. / C.V.E.) and de-radicalization<sup>3</sup>, in the M.E.N.A. (especially Libya),
- Gender integration and the fight against sexist discrimination,
- Women's empowerment and political rights<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly on questions concerning the Sahel and Mali.

<sup>2</sup> Her involvement in mediation began with her participation in the UN Women mission in Libya, to meet local women parliamentarians. She has, moreover, followed several training courses in mediation at CITpax (Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz), on whose behalf she is now an advisor.

<sup>3</sup> She is mainly interested in the role of women, in the prevention of violent extremism and in de-radicalization (cf. Seminar on “Women and de-radicalization”, Barcelona, October 2016), in particular in the Maghreb and the Sahel, and to moršidt women (ar. Guides) who have received special religious training to offer a counter-narrative to potentially radicalized young people.

<sup>4</sup> 6 A champion of the feminine cause, she has always defended women's rights, as was the case at the Bali Congress (August 2014) and at the Parliamentary Conference for Women (Brussels, November 2014).



## **Khaoula MATRI**

*Assistant lecturer, at both the Center of Anthropology and the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences of Sousse, and fellow researcher at Research Institute on Contemporary Maghreb (I.R.M.C.),*

*Khaoula Matri has a Ph.D. in sociology. Her thesis that she defended in 2014, is about “Wearing the veil: representations and practices of the body amongst Tunisian women”<sup>1</sup>.*

She is the author of several works<sup>2</sup> about gender-based violence, women's status in Tunisia, the question of the body and sexuality<sup>3</sup>, the veil, and the social norms. She is currently working on a comparative study on "the representations of gender violence and the normative framework of its production"<sup>4</sup> (P.A.P.A.)

In addition to conducting field research, she has conducted, inter alia, research on “Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (V.F.G) in public spaces/university spaces: from knowledge to action for

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<sup>1</sup> A collaborated thesis supervised by both the University of Tunis and the University of Paris V-Descartes (Doctoral School of Human and Social Sciences; cultures, individuals and societies) under the direction of Mohamed Kerrou and Pierre-Noël Denieul.

<sup>2</sup> “The social construction of the virgin female body in Tunisia”, under the direction of Sihem Najar in *Thinking about the Tunisian society today; young research in human and social sciences*, I.R.M.C. and Cérès editions, Tunis, 2013, pp. 61-81.

<sup>3</sup> See “Two bodily models: the body between exhibition and veil”, in *Gender in the Mediterranean: women facing socio-economic transformations, conflicts, negotiations and the emergence of new social relationships* (2008). See also "Violence against Tunisian women in the public space: an alarming question" (2012), "Women and political participation in post-revolutionary Tunisia" and "Women between visibility and invisibility in the political scene" (2013) and "Violence against women in the public space in Tunisia" (2017) in the *CREDIF review*.

<sup>4</sup> “Perceptions of gender violence and normative framework for the production of male and female relations: comparative study between Tunisia and Senegal” within the framework of the African Postdoctoral Pilot Academy (P.A.P.A.) program.

change<sup>1</sup>” on behalf of *the Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research* (C.A.W.T.A.R.). She also co-authored a study on “Gender-based violence in public space in Tunisia<sup>2</sup>”, (2016) and another on “Back in history for a future without violence against women<sup>3</sup>.” (2017).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019.

<sup>2</sup> In partnership with U.N. Women.

<sup>3</sup> On behalf of the A.T.F.D.



## Mohamed KERROU

*A sociologist by training, Mohamed Kerrou is a professor of political science at the Faculty of Law and Political Science in Tunis. He is also an international consultant in development and gender studies<sup>1</sup>.*

After a thesis on “The foundation of the new state in Tunisia”<sup>2</sup>, he obtained in 2001, a habilitation degree in Sociology and has continued to work as a researcher fellow at the University of Tunis since then.

**Specialist in political and religious sociology**, his fields of investigation and fields of publication are diverse and relate in particular to the sociology of Islam - in its ritual, ordinary, urban and gendered practices -, to that of political Islam in its secularized, reformist and radical variations<sup>3</sup> as well as on the question of mass mobilizations, revolutions and Arab springs and their consequences.

