



Mohammad Abu Rumman

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Infatuated with Martyrdom

Female Jihadism from Al-Qaeda
to the 'Islamic State'

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Translated by Banan Malkawi

The Hashemite Kingdom Of Jordan
The Deposit Number at The National Library
(2017/10/5568)

278

AbuRumman, Mohammad Suliman
Infatuated with Martyrdom: Female Jihadism From AlQaeda
To The 'Islamic State' Mohammad Suliman Abu Rumman,
Hassan Mahmoud AbuHanieh;
ترجمة Banan Malkawi. Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017

(460) p.

Deposit No.: 2017/10/5568

Descriptors: /Holy War//Women//Political Condition/

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Published in 2017 by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq
FES Jordan & Iraq
P.O. Box 941876
Amman 11194
Jordan

Email: fes@fes-jordan.org
Website:www.fes-jordan.org

Not for sale

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the editor.

Translation: Banan Malkawi

Cover and Lay-out: Mu'ath Al Saied
Printing: Economic Press

ISBN: 978-9957-484-75-0

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By:

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Dedication

To all women and men who believe in freedom and deliverance from tyranny: Tyranny is the disease that breeds extremism and terrorism, creates the climate of frustration, despair, and sectarianism, hijacks the future of the generations of youth, the displaced, the migrants, the frightened, and the disoriented who seek none other than a dignified humane life, like all other human beings.

To all women and men who believe in sound knowledge and disciplined research in analyzing human and social phenomena to reach objective solutions, away from the whims of ideology and the caprices of politics.

To all people who empathize with the plight of millions of women, children, and vulnerable people in places of conflict and war; those suffering in harsh living conditions, stuck between the hammer of extremism and armed militias, and the anvil of authoritarian regimes and occupation.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the production of this book and provided the appropriate conditions for its completion.

Our thanks extend foremost to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung/Amman office, particularly its Resident Director and dear friend, Anja Wehler-Schoeck, who has struggled with us, fought by our side, and at times even fought us in order to complete this study. Throughout her tenure in Amman, Ms. Wehler-Schoeck spearheaded FES' publishing of our books, including *The 'Islamic State' Organization: The Sunni Crisis and Struggle of Global Jihadism*, *I am A Salafi: A Study of the Actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis*, and *The 'Islamic Solution' in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and Ventures of Democracy and Security*, in addition to organizing numerous important regional conferences in analyzing the phenomenon of Islamism, published in a series of books and reports. She further exerted immeasurable efforts in conveying this knowledge content to English and German-speaking audiences by facilitating the translation of our books, including this one.

Such efforts by FES compel us to truly appreciate the task they carry insofar as effort, time, and financial costs. Our gratitude also extends to Ms. Amal Abu Jries, the director of programs at FES, who has been front and center, diligently working with us in the projects we achieved with FES.

At the research level, we would like to thank the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan for providing the climate and research possibilities for the co-author Abu Rumman, and the Center's researchers who worked diligently to acquire raw data and detailed information from a wide array of sources. They include the researchers and interns Ruba Tweis-si, Nour Dawud, and Armand Jhala, all of whom had an important role in our access to valuable information.

Of course, our work would not bear fruit and this book would not see the light of day without the sacrifices of our families, who bore – as usual – our seclusion for months of grueling work. Our gratitude goes out to Abeer Jawan and Ghaith Abu Hanieh (Hassan Abu Hanieh's family), and to Samah Bibars, Faris, and Sarah (Mohammad Abu Rumman's family), for all their patience and perseverance during the past few years. Our accomplishments would not have been possible without your sacrifice and understanding.

Finally, we are grateful to the editors who have played a role of no less importance or difficulty than that of the authors. Our special thanks go out to our friends Banan Malkawi (who translated the book into English), Osama Ghawji (who edited it in Arabic), and Günther Orth (who translated it into German).

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Preface

It is difficult to find an epistemic and objective analysis of the phenomenon of female jihadism that is not laden with ideological agendas, political and media propaganda, abstract or even mythical and imaginative perceptions, particularly with the emergence of the so-called ‘Islamic State’ organization (IS),¹ and the increased role played by females within the global jihadist movement.

Headlines like “brides of jihad,” “sexual jihad,” and “the mistresses of al-Baghdadi” and other flashy media titles divert the discourse on female jihadism away from real, accurate and unprejudiced grounds. This has created a state of obscurity that hinders efforts to study the phenomenon objectively, analyze its reality, magnitude, causes, and the practical conditions that drive hundreds of women and girls to travel, or attempt to travel, for the sake of jihad.

This obscure scene has incited us to explore this thorny and complex issue, and to attempt to make objective and factual distinctions of the political, ideological, and media agendas that are coated with stereotypical ideas and pre-fabricated conceptualizations of this phenomenon. After taking our first steps into this research journey – thinking that we would address

¹ Material written about this organization, whether in the media, political statements, academia, or elsewhere has used various names and titles to refer to the ‘Islamic State,’ a group that currently refers to itself as the Islamic Caliphate State (*Dawlat al-Khilafa al-Islamiya*). Common names include the ‘Islamic State,’ (IS) (*Al-Dawla al-Islamiya*), or use of the title previously held by the organization ‘The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’ (ISIL), with the Levant denoting the area of ‘Greater Syria (*Al-Sham*) in (*Al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*), denoted by the acronym (ISIS), established in April 2014, as will be discussed in later chapters. The organization came to be dubbed ‘*Da’esh*’ in Arab media and popular mediums, referring to its acronyms in Arabic. This study refers to the organization as “IS.” “Translator’s note”

'female jihadism' as a partial issue within the series of studies we have conducted on the overall phenomenon of jihadism – we found ourselves knee deep in a whole world of themes, issues, complexities, and astounding stories where the psychological, social, and ideological realms intertwine. We found ourselves before the manifold epistemic, doctrinal, and intellectual dialectics that preoccupy Islamist and Jihadist circles regarding the issue of women, their role, and their position vis-à-vis jihad, among many other multifaceted issues. Female jihadism is a world of its own, with its own entryways, spaces, and alleys. It overlaps with global jihadism in its historical evolution, but in certain occasions diverges from it, due to its gender-'feminist' particularity, especially in Arab and Muslim societies where there are defined and separate spaces for women away from men. This 'spaces' issue is one the most prominent – and problematic – of topics among jihadists, who view segregation between men and women, and the distinction between them, as a purely religious and jurisprudential issue, the rules of which are fixed and indisputable.

It is this particular point, the perspective of jihadists towards women, that constitutes the premise of our study. We attempt to tackle two important, opposite angles of the same issue:

The first angle is how do we understand – from within this fundamentalist jihadist perspective – the recent transformations and developments that have taken place in the role of female jihadists, and their transition from secondary and traditional roles in jihadist milieus (as housewives and childrearers), to the new phenomena of female jihadists' *hijra* (migration) and *nafir* (mobilization and departure for jihad), and suicide 'martyrs'? And, how do jihadists overcome the many doctrinal hurdles to reach this stage in which we see over 500 jihadist females migrating from Europe and the US, by themselves and at their own will, to the lands of the 'caliphate' in Iraq and Syria, not to mention the hundreds of females who come from across the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The second angle is related to the female jihadists themselves. This angle seeks to understand the motives that drive hundreds of women and girls from across the world to 'belong' and pledge loyalty to IS, and to accept sacrificing everything for the sake of joining the land of the caliphate, despite the organization's espousal of a regime that lays the foundation for an ultra-conservative patriarchal society with no room for equality, freedoms, full citizenship, and the other values ingrained by modernity, enshrined in

international conventions and treaties, and championed in revolutionary slogans.²

This second angle is also associated with a central problem found in the theoretical contradiction between the fanatical, bloody, and cruel nature of violent extremist organizations, on the one hand, and the supposed 'emotional' nature of women, who tend not to gravitate towards this style of life and behavior, on the other hand. Is there really such a contradiction between these two natures? Or is this premise inaccurate to begin with? Then, our goal would be to explain the phenomenon of female jihadism from the psychological perspective, in a more profound manner, through studying real case studies.

One of the main objectives of undertaking the writing of this book is to engage with, and address the reductionist, superficial perspective towards the jihadist phenomenon in general, and female jihadism in particular. For decades, the study of jihadism and jihadi organizations produced a field marred with confusion, disorder, and obscurity that hampered the understanding of the motives of jihadists and the attempt to approach the objective political, economic, and social causes, conditions, and factors behind the phenomenon of violent extremism. This field of study has, for years, yielded to reductionist and orientalist cultural-ideological approaches. And, if the study of jihadism in general suffers from misunderstanding, ill-intention, and confusion, and is coated with an orientalist aura, then the study of female jihadism suffers from all this twofold. For long, the study of Muslim women has constituted a rich and fertile theme for orientalist fantasies, and the issue of sexuality has been one of the paramount characteristics and distinctive themes of orientalist studies and imagination.³

Edward Said explains that orientalists routinely described the Orient as "feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic – but curiously attractive ruler."⁴

On the other hand, the domestic authoritarian regimes in many Mus-

² See: Amel Grami, "Al-Jihad al-Nisa'i: Al-Irhab bi Ta' al-Ta'nith" "Female Jihad: Terrorism with a Feminine Marker", *Al-Rawabit Center for Strategic Studies and Research*, January 21, 2015, <http://rawabecenter.com/archives/8592>

³ See: Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, University of Chicago Press, 2007.

⁴ Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", *Cultural Critique* No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), p 103.

lim countries, coupled with the dominance of the political orientalist approach, has contributed to depicting the Islamic religion as an essentialist entity impressed with violence, corruption, despotism, and lust, which further magnifies the problem of understanding the role of women in Islam in general, and in jihadist movements in particular. The stereotypical *a priori* conceptualization of the jihadist female has taken root, and her role in the view of such approaches has been reduced to being a victim of jihadist groups or exploited by them. The image of women as ‘brides’ or ‘dolls’ for jihadists, and the myth of *jihad al-nikah* (sexual jihad/temporary marriage jihad), became prevalent.⁵ All of this is based on a patriarchic masculine bias that sees that men are responsible for their actions, whereas women are passive victims or forced participants. Such assumptions “reinforce gender stereotypes. As a result, women are neither considered to be potential terrorists, nor perceived to be as dangerous as their male counterparts if they were to be involved in terrorism.”⁶

In addition to the above-mentioned premise that we wish to engage with and scrutinize its content, there are many other political and media assumptions about female jihadists and the motives behind their attraction to jihadist groups and eagerness to live under the caliphate. Among these

⁵ In the context of distorting the image of the armed Islamist opposition to the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, pro-Syrian regime Iranian and Lebanese media outlets led a widespread propaganda campaign against jihadists under the banner of *jihad al-nikah* (sexual jihad), starting in late March 2013. Two Syrian regime and Hezbollah-backed Lebanese TV stations, al-Jadid and al-Mayadeen, along with the Iranian al-‘Alam station, claimed to have uncovered a *fatwa* (religious edict) on the permissibility of ‘sexual jihad’ in Syria, allegedly issued by religious clerics who back Islamist opposition fighting groups in Syria, including the prominent Saudi preacher, Muhammad al-‘Arifi. The fabricated fatwa stated that “it is permissible for unmarried fighters, or married fighters who cannot meet with their wives, to sign religious ‘sexual marriage’ contracts with girls or divorcees, for a short period of time, sometimes not exceeding one hour, after which a divorce will take place; in order to give another fighter the opportunity to consummate.” Despite Al-‘Arifi and other clerics’ refutation and categorical rejection of such a fatwa, it nonetheless spread widely, causing a state of chaos particularly after former Tunisian Interior Minister Lutfi bin Jiddo announced before the Tunisian parliament that “females” return back to us carrying the seed of sexual contact under the name of *jihad al-nikah*, while we remain silent and motionless.” Despite a government statement issued later by the Tunisian Ministry of Women Affairs officially denying any basis to stories of ‘sexual jihad’, the myth nonetheless took hold. Its dissemination was not limited to pro-Assad TV channels and websites, but extended to pro-Syrian regime academics, including Dr. Adel Samara, who authored a book on the issue not only propagating that the phenomenon exists, but also arguing that Islamic history is laden with examples of this practice, albeit considering it a masculine patriarchal practice rather than a religious one. See: Adel Samara, *Jihad al-Nikah* “Sexual Jihad”, Beirut: Dar al-Ab‘ad, 1st edn., 2013.

⁶ “Women and Terrorist Radicalization Final Report,” *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)- Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Expert Roundtables*, Vienna, February 2013, p. 3. <http://www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true>

assumptions is linking the phenomenon with different variables, such as low levels of education, difficult economic situations, and unstable family backgrounds, all of which we attempt to examine and assess in this book.

Our journey into the world of female jihadism was not furnished with reliable and easily-accessible sources. Contrarily, the issue of sources and references in itself constituted one of the most significant obstacles we faced. We found that the sources that do discuss female jihadism with a degree of objectivity are rare, for most sources are either linked to the agendas of anti-IS and anti-jihadi Arab regimes and governments (where we find a great degree of curtailment and censorship of information about studied cases), or sources linked to jihadists themselves, which – naturally – take the character of counter-propaganda. Thus, in our case studies, we firstly resort as much as possible to primary sources, such as what the female jihadists themselves write or say, or those that are recorded in statements or documents of jihadist organizations. Secondly, we compare between the various sources, particularly the female jihadist sources and their counter-sources, to discern the issues, developments, events, and details that are substantiated across the different conflicting sources, and to identify the ones that such sources disagree on; that is, we undertake the task of screening, sifting, filtering, and comparing between these sources.

To present an in-depth study of the phenomenon of female jihadism, the book is divided into two parts, each of which practically embodies a study in itself. The first part is the theoretical study in which we address the historical transformations, ideological formations, and the developments in the status of women in jihadist discourse and in their reality in the territories of the ‘Islamic State.’ The second part consists of case studies of female jihadists, which help shed light on the phenomenon itself.

In the first part, we address the theoretical dimension of the historical, modern, and contemporary formations of female jihadism, beginning with Wahhabism, and then crossing through the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutbism, local jihadism, the Afghan Jihad era, down to the IS “Daesh” women, the female migrant jihadists, and the female suicide jihadists.

We also discuss the jihadist debates and discourse regarding the roles and obligations of women, and the objective and practical conditions that led to the transformation in such roles and obligations, leading up to the case of

female jihadists under IS regime, and the nature of the tasks they perform in propaganda, advocacy, social, and even combat aspects, and the female brigades that have been formed for these roles.

We dedicate a chapter to the study of the phenomenon of females who do, or are prepared to, carry out suicide operations, *'Ashiqat al-Shahadah* (Lovers of Martyrdom) as they call themselves. In this chapter, we address the issue from a holistic approach within the phenomenon of suicide jihadism, and its development globally. We discuss the evolution of the phenomenon in the region, beginning with the Shiite Iranian 'martyrs,' occupation-resistance in Lebanon, Palestine, and Chechnya, and how the phenomenon has been incorporated into the activities of jihadist movements that splintered from the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Finally, we address the phenomenon of female martyrdom in the context of global jihadism.

Part II of the book is dedicated to in-depth case studies of female jihadism, aimed at understanding the causes, conditions, and psychological and sociological factors that motivate women and girls to choose this path and delve into the world of jihadism.

Primarily, we search for the various 'turning points' in the lives of these females until they reach the critical and tipping point of no return. We attempt to distinguish between the practical, ideological, psychological, and sociological causes on the one hand, and on the other, the dynamics in which these turning points take place, such as recruitment and mobilization processes and so-called 'brain-washing' practices, etc.

Two important methodological determinants ought to be considered in reading this book:

First, we did not confine our study to the women who migrated to IS-controlled territories, or those who carried out suicide missions, rather we addressed the phenomenon of female jihadism in general. A basic description of a 'female jihadist' is one that believes in the Jihadi Salafist ideology, such as the *takfir* (excommunication and labeling as infidels) of regimes, belief in armed action as a means for change, and support for one or more of the prominent jihadist movements.

Procedurally, we consider that a female jihadist, whether local or foreign, is one who embodies one or more of the following indicators:

- A migrant to territories controlled by IS or other jihadist groups, or who attempts to do so.
- A female who openly declares her belief in the ideas of one or more of jihadist groups.
- A female who participates or attempts to participate in terrorist or suicide operations.
- A female who was arrested for such attempts, or for her activities in support of a jihadist group.

The second determinant is the need to distinguish between ‘Islamic feminism’ and ‘jihadist feminism,’ with feminism used loosely here to denote female activism for the cause of females in each respective context. Islamic feminism is distinctly different from the jihadist version in context, conditions, viewpoints, and approach. Islamic feminism considers itself as ‘rising above’ the strategies used by either of its two mutually exclusive adversaries: Western feminism, which claims universality of its mission, and fundamentalist Islamism, both of which are viewed as championing ‘identity strategies’ (*identitaire*). Islamic feminists, on their part, consider themselves representatives of an ‘alternative path,’ presenting an alternative discourse to the Western discourse that wants to impose an absolute model on an Islamic world, which in turn responds to this attack by “introverting into the position of remonstrative identity.”⁷

On the other hand, female jihadism – like its male jihadist counterpart – considers the intellectual reasoning of Islamic feminism to be blasphemous, apostate thinking that deviates from the fundamentals of Islam. There is no essential or practical dispute about this within female jihadist circles, which emphasize that the foundational and decisive fundamentals of Islam, found in the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, define particular roles and obligations for both men and women that are not open for interpretation or reasoning. Female jihadism identifies ‘globalized’ Western feminism with the strategy of invasion, occupation, control, and hegemony, and accuses it of presenting ideological justifications under the banner of liberalization

⁷ Dalal al-Bazri, “Al-Nisawiyah al-Islamiyyah aw al-Jihad al-Naw’i: Al-Mar’a al-Muslima Tanshat fi al-Gharb, La Yughriqaha Namuthajuh wa Tudin al-Qira’a al-Abawiyah” “Islamist Feminism or Gender Jihad: The Muslim Woman is Active in the West. She is Not Submerged into Its Model and Condemns the Patriarchic Reading”, *Al-Hayat*, January 22, 2007, issue number 15998, <https://goo.gl/ptgqho>

and rights. In this context, Lila Abu Lughod questions the feminist approach to countering terrorism, she states: “More pressing for me was why the Muslim woman in general, and the Afghan woman in particular, were so crucial to this cultural mode of explanation, which ignored the complex entanglements in which we are all implicated, in sometimes surprising alignments. Why were these female symbols being mobilized in this ‘War against Terrorism’ in a way they were not in other conflicts?”⁸

Islamic feminism includes a wide spectrum of orientations that seek to liberate and empower women in accordance with interpretive readings that are anchored in secular and religious authoritative references.⁹ ‘Jihadist feminism,’ on the other hand, is opposed to the two camps at once (Western and Islamic feminism) as an act of reclaiming an identity that faces external invasion and internal destruction. It considers the Islamic feminist experience that is active in the West as an indication of its imperialist connections that seek to strip away the Islamic identity. In the Western spaces of freedom, Islamic feminists found a wide avenue to express positions and experiences of Muslim females who migrated from Muslim to Western societies, European and American, carrying with them from their home countries and their former local or national environments thoughts, traditions, and experiences that engage with and assimilate into the new life, after which “feminist” inclinations develop, ones that reject the “cultural heritage” of their upbringing, justifying and vindicating this rejection in antagonistic positions related to theology or philosophy. Among the prominent representatives of such an inclination is the Bangladeshi Taslima Nasreen, Ugandan Irshad Manji, Somali Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Turkish Necla Kelek.¹⁰

⁸ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, September 2002. <http://org.uib.no/smi/seminars/Pensum/Abu-Lughod.pdf>

⁹ On the secular-religious debate and Islamic feminism, American academic Miriam Cooke discusses the problematic premise posed by Iranian academic Haideh Moghissi in her book *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*, and others who are skeptical of the intellectual and political viability of Islamic feminism. Cooke suggests that such arguments “have juxtaposed two mutually exclusive rigid ideologies, the one secular and the other fundamentalist and misogynist, and they have correctly concluded that an identity based on bringing these two incompatibles together is impossible.” Cooke, in turn, argues that “Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent contextually determined strategic self-positioning. This location confirms belonging in a religious community while allowing for activism on behalf of and with other women. This linking of apparently mutually exclusive identities can become a radical act of subversion.” Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature*, Routledge, 2000, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ See: Fahmi Jad'an, *Kharij al-Sirb: Baith fi al-Nisawiyah al-Islamiyyah al-Rafidah wa Ighra' at al-Hurriyah* “Off-Course: A Study of Rejectionist Islamic Feminism and the Allure of Freedom”, Arab network for Research and Publication, 2nd edn., 2012, p. 25.

This book does not intend to examine the epistemological principles guiding Islamic feminism or delve into their differences, agendas, strategies, objectives, and struggles in representing the Islamic identity, or its recognition of the identities of the ‘other,’ its belief in civilizational differences, and its dialectics on universality versus particularity. Instead, our focus here is on one of the forms of Islamic ‘feminist’ orientations that is the most adherent and parochial towards the abstract Islamic religious identity, according to a Salafist reading that finds the concept of *gender* to be an alien civilizational product that is in contradiction with essential Islamic beliefs, laws, and ethics.

Part I

Female Jihadism: Historical Transformations and Ideological Formations

Introduction

Ever since the ‘Islamic State’ organization took over vast swathes of land in Iraq and Syria, occupied the two key cities of al-Raqqā and Mosul, and declared establishing the Caliphate State, it has exhibited a shocking degree of both physical and symbolic violence. It imposed a rigid and brutal system of governance on the local populations, and reintroduced a version of classical Islamic rulings based on a penal code that includes punishments such as flogging, stoning, and amputation of limbs and heads. IS applied the provisions of *dhimmi* (non-Muslim minorities) and imposed on them a poll tax, not to mention taking non-Muslim women captive, imposing on all women Islamic attire of the *hijab* (head covering) and the *niqab* (face veil), in addition to the complete segregation of sexes.

IS adopts traditional Salafism as its jurisprudential religious authoritative reference, which is a male-dominated patriarchal authority par excellence. One of the major problematic issues facing the study of the phenomenon of female jihadism is understanding the causes that drive particular categories of females from around the world to sacrifice everything and face serious risks in a bid to migrate and join this organization, despite it facing a war on all fronts and a military and media offensive from all angles, on the one hand, and despite its imposition of a policy to establish a patriarchal society that has no place for equality, freedoms, or full citizenship rights, let alone women’s rights, on the other hand.

The course of evolution of jihadism, within the colonial and post-colonial framework and the rise of the nation state, reveals that the allure of ‘caliphate utopianism’ is a crucial factor in creating an awareness of the need to restore an Islamic religious identity. If it is feasible, in this context, to speak of ‘jihadist feminism’ – notwithstanding the particularity of the term feminism in its semantic field and practical usage – we find that female jihadists like their male jihadist counterparts cast the label of *kufir* (unbelief) on the postulations of Islamic feminism, considering them to be subject to

the conditions of the globalized Western feminism that seek to strip away differential identities. Thus, it is no coincidence that the emergence of the phenomenon of female jihadism – and along with it a type of ‘jihadist feminism’ – coincided with the emergence of the term ‘Islamic feminism’ in the early 1990s.

The formations of the ideological identity of female jihadism find their roots in the Wahhabi version of Salafism and in Qutbian-Muslim Brotherhood ideology. And, while the frame of reference of Wahhabi female jihadism emerged amidst an absence of anti-colonial nationalism, the other authoritative reference of female jihadism was born of the womb of colonialism and imperialism, which took shape with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Islamic caliphate. This second authoritative reference, in its Muslim Brotherhood influence, crystallized later with the thought of Sayyid Qutb and Abu al-A`la al-Mawdudi.

The various ways in which women get involved and participate in jihadist groups in the Arab and Muslim worlds and among women from Muslim communities in Europe, the US, and other countries, constitute a puzzling phenomenon, disturbing and magnetizing in tandem. With the rise of IS, allurements and recruitment of both sexes increased exponentially. While the involvement of female jihadists in the ranks of Al-Qaeda was limited, and their roles marginal, the era of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria witnessed a remarkable increase in involvement of women, signifying transformations and major changes in the traditional role of jihadist females in the future.

Women play a major role in IS propaganda, recognize the importance of their function and role, and work effectively within a media strategy that is founded on a holistic and totalitarian religious vision that espouses the caliphate system. These women are not the naïve victims stereotyped by orientalist discourse. Women’s propaganda under IS is founded on conceptualizations and ideas that speak to the sentiment of the Muslim audience, such as the dream and utopia of a caliphate that would establish rights, justice, equality, and dignity, and bestows a sense of superiority; this is because the basic narrative of IS on the global level is based on an identity premise. IS represents a case of violent Islamic protest to restore the Islamic identity, one that opposes and fights the imperialist West that – in its view – wages a Crusade to eradicate Islam and erase the Islamic identity.

On the regional level, the identity basis of IS' propaganda is founded on sectarianism. The regional narrative on identity is based on opposing and confronting Iranian Shiite sectarianism that battles Sunni sects and seeks to create a Shiite regional hegemony. IS propaganda presents the organization as a defensive shield for Sunnis in counteracting the Iranian expansionist inclination and its militias that desecrate the rights of Sunnis in Iraq and Syria, and persecute, marginalize, and combat the Sunni populations on Shiite sectarian pretexts.

IS' propaganda stretches across the other Sunni Arab and Muslim states. On the local level, this propaganda is founded on the belief that these countries do not represent true Sunni Islam, but are rather secular states; infidels and apostates that have rejected Islam and neglected its principles. These states, in the view of IS, have come to fight their own Muslim populations, ally with the 'Crusaders,' and have failed to confront the threat of the 'Safavid' Shiites.

Thus, we find that IS' propaganda is anchored in a milieu of prevailing ideas and beliefs in Arab Muslim societies that are aggrieved by a sense of humiliation and loss of identity. These societies lay the blame on the West, Iran, and the local regimes for the perpetual state of defeat and failure. In counter, IS' propaganda offers the promise of the return of the utopian caliphate that is not only achievable, but would also restore the historical glory of Islam.

The past few years demonstrated that major transformations are taking place in the outlook on women's roles in jihadist activities and their direct involvement in them, in a manner that shatters the stereotypical view of female jihadism. It is now commonly recognized that "women can play many roles with respect to violent radicalization with many typologies such as 'sympathizer, mobilizer, preventer, perpetrator' or 'participants, enablers, and preventers'."¹¹ Studies on reasons why women become radicalized towards engaging in violent extremism suggest that "most of the same factors that prompt men to become terrorists drive women in the same way."¹²

¹¹ "Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan," Technical Report, *UN Women and the Jordanian National Commission for Women*, Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development - Rased and Search for Common Ground, March 2016, p. 11. <http://bit.ly/2ynp5uF>

¹² Ibid.

This section of the book discusses the theoretical aspect associated with the evolution of female jihadism and the incorporation of women into jihadist activities. It addresses the debates and discussions that take place within jihadist circles regarding the role of the Muslim woman and the spaces in which she is supposed to operate. It looks into the conditions and factors that led to the transformations in perspective on incorporating women into jihadist activism, and the transition from women's traditional and secondary roles to prominent and indispensable ones, which are transformations that coincided with the retreat in Al-Qaeda's presence and influence within jihadist circles and the rise of the Islamic State organization, which on its part manifested great ability in attracting and recruiting women and girls, and capitalizing on this ability.

Chapter One

Historical Formations of Female Jihadism

“O Muslim women! Be Aware of extravagance, for it is the enemy of jihad and the cause of ruin of the human soul. Beware of luxuries, and suffice yourselves with basic necessities. Raise your children and instill in them toughness, manliness, heroism, and jihad. Let your homes be dens for lions, not chicken farms in which your children are fattened only to be slaughtered by tyrants. Instill in the hearts of your children the love of jihad, chivalry, and the battlefields. Experience the problems of the Muslim Ummah, and try to live one day a week – at least – the life resembling that of refugees and the Mujahideen, whose sustenance does not exceed dry bread and sips of tea.”

Abdullah Azzam

The ideology of female jihadism evolved over a series of historical stages, political conditions, and social transformations. The foundational roots of female jihadism were born of the womb of colonialism and imperialism experienced by the Arab and Muslim worlds starting in the late eighteenth century, leading to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate in 1924. Jihadist ideology emerged to confront Western occupation and to safeguard the Islamic identity. The jihadist woman became one of the most important symbols of this identity, carrying out the fundamental role of bearing children, and raising them on a 'jihadi education.' As jihadist ideology came to take a purely local character in the context of post-colonial regimes, particularly with the emergence of authoritative dictatorial political systems in Arab nation states, jihadists priorities geared towards combating the 'near enemy,' represented by these regimes. Women, in the meantime, maintained their traditional roles as ideological supporters and facilitators. But with the escalating intensity of the Cold War and the eruption of the Afghanistan front in 1979, a new trend of female jihadism developed, particularly amid the proliferation of fatwas (religious edicts) that called for supporting the networks of solidarity jihad (*al-jihad al-tadhamuni*).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of its communist system in 1989, the focus of jihadism transitioned towards the global scene, based on prioritizing fighting the 'distant enemy,' in reaction to the dynamics of globalization. Al-Qaeda emerged as the jihadist champion that aims to get rid of Western hegemony over Arab and Muslims lands. It espoused an anti-globalization ideological discourse, and adopted a combat strategy based on *jihad al-nikaya* (vexation and causing harm) and confronting American military globalism; a path that culminated with the attacks on September 11th, 2001. During this stage, female jihadism went through processes of debate, ideologization, definition and redefinition of the role of women in jihadist movements.

The era of the US occupation of Iraq, beginning in 2003, is a significant stage in the development of jihadist ideology, whereby the local and the global jihadist dimensions were integrated, bridging the gap between advocates of jihad against the ‘near enemy’ and those of the ‘distant enemy.’ Al-Qaeda developed new strategies in expanding and spreading its ideology and influence, and repositioned itself within the Arab and Muslim worlds by integrating and intertwining its global jihadist mission with the local dimension. The jihadist tactics were no longer confined to vexation and causing harm to the enemy, but rather broadened to seek control and consolidate power. During this stage, women within jihadist movements began to develop an adaptive vision, rebelling against their traditional roles by engaging in various jihadist activities ranging from ideological propaganda to carrying out suicide missions.

In the shadows of a short-lived Arab Spring that was sparked in late 2010 and intensified in early 2011, Al-Qaeda underwent ideological adaptations that led to more reliance on the concept of *nusra* (support) that coincided with the escalation of the wave of peaceful popular revolutions. Images of face-veiled jihadist women participating in protests and demonstrations became a familiar scene. However, the militarization of the revolutions, scheming of coups and empowering counter-revolutionary forces – within less than two years – contributed to restoring to Al-Qaeda its appeal and influence. The Arab Spring soon transformed into a jihadist spring. Global jihadist movements invested in the profound transformations witnessed in the region, and reinforced their presence and expansion. The regional jihadist branches of Al-Qaeda, which had evolved historically from local jihadist groups, became more liberated from the centralized and decentralized jihadist conditions and requirements. There emerged new networks and groups that shared in common with Al-Qaeda the Jihadi Salafist ideological belonging and the long-term aims of establishing the Islamic caliphate. Globalized jihadism became more powerful, more attractive, and more wide-spread, particularly in light of the forceful return of authoritative regimes in the region in an even more tyrannical and suppressive fashion, coupled with the sharp escalation of sectarian conflicts.

In the post-Arab Spring era of counter-revolutions, Al-Qaeda’s influence grew in vast areas in many places: in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Sinai, and the sub-Saharan and Sahel regions. Nevertheless, global jihadism experienced a schism across two dangerous approaches: the first adheres to

the traditional Al-Qaeda agenda led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. This approach prioritizes fighting the distant enemy represented by the West in general and the United States in particular, considering it the protector of Arab authoritative regimes and patron of its strategic ally, Israel. Naturally, this approach seeks to establish the Islamic caliphate and implement Islamic law, eventually.

The second approach is led by the Iraqi branch loosely affiliated with Al-Qaeda, which evolved into the so-called 'Islamic State,' led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Its agenda is based on prioritizing the near enemy, counteracting Iranian influence and expansion in the region, and combating the 'Safavid project,' as they describe it. The religious, sectarian (Sunni-Shiite) identity basis of this approach became the main catalyst behind the Iraqi branch's behavior, whereas the geo-political interest-driven basis remained the catalyst that drives Al-Qaeda's central leadership. The ultimate objective of consolidating power to implement the Shari`ah and restore the caliphate remained a manifest goal in common between the two approaches. The role of women, however, differed between the two, with women under IS becoming key effective components of the jihadist project, and their roles varied from ideological and logistical support, to leading the *hisba* (morality enforcement in public places), and participation combat operations.

During these stages, the issue of women was a prominent question for discussion and debate within Islamic and jihadist circles, whether in their discourse and literature, or in the practical roles that women began to play in Islamist activism in general, and jihadist activism in particular. This chapter seeks to trace the position of the modern and contemporary Islamist current, generally, towards women's participation in religious and jihadist activities. It examines this position from the modern Wahhabi Salafist perspective, then the *Ikhwani* (Muslim Brotherhood) perspective particularly in the thought of Sayyid Qutb, and down the jihadism chronology towards local *takfiri* and jihadist groups such as Gama' at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, the Shabab Muhammad organization headed by Saleh Sariya, al-Tali`a al-Muqatila (the fighting vanguards) in Syria, and the Gama`at al-Jihad and the al-Gamaa`a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, followed by the Afghan Jihad era.

In our examination of these decades, we are keen to clarify two main issues: the first is theoretical; how did such trends view women and their presumed roles? And how did they articulate them in their ideological discourse and literature? The second is a practical issue, related to the actual role played by women during these activist and jihadist experiences.

Doctrinal and Epistemological Frames of Reference

Before commencing to review the literature and experiences of the phenomenon of female jihadism, it is important to note that the frame of reference for contemporary female jihadism is based on the major Sunni *Fiqhi* (jurisprudential) sources and its main schools of thought: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali, particularly at the level of theoretical ideology, practical experience, and the nature and limits of the role of females. These sources are nearly identical insofar as the provisions related to female jihadism, and rely principally on the accounts of female companions of the Prophet and women from early succeeding generations (the *Salaf*) who participated in various ways in Muslim wars and conquests, primarily as supporters, but also as fighters in exceptional cases. There is broad consensus among the jurisprudential schools on the impermissibility of women participating in combat in the case of offensive jihad, while there is leniency, preference, and at times obligation in cases of defensive jihad. Sunni sources do convey examples of the role of women during wars in Islamic history, including various logistical roles in boosting men's fervor for jihad, nursing and medical assistance, care and support, transporting water and weapons, preparing food for soldiers, guarding prisoners, and other non-combat roles.¹³

On the other hand, there is broad agreement on the permissibility of females partaking in combat in the case of defensive jihad. Some opinions consider it an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) on all women who are able to take up arms in the case of invasion by an enemy where men alone are incapable of repelling the enemy, or in the case that Muslim leaders or Imams call for readiness under high alert. In such circumstances, many Islamic jurists made it permissible for a woman to partake in jihad without the permission of her husband or guardian, under the pretext that the right of God is superior to the right of the husband or parents, in these dire circumstances.¹⁴

¹³ For more details on jurisprudential rulings on the different roles of women in jihad in the discourse of traditional Sunni jurisprudential schools of thought, see: 'Aliya Ahmad Saleh Dayf Allah, *Ahkam Jihad al-Mar'a fi al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah wa Suwaruhu al-Mu'asira* "The Rules of Women's Jihad in Islamic Shari'ah Law and its Contemporary Forms", Master's Thesis, Faculty of Higher Education, University of Jordan, 2004, <http://elibrary.medi.u.edu.my/books/MAL11744.pdf>

¹⁴ On the issue of women's participation in jihad without the permission of a guardian, and the perspectives of jurisprudential schools of thought on the issue, see: Aqwal al-'Ualama' fi Mas'alat Jihad al-Daf' bidun Ithn al-Walidayn "Scholars' Opinions on the Issue of Defensive Jihad Without Parents' Permission", Shabakat al-Alukah, March 2012, <http://majles.alukah.net/t101402/>

Books on classical and modern Islamic history provide examples from the biographies of female companions of the Prophet who exemplify the model and guidance for female jihadism, as proof of the sincerity and devotion of women to the Islamic *Da'wa* (religious call, advocacy and preaching) and to Prophet Muhammad's message.¹⁵ These models would become icons for contemporary female jihadists, and their names would be given to female combat brigades and female jihadist literature and magazines. Historians affirm that a number of women participated in the wars of conquest and other hostilities, and relay stories of their courage and keenness to protect Islam.¹⁶

With the emergence of the globalized version of jihad, since the establishment of Al-Qaeda and later IS, and amid growing female involvement in jihadist movements in the Sunni Muslim world, various Sunni counter-campaigns emerged that rejected women's engagement in fighting, and considered it a departure from the requisites of Sunni schools of thought

¹⁵ The historian Al-Dhahabi reports in his book *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* "Biographies of Prominent Nobles" that Nusaybah Umm 'Amarah al-Ansariyyah witnessed the pledge of Al-Aqabah, and the battles of Uhud, Hunayn, and al-Yamama, and had participated fiercely in the fighting, and had lost her arm in the jihad. Other females were also renowned for their courage in battle, such as Umm Saleem. It is reported in the book *Hayat al-sahabah* "The Life of the Prophet's Companions" that Umm Saleem entered the battlefield on the day of Hunayn with a dagger. Other female jihadists include al-Rabi' bint Mu'awath, and Asma' bint Yazid al-Sakan, known as Umm Salama, who participated in the battle of al-Yarmuk (15 AH) and reportedly killed nine Roman soldiers with a pole that was supporting her tent. Furthermore, Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar reported in his book *Al-Isabah fi Ma'rifat al-Sahabah* "Correctness in Learning about the Prophet's Companions" that Safiyyah bint 'Abd al-Mutalib entered the battlefield on the day of Uhud as fighters were retreating, and she struck their faces with her spear. Ibn Hajar adds that Umm Hakim bint al-Harith joined the jihad against the Romans with her husband 'Ikrimah. On her part, Al-Khansaa' bint 'Amru al-Salamiyyah represents a symbol of sacrifice, as it was mentioned in the book *Al-Isabah* that she witnessed the war of Al-Qadissiyah with her four sons. When the news of her four sons' death reached her, she reportedly said "All praise be to God who honored me with their death, I pray to my Lord to unite me with them in his mercy." The books on biographies of early generations of Muslims are loaded with the stories of many other women who took part in jihad. See: Yusuf al-'Ayeri, *Dawr al-Nisaa' fi Jihad al-A'daa'* "The Role of Women in the Jihad against the Enemies", *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_9160.html

¹⁶ There are numerous contemporary books on the opinions of Sunni jurisprudential schools of thought on women's participation in jihad and fighting, including, for example: Wahbeh Zuhaili, *Aathar al-Harb fi al-Fiqh al-Islami* "The Effects of War in Islamic Jurisprudence", Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 3rd edn., 1998; Muhammad Khair Haykal, *Al-Jihad wa al-Qital fi al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyyah* "Jihad and Fighting in Islamic Politics", Beirut: Dar al-Bayariq, 2nd edn., 1996; Ali ibn Nafee' al-'Alyani, *Ahamiyyat al-Jihad fi Nashr al-Da'wa al-Islamiyyah wa al-Rad 'ala al-Tawa'if al-Daallah fih* "The Importance of Jihad in Spreading the Islamic Call and in Responding to the Misguided Sects in it", Riyadh: Dar Teebah, 1985; Saleh al-Lehidan, *Al-Jihad fi al-Islam bayna al-Talab wa al-Difa'* "Offensive and Defensive Jihad in Islam", Riyadh: Dar al-Shumai'i, 5th edn., 1997; Abd al-Malik al-Barrak, *Rudud 'ala Abatil wa Shubuhath hawla al-Jihad* "Responses to False Ideas and Doubts regarding Jihad", Denmark: al-Nur for Islamic Media, 1st edn., 1997; and Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam: A Reader* (Princeton Series on the Middle East), Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996.

and a move into the Kharijite doctrinal school.¹⁷ Comparisons were made revealing similarities between the Kharijite female leader Ghazalah and ‘the Lady of the Al-Qaeda’ Umm al-Rabab.¹⁸ The Kharijites became synonymous with rebellion against political authority, and were famous for female active participation in fighting, such as the *al-Shabibiyya* subsect, which persisted for a long period of time in rebellion and disobedience against the Umayyad authority of the Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and his *Wali* (Governor) al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi. For the *al-Shabibiyya*, Shabib was not the sole leader, his wife Ghazalah was an authoritative leader as well, and his mother Umm Shabib also wielded political influence. Ghazalah’s troops reportedly entered Kufa, forcing its Wali al-Hajjaj to retreat. Such female engagement was grounds for Shabib to opine a woman’s right to political leadership, even her eligibility for the position of caliph. The Kharijites, in general, gave ample leeway for women to partake in political and military affairs since the early Umayyad period. Historians also tell of all-female armies in some Kharijite sects.¹⁹

Perhaps one of the ironies in the case of the ‘Islamic State’ organization, which essentially espouses a Wahhabi frame of reference, is that it is labelled by other Muslims as Kharijites, which is the same label that was casted on the Wahhabi movement, by its opponents, since its emergence in the mid-eighteenth century due to its excessiveness in *takfir* of individuals

¹⁷ The *Khawarij* (Kharijites) is one of the historical Islamic sects that appeared in the first century of Islam. It represents a violent rebellious movement that was a source of insurrection against the state in Islamic history for hundreds of years. They extended their political influence across vast areas of the Islamic lands, including the Arab east and west, and areas of Oman, Hadramaout (Yemen), Zanzibar, and surrounding east African regions. Remnants of their ideology is found today in the Ibadī school of thought that continues to be prevalent in these regions. The Kharijites splintered into many groups, most prominently were al-Najdat and the Azariqa. In his book *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* “Sects and Groups”, Al-Shahrastani described Kharijites as “all those who revolted against the true *imam* “leader” agreed upon by the overall Muslim community.” Abu al-Hasan al-Ash`ari limited their definition to those who revolted against Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib. Al-Ash`ari says in his book *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin* “Islamic Articles”, “The reason they were called *khawarij* is because they revolted (outstepped, *khawaja* in Arabic) against Ali ibn Abi Talib.” For more details on the history of the Kharijites, their splintered groups, and their ideology, see: Latifa al-Bakay, *Harakat al-Khawarij: Nash’atuha wa Tatawuruha ila Nihayat al-`Ahd al-Umarvi* “The Kharijite Movement: Its Emergence and Development until the End of the Umayyad Dynasty”, Beirut: Dar al-Tali`a, 1st edn., 2001.

¹⁸ See, for example, Umaymah al-Khamis, “Ghazalah wa Umm al-Rabab,” *Al-Riyadh*, Saudi Arabia, November 11, 2015, <http://www.alriyadh.com/1099379>

¹⁹ See: Mohammad Alesa, “Thawrat Shabib ibn Yazid al-Khariji” “The Revolt of the Kharijite Shabib ibn Yazid”, *An-Najah University Journal for Research* (Humanities), Nablus, Palestine, vol. 28(11), 2014, p. 1, https://journals.najah.edu/media/journals/full_texts/6_VJ6UNHp.pdf

and states, such as their *takfir* of the Ottoman rule for “departing” (*khuruq*) from Islam.²⁰ The irony extends to the fact that IS, today, accuses the Saudi state (which was historically founded upon alliance with Wahhabism) of being infidels and Kharijites, for departing from Islam and deviating from the path of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as well as for allying with ‘infidels’ and ‘polytheists,’ and abandoning implementation of Shari’ah law; which happen to be the same accusations with which Wahhabi scholars charged the Ottoman state and other Muslim leaderships.²¹

The Role of Women in the Wahhabi Salafism Version

Despite the controversy and debate over the intellectual identity and the religious reference of contemporary jihadism, and the quest to delegitimize its claims of Sunni Salafi identity in the context of propaganda and ideological warfare, yet it remains that the frames of reference upon which global jihadism is based are none other than the Sunni references, irrespective of whether the jihadist reading of such references is literal, selective, or interpretive.