**Committed actor and involved citizen**, he is the organizer of many national and international conferences<sup>4</sup>, the themes of which often echo the upheavals that shake Tunisian society in particular, and

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<sup>1</sup> See “Water management in the delegation of Oueslatia, Kairouan, according to the gender perspective”, *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (2015), “The political participation of Tunisian women in the regions of Tunis, Zaghouan and Kairouan”, Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research & International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2009, “The participation of Tunisian women in decision-making. Power strategies and influencing roles in public and private spheres”, C.A.W.T.A.R, 2006, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Under the direction of Louis Siorat, 1987, University of Social Sciences of Toulouse.

<sup>3</sup> See *The conversion of young people to terrorism*, Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society and Human Rights “, 2017-2018.

<sup>4</sup> See “The Oasis of Jemna: Towards a Compromise Solution?”, Tunisian Observatory for Democratic Transition, 2017, “Homage to Clifford Geertz”, National Library of Tunisia, 2007, “Islam and secularization in the Maghreb and the Mashrek”, Casablanca, King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud Foundation, 2000 (I.R.M.C.), etc.

the world in general. In addition, he was a founding member of several national and international associations<sup>1</sup> as well as a permanent member of the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts - Beit El Hikma - in Carthage.

He is the author, among others, of *Tunisia, the Other Revolution. Essay on political transformations* (2018) and *Hijab. New Veils and Public Spaces* (2010) and the Publishing Director of *The Authority of Saints. Historical and anthropological perspectives in the Western Mediterranean* (1998), *Public and Private in Islam. Spaces, Authorities and Freedoms* (2002) and *From Islam and elsewhere. Homage to Clifford Geertz* (2008).

Finally, he has more than fifty articles<sup>2</sup> and book chapters to his credit, and he has contributed in two medium-length films: “*The Return of Bourguiba*”<sup>3</sup> and “*To The Mirage*”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> He is a founding member of the Tunisian Observatory for the Democratic Transition (O.T.T.D.), the Scientific Society “Orient/Occident” (OROC) and the Association of Anthropology of the Mediterranean (A.D.A.M.). He is also a Member of the Scientific Council of the “Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme” (M.M.S.H.).

<sup>2</sup> See “Islamic veils and public spheres in the Maghreb and in Europe” (2004), “The debates around the visibility of women and the veil in the public space of contemporary Tunisia (19th - 20th centuries)” (2005), “Women and Inheritance in Islam. State of research in Tunisia and the Maghreb” (2006), “Revolution, transition and political violence” (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Directed by Hichem Ben Ammar, based on an original idea by Mohamed Kerrou, Noir sur Blanc Productions, 2017, duration 52’.

<sup>4</sup> The documentary tackles the conversion of a young Tunisian to terrorism. It is produced by “Beder/Bwest”. This is an order by the Ministry responsible for relations with constitutional bodies, civil society and human rights organizations, 2018, duration: 30’.



## **Mohamed Saleck BEN BRAHIM**

*Mohamed Saleck Brahim Ahmed Banemou is both a statesman and an activist who is committed among others to the Palestinian cause. He is also an expert and an associative actor, not to mention being a project leader, an incubator and a networker<sup>1</sup>.*

After a diploma in Philosophy on “Epistemology and the Scientificity of Knowledge” and a Master's Degree in Public Administration<sup>2</sup>, he defended his thesis in International Relations on “Geo-strategic Issues Related to Natural Resources in the Sahel”<sup>3</sup>. He is also a graduate of the prestigious ENA<sup>4</sup>.

He was the ambassador, director of communication and spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania until 2018. He is also a lecturer<sup>5</sup>, researcher, communication expert, consultant trainer and national<sup>6</sup> and international<sup>7</sup> evaluator for

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<sup>1</sup> For example, he is an editorial member of the Network of Analysis and Information on International Current Affairs (M.U.L.T.I.P.O.L.), since 2007 and a researcher of the international network of euro-Arab foundation of Altos studios.

<sup>2</sup> Masters degree in Public Administration obtained from the Dubai School of Government in 2009.

<sup>3</sup> He is a graduate of Atlantic International University (Hawaii, U.S.A.) and is currently undertaking a training program in International Relations, taught in English and intended for diplomats and senior officials, at the Diplomatic and Strategic Studies Center (C. E. D. S.) in Paris (Dakar Antenna).

<sup>4</sup> International Diploma in Public Administration, with honors, Long international cycle.

<sup>5</sup> International Conference on Migration and Asylum Policy (Morocco). See also “Strategic issues for territorial development in Mauritania”, International conference on *The challenges of decentralization and management of territorial space in Mauritania*, Maghrebien Center for Strategic Studies (CMES) & Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 14 and December 15, 2014 (Nouakchott).

<sup>6</sup> “Institutional Strengthening in Mauritania Towards Agricultural and Pastoral Resilience” (R.I.M.R.A.P.), Ministry of Livestock and a consortium of four NGOs.

<sup>7</sup> From 2018 to 2020: “Regional Project for Strengthening Disease Surveillance Systems in West Africa” (R.E.D.I.S.S.E. 3).



UN institutions, bodies and programs and foundations<sup>1</sup> (African Union, League of Arab States, European Commission, etc.).

Specialized in geostrategic and development issues, his fields of intervention are diverse and include, in particular, the following:

- Issues related to security<sup>2</sup> and the establishment of peace;
- The sociology of sustainable development;
- Human rights and the rights of migrants;
- Food security (F.A.O., P.A.M., F.I.D.A.) and access to health;
- Empowerment of local non-state actors.

He is also a member of several associations and NGOs. (*Terre Solidali*, U.S. African Development Foundation, F.E.S., etc.) In 1999, he founded the Association of Development, Environment and Communication in Adrar (A. D.E.C.A. / Adrar R.O.N.G.A.) and is since 2006, the founding president of AdecaRim (Webzine on sustainable development, environment and humanitarian aid in Mauritania).

He is currently the Director of the Mauritanian Center for Research on Development and the Future (C.M.R.D.E.F., member of the *Red Euro-Arabe de ONG para el Desarrollo y la Integración*). Being the author of several scientific articles, studies and reports<sup>3</sup>, he has

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 Completion of a Sustainability Plan for a project to build the capacity of the members of the Union of Cooperatives of Bokol, through literacy in Arabic language, on behalf of the U.S. African Development Foundation (U.S.A.D.F.)

<sup>2</sup> He participated in the 3rd Africa Security Forum ("Redefining the axes of international cooperation in the face of 21<sup>st</sup> century threats"), Rabat, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "Study on the return of Maghreb women from areas of tension. Case of Mauritania", in *Return of Maghrebian jihadist women from areas of tension: what are the prospects for a common Maghreb strategy?*, U.M.A. /F.E.S., 2020. See also "Right to food and food sovereignty in Mauritania", in *Arab Observatory Report 2019* (Arrāšid al-'arabī, Arab N.G.O. Network for development). Or "Sahel and Maghreb: Security, energy issues and greed of the great powers", in International Symposium: *The security crisis in the Sahel region and its impact on the Maghreb countries*, C.M.E.S. / the K. Adenauer Foundation, Nouakchott. See also "Human rights, civil society and democracy in the Arab world: avenues of reflections", International workshop on *The sharing of experiences of civil society*

collaborated with prestigious journals (e. g. *German Institute of Global and Area Studies- G.I.G.A. of Hamburg*).





### **Dr. Nagia ELATRAG**

*Nagia Elatrag is present on all fronts. A feminist activist and tireless human rights defender<sup>1</sup>, she is also a teacher, consultant, lecturer<sup>2</sup>, and trainer<sup>3</sup>. She is also a tough political activist and lobbyist invested in the causes she wants to bring to the forefront in Libya.*

After obtaining a Master's degree in private law at the University of Tripoli, she defended a thesis in France on “Contractual liability and its application to health products<sup>4</sup>.”

A national and international legal expert<sup>5</sup> and specialist in comparative law, her areas of expertise are diverse and include, in particular, the following:

- The constitutionalization and promotion of the rights of women<sup>6</sup>, children and vulnerable persons (inclusive public policies, protection of the disabled).
- The fight against discrimination and inequality.
- Food security and the establishment of peace.