The roots of contemporary Islamic political movements, in general, are found in religious references rooted primarily in the Salafi school of thought and its various trends. Moreover, the global jihadist intellectual premise is intimately entwined with the heritage of both the Wahhabi Saudi Salafi version and the *Ikhwan*-Qutbian Salafi version. Such intellectual roots are found in the legacy of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791) and later Wahhabi developments with the movement of Juhayman al-Otaybi (which seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979), and also with

²⁰ Many scholars consider the Wahhabis to be Kharijites, including a group of scholars who were contemporaries of the Wahhabi *da'wa* at the time, and a number of contemporary scholars, including Ibn ‘Abidin, Al-Sawi, Muhsin ibn Abd al-Karim, Ibn Afaliq, and others. For more details, see: Abd al-Aziz ibn Muhammad ibn Ali al-Abd al-Latif, *Da'awa al-Munawi'een li Da'wat al-Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: ‘Ard wa Naqd* “The Claims of Opponents of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s Call: Presentation and Critique”, Riyadh: Dar Teebah, 1989, pp. 178-183.

²¹ For more details on the Wahhabi movement, their stern dealings with – and *takfir* – of others, and some of the Wahhabi scholars’ sayings in the ruling against the Ottoman state, the Aal al-Rashid in Ha’el, and the Hashemite Sharifs in Hijaz, among others, as apostates and disbelievers; see: Abdullah al-Maliki, “Al-Wahhabiyyah wa Ikhwan man Ta` Allah wa Da`ish.. Hal A`ada al-Tarikh Nafsah?” “Wahhabism and the Brothers of those who Obey Allah and Daesh (IS).. Has History Repeated Itself?”, *Al-Taqreer Electronic Journal*, August 14, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2AtAA4i>

the legacy of Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, and with the rise of the radical Muslim Brotherhood version with the legacy of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).

When Muhammad ibn Sa`ud, a prince in Najd and ruler of Dir`iyah in 1744, decided to back the religious revivalist call of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab,²² the region known today as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consisted of a group of independent small towns and villages and Bedouin tribes. Conflict was rampant between towns ruled by rival princes, and between tribesmen vying for tribal leadership. At that time, 'un-Islamic' practices were prevalent among the people of Najd, who took to superstitious practices and tomb worshiping considered by Muslims to be deviations from genuine Islam. Tribal laws prevailed over most of the regions and the Bedouin tribes, and customary laws governed the people living in cities, while the law of Islamic Shari`ah had little influence or primacy. Tribes invaded one another, and villages ransacked each other, meanwhile, Bedouins relied on highway robbery, attacking and looting trade caravans and pilgrims heading to Mecca.

In this environment, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab called for a return to the pure unadulterated Islam based on the Holy Qur`an and Sunnah of the Prophet, and guided by the doctrinal ideology of the Hanbali school of Islamic thought. With Ibn Sa`ud's backing, the region of Najd embraced and championed the Wahhabi call, and while followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's *da`wa* came to be known as 'Wahhabis,' they nonetheless call themselves *Murwahhi-*

²² Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791): He was born in `Uyayna, a village in Najd, where he received his early education before moving to Al-Madinah al-Munawarah where he studied under the tutelage of religious sheikhs there. He spent some time in Basra and Baghdad before returning to `Uyayna where he began spreading his *da`wa* call to reforming religion, influenced by the thought of jurists such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jazwiyyah, who followed the school of thought founded by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious movement received support from the prince of Dir`iyah in Najd, Muhammad ibn Sa`ud, who embraced Abd al-Wahhab's call for the need to return to the 'original purity' of Islam and spread the call throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The movement spread to regions in the Levant and Iraq, prompting the Ottoman Sultan to ask the governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha to fight the followers of Abd al-Wahhab. The influence of Abd al-Wahhab's movement was constricted and limited to Najd after bitter battles with Pasha's military campaigns on the Peninsula. The influence of 'Wahhabis,' however, resumed in 1841 with the withdrawal of Egyptian forces, and were able – under the political leadership of Aal Sa`ud – to seize control and lay the foundations of the modern Saudi state. Abd al-Wahhab's legacy continues to have influence until today, through his numerous writings, including famous books such as *Kitab al-Tawhid fima Yajib min Haq Allah `ala al-`Abeed* "The Book of Unification of God", *Kitab Al-Kaba'ir* "The Book on Grave Sins", and *Kashf al-Shubhat* "Clarifications of the Doubts", among others.

din or *Ahl al-Tawhid* (monotheists, people who espouse the Oneness of God).²³

The solid alliance between the ‘pen’ and the ‘sword’ contributed to a state of security, authority, and consolidation of power in the centralized government in Najd, where Shari‘ah law came to be implemented. The two power houses, the Aal al-Sheikh (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s family and descendants) and the Aal Sa‘ud, shared both victories and defeats. By 1811, the successive military victories in the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Iraq alarmed the Ottoman leadership, which sent its governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, on a military campaign to counteract the Wahhabi force. After successive attempts, Ottoman-backed forces succeeded in defeating Wahhabi forces in 1819 and destroyed their capital in Dar‘iyyah. After a brief reversion to tribal conflict in Najd amidst absence of centralized authority, the influence of the Wahhabi reformative call was revived in the Second Saudi State (1824–1891), and was further reinforced with the founding of the Third Saudi State, which declared the unity of the territories in 1932 under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman Aal Sa‘ud. The third state effectively became the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which “distinguished itself by creating a stable and durable realm that successfully incorporated Hijaz, ‘Asir and Hasa, in addition to the central province of Najd.”²⁴

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not devote any particular book to the issue of Muslim women, as is the case with the literature of traditional Sunni Fiqh in general, but only referred to the topic from within jurisprudential issues. In practical matters, Wahhabism is firm on the principle of gender separation and segregation. But in doctrinal issues related to roles and obligations, the Wahhabi Salafi doctrine addresses both males and females alike, affirming the principles of *tawhid*, countering *shirk* (associating deities with God), and *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* (loyalty to Muslims and disavowal of non-Muslims), and emphasizing the concept of identity, confronting causes of internal strife and rejecting the influence of foreign Westernization. Wahhabism broadens the scope and importance of jihad, a matter that ultimately led to disputes between followers of Wahhabism and the ruling Aal Sa‘ud family of the Third Saudi State, which embraced the nation-state political context at the expense of the primacy of jihad. The latter became one of the prime issues that Saudi jihadists, and global jihadist movements such as Al-Qaeda

²³ John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa‘ud’s Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Saudi Kingdom 1910–1930*, Leiden: Brill, 1978.

²⁴ Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn., 2010, p.1.

and IS, would hold against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, considering it to have deviated from Wahhabi principles.²⁵

Wahhabism has strong influence on the ideology of IS, which implements in the territories under its control policies and practices akin to those carried out by the early Wahhabis. The works of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the Najdi *da`wa`ulama* (scholars) are adopted as main references in religious curricula taught in IS-controlled territories.²⁶ IS adopts a strict standard of conduct based on literal implementation of Wahhabi principles, manifested in harsh rulings against those who do not exhibit proper religious behavior, as in the case of arriving late for prayer or practicing unlawful behavior such as smoking, singing, shaving beards, lengthening of male dress, and women's lack of commitment to modesty in dress and conduct, and so forth. IS, like the Wahhabis, deal with such 'deviations' by beatings, flogging, or imprisonment.²⁷

Wahhabi influence related to women is not confined to the ideological, religious, and jurisprudential authority, rather is also manifested in ingraining this influence, in practice, through bolstering a religious-political power solidified through kinship, intermarriage, and *`asabiyya* (solidarity and fervent loyalty) relationships. In fact, "the Saudis administer the country like a 'house,' in Claude Lévi-Strauss's sense of the term. The cohesion of such a house is based mainly on personal ties that are generally expressed in the language of kinship (whether real or fictive, biological or spiritual). In the Saudi case, these ties appear to play a crucial role in social mobility to the degree that certain claims of law, status, and power depend, in Alfred Radcliffe-Brown's phrase, 'on a network of genealogical relations.' Ibn Khaldun, for his part, used the term *`asabiyya* – that is, the spirit of kinship in the family or tribe – to describe this phenomenon."²⁸

²⁵ For more details on the Saudi Wahhabi Jihadist movements that oppose the rule of Aal Sa`ud, considering them to deviate from true Wahhabism, including the movement of Juhayman al-Otaybi, Al-Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), see: David Commins, *The Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia* (Library of Modern Middle East Studies), New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 155-204.

²⁶ Jacob Olidort, „Inside the Caliphate's Classroom: Textbooks, Guidance Literature, and Indoctrination Methods of the Islamic State,“ *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus 147, August 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus147-Olidort-5.pdf>

²⁷ See: Abdullah al-Maliki, *Al-Wahhabiyyah wa Ikhwan..* „Wahhabism and the Brothers...“, op. cit.

²⁸ Nabil Mouline (trans. Ethan S. Rundell), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 12.

In this context, the house of Abd al-Wahhab (Aal al-Shaykh) and the house of Aal Sa`ud were connected through ties of intermarriage (read: role of women) as an effective tool for solidifying and imposing power. After moving back to his home town of `Uyayna, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab married al-Jawhara bint Abd Allah ibn al-Mu`ammar, a woman from an influential family who was the aunt of the Emir of `Uyayna, Othman ibn Hamad ibn Mu`ammar.²⁹ Historical sources indicate that al-Jawhara played an important role in strengthening the relationship between her husband and her uncle Emir Othman and other influential figures.³⁰

The relationship between the two houses, religious power and political power, continued and strengthened over time. Conscious of the ideological importance of the Hanbali-Wahhabi tradition, King Abd al-Aziz (1902-1953) “hastened to resume the historic alliance that had united his predecessors with the ulama. The reactivated symbiotic relationship between the political power and the religious authority was expressed in the language of kinship: Abd al-Aziz married the daughter of Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Latif Al al-Shaykh, the head of the clerical corps.”³¹

The Hanbali-Wahhabi heritage, along with its practical applications in the historical space of Saudi Arabia, constitute the basis for contemporary radical jihadist movements, like IS, in their perspective on women. Separation of the sexes is elemental, and according to Wahhabi ulama, a woman’s natural place is in the home, and her modesty is essential. Shaykh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baaz says: “You are well aware, O Muslims, of the scourge sweeping many countries in terms of women’s adornment and unveiling “their

²⁹ According to Ibn Bishr, “The Sheikh “Ibn Abd al-Wahhab” moved to `Uyayna, which was under the leadership of Othman ibn Hamad ibn Mu`ammar, who welcomed and honored him, and married him to al-Jawhara bint Abdullah ibn Mu`ammar, who was Prince `Othman’s aunt. It appears this was the Sheikh’s first marriage, because before his father’s death, he moved between Hijaz, Basra, and al-Ahsa’ seeking knowledge. His trusted biographers did not mention that he had married before moving to `Uyayna. The issue mentioned in the book *Lam` al-Shihab* that “he” was then married to three women and had two sons and two daughters – that is before his travels to seek knowledge – are not substantiated by trustworthy historical sources. After scrutinizing the issue, Michael Cook suggests that the author of *Lam` al-Shihab* was not competent in the Arabic language, and had been working for the English delegation in Basra and Baghdad under the supervision of Captain Robert Taylor (1788-1852), and was commissioned by him. See: Hamadi al-Radisi and Asma` Nuwayra, *Al-Rad`ala al-Wahhabiyya fi al-Qarn al-Tasi` `Ashar: Nusus al-Gharb al-Islami Numuthajan* “The Response to Wahhabism in the Nineteenth Century: The Texts of the Islamic West as a Model”, Beirut: Dar al-Tali`a, 1st edn., 2008, p. 41.

³⁰ See: Hamad al-Jassir, *Al-Mar`a fi Hayat Imam al-Da`wa Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab* “Women in the Life of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab”, 1991, <http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-8548/page-28>

³¹ Nabil Mouline (trans. Ethan S. Rundell), *The Clerics of Islam*, op. cit., p. 94.

faces”, and not wearing the hijab in front of “or maintaining a barrier from” men, showing off much of their beautification that God has forbidden them from showing. Undoubtedly, this is among the grievous evils and manifest sins, and among the greatest causes for punishments and wrath that befalls “people”, considering the consequences that result from women’s unveiling and showing their adornment (*zeena*), such as prevalence of vice and promiscuity, crime, lack of modesty, and widespread corruption...So fear God O Muslims! Take the hands of the foolish obscene amongst you, prevent your women from what God has forbidden them to do, and impose on them modest covering, and beware of God’s wrath and His grave punishment.”³² Ibn Baaz stresses the necessity that women cover themselves with hijab and stay at home, as “God Almighty has commanded in His Noble Book that women cover with hijab, and that they stay at home, He warned against “public” adornment and uncovering, and that women submitting to the word of men is safeguarding for them against vice and a warning to them of the causes of *fitna* “seduction”.”³³

Adherents of Wahhabi Salafism authored numerous books and articles on the necessity and obligation of women remaining home and covering their faces in case they need to go out for necessity, or in front of ‘foreigners’ (unrelated men). Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saleh al-`Uthaymeen says “It should be known to Muslims that women’s covering in front of unrelated men, and covering their faces, is mandatory. The mandatory nature of this is indicated in the Qur’an, the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, sound consideration, and methodical analogy.”³⁴

Wahhabi Salafism is characterized by puritanical austere ideas, based on a prevailing belief of the completeness of the Islamic experience irrespective of historical changes. It insists on confining women’s role to the domestic realm, staying at home and taking care of family affairs. It has a strict perspective towards men’s *qarwama* (authority and protection) over women, sufficing to saying that the status given to women in Islam guarantees their rights, in accordance with a manifest reading and perspective on the religion

³² Shaykh Abd al-Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Baaz, *Hukm al-Sufur wa al-Hijab* “The Ruling on Uncovering and Veiling (Hijab)”, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da’wa, and Guidance, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1419 AH, p. 47.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁴ Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saleh ibn `Uthaymeen, *Risalat al-Hijab* “The Message on Veiling (Hijab)”, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da’wa, and Guidance, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1419 AH, p. 81.

that Wahhabi Salafism considers absolutely perfect.³⁵

Gender-based segregation became a central element of Saudi identity, dating back to public policies adopted by the Saudi state since the 1960s. These policies paved the way for the growth of public spaces reserved for women and prohibited for men. In the 1970s, the rise of the Islamic awakening (*sahwa*) discourse further ingrained gender separation, extending to creation of separate institutions for men and women in 1973, a policy that became possible to implement with the period of the oil boom (*tafra*). This continued to be applied, in strict manner, reinforced by religious discourse, official laws, and religious edicts (*fatawa*) that consider Saudi women to be 'lucky' for having the right not to work, which in turn reinforces the Islamic character of society.³⁶

On the debate about the status and position of women in Saudi Arabia, Natana DeLong-Bas presents a counter-argument to the position that finds Wahhabism as the cornerstone of discrimination against women and their lack of empowerment. In her reading of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's discourse, she concludes that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was a 'liberator' of women in a society afflicted by deep hatred and discrimination against the feminine.³⁷

On the other hand, Madawi al-Rasheed emphasizes that the contemporary status of women in Saudi Arabia is shaped by the historical legacy of Wahhabism and its transformation into a religious nationalist movement under the banner of the Saudi state. She argues that,

This transformation had an important impact on gender after the movement became not only state religion but also state nationalism... When Wahhabiyya emerged in the eighteenth century, it was a religious revivalist movement sharing in character and orientation many similarities with its contemporaries in the Muslim world... Central to this relationship were the

³⁵ For more details on the status of women in Saudi society and the fatwas of the official religious committee, see: Muhammad Al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity: Dar al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State*, Studies in Islamic Law and Society, Vol. 32, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010, pp. 99-106.

³⁶ For more details on public spaces for women in Saudi Arabia, see: Amélie Le Renard, *Femmes et espaces publics en Arabie Saoudite*, Paris: Dalloz, 2011. Also see in English: Amélie Le Renard, *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power, and Reform in Saudi Arabia*, Stanford University Press, 1st edn., 2014.

³⁷ See: Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, Oxford University Press, 1st edn., 2008. It is noted that Saudi Arabia welcomed this book and commissioned its translation and publication.

gender perceptions of urban religious scholars, who aspired towards universalising them and imposing them on the whole of Arabia with the assistance of a political leadership...The modern state of 1932 institutionalised perceptions of gender that sprang up among a narrow religious community in southern Najd. In the absence of a Saudi anti-colonial or secular nationalist movement, Wahhabiyya moved from revival to become a national religious movement, by virtue of its universalistic and homogenising rhetoric. This rhetoric aspired to obliterate local tradition in favour of an overarching universal Muslim ideal. In the twentieth century, Wahhabiyya developed into religious nationalism in which the exclusion of women was a visible sign, marking the boundaries of the pious nation and defining its unity in the absence of Saudi or anti-colonial nationalism.³⁸

From the Ikhwan Sister to the Qutbian Jihadist Advocate

While the frame of reference for female jihadism, in its Wahhabi version, emerged amidst an absence of anti-colonial nationalism, another such frame of reference was born from within the response to colonialism, taking shape in the aftermath of the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. This emerged through the *Ikhwani* (Muslim Brotherhood) schema, which later crystallized with the thought of Sayyid Qutb and al-Mawdudi's Jamaat-e-Islami, characterized by an ideological framework focused on conflict and divine sovereignty (*hakimiyya*). This modern jihadist ideology first emerged as an effort to preserve 'identity' in the face of Western occupation and hegemony over the Arab and Muslim worlds. In the Indian sub-continent, the discourse of Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi³⁹ focused on asserting a Muslim Indian identity capable of filling the

³⁸ Madawi al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 43-44.

³⁹ Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (1903-1979) is the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in the 1940s British India. Born in 1903, he received his early education at the hands of his father and private tutors. He began his career in journalism in 1918, and was an editor of a newspaper aimed at spreading the message of Islam. In 1928, he authored *Jihad in Islam*, a book that had significant influence in anti-British sentiment. In 1933, he joined the journal *Turjuman al-Qur'an*, which helped propagate his ideas to Muslims throughout the

vacuum created by the departing colonial order and the rise of political aspirations of the Hindu majority.⁴⁰

Seyyed Vali Nasr finds that al-Mawdudi's vision was rooted in "In-do-Muslim cultural traditions, political sensibilities, and the legacy of Muslim rule, which in India shaped the Muslim worldview and set the agenda for Muslim politics. Al-Mawdudi was clearly driven by this vision, which 'tended to stress the dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims, and to reject the 'dualism' obtained by subjecting Muslims to non-Muslim law'."⁴¹

Al-Mawdudi's writings had significant influence on shaping modern jihadist ideology. In 1928, he wrote *Jihad in Islam*, which although void of particular reference to women's role in jihad, it nonetheless lays the foundation for jihadist identity for both men and women. Indeed, the very founding of Jamaat-e-Islami in the early 1940s was based on the concept that the Muslim identity is threatened by Westernization. On his perspective on women, he authored *Muslim Khawatin se Islam ke Mutalabat* (The Demands of Islam from Muslim Women) in 1953, in which he emphasized the need to hold steadfast to the traditional jurisprudential frames pertaining to women and family law, and considered the issue of women to be among the most important symbols of identity and cultural authenticity in the face of the Western modernity associated with colonial powers. His opinions regarding women's political participation are indeed very conservative, for he asserts that "according to Islam, active politics and administration are not the field of activity of the womenfolk."⁴²

Indian subcontinent, paving the way for the founding of Jamaat-e-Islami. He moved to Lahore in 1937, and later moved to the village of Pathankot in the Punjab to oversee an Islamic endowment called Dar al-Islam, where he would devote himself to da'wa and authoring books. In 1941, he invited Muslim scholars to attend a conference in Lahore, attended by 75 representatives of various places of India. The conference culminated in the founding of Jamaat-e-Islami and Mawdudi was elected as its leader. He was arrested and detained several times in the 1950s and 1960s, and was sentenced to death in 1953, but the sentence was commuted and later canceled. He suffered from kidney ailment and died in 1979 after undergoing a surgery in the United States. His body was taken to Lahore, Pakistan where he was buried. His legacy consists of over 70 books and numerous writings, many of which were translated into many languages and republished many times. See: Hamad ibn Sadeq al-Jamal, Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi: Hayatuhu wa Fikruhu al-'Aqadi "Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi: His Life and Doctrinal Thought", Cairo: Dar al-Ansar, 1979. Also see Muhammad 'Amarah, Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi wa al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya "Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi and Islamic Awakening", Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1987.

⁴⁰ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1st edn., 1996, p. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (trans. Khurshid Ahmad), *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1960 (originally published 1955), p. 322.

In the context of reinforcing the symbols of Islamic identity, al-Mawdudi wrote *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, in which he emphasized the necessity of women's modest dress and veiling their faces. Hijab (*Purdah*) and women's segregation from men would indeed become one of the hallmarks of the agenda of political Islamist movements and a prominent line of confrontation with the West and the post-colonial state in the Arab and Muslim worlds in the context of women's liberation efforts. Al-Mawdudi's discourse, with its stern anti-Westernization stance, advocacy of preserving the pure and authentic Muslim identity, and the concept of *Hakimiyya* would indeed become one of the most significant foundational principles of female jihadism and one of its authoritative frames of reference. It delineates individual roles on the basis of gender in accordance with Shari'ah provisions that are religiously authoritative because they emanate from a 'Divine discourse' rather than human convention.

In the Arab world, the issue of women occupied a key position and became a symbol of the political conflict within identity contexts. The 'Muslim woman' came to be considered from a qualitative dimension as a producer of jihadists. In the thought of the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), since its establishment in 1928, the concept of jihad in its various dimensions occupied a central position as an identity ideology and a strategy for liberation. Hassan al-Banna,⁴³ the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, outlined the nature of Ikhwani understanding of the message of jihad and its universal function in his essay *Risalat al-Jihad* (The Message of Jihad) written in 1947. In its conclusion, he states: "My brothers, the Ummah that knows how to die a noble and honorable death is granted by God an exalted life in this world and eternal felicity in the Hereafter... You should yearn for an honorable death "through jihad" and you will gain perfect happiness. May Allah grant myself and yours the honor of martyrdom in His

⁴³ Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) is the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. He was born in Mahmudiyya in Beheira governorate in Egypt to a religious family. He received his primary education in Mahmudiyya at the hands of Sheikh Muhsin Zahran, and then joined the Dar al-'Ulum college in Cairo. After his graduation, he was appointed as a primary school teacher in Isma'iliyya, where he would establish the nascent groups that would later develop into the Muslim Brotherhood Society in 1928. He then moved to Cairo to teach there, and transferred the Brotherhood's Headquarters to Cairo as well, where he would also establish the "Muslim Brotherhood" journal to propagate the Society's ideas. The movement's da'wa and propagation spread widely, and the Society boasted branches and centers throughout Egypt. The movement's discourse also spread to other Arab countries, where 'branches' of the Brotherhood would emerge. The monarchical regime of King Faruq in Egypt eventually disbanded the Society in 1948. Al-Banna was assassinated by Egyptian secret police in Cairo on February 11th, 1949.

path.”⁴⁴ The essay, nonetheless, was void of any direct mention of women’s role in combatant jihad.

The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood⁴⁵ was founded in Egypt in the context of confronting colonial policies and measures that threatened Muslim identity. It emerged as a global trans-national movement founded on revivalist and reformist identity bases. In its formative years, the movement was preoccupied with organizational building and *da’wa* advocacy using peaceful means. Yet its preference for spiritual strength over material strength did not dissuade it from engaging in political activities,⁴⁶ or from preparedness for jihad. From the early days in 1928, it formed athletic training groups at Isma`iliyya, and later in 1935 regularized the formations of ‘rovers’ (*jawwala*), which gradually developed out of the athletic training, followed by the creation in 1937 of the ‘battalions’ (*kata’ib*), and later in the 1940s developed into ‘families’ (*usar*) and a unit called the ‘special section’ (*al-nizam al-khass*). The Brotherhood’s organizational planning and formations were of a military structural nature, founded within missionary and reformative activism.

The cause of jihad is present in most of Hassan al-Banna’s essays, but the Ikhwanī jihadist ideology at the time was more focused on spiritual cultivation and solidarity. The Society was preoccupied with sending donations and aid to Palestine, delivering anti-occupation telegrams and letters to authorities and the press, organizing public demonstrations, and dispatching supplies and equipment.⁴⁷ The first formal act of support to Palestine came during the Arab general strikes of 1936-7,⁴⁸ and the Brotherhood took part in fighting alongside Palestinian jihadist groups. Indeed, the Society’s ‘secret military apparatus’ known as *al-nizam al-khass* was formed with the focus on Palestine and the Palestinian cause. The Brotherhood also partic-

⁴⁴ Hassan al-Banna, *Majmu`at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hassan al-Banna* “Compilation of the Essays of the Martyr Imam Hassan al-Banna”, al-Mansura, Egypt: Matabi` al-Wafaa', n.d., p. 171.

⁴⁵ For more details on the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, see Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969/1993.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16. Mitchell states: “Political activity as a part of the movement’s interests was officially if belatedly recognized by Banna in the first issue of the weekly, al-Nadhir, in May 1938, the appearance of which, he said, marked ‘the beginning of their involvement in the external and internal political struggle.’”

⁴⁷ Hassan al-Banna, *Mudhakkarat al-Da`wa wa al-Da`iyah* “Memoirs of the Preaching (Propagation of Religion) and the Preacher”, Cairo: al-Zahra' li al-Ilam al-'Arabi, 1990, pp. 279-286.

⁴⁸ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, op. cit., p. 55.

ipate with nationalist committees that were re-sent to Palestine following the UN partition resolution of 1947, most prominently fighting in the city of Jaffa. The Brotherhood formed independent forces to defend villages, and fought in the Battle of al-Qastal led by Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini alongside volunteers from the Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian Brotherhood branches.⁴⁹ In this context, it is evident that the concept of “solidarity jihad” persisted throughout all stages of the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Hassan al-Banna gave women’s issues particular importance in his speeches and practical experience; for he was convinced of the need for women’s participation in public work as ‘she’ is one of the important elements of actualizing the Brotherhood’s reformatory project, clearly stated in the bylaws of the Statute of the Muslim Sisterhood (*al-Akharwat al-Muslimat*).

From an early stage, al-Banna worked to establish a women’s branch for the movement. On April 26th, 1933, he announced forming the Muslim Sisterhood department, consisting of the wives, daughters, and female relatives of Muslim Brotherhood members. The branch was later renamed the Muslim Sisterhood Division (*Firqat al-Akharwat al-Muslimat*), which is an extension to the structure founded earlier by al-Banna in Isma`iliyya called ‘The Mothers of Believers’ (*Umahat al-Mu`minin*). The first to chair the Division was Labiba Ahmad, considered the first woman in the Muslim world to frame a methodology particular to Muslim women’s gaining their rights. The Sisterhood Division was later headed by other women, including Aamal Ashmawy, Na`ima al-Hudaibi, Fatima Abd al-Hadi, and Zaynab al-Ghazali.

Al-Banna drafted bylaws to govern the work of the Sistershood Division, which he himself used to supervise, outlining its objectives, means, and internal structure. The aims of forming this Division included adherence to Islamic morals, propagating virtue, and caution against the harms of deviations prevalent among Muslim women. Muslim Sisterhood Committees multiplied and grew steadily, reaching 50 committees in 1948, which is the same year in which all branches of the Muslim Brotherhood were dismantled by Egyptian authorities.

In one of his essays entitled *al-Mar’a al-Muslima* (The Muslim Woman), addressed to the Muslim Sisters, al-Banna attempts to reformulate the

⁴⁹ For more details on the Muslim Brotherhood’s participation in Jihad in Palestine, see: Kamil al-Sharif, *Al-Ikhrwan al-Muslimin fi Harb Filastin* “The Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine War”, Cairo: al-Zahra’ li al-‘Ilam al-‘Arabi, 1987.

Islamic discourse pertaining to the status, position, and rights of women in Islam.⁵⁰ He emphasizes that Islam elevates the value of women as partners of men in rights and obligations, stating: “Islam recognizes a woman’s full personal rights, and her full civil rights as well, and her political rights also, and treats her as a full human being that has rights and duties... The Qur’an and Prophetic Hadiths are full of abundant texts that affirm and elucidate this meaning.”⁵¹ Al-Banna stresses that distinction between men and women in rights is due to ‘natural differences,’ and due to the difference in tasks that each performs, and to protect the rights granted to both men and women.

He posits that there is a strong innate attraction between men and women, which is the basis of the relationship between them, the purpose of which – before pleasure – is cooperation to safeguard the human race and bear the difficulties of life. In the area of education, al-Banna emphasizes the need for women to learn essential skills, such as reading and writing, however, he finds no need for women to be educated in ‘what they do not need.’⁵² He further advises Muslims: “Teach the woman what she needs by virtue of her task and function to which God created her: housekeeping and child care.”⁵³ He stresses the need for segregation between the sexes to avoid mixing, noting that “Islam considers the mixing of women and men to be an imminent risk... Therefore, we declare that the Muslim society is an individualistic rather than dual society, where men have their communities and women have theirs. Islam permitted for women to attend the “public” Eid and collective functions, and to set out for fighting in extremely necessary cases, but it stops at this point. It made several conditions for this “public attendance”, including: avoiding showing all aspects of adornment, covering the body wrapped in loose clothing that are neither tight nor see-through, and not being alone with a “male none-relative” foreigner, regardless of the circumstances.”⁵⁴

The teachings of Hassan al-Banna are based on the premise that the

⁵⁰ Hammoud Hammoud, “Fi Naqd Zahirat al-Nisawiyah al-Islamiyyah: al-Akhawat al-Muslimat Mithalan” “In Critiquing the Phenomenon of Islamic Feminism: Muslim Sisters as an Example”, *Jadaliyya*, October 14th, 2015, <https://goo.gl/CTHHIr>

⁵¹ Hassan al-Banna, *Al-Mar’a al-Muslima* “The Muslim Woman”, Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 2nd edn., 1988, p. 7.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

place and role of women is the home, raising children and caring for the family, headed by the husband. This stems from the premise that the home is the first base in raising and preparing ‘men.’

Fatima Abd al-Hadi, the wife of Prominent Brotherhood figure Muhammad Yusuf Hawwash (who was executed along with Sayyid Qutb), published her memoirs entitled “My Journey with the Muslim Sisterhood: From Imam Hassan al-Banna to the Abdel Nasser’s Prisons,” in which she revealed that the role of women in the movement did not go beyond maintaining the family entity of the Brotherhood’s members. With the start of a series of arrests and imprisonment of Brotherhood members, Abd al-Hadi notes that the “Muslim Sisterhood Division took care of our families during our absence in prisons and detention centers. The Akhawat “Sisters” would collect donations and manage providing for the homes whose breadwinners were absent. They also provided the basic necessities to any family whose provider was imprisoned or fleeing from detention.”⁵⁵

Following the July 1952 Revolution and the founding of the modern nation-state in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood came under siege and harassment. The regime of the Free Officers, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, dealt a heavy blow to the Brotherhood in 1954 after an exchange of accusations of deviation and disloyalty, which was the start of an enduring clash between the Islamist and the nationalist movements. The Brotherhood accused Nasser’s regime and other Arab nationalist regimes of being ‘agents’ of the West, an accusation that was casted against the Muslim Brotherhood in return.

In the context of the deteriorating relationship between the Brotherhood and the Nasserite regime, an alternative *Ikhwani* vision began to take shape, one that was moving further away from the traditional Brotherhood vision that was shaped by the reformative legacy of the movement. The theorization of this new vision’s ideological bases was presented by a group of Ikhwan ideologues, including Abd al-Qadir Odeh, who wrote *Al-Islam wa Awwda`una al-Siyasiyya* (Islam and Our Political Conditions).⁵⁶ But undoubt-

⁵⁵ Fatima Abd al-Hadi, *Rihlati ma` al-Akhwat al-Muslimat: Min al-Imam al-Shahid Hassan al-Banna ila Sujun Abdel Nasser* “My Journey with the Muslim Sisters: From the Martyr Imam Hassan al-Banna to the Prisons of Abdel Nasser”, Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2011, p. 5.

⁵⁶ The regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser executed Abd al-Qadir Odeh in 1954 after the infamous al-Manshiyyeh incident. The writing of the book dates to the late 1940s. Among his other famous works is the large volume on *Al-Tashri` al-Jinaa`i al-Islami Muqaranan bi al-Qanun al-Wad`i* “The Legislation of Islamic Criminal Law in Contrast to Positive Law”.

edly, the most prominent influence in the transformation of the movement's reformist vision came at the hands of Sayyid Qutb,⁵⁷ who spearheaded an explicitly revolutionary ideology that took to rebuking the foundations of the nation-state in post-colonial Muslim countries, and propagated instead the building of an Islamic state in which *hakimiyya* (sovereignty) and governance is to God alone.

Although Qutb did not marry, women had an influential role in his life. His mother was the first woman that had influence on him, a woman he described (in his dedication to her of his book "Artistic Representation in the Qur'an") as religiously devout with qualities of the believers, who loved to listen to the Qur'an and was deeply affected by it. In his book "A Child from the Village," Qutb said that his mother wanted Him to be a grown man, well ahead of his age; hence, he would escape all aspects of childishness even when he was a child. His mother, the second wife of his father, died in 1940 after she settled with him in Cairo. In a book he co-wrote with his brother Muhammad and sisters Ameena and Hameeda, called "The Four Apparitions," Qutb eulogized his mother describing what she had ingrained in him. He had another sister named Nafisa. His sister Ameena wrote a collection of poems eulogizing her husband Kamal al-Sananiri entitled "Letters to a Martyr."

In "A Child from the Village," Qutb recalls that he fell in love with a girl who was a distant acquaintance when he was 14 years old in the village. He left for Cairo carrying with him her memories, remembering clearly the

⁵⁷ Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was an influential author, Islamist ideologue, and leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was born in a village in Asyut in Egypt to a landowner who was also politically active in the National Party. Qutb enrolled in school at age 6, and memorized the Qur'an at age 10. His father sent him to Cairo where he completed his secondary education and later enrolled in Dar al-'Ulum college, graduating in 1929. His early career was in teaching. The Ministry of Education sent him to the United States to learn about the educational system there. After his return in 1951, he quit his job and devoted his time to writing and authoring books. He began his literary career a follower of the 'Aqqad school of thought, but later transitioned from literature to Islamic intellectual activism in the late 1940s, coinciding with the rise of influence of the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan al-Banna. Qutb found in the Brotherhood movement an embodiment of aspirations he had through his reading of the works of Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida. He joined the movement and became one of its prominent members and theorists. After conflicts erupted in 1954 between the Muslim Brotherhood and leaders of the "Free Officers" revolution in Egypt, Qutb and other Brotherhood leaders were imprisoned and suffered harsh detention conditions. He published a series of radical revolutionary books, including *This Religion*, *The Future of this Religion*, and *Milestones*. He was imprisoned again in 1965, accused of conspiring against the political system and was sentenced to death along with other members. He was executed in 1966.

girl's face. During a visit to the village after three years, he asked about the girl and found that she had married. Qutb fell in love again after he finished his education and worked at the Ministry of Education. The girl from Cairo resembled his first love in the village, and he decided to ask her to marry him. The night he got engaged to her, she told him that she was previously in love with a neighbor who was an officer in the Army. Qutb was distraught, and broke off the engagement, after which he wrote down his love story in a poem in his autobiographical novelette "Thorns." Qutb also wrote numerous other poems, including "The End of the Path," "The Poisoned Cup," and "After It's Too Late."⁵⁸

Qutb's writings, however, underwent a transformation from the literary to the Islamist theorization field. His Islamic discourse became a launching point in formulating the jihadist orientation in general, and the female jihadist orientation in particular. His book *Ma`alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones), is considered a foundational statement of the jihadist movement's philosophy insofar as the vision and methodology of the movement, and the mechanisms for change and action in the context of the post-colonial national state and the struggle over the identity of the state and society. Qutb's theses on *hakimiyya* (God's sovereignty) and *jahiliyya* (characteristic of pre-Islamic ignorance) became common keywords for jihadist discourse. For Qutb, a *jahili* society is any society other than the Muslim society. According to this a definition, "all societies existing in the world today are *jahili*. Included among these are...all the existing so-called 'Muslim' societies are also *jahili* societies."⁵⁹ This *jahiliyya*, according to Qutb, "is based on rebellion against Allah's sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others. It is now not in that-simple and primitive form of the ancient Jahiliyyah, but takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what Allah Almighty has prescribed."⁶⁰

In his formulation of female jihadism, Qutb is not speaking of men and women, but rather of the human being as the holder of values. His 'fem-

⁵⁸ See: Ali Muhammad al-Gharib, "Sayyid Qutb: al-Mamnu` min al-Zawaj bi Amr al-Mawt!" "Sayyid Qutb: Prevented from Marriage by Order of Death!", *Laha Online*, November 28, 2002, <https://goo.gl/BqBs4A>

⁵⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones "Ma`alim fi'l-Tareeq"*, (ed. A. B. al-Mehri), Birmingham, England: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006, pp. 91-93.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

inist' views vis-à-vis Divine *hakimiyya* is that it is a binding choice of human beings regardless of gender. Qutb speaks of the family as a producer of values, and considers the relationship between men and women according to the functional specialization of each. Despite his focus on the combatant jihad dimension in "Milestones," Qutb nonetheless stresses, repeatedly, the ethical and value dimensions and the role of Islam in 'saving' humanity.

Qutb gives careful attention to the concept of civilization, the repository of values, and dispossesses from the West the characteristic of civilization due to what he considers the collapse of their moral value system. Qutb considers the family as a value, determinant, and indicator of civility and civilization. He states:

If the family is the basis of the society, the basis of the family is the division of labour between husband and wife, and the upbringing of children is the most important function of the family, then such a society is indeed civilized. In the Islamic system of life, this kind of a family provides the environment under which human values and morals develop and grow in the new generation; these values and morals cannot exist apart from the family unit...The family system and the relationship between the sexes determine the whole character of a society and whether it is backward or civilized, Jahili or Islamic...Thus, only Islamic values and morals, Islamic teachings and safeguards, are worthy of mankind, and from this unchanging and true measure of human progress, Islam is the real civilization and Islamic society is truly civilized.⁶¹

Qutb's discourse resonated with generations of the Muslim Sisterhood. Most notably, Zaynab al-Ghazali was heavily influenced by Sayyid Qutb. Al-Ghazali had pledged allegiance to Hassan al-Banna in 1948, and was among the most influential Muslim Sisters in the field of *da'wa* for over half a century. She played an instrumental role in the political struggle, and was imprisoned during Abdel Nasser's rule in 1965, and sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor (25 years). After the death of Abdel Nasser, al-Ghazali was released from prison by a general pardon issued by President Anwar Sadat in August 1971. In 1975, she released an autobiographical ac-

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 110-112.

count of her experience in a book entitled *Ayyam min Hayati* (Days from My Life).⁶²

Other prominent Sisters alongside Labiba Ahmad and Zaynab al-Ghazali include Ameena Qutb and Hameeda Qutb, Sayyid Qutb's sisters, who were imprisoned with al-Ghazali.⁶³ During the wave of arrests and harassment of the Muslim Brotherhood, around 200 women, including wives, daughters, and female relatives of Brotherhood members were also imprisoned, including Ghada Ammar, Aliya al-Hudaibi, Na`ima Khattab, and Aamal Ashmawi. Court rulings were only issued against two of them, Hameeda Qutb and Zaynab al-Ghazali.

In her memoirs, Zaynab al-Ghazali presents a female jihadist biography par excellence, heavily utilizing in it the Qutbian system of concepts, such as *hakimiyya*, *jahiliyya*, *al-taghut* (rule of idolatrous tyrants), *al-shahada* (martyrdom), Jihad, and the Islamic state. She says, "We were also convinced that the earth is today devoid of any base that has the characteristics of an entirely devoted Islamic Ummah, as was the case with the era of the Prophet and the righteous caliphs. Therefore, jihad is obligatory on the Muslim community which seeks to govern by God's laws and empower His religion on earth, until all Muslims return to Islam, and the religion of God is upheld, not as slogans but as a practical, living reality."⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali's views on the role of women in the Muslim society is congruent with that of Qutb, she states: "On the day that Islam "finally" rules, the position of the Muslim woman will be in her natural kingdom, educating the men of this Ummah."⁶⁵

Miriam Cooke sees that the concept of jihad in al-Ghazali's memoirs is not confined to men, but is an activity that includes women as well. Al-Ghazali's women heroes are the early Muslim women warriors, including the Kharijite Layla bint Tarif (whose story influenced al-Ghazali during her youth years) and Nusayba bint Ka`b al-Maaziniyya, who fought with the Prophet in the Battle of Uhud, in addition to the Prophet's women compan-

⁶² See: Zaynab al-Ghazali, *Ayyam min Hayati* "Days from My Life", Cairo: Dar al-Tawzi` wa al-Nashr al-Islamiyya, 1st edn., 1999.

⁶³ Timothy Mitchell, "L'expérience de l'emprisonnement dans le discours islamiste: une lecture d'Ayyam min hayati de Zaynab al-Ghazzali." In Gilles Kepel and Yann Richard (eds), *Intellectuels et militants de l'islam contemporain* "Intellectuals and Militants of Contemporary Islam", Paris: Seuil; Sociologie edition, 1990, pp. 193-212.

⁶⁴ Zaynab al-Ghazali, *Ayyam min Hayati* "Days from My Life", op. cit., p. 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

ions. According to al-Ghazali, this transformation of women into ‘soldiers,’ ...involves improvising new rules of conduct that will allow her to execute her soldierly tasks. These rules for military men often contravene peacetime norms, for example, in war to kill is not to murder but to be a hero. In the case of the Islamic womanist, these new rules might not be as lethally paradoxical, but they could be as radically transformed... The ideal Muslim woman must work out, with God’s help, priorities for her life: should she stay in the kitchen and the maternity ward or should she go out into the battlefield? The true believer will not be confused, for what could be more important than building the Islamic state?⁶⁶

In an essay entitled *Ila Ibnati: Hub al-Jihad* (To My Daughter: The Love of Jihad), al-Ghazali addresses the concept of jihad, its importance and centrality to the establishment of the Islamic state, and defines the roles of women in jihad. She states:

The Ummah is facing many tribulations, but the most severe of them is the neglect of raising and educating “children” on jihad and the love of dying for the sake of God. The Prophet (PBUH) warned us against reliance to this life and hatred of death. The Ummah, individually and collectively, must review itself and reposition jihad and the jurisprudence of martyrdom atop its concerns. There must be an awakening of faith and sound jurisprudence to defend the religion of this Ummah and defend its land, honor, and wealth from its enemies. The verses on jihad are numerous in the Qur’an, and are explained and elucidated in the Hadiths of the Prophet. The first stage of jihad is the jihad against one’s self and training it on obedience and adherence to God’s commands and avoidance of what is prohibited, and the jihad against the devil, crushing and chasing it away. Then comes material jihad, through spending, giving charity, and donating to equipping the Mujahideen. There is also the jihad by the word, through advice and guidance. Then there is the jihad against the enemies by sacrificing the self and all that is precious to the self, and this form of jihad is the pinnacle of Is-

⁶⁶ Miriam Cooke, “Ayyam min Hayati: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 26/1-2, 1995, p. 150.

lam. Our children ought to be cultivated on the love of jihad, striving, giving, and sacrificing in order to raise the banner of Islam again. I call for the correct jihad, the lawful not the fake jihad. Your role, my daughter, is to awaken the spirit of jihad and the love for martyrdom in your husband and children. This is the role I expect from you, the one awaited by the whole Ummah.⁶⁷

Although al-Ghazali speaks in her memoirs about the 1960s Nasserite socialism era, yet her writings are saturated with the atmosphere of the 1970s Sadat's Egypt, especially after the new liberal regime embarked on a campaign aimed at curbing the influence of the Left and making way for Islamist groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, which resumed its activities and propaganda. The Brotherhood began to issue two magazines, *al-I'tisam* and *al-Da'wa*, the latter having dedicated a section of its pages for women, entitled "For the Muslim Family," edited by Zaynab al-Ghazali, which made her an icon of female political Islamist struggle more than an outright jihadist. Al-Ghazali indeed had a strong presence in political Islamist movements, but there is barely any mention of her in the accounts of female jihadists of later jihadist movements such as Al-Qaeda and IS.

It may be argued that the conditions that Egypt faced with Nasser's marginalization policies, followed by the process of political rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s, contributed to the rise of two main trends within the movement: the first is a revolutionary radical current that called for regime change and replacing them with Islamic regimes, by use of force, most prominent of its ideologues being Sayyid Qutb, and the second is a reformist trend that embraced the mechanisms of gradual reform of regimes, by peaceful means, most prominent of its figures is Hassan al-Hudaibi who wrote the famous revisionist work *Du'aa la Qudaa* (Advocates not Judges).

⁶⁷ Zaynab al-Ghazali, *Ila Ibnati: Hub al-Jihad* "To My Daughter: The Love of Jihad", republished in The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization Studies- London, June 7, 2012, <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/ruiah/qutuf-276.htm>

The Role of Women in Local Jihadism

The legacy of Sayyid Qutb's thought transpired in a more extreme version with a generation of Jihadi Salafists in Egypt and elsewhere in the 1970s. This was evident in the discourse of "Islamist Anger" movements⁶⁸ that focused on the internal front and on conflict with local dictatorial secularist regimes. Jihadi Salafist theorization on these aspects evoked notions of *ta'sil* (finding roots in religion) of the issues of *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and *Dar al-Kufr* (Abode of Unbelief), reviving the Islamic caliphate, effectuating jihad as the ideology for revolutionary change, and heavily utilizing Qutbian discourse and traditional jurisprudential concepts in defining the state and society, dominated by identity-exclusionary terms of *takfir* (labeling others as unbelievers), *tajhil* (labeling others with pre-Islamic ignorance), *al-tawaqquf wa al-tabayyun* (stop and disclose), and *al-wala' wa al-bara'* (loyalty and disavowal). Among the local jihadism movements that emerged during this era:

1. *Gama`at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra*: The most explicit expression of this emergent identity lexicon came in the discourse of a radical group that called itself *Gama`at al-Muslimeen*, and its founder Shukri Ahmad Mustafa,⁶⁹ who was arrested during the wave of crack-down against the Muslim Brotherhood in 1965. During his interrogation, Mustafa reportedly addressed the Egyptian Intelligence Chief and boldly pronounced: "I refuse to dialogue with you because you are an unbeliever, an infidel, and so is your government."⁷⁰

Mustafa and other members of Islamist groups were eventually released from prison in a general pardon in October 1971, upon Sadat taking office. Mustafa returned to his hometown of Asyut in Upper Egypt, only to propagate and expand the *Gama`at al-Muslimeen*, which the Egyptian author-

⁶⁸ For more information on this phase, see: Rif'at Sayyid Ahmad, *Tanzimat al-Ghadab al-Islami fi al-Sab'inat* "Islamic Anger Movements in the 1970s", Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1st edn., 1989.

⁶⁹ Shukri Ahmad Mustafa (1942-1977): was the founder of *Gama`at al-Muslimeen*, also known as *Gama`at al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad*, which came to be known by the authorities and the press as *Gama`at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra*. He was married to the sister of Muslim Brotherhood member Muhammad Subhi Mustafa. Being sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s, he was arrested along with hundreds of Brothers in 1965 and was imprisoned in the infamous "Liman Turra" prison, where a massacre of Muslim Brotherhood members took place. He nicknamed himself "The Emir of the End of Times Taha Mustafa Shukri." He spent nearly six years in prison between 1965-1971, before being released when Anwar Sadat took office. He was later executed in March 1978.

⁷⁰ Rifat Sayyid Ahmad, *Al-Nabi al-Musallah: Al-Tha'iroun* "The Armed Prophet: The Revolutionaries", London, Riyad al-Rayyis Books and Publishing, 1st ed., 1991, vol. 2, p. 77.

ities and the press called *Gama`at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra*. Within five years, the group's membership reached over 5,000 members, and took control of a number of religious associations in various Egyptian universities.⁷¹ Despite of the fame of Shukri Mustafa, the de facto leader of the group was Ali Abdu Ismail, who espoused the concept of withdrawal and rupture with society (*al-`uzla*); but later abandoned the exclusionary approach and adopted al-Hudaibi's reformist approach.

Among the most important of the group's ideological literature are Mustafa's two essays "*al-I'tiraf*" (Confession) and "*al-Khilafa*" (Caliphate), which espouse religious *da'wa* and the establishment of an Islamic state. The group's discourse considers both society and the state, with all its institutional, intellectual, and relational components, to be unbelieving; with nothing of it to be salvaged, and hence, must be demolished and rebuilt anew. Its strategy for this rebuilding, however, does not necessitate the formation of borders of this envisioned 'state' at that present time, because *Gama'at al-Muslimeen* "was then still vulnerable and powerless." According to Mustafa, the conditions of *tamkeen* (empowerment) must be actualized first, and therefore, *hijra* (migration) and *`uzla* (isolation) from society are necessary in order to build the *gama'a* (community). This group would go through two phases: "The first will be in the caves, mountains, and the desert...and the second will be the building of contemporary Yathrib, the early society of Medina that enabled Muslims to conquer Mecca."⁷²

In the context of building this society with new relational ties, Mustafa's group, "unlike most other more or less clandestine Islamicist organizations, included women among its membership, who were married according to a special ritual and had children, thus assuring the survival of authentic Muslims." Women whose husbands and families were not members of the *Gama'at al-Muslimeen* had to abandon their husbands and families. The first extensive police operations against the group's adherents seem to have been initiated after complaints by families whose daughters had disappeared to join the group and had found partners there.⁷³

⁷¹ See: Muhammad Saeed Abu Amoud, "Al-Binaa' al-Tanhimii li Jamaa'at al-Islam al-Siyasi fi al-Watan al-'Arabi (Misr ka Halat Dirasa)," "The Organizational Structure of Political Islamism Groups in the Arab World: Egypt as a Case Study", *Al-Wihda*, Rabat: Al-Majlis al-Qawmi li al-Thaqafa al-'Arabiya, No. 82 & 83, July and August 1991, p. 37.

⁷² Rifat Sayyid Ahmad, *Al-Nabi al-Musallah* "Armed Prophet", Op. Cit., p. 77.

⁷³ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, University of California Press, 2003 ed., p. 86-88.

According to the documents of the Military Court that prosecuted the group, 22 women were included in the list of defendants, accused of belonging to *Gama`at al-Muslimeen*. Mustafa admitted before the tribunal that he imposed on members to leave their families if their parents do not join the group, and that women had to leave their non-member husbands. The group took care of the youth aged 14–20 years old, provided religious education and urged them to abandon formal education, defect from armed forces and all government jobs because they are part of “infidel institutions,” prior to accepting their pledge of allegiance and adherence. The group had a matrimonial service that matched men and women through profiles that included a description of each, and would then allow them to meet in public, and are then married. The couple would be offered a furnished apartment. Within a few years, employment contracts abroad were offered to the members in exchange of sending half their salaries back to the group. In this manner, the group ensured receiving both loyalty and resources. If either a husband or wife defects from the group, the other spouse would be granted divorce by ruling that their spouse has left the group and hence, became an apostate and an unbeliever. A husband who refused to divorce his wife would be considered unbelieving, and hence, the wife would be considered, ipso facto, divorced. When Mustafa was asked during the investigation: Can she remarry?⁷⁴ He answered, “Yes, she can remarry another man, even if the first did not divorce her formally through an officiant. But she would have to leave the country in order not to be subjected to conventional laws.”⁷⁴

Gilles Kepel notes that “this ‘leading of women astray’ outraged public opinion, and provided headline material and innumerable photographs for the Egyptian press.”⁷⁵ This strategy led to further caution from including women in the activities and ranks of jihadist groups that would later emerge in Egypt. Shukri Mustafa’s *Gama`at al-Muslimeen* would soon dissipate, after the group kidnapped Muhammad al-Dhahabi, a former minister of Awqaf (religious endowments), on July 3rd, 1977, and later killed him. After a wave of mass arrests of the group members and its entire leadership, and a swift trial, Mustafa was sentenced to death and executed in March 1978.

⁷⁴ Nabil Sharaf al-Din, “Hikayat Nisaa’ al-Irhab min al-Qahira ila Kabul: Qissat al-Mar’a allati Sharakat fi Ightiyal al-Sadat” “Stories of the Women of Terrorism from Cairo to Kabul: The Story of the Woman who Took Part in Assassinating Sadat”, *Elaph*, June 14, 2005, <http://elaph.com/Web/Reports/2005/6/69163.htm?sectionarchive=Reports>

⁷⁵ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, op. cit., p. 86.

2. Tanzim Shabab Muhammad: Sayyid Qutb's influence was a pivotal inspiration to various jihadist figures and movements in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Among them was the Palestinian theorist Saleh Sariya,⁷⁶ who had ties with the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq, and later associated with Egyptian Brotherhood figures such as Zaynab al-Ghazali and Hassan al-Hudaibi upon settling in Egypt in 1971, according to Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁷⁷ By then, the Brotherhood's leadership, in rapprochement with the authorities, did not agree with Sariya's revolutionary approach.⁷⁸ In 1971, following Sadat's taking office and general pardon of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and their release from prison, Sariya met with Zaynab al-Ghazali and expressed his disappointment towards the Brotherhood's *da'wa*-oriented focus and exclusion of the 'use of force' in their activities. The disagreement between the two sides did not amount to cutting ties, for Sariya continued to meet with Brotherhood leaders while forming his jihadist group, *Shabab Muhammad*. These reported meetings led many researchers to associate Sariya's group with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, who Sariya – during his trial before the Military Tribunal – defended vehemently and claimed their disassociation with his group.⁷⁹

Sariya's group, which came to be known to the authorities and the press as "*al-Kuliyya al-Faniyya al-'Askariyya*" (The Military Technical Col-

⁷⁶ Saleh Sariya (1947-1975) was born in Jaffa, Palestine in 1947. He lived in Jordan before moving to Iraq, and then escaped to Egypt in 1971, escaping a death sentence in absentia over accusations laid against him by the Iraqi authorities for forming a cell of Hizb ut-Tahrir and anti-regime activities. In Egypt, he worked at the Arab League headquarters, and earned a doctoral degree in Education from Ein Shams University. In 1973, he established *Shabab Muhammad* (The Youth of Muhammad) organization, which became known as the "Military Technical College" group. He masterminded a failed coup and assassination attempt against Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. He was sentenced to death in 1975. Although he was versed in the heritage of sheikh Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, however, he did not have any organizational ties to Hizb ut-Tahrir.

⁷⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Fursan Tahta Rayat al-Nabi* "Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet", Mu'asasat al-Sahab, 1st edn., n.d., p. 15.

⁷⁸ Talal al-Ansari, a prominent figure in the "Military Technical College" group, presented a counter narrative on the relationship of the Muslim Brotherhood with the group. He notes that Sariya held numerous secret meetings with the Brotherhood's leader Hassan al-Hudaibi and presented a memo of 50 pages on a new era and new approach for the Brotherhood that involved transformation from the framework of 'truce' to that of confrontation with ruling regimes as a means to reach power. Sariya however denied this during interrogations, and provided a counter-narrative to the information, reportedly to protect the Brotherhood and its survival and distance it from the case against the *Kulliya al-Askariyya*. See: Mukhtar Nouh, "Al-Shahada al-'Aksiyya li Talal al-Ansari" "The Counter-Narrative of Talal al-Ansari", *Al-Mesryoon*, October 29, 2009, <http://www.masress.com/almesryoon/20137>

⁷⁹ See: Hazem al-Ameen, "Bakurat al-Jihad al-'Alami" "The Dawn of Global Jihad", *Kalamon* quarterly journal, Spring 2010, <http://www.kalamon.org/articles-details-12>

lege), embarked on a failed attempt to overthrow the government by carrying out attacks on the Military Technical College on two stages on April 18th, 1974, during an event in which Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was on campus. The group nonetheless failed in the attack and all who took part in it were arrested.⁸⁰ Sariya's group was male-oriented to the fullest extent, it excluded women from its membership, and maintained a highly secretive organizational structure.

Sariya consolidated the crux of his overall thought in one lone treatise entitled *Risalat al-Iman* (The Message of Belief), which he wrote in 1973, described as “the first treatise in diagnosing the *kufir* that Muslims have fallen into, knowingly or not, because of the unprecedented conditions they face.” He describes the essential problem of contemporary society with what he called “collective apostasy,” and defines the methodological basis that allows for the *takfir* of the state and for stigmatizing society as living in a state of contemporary *jahiliyya*. He begins his message with an in-depth look at contemporary reality to identify the ‘identity,’ considering that his treatise is a message on ‘belief.’⁸¹ The only path to changing the unbelieving regime, according to Sariya, is that of “jihad to change these governments and establish the Islamic state.” This mission is “an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman, because jihad is ongoing until the Day of Judgement.”⁸² This revolutionary form of jihad is “the path to establishing the Islamic state, because it is impermissible to be loyal to unbelievers and unbelieving regimes.”⁸³ His treatise would come to formulate new bases for Jihadi Salafist theorization that would later crystallize more clearly with *Gama`at al-Jihad* and other jihadist groups, particularly in defining the parameters of the Abode of Islam and the Abode of unbelief.

3. Local Jihadist Groups: In late 1970s and early 1980s, local radical Islamist movements emerged and spread throughout the Arab world. These groups were explicitly male-centric, excluding any participation of women within their ranks. Examples of these groups include *al-Tali`a al-Muqatila* (The Fighting Vanguard)⁸⁴ led by Marwan Hadid in Syria, which clashed

⁸⁰ See: Rifat Sayyid Ahmad, *Armed Prophet*, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

⁸¹ Saleh Sariya, *Risalat al-Iman* “The Message of Belief”, The Student Union of Dar al-`Ulum Faculty, University of Cairo, 1977, p. 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁴ For further discussion of the “*Al-Tali`a al-Muqatila*” (The Fighting Vanguard) in Syria, see: Fadi

with the ruling regime there. In Algeria, the Algerian Islamic Armed movement emerged, led by Mustafa Bouyali. In Morocco, the discourse of Abd al-Karim Moutia and the *al-Shabiba al-Islamiya* (Islamic Youth) movement became widely popular among jihadi Salafist circles there. Saudi Arabia saw the rise of a group led by Juhayman al-Otaybi, who seized the holy Mosque in Mecca in 1979.⁸⁵

By excluding women from their organizational and military structures, these localized versions of jihadist groups maintained women's traditional roles, confined to childbearing, child care, and housekeeping. Women remained marginalized in both jihadist discourse and practice. The 'Muslim woman,' nevertheless, became a pivotal theme in the struggle over society's identity. With the evolution and spread of jihadist groups in Egypt, most notably *Gama`at al-Jihad* and *al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya*, the issue of women came to be clearly incorporated into the ideological discourse and practical experience of new jihadist groups. One of the most significant contributions to the theorization of Jihadi Salafism during the late 1970s came from the Emir of Tanzim *Gama`at al-Jihad* (The Organization of al-Jihad Group) Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj,⁸⁶ whose book *Al-Jihad: al-Faridha al-Gha'iba* (Jihad: The Neglected Duty), is a primary reference for contemporary jihadist movements. Written in the wake of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979 following the Camp David Accords, it is considered the theoretical basis that paved the way for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on October 6th, 1981. The book nonetheless is devoid of direct mention of women's role in jihadist movements.

Faraj presents the premise that jihad is an individual obligation (*farid`ayn*) – that is being neglected – rather than a communal obligation that may be discharged by the collective Muslim community (*farid kifaya*). This prem-

Shamiya, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoun wa al-Tali'a al-Muqatila wa al-'Alaqa ma' al-Sulta* "The Muslim Brotherhood, the Fighting Vanguard and the Relationship with the Regime", part of collective edited work, Al-Misbar Center for Studies, Book No. 32, August 2009, pp. 152-181.

⁸⁵ For more details on the Juhayman movement, see: Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix, *The Meccan Rebellion: The Story of Juhayman al-'Otaybi Revisited*, Amal Press, 2011.

⁸⁶ Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (1942-1982): an Egyptian jihadist leader and ideologue. He was born in the village of al-Dalanjat in 1942, graduated from the faculty of Engineering at University of Cairo, and worked there. He became the first 'Emir' of the *Gama`at al-Jihad* in Egypt in 1979, and was able to recruit Khalid al-Islamboli to the organization in 1980. Along with Islamboli, Faraj was the main mastermind of the assassination of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. He was arrested after the *Manassa* incident on October 6, 1981, and was sentenced to death and executed in April 1982.

ise is indeed at variance with the traditional jurisprudential discourse and contemporary jihadist perspectives that adhered to the Qutbian concept of *tali`a* (vanguards), the group that would discharge the obligation of jihad on behalf of the Muslim community. In his book, Faraj postulates on two key issues, namely: the *kufir* of the existing state across the Arab and Muslim worlds, and the necessity of fighting by evoking the pillar of jihad, which is the only religiously legitimate means capable of producing desired change.⁸⁷ Faraj drew extensively on classical frames of reference on jihad, particularly the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim. He is among the first to expound on the concepts of 'near enemy' and 'distant enemy' as two poles of prioritizing jihad.⁸⁸ Despite his emphasis that fighting and jihad against regimes in the Muslim world is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim, in the general sense, his discourse nonetheless remained confined to addressing the role of men in discharging this obligation.⁸⁹

Gama`at al-Jihad may be rightly characterized as an elitist male-centric group. Their approach was line with the Qutbian *tali`a* approach, considering the nature of its radical and militant revolutionism. Its case is distinct from that of another, equally widespread and active movement in Egypt, known as al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group), which began as a revivalist movement that gradually shifted towards jihadism. Overlap and interlock was common between the two groups during the 1970s and 1980s. Al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya was formed from a number of organizations active in Egyptian universities in the early 1970s, which grew and spread rapidly particularly among university students. What began as a simple revivalist traditional Salafist group focused on religious adherence, purifying beliefs and rituals from 'deviations' aimed at preserving Muslim identity, later thrived into a rapidly politically dynamic organization, especially between 1980-1996, with the group taking control of student unions in most Egyptian universities. The Egyptian state nevertheless began to take heed of the group, particularly in 1978 as Egypt was politically gearing towards peace with Israel.

⁸⁷ Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, *Al-Jihad: Al-Faridha al-Gha`iba* "Jihad: The Neglected Duty", Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, 1980, p. 10.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The revivalist and reformist discourse of both the al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya and the Muslim Brotherhood was effective in mobilizing women and propagating women's themes. This era witnessed the phenomenon of 'the return of the veil' among female students, where hijab became a symbol of the resurgence of Islamic identity, and a sign of commitment to the provisions of Islamic Shari`ah. Hijab was no longer merely a matter of dress and modesty, but became an icon that encompasses a holistic value reference, beginning with modes of conduct (modesty, obedience, not traveling without a *mahram* (non-marriageable male kin), abstaining from hand-shaking non-mahrams, remaining at home, awaiting absent husbands, women not re-marrying unless husband's death is confirmed, refraining from using the left hand, and refraining from using means of communication, including the press, audio, or visual outlets). Other forms of behavior focused on include manners of speech, body expressions, methods of worship, and proper manners of sexual life, all of which are signifiers of the dominance of the patriarchal code over women.⁹⁰

Adherence to modes of proper dress is not only a manifestation of overall religiosity, but extends to reveal the authoritative reference that governs the physical 'body' of female followers of various Islamist and jihadist groups. Female members of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya, and the *Sharwqiyyin* preferred to wear the traditional hijab (headscarf), whereas female members of Gama`at al-Jihad, and the *Salafiyyin*, *al-Tabligh*, *al-Najjyin min al-Nar*, and *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* groups favored the *niqab*, which covers the face in addition to the whole body.

Before 1981, al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya did not produce any independent publications, but its discourse and ideology was undoubtedly Salafist in nature. Its ideology came to be defined later through a range of publications and books, most notably *Mithaq al-`Amal al-Islami* (The Charter of Islamic Work), which served as the group's constitution, in addition to *Hatmiyyat al-Murwajaha* (The Inevitability of Confrontation); the book *Asnaaf al-Hukam wa Ahkamuhum* (The Types of Rulers and the Rulings about Them), written by Sheikh Omar abd al-Rahman; and the latter's argument in court published in a book entitled *Kalimat Haq* (A Word of Truth). Other publications included *Ilahun ma`a Allah: E`lan al-Harb `ala Majlis al-Sha`b* (A

⁹⁰ See: Muhammad hafiz Diyab, "Al-Hijab wa al-Ikhtilaf" "Hijab and Difference", *al-Kalima Christian Center*, January 6, 2003, <http://alkalema.net/articl/alhegab.htm>

Deity with God: Declaring War on Parliament), and the document *Falsafat al-Muwajaha* (The Philosophy of Confrontation). The group's literature, albeit becoming prominent references for Islamist ideology, were devoid of any mention of women's direct role in jihad.

Although women were not incorporated into the administrative structure of jihadist organizations, officially at least, they nonetheless assumed non-combat logistical roles by virtue of kinship and intermarriage relations. For example, a wave of confrontations between extremist groups and Egyptian security forces in the early 1990s led to the arrest of a group of "extremist" women. Official investigations on the female detainees claimed that these women did not partner directly with men in carrying out terrorist activities, including assassinations, bombings, or attacks on tourists, rather their tasks included harboring fugitives, transmitting orders from leaders to members, and smuggling funds and weapons between governorates. Security sources said that large numbers of women in Egypt adopt extremist ideology and convictions, and work to disseminate its thought among family members and in their surrounding community.⁹¹

While women maintained traditional roles in the ranks of Egyptian jihadist groups, Egypt did however witness one incident in which women participated in combat activities, related to an independent jihadist cell not associated with known jihadist groups there. On April 30th, 2005, the cell carried out three attacks, where two face-veiled females opened fire in Sayyida `Aisha district on a tourist bus carrying Israeli tourists, injuring some of them. The two attackers, 22-year-old Najat Yusri Yasin and 19-year-old Iman Ibrahim Khamis, are respectively the sister and fiancé of a militant named Ehab Yassin, who carried out a third simultaneous attack. According to security and judicial sources, following the operation and as police narrowed down on the two, Najat shot and killed Iman and then shot herself, and later died at the hospital. The investigation into the incident reveals that the cell operates on a type of "family jihad," relying on family and intermarriage relations to plan

⁹¹ For more details on the nature of the logistical roles played by women in jihadist groups during this period in Egypt, and on the issues, accusations, and rulings against them, see: "Al-Wasat Tujri Tahqiqan Hawla Zahira Jadidah wa Muhimma wa Tuhawir Majmu'a min al-Mu'taqalat fi al-Sujun al-Misriyya al-Mutatarifaat" "Al-Wasat Conducts an Investigative Report on a New and Important Phenomenon, Speaks with a Group of Female Extremist Detainees in Egyptian Prisons", *Al-Hayat*, 1993, <https://goo.gl/zr6xBn>

and carry out their attacks.⁹²

Jihadist groups in other parts of the Arab world were similarly male-centric, with women assuming only supportive roles through kinship and intermarriage relations. In Algeria, several jihadist groups emerged following the 1992 military coup against the Islamic Salvation Front's (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS) victory in the legislative elections earlier in 1991. The government had rejected the election results, and a military coup officially banned FIS and dismantled all the local councils affiliated with it. The regime's crackdown was followed by a campaign of mass arrests, including FIS leaders Abbas Madani and Ali Belhadj. Among the jihadist groups that emerged at the time was *al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha* (The Armed Islamic Group, known by its French acronyms GIA), which then splintered into the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, GSPC) in 1998, branded in the Algerian jihadist context as a "corrective" measure aimed to avoid the atrocious reputation that beset the jihadist movement.⁹³

One example of the effect of family relations on women's involvement in jihadist activities in Algeria is the case of a veteran militant named Boutaoui Bouzid, alias El-Hilali, who turned himself to the authorities in 2015, along with three female relatives to benefit from the National Reconciliation Program. The Algerian state television broadcasted pictures of the militant who joined jihadist groups since 1995, along with his female relatives who were his maternal cousin and her two daughters. An official statement from the Ministry of National Defense stated that the cousin, born in 1970, had received limited education and joined terrorist groups along with her family in 1994 in Mount El-Guerrouch in Jijel province east of Algiers. The second female, born in 1994, is the woman's oldest and unschooled daughter with a detained terrorist, while the third is her youngest daughter, born in 1998 and also unschooled, born to another killed terrorist in Mount El-Geurrouch.⁹⁴

⁹² See: "Al-Amn al-Misri Yuwasil al-Mulahaqaat wa Yu'akid Irtibat al-Hajamat al-Thalath" "Egyptian Security Forces Continues in Pursuit (of Suspects) and Confirms the Three Attacks are Linked", *Al-Jazeera*, May 1, 2005, <https://goo.gl/Pcxmra>

⁹³ For more details, see: Liess Boukra, *Algérie, la terre sacrée* "Algeria: Sacred Terror", Lausanne, Favre, 2002.

⁹⁴ See: "Terrorist Surrenders to Army Forces in Jijel," *Algeria Press Service*, August 27, 2015, <http://en.aps.dz/algeria/8359-terrorist-surrenders-to-army-forces-in-jijel> Also see: Yaqeen Hussam al-Din, "Al-Jaza'ir: Musallah wa Thalathat Nisaa' bi Jama`at Irhabiyya Yusallimouna Anfusahum li al-Sulutat" "Algeria: Armed Man and 3 Women in Terror Groups Turn Themselves in to Authorities", *The New Arab* (Al-Araby al-Jadeed), August 28, 2015, <https://goo.gl/BE4hrH>

In recognizing the importance of women and their role in militant groups in Algeria, FIS leader Ali Belhadj wrote from his prison cell in 1993 an article entitled “The Role of Women in Jihad in the Path of God,” in which he emphasized women’s non-combat logistical roles. He addressed the message to every female Muslim, “mother, wife, and sister to recognize her role in Islamic work pertaining to jihad considering the conditions facing the Islamist movement amidst the regime’s tyranny and use of every hellish method to crush Muslims.” He stressed that the Muslim woman cannot remain absent from participating in aiding her Muslim brothers, but should, however “know the limits of this participation, because – as it is indeed said – women are the other half “sisters” of men. But this is not absolute, the Muslim sister should know that this essay addresses a set of points through which she would recognize her areas of work and participation in jihadist work in its broadest sense, and in its particular sense related to the Muslim woman.”⁹⁵

In Libya, women were also absent from the ranks of *al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya al-Muqatila* (The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)), which emerged in 1989, and formed cells throughout the country. The group did not engage in clashes with the Libyan regime, unlike the Egyptians and the Algerians, but had remained underground until it was exposed in 1995 when Libyan authorities discovered a number of their cells, prompting LIFG to publicly declare its presence so as other rival groups do not take advantage and claim their operations. But in the years underground, since 1993, their operatives went to Algeria to aid in the fighting there.⁹⁶

Women in the Afghan Jihad

During the era of the Afghan Jihad, beginning in 1979 against the Soviets and the pro-Soviet Afghan regime, ‘solidarity jihad’ (*jihad al-tadhamun*) emerged in defense of Muslim countries facing foreign aggression, a form of jihad that was considered an obligatory religious duty. Afghanistan became a fertile environment for the rise of global jihadist icons, such as Abdullah

⁹⁵ Ali Belhadj, *Dawer al-Nisaa’ fi al-Jihad fi Sabeel Allah* “The Role of Women in Jihad in the Path of God”, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad Forum, p. 1.

⁹⁶ See: Kameel al-Taweel, *Al-Qa`ida wa Akhawatuha: Qissat al-Jihadiyeen al-Arab* “Al-Qaeda and its Sisters: The Story of Arab Jihadists”, Beirut: Dar al-Saaqi, 1st ed., 2007, pp. 231-273.

Azzam, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Filastini, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Aziz, Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, and others.⁹⁷

The Afghan cause attracted many of the prominent figures and idealogues of Jihadi Salafism from throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, who brought their families along with them, including Abdullah Azzam⁹⁸ and Osama bin Laden, who formed their own training camps there. The phenomenon of “Afghan Arabs” (Arab Mujahideen who fought in Afghanistan) became more pronounced, and served as a catalyst for the growth and spread of global Jihadi Salafism. The Afghan jihad era attracted thousands of young Arabs who came to fight or work in relief missions, only to later return to their homelands heavily indoctrinated by Jihadi Salafist ideology.

Abdullah Azzam played a pivotal role in the Afghan jihad. He may be rightfully considered the spiritual father of Afghan Arabs, as his efforts to

⁹⁷ With the outbreak of the Afghan civil war, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had reached a highpoint, pinning Afghanistan as one of the most important proxy fronts of the conflict between the two great poles. The US took advantage of the Soviet invasion of Kabul as a pretext – and an opportunity – to work to undermine and dismantle the Soviet Union, via the Afghan front. This contributed to the rise of jihadist support networks, backed by the US and its Arab and Muslim allies. Global jihadism at the time was not founded on an anti-American vision, but rather had strong cooperative relations with the US, particularly the networks of Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden. See: Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: Oil, Money, Terrorism and the Secret Saudi World*, Penguin Publishers, 2009. Also available in Arabic as “*Aal Bin Laden: `Alam al-Nift wa al-Maal wa al-Irhab*,” Translated by Eman Abd al-Ghani Najm, Beirut: The Arab Network for Research and Publications, 1st ed., 2014, p. 400.

⁹⁸ Abdullah Azzam (1914–1989), born in a village near Jenin, Palestine, he studied at the Kadoorie Agricultural Institute in Tulkarm before being appointed as a teacher in the Jordanian city of Karak in early 1960s. He earned a Bachelor’s degree with high honors in Islamic Shariah from the University of Damascus in 1966. He married in 1965, and after the 1967 war, him and his family joined the Palestinian exodus to Jordan. He then worked in Saudi Arabia as a teacher for one year. He helped establish the *Qarwa`id al-Shuyoukh* (Sheikhs’ Bases) training camps run by the Muslim Brotherhood between 1968–1970, and took part in a number of paramilitary operations against Israeli occupation. Meanwhile, he received a Masters’ Degree in *Usul al-Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence) from Al-Azhar University in Egypt through correspondence. He then earned a PhD (with Honors) in *Usul al-Fiqh* in 1973 from Cairo. He lectured at the University of Jordan’s Shariah Faculty between 1973–1980, but was expelled in 1980. He then moved to Saudi Arabia where he lectured at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah in 1981, and later at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan. In 1984, he was appointed as an education advisor for Afghan Mujahideen. In Peshawar, he joined jihadi activities and established the *Maktab al-Khadamat* (Services Desk) in 1984, which served to guide Arab incomers seeking to join the Afghan jihad. The Services Desk also offered various educational, health, social, and military activities. During the 1980s, Azzam became one of the most important theorists of the Jihadi Salafist movement. He travelled throughout the Middle East, Europe, and North America, including over 50 US cities to preach about the Afghan cause and jihad. He issued the *Al-Jihad* and *Lahib al-Ma`raka* (Flames of the Battle) magazines. He was assassinated in mysterious circumstances in Afghanistan on November 24, 1989.

recruit volunteers and spread awareness of the Afghan cause worldwide constituted a historic turning point in the evolution of Solidarity Jihad. He established *Maktab al-Khadamat* (Services Desk) in 1984, which provided relief, reform, and advocacy services.⁹⁹ Azzam collaborated with Osama bin Laden, who on his part established *Bayt al-Ansar* (House of helpers) in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. While Arab and foreign volunteers in Afghanistan began to establish their own camps and combat forces, none of these groups, including Azzam and Bin Laden's, incorporated women in their jihad activities.

According to Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, a prominent jihadist theorist and historian, Arab and Muslim volunteers in the Afghan jihad up until the fall of Kabul in 1992 reached nearly 40,000,¹⁰⁰ yet most of them performed relief missions rather than fighting. Al-Suri notes that the Mujahideen who actually flocked into Afghanistan for the purpose of fighting and settling there did not exceed 1,500 fighters, 300 of whom came with their families.¹⁰¹

Abdullah Azzam's influence in the Afghan jihad manifested in both theory and practice. In propagating the cause of jihad, he authored more than 20 books and essays on the virtues and rules of jihad, beginning in 1982 when he started publishing articles on the Afghan cause in the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood-associated magazine, *al-Mujtama`* (Society), all of which were later compiled in a book entitled *Ayaat al-Rahman fi Jihad al-Afghan* (The Signs of the Merciful in the Afghan Jihad). He also authored an important book on jihadist discourse in 1984, *Al-Difaa` an Aradi al-Muslimin Aham Furud al-A`yan* (Defense of Muslim Lands is the Most Important Individual Obligation). His perspective on jihad remained male-centric, confined within the framework of solidarity jihad based on the premise of 'defensive jihad.' However, he was more lenient towards the participation of women in non-combat functions.

Azzam paved the way for others who came after him to consider – and expand – the role of women in jihad. Despite his reservations towards women's participation in combat in the context of offensive jihad, he was more de-

⁹⁹ Basil Muhammad, *Safahat min Sijil al-Ansar al-Arab in Afghanistan* "Pages from the Records of Arab Helpers in Afghanistan", Riyadh: Dar al-Ilm for Printing and Publishing, 1991, p. 99.

¹⁰⁰ Abu Mus`ab al-Suri (Omar Abd al-Hakim), *Da`wat Al-Muqarwama al-Islamiya al-'Aalamiya* "The Call to Global Islamic Resistance", Dhul Qi`dah 1425 Hijri Edition, December 2004, vol. 1, p. 896, <https://archive.org/details/Dawaaah>

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

cisive in the case of defensive jihad, issuing a fatwa permitting women to join the jihad without her husband or guardian's approval if the Ummah is under attack or Muslim lands are occupied. He states: "We have spoken at length about the ruling of jihad today in Afghanistan, Palestine, and other similarly usurped Muslim lands. We have confirmed what has been agreed upon by the earlier (*salaf*) and succeeding (*khalaf*) generations of religious scholars... namely that when a span of Muslim land is occupied, jihad becomes an individual obligation (*fard `ayn*) on the people of that land. The woman may go out without her husband's permission..."¹⁰²

However, Azzam makes the condition that a woman who travels and participates in jihad must be accompanied by a *mahram* (male kin), and her role is confined to non-combat logistical functions, which was in line with the prevailing religious norms. He did not support the participation of Arab women in combat, considering that Afghan women themselves did not. He states: "Arab women may not come without a mahram. Their duties are confined to education, nursing, and relief and support of refugees. As for fighting, Arab women may not fight because Afghan women, until now, are not participating in the fighting."¹⁰³

In his last will, Azzam emphasized the traditional roles of women in jihad as educators of jihadist generations, and spoke of the need for them to be patient and refrain from indulgence. He says: "O Muslim women! Be Aware of extravagance, for it is the enemy of jihad and the cause of ruin of the human soul. Beware of luxuries, and suffice yourselves with basic necessities. Raise your children and instill in them toughness, manliness, heroism, and jihad. Let your homes be dens for lions, not chicken farms in which your children are fattened only to be slaughtered by tyrants. Instill in the hearts of your children the love of jihad, chivalry, and the battlefields. Experience the problems of the Muslim Ummah, and try to live one day a week – at least – the life resembling that of refugees and Mujahideen, whose sustenance does not exceed dry bread and sips of tea."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Abdullah Azzam, *Ilhaq bi al-Qafilah* "Join the Caravan", The Media Center of Martyr Abdullah Azzam, Peshawar, 1987, p. 45. Also see: Abdullah Azzam, *Al-Difaa` `an Aradi al-Muslimin Aham Furud al-A`yan* "Defense of Muslim Lands One of the Most Important Individual Obligations", Peshawar: The Media Center of Martyr Abdullah Azzam, p. 19.

¹⁰³ Abdullah Azzam, *Ilhaq bi al-Qafilah* "Join the Caravan", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Abdullah Azzam, *Wasayyat al-Shaheed Abdullah Azzam* "The Will of the Martyr Abdullah Azzam", Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_9082.html

Azzam focused his efforts in supporting Afghan jihadi factions in cooperation with various Arab and Islamic relief advocacy associations, such as the Muslim World League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Saudi Red Crescent Society. He worked to raise funds, recruit volunteers, and organize humanitarian relief efforts, including health care and care for orphans. His “Services Desk” issued a magazine entitled *al-Jihad*, aimed at jihadist media propagation and mobilization.¹⁰⁵ The magazine did not have a special section dedicated to women, as would become the case with later jihadist publications. Pressured by Arab jihadists who wanted to form training camps independent of Afghan Mujahideen factions, Azzam established the “Sada” training camp in Pakistani tribal regions near the Afghanistan borders, which was exclusively for men.

Within their supportive role in solidarity jihad, several women became role models of exemplary participation and sacrifice. One example is Umm Omar al-Makkiyya, who according to Yusuf al-`Ayeri, is an old woman who “took an oath to God to support the Afghan jihad with all she had. She sent her son “to Afghanistan”, and worked in Mecca to incite women to support the jihad. She would even send food that she made at home to the battle fronts in Afghanistan.” Al-`Ayeri notes that Umm Omar visited Afghanistan to meet with the women of jihadists, but after arriving had insisted to enter into the battle front, “the Mujahideen tried to dissuade her considering the danger, but to no avail; she had taken an oath to attack the enemy with her weapon. Some brothers responded to her, she rode in the car with her son and entered the battlefield, all in a bid to witness the enemy first hand, fulfill her wish and her oath by shooting at the enemy...She stood behind the rocket launcher and bombed the enemy with several missiles.” Al-`Ayeri adds that other examples of such women include Umm Suraqa, who sent her son to Afghanistan, and Umm Ghadhanfar, who sent her only son, her eldest child, to the jihad in Afghanistan to be blessed with martyrdom so he would intercede “with God” on her behalf.”¹⁰⁶

Abdullah Azzam’s wife, Samira Awatlah (Umm Muhammad), who was dubbed “the mother of *mujahidat* (female jihadists) in Peshawar,” emphasized in an interview that women during the Afghan jihad era maintained tradi-

¹⁰⁵ The first edition of *Al-Jihad* magazine was issued in December 1984. The magazine issued over 60 editions.

¹⁰⁶ Yusuf ibn Saleh al-`Ayeri, *Dawr al-Nisaa’ fi Jihad al-A’daa’* “The Role of Women in Jihad Against the Enemies”, op. cit., p. 16, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_9160.html

tional roles as wives of Mujahideen, occupied with supporting their husbands and raising and educating their children. Awatlah herself played a role in supporting the wives of jihadists, educating them on the virtue of jihad and the nature and developments in the conflict. She states: “Arab women played an important role in recognizing and examining the problems of Afghan refugees who had fled the conflict because men and women did not mingle in the refugee camps. At the time, men spent most of their times in trenches on the frontlines fighting the Russians. We would often visit the camps and inform Sheikh Abdullah about the problems the families suffer from and their lack of foodstuff etc.... Everyone who participated in the jihad in Afghanistan brought his wife with him. They would leave them behind in Peshawar and we all lived as one family. They used to consider me a mother figure. The wives of Mujahideen coordinated amongst themselves.”¹⁰⁷ She noted she and other sisters carried out relief work, including distributing aid to women’s hospitals in Peshawar, fostering orphans, establishing sewing factories, and organizing lessons and seminars for Arab and Afghan women.

Most narratives and reports from the Afghan jihad era indicate confinement of women to traditional and secondary roles in the conservative Afghan society. Claims that women took part in combat missions are rarely substantiated. There are, however, indications of individual and unorganized logistical roles played by some women, including claims by a woman who uses the alias Umm Osama (who claimed to be the leader of Al-Qaeda’s female jihadists) that women did in fact participate in combat operations during the Afghan jihad and played a pivotal role in transmitting messages and warnings between leaders and preparing hiding places for jihadists during missions.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it remains that facts and reports from that era do not substantiate Umm Osama’s claims. Another jihadist activist who goes by the name Arij al-Jihad, wrote a series of stories about female jihadist models of the Afghan era, indicating that women’s roles did not exceed supporting the Mujahideen and persevering in patience the hardship of migration, life,

¹⁰⁷ “Asharq Al-Awsat Interviews Umm Mohammed: The Wife of Bin Laden’s Spiritual Mentor,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, April 30, 2006, <http://english.aawsat.com/theaawsat/features/asharq-al-awsat-interviews-umm-mohammed-the-wife-of-bin-ladens-spiritual-mentor>

¹⁰⁸ Mahmud Khalil, “Qa’idat Mujahidat Al-Qaida: Nabni Tanziman Nisa’iyyan Sayaqum bi `Amaliyat Tafjiriyya Tunisi Amrika Ismaha” “Leader of Al-Qaeda Female Jihadists: We Are Building a Women’s Organization to Carry Out Bombing Operations that Makes America Forget Its Name”, Interview, *Asharq al-Awsat*, March 12, 2003, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=157364&issueno=8870#.WNCVmjvys2x>

and ascetic standards of living there.¹⁰⁹

With the rise of a new generation of jihadist ideologues, including al-Maqdisi, al-Suri, Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz, and Abu Qatada, among others, the jihadist discourse evolved and broadened, subscribing to the heritage of Wahhabism and Qutbism in emphasizing fundamental concepts of reviving *Tawhid* (unification of God), the return of the caliphate, and the pillar of jihad, and in evoking key terms that form the basis of jihadist identity, ideology, and discourse including *hakimiyya* and *jahiliyya*, *al-taghut* (taking tyrants as idols), *al-zala' wa al-bara'* (loyalty to Muslims and disavowal of unbelievers), *al-ta'ifa al-mansura* (the victorious sect), and the stages of *nikaya* (causing harm, vexation) and *tamkeen* (consolidation of power). Nonetheless, the emerging jihadist discourse of the late 1980s and 1990s regarding women's roles remained in line with the traditional perspective that confines women's participation in jihad to supportive non-combat roles.