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<sup>1</sup> She is Legal Counsel at the National Commission for Human Rights (N.C.H.R.L.).

<sup>2</sup> Children's rights, between national legislation and 2017 international law” in collaboration with the Libyan Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020. See also “The Daily Life of Women Human Rights Defenders in Libya”, a colloquium organized by the Noor charity. See also “the Compliance of Libyan legislation with the C.D.A.W. Convention”, F.E.S / U.M.A. /L.T.D.H., Tunis, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Legal training on “Libyan Women's Rights”, Kteib Social Affairs Office. She has also conducted training sessions on women's leadership, including as a trainer of trainers.

<sup>4</sup> Doctorate in private law, on “The obligation of safety in the light of the development of contractual liability and its application to health products: a comparative study between French and Libyan civil law, under the direction of Antoine Leca and Geneviève Rebecq, Paul Cézanne University - Aix-Marseille III, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> She has intervened with several Libyan authorities and ministries, including the Ministry of Economy and Social Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> Since 2018, she has been the Director of the Office for the Protection of Women and Children, in collaboration with the Shaikh Tahar Azzawi Charity Organization (STACO), under the auspices of the I.O.M.O. and the H.C.R.

- Participatory democracy, decentralization, local governance and e-governance.
- Bioethics (legal personality of the embryo and fetus, clinical trials, genetic manipulation, etc.)
- Sustainable development.
- The conservation and protection of written heritage and the protection, preservation and restoration of monumental heritage.
- The fight against corruption.

In addition, she is a member of several charities (e.g. Union of Zaouïa Women) and NGOs. (FES, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Arab Women Organization), she is also the organizer of a plethora of conferences and seminars<sup>1</sup> and the author of numerous articles<sup>2</sup> and studies<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, her study on “Women's Rights between Local Legislation and International Law”<sup>4</sup> is currently in press.

Today, she is an associate professor at the University of Sabrata, where she was the head of the “Private Law” department from 2014 to 2015. She has also taught History of Law and Civil Law at the Faculty of Law of Zaouia & Sourman and at the Faculty of Economics and Management of Harcha. She has also taught courses in private international law at the Union Africa National University in Benghazi. Given her brilliant academic background, she is also a member of the Legal Advisory Committee, the Office of Monitoring and Performance Evaluation of the Ministry of Higher Education.

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<sup>1</sup> “Consequences of pandemics and conflicts on food security in the Maghreb countries”, Democratic Arabic Center for strategic Political and Economic Studies, Egypt, 2020. Or again: “The marriage of minors between permit and prohibition”, “The crisis of displaced women and children, problems and solutions”, etc.

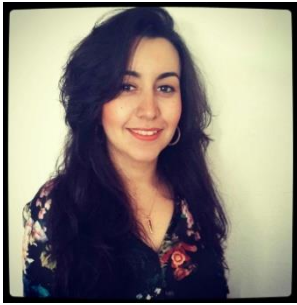
<sup>2</sup> “Nationality of the child having a Libyan mother and a foreign father”, “Consumer protection”, “Relationship between sharia and positive law”, etc.

<sup>3</sup> “The status of Jihadists Returning from Areas of Tension in Libyan Law” the return of Maghrebian people belonging to extremist and violent groups, F.E.S. / U.M.A., 2020.

<sup>4</sup> With the help of the Women's Support and Empowerment Office, Libyan Ministry of Higher Education, 2020.

Very active in the legislative field, she has been a member of numerous committees for drafting and preparing draft laws (on consumer protection, in cooperation with the National Anti-Corruption Authority 2018, on the fight against violence against women, etc.)





## Nesrine REBAI

*Nesrine Rebai is a committed citizen and an involved professional. She is both an activist for global action, and also an entrepreneur who is not afraid to engage in human rights reforms, both in an international and intercultural environment as well as in a national context.*

As a witness to the injustices that society - *her society* - inflicts on the “second sex”; she has chosen to improve on the daily life of women. She has made this fight the pillar of her professional life and the pivot of her associative<sup>1</sup> and political commitment. She has also been at the initiative of several prevention campaigns on violence against women and children.