Like Abdullah Azzam, Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Aziz¹¹⁰ emphasizes in his book *Al-'Umda fi I'dad al-'Udda'* (The Deliberations Required to Prepare for Jihad), which he wrote in 1988 in Afghanistan commissioned by the Egyptian Gama'at al-Jihad, that women should maintain non-fighting roles in offensive jihad, and may only participate in dire cases of defensive jihad with the authorization of the Emir. He states, "Jihad is not obligatory on women in all cases of individual obligatory (*'ayn*) jihad, it may be allowed

¹⁰⁹ Arij al-Jihad, *Silsilat Hafidat Safiyya: Arwa' Sit Qisas li Mujahidat fi Hatha al-Zaman* "Series on the Granddaughters of Safiyya: Best Six Stories of Female Jihadists of Our Time", September 23, 2009, <https://forums.graaam.com/241143.html>

¹¹⁰ Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz (1950 -): Sayyid Imam Abd al-Aziz al-Sharif, goes by several noms de guerre most notably Dr. Fadhl. He was born on August 8, 1950 in Beni Seuf Upper Egypt. He memorized the Qur'an as a child, and attended the Faculty of Medicine at University of Cairo. He graduated in 1974 with honors, specializing in general surgery. Before 1993, he was Emir of *Gama'at al-Jihad* (although he denies it), and maintained a very secretive approach in all his activities, to the extent that members of the organization did not know he was its leader. He resigned from his position in 1993 and left the group after a dispute with Ayman al-Zawahiri. He was among the first wave to join the Afghan jihad in the early 1980s, but focused on writing and ideological counseling for the Mujahideen, and did not engage in fighting. He left Pakistan after a massive wave of arrests of Arabs in Peshawar in 1993, and went to Sudan for a while before leaving to Yemen in 1994 towards the end of the Yemeni civil war. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, he was arrested on October 28, 2001 in detained in Yemen's Political Security Prison in Sanaa, and released less than three years later. He was transferred to Egypt in February 2004, and later released from Egyptian prison after he wrote several ideological revisions (published in November 2007), collected in a book entitled *Wathiqat Tarsheed al-'Amal al-Jihadi fi Misr wa al-'Aalam* "Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World" essentially renouncing violence and criticizing Al-Qaeda. Ayman al-Zawahiri's rebuttal to the document accused Abd al-Aziz of weakness and retreat. Among the most famous of his books include *Al-'Umda fi I'dad al-'Udda* "The Deliberations Required to Prepare for Jihad", and *Al-Jaami' fi Talab al-'Ilm al-Sharif* "Comprehensive Collection in the Pursuit of Honorable Knowledge".

in one case, namely if the enemy attacks a country, invades the homes and reaches women, then women are allowed to fight the enemy in defense of themselves and those with them. A woman is allowed to go out voluntarily and take part in the battle with the authorization of the Emir.”¹¹¹ Hence, he concludes, a woman should be prepared for jihad by learning to use weapons for self-defense, and may be trained by her husband, male relatives, or a trained woman.¹¹²

Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi¹¹³ as well remains within the traditional frameworks that position women principally in the home. He argues that the status of women in Islam is superior to the status given to women in modernist frames of reference, and emphasizes that the Muslim woman is essential to the efforts of defending Islam and the Muslim Ummah. He says, “Whoever contemplates the history of Muslims would see the effective role of women in supporting the religion and raising its banner. Women participated in this role since the dawn of Prophethood, for the first to believe in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a woman “Khadijah, the Prophet’s wife”. In *Bay`at al-`aqaba* “pledge of allegiance to the Prophet”, women also participated, and in the story of the *hijra* “migration to Madinah” she was an aid and a shield. In many of the battles of Muslims, the woman was present and her participation was clear on the level of consultation, support of fighters in all forms, nay even in fighting.”¹¹⁴

Al-Maqqdisi refutes those who say that women are oppressed in Islam, and he considers that the calls for liberating women are associated with a

¹¹¹ Abd al-Qadir ibn Abd al-Aziz, *Al-`Umda fi T`dad al-`Udda* “The Deliberations Required to Prepare (for Jihad)”, Amman: Dar al-Bayariq, 1st ed., 1999, p. 33.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi (1959 -): He is Issam Bin Mohammad Taher al-Barqawi, goes by the alias Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi. He was born July 3rd, 1959 in the town of Barqa in the outskirts of Nablus, Palestine in 1959. His family left for Kuwait when he was a child. In Kuwait, he finished high school and later enrolled in the University of Mosul in Northern Iraq to study sciences. His Jihadi Salafist tendencies began to manifest during his numerous travels to Pakistan and Afghanistan. During this period, he wrote his first and most famous book, *Millat Ibrahim* (Abraham’s Creed). In 1992 after the Second Gulf War, he settled in Jordan, where he began to actively call and recruit to Jihadi Salafism. He was arrested, along with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, in 1993 for being affiliated with the *Bay`at al-Imam* (Pledging Allegiance to the Imam) group. Like al-Zarqawi, Al-Maqqdisi was sentenced to 15 years but released in 1999 by a royal pardon. He was arrested several times after his release on charges of being affiliated to various movements, and only recently was released from his last arrest. His writings are a reference for Jihadi Salafism all over the world.

¹¹⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqqdisi, *Mashru` al-Sharq al-Awsat al-Kabir* “The Greater Middle East Project”, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, p. 51, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqqdis/MS_700.html

Westernization agenda to spread vice and destroy Muslim identity. He argues that “women’s rights is yet another string played by enemies of Islam. They claim that the woman is oppressed not in the Muslim lands that have abandoned God’s law, but she is oppressed by Islam itself, subjugated, constrained by the hijab, beleaguered by the restrictions of purity and chastity, victimized by polygamy, having only half the inheritance of a man, and having no freedom to marry a non-Muslim. They demand her emancipation, or say: loosening her from the grip of Divine laws they describe as outdated customs and traditions.”¹¹⁵

He posits that the West seeks to corrupt the Muslim identity after the awakening that emerged to challenged the West. He says, “It is known that “the West” do not, and will not, be pleased except with a ‘modern’ Americanized Westernized Islam. Their war over this piece of cloth ‘the hijab,’ in addition to its being a war on chastity, purity, and virtue, it is in reality a war on this religion that commands goodness, and requires the wearing of the hijab... The reality of hijab as our enemies read it is an explicit declaration of the refusal to bow down and submit to the promiscuous culture of the West and its degraded infidel globalization. For the Muslim woman, it represents her Islamic identity of which she is proud, it signifies Islamic pride and dignity, freedom from slavery to the impure tyrants of Western culture... Hijab is an indicator of the Ummah’s awakening and revival from its slumber and its declaration of refusing to submit to the corrupt Western culture or follow in its example.”¹¹⁶

Abu Qatada al-Filastini¹¹⁷ is no different from al-Maqqdisi on women.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹⁷ Abu Qatada al-Filastini (1961 -): His real name is Omar Mahmoud Othman Abu Omar. He was born in 1961 and is a Jordanian of Palestinian descent. He originally comes from the village of Dair al-Shaikh, in the outskirts of Jerusalem. He received a bachelor’s degree in Islamic Shariah from the University of Jordan in 1984, and began his career in *da’wa* with *Jama’at al-Da’wa wa al-Tabligh* before he moved to the ranks of Traditional Salafism. He worked for four years as a religious guide in the Jordanian army. In 1991, after the Second Gulf War, he left for Malaysia and continued to Pakistan where his affiliation with the Jihadi Salafist movement developed. In 1993, he settled in Great Britain as a political refugee. In London, he emerged as a leading theorist of Jihadi Salafism, and began to issue the *Al-Ansar* bulletin, which specifically supported the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria. He also contributed to the *Al-Fajr* publication, which supports the Islamic Fighting Group in Libya. Thereafter, he published another magazine, *Al-Minhaj*, which specializes in spreading Global Jihadi Salafism. He is known worldwide as the spiritual leader of Al-Qaeda in Europe and in North Africa. In 1998, Jordan charged him with being affiliated with *Al-Islah wa al-Tahaddi* group and was sentenced to 15 years in absentia, and charged in connection with Al-Qaeda in Jordan. He was arrested in the UK under an anti-terror law in 2005. Jordan

He also argues that a woman's status in Islam is superior to that of her counterparts in the West. He emphasizes that "God Almighty created the woman on the natural disposition to stay at home, serve her kids and care for her husband."¹¹⁸ In his book on Jihadi nurturing and sacrifice, Abu Qatada speaks of a role played by the enemies of Islam to distance the Muslim woman from her religion, and delineates the nature of her role, her neglect of her hijab and modesty, and some of the deviations that many women – even the more pious among them – fall into. He presents examples of believing women, both from history and contemporary ones, who excelled in raising their children on proper Islamic teachings, and emphasizes women's important role in upbringing, cultivating and making men, raising children to love jihad, sacrifice and martyrdom in the path of God.¹¹⁹ His emphasis on the domestic role of women is clear in his fatwa prohibiting women from migrating or traveling for jihad without her guardian's permission, and only permits women to travel to be with their husbands if it was secured journey.¹²⁰

Despite his emphasis on women's traditional roles and not permitting their participation in combat, he did however issue an extreme fatwa during the 'bloody decade' of the Algerian civil war that began in the early 1990s in which he sanctioned the killing of the women and children of Algerian armed forces, without regard to their non-combatant positions in the war.¹²¹

In summary, the role of women in jihadist activities prior to the emergence of Al-Qaeda and the September 11th, 2001 attacks was relatively marginal. The jihadist discourse related to women was focused on issues of identity and morality, portraying women as bearers and carers of future

demanding his extradition; however, Abu Qatada won a court battle against the extradition and the British authorities were obliged to release him on June 16, 2008, but under strict conditions restricting his activities. Britain eventually extradited Abu Qatada to Jordan in July 2013, where he was retried in court for his absentia sentences. He was later found not guilty and released in September 2014.

¹¹⁸ Abu Qatada al-Filastini, *Al-Tarbiya al-Jihadiyya wa al-Fidaa'* "Jihadi Education (Nurturing) and Sacrifice", Muasasat al-Shaamikh al-I'lamiyya al-Iliktruniyya, 2015, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁰ Abu Qatada al-Filastini, "Liqa'a' Ghurfat al-Fajr al-Islamiyya fi Barnamij al-Paltalk" "Interview at the Islamic Dawn Chat Room on Paltalk", *Mu'asasat al-Tahayya*, June 1, 2015, <http://dorarmouba3tara.blogspot.com/2015/06/3.html>

¹²¹ Abu Qatada's position on this subject gave great leeway to justifying the killing of women and children of members of the Algerian Armed Forces during the civil war. See: Abu Qatada al-Filastini, *Fatwa Haamma 'Athimat al-Sha'n fi Mas'alat Qatl al-Dhuriyya wa al-Niswan* "An Important Religious Edict of Vital Significance regarding the Killing of Offspring and Women", The Al-Ansar bulletin, Issue No. 88, March 16, 1995.

jihadist generations. Women's logistical participation in jihad was anecdotal and rarely substantiated, as evident in tracing the history of jihadist groups. The prominent jihadist historian and theorist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri¹²² does not mention significant roles of women in jihadist movements, neither in his instrumental work, *Da`wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya al-`Aalamiya* (The Call to Global Islamic Resistance), nor in his other books and essays on the history and development of jihadist movements. Women were generally excluded from combat operations and from any leading roles during the early jihadist stages of the Wahhabi version, the Muslim Brotherhood and Qutbian experience in Egypt, the 'local jihadism' experiences across the Arab and Muslim worlds, and the Afghan jihad era, whether it was the Afghan Mujahideen or the Arab and Muslim 'solidarity jihad' groups there. This status however would begin to transform with the rise of Al-Qaeda and the 'globalized jihad' phenomenon.

¹²² Abu Mus`ab al-Suri (1958 -): His real name is Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir bin Mustafa, also goes by the alias Omar Abd al-Hakim. He was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1958, and studied Mechanical Engineering at the University of Aleppo between 1976 and 1980. In 1980, he joined *al-Tali`a al-Muqatila*, founded by Marwan Hadid in Syria. He then immigrated to Jordan following clashes between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian regime. Al-Suri moved to several places before settling in France, then moved to Spain and settled there, and married a Spaniard woman who converted to Islam. He went to Afghanistan in 1987, and later to Pakistan where he met Abdullah Azzam in Peshawar. He also met Osama bin Laden, and joined the Al-Qaeda organization since its inception in 1988. After he moved to London in 1996, he faced tremendous pressures from British security agencies, and moved back to Afghanistan in 1997, where he until the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. He was later arrested in the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan in 2005 and handed to Syrian authorities. He is believed to be still in Syrian detention.

Chapter Two

The Women of Al-Qaeda and the ‘Islamic State’

“Many jihadist sisters in Iraq sent me letters requesting to carry out martyrdom operations, and insisting on that request. One of them sent me a letter she wrote with a mixture of tears and blood, after our brothers were martyred in the Abu Ghraib operation during their attempt to rescue the female detainees from the oppressive Crusader prisons. She insisted on carrying out a martyrdom operation, saying: ‘Life is not worth living after the death of those’... Since that day and until now – almost eight months – she has been fasting without a break.”

Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi

Women's roles in Al-Qaeda's activities did not receive ample attention from the founder of the organization, Osama bin Laden, or from his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri. The leaders' ideological contributions, mostly through speeches and letters, lack detailed discussion of women's issues, except for limited and rare directives emphasizing women's non-participation in hostilities and maintaining their traditional role in caring for their homes and raising jihadist generations, considering this role to be an essential value in safeguarding Muslim identity. The central leadership of Al-Qaeda excluded women from its organizational structure, although there were individual cases of women seeking to join, participate, and pledge loyalty to the organization. Regional branches of Al-Qaeda however began incorporating women in various ways, including *da`wa* and media roles, particularly Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), headed by Yusuf al-Ayeri, who gave special attention to women's participation in propaganda and logistical roles, such as collecting donations and caring for the families of killed or imprisoned jihadists.

The significant development came through Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's network, which later became Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, before it evolved into the Islamic State organization. The network incorporated women in combat and suicide missions, and the efforts to mobilize and recruit females into the organization surged exponentially especially after it seized control of the two key cities of al-Raqqah in Syria and Mosul in Iraq in 2014, and its declaration of the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate State. Hundreds of women joined the organization from around the world.

The expansion of the 'Islamic State' necessitated the incorporation of women in the fields of health, education, and *al-hisba* in the form of women's police. The women of the organization remain active in the fields of propaganda, media, religious theorization and Shari`ah implementation, in addition to some women who take part in combat missions.

The era of the Islamic State witnessed a quantum leap in women's activism in establishing a 'feminist' jihadist discourse. Women of IS began

speaking for themselves rather than relying on men's discussion of their issues. Nonetheless, the discourse of IS women does not deviate from the men's interpretation and jurisprudential analysis of Islamic Shari'ah, considering that it is based on 'God's Law' and a sound Islamic lifestyle where there is no room for 'feminine' or 'masculine' interpretations. Meanwhile, it remains that nearly all prominent ideologues of global jihadism are men.

The ideological frames of reference of the women of Al-Qaeda and IS are none other than the male-centric jihadist references that are based on the legacy of the Salafist school in its Wahhabi version and in its *Ikhwan-Qutbi*-an version. The women of Al-Qaeda, like their male counterparts, draw on the inspiration of Sayyid Qutb for their frame of reference, while IS women, like its men, are more inspired by the religious discourse of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

Women of Al-Qaeda: From Domestic to Logistical Jihad

The Al-Qaeda organization emerged as Osama bin Laden¹²³ began to operate independently from Abdullah Azzam and the Services Desk in Afghanistan. Bin Laden and Azzam had been cooperating and coordinating efforts to manage the influx of Arab volunteers to the Afghan jihad. Bin Laden visited Afghanistan frequently during the early 1980s, supplying jihadists with financial support and weapons, in addition to relief and religious advocacy work, before he settled there in 1986.¹²⁴ He founded a special jihadist

¹²³ Osama bin Laden (1957-2011): He is the founder and leader of Al-Qaeda organization. He was born in the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh to a prominent wealthy family. He studied at King AbdulAziz University, before getting engaged in the support of the Afghan Mujahideen cause against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, where he co-founded with Abdullah Azzam the "Services Desk" in 1984 to support Arab volunteers. In 1988, he founded Al-Qaeda organization. He was banished from Saudi Arabia, and later moved to Sudan before returning to Afghanistan in 1996. He remained one of the top targets during the War on Terror, launched after the September 11th, 2001 attacks. He was killed on May 2, 2011 inside a private residential compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan during a covert operation conducted by US forces.

¹²⁴ Abdullah Azzam did not support the idea of forming combat training camps for Arab and foreign fighters, and preferred to continue in supporting the Afghan Mujahideen and joining their camps. It wasn't until 1986 that separate training camps were established for Arab and foreign fighters, independent of the Afghan fighters. During that year, Bin Laden formed a special fighting front for Arab fighters in the region of Jaji near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and established the training camps of Al-Qa'eda (The Base) and Al-Ma'sada (The Lions' Cluster) for Arab fighters, overseen by two of his close Egyptian associates from Gama'at al-Jihad, Muhammad Aatif (Sobhi Abu Setta, AKA Abu Hafs al-Misri), and Ali Amin al-Rashidi (AKA Abu 'Ubaidah al-Banshiri). Bin Laden and his followers fought bitter battles against Soviet forces in Jaji in 1987. With the Soviets sustaining great losses in Jaji, the 'Afghan Arabs'

combat group that was independent of the Afghan Mujahideen, and established training camps for Arab and foreign fighters who were beginning to organize themselves into full-fledged combat forces, and founded *Madafat Abu 'Uthman* "The Abu Uthman Guesthouse" in Peshawar.¹²⁵

By 1988, Bin Laden began transforming his group into a well-organized bureaucratic jihadist organization. With the Afghan War at its height, the need was growing to have documented records of jihadist fighters, 'martyrs,' and the wounded. Inquiries from families of fighters asking about the status of their sons were increasing, particularly ones that came from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which necessitated more systematic organization and management of Arab jihadists' affairs; thus, emerged *Al-Qa`eda* (the Base).¹²⁶ Al-Qaeda organization's leadership and membership were entirely made up of males, and its camps had no place for women. Women were no more than wives with traditional roles in the homes.

The year 1989 saw a radical shift in the international order with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its withdrawal from Afghanistan. These developments contributed to the fall of the Soviet-backed government in Kabul in April 1992, and the transformation of Arab Mujahideen into the phenomenon of "Afghan Arabs." The outbreak of violent conflict and civil war between the Afghan factions continued until the emergence of the Taliban led by Mullah Muhammad Omar in July 1994, which swept the various factions quickly and took control of most of the territory of Afghanistan by 1996.¹²⁷

grew in popularity and influence. According to Abu al-Walid al-Misri, this era saw the nascent stages of what would become the organization named Al-Qaeda. He notes that after the Battle of Jaji, Abu Hafis al-Misri and al-Banshiri dedicated all their time to an organization called "Al-Qaeda," which crystallized by 1988, and included Arab Mujahideen in Afghanistan supported by Arab and non-Arab organizations. See: Abu al-Walid al-Misri (Mustafa Hamid), Tanzeem al-Qa`ida ila Ayn? "The Al-Qaeda Organization: Where It's Headed?", May 23, 2011, <http://www.mustafahamed.com/?p=309>

¹²⁵ Abdullah Anas, *Wiladat al-Afghanistan al-'Arab* "The Birth of the Afghan Arabs", Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2002, p. 34.

¹²⁶ Abu Jandal al-Azdi (Faris al-Zahrani), *Osama bin Laden: Mujadid al-Zaman wa Qahir al-Amreekan* "Osama bin Laden: The Renewer of this Age and Conqueror of Americans", via Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, Muntada al-Ansar, 2011, pp. 36-37, https://archive.org/details/U_Qaher

¹²⁷ In the early 1990s, as the fighting intensified between various Afghan jihadist factions, Osama bin Laden left for Sudan in December 1991, which was then under the rule of President Omar al-Bashir and his former ally, Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, head of the National Islamic Front. Al-Qaeda's leadership engaged in various economic and investment projects in Sudan, a country that – in their view – was an Islamic state that needed support. They formed a small community of jihadists and their families there. Al-

In late 1996, Afghanistan witnessed a second influx of Arab and foreign jihadists, particularly amid the failure of the versions of 'localized' jihad and 'solidarity' jihad in various fronts. During this time, Bin Laden's globalized jihadist approach began to crystalize, characterized by mixing traditional Salafist ideology with solidarity jihad, shifting the helm of conflict from fighting the near enemy (Arab regimes) to fighting the distant enemy (the United States). This new approach essentially transformed the mission of Jihadi Salafism from local and regional struggle to a more global objective, which was realized with the 1998 declaration of the birth of the "Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders," heralding a new type of global-level war between the global Al-Qaeda organization, on the one hand, and the United States, the West, and Arab regimes on the other hand. The new front commenced with the coordinated attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7th, 1998. The globalized version of jihad would later claim responsibility for the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the United States.¹²⁸

The Taliban government condemned the September 11th attacks,¹²⁹

Qaeda also formed its "East Africa" cell, based in Nairobi, Kenya, under the leadership of Abu `Ubaidah al-Banshiri, Al-Qaeda's military commander. In Somalia, Al-Qaeda began establishing training camps in the northern and southern parts of the country, supervised by Abu Hafis al-Misri, who was appointed as the commander of the Somalia front. The East Africa cell would later assume responsibility for the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden was facing growing restrictions in Sudan amid intense international pressures on al-Bashir's government to expel Bin Laden. The governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UK, and the US put pressures on Sudan, and Saudi Arabia stripped Bin Laden of his citizenship in March 1994. These developments coincided with the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, headed by Mullah Muhammad Omar. Following communications with Taliban, which by then had taken control over most of Afghanistan, Bin Laden left Sudan with several his followers, and headed to Afghanistan in May 1996, carrying with him the conviction that the United States represents the "serpent's head" and the basis of evil against the Muslim world. In August 1996, Bin Laden issued a statement paving the way for a new era with the "Declaration of Jihad against the American Occupiers of the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries "Saudi Arabia".

¹²⁸ For more details on the September 11th, 2001 attacks, the perpetrators, their history and connections with Al-Qaeda, the planning and preparations for the attacks through the 'Hamburg Cell' in Germany between 1996-1998, headed by Muhammad Atta, along with UAE national Marwan al-Shehhi, Lebanese national Ziyad al-Jarrah, and Yemeni national Ramzi bin al-Shibh; see: Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *Contre-Croisade: Origines et Conséquences du 11 Septembre*, Paris: l'Harmattan, 2004. Also available in Arabic entitled

Al-Hajma al-Mudhadda li al-Hamla al-Saleebiya: Juthour wa Tada'iyat al-Hadi 'Ashar min September, "Counter-Crusades: Origins and Consequences of September 11th", translated by Ahmad Saleh Ehmaid, Irbid, Jordan: 'Alam al-Kutub al-Hadith, 1st ed., 2010.

¹²⁹ The government of Taliban condemned the September 11th attacks, denied responsibility, and considered the attacks a "human tragedy." Taliban's Foreign Minister Wakeel Ahmad Mutawakkil said that his 'country' does not support terrorism, and that the Taliban movement stands against crimes

nonetheless, the United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. Although the American military intervention in Afghanistan destroyed Al-Qaeda's safe havens there, the organization's core leadership managed to survive, finding a new haven in the northwestern border regions where they continued to operate.

The policies of the War on Terror did achieve specific successes that helped weaken Al-Qaeda, including detaining a number of Al-Qaeda leaders and members,¹³⁰ and killing several top leaders, including Abu al-Yazid al-Misri, Abu Hafs al-Misri, and later Osama bin Laden. While the War on Terror managed to disrupt Al-Qaeda's hierarchical structure, yet it was not able to completely eliminate Al-Qaeda or its ideology. Instead, it helped transform Al-Qaeda from a centralized organization to a more ideologically-linked decentralized global network.

The War on Terror campaign of arrests and assassinations revealed the male-centric nature of Al-Qaeda. The campaign did not target women, as they did not have any logistical or military roles. However, kinship and networks of intermarriage and friendship ties between the women of Al-Qaeda, as wives and female relatives of members and leaders, would soon form the nucleus of female jihadism within Al-Qaeda.

against humanity. Taliban offered to hand over Bin Laden to a neutral country for trial if the US provided evidence of his complicity in the attacks. US President George W. Bush however decided to launch military strikes on Afghanistan after the ruling Taliban movement refused to hand over Bin Laden directly to the US. Taliban's refusal, as its government claimed, came on the basis that the US did not provide conclusive evidence that Bin Laden is responsible for the attacks.

¹³⁰ Many alleged leaders and members of Al-Qaeda were detained at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, a US military prison in the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. It is one of the most notorious prisons that detains individuals "without charges." Human rights organizations criticized the prison for subjecting detainees to severe torture methods. In 2005, Amnesty International called the facility "the Gulag of our times," and considered the US' haphazard campaign to arrest the detainees a grave violation of international law. The gravest issue, however, has been the inability of the US to take the decision to close the facility. Despite repeated promises by US President Barack Obama to close the camp, since he was inaugurated into office in early 2009, the camp continues to be in operation. Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp was opened after the September 11th, 2001 attacks, during the presidency of George W. Bush. It was officially opened in January 2002 in the US Naval base in the southern portion of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, which is under US territorial control under the lease agreement of the 1903 Cuban-American Treaty of Relations. The facility detained nearly 779 individuals since it opened, classified by the US as "enemy combatants." The facility became a symbol of the War on Terror. Currently, about 55 detainees out of a total of 779 remain in the camp. They include the five defendants accused of planning the September 11th attacks, where they face death penalties, and are being tried by a special Military Commission. No women have been detained there.

Bin Laden recognized early on the importance of these ties. He married five women in his lifetime, and had over 20 sons and daughters with them. In one of his wills, dated August 15th, 2008, he addresses one of his wives as “my love, the apple of my eye, and the most precious thing that I have in this world,” and expresses that he wishes she does not marry after him, saying “I really want you to be my wife in paradise; for the woman, if she marries two men, is given a choice on Judgement Day to be with one of them.” He asks her to take care of their children, particularly the girls, and to marry them to jihadists. He also asked that his son would be sent to live with his grandfather and later to join jihad fronts.¹³¹

He married first wife, Najwa Ghanem, in 1974. She was the daughter of his Syrian maternal uncle. He married his second wife, Khadija Sharif (who was nine years his senior), in 1983 and had three children together, but separated while Bin Laden was in Sudan. In 1985, he married his third wife, Khayriyya Saber, who had a PhD in Islamic Shari’ah, and had one son with her (Hamza). His fourth marriage was to Siham al-Sabbar in 1987, and they had four children. The fifth marriage was to Amal al-Saddah, a Yemeni national, in 2000.¹³²

In an effort to create a tight-knit jihadist community and solidify ties within Al-Qaeda’s structure, Bin Laden married some of his children to sons and daughters of other jihadists within the organization. He married one of his daughters to Al-Qaeda’s spokesman, Sulayman Abu Ghaith, a Kuwaiti national. He also solidified his relationship with Al-Qaeda’s military commander, Abu Hafs al-Misri, with his son Muhammad marrying Al-Misri’s daughter.

The issue of polygamy and networks of intermarriage, along with the common jihadist ideology, were among the most important means to create a coherent organization. Investment in marriage relationships was, and remains, characteristic of jihadist groups. Al-Qaeda’s current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who succeeded Bin Laden, married three women, and also solidified his relationships by marrying his children to jihadists.¹³³

¹³¹ See: “My Last Will,” Osama Bin Laden’s Will, dated August 15, 2008, in *Bin Laden’s Bookshelf*, Director of National Intelligence, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english/Letter%20to%20wife.pdf>

¹³² For more details on Bin Laden’s personal life, see: Najwa bin Laden, Omar bin Laden, and Jean Sasson, *Growing Up Bin Laden: Osama’s Wife and Son Take Us Inside Their Secret World*, St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010.

¹³³ Al-Zawahiri had six children with his first wife, Azza Anwar al-Sadeq (Umm Muhammad), who was

At a time when Al-Qaeda was losing its safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and was retreating and on the verge of disintegrating, US President George W. Bush launched a military campaign to invade Iraq in March 2003 under the pretext of Saddam Hussein's regime having weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorism; claims that remain unsubstantiated. The US occupation of Iraq contributed to the revival of jihadism, and particularly the birth of active female jihadism, amid a flourishing of a religious fatwa market against the US occupation of Iraq. The inundation of fatwas for jihad in Iraq lent credence to Al-Qaeda's ideology, which was hostile to US military globalism and to Arab and Muslim regimes allied with it, especially Saudi Arabia.

The loss of Al-Qaeda's physical safe havens also coincided with growing access to the internet and the globalization of communication. Al-Qaeda worked to make up for its losses in the physical world by expanding and disseminating in the virtual world, which would soon become fertile grounds for the activism of female jihadists.

In terms of his perspective on women's roles vis-à-vis jihad, Bin Laden remained in line with the Salafist and Jihadist consensus that women's domain is the home, and held strong reservations against women's participation in the organization. Despite the abundance of letters, speeches, and directives he issued, the topic of women remained absent from his discourse. His conservative traditional view regarding women, anchored in Shari'ah interpretation and holding steadfast to Islamic identity in the face of Westernization, is evident in a will he wrote on December 14th, 2001, a few months after the September 11th attacks. In it, he emphasizes women's domestic roles, caring for children and raising jihadi generations. He addresses women by warning them against adornment and emulating 'promiscuous' Western women, and urges them to safeguard their dignity and emulate the model

killed with her son Muhammad in a US airstrike in Afghanistan following the September 11th attacks. He married his second wife, Umayma Hassan (Umm Khalid) in 2001. She hailed from a jihadist family and was the widow of a killed jihadist. In 2009, Al-Qaeda's Al-Sahab Media Foundation published a letter she wrote, entitled "A Message to the Muslim Sisters." His third wife is Sayyida Halawa (Umm Tasneem), who also hails from an Egyptian jihadist family and is a widow of two Egyptian militants, the first was executed in 2000 in Egypt, and the second was killed in Afghanistan. Al-Zawahiri's daughters also married jihadists: His daughter Fatima married a Jordanian jihadist named Abu Turab al-Urduni. Another daughter, Umayma, married an Egyptian jihadist named Abu Dujana al-Misri al-Sharqawi. A third daughter, Nabila, married a Moroccan jihadist named Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Maghribi. See: Abu Abd al-Qadir, *Namazij min Nour... Shay' min Syar Zawjat Hakim al-Ummah Ayman al-Zawahiri* "Models of Light...Some Information from the Biographies of Ayman al-Zawahiri's Wives", goo.gl/PZ8g10

of the Prophet's wives. He addresses his wives in particular, praising them for their patience and forbearance, thanking them for their support and willingness to leave a comfortable life to live one full of hardships with him. He also urges them not to remarry after him, but focus on taking care of their children, sacrifice, and continue to pray for them.¹³⁴

Ayman al-Zawahiri maintained Bin Laden's approach to women roles. He did not incorporate women into the organization and did not allow their participation in combat. In an open discussion with Al-Qaeda's media arm, al-Sahab Foundation, in 2008, al-Zawahiri was asked who were the highest-ranking women in Al-Qaeda and what were their roles. He replied unequivocally: "There are no women in *Qa'idat al-Jihad* "Al-Qaeda" organization, but the women of the Mujahideen are assuming a heroic role in taking care of their homes and their children amidst the hardship of migration, movement, and stationing "at war fronts".¹³⁵

In a rare letter by al-Zawahiri's wife, Omayma Hassan, entitled "A Message to the Muslim Sisters," published by al-Sahab Media Foundation in December 2009, Hassan confirms Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's view of women and their emphasis on traditional roles, the issue of identity, Shari'ah, and anti-Westernization. The letter coincided with increased debate over banning the hijab in Europe. She says, "My third message is general, to Muslim women around the world, to adhere to the hijab, which is facing one of the gravest battles between Islam and unbelief." She warns that abandoning the hijab will be followed by abandoning the rest of religion. Hassan urges Muslim women to raise their children to obey God, love jihad, and encourage their brothers, husbands, and sons to defend Muslim lands and resources, and emphasizes women's non-combatant roles, by "helping the Mujahideen with prayer and money, supporting the families of the wounded and detained with donations to their children and women, for they are in dire need for support to bear the hardship of life."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Muhammad Nasser, "Wasiyat Bin Laden" "Bin Laden's Will", Al-Anbaa, May 3, 2011, <http://bit.ly/2zrJfHX>

¹³⁵ Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Al-Liqaa' al-Maftouh ma' al-Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri* "Open Discussion with Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri", Al-Sahab Media Foundation, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, February 15, 2009, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_19720.html

¹³⁶ Umayma Hassan, Risala ila al-Akhawat al-Muslimat "A Message to the Muslim Sisters", Al-Sahab Media Foundation, December 2009, <https://justpaste.it/iqse>

Hassan stresses that women should not join physical jihad, despite it being obligatory to Muslim men and women, because the road to the battle fronts “is not easy for women, it requires a mahram for women to go back and forth.” She adds that women are subordinate to men, and that they ought to comply with the orders of jihadists. Yet in her elucidation of women’s supportive role in jihad, she notes the various ways women may participate, including in fighting, if commanded by the jihadist men. She states, “We “Muslim women” must support our religion in various ways, we put ourselves in the service of the Mujahideen, and do what they ask of us, whether it is support through money, serving them, transmitting information, providing opinions, participating in fighting or even in martyrdom operations. For we see how many sisters carried out martyrdom acts in Palestine, Iraq, and Chechnya.” Her letter also includes an appeal to liberate detained Muslim women.¹³⁷

The letter of al-Zawahiri’s wife suggests the possibility of a shift in women’s roles in jihadist groups, particularly the ones outside Al-Qaeda’s framework in Chechnya, Palestine, and Iraq. By the turn of the twenty-first century, several jihadist groups began incorporating women and giving them a larger role in their administrative structures and combat operations, particularly suicide missions. Hawaa Barayev became the first woman known to carry out a suicide mission in Chechnya in June 2000, followed by others. In Palestine, the phenomenon emerged during the Second Intifada, with Wafaa Edris carrying out a suicide mission in January 2002. Edris was a member of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, a secular coalition of Palestinian militant groups affiliated with Fatah. Palestinian Dareen Abu Aysheh was the first to join the women’s Martyrdom operations under the banner of Hamas, the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite the consensus in the discourses of almost all jihadist groups on women’s traditional roles, many women began to seek increasing roles and search for new positioning within the jihadist space. The phenomenon was seen in Arab and Muslim women, but also with new female converts to Islam from Europe and the US. Malika el-Aroud, who goes by the alias Umm Ubayda (known as the ‘black widow’ for being widowed twice in the death of two jihadist husbands), became one of the most famous cyber jihadists in Europe. She is Belgian of Moroccan descent, described by the authorities in

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Brussels as the most dangerous woman in Europe,¹³⁸ as will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the book.

Dr. Aafia Siddiqui is perhaps the most notoriously claimed Al-Qaeda woman, even though her ties to Al-Qaeda are surrounded by much doubt, suspicion, and mystery. A Pakistani neuroscientist, Siddiqui graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later obtained a PhD in neuroscience from Brandeis University in 2001. She married a Pakistani anesthesiologist, Amjad Mohammad Khan, and had three children together. During college, she was known for her Islamic activism, leading many campaigns across the US to raise funds and donations to send to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia. She separated and was later divorced from Khan in 2002, after which she reportedly married an accused Al-Qaeda member, Ali Abd al-Aziz, known as Ammar al-Baluchi, who was the nephew of Khalid Sheikh Muhammad (who the US considers the mastermind of the September 11th attacks). Her family however denies that Siddiqui married al-Baluchi, who was arrested by Pakistani authorities in 2003 and turned over to CIA custody and later transferred to Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp on charges of financing and facilitating Al-Qaeda operations.¹³⁹

The mysteriousness in Siddiqui's story begins after she left the US and moved back to Pakistan. On March 30th, 2003, she left her home in Karachi with her three children, reportedly heading to Islamabad to visit her uncle, but never showed up. One scenario of the story says that she was snatched along with her children by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), on behalf of the Americans, and was reportedly held at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, where a number of people were held as "ghost prisoners." In May 2004, while her family was searching for her, the FBI named Siddiqui as one of its seven Most Wanted Terrorists, considering her a grave threat working with Al-Qaeda in plotting against US interests. Siddiqui's family insisted she was being held by the Americans, but the US authorities repeatedly denied the claims. Meanwhile, in an investigative report, British journalist Yvonne

¹³⁸ See: Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Al Qaeda Warrior Uses Internet to Rally Women," *New York Times*, May 28, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/world/europe/28terror.html>
 Also see: Muhammad Hamid, "Malika el-Aroud: Mujahidat al-Internet allati Arraqat al-Istikhbarat al-Europia" "Malika el-Aroud: The Internet Jihadist Who Kept European Intelligence Awake", *Elaph*, May 29, 2008, <http://elaph.com/Web/Politics/2008/5/335025.htm>

¹³⁹ See: Sabghat Allah Saber, "Aafia Siddiqui: Tabiba Jihadiyya am Dahiyya?" "Aafia Siddiqui: A Jihadist Doctor or a Victim?," *Al-Araby al-Jadid*, September 28, 2014, <https://goo.gl/cmCMgg>

Ridley said that Siddiqui was being held in secret by the US at Bagram. Ridley was investigating "Prisoner 650," and reached the conclusion that the prisoner is the Pakistani neuroscientist Aafia Siddiqui. US authorities, however, denied having Siddiqui in custody at any point before 2008.¹⁴⁰

Aafia Siddiqui is now spending an 86-year sentence at a prison in Fort Worth, Texas, after being convicted of assault and attempted murder of a US soldier at a police station in Ghazni, Afghanistan, where she was arrested in 2008. According to the US narrative, Siddiqui drew back a curtain in the investigation room where she was being held, grabbed a rifle laid down by a warrant officer, and began shooting at the army officers and FBI agents in the room, missing them, before an officer returned fire and shot her in the torso, a narrative that Ridley claims is fabricated. Siddiqui was extradited to the US where she stood trial until she was convicted in September 2010 of all charges against her, including two counts of attempted murder, armed assault, using and carrying a firearm, and three counts of assault on US officers and employees. No terrorism-related charges were brought against Siddiqui in a case that attracted the attention of human rights groups and became a rallying cry for various jihadist groups.¹⁴¹

Apart from the shaky American narrative, for jihadists, Siddiqui became an icon and the 'lady of Al-Qaeda,' a symbol of the injustice practiced by the United States. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates did not stop demanding her release, and several jihadist groups offered her exchange for kidnapped Americans. In August 2014, the Islamic State organization offered to release American journalist James Foley in exchange for Siddiqui. In a letter addressed to US authorities and Foley's family a week before he was executed, IS said "We offered you many chances to negotiate the release of your national by paying ransom, as other governments do. We also offered you to exchange hostages with Muslims being detained by you, such as our sister Aafia Siddiqui, but you soon proved to us that you are not interested in this."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Yvonne Ridley, "The Algerian Kidnappers and the Case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui," *Information Clearing House*, January 20, 2013, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article33662.htm>

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Also see: C. J. Hughes, "Pakistani Scientist Found Guilty of Shootings," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/04/nyregion/04siddiqui.html>

¹⁴² "Aafia: Al-'aalima al-Pakistaniyya wa Sir Tamassuk 'Da'ish' bi Itlaq Sarahiha" "Aafia: The Pakistani Scientist and the Secret of Daesh's "IS" Persistence for Her Release", *Assakina*, August 30, 2014, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/51985.html>

Another female jihadist story that drew media and public attention is the case of an American woman who converted to Islam named Colleen LaRose, known as ‘Jihad Jane’ and ‘Fatima LaRose.’ Her story dates back to June 2008, when she posted a comment on a YouTube account under the name ‘JihadJane’ saying that she was “desperate to do something somehow to help “suffering Muslims”.” Between December 2008 and October 2009, she communicated over the internet with five others who reportedly expressed desire to join jihad and become martyrs. According to the indictment, LaRose and her co-conspirators used the internet to conspire to provide material support and resources to terrorists, “recruited women online who had passports and the ability to travel to and across Europe in support of violent jihad.” The indictment stated that their plans included martyring themselves, soliciting money for terrorists, soliciting passports and avoiding travel restrictions by collecting passports and by marrying so they could wage jihad.¹⁴³

The indictment adds that in order to facilitate “international terrorism,” LaRose willingly took the American passport of a man (her boyfriend) without his permission, and was directed by a co-conspirator to kill a Swedish citizen “in a way that the whole kufar “non-believer” world get frightened.” Informed sources noted that the target was Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks, who depicting Prophet Muhammad with the body of a dog in 2007. ‘Jihad Jane’ traveled to Europe in August 2009, “with the intent to live and train with jihadists, and to find and kill “Vilks”,”¹⁴⁴ but was arrested two weeks later.¹⁴⁵ In January 2014, LaRose was sentenced to 10 years in prison, after being found guilty on terrorism charges.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ See the US Federal Indictment of Colleen LaRose at <http://media.nbcphiladelphia.com/documents/JihadJane.pdf> Also see: Vince Lattanzio, “Montco’s ‘Jihad Jane’ Charged with Recruiting,” *NBC10 Philadelphia*, March 9, 2010, <http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Montco-Woman-Charged-With-Recruiting-Jihadists-87149482.html>

¹⁴⁴ See Indictment of Colleen LaRose, op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ See: Susan Candiotti, “‘Jihad Jane’ Suspect Pleads Not Guilty,” *CNN*, March 18, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/03/18/jihad.jane.hearing/>

¹⁴⁶ See: Chris Boyette, “‘Jihad Jane’ Sentenced to 10 Years” *CNN*, January 6, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/06/justice/jihad-jane-sentenced/>

Women between the Central Al-Qaeda and Regional Branches

A dichotomy in women's status in jihad would emerge between the Al-Qaeda's central leadership and local jihadist movements in conflict zones, particularly ones facing foreign occupation. While Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were heavily influenced by the Qutbian frame of reference, which shaped their position on distancing women from militant jihad and focus instead on women as symbols of identity, Al-Qaeda's regional branches and local movements however would embrace a rigid Wahhabi reference that championed identity policies and were more lenient toward incorporating women within their structures and activities. This was most evident during the Russia-Chechnya conflict, the US invasion of Iraq, and the enduring Israeli occupation in Palestine. While both foreign and Arab women who wished to join the jihad would seek out Al-Qaeda, it was in the regional branches that these women found greater roles.

In Chechnya and Tajikistan, the leader of the Arab Mujahideen Samer Sweilem, a Saudi national who went by the nom de guerre Khattab, along with the religious ideologue Muhammad al-Tamimi, AKA Abu Omar al-Sayf, had significant influence in paving the way for women to participate in jihadist activities. It would soon become evident that leaders of regional Al-Qaeda branches, such as Yusuf al-'Ayeri and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, were more influenced by Khattab and al-Sayf than by Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. The nascent stages of women's active role in jihadist operations are found in l-'Ayeri tasking women with logistical jihadist roles in the Saudi branch (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula AQAP), and al-Zarqawi incorporating women in combat jihadist operations – including suicide missions – in Iraq.

Beginning in 1992, Tajikistan witnessed a bitter civil war following its independence from the Soviet Union. Khattab emerged as a leader of the Afghan Arabs who joined the Tajikistan front in furtherance of their 'Solidarity Jihad' against Russia. However, by 1995, the jihadist factions, including Afghan Arabs, were sustaining heavy losses especially as Russian-backed Tajik government forces took control. Under pressure, Arab jihadists began withdrawing from Tajikistan and headed towards the Chechnya front.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ See: Ray Takeyh and Nicholas Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Political Islam*. Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2004. Translated into Arabic under the title "Nushou' al-Islam al-Siyasi al-Radikaly wa Inhiyuruh," translated by Hassan Bustani, Beirut: Dar al-Saaqi, 1st ed., 2005, pp. 197-204.

In the mid-1990s, Chechnya became the preferred front for Afghan Arab fighters, particularly Saudis, and for networks of Solidarity Jihad, considering that – in their view – Chechnya was facing Russian occupation, as Afghanistan had faced earlier. War broke out in the Caucasus Chechen Republic in late 1995 (and later renewed in 1999) between Russia and Chechen secessionists, who were joined by an influx of Solidarity Jihadists from the Arab world. As a leader of Arab jihadists, Khattab began establishing training camps in cooperation with the Chechen militant leader Shamil Salmanovich Basayev. The two built networks of logistical supply to facilitate the entry of volunteer fighters, including women, and tasked women with logistical and militant roles unprecedented in modern jihadist experience. Despite the Solidarity Jihad efforts in Chechnya, the relationship between Khattab and Osama bin Laden was tense, considering that Khattab would not work under the banner of Al-Qaeda's network. By the end 1999, the momentum of the Chechen jihad was weakening, and the majority of Arab jihadist leaders there were killed by Russian forces. Khattab was assassinated by the Russian intelligence via a poisoned letter on March 20th, 2002, and Abu Omar al-Sayf was killed in early December 2005. The Chechen jihad movement became fraught with divisions and polarization between global and nationalist jihadist currents.¹⁴⁸

In both discourse and practice, Yusuf al-'Ayeri¹⁴⁹ may rightfully be considered a trailblazer within jihadist discourse in institutionalizing women's jihadist status and defining her roles. His biography summarizes many of the transformations witnessed in Al-Qaeda and in Saudi jihadism. He is the actual founder of the Al-Qaeda branch in Saudi Arabia in 2002, and gave it the name "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP).¹⁵⁰ He wrote a set

¹⁴⁸ For more details, see: Murad Batal al-Shishani, *Tanzeem al-Qa`ida: Al-Ru'ya al-Jeosiyasiya, wa al-Stratijiya, wa al-Bunya al-Ijtima'iya*, "The Al-Qaeda Organization: Geo-Political Vision, Strategy, and Social Structure", Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, 1st ed., 2012, pp. 125-134.

¹⁴⁹ Yusuf al-'Ayeri (1974-2003): His name is Yusuf ibn Saleh ibn Fahad al-'Ayeri, also known as 'al-Battar.' He was born to a middle-class family originally from al-Qaseem. His family settled in Dammam. He left school and went to Afghanistan where he distinguished himself in the training camps. He returned to Saudi Arabia in late 1993, and was later arrested following the Khobar bombings in June 1996. He was released in June 1998. He is the first Emir of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. Al-'Ayeri was killed on May 31, 2003 during confrontations with Saudi forces.

¹⁵⁰ By the time al-'Ayeri founded AQAP in 2002, the new reality facing jihadists stirred debates between the central Al-Qaeda organization and al-Zarqawi's network regarding the strategic priorities of Jihadi Salafism. With the fall of the Taliban regime and the loss of safe havens (especially in the brief period between the war in Afghanistan and the fall of Baghdad in 2003), Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri focused on targeting Saudi Arabia and launching armed operations there, aimed to destabilize American confidence

of books and articles specifically on women, emphasizing women's logistical roles in jihad, influenced by the Chechen experience and its Saudi leader Khattab, despite never having met him in person.

Al-'Ayeri established a broad jihadist network in Saudi Arabia, implementing an organized ideological program and military training by investing in his extended jihadist links to finance his group. He remains widely known and respected within global jihadist circles, considering his vast writings and experience particularly in 'cyber jihad.' On the internet, he established *al-Nidaa'* (The Call) website in 2001, which served as a jihadist platform rich with jihadist books, articles, letters, and fatwas. He personally managed the site and edited its contents using the screen name 'al-Battar.' He founded The Center for Islamic Studies and Research, which published global jihadist books and studies. He also published one of the most prominent jihadist magazines, *Sawt al-Jihad* (The Voice of Jihad), which became the mouthpiece of AQAP. AQAP published *Mu'askar al-Battar* (al-Battar Military Camp), a magazine specializing in military and combat aspects. Moreover, al-'Ayeri published the first jihadist magazine dedicated to women, *al-Khansaa*, first issued in September 2004.¹⁵¹

In his writings on women, al-'Ayeri presented a perspective uncommon in the male-centric jihadist discourse. Despite his emphasis that the woman's primary place is the home and caring for her family, he nonetheless revived the model of the jihadist woman from various Islamic eras. In an article entitled *Dawr al-Nisaa' fi Jihad al-A'daa'* (The Role of Women in Jihad against the Enemies), he narrates stories of female companions of the Prophet and women from succeeding generations until the modern era who

in its Saudi ally, and to provoke popular opposition there. The decision to open the door of confrontations with the Saudi regime stirred disputes within AQAP, as al-'Ayeri was heavily opposed to the move, while others were neutral on the decision, including Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. According to Muhammad al-Tamimi (AKA Abu Omar al-Sayf, a prominent jihadist ideologue affiliated with AQAP), the decision to launch confrontations came from personal calculations of cells within AQAP, most notably the cell headed by Turki Dandani and Khalid al-Haj (Abu Hazem al-Sha'er), both of whom belong to the more extreme wing within AQAP. Despite initial hesitancy, AQAP launched armed operations in May 2003 with an attack on a residential complex in the capital Riyadh, killing 18 people and injuring 225. Other attacks included targeting western interests, taking hostages, and attacking the US Consulate in Jeddah. See: Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, *Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamist Extremists*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Draft, Revised January 26, 2005, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/050106_al-qaedainsaudi.pdf

¹⁵¹ A total of 30 issues were published of the magazine *Sawt al-Jihad*, the first of which was published in September 2003. 22 issues were published of the magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar*, while only one issue was published of *al-Khansaa*, a sister magazine of *Sawt al-Jihad*.

took part in jihad in various combat and non-combat roles. He emphasizes women's essential role in jihad, stating:

Islam in its glory ages did not triumph over the states of kufr – who were richer, greater in numbers and better equipped – except because the “Muslim” woman was responsible to a great degree; she is the one who raises her children on jihad, she is patient and encourages her children and husband to be patient and persist on that path. This is why the saying ‘behind every great man is a woman’ applies to Muslim women at that time. So, we say ‘behind every great jihadist is a woman.’ The enemies of the Ummah are not keen to liberate the “Muslim” woman except because they know that she is the backbone of the Ummah...The woman is an important element of the struggle today; her presence is essential in all her capabilities and emotions. Her presence is not merely supplemental in the struggle, nay, her presence is a pillar of victory and perseverance.¹⁵²

Although al-`Ayeri provides examples of women who took part in combat, he nonetheless emphasizes that women today are needed specifically in logistical roles. He opines:

The reason we address women in these pages is because we see that when a woman is convinced of something, she becomes the greatest motivation for men to perform it, and if she opposes it, she becomes the greatest hindrance to it... We do not want you to enter the battlefield because of what it poses of degradation and strife, but we want you to emulate the women of the Salaf “early generations” in their incitement of jihad, preparation, and patience on this path, and in their desire to take part in anything in order for Islam to triumph...The least that is asked of you when men are out for jihad is to be quiet and accept what God has commanded, and know that when you dissuade men from jihad, whether it is your sons, husband, or brothers, then this is a form of shunning the path of God, something that God will never accept.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Yusuf al-`Ayeri, *Dawr al-Nisaa' fi Jihad al-A'daa'* “The Role of Women in the Jihad against the Enemies”, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

Al-'Ayeri is not exceptional in his elucidation of the historical role of women in jihad from the perspective of Islam in general, and the Wahhabi-Hanbali school of thought in particular, for numerous fatwas issued by the Council of Senior Scholars in Saudi Arabia affirmed the issue. But al-'Ayeri is unique in using the classical *fiqhi* (jurisprudential) approach and applying it to contemporary reality. His basic theorization addresses Solidarity Jihad in the case of jihad to deter foreign aggression, which he then extends to the case of contemporary regimes in the Arab and Muslim worlds. His perspective on this form of defensive jihad reiterates the consensus of Wahhabi *'ulama* (religious scholars), which concludes, as Ali al-Khudhair says, that "women are not obliged to carry out armed jihad...but it is permissible in the case of self-defense if an aggressor attacks her." Al-Khudhair notes that if the *'ulama* or leaders of jihad see need for incorporating women, and they approve it, then there is no objection, considering that some female companions of the Prophet joined the jihad. He notes, however, that if such participation cannot be facilitated, then women should "carry out another kind of jihad; that is, by supporting the Mujahideen with money, knowledge, prayer, and the pen "writing", and raising children on the spirit of jihad and animosity and hatred towards infidels. The woman ought to stay with her children, and support the families of jihadists and jihadists taken captive."¹⁵⁴

Al-'Ayeri's position on women in combat is irresolute. Although he prefers women's traditional domestic roles, and logistical roles – at best – in jihad, he nonetheless wrote a book on martyrdom operations in which he permits women to carry out suicide missions. In *Hal Intaharat Hawaa am Ustishida?* (Did Hawaa Commit Suicide or was She Martyred?), he praises Hawaa Barayev, the Chechen woman who carried out a suicide attack on Russian soldiers in 2000. He explains that he wrote the book to respond to those who deny Barayev the status of martyrdom and consider her action unlawful suicide rather than martyrdom. He laments that the celebration of Barayev's sacrifice was ruined by those from within the Islamist and jihadist circles who 'wrongly' stigmatize the "lady of *mujahidaat* "female jihadists"" in Chechnya as having killed herself, and who criticize al-'Ayeri's group for mentioning her name on their website.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Ali ibn Khudhair al-Khudhair, *Hal 'ala al-Mar'a Jihad? "Are Women Obligated to Perform Jihad?"*, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_9175.html

¹⁵⁵ Yusuf al-'Ayeri, "*Hal Intaharat Hawaa am Istushida?* "Did Hawaa Commit Suicide or was She Martyred?", Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, p. 2, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_13005.html

In his praise of Hawaa Barayev and her mission, and in his attack on those who criticize her, al-`Ayeri considers her an example and role model for jihad and sacrifice. He states:

Our Ummah is accustomed to hearing in its history of men sacrificing their lives for the sake of their religion, but its covenant to what women have “recorded” with their blood remains distant. The martyred girl – By God’s will – Hawaa Barayev is one of a few women whose name will be everlastingly preserved in history. She presented the finest example of sacrifice. After her mission, the Russians can rightly expect death from everywhere, and their hearts should rightly be filled with horror from a girl like this. Every envier has the right to die in fury and jealousy from her heroism, and every spineless deserter should bury their head in the dirt, for she has done what many men have not done. Every supporter can rightfully be incited to give forth what she has given, and have the right to raise their heads high that such a model has emerged in this Ummah. We are certain that an Ummah that has the likes of “Barayev” will not cease to have goodness, by God’s will.¹⁵⁶

The role of women in AQAP evolved slowly and gradually through logistical roles in the context of confrontation with the Saudi authorities. Women’s functions were confined to the media, propaganda, fundraising, and caring for the families of detainees, but not partaking in any combat operations. Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia launched several armed operations, but the Saudi authorities were successful in containing the group. The Saudi government launched a widespread counter-propaganda campaign that managed to weaken AQAP’s ability to recruit and find safe havens. AQAP’s cells were infiltrated, their leaders pursued, and a list of high value targets was issued by Saudi authorities that included leaders and members of the group.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Yusuf al-`Ayeri was killed on May 31, 2003, and his successor, Yemeni national Khalid al-Hajj was killed on March 15, 2004. Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin purportedly took over after al-Hajj, and was later killed on June 18, 2004. The death of senior leaders of AQAP contributed to weakening the organization, and the new leaderships lacked experience and capabilities to maintain the confrontations with Saudi authorities. See: International Crisis Group, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?*, September 21, 2004, ICG Middle East Report No. 31, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/31-saudi-arabia-backgrounder-who-are-the-islamists.pdf>

By 2005, Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia was retreating, and the rest of the organization's members who had not been arrested or killed were besieged, while some others managed to escape to Iraq and joined the insurgency there against the US occupation.¹⁵⁸

Saudi Arabia would come to witness one of the earliest cases of women's involvement in jihadism in the story of Fawzia al-'Aufi, the wife of Saleh al-'Aufi, the commander of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia at the time. In July 2004, Saudi authorities stormed a villa in Riyadh and engaged in confrontations with wanted suspected jihadist leaders who were inside. The authorities found the severed head of American hostage Paul Johnson Jr. in the freezer inside the villa where Fawzia al-'Aufi was present with her three children and a number of other women. After her arrest, Fawzia was released by the authorities considering that she is a woman and her children needed her for care and psychological rehabilitation.¹⁵⁹ Her husband, Saleh al-'Aufi was later killed in April 2005.

Women's media and propaganda roles in AQAP would take a leap forward with the publishing of *al-Khansaa*, the first online magazine dedicated to female jihadism, issued in September 2004 by the "Women's Media Bureau in the Arabian Peninsula." The managing editor of the magazine was an Egyptian woman who went by the name Umm Osama, who was later arrested by Saudi authorities for her activities in the women's media wing of AQAP. In July 2008, the state-affiliated Saudi TV channel broadcasted Umm Osama's confessions, in which she admitted to editing the magazine and for carrying out "logistical tasks" for Al-Qaeda via the website. Umm Osama's

¹⁵⁸ AQAP's operations backfired and had disastrous results on Al-Qaeda, especially with the success of Saudi Arabian security forces in thwarting the organization, the death of its leaders, and the lack of an adequate social incubator to host the jihadists locally. It became evident that the utility of Saudi jihadism is strongest in partaking in solidarity jihad in fronts outside of Saudi Arabia. Al-Qaeda's Saudi branch grew further convinced of the success of al-Zarqawi's strategy in Iraq, which appeared to be more effective. A number of AQAP leaders began siding with al-Zarqawi and his network, declaring their support via audio, visual, and written messages. Saleh al-'Aufi issued several messages supporting al-Zarqawi's operations in Iraq, and many members from the Saudi Al-Qaeda branch joined al-Zarqawi's ranks, most notably, Abdullah al-Rashoud. These developments and shifts in support helped overcome some of the differences between central Al-Qaeda's vision and that of al-Zarqawi. See: Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, *Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia*, op. cit., pp. 13-18.

¹⁵⁹ See: "Zawjat Za'im al-Qa'ida fi al-Su'udiyya Tunashid al-Qiyada al-Sa'udiyya Musa'adataha" "The Wife of Al-Qaeda's Leader in Saudi Arabia Appeals to Saudi Leadership to Help Her", *Al-Arabiya Net*, March 20, 2005, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/03/20/11390.html> Also see: "U.S. Hostage's Head Found in Freezer," *CNN*, July 21, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/07/21/saudi.johnson/index.html>

role also included supervising the training of “Al-Qaeda’s *Mujahidaat*” and editing the women’s section of AQAP publications in Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi officials, Umm Osama “renounced Al-Qaeda’s thought” after undergoing the *Munasaha* program, a counseling and guidance program aimed at rehabilitating former jihadists. For their part, Al-Qaeda announced expelling Umm Osama and stigmatized her as a “hypocrite.”¹⁶⁰

While only one issue of *al-Khansaa* was published, it would nonetheless pave the way for further engagement of women in media and cyber jihad. The issue included articles by a number of women using pseudonyms, such as Athir al-Khalidi, Umm al-Miqdad, Umm Ra`ad al-Tamimi, Ghaydaa al-Harbi, Umm Badr, and Asirat al-Jihad. The editorial of the issue discussed the duties and roles of women in jihad. It stated, “We shall stand firmly wrapped in our veils, covered with our *abaya* cloaks, our weapons in our hands, our children in our laps, and the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet as our guide and inspiration... We present the blood of our husbands and bodies of our children a sacrificial offering to draw nearer to God, for Him to facilitate for us martyrdom in His path... The winds of heaven are blowing.”¹⁶¹ Notwithstanding the rhetorical introduction, the remainder of the articles in the issue focused on women’s logistical non-combatant roles, in addition to traditional domestic roles.

The failure to publish additional issues of *al-Khansaa* is indicative of the weakness and disintegration of the organization at that stage. Indeed, by the end of 2005, Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia was on the verge of dissipating, with the majority of its leaders killed, imprisoned, or fled to other fronts.¹⁶²

This retreat and crackdown on Al-Qaeda’s capabilities in Saudi Arabia would nonetheless unleash a wave of female jihadist activism by the wives and relatives of jihadists. With their convictions deepened by a mixture of ideological and emotional and psychological motivations to engage more ac-

¹⁶⁰ See: “Al-Majallat al-Nisa’iyya al-Sadira `an al-Tanzim al-Irhabi” “Women’s Magazines Issued by the Terrorist Organization”, *Assakina*, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/60180.html>

¹⁶¹ See: *Al-Khansaa*, a monthly magazine issued by the Women’s Media Bureau in the Arabian Peninsula, issue number 1.

¹⁶² Thomas Hegghammer posits that three factors undermined the jihad on the Arabian Peninsula: “First was the power of the state, whose unlimited resources and efficient counterterrorism strategy made the QAP’s campaign militarily unviable. Second was the lack of popular support for the QAP’s project and the popular perception of the militants as revolutionaries bent on creating disorder. Third was the Iraq war which split the Saudi Jihadist movement and undermined mobilisation to the QAP.” See: Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge Middle East Studies), Cambridge University Press, 1st edn., 2010, p. 217.

tively in jihadist movements, these women took to the cyber world to propagate for jihad and defend the cases of detainees and wanted jihadists. Some began to think of 'migrating' and searching for more secure havens, particularly in Iraq and Yemen, as is the case of Wafaa al-Yahya, the divorcee of a Saudi jihadist who fought in Afghanistan. Al-Yahya became active on jihadist online forums in 2005, and was an admirer of the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. She later moved to Iraq and married him,¹⁶³ as will be discussed in more detail in Part II.

In 2006, AQAP would re-emerge, this time in Yemen. The Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—the land of Yemen (AQAP-Yemen) was established after the infamous February 3rd, 2006 prison escape in which 23 Al-Qaeda members detained in Sanaa's Political Security Prison managed to escape¹⁶⁴ and relaunch activities in Yemen under the leadership of Nasir al-Wuhayshi (AKA Abu Basir).¹⁶⁵ Al-Wuhayshi and his Saudi deputy, Saeed al-Shihri (AKA Abu Sufyan al-Azdi),¹⁶⁶ resuscitated AQAP by merging the Saudi and Yemeni branches into one that spans the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ For more details, see: "Al-Zikra al-'ashira li Tafjirat Hamra' al-Riyadh: Qissat al-Mar'a al-Sa'udiyya allati Safarat bi Atfalaha li al-'Iraq min Ajl 'al-Jihad' wa Tazawajat al-Zarqawi" "The 10th Anniversary of the Hamra' al-Riyadh Bombings: The Story of the Saudi Woman Who Travelled With Her Children to Iraq for Jihad and Married al-Zarqawi, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 11, 2013, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=728067&issueno=12583#.WPRNSYjys2x>

¹⁶⁴ See: Abdulelah Haider Shaye, "Tanzeem Al-Qa'ida fi al-Yaman min al-Mahalli ila al-Iqleemi wa al-Dawli," "Al-Qaeda in Yemen: From the Local to the Regional and International", *Al-Jazeera Center for Studies*, January 20, 2010, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2010/2011172119158421200.html>

¹⁶⁵ Abu Basir al-Wuhayshi (1976-2015): his real name is Nasir Abd al-Karim Abdullah al-Wuhayshi, and goes by the nom de guerre Abu Basir. He left his hometown in al-Baydaa province in Yemen in the 1990s for Afghanistan, where he became Bin Laden's secretary. After the US invasion of Afghanistan, Al-Wuhayshi fled to Iran, where he was arrested. He was extradited to Yemen in November 2003 and detained in the Sanaa Political Security Prison. In prison, he was appointed as the "Emir" of Al-Qaeda members in the prison in 2004. In February 2006, Al-Wuhayshi and 22 other Al-Qaeda members escaped from the prison, and relaunched the activities of Al-Qaeda in Yemen. He was officially appointed as Commander of Al-Qaeda in Yemen in June 2007. Al-Wuhayshi was killed in a US drone attack in the city of al-Mukalla in Hadhramaut on June 9, 2015. AQAP confirmed his death in a statement issued on June 16, 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Saeed Ali al-Shihri (1973-2013): A Saudi national known by the nom de guerre Abu Sufyan al-Azdi al-Shihri. He was a former police officer in the Saudi Internal Security services before leaving for Afghanistan. US forces arrested him at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in December 2001, and he was sent to Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, where he spent five years. He was then repatriated to Saudi custody, where he was enrolled in the *Munasaha* program operated by the Saudi Interior Ministry that aims to rehabilitate and reintegrate Jihadists. After completing the program, al-Shihri left Saudi Arabia for Yemen, where he became AQAP's second-in-command after Nasir al-Wuhayshi. Al-Shihri escaped three assassination attempts, before he was eventually killed on July 17, 2013 in a US drone strike.

¹⁶⁷ See: *Al-E'lan 'an Ta'sis Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Jazirat al-'Arab, Min Huna Nabda' wa fi al-Aqsa Naltaqi*:

Women's logistical roles in AQAP would gain further momentum with the Yemen branch. Women became more determined to engage in jihadism and venture into dangerous fronts. One example is Wafaa al-Shihri, Saeed al-Shihri's wife, who left Saudi Arabia with her three children to join her husband in Yemen in March 2009. She would assume a media role through *al-Malahim* Foundation for Media Production, which became the Yemeni group's media wing that published a magazine called *Sada al-Malahim* "Echo of the Epics", administered by Saudi national and Al-Qaeda propagandist Abu Hammam al-Qahtani.¹⁶⁸ The first issue of the magazine was released in January 2008, and included a special section for women entitled *Hafidaat Umm `Amarah* (The Granddaughters of Umm Amarah "Female Companion of the Prophet"). Wafaa al-Shihri became one of the main writers in the section, using the pseudonym Umm Hajar al-Azdiyya, in addition to other women writing under the names Umm Abd al-Rahman, Umm al-Hassan al-Muhajira, and `Ashiqat al-Shahada.

The women's section of the magazine focused on non-combatant logistical roles, summarized by Umm Abd al-Rahman as mainly serving jihadists such as preparing food and assisting the wounded, defending jihadists through media activism, and supporting them through donations and fundraising, in addition to raising children, exhibiting patience, simplicity and asceticism, and praying for the fighters.¹⁶⁹ Umm Hajar al-Azdiyya wrote about the stories of women who were role models, including Khadijah, the Prophet's wife.¹⁷⁰ In the same context, Umm al-Hassan al-Muhajira wrote an article on women of the *Salaf* (early generation of Muslims), who were the epitome of perseverance, patience, asceticism, and jihad activism.¹⁷¹

Kalimaat Qadat Qa`idat al-Jihad fi Jazirat al-`Arab, "Announcing the Establishment of Al-Qaeda for Jihad in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP): From Here We Begin, and In Al-Aqsa (Jerusalem) We Meet, Speeches by Leaders of AQAP", video released by Al-Malahim Media Foundation, January 23, 2009, https://archive.org/details/here_we_start

¹⁶⁸ AQAP announced the death of Abu Hammam al-Qahtani in 2010, and published his jihadist biography, stressing his instrumental role in strengthening Al-Qaeda in Yemen and his establishment of al-Malahim media Foundation. See: Abu Khalid al-Asiri, *Sirat al-Shahid Abu Hammam al-Qahtani*, "The Biography of the Martyr Abu Hammam al-Qahtani", Shuhada' al-Jazeera Series No. 4, al-Malahim Media Foundation, https://ia902609.us.archive.org/17/items/shamikh_118/4.pdf

¹⁶⁹ See: Umm Abd al-Rahman, *Dawr al-Mar'afi al-Jihad* "The Role of Women in Jihad", Sada al-Malahim magazine, issued by AQAP, issue no. 4, 1429 AH, pp. 26-37.

¹⁷⁰ See: Umm Hajar al-Azdiyya, *Khadija..Qudwa Hasana* "Khadija "Prophet's Wife". A Good Role Model", Sada al-Malahim magazine, issue no. 10, 1430 AH, p. 46.

¹⁷¹ Umm al-Hassan al-Muhajira, *Risala liman Tuhib Allah wa Rasulih* "A Message to Those "Women" Who Love God and His Messenger", Sada al-Malahim magazine, issue no. 10, 1430 AH, p. 51.

It seems that the response of women was weak in meeting the aspirations of the female jihadists, particularly wives, daughters, and female relatives of jihadist men. In the sixteenth issue of *Sada al-Malahim*, a woman who wrote under the name `Ashiqat al-Shahada (Lover of Martyrdom) wrote an article berating wives of jihadists, and urging them to be more obedient, patient, and to sacrifice willingly. She states, "I swear it saddens me to know that some women of jihadists do not support their husbands, or help them in their patience, or incite them toward jihad, migration, and supporting "others in jihad".¹⁷²

The most prominent case of Saudi women's jihadism is that of Haila al-Qusayr, who went by the alias Umm al-Rabab, and became known in Saudi media as "the leading lady of Al-Qaeda's women." She was arrested by Saudi authorities on March 24th, 2010 and sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted of 18 charges, including affiliation with Al-Qaeda, providing logistical services to Al-Qaeda, and money laundering by collecting funds and sending them to Al-Qaeda in Yemen.¹⁷³ Wafaa al-Shihri wrote an article following al-Qusayr's arrest, describing her friend as an educator and nurturer who would command virtue and prohibit vice and provided care for widows and children. Al-Shihri launched fierce criticism against Saudi Arabia for arresting women, whom she described as chaste and virtuous, and called on women to migrate and join the jihad fronts.¹⁷⁴

While AQAP in Saudi Arabia and Yemen gave women greater space to perform logistical roles within its organizational structures, especially in media and fundraising, the shift towards incorporating women into combat operations would emerge through the al-Zarqawi network in Iraq and later with the Islamic State organization. In these later stages, women would be given roles exceedingly beyond what they were given in the heritage of local, solidarity, and global jihadism versions, particularly with the tactic of merging jihadi dimensions and transitioning from guerrilla warfare and wars of vexation (*jihad al-nikaya*) to wars of control, empowerment, and the founding of the 'Islamic State' and the 'Caliphate' (*jihad al-tamkeen*).

¹⁷² `Ashiqat al-Shahada, *Ya Zarejat al-Mujahid* "O You Wife of the Jihadist", Sada al-Malahim magazine, issue no. 16, 1432 AH, p. 47.

¹⁷³ Cases of Saudi female jihadism are discussed in further detail in Part II of the book.

¹⁷⁴ Umm Hajar al-Azdiyya, *Ahaqqan Usirti Ya Umm al-Rabab* "Have You Really Been Detained Umm al-Rabab "Haila al-Qusayr"?", Sada al-Malahim magazine, issue no. 13, 1431 AH, p. 50.

Women of the Islamic State of Iraq: From Logistical to Combatant Jihad

Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi¹⁷⁵ was instrumental in engaging women in jihadist combative and non-combative roles, particularly suicide bombings. The Wahhabi ideology, coupled with the inspiration of the Chechen jihad experience, would come to shape al-Zarqawi's vision on his path to forming his extensive, and soon to be the most dangerous jihadist network.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006): His real name is Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalayleh. Born in the city of al-Zarqaa, Jordan, he belongs to the prominent Jordanian Bani Hassan clan. He left school towards the last stages of high school, and in 1989, left for Afghanistan via Peshawar, Pakistan. After returning to Jordan in 1993, al-Zarqawi began to meet with Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi, and was later arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison for charges of belonging to the "Bay`at al-Imam" (Pledging Allegiance to the Imam) jihadist group. He was released from prison by a royal pardon in 1999, and left the summer of that year back to Pakistan, then Afghanistan. In early 2000, he settled in the Afghan region of Herat, where he established a special training camp for Arab fighters. Following the US occupation of Iraq in March 2003, al-Zarqawi, through his network, launched an extensive guerrilla militant war there, adopting violent combat tactics. Large numbers of Arab and foreign fighters joined him, in addition to local Iraqis. In October 2004, al-Zarqawi and his organization, al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, officially joined the central Al-Qaeda organization. Al-Zarqawi was killed on June 7th, 2006 in an American air strike.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Zarqawi's network began to crystallize during the 1990 Gulf War, an event that was instrumental in consolidating Jihadi Salafism into its globalized version. The rise of al-Zarqawi coincided with the communication revolution and the prevalence of the internet. He soon transformed from a submerged young man in the poor neighborhoods of al-Zarqaa city in Jordan into one of the most important jihadist figures in the world. It is known that he went to Afghanistan in 1989 to participate in the Afghan jihad, where he settled in Jalalabad, a suburb of Peshawar, which was the rear base for Arab and Afghan Mujahideen. It is there that *Bayt al-Ansar* (House of Supporters) was based, which housed fighters and supporters of Al-Qaeda and was headed by Osama Bin Laden, in addition to Abdullah Azzam's Services Desk. Both facilities served as first posts for receiving Arab volunteer fighters. It is around this time in Peshawar that al-Zarqawi met Abd al-Rahman al-Ali, an Egyptian who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, and Issam al-Barqawi, known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi, through a Palestinian named Abu al-Walid al-Ansari al-Filastini, a close associate of Abu Qatada al-Filastini. Al-Zarqawi was strongly influenced by these figures, all of whom later became among the most important theorists and ideologues of the global Jihadi Salafist current.

Al-Zarqawi witnessed the assassination of Abdullah Azzam in Peshawar in 1989, and fought in the second wave of civil war between Afghan jihadist factions. He joined the military camp of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, alongside Jalalludin Haqqani. Al-Zarqawi underwent military training in several training camps, in particular the *Sada* training camp. After returning to Jordan in 1993, al-Zarqawi began to meet with al-Maqqisi again. The two joined forces to propagate Jihadi Salafism, and established a jihadist group that came to be known in the media as *Bay`at al-Imam* (Pledging Allegiance to the Imam). After his arrest, imprisonment and subsequent release by royal pardon in Jordan, al-Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan where he worked to rebuild his network and jihadist relations. By then, however, the Pakistani security campaigns had escalated after Al-Qaeda established the "Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders" in 1998, and following the targeting of the two U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August of the same year. Al-Zarqawi attempted to join the Arab jihadist in Chechnya but couldn't, prompting him to return to Afghanistan where he created his own training camp in the Herat region, at the Afghan-Iranian border. He soon emerged as a leader of the jihadist fighters from Jordan, Palestine, and the Levant region, and was able to weave an extensive network of relations with various local and

Like other prominent Jihadi Salafist figures, al-Zarqawi recognized early the importance of networks of marriage, kinship, and friendship in consolidating a coherent jihadist society. He encouraged the marriage of one of his sisters to the jihadist Saleh al-Hami (Abu Qudamah) in Peshawar in 1991. His sister Maryam married jihadist Haytham Mustafa Obeidat (Abu Hassan), a veteran of the Afghan jihad, and his other sister Aliyaa married Abu al-Qassam Khaled al-Aruri, one of al-Zarqawi's closest lieutenants in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.¹⁷⁷ Abu al-Muntaser, who was a member of *Bay'at al-Imam* group founded by al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi in Jordan, notes that the group, both leaders and members, embraced the issue of polygamy and encouraged it. He says that Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi married a second wife before he was imprisoned, who was the sister of one of the members, while al-Zarqawi married after he was released from prison.¹⁷⁸

The Herat militant training camp, founded and run by al-Zarqawi in Afghanistan in 2000, embodied a "miniature Islamic jihadist community"¹⁷⁹

regional jihadist groups.

In his ideological, intellectual, and religious discourse and program, he relied on the reference of his Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, who had a direct impact in emboldening al-Zarqawi's warfare doctrine and his jurisprudential approach, especially with regard to the issue of prioritizing fighting the near enemy (represented by the 'apostate' Arab and Muslim regimes), and the issue of collective *takfir* of Shiites. Al-Muhajir also had a strong influence on al-Zarqawi's extremist choices related to suicide bombings, kidnapping, assassinations, beheadings, and tactics of vicious violence and terrorizing, and the question of *tatarrus* (the 'barricading' principle in certain religious interpretations where the death of civilians is exonerated if they happen to be present at a legitimate target (i.e. legitimizing civilian collateral damage)). Despite al-Muhajir's prominent position as a jihadist ideologue, his writings in general, and in particular his famous doctrinal book *Masa'il fi Fiqh al-Jihad* (Issues in the Jurisprudence of Jihad), known in Jihadi circles as *Fiqh al-Dimaa'* (The Jurisprudence of Blood), were void of any mention of a role for women in jihad. The same may be said of al-Zarqawi's second authoritative reference, Abu Bakr Naji, who was al-Zarqawi's inspiration on the military strategic level and the tactics of vexation warfare, 'management of savagery,' and *tamkeen* (empowerment), particularly with his famous tactical book, *Idarat al-Tawwuhush* (The Management of Savagery).

***The absence of women's issues and roles in jihad in these writings may be attributed to the fact that these ideologues were writing prior to 2003, when women's roles in jihadist organizations were marginal and limited, and that is before the writings of Yusuf al-Ayeri and the experiences of jihadist women in the Chechnya and Palestine fronts. See: Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *The Jihadi Salafist Movement in Jordan after Zarqawi: Identity, Leadership Crisis, and Obscured Vision*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Amman, Jordan, 1st ed., 2009, pp. 12-29.

¹⁷⁷ Jean Charles Brisard (collaboration with Damien Martinez), *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, Other Press, 1st ed., 2005, pp. 22-23.

¹⁷⁸ See the testimony of Abu al-Muntasir in Fu'ad Hussein, *Al-Zarqawi al-Jil al-Thani li al-Qa'ida* "Al-Zarqawi: The Second Generation of Al Qaeda", Beirut: Dar al-Khayal, 1st edn., 2005, p. 94.

¹⁷⁹ Sayf al-'Adl, *Tajribati ma' Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi* "My Experience with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi", Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, http://www.ilmway.com/site/maqdis/MS_9618.html

of around 80 members, along with their families.¹⁸⁰ In Herat, al-Zarqawi married a second wife, Israa, the daughter of Yassin Jarrad, a militant who later carried out the assassination of well-known Shiite cleric Ayatolla Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim in a suicide bombing in Najaf on August 29th, 2003.

Following the September 11th, 2001 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi managed to escape along with his followers to Iran. With the US occupation of Iraq, beginning in March 2003, and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, al-Zarqawi and his followers slipped into Iraq and launched bitter guerrilla warfare against US forces, relying on an ever-extending network of jihadist relations.

The early days of jihadist activities in Iraq did not witness active participation of women, and al-Zarqawi's newly formed al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad organization, formed in September 2003, maintained the traditional male-centric approach. But this would soon change with the expansion and spread of the organization within a social incubator in Sunni-majority areas of Iraq, particularly after the Fallujah battles (April and November 2004), which culminated in al-Zarqawi's group taking control of the city. The developments in Iraq also saw the rise of Shiite sectarian practices against Sunnis and their marginalization from nearly all aspects of life in the new Iraq, which contributed to al-Zarqawi's hardening position on targeting Shiites for explicit sectarian identity motives, particularly towards the end of 2004, according to the group's media official, Maysara al-Gharib.¹⁸¹

With the escalation of arrest and detention campaigns against both Sunni men and women, which included gruesome cases of torture, rape, and sexual assault, as documented by a shocking series of reports on the Abu Ghraib prison,¹⁸² the issue of women would take center stage in the discourse

¹⁸⁰ These 80 members formed the first nucleus for al-Zarqawi's network of Arab and foreign fighters. The most prominent of these were the Jordanians Khaled al-Aruri (Abu al-Qassam), Abd al-Hadi Daghlas (Abu 'Ubaida), Ra'ed Khreisat (Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Shami), Azmi al-Jayyousi, Nidal Arabiyat, Mu'ammarr al-Jaghbeer, and the Syrian Sulaiman Khalid Darwish (Abu al-Ghadiya) and the Lebanese Abu Muhammad al-Lubnani. In Iraq, al-Zarqawi extended his network and oversaw several training camps in the Serghat area of Kurdistan.

¹⁸¹ Maysara al-Gharib, *Muqatalat al-Shi'a fi al-'Iraq: al-Hukm wa al-Hikma* "Fighting the Shiites in Iraq: the "Religious" Ruling and the Wisdom Behind It", Al-Furqan Foundation for Media Productions, episode 4.

¹⁸² The shock of Abu Ghraib began with the US TV program, 60 Minutes, showing what became the infamous images of Abu Ghraib's torture, followed by a detailed report in the New Yorker by Seymour Hersh, who outlined in detail the systematic policy of torture at the prison. He traced the events at Abu

of Iraqi insurgency groups in general, and al-Zarqawi's group in particular. The issue of women, particularly females detained in Iraqi and US-administered prisons, became one of the most important war cries in mobilization, polarization, and recruitment, prompting al-Zarqawi to attempt to break into the prison several times to free male and female detainees.¹⁸³

The discourse and speeches of al-Zarqawi and his group (which was renamed Al-Qaeda in Iraq after al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Bin Laden in 2004) focused on violations against Iraqi women at the hands of US occupation forces and Iraqi government forces, dominated by Shiites. The humiliated, abused, raped, and detained Iraqi women became a constant theme, and their stories began to spread widely within Iraqi Sunni society in particular and throughout the Arab and Muslim world. The second attempt by Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to break into Abu Ghraib Prison in January 2005 was a major coordinated operation, carrying the name of the commander of the first operation at Abu Ghraib, Abu Anas al-Shami.¹⁸⁴ With two car bombings, the second operation freed over 150 detainees.

During the escalation of sectarianism and civil war in the midst of the US occupation, the Iraq Parliament passed an Anti-Terrorism Law, which contributed to an escalation of arrests and detention of women. Interviews by Human Rights Watch with female detainees, lawyers, and judges indicate that authorities then were detaining at least 100, and perhaps many more, women under Law No. 13 of 2005 Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law. The Human Rights Watch Report states that Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law mandates the death penalty for "those who commit ... terrorist acts," and "all those who enable terrorists to commit these crimes." Many women are detained under article 4 of the law for allegedly "covering up" for their husbands. The report indicates prevalence of sexual assault, rape, and horrendous forms of

Ghraib through interviews with several past and present American intelligence officials, interrogators, translators, defense contractors, and prison guards. Hersh cites an internal US Army report, written by Major General Antonio Taguba, which detailed prison abuse charges. See: Seymour M. Hersh, "The Gray Zone: How A Secret Pentagon Program Came to Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker magazine*, May 24, 2004 issue.

¹⁸³ For more details on violations against women at Abu Ghraib prison, see: Fadhil al-Rubai'i, "Nisa' Abu Ghraib: Buzugh Mujtama' Ightisab Namuthaji fi al-'Iraq al-Jadid (I'adat Bina' al-Riwaya al-Naqisa `an Fadihat Sijn Abu Ghraib) "The Women of Abu Ghraib: The Dawn of a Model of Rape Culture in the New Iraq (Rebuilding the Incomplete Narrative on the Abu Ghraib Prison Scandal)", *Al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi*, year 28, issue 316, June 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Walid al-Rawi, *Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya* "The Islamic State of Iraq", Amman: Dar Aminah, 1st edn., 2012, pp. 204-205.

torture. It states that “Women appear to be disproportionately targeted for their relationships to male family members whom the government considers suspects, particularly in terrorism cases. Targeting women as a way to reach male suspects punishes them for crimes they have not committed, violating their right to due process of law.”¹⁸⁵

Al-Zarqawi’s speeches began to increasingly address women directly, and incite men to free women from prisons and protect them from the abuses at the hands US forces and Iraqi Shiite forces. In April 2005, al-Zarqawi addressed Sunni Muslim fighters with rebuke, “How does your conviction weaken and your determination languish when you...hear the screams of your sisters crying from behind the walls of the prisons of Crusader oppression? Have you not learned of what happened to your sisters in Fallujah? Have you not heard the scream of your mother whose dignity was stomped on by a malicious *Rafidhi* “rejecter Shiite” the day they came to arrest her husband, and when they did not find him they arrested her while she pleaded and kissed his shoes begging not to be turned over to the Americans, saying: ‘I am Iraqi, and you are Iraqi, why do you turn me over to “the Americans”?’ But “they” blindfolded her, tied her hands, carried her and threw her into a US detention vehicle.” Al-Zarqawi vows in the speech to avenge Iraqi women’s dignity and honor, recalling his achievement of freeing women from Abu Ghraib, saying “Let the battle of vengeance “the Abu Anas al-Shami operation” be a beginning of a new era of conquest.”¹⁸⁶

In the context of al-Zarqawi’s increasing reliance on suicide missions to target US and Iraqi Shiite forces, and the increased backlash against these operations from Muslim scholars and Muslim public opinion, and in paving the way to involve women in combat operations, al-Zarqawi emphasized in a statement in May 2005, entitled “The Descendants of Ibn al-Alqami Return,” the permissibility of suicide ‘martyrdom’ missions and the *tafīr* of Shiites. In his religious justification of these extreme practices, al-Zarqawi relies on the theorization of his mentor Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, and evokes images of US and Shiite forces’ violations against Sunni women, including

¹⁸⁵ See: Human Rights Watch, “No One is Safe:” *The Abuse of Women in Iraq’s Criminal Justice System*, February 6, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/02/06/no-one-safe/abuse-women-iraqs-criminal-justice-system>

¹⁸⁶ Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, *Ya Ahl al-Islam al-Shidda al-Shidda* “O Muslims Sternness Sternness”, The Collective Archives of Statements and Speeches of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Shabakat al-Buraq al-Islamiyya, p. 234.

arrest, torture, and rape.¹⁸⁷

His speeches gradually shifted from inciting the recruitment of men by evoking the violations against Sunni women, to addressing women directly. In a lengthy statement issued in July 2005, entitled "Religion Shall Not Lack While I am Alive" (we chose excerpts from this statement considering its significance as al-Zarqawi's first detailed address to women where he incites them to physically partake in jihad), he states:

When shall we die in defense of the honor of Muslim men and women? Is it when the worshippers of the Cross enter the land of Sham "Levant"? Or Mecca and Medina... What about our sisters, the chaste pure women of Iraq who can only resort to God while they lie at the bottom of their prison cells from the injustices of God's enemies. God knows that the fingernail of a woman of the Sunnis of Iraq in general, and the people of Fallujah in particular, is more beloved to me than this whole world and what is in it. By God, if Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers "Mesopotamia, i.e. AQI" would completely dissipate tomorrow in order for women to be freed from the prisons of the Crusaders and the *Rawafidh* "Shiites", we would not hesitate for one second.¹⁸⁸

He calls on women to carry out various logistical roles, and paves the way for their involvement in combat and suicide missions. He tells them, in reproach:

This message is to the free women of Mesopotamia in particular, and the women of the "Muslim Ummah" in general: Where are you from this holy jihad? What have you contributed to this Ummah? Do you not fear God? Do you raise your children to be slaughtered by tyrants? Have you accept-

¹⁸⁷ Al-Zarqawi entitles his speech in a reference intended to be derogatory towards Shiites, describing them as the "Descendants of Ibn Al-'Alqami." Mu'ayyid al-Din Ibn al-'Alqami is a historic Shiite Abbasid minister who reportedly conspired to destroy the Sunni caliphate and establish a Shiite state, and allied with the Mongol Hulagu Khan to siege Baghdad in 1258 CE. "Translator's note" See: Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi, *Wa 'Aada Ahfad Ibn al-'Alqami* "The Descendants of Ibn al-'Alqami Return", dated May 18, 2005, a series of lectures, the Collective Archives of Statements and Speeches of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, Shabakat al-Buraq al-Islamiyya, pp. 259-261.

¹⁸⁸ Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, *Ayanqus al-Deen wa Ana Hay?* "Religion Shall Not Lack While I am Alive", dated July 7, 2005, the Collective Archives of Statements and Speeches of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, Shabakat al-Buraq al-Islamiyya, p. 299.

ed submissiveness and shunned jihad? Are you not seeing that men have ‘neglected their horses and laid down their arms saying, no to jihad?’ “in reference to a Prophetic Hadith which prohibited such actions”. Why are you not pushing your sons into the midst of the battle so that they would be burnt by its fire in defense of this religion? Why do you not incite your husbands and children to wage jihad against the Crusaders and fight the apostates, and to sacrifice their lives and blood for this religion? Even the women of the *mushrikeen* “pre-Islamic polytheists of Mecca” at the Battle of Uhud “3 AH” – who were in falsehood – would enter the battlefield carrying *kohl* eyeliners. Every time a man would retreat or hesitate, one of these women would hand him an eyeliner, saying ‘are you a woman?’ So, what about your case when you are in rightness! By God, save yourselves from hellfire “martyrs do not enter hell”, you are the granddaughters of Umm `Amarah “woman companion of the Prophet”; and what do you know about Umm `Amarah? The Prophet (PBUH) said about her on the day of the Uhud Battle: ‘Her position today “in paradise” is higher than the position of so and so “men”’. When she would see danger nearing the Prophet she would be his shield, to a point that the Prophet said: ‘Every time I turn right or left I find her fighting behind me.’ She also witnessed the Battle of al-Yamama, and fought until her arm was severed and sustained twelve wounds.

The jihadist woman is one that raises her child not to live, but to fight and then be killed, and then to live and be free... what great fervor, and what mighty intention...Do you not see the Ummah is being slaughtered from vein to vein, and desecrated from north to south, and east to west? Have you not learned of what your sisters in Crusader prisons face? Has one of you thought what it would be like to be in their place, wishing that the Muslims would rescue and free her?