She was former student of the Normal Superior School and a Doctoral student in French Literature<sup>2</sup>. She was, for two years, a professor at the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities of Manouba.

She is a Gender & Security expert-consultant<sup>3</sup>; her areas of intervention are diverse and they relate in particular to:

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<sup>1</sup> She is the communication manager and founding member of the Tunisian Committed Skills Pact (PaCTE) for stability and reconstruction (from 2011 to 2014). She was also responsible for the observation of the Tunisian Elections abroad in Mourkiboun (from 2011 to 2019), where she pleaded for the increase in the representativeness of women within the APR and for the integration of Gender streaming into the electoral code.

<sup>2</sup> She wrote a thesis on *Poetic language and figuration in the work of Jacques Prévert*, under the supervision of Jean-Michel Maulpoix, at the University of Paris X Nanterre.

<sup>3</sup> In 2019, she oversaw the implementation of the “Media Coverage of Security Sector Reform Projects” program with the Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center and the Search for Common Ground. Since May 2018, she has been coordinating on behalf of the UNDP, the project “Support for the improvement of the care for women and children victims of GBV by the internal security forces” in partnership with the Tunisian Ministry for the Interior affairs. It is in this context that she oversaw the publication of the Women Safety Audit.



- Improving care for women and children victims of GBV (Gender-based violence) and the promotion of equal opportunities and reproductive rights;
- The integration and institutionalization of gender.
- The fight against discrimination and inequalities.
- Promotion of Human Rights<sup>1</sup> and Democracy (particularly participatory).

She works with several national ministries, offices and agencies<sup>2</sup>, as well as with public institutions<sup>3</sup>, associations, NGOs<sup>4</sup>, organizations, international bodies (C.E. / U.M.A.<sup>5</sup>, OXFAM<sup>6</sup>, Democracy Reporting International<sup>7</sup>) and UN programs, funds and agencies (P.N.U.D., U.N.F.P.A., International Labor Organization<sup>8</sup>).

In addition to being a Gender Expert, she wears the triple Hats of a Trainer - Coach (since 2012)<sup>9</sup> in personal and professional

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, she was in charge of the “Support for Tunisian civil society” project at EuroMed Rights and she worked on other “women's rights” projects.

<sup>2</sup> She was a consultant for the project “Fight against discrimination and GBV and gender integration”, in support of the M.F.F.E.S. and the Ministry of Health, via the National Office for the Family and Population, under the aegis of the U.N.F.P.A.

<sup>3</sup> She supported the Moussawet program (equality in Ar.)

<sup>4</sup> As is the case of “Women in Action” (2018-2020), the “M.E.N.A. for the economic empowerment of women or for that of “Equality in Inheritance” (July 2018)

<sup>5</sup> She supervised the development of a Maghreb study on the “return of women ‘Jihadists’ from conflict zones”

<sup>6</sup> She was a consultant to OXFAM, for the realization of three projects “Youth Participation and Employment”, “MedUP Tunisia” and “Reducing inequalities in agricultural value chains in Tunisia and Morocco” (2019)

<sup>7</sup> For the project: Decentralization reforms and local governance “Young leaders for local democracy”.

<sup>8</sup> In 2015, she was in charge of training for the I.R.A.M. “Improving the governance of labor migration and the protection of the rights of migrant workers in Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Egypt”.

<sup>9</sup> In 2012, she obtained a professional master's degree in coaching from H.E.C. de Paris (O.P.Q.F qualification)

development, communication expert and support for project leaders<sup>1</sup>.

She is also the founder of the Office of Consulting, Training and Coaching in Communication and Personal and Professional Development “GANBATTÉ” in 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> She was a trainer in Public speaking techniques and stress management for young entrepreneurs (SU ST “Startup System Tunisia”, within the framework of the project “NETwork to foster Knowledge intensive Business Incubation and Technology transfer”).





*« One is not born,  
but rather becomes a woman. »*

Simone de Beauvoir,  
Second Sex (1949)