Many jihadist sisters in Iraq sent me letters requesting to carry out martyrdom operations, and insisting on that request. One of them sent me a letter she wrote with a mix-

ture of tears and blood, after our brothers were martyred in the Abu Ghraib “prison” operation during their attempt to rescue the female detainees from the oppressive Crusader prisons. She insisted on carrying out a martyrdom operation, saying: ‘Life is not worth living after the death of those’... Since that day and until now – almost eight months – she has been fasting without a break. God knows how much impact her words had on me, I couldn’t contain myself and I cried in sorrow over the state of this Ummah. Is it to this extent that the humiliation of my Ummah reached, have men vanished that we have to resort to recruiting women? Isn’t it shameful for the men of the Ummah to ask our chaste and pure sisters to carry out martyrdom operations while the men are deep asleep and playing around?!¹⁸⁹

Fa`iq al-Janabi, an Iraqi expert on militant groups, finds that al-Zarqawi’s position represented a shift in roles of jihadist women by laying the foundation for the model of the ‘*istishhadiyya* (martyr) woman’ in lieu of the ‘weak spineless man’ who turns away from joining the battlefields in Iraq, especially after Al-Qaeda’s ideologues had avoided, for years, dealing with this religiously and socially thorny issue. Al-Janabi argues that most researchers at the time failed to link al-Zarqawi’s use of the *istishhadiyyat* suicide women ‘trump card’ in order to attract more foreign fighters, with the wave of sectarian violence that would ensue shortly after, beginning with the bombings of Shiite shrines in Samarra in February 2006.¹⁹⁰

Of course, al-Zarqawi was seeking to rally the Sunnis in Iraq and in the Arab and Muslim worlds to wage a war against the ‘Crusaders’ and the sectarian ‘Safavids’ (Shiites), terms that are at the heart of the lexicon of al-Zarqawi’s AQI and later the ‘Islamic State.’ Al-Zarqawi invested in the conditions facing women in Iraq: arrest, imprisonment, physical and sexual abuse, in a religiously conservative society where the value of honor and dignity is an existential and instrumental approach to inciting religious, tribal, and sectarian zeal, and to attract more fighters amidst a sectarian civil war that was escalating under US occupation.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 306–308.

¹⁹⁰ See: Mayyada Dawoud, “Ajjal al-Intihariyat fi al-`Iraq: Bayna Ruba`iyat al-Mawt wa Ikhlas li Ummara` Ghuraba” “Generations of Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq: Between the Quatrain of Death and Loyalty to Strange Emirs”, Investigative Report, *Network of Iraqi Reporters for Investigative Journalism (NIRIJ)*, June 15, 2012, <http://www.nirij.org/?p=625>

The freeing of male and female detainees from Abu Ghraib garnered for al-Zarqawi reputation and esteem within Sunni communities, and he emerged as a shield and armor defending Sunnis' rights. This new status is clearly reflected in a letter leaked from the Kazimiyya Prison in August 2005 and disseminated widely on the internet and social media sites, written by a Sunni detained woman named Fatima, appealing to al-Zarqawi – the ‘savior’ – to rescue them and explaining to him the gruesome conditions, torture, and rape that she and fellow female Sunni prisoners face.¹⁹¹

Al-Zarqawi's message to women was successful and had swift impact; the numbers of Arab and foreign volunteers, both men and women, increased exponentially. The model of the ‘martyrdom woman’ became acceptable and legitimate, after women had for long been distanced from the ‘sacred death.’ The phenomenon of female suicide bombers entered a new phase, transitioning from rhetoric to practice. The inauguration of the phenomenon in its trans-border global jihadist model took place with two simultaneous suicide missions, on November 9th, 2005, carried out by Muriel Degauque and Sajidah al-Rishawi,¹⁹² as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

Towards the end of 2005, the growth of capabilities of the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda, its expansion, and increased sphere of influence attracted various Sunni militant groups to join AQI's ranks, and al-Zarqawi

¹⁹¹ The woman addressed the letter to al-Zarqawi from the women of Iraq, stating: “I am Fatima, a Sunni Iraqi “woman”. I have been imprisoned since three months ago. During the first ten days, no charges were brought against me and no investigation was held. Afterwards, they took me to interrogation and torture, where there were charges and much indignity. Pride and honor was lost. We have no friend left but death to give us mercy from what we endure of rape and torture day and night. They are monsters in front of us, they do not understand anything but murder, torture, and criminal acts. Every day we die, and we live only on the voice of another girl being tortured and raped by agents of the Iraqi police. There is no commander or military officer at the “detention” center who did not rape and torture us in such horrible ways we never imagined. I plead to you and entrust you to spread this message and deliver it to the commander of the Mujahideen Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, and to every jihadist from Fallujah and Baghdad, and to every jihadist who still prostrates to God, to bomb and destroy them. We no longer want but to die to get rid of what we face. By God, we do not know what is in our wombs or who their fathers are. Free us, Zarqawi, free us, we cannot bear this torment.” See: *Risala Khatira lilghaya min Nisaa' al-'Iraq ila Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi* “An Extremely Grave Letter from the Women of Iraq to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi”, <https://forums.graam.com/13153.html>

¹⁹² Sophie Viollet, *L'Islamisme Radical et l'Occident: les logiques du ralliement aux formations islamistes dites radicales dans les sociétés occidentales*, Paris: Editions Du Cygne, 2013. Translated into Arabic as *Al-Islamawiyya al-Mutatariffa wa al-Gharb: Asbab al-Iltihaq bi al-Tashkilat al-Islamawiyya al-Musamaa Mutatarifa fi al-Mujtama'at al-Gharbiyya* “Radical Islamism and the West: The Logic of Joining Radical Islamist Formations in Western Societies”, translated by Muhammad Ahmad Sobh, Dar Nineveh, 1st edn., 2014, pp. 51-53.

began to consider establishing a 'Sunni emirate' in Iraq. In December 2005, AQI announced forming the "Mujahideen *Shura* "Consultative" Council" that incorporated the various militant groups.¹⁹³ Al-Zarqawi was on the verge of announcing the Sunni emirate, but was killed on June 7th, 2006. His successors however would later declare the creation of "The Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI) on October 15th, 2006,¹⁹⁴ founded on a Sunni identity basis, headed by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi¹⁹⁵ as Emir, a position he held with the blessings of BinLaden.¹⁹⁶

The newly founded Islamic State of Iraq announced its first ministerial government formation on April 19th, 2007, which did not include any women.¹⁹⁷ Despite the declaration of the founding of the 'Islamic State,' the organization nonetheless was in a phase of retreat and decline, especially with the rebellion of the Sunni communities against it with the formation of the *Sahawat* (Awakening) forces, formed by local Sunni tribes. ISI suffered from a state of isolation and weakness, began to lose the ideological appeal needed to mobilize, recruit, and reinforce its ranks, lacked human and financial resources, and lost the Sunni social incubator necessary for growth and operation; essentially depriving it of the strategic territorial depth necessary

¹⁹³ See the Statement: *Bayaan Ta'sees Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen fi al-'Iraq* "A Statement on the Establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq", Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, <https://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=5cqqk0o>

¹⁹⁴ The declaration of establishing the Islamic State of Iraq, announced by Muharib al-Jabouri, Spokesman of ISI and Minister of Media, was reflective of the changes happening on the Iraqi scene, particularly the marginalization of the Sunni component of Iraqi society. See the text of the statement in Arabic <https://nokbah.com/~w3/?p=536>

¹⁹⁵ Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (1958-2010): His real name is Hamid Dawoud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi, born in the town of al-Zawiya, near the city of Haditha in al-Anbar Province, Iraq. He graduated from the Police Academy in Baghdad, and worked as a police officer. Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, his jihadist interests began to solidify, and he began training with a group of his friends in the town of Haditha, and established a jihadist group with other fighters. Abu Omar began communicating with al-Zarqawi and joined the *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* group upon its establishment in September 2003. He assumed various positions in the organization and moved between Iraqi provinces. He became a general commander overseeing the organization's *wilayaat* (provinces). After al-Zarqawi was killed, the 'Islamic State of Iraq' was declared on October 15th, 2006, and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi received pledges of allegiance as Emir of the State. The US announced killing Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, along with Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, on April 19th, 2010 during armed confrontations in the town of al-Tharthar, southwest of Tikrit.

¹⁹⁶ Osama bin Laden, *Al-Sabeel li Ithbaat al-Mu'amarat* "The Approach to Thwarting Plots", December 29th, 2007, Al-Sahab Media Foundation, https://archive.org/details/Osma_E7bat_Mo2amrat

¹⁹⁷ See: *Al-Tashkila al-Wizariyya al-Uula li Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya* "The First Ministerial Formation of the Islamic State of Iraq", April 19, 2007, in the book *Collective Archives of Speeches of Leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq*, Al-Furqan Media Foundation, 1st Ed., 2010.

to enable it to endure the war of attrition against it.¹⁹⁸ Yet it did not dissipate completely, but went underground.

The speeches and discourse of ISI's leader Abu Omar al-Baghdadi stayed in line with al-Zarqawi's approach, evoking the suffering of Iraqi Sunni women to incite men to join the organization, as evident in the title of one of his speeches in July 2009, *Al-ʿIzz bi Siyanat al-Din wa al-ʿIrdh* (Glory Comes by Guarding Religion and Honor).¹⁹⁹

Although ISI's ministerial formation and leadership structures were void of women, women's logistical and combat roles nonetheless grew within the ranks of the organization. There were increased arrests of women on charges of affiliation with the organization. By mid-2007, the phenomenon of female suicide bombers broadened from individual recruitment to mass institutionalization, with ISI announcing the formation of the first *istish-hadiyya* all-female martyrdom brigade in Iraq, called al-Khansaa Brigade. Between the spring of 2007 and the summer of 2009, dozens of 'would-be' female suicide bombers were arrested and detained, charged with recruiting female suicide bombers or attempting to carry out suicide missions. There are conflicting figures on the number of female suicide operations carried out during this period, but they reached an average of more than 90 operations.²⁰⁰

The US managed to achieve significant successes against the insurgency in Iraq prior to its troop withdrawal in late 2011, including killing ISI's leader Abu Omar al-Baghdadi along with his Minister of War Abu Hamza al-Muhajir in April 2010. For the Americans, this appeared to be the right time to withdraw from Iraq.²⁰¹ The Islamic State of Iraq, however, and

¹⁹⁸ See: Brian Fishman, "Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, March 16, 2009, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/dysfunction-and-decline-lessons-learned-from-inside-al-qaida-in-iraq>

¹⁹⁹ Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, *Al-ʿIzz bi Siyanat al-Din wa al-ʿIrdh* "Glory Comes by Guarding Religion and Honor", July 2009, in the book *Collective Archives of Speeches of Leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq*, Al-Furqan Media Foundation, 1st Ed., 2010.

²⁰⁰ See: Milad al-Jabouri, "Ajjal al-Mawt: Intihariyat Tahta Zilal Qatala Ghurabaa" "Generations of Death: Female Suicide Bombers in the Shadows of Strange Killers", *Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)*, July 6, 2011, <http://arij.net/report/>

²⁰¹ Between 2003 and 2011, the US suffered serious losses in the Iraq War. Over 5,000 US soldiers were killed, and over 35,000 were injured. A Congressional study found that the Iraq War alone cost the US more than 823 billion dollars up until 2012. See: Anthony Cordesman, Adam Mausner, Sam Khazai, Peter Alsis, and Charles Loi, *The Real Outcome of the Iraq War: US and Iranian Strategic Competition in Iraq*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 8, 2012, <http://csis.org/publication/real-outcome-iraq-war-us-and-iranian-strategic-competition-iraq>.

despite going underground, was able to maintain its organizational structure. Under a new leadership, ISI developed a more coherent bureaucratic organization, and was able to rebuild its propaganda machine in light of the failure of the political regime to establish a post-occupation Iraqi national state, and amid weakness – if not absence – of democratic practices, rule of law, autonomy, and principles of citizenship. Instead, ISI was operating in an environment of authoritarianism, sectarianism, and corruption that became widely institutionalized in Iraq.²⁰²

Serious strategic factors played a role in the revival of ISI's strength and influence. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's authoritarian and sectarian policies were emboldened with the preparations for US troop withdrawal, coupled with deepening Iranian influence on Iraq. In the successive era of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,²⁰³ ISI began to recover its strength and capabilities, reshuffled its top commanders, ingrained a highly bureaucratic organizational structure, and regained some of its Sunni social incubator. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was declared the new Emir of ISI in a statement by the Mujahideen Shura Council on May 16th, 2010.²⁰⁴

As a result, and with the conclusion of troop withdrawal from Iraq (officially on December 31st, 2011), the country was sinking deeper into a climate of Iranian influence,²⁰⁵ Shi'ite domination in government, increased authoritarianism,²⁰⁶ sectarian policies, marginalization of Sunnis, and a situa-

²⁰² See: Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman (Trans. Banan Malkawi), *The 'Islamic State' Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism*, Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq, 2015, pp. 148-168.

²⁰³ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (1971 -): His real name is Ibrahim bin `Awwad bin Ibrahim al-Badri al-Samarra'i, born in 1971 in al-Jalam village in Samarra, Iraq. He graduated from the Islamic University in Baghdad, where he earned a Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD degrees. After the US invasion of Iraq, he formed a Jihadi Salafist organization called *Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. Coalition forces arrested and detained him from February until December 2004, and then released him because it did not consider him a high-level threat. He, along with his organization, joined the "Mujahideen Shura Council" in 2006, and worked his way up the leadership ranks until he was appointed Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq in May 2010, succeeding Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. With the proclamation of the Islamic State of the Caliphate, and the taking over of Mosul, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed 'Caliph of Muslims' on June 29, 2014. Five days later, on July 5, 2014 (the sixth day of Ramadan) he appeared publicly and gave the Friday prayer sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mosul.

²⁰⁴ See: *Bayan Majlis Shura Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya* "Statement by the Consultative Council of the Islamic State of Iraq", May 16, 2010, <http://www.muslim.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-388724.html>

²⁰⁵ See: Anthony Cordesman, et. al., *The Real Outcome of the Iraq War*, op. cit.

²⁰⁶ See: Tony Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change: The Rise of a New Authoritarianism," *International Affairs*, March 11, 2013, 89:2, pp. 241-257.

tion where all branches of the state were replete with corruption.²⁰⁷

It may be argued that the growing presence of women and multiplicity of their roles in the organizations that heralded the emergence of the 'Islamic State' organization known today, from al-Zarqawi to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, evolved within a milieu of the failure of democratic transformation in Iraq in particular, and in Arab and Muslim countries in general. This female presence would significantly grow in the wave of coups against the peaceful revolutionary protests that swept the Arab world beginning in 2011, and especially with the escalation of conflict in Syria. The regime of Bashar al-Assad's violent crackdown on peaceful protests transformed the dynamic of resistance into a militant approach, and within a short period of time, Syria became the largest hub attracting Arab and foreign jihadists. With the expansion of the 'Islamic State of Iraq' into Syria, and the forming of the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or *Sham*/Levant, known as ISIS or ISIL), the influx of jihadists from all over the world grew significantly. In April 2015, the United Nations estimated that "at least 22,000 foreign fighters (FFs) from 100 countries had joined the jihad in Syria and Iraq, including approximately 4,000 from Western Europe. Considering the likelihood of unrecorded individuals, the number is likely closer to 30,000."²⁰⁸

On the influx of women to IS-controlled territories, the Director of the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), Jean-Paul Laborde, remarks: "The first issue for us that really astonishes the analysts that I have in my team, is that, for example, 550 European women have travelled to territories controlled by ISIS-Daesh, and in some states, women account for 20 to 30 percent of the foreign terrorist fighters. We also want to say that the number of young girls who have pledged their support for ISIL online has also increased."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Between 2010 and 2011, corruption became rampant in all aspects of the state in Iraq, where the Corruption Perceptions Index of 2011, surveyed by Transparency International, put Iraq in the rank of 175 out of a total of 182 countries. See: "Corruption Perceptions Index 2011," *Transparency International*, <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results>

²⁰⁸ Charles Lister, "Returning Foreign Fighters: Criminalization or Reintegration?," *Brookings Doha Center*, Policy Briefing, August 2015, p. 1, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/En-Fighters-Web.pdf>

²⁰⁹ "Jean-Paul Laborde (CTED) on States affected by foreign terrorist fighters" - Press Conference, *UN Web TV*, February 26, 2016, <http://webtv.un.org/search/jean-paul-laborde-cted-on-states-affected-by-foreign-terrorist-fighters-press-conference/4775856934001?term=laborde>

While the international community was still under the shock effect of the fall of vast and important areas of Iraq and Syria, particularly the strategic cities of Mosul and al-Raqqa, into the hands of ISIS in 2014, the organization's spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani announced in a speech entitled *Hatha Wa`adu Allah* (This is God's Promise) the establishment of the "Islamic Caliphate," on June 29th, 2014, and the inauguration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as a "Caliph of Muslims."²¹⁰ This era forward would witness an unprecedented participation of women in jihadist activities, and unprecedented 'migration' of women and girls to the lands of the caliphate.

²¹⁰ Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, *Hatha Wa`adu Allah* "This is God's Promise", audio recording published by Al-Furqan Media Foundation, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1qkBXKvs_A

Chapter Three

Women of the Caliphate

Following its swift takeover of Mosul, the ‘Islamic State’ organization issued a foundational social and political document that represents the constitution of the new state, calling it *Wathiqat al-Madinah* (The Medina Charter), consisting of 16 articles.²¹¹ Article 14 addresses women in particular, stipulating that a woman’s principal place is at home, which she should not leave except for urgent matters, and calling on women to adhere to religiously appropriate and modest attire, wearing a loose *jilbab* (cloak) when in public, “such is the guidance of the Mothers of Believers “the Prophet’s wives” and the Prophet’s female companions.”²¹²

²¹¹ The document, issued by the Media Office of the Nineveh *Wilayah* (province), is entitled with the same name as the historical charter introduced by Prophet Muhammad upon his migration from Mecca to Medina as a pact with the local population in Medina. The IS document delineates the principles of governance and administration of state and society. It emphasizes the Islamic identity of the state, and heralds a new era radically different than previous regimes that ruled Iraq. In the preamble, the document criticizes the secular regimes that successively ruled Iraq, including the monarchy, republic, the Baathist, and the ‘Safavid’ Shiite regimes that “confiscated the energies of people, silenced them, and desecrated their rights and dignity,” compared to the ‘Qurayshi’ (an attribute of the Prophet’s clan) leadership that adopts Divine revelation as the reference for governance.

The document is composed of 16 articles addressed to the tribes and people of Nineveh *Wilayah*, in particular the city of Mosul. The document is significant as a foundational charter of a new social contract that is based on IS’ particular reading of Islamic Shari’ah and creed within its Sunni historical context. It calls on all subjects to unite under the leadership of the “Islamic Caliphate,” and clearly stipulates on the people to acknowledge the authority of the state and its leadership, which seeks to achieve justice, tranquility, and well-being, for “there is no welfare except under an Islamic rule that guarantees for people their rights, and establishes justice for the unjust whose rights were stripped away.” The document warns those “rebels, fighters, and apostates” against the State. Its articles delineate the punitive measures against those who rebel against the “governance of Islam,” considered to be apostates.

IS presents itself as a holistic political, economic, and social governing system. The Caliph is the imam of Muslims, and Muslims are the subjects of the Caliph. The status of the wealth that was “under the clutches of the Safavid government... is in the hands of the imam of Muslims.” Anyone from other forces who “extends his hands to the money of Muslims through looting or robbery” is subject to be tried by the Shari’ah justice courts. Armed robbery gangs will be prosecuted with the charge of “spreading strife on earth.” The document urges subjects of the State to adhere to Islamic Shari’ah provisions, perform prayer collectively and on time. It prohibits use of or trade in alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, and declares its intention to remove all manifestations of *shirk* (idolatry or associating deities with God) by demolishing shrines and prominent tombs. The document criminalizes all forms of association, establishment of councils or assemblies or carrying arms.

See: The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, *Wathiqat al-Madinah* “The Medina Charter”, Wilayat Nineveh, 14 Sha’ban 1435 AH, issue no. 34, <https://justpaste.it/Nenwa>

²¹² Ibid.

In the structure of the state and its institutions, IS combines traditional classical Islamic models with modernist ones, but its philosophy of governance remains that of a religiously totalitarian nature. It established a strict political, legal, legislative, judicial and administrative system based on classical Islamic political and administrative heritage. It forcefully imposed its perceptions and laws on people in territories already witnessing turmoil and chaos. The organization established a number of ideological and military institutions, most notably a system of *dawarwin* (s. *dirwan*, departments) tasked with regulating various aspects of life under IS rule, including the *Diwan al-Jund* related to administering soldiers under the Ministry of War, and others for the judiciary and the Ombudsman department, education, media, *da'wa* and mosques, research and *iftaa'* (issuing religious opinions and edicts), health, finance, agriculture, services, *zakat* (alms-giving), donations, public security, a department for administering the affairs of tribes, and *Diwan al-Hisba*, which regulates proper conduct and morality in public areas, such as markets.²¹³

Women actively participate in administrative and logistical roles in various departments, but are noticeably excluded from senior leadership positions. The women of the Islamic State share with their male counterparts a common vision towards defining the role of women in state and society, a vision that stems from predetermined roles outlined by Islamic Shari'ah. They are actively engaged in a form of counter-feminist discourse against both Western and Islamic forms of feminism, and present an image of IS women that is radically different than the prevailing stereotypical image in the media and political discourses that portray women who join jihadist groups as desperate, mentally unstable, naïve, or manipulated by their male counterparts, or seeking to become 'brides' of jihadists.

It may be argued that female jihadism – as is the case of the reality of women willingly living under IS rule – is an act of radical and violent reclaiming of identity that is hostile towards Islamic feminist discourse that calls for reinterpreting the Shari'ah in regard to women's rights and equality. Female jihadists consider such calls to be a submission and subjugation to Western feminism. The discourse of female jihadists is congruent with

²¹³ See: the Diwans of the Islamic State, Al-Bayan Radio Station, *Barnamaaj Jawla fi Dawaween al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* "A Tour of the Islamic State's Departments Program", Saturday Rajab 12, 1436 AH until Friday Rajab 18, 1436 AH, <https://isdarat.tv/16001> also at <https://archive.org/details/jwllaa.fe.Dawaween.alDwlla>

the discourse of their male counterparts, espousing a frame of reference that transcends the male–female binary, according to their perspective, which stems from a Divine source that predefines the roles and functions of individuals notwithstanding of the issue of gender.

Women of the Islamic State adopt a fundamentalist view that considers the interpretation of Islamic feminists to be blasphemy, apostasy, a deviation from the fundamentals of Islam, and a surrender to the globalized Western feminist strategy of conquest, domination, and hegemony over Muslims. The jihadist women of IS view the issue of women’s liberation from male domination with great suspicion. They advocate that a woman’s covering of her body bestows dignity and honor upon her, rather than degrades her, and emphasize the religious obligation that she must cover her whole body, including her face and hands.

In the context of defining the ideological, doctrinal, and jurisprudential bases in elucidating women’s status and role within the caliphate, the al-Khansaa Women’s Media Unit of IS issued a foundational statement on January 23rd, 2015 entitled “Women in the Islamic State: A Message and Report,”²¹⁴ consisting of a preamble and three sections. The first section discusses the message and mission of Muslims in life, the second section discusses women in the Islamic State, and the third section is a brief comparison between the status of women in the Islamic State and their status in the Saudi Arabian state. The document’s rhetoric is dominated by emphasis on the religious identity of IS women that is counter to the approaches of secular feminism.

The preamble outlines the causes of decline in the status of Islam and Muslims in the world, blaming it on the historical factors of Western colonialism and the abolition of the Islamic caliphate and replacing it with local heteronomous regimes who are “agents to the enemies of Muslims.” It emphasized that the real Islamic society has disappeared ever since, with Western culture invading the minds of Muslims and replacing the “pure Islamic thought derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah, which became strange and alien to the reality of people.”²¹⁵

²¹⁴ See: *Al-Mar’a fī al-Dawla al-Islamiyya: Risala wa Taqrir* “Women in the Islamic State: A Message and Report”, Al-Khansaa Media Unit, February 16, 2016, https://justpaste.it/almarah_resalh

²¹⁵ Ibid.

The charter celebrates the return of the caliphate, which “brought an end to the disorientation that generations of Muslims have experienced for long decades; it is the end of the era of emulating the powerful, the Western victor, in lifestyle and way of living.” In this new era, there is a return to the fundamentals, where IS’ view of women stems from the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, “away from the disruptions of these late eras, which messed with “the Muslim woman’s” instincts and her religion, making her and us forget the reason for her existence and ours on the face of this earth.”²¹⁶

The first section elucidates what IS considers to be the “Message of Muslims in Life.” It defines a Muslim as “an individual who is distinguished from others who hold false ideas in that a Muslim seeks to achieve *tawhid* “oneness of God” on earth.” It describes the ideal Muslim society as one that is not asked to “examine the innermost aspects of matter, discover the secrets of nature, or reach the highest levels of architectural civilization, but is rather asked to achieve *tawhid* with regard to tombs and palaces “associating deities with God, whether they be saints or rulers”, to establish Shari’ah law, spread Islam on earth, and take people out of the darkness of unbelief and into the light of belief.” It explains, however, that “this in no way means to neglect the necessary worldly sciences essential for human life, such as agriculture, medicine, and engineering, etc., but to take from “these sciences” to the extent of what is needed for people’s lives and the betterment of their affairs.”²¹⁷

The charter stresses that both women and men are subject to religious standards and a Divine authoritative reference, and that their message in life is one. It states: “The woman was created as man was, to build this earth, but as God wanted. God created her from Adam and for Adam, after she fulfills the rights of her Creator of what He commanded of her, there remains no greater right than the right of her husband.” The problem today, according to the charter, is that the woman does not find herself belonging to her real function, which is consistent with her instinct and nature, for good reason; “she finds herself in front of the image of a man not in front of a real man.” Despite all this, it states that Muslim women must have self-discipline and raise their children based on what God commands of them in order for the ideal “Muslim home” to materialize, after which the ideal “Muslim society”

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

materializes. It states: “The basic function of the woman and her rightful place in society is the peaceful home, amongst her children and family, where she raises and educates and nurtures them. She cannot perform this if she is illiterate and ignorant. Islam does not prohibit “female” education or deprives her from culture.”²¹⁸

Under the title “The Failure of the Western Model in Women,” the charter explains that the model of liberating women by allowing them to leave their homes has led to “her wretchedness,” for “Satan’s soldiers today, with their ‘advancement,’ ‘progress,’ and ‘culture,’ want to send Adam’s daughters away from their gardens of paradise in the shelter of their husbands to the hellfire of hard work, travail, and exhaustion.” They did this, according to the charter, by distorting four concepts with which they infiltrated the minds of Muslim women and manipulated their emotions: promoting women to leave their homes, distorting the concept of ‘work’ by differentiating between working at home and outside the home, distorting the concept of ‘knowledge’ by confining it to worldly sciences to the exclusion of religious sciences, and manipulating the concept of ‘beauty’ by uglifying modesty and covering up while beautifying nudity and exposing the body.”²¹⁹

While a woman’s basic function is the home and family, she may leave the home in circumstances necessitating her service to society, including obligatory jihad (*`ayn*) if enemies attack her land and men cannot fulfill the task with collective jihad (*kifayah*), or to seek knowledge especially religious sciences, or when a female doctor or teacher may be of benefit to other women. Other than that, according to the charter, “women did not reap anything from the myth of ‘equality’ with men except thorns.”²²⁰

The second section of the charter is dedicated to the issue of women in the Islamic State. It presents a rosy image of the situation of women under the caliphate and its *wilayat* (provinces), describing it as a radical change from the reality of women during colonial times and subsequent eras of “Crusader invasions,” followed by the domination of Shiites over governance in Iraq and control of *Nusayriyya* “Nusayris, i.e. Alawites” over Syria. It notes that each country went through “particular stages of injustice and oppression practiced against Muslim women in the name of freedom, humanity,

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

and equality.”²²¹

It deals with women’s rights and obligations, most prominently the issue of hijab and women’s proper attire as the basis of Islamic identity and “a right reclaimed after being deprived by colonialism.” On the issue of women’s security, the charter laments that “the Sunni woman during the Crusader-Shiite war period against Iraq suffered from abduction, detention, torture, abuse, and desecration of her honor, and in many cases, death.” As women enjoy security and justice under the caliphate today, according to the charter, just courts were not available before the caliphate took over because Shari`ah law was not enforced.²²²

In the third section, the charter compares between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State in relation to women, considering that both ‘states’ claim to apply Shari`ah law and espouse a Wahhabi Salafi frame of reference. It says, “We want to expose this “Saudi” model of deception and show people the falsity of their claims in regard to women in several points.” On security, it describes Saudi courts as ‘unjust’ and authorities that arrest, detain, torture, and threaten women. On the issue of “Women and Westernization: Saudi Policies,” the charter considers that Saudi Arabia’s prohibition of women’s driving is not motivated by religion, but by ‘security’ considerations. On Westernization, it rebukes Saudi Arabia for educating women and sending them abroad to get an education, and for supporting and financing corrupt satellite channels that propagate vice. On the issue of poverty, it highlights what it considers corruption in the oil-rich state that is full of poor slums and lacks an adequate social welfare system.²²³

The document concludes by addressing women of the caliphate: “Fear God and fulfill your duties towards your state. Beware of offending “the caliphate” knowingly or unknowingly. Take initiative in raising the sons of the caliphate on pure *tarwid*, and its daughters on chastity and decency. Know that you are the hope of this Ummah, for it is your hands that beget the guardians of faith and protectors of the land and honor. May God bless you and reward you for your patience, you are from us and we are from you.” In a following message addressed to Muslim women ‘everywhere,’ the statement

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

says: “Know that the Ummah of Muhammad (PBUH) will not rise without your helping hands, do not let the caliphate down, serve it even with a word. Let your children be the building blocks of the monument of glory and the beacons of the State of Islam... You are from us and we are from you.” Finally, it addresses the enemies of the Islamic State, and the “enemies of chastity and purity from among the secularists and liberals from within our own people: our girls have returned to their *jilbab* “modest cloaks”, and our women have settled in their homes. Throw the spit of your culture, civilization, and thought in the sea, may God fight you. You are not from us, and we are not from you.”²²⁴

Notwithstanding the traditionalist rhetoric of the charter vis-à-vis women, the coming days of building and expanding the caliphate will come to witness the impact of the previous visions of al-Zarqawi and al-`Ayeri and active female jihadists that laid the foundation for incorporating women into the organizational structures of IS. Women of the caliphate began to have greater presence in IS departments, where they would contribute to solidifying the state and jihadist society, particularly in the fields of media and propaganda, education, religious scholarship, health, services, and women’s morality police (*al-hisba*), among other non-combatant functions. Combatant roles were not ruled out, as delineated in the charter, in cases of dire need or mass mobilization, or if a woman “desires martyrdom.”

Propaganda and Religious Advocacy (*Da`wa*)

In the context of globalized jihadist structures from Al-Qaeda to IS, female jihadism is situated primarily at the core of ideological and propaganda institutions, rather than governance and leadership. As totalitarian religious movements, the military aspects of these organizations are strongly entwined with the religious *da`wa* advocacy mission, and hence, their *da`wa* propaganda apparatuses are among the most important devices that facilitate mobilization, polarization, and recruitment for the military branch. Considering the religious jihadist nature of their ideology, knowledge of religious sciences, including *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *`aqidah* (doctrine), and Shari`ah law is essential for proselytization, persuasion, and debate. In addition, jihadist movements’ reliance on alternative media outlets, particularly in cyberspace

²²⁴ Ibid.

and social media necessitates proficiency and even mastery of use of communications and technological advances. Thus, it is quite difficult to separate the religious apparatuses from the media and propaganda ones in terms of specialization, functions and roles, where ideology intertwines with propaganda, creating ample space for female contributions and activism.

While IS established various departments and institutions within the structures of the state, i.e. the diwans, nonetheless these separate bodies cooperate and coordinate in espousing the unified IS message, and it is quite common to find overlap in their functions. The Religious (Shari`ah) Commission, for example, publishes books and letters, drafts al-Baghdadi's speeches and statements, and evaluates the organization's videos, music, and other media and propaganda productions. The entity is divided into two departments: The first is related to regulating religious courts and the judiciary, and handles litigation, arbitration and mediations in disputes, dictates and carries out punishments (*hudud*), and manages the function of *al-hisba* and the task of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (*al-amr bil ma'ruf wa al-nahi`an al-munkar*). The second department is tasked with preaching, guidance, recruitment, propagation, and monitoring the media. In the membership of the Religious Commission, the organization relies mainly on Arabs and foreigners, particularly members who hail from the Arab Gulf states.

Ideological institutions integrate with, and supplement, media and *da`wa* institutions. Media and communications is a significantly important function for IS, the jihadist organization that gives the most priority and attention to the internet and mass communications. From its nascent stages in the early 2000s, globalized jihadism recognized the exceptional value of alternative media outlets in spreading its political message and its jihadi Salafist ideology, giving rise to the phenomenon of 'electronic' or 'cyber' jihad.²²⁵

Al-Qaeda's regional branches were quick to establish jihadist websites, forums, and media centers. Al-Qaeda's central organization founded al-Sa-

²²⁵ Prior to IS, Al-Qaeda recognized the impact of media propagation. Al-Zawahiri emphasized that Al-Qaeda's media work enjoys the same importance as military work. He says in a statement addressed to media jihadists, "I ask God to reward those who work in media jihad...and call on them to give forth more effort and contributions. I thank God that the enemies of God witnessed defeat, despite having at their service massive capabilities and media institutions, and witnessed defeat in the face of the meager capabilities of the Mujahideen." See: Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Kalima ila Rijal al-`I`lam al-Jihadi: Nukhbat al-`I`lam al-Jihadi min Liqaa' Mu'asat al-Sahab* "A Message to the Men of Media Jihad: The Elite of Media Jihad during a meeting with Al-Sahab Media Foundation, Dhu al-Hijja 1428 AH, December 16, 2007.

hab Media Foundation, and AQAP in Saudi Arabia founded *Sawt al-Jihad*. With the merging of the Saudi and Yemeni branches, AQAP established *Sada al-Malahim* media foundation. These outlets published electronic books and magazines, including *Sawt al-Jihad*, *al-Battar*, and *Dharwat al-Sanam*, among others. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) founded the Media Committee Center, later renamed *al-Andalus* Foundation for Media Productions. In February 2006, *al-Fajr* Media Center was established to serve as the umbrella organization for all media centers affiliated with regional Al-Qaeda branches.²²⁶ Despite the spread and growth in numbers of these media outlets and magazines affiliated with Al-Qaeda, they nonetheless lacked active female contributions.

AQAP al-`Ayeri's attempts to incorporate women in jihadist media laid the foundation for further women's engagement in cyber and media jihad. After publishing only one issue of al-Khansaa women's jihadist magazine, Al-Qaeda resumed dedicating media activities to, and by, women, and established *al-Shamikhah* Media Foundation, under the umbrella of Central Al-Qaeda media organization *al-Fajr*, and published a women's magazine entitled *al-Shamikhah* (The Lofty Woman), with the first issue released in February 2011. While the editor of the magazine was a male jihadist, Saleh Yusuf, the magazine nonetheless included writings by women using pseudonyms such as Umm Ragheb al-Maqdissiya, Umm Razan, and Umm Muhammad al-Hashimiyya. The contents focused on traditional non-combative roles for women, but used terms and references unusual in jihadist discourse, such as the 'etiquette of the lofty woman,' the 'beauty of the lofty woman,' domestic skills, and references to male jihadists as 'journey companions' and male children as 'the lofty boys.'

Nevertheless, *al-Shamikhah* magazine ceased publication after the second issue. Other jihadist women's magazines were also short-lived, including *Hafidaat al-Khansaa'* (al-Khansaa's Granddaughters), published by al-Sumud Media Unit, and *Hafidaat `Aishah* (Aisha's "Prophet's Wife" Granddaughters). Another magazine focused on female jihadist detainees, entitled *al-Asir-aa*t (The Female Captives), was also short-lived.

Al-Qaeda women's contributions on the internet and social networking sites was nonetheless modest in impact and weak in content and technical

²²⁶ Hassan Abu Hanieh, "Al-Qa`ida wa al-Jihad al-Electroni" "Al-Qaeda and Electronic Jihad", *Al-Jazeera Center for Studies*, February 10, 2012, <http://www.assakina.com/center/files/12842.html>

creativity, in comparison to the case of IS, which did not dedicate special magazines for women, but rather incorporated women within its media and propaganda apparatus. IS women worked in accordance with a centralized media strategy run by the Media Diwan, which manages dozens of institutions specializing in media production and distribution.

IS's media apparatus boasts high technical capabilities and great sophistication in dealing with the cyber world, the communication revolution, and virtual social networks. IS mobilized a sizeable electronic army, and developed an advanced media machine that infiltrated the global 'media game' and utilized its media platforms to propagate and manipulate minds by relying on an industry of savvy and captivating media production that portrays IS as a superpower that cannot be defeated.

IS attracted the attention of international media in a way that no other jihadist group ever did. This did not come about incidentally, but rather in accordance with a savvy strategy, implemented through carefully planned propaganda campaigns and through training and preparing an army of on-line publishers capable of navigating and circumventing the challenges of censorship and securitization of the cyber world. The impact of IS propaganda is not limited to its technical professionalism and high-quality productions, but extends to the ideological mission behind the mind-boggling cinematographic sophistication.

The full body of IS propaganda is vast, notes Charlie Winter, who examined the Islamic State's 'virtual' propaganda strategy. By 2015, an average of three videos and more than fifteen photographic reports were circulated per day. Nine radio news bulletins were appearing daily, "meticulously timed in their regularity and broadcast in multiple languages, including Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, English, French and Russian. Beyond radio propaganda, Islamic State centrally composes and produces *nashīds* (jihadist music sung a cappella) and feature-length films that depict its most barbarous acts, which emerge on a monthly basis."²²⁷

IS' media department has undergone considerable development in form and content, and enjoys extensive support and backing. *Al-Furqan*,

²²⁷ Charlie Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy," *Quilliam*, July 2015, p. 12, <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/charlie-winter-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy>

an institution for media production, is the oldest and most influential of IS media outlets. New media outlets and production agencies continue to be established to propagate and spread IS' message, ideology, and operations, including: *al-I'tisam*, *al-Hayat*, *A'amaaq*, *al-Battar*, *Dabiq*, *al-Khilafah*, *Ajnad*, *al-Ghuraba'*, *al-Isra'*, *al-Saqeel*, *al-Wafa'*, and audio production agencies, in addition to a number of media agencies affiliated with provinces and regions under IS control, such as *al-Barakah* and *al-Khair* news agencies, among others. The department also publishes a number of Arabic and English-language magazines and bulletins, such as *Dabiq* and *al-Shamikhah*, and has established local radio stations, such as *al-Bayan* in the Iraqi city of Mosul, and another radio station in the Syrian city of al-Raqqah. IS is also preparing to launch *al-Khilafah* (The Caliphate) satellite TV channel.

It may be argued that the success of IS' media strategy in disseminating its ideological message is due to the nature of working within a "milieu of supporting ideas, concepts, and narratives," what Jacques Ellul refers to as "pre-propaganda." Without this milieu, "propaganda cannot exist." As Charlie Winter adds, "All too often, the consensus is that brutality is the extent of Islamic State propaganda. This is simply not the case. The full spectrum of its political messaging is vast – besides brutality, it is preoccupied with mercy, victimhood, belonging, militarism and, of course, apocalyptic utopianism. In no way are these ideas new. Most, if not all, likeminded jihadist organisations exploit the same ideas. However, what makes Islamic State different is the quantity, quality and regularity with which it manipulates them."²²⁸

The role of women in creating media momentum is guided by IS' centralized media strategy, where instructions and directives are issued continuously in relation to topics, ideas, and rhetoric of media productions. However, the breadth of propaganda and the attractiveness of the organization's ideology are based on the "pre-propaganda" stock: the dominant ideas, the cultural, religious, political and social environment, and on the objective reasons and conditions that are not necessarily created or manipulated by the organization. IS presents itself as a victim of these conditions, a savior from their horrors, an avenger against those who created them, and a founder of a future that is opposite to these conditions. This portrayal can easily resonate, especially that – despite the violent and extremist nature of IS' ideology and behavior – nonetheless, the majority of Arab and Muslim public opinion does

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 16-18.

not disagree with IS in its perception and description of prevailing political and economic conditions in the region. IS' propaganda is anchored in a set of issues, causes, and ideas that may be summarized under five headings:

First: the failure of the Arab and Muslim nation state politically, economically, socially and culturally; its politically-dictatorial nature, its failure to achieve modernization and independence, and its dependency on the West. IS did not invent these descriptions, but attributes this failure to the neglect of the rule of Shari`ah law and Islamic principles and ideals, and submission instead to secularism and democracy, which it describes as *kufri* and apostasy.

Second: the emergence of sectarianism, which has become one of the prevailing concepts in conflict areas in the region, especially Iraq and Syria. Sectarian discourse has become a key feature in mobilization and recruitment in a region growing further divided on sectarian bases between Sunnis and Shiites, and where sectarian militias are formed and backed by sectarian regional opposites such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. IS' discourse exploits this state of reality, and presents itself as a shield for Sunnis against Shiite atrocity, and attempts to discredit Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia's claims to representing Sunnis, and accuses them of complicity and incapacity.

Third: Western imperialist policies and the US occupation of Iraq in particular, the West's support for Arab and Muslim dictatorships, and its support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine. IS propagates the idea that there is a Western 'crusade' against Islam and Muslims, and presents itself as a defender and freedom fighter against hegemony and occupation, and portrays its war as one that is against injustice and exploitation to achieve independence and dignity of the Muslim Ummah.

Fourth: the coup against the Arab Spring, which has revitalized authoritarian regimes and reinforced the ideology of the Islamic State that considers violence as the only means of change. Most of the Arab masses have lost faith in peaceful change and the democratic electoral process. IS propaganda focuses on the fact that Arab governments are fighting any change that would lead to the rise of Islamists.

Fifth, the symbolism of utopian model of the Islamic caliphate in Muslim imagination. IS invested in the dream toward an Islamic caliphate as a perfect system of government imagined, and aspired, by Muslims, and presented itself as the struggler for the return of the caliphate. It hastened to

announce the re-establishment of the caliphate system, and called on Muslims to migrate to and defend the Caliphate State that now represents Islam and Muslims in the world, and which heralds a decisive battle between Islam and the West that ends with the ‘conquest of Rome.’

Female jihadist activists in various IS media, research, and advocacy institutions took upon themselves the mission of disseminating this political and ideological message. Foremost among them were the all-female al-Khansaa Media Unit, which was dissolved and merged with Hafidaat `Aisha Unit in September 2015.²²⁹ Hafidaat `Aisha became noticeably active on the internet and social media, launching coordinated propaganda campaigns,²³⁰ and relying heavily on Saudi Arabian female propagandists, despite the fact that the most prominent female leaders in IS are not Saudis, such as Iman al-Bugha and Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira.

Iman al-Bugha is one of the most renowned women in the Islamic State. A Syrian daughter of a renowned Syrian Islamic scholar, she holds a doctoral degree in Islamic Shari`ah, and had taught in Saudi universities before joining IS in October 2014, where she came to hold senior positions in the Research Department (*Diwan al-Buhouth*). Al-Bugha is perhaps the only known woman in IS' *Shura* Consultative Council. She has published a book entitled “I Am a Daeshite “IS-follower” Before Daesh “IS” Existed” in which she defends IS ideology and behavior.²³¹

Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira is also one of the most famous and controversial women of IS. Her real name is not known, and she is believed to be European of Tunisian descent, and is said to be the wife of IS' Religious *Mufti* (fatwa-issuing cleric), the Bahraini national Turki al-Ban`ali. She is an avid writer in the IS' English-language magazine *Dabiq*, and a staunch defender of the organization's most controversial fatwas. After IS issued a

²²⁹ See: ‘*Ilan Ilghaa Sariyat al-Khansaa’ al-I`lamiyya wa Damjiha ma` Sariyat Hafidaat `Aa’isha* “Statement on Dissolving Al-Khansaa Media Unit and Merging it with the Granddaughters of Aisha Unit”, Al-Battar Media Foundation, September 6, 2015, <https://justpaste.it/njss>

²³⁰ For an example of the volume and diversity of female jihadist contributions through articles, essays, photographs, and reports in the media campaign “*Lajji`un ila Ayn?*” “Migrating (seeking asylum) to Where?”, see the link including all publications of Hafidaat `Aisha Unit as part of the campaign, September 17, 2015, <https://justpaste.it/nsji>

²³¹ Iman Mustafa al-Bugha, *Ana Da`ishiyya Qabla an Tujad Da`ish* “I Am a Daeshite (IS-follower) Before Daesh (IS) Existed”, Maktabat al-Himma, 1st edn., 2014.

fatwa permitting taking ‘infidel’ women captives,²³² she wrote an article entitled “Are They Captives or Whores?” in which she defends IS’ taking women considered non-Muslims as *sabaya* (captives), particularly Yazidi women,²³³ arguing that it is a religious ruling that was applied in Islam and enjoys the consensus of religious jurists.²³⁴

After IS issued a series of books and essays on the necessity of *hijra* (migration) to the lands of the caliphate from the countries that are considered *dar al-kufr* (abode of unbelief),²³⁵ Umm Sumayya wrote an article entitled “Sisters of the Migrants” in which she calls on Muslims worldwide to migrate to the lands controlled by IS, presents the opinions of religious jurists who argue that it is a religious obligation, and refutes fatwas issued by jurists who oppose the opinion.²³⁶

With the escalation of clashes between IS and Syrian revolutionary and opposition factions, particularly Al-Nusra Front, IS issued fatwas declaring the Syrian factions as unbelievers. In propagating these fatwas, Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira wrote an article in Dabiq magazine calling on the wives of fighters in Al-Nusra and other factions to leave their husbands under the pretext that *kufr* necessitates separating spouses, and considered their refusal to leave their husbands to be a type of sinful fornication.²³⁷ On women’s role

²³² See: *Su’al wa Jawab fi al-Sabii wa al-Riqab: Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* “Question and Answer on Taking Captives and Slaves: The Islamic State”, Maktabat al-Himma, Muharram 1436 AH.

²³³ Much has been written on the tragedy and affliction of Yazidi women and girls taken captive by IS. See a sample of legal reports documenting some of their stories in “Escape from Hell: Torture and Sexual Slavery in Islamic State Captivity in Iraq,” *Amnesty International*, December 2014, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/escape_from_hell_-_torture_and_sexual_slavery_in_islamic_state_captivity_in_iraq_-_english_2.pdf

²³⁴ See: Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira, *Asabayaa am Baghaya?* “Are They Captives or Whores?”, Dabiq Magazine, Issue 9, Sha’ban 1436 AH, pp. 44-49.

²³⁵ IS issued numerous fatwas, books, and statements calling on Muslims to emigrate from the lands of *kufr* to the lands of the Islamic State. See, for example, Asad al-Ma’arik al-Athari, *Al-Hijra wa Ahkamuha* “Emigration and Its Religious Rulings”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2nd edn., 2015.

Also see, Abu Maria al-Asyaf, *al-Hijra wa al-Maqam fi Dar al-Islam* “Immigration to, and Residing in the Abode of Islam”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2015. Suhail al-Hijazi, *Lujou’ al-Muslimeen ila Aradhi al-Salibiyeen wa al-Iqama Fiha* “Muslims’ Resorting to the Lands of Crusaders and Residing There”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2015.

²³⁶ See: Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira, *Shaqaa’iq al-Muhajireen* “Sisters of the Migrants”, Dabiq Magazine, Issue 8, Jumada al-Akher 1436 AH, pp. 32-38.

²³⁷ See: Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira, *La Hunna Hillun Lahum wa La Hum Yahillun Lahum* “They are not lawful wives for the (Unbelievers), nor are the (Unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them”, Dabiq Magazine, Issue 10, Ramadan 1436 AH, pp. 42-48.

in jihad, Umm Sumayya stressed that jihad and fighting are not obligatory on Muslim women except in the case of repelling aggressors who attack them. She stresses, however, that the demanded role of women in jihad is in building the Ummah, 'making' men, and pushing them into the midst of battles.²³⁸

Many veteran jihadist women joined IS' religious and media departments, particularly ones who have a jihadist history and experience in various previous jihad fronts, and women who made the *hijra* to the caliphate such as the Moroccan female jihadist Fatiha el-Mejjati. Yet the biggest contribution came from Saudi Arabian female jihadists who have extensive knowledge of religious sciences coupled with experience in electronic media fields. Saudi female jihadists became the most renowned in the religious and media apparatuses especially as they began to leave Saudi Arabia for Iraq and Syria, such as Nada al-Qahtani, who goes by the alias Ukht Julaybib in reference to her brother Julaybib al-Qahtani, who went to Syria and joined IS there. Several female jihadists' writings and aliases indicate their countries of origin, particularly Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Egypt, and Iraq. Many of them issued books and articles that reinforce and defend IS' ideological message, such as Irhab al-Qahtaniyya,²³⁹ Ukht liman Baya` Dawlat al-Islam,²⁴⁰ Lam` al-Asinna al-`Adnaniyya,²⁴¹ Mawiya al-`Adnaniyya,²⁴² Umm Nusayba (Nada al-Khila-

²³⁸ See: Umm Sumayya al-Muhajira, *Jihad laa Qital Fih* "A Jihad with No Fighting", Dabiq Magazine, Issue 11, Dhu al-Qi`dah 1436 AH, pp. 40-46.

²³⁹ See: Irhab al-Qahtaniyya, *Ahyuu Sunnat al-Ribat* "Revive the Prophetic Tradition of Garrisoning", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016.

²⁴⁰ See writings of Ukht Liman Baya` Dawlat al-Islam, including: *Al-Hushoud al-Khadi`a bi Qur'wat Allah al-Qahira* "The Masses Subjected by God's Mighty Power", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; and *Al-Nizam al-Turki al-Kha'ib bayna Barathen al-Ajdal al-Ghadeb* "The Futile Turkish Regime Between the Angry Hawk's Claws", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016.

²⁴¹ See: Lam` al-Asinna al-`Adnaniyya, *Murwalaat al-Kafirin Tanqudh Asl al-Din* "Loyalty to the Unbelievers is a Breach of the Basis of Religion", Ashhad Media Foundation, 2016.

²⁴² See: Mawiya al-`Adnaniyya, *Al-Siyaaha al-Haqiqiyya fi Turkiya* "The Real Tourism in Turkey", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2017.

fah),²⁴³ Umm Maria al-`Iraqiyya,²⁴⁴ Umm `Amarah al-Wazirah,²⁴⁵ Umm al-Samh al-Qurashiyya,²⁴⁶ and Umm Aseed al-Ghariba.²⁴⁷

Moreover, numerous female poets wrote poetry defending and glorifying the 'Islamic State.' Most prominently is the case of "Ahlam al-Nasr," an alias for IS' most celebrated female poet, believed to be the daughter of Iman al-Bugha, who arrived in IS territory in Syria in early October 2014. Upon arriving, Ahlam al-Nasr said that her desire was to mobilize and prepare for battle, or to carry out a 'martyrdom' operation against US bases in the Arab Gulf states. She managed to leave Saudi Arabia with a *mahram*, and later married Abu Osama al-Gharib, a jihadist from Austria who moved to Germa-

²⁴³ See writings of Umm Nusayba (Nada al-Khilafah), including: *Asiraat al-Kinana: Sarahkat Misriyyat fi Sujun al-Tawaghit* "The Female Detainees in Egypt: The Cries of Egyptian Women in the Prisons of Tyrants", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Al-Qawl al-Mubin fi Asbab Bay` al-Jisr wa al-Jaziratayn* "The Clear Say on the Reasons for Selling the Bridge and Two Islands (Tiran and Sanafir)", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *Al-Mar'a al-Islamiyya bayna Jahim al-`Almaniyya wa Na'im al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* "The Islamic Woman between the Hell of Secularism and the Bliss of the Islamic State", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Al-Wa'd wa al-Wa'id li Qatalat Ahl al-Tawhid* "Promise and Punishment for Those Who Kill the People of Tawhid (Oneness of God)", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Bi al-Yaqin Ya'ti al-Tamkeen* "With Conviction Comes Empowerment", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Ajnad Misr Khayr Ajnad al-Ardh* "The Soldiers of Egypt are the Best of the World's Soldiers", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Ashrat Asbab li Ghazwat Brooksil al-`Asimah* "10 Reasons for the Battle on Brussels the Capital", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Kushifat `Awrat al-Ikhrwan fama al-Qadim* "The (Muslim) Brotherhood have been Exposed, What Comes Next?", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; *Ya Ahl Halab Inama Huma Fustataan Fakhtarau* "Oh People of Aleppo: It is Two Groups, So Choose One", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015.

²⁴⁴ See writings of Umm Maria al-`Iraqiyya, including: *Uqtul al-Kuffar wa al-Murtadin wa Isfhi Sudur al-Mu'minin* "Kill the Infidels and Apostates and Relieve the Hearts of Believers", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *Al-Haq al-Mahiq li Junud al-Salibiyyin fi Dabiq* "The Annihilative Right Against Crusader Soldiers in Dabiq", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *Indhar al-Mutajassiseen `ala Dawlat al-Haq wa al-Din* "Warning the Spies on the State of Rightness and Religion", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *Taffirat al-Raqqa wa al-Mosul Tatakarrar fi Brooksil* "The Bombings of Raqqa and Mosul Continue in Brussels", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *Tanbih al-Ghafilin lima Yuhaku bi Nashr al-Fasad fi Bilad al-Haramayn* "Warning the Heedless of Schemes to Spread Corruption in the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries (Saudi Arabia)", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; and *Hal Sinaa' ba'da Bay' at Muwahideha* "The State of Sinai After its Believers in One God Pledged Allegiance (to IS)", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016.

²⁴⁵ See writings of Umm `Amarah al-Wazirah, including: *Kharvatir `ala Tareeq al-Nafeer wa al-Shahadah* "Passing Thoughts on the Path of Mobilization and Martyrdom", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; *La Sabeel li al-Tamasuh bi al-`Aqidah* "There is No Way to (Touch to Seek Blessings) by Creed", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016; and *Hal Ataaka Naba' Aal Sa'ud?* "Did You Get the News about Aal-Sauds (Saudi Royal Family)?", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016.

²⁴⁶ See: Umm al-Samh al-Qurashiyya, *Turiduna al-Raqqa wa Nuridu Roma* "They Want Al-Raqqa and We Want Rome", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2016.

²⁴⁷ See writings of Umm Aseed al-Ghariba, including: *Risala ila Ahli bi Tunis: Thabatan ya Usud al-Qayrawan Thabatan* "A Message to my People in Tunisia: Hold Steadfast O Lions of Qayrawan", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015; and *Rasa'il ila Usud Bayt al-Maqdis* "Messages to the Lions of Jerusalem", Al-Wafa' Foundation, 2015.

ny, then travelled to Turkey en route to Syria, but was arrested by Turkish authorities and later released in an exchange of prisoners with IS.²⁴⁸

Ahlam al-Nasr published a collection of poems in 2014 glorifying jihad and jihadists.²⁴⁹ She publishes her poetry on social networking sites, in addition to various studies and articles. In an article entitled “The Islamic Caliphate’s Strategic Weapon,” she describes that “the children...the Muslim generation growing in the Islamic Caliphate, is the real terror for infidels! It is the strategic weapon of the Islamic Caliphate.”²⁵⁰

Other female poets include Sulaf al-Najdiyya, a Saudi Arabian national, who wrote a piece entitled “The Idol of Nationalism”²⁵¹ in which she criticizes and shames bonds made on the basis of nationalism, and glorifies instead bonds of Islamic religious brotherhood. Upon the death of IS’ spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, Sulaf al-Najdiyya wrote a eulogy glorifying al-Adnani’s character and sacrifice.²⁵² She also wrote literary works describing the virtue of *hijra*, leaving the Arabian Peninsula and the beauty of living under the caliphate.²⁵³ In a collection of poems glorifying IS, she celebrates jihad and IS jihadists, and defames IS opponents and enemies.²⁵⁴ She also eulogizes senior IS officials and laments their death, including Abu Muhammad al-Adnani²⁵⁵ and Military Commander Omar al-Shishani.²⁵⁶

Despite the electronic warfare against IS and the continuous closure of thousands of accounts belonging to IS supporters on social media networks, IS nonetheless remains active on outlets like Facebook and Twitter, and re-

²⁴⁸ Mu’ayad Bajis, “Sha’irat ‘Da’ish’ al-Sa`udiyya Tasil Suriya wa Tatazawaj al-Gharib” “IS’ Female Saudi Poet Arrives in Syria and Marries Al-Gharib”, *Arabi21*, October 14, 2014, <https://goo.gl/beYPeU>

²⁴⁹ See: Ahlam al-Nasr, *Aarwar al-Haq* “The Parching Heat of the Truth”, Fursan al-Balaagh Media, 2014.

²⁵⁰ See: Ahlam al-Nasr, *Silah al-Khilafah al-Islamiyya al-Istratiji* “The Islamic Caliphate’s Strategic Weapon”, Al-Battar Media Foundation, August 13, 2015, <https://justpaste.it/mzsm>

²⁵¹ See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Sanam al-Wataniyya* “The Idol of Nationalism”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

²⁵² See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Faqiduna al-Shaykh Al-Adnani wa Kalimatuhu al-Akhira* “Our Late Sheikh Al-Adnani and His Final Speech”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

²⁵³ See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Hijrat Rouh: Rihla ila al-Nour min Jazirat al-`Arab* “The Migration of the Soul: The Journey from the Arabian Peninsula to the Light”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

²⁵⁴ See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Araajiz Tahridiyya* “Inciteful Rajaz Poems”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

²⁵⁵ See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Raheel al-Manjaneeq: Fi Rithaa’ al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Abu Muhammad al-Adnani* “The Passing of the Catapult: Eulogy of the Mujahid Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

²⁵⁶ See: Sulaf al-Najdiyya, *Thalm al-Quloub: Fi Rithaa’ al-Shaykh al-Qa`id `Umar al-Shishani* “Piercing of the Hearts: Eulogy of the Commander Sheikh Omar al-Shishani”, Al-Wafa’ Foundation, 2016.

lies heavily on Telegram, a messaging service app that provides end-to-end encryption and secure messaging. In their cyber jihad, active IS female jihadists make up a large electronic army, using various aliases and screen names, promoting IS and propagating its ideology. A group of 200 female cyber jihadists issued a collective statement in 2014 pledging allegiance to Abu Bakral-Baghdadi.²⁵⁷

It is becoming ever more evident that women play a significant role in IS propaganda. These female jihadists recognize the importance of their function, they are not naïve victims, but active and effective propagandists working within a savvy media strategy anchored in a totalitarian religious vision that strongly believes in the caliphate system. Their propaganda focuses on ideas and concepts that speak to the emotions of recipients: the dream and utopianism of the caliphate, which establishes justice and equality, protects rights and dignity, and arms its followers with a sense of moral and material superiority.

Al-Khansaa Brigade: The Hisba Women

As IS began seizing control of large territories in Iraq and Syria, and with the declaration of the ‘Islamic State,’ it began to establish various institutions, commissions, and departments to manage the affairs of governance. *Dirwan al-Hisba* is one of the most important departments tasked with ingraining IS ideology and way of life in society. *Al-Hisba* is a classical Islamic system of moral regulation widely addressed in Islamic political jurisprudence. Numerous books and treatises discuss the definition, status, function, and ethics of *al-Hisba*, considering its importance in regulating social, economic, and cultural life within an Islamic system of governance. The concept relates to the Qur’anic command of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (*al-amr bil ma’rouf wa al-nahi `an al-munkar*), which began as a volunteer vigilante effort stemming from strong sense of faith and concern for public interest, and then evolved into a regulatory administrative body tasked with maintaining security and overseeing markets and enforcing public morals. A

²⁵⁷ See: *Al-Nusra al-Hayyia li al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* “The Modest Shy Support to the Islamic State”, Warshat Junoud al-Γ lam li Nusrat al-Islam (Media Soldiers in Support of Islam) and Al-Battar Media Foundation, May 26, 2014, <https://justpaste.it/fm65>

person tasked with this role is known as a *muhtasib* (fem. *Muhtasiba*).²⁵⁸

By January 2014, IS began enforcing its ideological vision in the territories it controlled in the cities of al-Raqqa in Syria and Fallujah in Iraq. Its system of governance is derived from its vision of traditional Islamic jurisprudence mixed with modern administrative political systems. IS began incorporating women into various administrative bodies, and established *Katibat al-Khansaa'*, al-Khansaa Brigade, in February 2014 tasked with searching and inspecting women at security checkpoints within IS territories.

Security conditions necessitated the formation of this brigade, particularly after several attacks were carried out against IS by individuals disguised in women's clothing. According to a former member of the brigade named Hajar, the establishment of al-Khansaa Brigade was hastened after an attack on the Sabahiyya checkpoint in western al-Raqqa killed three IS fighters, and another attack on the Mashlab checkpoint in eastern al-Raqqa killed four others. The attacks were carried out by unidentified individuals wearing women's clothing and covering their faces with a burqa. She states, "Out of fear of similar attacks, 'Umm Rayyan' "a Tunisian IS woman leader" was quick to take executive steps to form the brigade. Initially, we were 35 women: 3 Syrians, 2 Yemenis, 4 Saudis, 1 Kuwaiti, 7 Tunisians, 3 Libyans, 9 Chechens, 3 Egyptians, and 3 Iraqis. The urgent task of this brigade was to search women in the streets and shops for fear of repeated attacks, and also to remove the obstacles facing the organization during the arrest, questioning, or guidance of women who commit mistakes or violate Islamic law."²⁵⁹

After IS took control of Mosul in June 2014, al-Khansaa Brigade was integrated into The Hisba Department, where its scope of operations was expanded and its functions and roles increased. The Brigade operates effectively as a ministry for women's affairs within the caliphate. Its mission spans the fields of media, education, *da'wa* and religious advocacy, mosques, security, police, investigations and interrogations, and border control. With the establishment of state institutions, IS began hiring in the education and *Rakaz* (buried resources) departments, and thousands applied for the job openings.

²⁵⁸ For more details on the institution of *Hisba* in Islam, see: Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi, *Kitab al-Hisba fi al-Islam* "The Book on the Institution of Public Morality Enforcement in Islam", Al-Jazeera for Publishing, 2005.

²⁵⁹ See: Ahmad Ibrahim, "Hajar, wa Katibat al-Khansaa'," "Hajar and the Khansaa Brigade", *Al-Jumhuriyya*, July 7, 2015, <http://aljumhuriya.net/33606>

A large number of women were hired to work in these public departments, after IS ensured that workplace conditions are compliant with religious standards and non-mixing of men and women. According to witnesses, salaries of IS employees ranged between 200 to 600 US dollars, depending on the specialization and the nature of the job.²⁶⁰

The women's brigade also occasionally partakes in combat operations and plays a supporting role in the Army Department (*Diwan al-Jund*) and military aspects including providing medical services and preparing food for fighters. According to documents issued by the Diwan of Da'wa and Mosques related to biographies and stories of female IS jihadists, one of the daughters of Umm Khaled al-Wahaji (Moroccan), who works in the Hisba department in al-Raqqa, carried out a martyrdom operation against forces of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Ayn al-Arab (Kobani). Another document tells of the story of Fatima al-Shami, a 30-year old Syrian whose husband and three children were reportedly killed by Syrian regime forces. She joined the ranks of the organization, and worked in its kitchens to prepare food for the jihadists in fighting fronts, and had served in the most difficult fronts from the Damascus countryside to Fallujah and Wilayat al-Khair(Deiral-Zour).²⁶¹

The mission of al-Khansaa Brigade also includes security and intelligence work to detect and track down spies, both male and female. In 2016, IS announced via its magazine *al-Manba`* that it carried out a *qisas* (retaliatory punishment) against a woman from the North Caucasus, named Elvera Karaeva, also known as Sumayya, who was convicted of spying for the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). According to investigations conducted by the organization, Karaeva leaked secrets about a large number of Mujahideen from the North Caucasus, and caused the deaths of six jihadists, including her husband Abu Muslim, and a female jihadist who was preparing to carry out a martyrdom operation.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Ubaida al-Dulaimi, "Tanzeem al-Dawla Yuwathif al-Nisaa' fi al-Mu'asasat al-'Amma bi al-'Iraq" "The Islamic State Organization Employs Women in Public Institutions in Iraq", *Arabi21*, August 27, 2015, <https://goo.gl/fDmjhR>

²⁶¹ Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The Archivist: Stories of the Mujahideen: Women of the Islamic State", *Jihadology*, October 17, 2016, <http://jihadology.net/2016/10/17/the-archivist-stories-of-the-mujahideen-women-of-the-islamic-state/>

²⁶² See: "Al-Jasusa 'Elvera Karaeva' wa al-Maseer al-Mahtoum" "The Spy Elvira Karaeva and the Inevitable Fate", *Uyun al-Ummah*, June 4, 2016. Also see: "Da'ish Ya'dim Jasusa Russiyya fi al-Qawqaz" "Daesh Executes a Russian Spy in the Caucasus", *Al-Wafd*, May 11, 2016.

The Brigade's membership includes women who migrated from Europe and Arab and Muslim countries, in addition to local Iraqi and Syrian women. Among the most prominent brigade leaders is Umm Rayyan, also known as Umm Muhajir, who is among the first and most powerful women in IS who worked to establish the brigade. She is a Tunisian who came to Iraq along with her family and married off her two daughters to senior IS leaders, who reportedly later nominated her to form and lead al-Khansaa Brigade in al-Raqqa.²⁶³ Her real name is not known, but she is believed to be in her forties and described as having a strong and fierce personality. She is known for her strict management and cruel treatment of women, strict adherence to the organization's decisions and orders, and a staunch believer in its religious and ideological message.

Also among the prominent al-Khansaa leaders are the Saudi women Rima al-Jraish (Umm Mu`ath) and Nada al-Qahtani. Al-Jraish had arrived in Syria in August 2015 and married senior IS leader Abu Muhammad al-Shamali. It was rumored that she had been killed in coalition airstrikes on the Syrian city of al-Hasaka, but her mother denied that she is dead.²⁶⁴ Nada al-Qahtani, who goes by the alias Ukht Julaybib, is reported to enjoy considerable influence within IS, and that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had met with her several times and personally appointed her to head al-Khansaa Field Brigade in al-Raqqa, at the time that Rima al-Jraish was heading the al-Khansaa Electronic Brigade tasked with recruiting women and girls online.²⁶⁵

Among the most renowned local jihadist women in al-Khansaa Brigade is the Iraqi national Aisha Othman, whose roles within IS go beyond the women's brigade and is known to be involved in combat missions. She is believed to be among the first women to join the organization during the era of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. Now in her thirties, Othman is from Diyala Province in northern Iraq, and had previously taught at a nursing school. She is reportedly close to the Shura Consultative Council and has strong ties with Iraqi army officers of the former Ba`ath regime. She was detained

²⁶³ See: Ahmad Ibrahim, "Hajar, wa Katibat al-Khansaa," *op. cit.*

²⁶⁴ See: "Walidat 'Rima al-Jraish' Tanfi Maqtal Ibnataha fi Suriya" "Rima al-Jraish's Mother Denies Her Daughter was Killed in Syria", *Mufakirat al-Islam*, February 24, 2016, <http://islammemo.cc/akhbar/locals-ksa/2016/02/24/284188.html>

²⁶⁵ See: Huda Saleh, "Mann Hiya al-Da`ishiyya al-Sa`udiyya allati Iltaqaha Khalifat Da`ish?" "Who is the Saudi Daesh 'IS' Woman Who Met with Daesh's Caliph?", *Al-Arabiya Net*, February 28, 2016, <https://goo.gl/owChYq>

at Abu Ghraib prison for over 20 months before she was freed along with 150 others in the 2004 attack on the prison. She is married to a Tunisian IS jihadist known as Abu Hafis.²⁶⁶

Among the foreign fighters in al-Khansaa Brigade is Aqsa Mahmood, a Scottish Muslim woman of Pakistani origin. Known as Umm al-Layth, she is believed to be responsible for the Umm `Amarah Unit within the brigade. Despite her young age, about 21 years old, reports indicate that she is the main recruiter of Muslim girls from Europe.²⁶⁷ In a report issued by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, Aqsa Mahmood was linked to jihadist women from Europe, including Umm Haritha, Umm Waqqas, and Umm `Ubaydah, all from the UK. Umm `Ubaydah is believed to have a network of connections in Sweden and runs online accounts for al-Khansaa Brigade.²⁶⁸

Umm Sayyaf, an Iraqi Kurd whose real name is Nisreen As`ad Ibrahim al-`Ubaydi,²⁶⁹ made important – albeit confusing – confessions, following her arrest, about al-Khansaa Brigade and the role of women in IS. Umm Sayyaf is the top IS female captive in US custody, and is among an elite class of women within IS' male-dominated hierarchy. She said that most of the organization's operations are planned and run by men, while women's roles are minor, consisting of guarding female hostages. Her confessions reveal that ““t”here is a hierarchy within ISIS among women. A woman's rank tracks with her husband's. The higher in the ISIS org chart, the more she would know about the terror group's operations.”²⁷⁰ She stated in her confessions that the role of women in IS is primarily to marry IS fighters, maintain their

²⁶⁶ See: “Mann Hiya `Aisha `Othman Amir Harb Tanzim Da`ish” “Who Is Aisha Othman, Emir of The IS War”, *Sada al-Haqiqa*, November 13, 2016, <http://sdhnews.com/archives/47445>

²⁶⁷ Ashley Fantz and Atika Shubert, “From Scottish Teen to ISIS Recruiter: The Aqsa Mahmood Story,” CNN, February 25, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/23/world/scottish-teen-isis-recruiter/>

²⁶⁸ Rima Shirri, “Urudh Zawaj Mughriya Tadfā` Umm Hussein wa Umm Layth wa Umm Ja`far li al-Indimam li al-Jihad” “Lucrative Marriage Offers Incite Umm Hussein, Umm Layth, and Umm Ja`far to Join the Jihad”, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, September 13, 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=220608>

²⁶⁹ She is an Iraqi Kurd, the widow of an IS Chief financier, nom de guerre Abu Sayyaf, who was killed during a US operation in eastern Syria on May 15, 2015. Abu Sayyaf is Tunisian, his real name is Fathi bin Awn bin al-Jleidi Murad. He had a prominent role supervising oil and gas revenues and IS financial management. Umm Sayyaf was arrested during the operation. US forces later turned her over to the Iraq Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil in August 2015.

²⁷⁰ Nancy Youssef and Shane Harris, “The Women who Secretly Keep ISIS Running,” *The Daily Beast*, July 5, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/07/05/the-women-who-secretly-keep-isis-running.html>

homes, and produce future IS fighters. The main exception to this are the women who work for the religious police, or al-Khansaa Brigade, tasked with monitoring public morals and integrity in public places within IS territories. Despite known cases of female participation in combat, she indicated that women do not have any organizational or combative roles within IS, since fighting and suicide missions are confined to men.²⁷¹

It may be argued that Umm Sayyaf's testimony stands on a half-truth, and that she did not reveal the full truth deliberately or out of lack of real knowledge. Indeed, according to IS' own vision, women's main roles are supportive and logistical, consisting of maintaining their homes and raising children to become *ashbal al-Khliafah* (the cubs of the caliphate). But IS itself issued many statements and documents that encourage women's role in fighting and in martyrdom operations, and confirmed the activism of female jihadists in both combat and suicide missions. Nevertheless, Umm Sayyaf's narrative remains highly significant; it provides a balanced account away from myths, stereotypes, and legendary propaganda woven around the 'women of the caliphate.'

²⁷¹ Ibid., Also see: "Da'ish.. Ayy Dawr li al-Nisaa'? 'Umm Sayyaf' Tafdah al-Tanzim" "IS.. What Role for Women? Umm Sayyaf Exposes the Organization", *Radio Sawwa*, July 6, 2015, <https://www.radiosawa.com/a/isis-women-rule-/274663.html>

Chapter Four

For Love of Martyrdom: Female Suicide Jihadism

“Let them clear the way for the free women of the Arabian Peninsula. By God, we will not sleep one night without a martyrdom operation that tears our bodies into pieces... My believing sisters: learn to drive cars, not to roam around the streets, but so that you would be recorded in the list of female martyrs; nothing remains but a click of a button.”

Ukht al-Jihad from Saudi Arabia

Suicide operations are a recent phenomenon introduced by secular and religious groups as a military stratagem of war and as a tactic to confront an adversary that has superior military weapons and capabilities with which it imposes control on land and people. Direct confrontation with such an adversary is impossible considering the imbalance of power, hence, resistance groups resort to suicide attacks. Global jihadist groups, from Al-Qaeda to IS, were late in adopting suicide attacks in their activities, hindered by the fierce debate among its ideologues and clerics regarding the religious permissibility of the tactic and its effectiveness. But when they did finally resort to it, global jihadist groups copied it from other secular, religious, and nationalist movements and ended up mastering it, relying on it increasingly until it became the prime military tactic in their combat strategy.

While a great deal of studies and research have sought to analyze the motives behind suicide operations and attempted to transcend stereotypical readings, they remain nonetheless laden with interpretations that attribute the phenomenon to religious and cultural motivations, influenced by the prevalent orientalist approach to the study of the Arab and Islamic worlds. With an exaggerated focus on the “culture of death” in the religion of Islam and the culture and history of the Arabs, suicide operations carried out by non-Muslims become an exception, reinforcing the orientalist axiom that the phenomenon is founded upon an Islamic religious basis. In his analysis of the origins of suicide bombings, Pierre Conesa embodies this prevailing culturalist orientalist view and the arguments commonly presented by those who espouse this orientation. He states, “The phenomenon is largely of Muslim origin but is not confined in it...and to a large extent, the culture of violence and death is very strong. The construction of the figure of the martyr, which gradually supplanted that of the combatant, was essential to prepare the ground. The mortifying atmosphere, sustained by the violence of the occupying troops and by the glorification of the resistance, prepares for the supreme sacrifice, supposed to be preferable to life here below.”²⁷²

²⁷² Pierre Conesa, “Aux origines des attentats-suicides” “The Origins of Suicide Bombings”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, juin 2004, pages 14 et 15.

Some researchers, like French political scientist Olivier Roy, claim to transcend culturalist-orientalist frameworks and seek sociological explanations for the motives behind suicidal acts committed by Sunni jihadists. Yet he does not deviate from the discourse of the orientalist approach in excavating the religious roots of the phenomenon within Islam. He surrenders to this approach, and concludes that the suicidal act is an irrational nihilistic act on the geopolitical level. For Roy, the desire to die is clear, and it goes beyond mere sacrifice. He does not find any difference in terms of the phenomenon between the Sunni and Shiite sects, for the martyr of the Sunni Al-Qaeda organization is no different than the nihilism of the Shiite martyr.²⁷³ Roy cites Farhad Khosrokhavar, who studied the nihilism of the Iranian Shiite martyr who “seeks death on the Iraqi front in the 1980s, not so much to win the war or paradise as to leave a world that no longer interests him, because the purity of the revolution has vanished under corruption and power games. Life had ceased to be ‘worth it’.”²⁷⁴

This scholarly resignation from understanding the jihadist phenomenon obscures the epistemological approach in favor of the political ideological approach, where the objective conditions, factors, and motivations behind the phenomenon of terrorism in general, and suicide acts in particular, are overlooked. Nonetheless, there is recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon and the multiplicity of its causes and dimensions. According to Mia Bloom,

Authors from the fields of psychology, sociology, and political science all identify root causes as key to understanding why most terrorism occurs. Much of what is listed as a root cause, however, also explains mobilization of non-terrorist political groups and, therefore, falls into the category of ‘necessary though insufficient’ explanations for why these factors result, for some, in a turn to violence. They include: Lack of democracy, civil liberties, and the rule of law; Failed

²⁷³ For more details on the concept of martyrdom in the thought of Farhad Khosrokhavar and the nihilistic reading of the centrality of the concept in the Shiite sect and the model of Al-Hussein’s martyrdom, see: Farhad Khosrokhavar, *l’Islamisme et la mort: Le martyre révolutionnaire en Iran* “Islamism and Death: Revolutionary Martyrdom in Iran”, Paris: L’Harmattan, coll. “Comprendre le Moyen-Orient”, 1995. Also see: Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah’s New Martyrs*, (Trans. David Macey), Pluto Press, 2005.

²⁷⁴ Olivier Roy, “Al-Qaïda et le nihilisme des jeunes” “Al-Qaeda and the Nihilism of the Youth” *Esprit*, 3-4 Mars/Avril 2014, pp. 113.

or weak states that provide havens for terrorists; Too rapid modernization; Extremist ideologies—both secular and religious; A history of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships, or occupation; Illegitimate or corrupt governments; Repression by foreign occupation or colonial powers; The experience of discrimination on the basis of ascriptive (ethnic, racial, or religious) characteristics; Social injustice; The presence of charismatic ideological leaders...According to experts like Yoram Schweitzer and Farhana Ali, women tend to be motivated by reasons that are more ‘personal’ than those that influence men. These can be summarized as the four R’s: Revenge, Redemption, Respect, and Relationship. In particular, they include: ²⁷⁵ “The loss of a loved one (usually the dominant male in their life—their husband, father, or brother); A need to reinvent themselves because of alleged or real sexual misconduct; An inability to conceive children or being considered not marriageable; A desire to improve the status of women in their society; Proof that they are just as dedicated as the men to the Cause; and Being the sisters, daughters, or wives of well-known insurgents.”²⁷⁵

On the Evolution and Logic of the Phenomenon

In the context of debating the motives behind suicide operations, Robert Pape argues that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism in particular, or any one of the world’s religions in general, but that this form of terrorism is rather an effective military strategy for confronting occupation. He finds that the “presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is misleading and may be encouraging domestic and foreign policies likely to worsen America’s situation and to harm many Muslims needlessly.” Pape compiled a database of every suicide bombing and attack around the globe from 1980 through 2003—315 attacks in all. In distributing this number geographically, ethnically, and politically, Pape finds that the least number of suicide attacks

²⁷⁵ Mia Bloom, “Women as Victims and Victimiziers,” *eJournal USA, Countering the Terrorist mentality*, Foreign Policy Agenda, US Department of State, Vol. 12, Issue 5, May 2007, p. 17.

during in this period was carried out by Islamic groups. In fact, he says “the leading instigators of suicide attacks are the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a Marxist-Leninist group whose members are from Hindu families but who are adamantly opposed to religion.”²⁷⁶ Between 1980 and 2003, he tallied 17 suicide campaigns carried out by local groups to drive the United States, French, and Israeli forces out of Lebanon;²⁷⁷ by Palestinian terrorist groups to force Israel to abandon the West Bank and Gaza; and by Al-Qaeda to pressure the United States to withdraw from the Persian Gulf region. Since August 2003, an eighteenth campaign has begun, aimed at driving the US out of Iraq; “as of this writing, it is not yet clear how much this effort owes to indigenous forces and how much to foreigners, possibly including al-Qaeda.”²⁷⁸ Other attacks were carried out by other religious, ethnic, or nationalist groups in Chechnya, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and Sikh movements.²⁷⁹

Pape’s findings in disputing connections between suicide missions and religion, culture, ethnicity, or race are significant, yet this does not mean that the role of religion and culture is completely negated from the motives behind suicide bombings. More importantly, these operations do not always constitute an effective strategy in the face of occupation; contrarily, they often further ingrain the occupation, provoke it to expand control over land and people and justify its violations under the pretext of combating “suicide terrorism,” as is evident in the cases of Palestine, Chechnya, and others.

The raw number of suicide attacks carried out by Islamic and jihadist groups multiplied significantly in the Middle East and other parts of the world since the period studied by Pape (up until 2003). These attacks reflect – primarily – the serious complications of wars and conflicts, and the sequence of events associated with this phenomenon shows the increasing violence of this bloody method and its ability to cross ‘red lines’ in spreading terror and

²⁷⁶ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House Trade, Reprint, 2006, pp. 1-2.

²⁷⁷ Karen Armstrong cites a survey that finds that Hezbollah was responsible for seven suicide operations; the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party for twenty-two, and the Socialist Baath Party for ten. See: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and The History of Violence*, New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, p. 352.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷⁹ See: Sa`adah Khalil, “Mantiq Jadid li al-Tafjiraat al-Intihariyya Mughayer li al-Sa`id fi al-Gharb” “A New Logic of Suicide Bombings Dissimilar to that Prevalent in the West”, *Al-Hiwar al-Mutamadin*, October 15, 2005, <http://www.miftah.org/Arabic/Display.cfm?DocId=3958&CategoryId=2>

panic using various means. Suicide attacks ranged from using explosive belts to exploding cars and trucks, and ultimately using civilian aircraft. From 1981 to 2015, about 4,814 suicide attacks took place in over 40 countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, killing over 45,000 people.²⁸⁰ More recently, the Islamic State organization adopted suicide attacks as its prime military tactic, carrying out 1,112 various suicide operations in Iraq and Syria in 2016 alone.

In analyzing the Western discourse on suicide operations, anthropologist Talal Asad gives an insightful reading of the prevailing culturalist interpretation of the phenomenon, which evokes religious and cultural motives based on the concepts of martyrdom, sacrifice, and the sacred. He says, “The question presupposes the desire for an explanation in terms of motive—with the assumption that there must be a single clear answer to the question of motivation. Explanations in terms of religious (and especially Islamic) motive are still favored, partly because they provide a model that combines psychological elements (familiar from criminal trials) and cultural signs (distinguishing them from us), a model that lends itself to the discourse of the protection of civilization (committed to life) against barbarism.”²⁸¹ On how Western discourse interprets the phenomenon, he states, “I have come to the conclusion that some of these reasons are religious, but not religious in the sense that Western commentators take this to mean. For the latter, suicide bombing is seen as a violent expression either of a perverted, totalitarian Islam or of a primordial (and therefore irrational) religious urge that secularism has overcome.”²⁸² This, in turn, is what makes suicide bombings so horrifying to liberal societies, consuming their fear more than attacks by traditional weapons of airstrikes and rockets, and even pertinently scarier than nuclear weapons. “This leads me to the thought that the suicide bomber belongs in an important sense to a modern Western tradition of armed conflict for the defense of a free political community: To save the nation (or to found its state) in confronting a dangerous enemy,” he adds.²⁸³

The chronology of the suicide bombing phenomenon indicates that

²⁸⁰ Muhammad al-Tahir, “Tarikh al-Hajamat al-Intihariyya min al-Alif ila al-Yaa’,” “The History of Suicide Attacks from A to Z”, *Russia al-Yawm* (Russia Today), May 22, 2016, goo.gl/C9eBa6

²⁸¹ Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombings*, Columbia University Press (The Wellek Library Lectures), 1st edn., 2007, p. 56.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 63.

global jihadism was late in adopting – and legitimizing – suicide bombings, it was not until the 1990s that the phenomenon began to emerge, and it did not begin to incorporate women into the tactic until the turn of the 21st century. Global jihadist leaders from Abdullah Azzam to Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri held reservations against the legitimacy of suicide operations, to the point of finding it religiously prohibited and banned it from being carried out by either men or women. Hence, throughout the decade of Russian intervention from 1979 to 1989, Afghanistan did not witness suicide attacks. As more national and localized jihadist movements began to adopt it in the 1990s and use women to carry out the attacks, the global jihadist movement began to consider legitimizing it.

Suicide Warfare in the Arab and Islamic Context

The strategy of ‘martyrdom’ in the Islamic context first developed within the Shiite framework, where the martyr became a symbol of the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. The first suicide attack took place on October 30th, 1980 carried out by a 13-year-old Iranian boy who detonated a grenade wrapped around his waist under an Iraqi tank in the city of Khorramshahr in southwestern Iran. The phenomenon spread to the Arab world via Shiite movements in Lebanon since 1982, days after the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah was the first to adopt the strategy, confining it to men. Hezbollah claimed its first suicide attack when 18-year-old Ahmad Qassir attacked the Israeli military governor’s headquarters in the city of Tyre on November 11th, 1982.

Women’s involvement in suicide bombings in Lebanon first appeared in 1985 through secular movements such as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Baath Party, in the struggle against the Israeli army and militias supporting it such as the South Lebanon Army. At the time, Hezbollah opposed involving women in such operations, espousing instead traditional perspectives on women’s roles of childbearing and caring for the family and the home.

On April 9th, 1985, Sanaa Mehadli, then aged sixteen, was the first female to carry out a suicide operation in Lebanon. She drove a car loaded with 200 kilograms Of TNT exploding it by an Israeli military convoy on

the road to Jezzine, in the south of the country, killing two Israeli soldiers and wounding two others. She “incarnated then a new face of the nationalist struggle: A Shiite operating with a secularist party “The Syrian Social Nationalist Party”, Sanaa Mehadli, nicknamed ‘the bride of the South’, was not only the first Lebanese woman martyr, but also the first to undertake this type of mission.”²⁸⁴ She was followed by Sana’ Loula Abboud, nicknamed ‘the pearl of the Bekaa’, a communist militant who was a native of Qaraoun, and of Orthodox faith. She carried out the second suicide operation on April 21st, 1985. In all, during the war, nine women were responsible for suicide attacks planned and claimed by the PSNS (Syrian Social Nationalist Party), the PCL (Lebanese Communist Party), and the Baath Party in Lebanon.²⁸⁵

Soon after, Palestinian Islamist and jihadist nationalist movements began to adopt the tactic. The first female to attempt to carry out a suicide attack within the Palestinian context is Etaf Elayyan, born in 1962, she was a member of the *Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami* (The Islamic Jihad Brigades).²⁸⁶ In 1980, she secretly left the occupied Palestinian territories for Lebanon to receive training on firearms and weapons at the Fatah movement camps. Upon her return to Palestine in 1984, Elayyan began calling on the leadership of the Islamic Jihad Brigades to allow her to carry out a suicide mission. She received approval in 1985, and the movement began a two year long planning for the operation that was supposed to target the Israeli government headquarters in Jerusalem. A young Palestinian man from Tulkarm was tasked with installing the bomb in the vehicle she was supposed to drive into the target. On August 2nd, 1987, Elayyan and the young man were arrested prior to carrying out the attack.²⁸⁷

By the 1990s, the suicide tactic that first emerged within a secularist nationalist context was adopted by Islamic Palestinian movements,²⁸⁸ most

²⁸⁴ Carole André-Dessornes, “Être martyr au Moyen-Orient, un phénomène à mettre aussi au féminin,” *Moyen-Orient* 21, Janvier-Mars 2014, p. 70.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ *Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami*, The Islamic Jihad Brigades group was founded by Hamdi Sultan al-Tamimi and Munir Shafiq from within Fatah in an attempt to launch Islamist-oriented militant activism against the Israeli occupation.

²⁸⁷ See: “Etaf `Elayyan Ra`idat al-`Amaliyyat al-Istishhadiyya al-Filastiniyya” “Etaf Elayyan: The Pioneer of Palestinian Martyrdom Operations”, *Dunia al-Watan*, September 14, 2003, <http://bit.ly/2meob28>

²⁸⁸ Both Hamas and The Islamic Jihad movements published a number of books and studies on the permissibility of martyrdom operations. See, for example, Abdullah al-Shami, *Fiqh al-Shahadah* “The Jurisprudence of Martyrdom”, published by Al-Jihad in Palestine, also see: Ahmad Abu Zayd, *Al-Shahadah fi Sabeel Allah* “Martyrdom in the Path of God”, published by Hamas.

notably Islamic Jihad²⁸⁹ and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).²⁹⁰ Martyrdom operations were linked to Hamas primarily through their mastermind Yahya Ayyash, an engineer who joined the Qassam Brigades and became its commander in the last quarter of 1992. Ayyash brought about a quantum leap in Palestinian resistance militant activities through mastering the planning and training for execution of suicide missions. The first martyrdom operation claimed by Hamas occurred on April 16th, 1993, carried out by a young man named Saher Hamad Allah al-Tamam inside an Israeli settlement near the city of Bisan in northern Palestine, who targeted a café frequented by Israeli soldiers at the settlement. The attack killed and wounded dozens of soldiers.²⁹¹

While the first Palestinian Intifada witnessed the launch of suicide attacks carried out by males, the Second Intifada (al-Aqsa Intifada), which broke out following the storming of the Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon and Israeli soldiers into al-Aqsa Mosque premises on September 28th, 2000, witnessed the launch of suicide operations carried out by females as well. 25-year-old Wafaa Idriss, the first female ‘martyr’ of Palestinian origin, carried out a suicide attack on January 27th, 2002 by detonating a bomb in a market in Jerusalem, killing an elderly man and injuring dozens. Idriss was a member of the *Kata’ib Shuhada’ al-Aqsa* (al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), a Palestinian militant group affiliated with the secularist Fatah movement. With Idriss becoming an icon for Palestinian struggle, other women wanting to carry out such operations will turn To al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the only organization to accept them at the time.²⁹²

To prevent Fatah from monopolizing female martyrdom operations, militant wings of the Palestinian Islamist movements began to reconsider the exclusion of women from the suicide tactic. The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas) and al-Quds Brigades (Islamic Jihad) backed down from earlier fatwas confining women’s jihadist roles to logistical support, such as

²⁸⁹ The Islamic Jihad movement was founded in the late 1970s by a group of Palestinian students studying in Egyptian universities, headed by Dr. Fathi Shaqaqi.

²⁹⁰ The establishment of Hamas Movement was declared on December 6, 1987, amidst the First Palestinian Intifada which extended from 1987 until 1994. Hamas’ Foundational Statement was issued on December 15, 1987, and its Charter was issued on August 18, 1988, as the extension of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Palestine.

²⁹¹ Ahmad Muhammad al-Sa’ati, “Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya ‘Hamas’ 1987-1994” “The Islamic Resistance Movement ‘Hamas’ 1987-1994”, *Felesteen Online*, January 8, 2013, <https://goo.gl/9xbx93>

²⁹² Carole André-Dessornes, “Être martyr au Moyen-Orient,” op. cit., p. 17.

the fatwas issued by Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and the majority of Muslim Brotherhood's religious scholars. Both movements began to accept women in suicide operations.²⁹³ 19-year-old Heba al-Daraghmeleh embodied this transformation in an attack she carried out on May 19th, 2003 in Afula, northern Israel, killing three civilians. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁹⁴ Since then, it has become difficult to differentiate between nationalist operations carried out by secular-leaning groups, and others carried out by religious-leaning groups within the Palestinian context.

The first Hamas supporter to carry out a suicide attack under the banner of *istishhadiyyat* (female martyrs) was 22-year-old Dureen Abu Aysheh, a student at al-Najah University in Nablus. In February 2002, she contacted Hamas requesting permission to carry out a suicide attack, but after the Muslim Brotherhood leaders there refused her request, the Hamas-supporter resorted to al-Aqsa Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, which furnished the young woman with the necessary equipment and planning to carry out the attack that took place on February 27th, 2002 at a checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Since Abu Aysheh's attack, Hamas began allowing women to participate in this tactic. On January 14th, 2004, Reem al-Riyashi, a mother of two from Gaza and supporter of al-Qassam Brigades, detonated herself at the Erez checkpoint, on behalf of Hamas, killing four officers and wounding several others. Women like these "have become role models for the female fighters who recently founded a women's unit of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades. In September 2005, they appeared, veiled and wielding rockets, in the Hamas weekly paper 'Al-Risala' and professed themselves ready to take part in active battle."²⁹⁵

The early experiences of women's involvement in combat and suicide operations of global jihadism emerged in the context of nationalist and sol-

²⁹³ For more details on the transformations in the roles of women in the Hamas Movement and the intellectual and religious debates in this context, see: Khalid Muhammad Safi and Ayman Talal Yusuf, "Mawqif Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya 'Hamas' min Dawr al-Mar'a al-'Askari wa al-Siyasi (Dirasah Mafahimiyya)" "The Position of The Islamic Resistance Movement 'Hamas' Toward the Military and Political Role of Women: A Conceptual Study", *Al-Aqsa University Journal*, Vol. 11, issue 1, January 2007, pp. 45-55. https://www.alaqsa.edu.ps/site_resources/aqsa_magazine/files/137.pdf

²⁹⁴ See: *Al-Istishhadiyya al-Mujahida 'Heba 'Azim Daraghma' Qalat li Walidiha Qabla Istishhadiha: Sa Uqadim Laka Shahahah Taftakhir Biha* "The Female Martyr Jihadist Heba Azim Daraghma told her father before being martyred: I will present you with a martyrdom that makes you proud", Al-Quds Brigades, The Military Wing of Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, May 19, 2012, <https://goo.gl/MHEh19>

²⁹⁵ Kai Adler, "The Women of Hamas: 'Islam Protects Us,'" *Qantara*, Translated from the German by Jennifer Taylor-Gaida, January 26, 2006, <http://en.qantara.de/content/the-women-of-hamas-islam-protects-us>

idity jihad in the Palestinian and Chechen fronts. In Chechnya, the Saudi national, Samer Sweilem (AKA Khattab), the leader of the Arab Mujahideen there, along with the Religious official Abu Omar al-Sayf and Chechen commander Shamil Basayev, had significant impact on incorporating women into direct combat. Many experts believe Chechen rebel leader Basayev was a pioneer in recruiting women into the insurgency. “Basayev created the Riyad al-Salikhin “alt. Riyad al-Salihin” martyrs brigade, which trained female fighters,” explained Domitilla Sagramoso, an expert on conflict and violence in Russia and the Caucasus from King’s College London. “They conducted several attacks, including the 2004 Moscow metro attack.”²⁹⁶

17-year-old Hawaa Barayev was the first female jihadist to carry out a suicide attack in Chechnya on June 8th, 2000 against a Russian special forces post. She was followed by many other women, giving rise to the term “black widows” adopted by Russian media outlets to suggest that these women carry out suicide attacks out of personal revenge for their families, as they were widows and female relatives of men killed in the conflict with Russia. Although this interpretation is partially correct, yet the motives behind women’s suicide actions are generally the same as the motives of their male counterparts. The term “black widows” became prevalent after the Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis in Moscow beginning on October 23rd, 2002 when 41 armed men, including 19 Chechen women, stormed the theater building and held 914 people as hostages. The ‘Nord Oost’ operation lasted 57 hours, ending with the release of some of the hostages but the death of over 130, including the assailants.

Witnesses of the attack noted that “the women’s job was to guard the hostages, and on command, to detonate the explosives strapped to their waists. ‘The Chechen women showed us their bomb belts. All they’d have to do was to connect two wires,’ says Irina Kuminova, one of the hostages. Behind the other veils were educated and worldly women - an accountant, a teacher, and an actor. Many had been married to Chechen rebels who had been killed by the Russians. To their hostages, the black widows, as the Russians later dubbed the Chechen women, seemed to be just as much victims as themselves... In the end, the black widows of Chechnya had their revenge. Since the theatre siege, the Chechen black widows have struck again in Mos-

²⁹⁶ Leela Jacinto, “Are Russia’s ‘Black Widows’ rising up again?” *France 24*, March 30, 2010, <http://www.france24.com/en/20100329-are-russias-black-widows-rising-again>

cow. "In July 2003", two of them killed at least 16 people when they detonated the explosives in their belts at a rock concert in the Russian capital."²⁹⁷

As suicide bombings became commonplace as a war strategy copied by nationalist Islamic religious movements from the experience of secular nationalist movements, global jihadist movements jumped on the bandwagon. Yet the prolonged debate over its religious legitimacy within global jihadist circles lasted until the mid-1990s, after fatwas and jurisprudential studies had already legitimized the tactic in other localized groups since the mid-1980s, particularly in cases of occupation such as Palestine and Chechnya. It is noteworthy that the fatwas on the permissibility of suicide attacks, defining them as martyrdom operations, came from contemporary religious scholars affiliated with, or close to, official religious institutions rather than from global jihadist ideologues. Under the clause of permissibility of "blowing oneself up with the intention of harming the enemy," such fatwas were issued by mainstream scholars including Wahbah al-Zuhayli, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Ali al-Sawwa, Muhammad Sa'id al-Buti, Ojail al-Nashmi, al-Azhar's Grand Imam Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi,²⁹⁸ Syria's Grand Mufti Ahmad Kuftaro,²⁹⁹ and Sheikh Nasser al-Din al-Albani. Martyrdom operations were also sanctioned by Saudi Arabian religious scholars, including Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamid, Abdullah al-Bassam, Abdullah bin Muni', Hmoud al-'Aqla, and Muhammad bin 'Uthaymeen.³⁰⁰

Suicide Martyrdom in Jihadist Debates

The position of prominent global jihadist leaders on the permissibility of suicide bombings as a legitimate martyrdom act was clear. Renowned jihadist theorist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri notes that he inquired about the ruling of martyrdom operations from Sheikh Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Aziz (AKA Dr.

²⁹⁷ Rebecca Leung, "Terror in Moscow," *CBS News*, October 24, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/terror-in-moscow/>

²⁹⁸ See: Nawaf Hayel al-Takruri, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya fi al-Mizan al-Fiqhi* "Martyrdom Operations on the Religious Jurisprudential Scale", Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1st edn., 1997, pp. 85-101.

²⁹⁹ See: "Mawqif Kuftaru al-Fiqhi" "Kuftaru's Jurisprudential Position", *Majallat al-Mujtama'*, issue August 25, 2001.

³⁰⁰ See: Sami ibn Khalid al-Hmoud, "Al-A'mal al-Fida'iyya: Suwaruha wa Ahkamuha al-Fiqhiyya" "Sacrifice Acts: Their Types and Jurisprudential Rulings", Master's Thesis in Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, Islamic Culture Department, Faculty of Education, King Sa'ud University, Riyadh, 1428 AH, pp. 181-183.

Fadhl), who said that he initially did not find it permissible because he did not find any clear evidence in the referential religious texts that rules it out of the context of suicide, which is prohibited in Islam. However, adds Dr. Fadhl, “After contemplating it for a long time, I found the evidence of its permissibility in God’s verse “in the Qur’an” ‘And do not kill the soul which Allah has made sacred – except for just cause’ (Qur’an 17:33). The jihad against the enemies and harming them is the most just of all causes. I have found that this evidence is the clearest proof in signifying martyrdom operations in their contemporary method.”³⁰¹

The jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi was adamantly against suicide bombings and issued fatwas prohibiting the act. However, he later issued a fatwa permitting it – albeit with conditions and restrictions to limit its use. He criticized his disciple, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, for using the tactic excessively in Iraq. In an interview with Al-Jazeera network in 2005, al-Maqdisi noted that al-Zarqawi had initially adopted al-Maqdisi’s approach on prohibiting it, but later “exaggerated in its use.”³⁰² Despite al-Zarqawi denying he ever adopted al-Maqdisi’s prohibition, he nonetheless confirmed that he did not find it permissible until he met his Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir after being released from prison in 1999 and went to Afghanistan.

Similarly, Al-Qaeda under Bin Laden’s leadership initially did not permit suicide operations, but began to reconsider its position in the mid-1990s. Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, a prominent global jihadist ideologue and religious scholar who dedicated his time to religious jurisprudential theorizing for Al-Qaeda, is perhaps the first to write in detail on the permissibility of martyrdom acts. In his famous book “Issues in the Jurisprudence of Jihad,” he discusses the doubts, obstacles, and problematic aspects in legitimizing the tactic in Sunni jurisprudential schools of thought. He then interprets the phenomenon from the approach of *nawazil* (newly emerging issues) and legitimizes it religiously by drawing analogy with the tactic of *inghimas* (commandos plunging themselves in the midst of the enemy) with the intention of causing harm and out of desire for martyrdom in the path of God. This tactic, according to al-Muhajir, is different from suicide that results from discontent and despair. Al-Muhajir sanctioned these martyrdom acts even

³⁰¹ Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, *Da`wat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, op. cit., p. 1146.

³⁰² See: Al-Jazeera’s Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, 2005, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EYVO98K4Vo>

if they lead to killing non-combatant Muslim civilians, drawing an analogy with the issue of *tatarrus* (the barricading principle in certain religious interpretations legitimizing and exonerating the death of civilians if they happen to be present at a legitimate target; i.e. legitimizing civilian collateral damage and using them as human shields) and the issue of *tabyeet* (attacking the enemy without prior warning and without differentiating between combatants and civilians), anchored on the jurisprudential rule of ‘reciprocity.’ Most extreme of al-Muhajir’s discourse is that he considers that *kufr* (unbelief) in itself merits killing, whether combatants or civilians.³⁰³

By the time Bin Laden and a group of jihadist leaders announced the establishment of the “Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders” in 1998, the debate over the permissibility of martyrdom operations had been settled, for Al-Qaeda at least. The declaration of the Front was followed by a fatwa that ruled killing Americans and their allies, be they military or civilian, is an individual duty (*farḍ ḥayy*) on every Muslim.³⁰⁴ Al-Qaeda commenced preparation to attack American interests using suicide operations, the first of which was launched in the twin attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7th, 1998 using trucks packed with explosives. The attacks killed 213 people in Nairobi and 11 in Dar es Salaam, most whom were local Kenyans and Tanzanians, in addition to 12 Americans, and left over 5,000 wounded.³⁰⁵ Al-Qaeda’s suicide tactic evolved into the use of civilian aircraft, culminating in the September 11th, 2001 attacks that targeted New York and Washington DC using four hijacked airplanes, killing nearly 3,000 people.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ See: Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, *Masa’il fi Fiqh al-Jihad* “Issues in the Jurisprudence of Jihad”, pp. 79-118, <http://ia601203.us.archive.org/19/items/kotobjehad/masael.pdf>

³⁰⁴ See the text declaring the establishment of The Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders, <http://www.islamww.com/a/index.php/topic/9423-%D9%86%D8%B5-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86->

³⁰⁵ The United States issued a list of 22 wanted individuals in connection with planning and carrying out the bombings, including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. See: “Al-Hukm bi al-Sijḥ Mada al-Hayat `ala Atba` Bin Laden al-Mudaneen bi Tafjir al-Safaratayn al-Amirikiyatayn fi Ifriqiya” “Life in Prison Sentences Handed to Bin Laden Followers Convicted in the Bombings of Two US Embassies in Africa”, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 19, 2001, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=62371&issueno=8361#.WQwn-9ryvb0>

³⁰⁶ For more on the September 11th, 2001 attacks, planning, and execution, see: Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *Contre-Croisade: Origines et Conséquences du 11 Septembre*, op. cit.

The Female Suicide Jihadist

With the turn of the 21st century, global jihadist movement adopted suicide attacks as a primary war strategy, considering its effect in generating fear and terror, low cost of operation, and impact on enemies, according to jihadist discourse. Books, articles, and fatwas espousing its permissibility and preferability as a war tactic proliferated, to the point that almost all jihadist theorists and ideologues address the tactic within their writings on the rules of jihad. Hence, a vast volume of references has been made available to jihadist groups particularly addressing martyrdom operations and *inghimasi* acts (a term that has come to describe a fighter who launches a violent attack that ultimately ends up killing him or her, an act distinct from suicide missions). Yet despite these numerous writings, it is rare to find in them discussion of women's involvement in these operations, although the majority of this literature praises the perpetrators of these acts regardless of gender.⁹⁰⁷

AQAP's leader Yusuf al-Ayeri was among the first to push for women's involvement in jihad, with a particular focus on logistical support, yet he does praise women's martyrdom missions, such as the attack carried out by Hawaa Barayev in Chechnya, as previously mentioned. For his part, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was the jihadist leader who used suicide operations most extensively as a combat tactic, and forged the path for women's participation

⁹⁰⁷ For a sample of books and articles dealing with martyrdom operations on *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*, a prominent online forum for global jihadism, <https://justpaste.it/3cvq> See, for example, Turki bin Mubarak al-Ban'ali, *Al-Aqwal al-Muhdiya ila al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Abu al-Hassan al-Filastini, *Al-Bushra al-Muhdiya li Munafithii Al-Bushra al-Muhdiya li Munafithii al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Ahmad al-Jada', *Fida'iyyoun min 'Asr Al-Rasul Sallah Allah Alaiyhi wa Sallam*; Abd al-Hakim Hassan, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Shifaa' Sudur al-Mu'minin*, Yusuf al-'Ayeri, *Hal Intaharat Hawwa am Ustushhidat?*; Abu Ayman al-Hilali, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya wa Nihayat al-Dajal al-Siyasi*; Al-Amin al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Jihadiyya al-Istishhadiyya: Hukmuha, Shurutuha, Fadhluha, Tharwabuha*; Al-Amin al-Haj Muhammad Ahmad, *Al-Jihadiyya al-Istishhadiyya: Bayn al-Mujizeen wa al-Mani'een*; Abu basir al-Tartusi, *Mahadhir al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya aw al-Intihariyya*; Yahya Hashem Hasan Farghal, *Kashf al-Tarwiya fi al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Abu Ayman al-Hilali, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya: Tariquna ila Tahrir al-Quds*; Group of Scholars, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya: Jihad fi Sabil Allah...Halal Shar'an*; Abu Sa'ad al-Amili, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya: Dharwat Sanam al-Istishhad*; Abu Qatada al-Filastini, *Jarwax al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya wa Annaha Laysat bi Qatl li al-Nafs*; Bishr bin Fahad al-Bishr, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Hamed bin Abdullah al-'Ali, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Sulayman bin Nasser al-'Alwan, *Hukm Qatl Atfal wa Nisaa' al-Kuffar fi al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Sulayman bin Nasser al-'Alwan, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya* (Parts 1 and 2); Ali bin Khudhair al-Khudhair, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Hmoud bin 'Aqlaa' al-Shu'aibi, *Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Harwa Fatwa Mufti al-Sa'udiyya biSha'n al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Abu Humam Bakr bin Abd al-Aziz al-Athari, *Ma Hukm al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya?*; Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi, *Hukm man Saqata min al-'Abriyaa' fi al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya*; Abu Juwayra al-Shami, *Al-'Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya wa Ahkamuha*.

in combat by founding an all-female jihadist brigade, with a focus on using women to carry out suicide attacks. By mid-2005, al-Zarqawi's discourse gradually shifted from mobilizing men by evoking the violations against Sunni women, to addressing women directly and inciting them to actively engage in jihad.³⁰⁸

Al-Zarqawi's message to women was swiftly received by jihadist and aspiring fighters. The numbers of Arab and foreign fighters, both men and women, multiplied, and the model of the *istishhadiyyat* female martyrs became acceptable and legitimate. The phenomenon of female suicide bombers within the context of global jihadism first manifested in simultaneous attacks using women suicide bombers on November 9th, 2005, in two separate places, with perpetrators from different nationalities and origins, one of them succeeded while the other failed. The first woman arrived in Iraq from Europe, she was the Belgian Muriel Degauque, who later adopted the name Maryam after converting to Islam. She was born in 1967 and grew up in a middle-class labor family in southern Belgium. According to Belgian press, she left school early and worked in various jobs including selling bread. She converted from Catholicism to Islam when she was in her thirties, and married a Turkish man but later got divorced.

In 2002, Degauque married Issam Ghoris, a Belgian of a Moroccan mother and a Belgian father, who was seven years her junior. The couple went to live in Morocco for three years, and had cut off ties with friends and family back in Belgium. Upon her return to Belgium, Degauque had reportedly changed, began wearing hijab and covered her hands with gloves, she rarely visited her family, and later turned to wearing the *niqab*, the face veil. In 2005, she left with her husband for Iraq via Italy and Turkey, and joined al-Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). She reportedly volunteered to carry out a suicide attack, which was facilitated by AQI, and detonated an explosive vest nearby a US patrol in Baqubah, northeast of Baghdad, injuring one American soldier, according to a US State Department report provided to the Federal Police in Belgium. Her husband Ghoris was later killed by US forces, and had been wearing a suicide vest at the time, according to the US military.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ See: Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, *Ayanqus al-Deen wa Ana Hay?* "Religion Shall Not Lack While I am Alive", op. cit., p. 299.

³⁰⁹ Sophie Violette, *L'Islamisme Radical et l'Occident*, op. cit., pp. 51-53.

The second woman, Sajidah al-Rishawi, was part of a group of suicide bombers who simultaneously attacked three hotels in Amman, Jordan on the same day, November 9th, 2005, killing 57 people and injuring over 115. Al-Rishawi, an Iraqi national, hails from a jihadi family, with three of her brothers killed by US forces in Iraq. Her brother Thamer al-Rishawi was one of al-Zarqawi's close aides. Sajidah and others (including her husband) had entered the Radisson SAS hotel during a Jordanian wedding party, but unlike her co-attackers, al-Rishawi's suicide belt did not detonate, and she managed to escape. Her husband, Ali Hussein al-Shammari, was killed when he detonated his suicide belt in the midst of the wedding hall. She was arrested on November 13th in the city of al-Salt, northwest of Amman, where she was hiding in the home of the family of a Jordanian jihadist member of AQI who was related to her through marriage.

Following her arrest, the Jordanian state television broadcasted her confession, where she gave details of the planning and execution of the triple attack. She testified that she is an Iraqi national born in 1970, and had been living in al-Ramadi. She traveled on November 5th, 2005 to Jordan with her husband using forged Iraqi passports. On the day of the attack, she and her husband each took to a corner of the wedding hall, and as her husband detonated his belt, hers failed to explode. Amidst the chaos, she managed to run out with the survivors and took a taxi to the safe house in al-Salt. AQI, headed by al-Zarqawi (a Jordanian national), claimed responsibility for the attacks. Al-Rishawi was sentenced to death in 2006, but the sentence was not carried out. Her story resurfaced after IS captured Jordanian air force pilot Mu`ath al-Kasasbeh, and tried to strike a prisoner exchange deal with the Jordanian government to release Sajidah al-Rishawi in exchange for al-Kasasbeh and Japanese freelance photojournalist Kenji Goto, who had also been captured by IS.

As IS did not provide the Jordanian government with any proof that al-Kasasbeh was still alive, Jordan refused to release al-Rishawi. On February 3rd, 2015, IS released a gruesome video showing al-Kasasbeh being burned alive inside a cage, and released footage of the beheading of Goto a few days earlier. In response, the Jordanian government executed al-Rishawi, along with other convicted terrorists, the very next day at dawn on February 4th, 2015.³¹⁰

³¹⁰ See, Muhammad al-Najjar, "Sajidah al-Rishawi," *Al-Jazeera Net*, January 25, 2015, goo.gl/eHKkWA

By mid-2007, the phenomenon of female suicide bombers in AQI became more systemized, turning from individual recruitment to collective organization. The first *ishtishadiyyat* unit was called al-Khansaa Brigade, consisting of 26 female suicide bombers, most of them being relatives of Al-Qaeda members, according to Iraqi security officials. The brigade did not issue any statements.

In mid-2008 another female suicide unit was formed by a woman who went by the nom de guerre Umm Salama. The *Dhat al-Nitaqain* Martyrs' Brigade operated in several Iraqi cities and issued statements threatening of "the revenge by dozens of the women of Fallujah, Baghdad, Diyala, and the widows and bereaved mothers of Mosul." Until today, the fate of Umm Salama remains unknown, but her brigade carried out suicide operations in Diyala and Baghdad, and was the first female martyrs brigade to appear in Iraq publicly declaring their fight against the US occupation and the 'infidels.'

Umm Salama, dubbed the Emira of Dhat al-Nitaqain Brigade, is believed to be the wife of Abu `Ubaida al-Rawi, a leader of AQI in northern Iraq who was killed by a US air strike in autumn 2007. Statements issued by Dhat al-Nitaqain Martyrs Brigade are similar in style and content to those issued by AQI, appearing after every suicide operation carried out by an Iraqi woman. According to some analyses, this women's brigade was directly linked to Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, the Emir of AQI, and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the Emir of the successive organization, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), before they were both killed.³¹¹

In August 2008, special forces arrested Ibtisam `Adwan, who Iraqi security authorities say was responsible for preparing and training female suicide bombers. She is accused of recruiting Rania Ibrahim al-`Anbaki, a 15-year-old girl who was captured on August 25th, 2008 while attempting to blow herself up in Baqubah. Al-`Anbaki came from a poor Iraqi family, her father and one of her brothers were killed in the sectarian violence that swept across Iraq, and her mother and aunt were arrested for allegedly recruiting female suicide bombers. The girl was married to 17-year-old Muhammad Hasan al-Dulaimi, a field fighter for AQI who was captured in early 2009. On August 3rd, 2009, an Iraqi court sentenced Al-`Anbaki to seven and a half

311 Saman Nuh, "Zahirat al-Intihariyat fi al-`Iraq Nitaj Takhalluf wa Faqr Am Muqawamat Ihtilal?" "The Phenomenon of Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq: A Result of Backwardness and Poverty, or Resistance against Occupation?", *Amaan Center*, October 30, 2008, <http://ror21.d1g.com/qna/show/2406378>

years in prison, but an Appeals court later raised the sentence to 15 years.³¹²

With the growing phenomenon of female suicide bombers, an Iraqi women's civil organization was formed in mid-2008 called *Banat al-`Iraq* (The Daughters of Iraq), supported and funded by the US military, aiming to confront the threat and challenge of female suicide bombers in the country. The Daughters of Iraq do not reveal their identities, often veiling their faces and are deployed at security checkpoints to search women instead of male guards who cannot search women's bodies because of tribal and social customs.³¹³

The statistics on female suicide bombers in Iraq vary, with propaganda mixing with the truth between the opposing parties in the conflict where both the Iraqi government and Al-Qaeda tried to exploit, and invest in the phenomenon. The Iraqi government exaggerated the number in order to intimidate, justify arrests, and obtain more support and resources. AQI exploited the phenomenon and exaggerated the number of female suicide attacks in a bid to spread fear, attract more followers and recruits, and mobilize males to join its ranks. According to the Center for the Study of Terrorism, between May 2005 and August 2008 nearly 50 women were involved in suicide bombing attacks. Other estimates find that between May 2005 and December 2007, out of a total of 665 suicide operations, only 14 women carried out such attacks. According to the US military, there were 32 women involved in such operations in 2008, compared to only 8 in 2007. The numbers vary from one source to another.³¹⁴ In an investigative report, Mayyada Dawoud reported that 60 suicide operations were carried out by women in 2008 throughout Iraq, according to security officials' statements to various press agencies. The numbers do not correspond with AQI's statements, which indicated that women carried out 77 attacks, including 49 in Diyala alone; the numbers also do not correspond with a statement by the US Military Spokesperson who stated that 27 suicide attacks were carried out by women in Iraq during

³¹² See: "Al-Saj'n Saba` Sanawat li Awwal 'Intihariyya Iraqiyya' Taftah 'Malaf' al-Nisaa' al-Intihariyyat'" "Seven-Year Prison Sentence given to the First Female Iraqi Suicide Bomber; Opening the Case of 'Women Suicides'", *Xinhua News Arabic*, August 4, 2009, http://arabic.news.cn/speak/2009-08/04/c_1320254.htm

³¹³ See: Muhammad Abdullah, "Banat al-`Iraq fi Muwajahat Nisaa' al-Qa`ida" "The Daughters of Iraq in Confrontation with the Women of Al-Qaeda", *Niqash*, July 24, 2009, <http://www.niqash.org/ar/articles/politics/2494/>

³¹⁴ Carole André-Dessornes, "Être martyr au Moyen-Orient, op. cit., p. 73.

the first eight months of 2008. Moreover, Iraqi Army General Abd al-Kareem al-Rubai'i indicated that the number of such attacks during this period was 21, and attributed the discrepancy in statistics to the "case of hysteria" caused by the escalating phenomenon of female suicide bombers that led Iraqi security officials to believe that any suicide or car bomb attack is "a suicide bombing carried out by a woman wearing an explosive vest."³¹⁵

Against the backdrop of this 'hysterical' situation, dozens of alleged would-be female suicide bombers have been arrested and imprisoned since the summer of 2009 on charges of participating in the recruitment of female suicide bombers or attempting to carry out suicide attacks. Despite the discrepancy in the figures on female suicide bombings between 2005 and 2011, the average number is more likely to be closer to 90 attacks, with the numbers declining steadily from 2011 until the end of 2016.

The case of female suicide bombers of AQI and later ISI in Iraq encouraged women in other regions to engage in the phenomenon of *istishad-iyat*. Pakistan witnessed the case of a woman covered in a face veil, believed to be associated with Taliban, who blew herself up in the middle of a crowded market in the town of Farah, southwestern Afghanistan on May 15th, 2008, killing 15 people including three officers and wounding 22 others. The attack came after a controversy erupted over the Red Mosque in Islamabad, which the government intended to demolish along with other mosques on the pretext that they were built illegally on state-owned land. Last minute mediation efforts failed to contain the crisis, and the Pakistani army stormed the Red Mosque on July 10th, 2007, resulting in the death of 75 people.³¹⁶ Taliban responded by forming an all-female "revenge cell" that commenced with the May 2008 attack.

The Caliphate's Impassioned Martyrs

With the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate State in 2014 and institutionalization of governance in IS-controlled territories, women's roles increased in various fields, including health, education, security, and moral

³¹⁵ Mayyada Dawoud, "Ajyal al-Intihariyat fi al-'Iraq... "Generations of Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq...", *NIRIJ*, op. cit.

³¹⁶ See: Uqbah al-Ahmad, "Al-Masjid al-Ahmar.. Fusul al-Muwajaha al-Damiya" "The Red Mosque.. Episodes of the Bloody Confrontation", *Al-Jazeera Net*, July 10, 2007, goo.gl/QRQyjs

policing (*al-hisba*). Women's involvement in suicide attacks in IS territories expanded to IS satellite branches called *wilayaat* (s. *wilayah*, i.e. provinces), most notably the wilayah of West Africa in Nigeria and wilayah of Tripoli in Libya, both of which pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as Caliph of Muslims and IS as the Islamic Caliphate.

Female jihadist suicide attacks in West Africa increased after the Boko Haram group in Nigeria announced joining IS and forming the West Africa wilayah. Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau officially pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi on March 7th, 2015,³¹⁷ but had declared his support to IS back in 2014, upon which suicide attacks by women affiliated with Boko Haram commenced. In June 2014, the first suicide attack carried out by a female took place in front of a military base in the northeastern state of Gombe, followed by a wave of suicide attacks in July carried out by girls in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria, spreading terror and fear among local populations.³¹⁸ On November 16th, 2014, a female suicide bomber carried out an attack in a market in Azar in the northeastern state of Bauchi, killing at least 10 people. Another attack followed on November 27th, when two female suicide bombers detonated bombs at a market in Maiduguri in northern Nigeria, on behalf of Boko Haram, killing and injuring 78 people.

In Libya, the IS branch there declared its allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on November 14th, 2014, and formed three wilayaat in the eastern coastal region of Barqah, Tripoli in the west, and Fezzan in the south. It took control of the city of Sirte on February 8th, 2015. Women were first used in suicide attacks in the Libyan front with the escalating military campaign against IS control in Sirte (which ended with the organization leaving the city in December 2016).

On February 29th, 2016, the Libyan army announced arresting seven women fighters from the ranks of IS' Libya branch, and killing three others during military operations. With the military advances of the *al-Bunyan al-Marsous* internationally-backed forces against IS in Sirte, women suicide

³¹⁷ See: *Bay`at Jama`at Ahl al-Sunnah li al-Da`wa wa al-Jihad Li Khalifat al-Muslimin Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi Hafizahu Allah* "The Pledge of Allegiance of the Sunnah People for Da`wa and Jihad Group "Boko Haram" to the Caliph of Muslims Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi May God Protect Him", Audio recording of statement by Sheikh Abubakar Shekau, Al-Urwa al-Wuthqa Media Foundation, <https://isdarat.tv/20119>

³¹⁸ See: "Nigeria: al-Intihariyyat Silah Boko Haram al-Jadid" "Nigeria: Female Suicide Bombers are Boko Haram's New Weapon", *Assakina*, December 13, 2014, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news1/59445.html>

bombers were used in an attempt to stop the government forces' advance. The spokesperson of the *Bunyan al-Marsous* forces, which are part of the Libyan National Army affiliated with the Libyan Presidential Council, stressed on August 18th, 2016 that "for the first time, we are dealing with Da'esh "IS" women wearing explosive vests."³¹⁹

The phenomenon of female jihadists, suicide bombers in particular, in the context of IS extended from the 'caliphate lands' in Iraq and Syria to various IS branches, but also to individual cells, networks, and lone wolves inspired by IS. A female suicide bomber called Diana Ramazova blew herself up on January 6th, 2015 at a Turkish Tourism Police Station in Sultanahment, one of Istanbul's most popular tourist districts, killing one policeman. Ramazova, a Russian citizen from Daghestan Republic, was the widow of Abu Aluevitsj Edelbijev, a Norwegian IS jihadist of Chechen origin, who was killed in Syria in December 2014 fighting with IS. The couple had entered Syria through Turkey in July 2014 using fake names, and after Edelbijev was killed, Ramazova illegally reentered Turkey on December 26th, 2014 through the southeastern province of Gaziantep on the border with Syria and carried out the attack nearly 10 days later.³²⁰

Women also began to carry out other forms of suicide attacks, dubbed *inghimasiyya* (carrying out attacks most likely to end up with the attacker's death). The first such reported attack was witnessed in the United States, with the case of Tashfeen Malik and her husband, who went on a shooting spree during an event at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California.³²¹

In France, there were conflicting reports about the first female suicide attacker linked to IS, said to be Hasna Ait Boulahcen, which the media dubbed as "Europe's first female suicide bomber."³²² However, French authorities later dismissed reports that Boulahcen detonated a suicide vest during

³¹⁹ See: Abd al-Basit Ghabaara, "Intihariyyat Da'esh fi Sirte.. al-Ramaq al-Akhir" "The Suicide Women of IS in Sirte: The Last Breath", *Bawabat Ifriqiya*, August 18, 2016, goo.gl/GXcYM4

³²⁰ Toygun Atilla, "Suicide bomber who attacked Istanbul police was married to Norwegian ISIL jihadist," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/suicide-bomber-who-attacked-istanbul-police-was-married-to-norwegian-isil-jihadist.aspx?PageID=238&NID=77070&News-CatID=509>

³²¹ Cameron Tankersley and Michael Martinez, "San Bernardino shooter Tashfeen Malik: What we know," *CNN*, December 7, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/04/us/tashfeen-malik-san-bernardino-shooting-what-we-know/>

³²² Sarah Ann Harris, "Paris Attacks: Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber Named As Hasna Aitboulahcen," *Huffington Post*, November 19, 2015, <https://goo.gl/TzM5eg>

a raid in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis in November 2015, noting that a man nearby detonated his vest while Boulahcen stood nearby. The woman was found dead after the police assault on an apartment building in Paris that targeted the suspected ringleader of the November 13th, 2015 coordinated terrorist attacks in France that killed 130 and injured more than 350.³²³ Both Tafsheen Malik and Hasna Aït Boulahcen's cases will be discussed in further detail in part II.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the transformations witnessed in the role of women in jihadist circles, and the development of a female jihadist ideology that transcends the traditional domestic roles of jihadist women, nonetheless, the general nature of women's roles in jihadist groups remains mostly confined to logistical support, as is the case with various countries that differ in the extent to which they allow their women in uniform to partake in combat. The preferred nature of women's jihad, according to jihadist ideology, remains that of the traditional domestic home caring woman who supports her family and husband and instills in her children the love of jihad and sacrifice, in addition to participating in building the jihadist society by actively engaging in media, education, health, moral policing, and logistical supportive roles.

Involving women in martyrdom operations, in most cases, emerges under pressure and appeals from the women themselves to carry out suicide missions motivated by the same motives that drive men toward such missions. After prolonged debate, jihadist circles not only embraced the phenomenon, but exploited it as well, where the case of the 'brave martyred woman' became an effective form of propaganda and recruitment that shames 'cowardly' men into joining the ranks of male-dominated patriarchal jihadist groups operating within conservative and tribal societies.

Female jihadists seek to consolidate their image as martyrs, to satisfy self-driven causes and achieve a sense of equality with men from within the framework of a divinely-ordained cause. They want to partake in creating the ideal jihadist society; the discourse of female jihadism is akin to that of

³²³ See: Raya Jalabi, "Paris attacks: woman killed in St-Denis raid 'did not blow herself up,'" *The Guardian*, November 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2015/nov/20/paris-attacks>

their male counterparts, inciting fellow Muslims and propagating a utopian vision to escape the injustice and suffering imposed on their current societies. A female cyber jihadist from Saudi Arabia (which prohibits women's driving), writes on her Twitter account under the handle *Ukht al-Jihad* (Sister of Jihad), "Let them clear the way for the free women of the "Arabian Peninsula". By God, we will not sleep one night without a martyrdom operation that tears our bodies into pieces... My believing sisters: learn to drive cars, not to roam around the streets, but so that you would be recorded in the list of female martyrs; nothing remains but a click of a button." Until today, it is known that no Saudi woman has carried out a suicide attack. The issue is a matter of inciteful discourse, provoking males to 'man up' and join the ranks and carry out attacks. But nonetheless, these female propagandists' call for women to take their part in combatant jihad is likely to continue to evolve; the ideological basis is already primed, it is the conditions and factors on the ground that dictate an increase or decrease in such activity.

It is difficult to substantiate the image of jihadist women as victims of the cruelty of jihadist men, or the claim that jihadist groups exploit women and push them into the midst of combative acts. Female jihadists are no different from their male counterparts in their motives and factors that drive them to carry out attacks. Most of the female suicide bombers have been wives, daughters, or sisters of male jihadists, or friends of male or female jihadists, with convictions anchored in a common ideology and a common cause. Likewise, it is difficult to substantiate talk of jihadist men exploiting their wives, children, friends, and families to thrust them into a life of hardship and exposure to death. The media focus on portraying the female protagonists of suicide bombing stories as exploited victims seems to be little more than a military propaganda entrenched in a masculine tendency to disparage females' ability to make choices.

One of the most problematic issues in understanding the motives behind Arab and Muslim Jihadism is that it is often measured by liberal standards according to the duality of civilization vs. barbarism. This results in orientalist and culturalist interpretations that finds the phenomenon of jihadist suicide to be nihilistic, due to the dominance of positivist perspectives that separate the visible world from the invisible, and interpret motives of actions according to worldly stakes. Whereas Islamism in general, and jihadism in particular, do not separate between the two worlds, the material and the sym-

bolic, but rather consider the temporal stakes of this world to be closely entwined and interrelated with the stakes of the afterlife. Hence, when a male or female martyrdom-seeker makes the choice of death, he or she does so in order for their death – according to their belief – to enable others left behind to live, and to live a decent life. Martyrdom in Muslim societies is the highest moral value: the martyr enjoys the highest degree of appreciation and celebration, and reward in the afterlife.

According to Muslims across their differences, doctrines, and sects, martyrdom represents the path to the life of eternal felicity, as the most notable Qur’anic verses on fighting for the sake of Allah through jihad states, “Think not of those who are killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord. They rejoice in the bounty provided by Allah, and they receive good tidings about those “to be martyred” after them who have not yet joined them - that there will be no fear concerning them, nor have they cause to grieve.” (Qur’an 3:169-170).

On the individual level, there is much overlap and commonality in the motives and factors that drive both males and females to carry out martyrdom operations. But on the organizational level, for IS in particular, suicide attacks have become the prime military tactic to win battles and consolidate territorial control in conflict zones. For localized and globalized versions of jihadism, the phenomenon has become an important militant tactic to deter occupation and an easier approach to attack the enemy at home or attack its interests abroad, pushing it to reconsider its policies and schemes by creating a state of fear, intimidation, chaos, destabilization, insecurity, and weakening of its economy.

Suicide operations carried out by both males and females are likely to increase and extend beyond the geographical scope of conflict zones in the event that jihadist movements are constricted, faced with considerable pressure under military campaigns accompanied by destructive forces that violate human rights and dignity of local populations, and leads to jihadist movements losing territorial control, where the space between life and dignity on the one hand, and death on the other hand, becomes almost non-existent. Jihadist movements and elements inspired by them are no longer confining themselves to traditional suicide bombings, which require much planning, equipment, explosives, training, and expertise; newer versions of *inghimasi* style attacks – where the attacker plunges himself or herself in the midst of

the enemy (even civilian targets) that will most likely end with death, including mass shootings, driving vehicles into crowds, or stabbings – are gaining momentum as a more facilitated way to earn ‘martyrdom.’

Part II

Muhajirat: On Becoming Female Migrant Jihadists

Introduction

The phenomenon of female jihadism preceded the rise of the Islamic State organization, and was indeed present in various jihadist movements, including Al-Qaeda, Chechen groups, and jihadist nationalist liberation movements such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine. Yet a dramatic leap in women's proactive participation in jihadist activities has been seen with the rise and expansion of IS in Iraq and Syria, and its ideological proliferation worldwide, both in terms of quantity of female jihadists and quality of the roles they have been assuming within IS.

Part II transitions from the theoretical to the practical sphere of female jihadism by examining specific cases to explore the factors influencing the formation of female jihadists. It seeks to answer two key questions: Why have these women become jihadists? And, how did they reach this stage? An exposition of answers to these questions lies in searching for the 'turning points' in the path of women's transition into jihadism.

In venturing into the world of female jihadism we encountered serious research obstacles, the most significant of which is the problem of limited availability of reliable information, particularly in the Arab world. At the level of the Arab media narrative, censorship and restrictions imposed by security and government apparatuses often hinder the dissemination and availability of information in this context. At the level of jihadist sources and narratives, jihadist groups are keen to hide the real names of females involved in its structures and activities, and instead refer to them – as is the case with their male counterparts – by their noms de guerre and aliases they adopt upon joining the movement.

In addition to the above, two factors contribute to the paucity of information on female jihadists:

First, Arab societies remain conservative. In many families, the participation of female members in jihadist organizations, their *hijra* to jihadist territories, or their arrest and imprisonment is seen as disgraceful, prompt-

ing families to cover up and deny the stories.

The second factor concerns the security aspect, where some information, details and names are often censored, even in Western societies, for fear of generating adverse reactions in these communities against the families of female jihadists. Many families of migrant female jihadists do not acknowledge or report the travel of these females for both personal and security reasons.

Other difficulties encountered during the study include the lack of objective sources of information. Jihadi Salafist sources often present narratives antithetical to that of official narratives. Different parties also handle information selectively, masking facts with political and media agendas between the parties in the conflict, particularly in the Arab world.

The above is coupled with the problem of Arab media's tendency to mesh facts with political agendas, leading to inaccuracy and subjectivity. Quite often, news outlets are driven by the need to excite, as mentioned in Part I, causing them to exaggerate certain stories, particularly 'sexualize' the narrative, such as the often-unsubstantiated stories from anonymous, weak, and impartial sources talking about the relationships of certain female jihadists with IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, labeling them as his 'mistresses' or exaggerating the role of women within the organization. Western media is not immune to this methodological problem, although on the whole they tend to be more accurate, investigative, and objective compared to Arab media outlets. There is a clear gap in objectivity between *relatively* independent European and American media, on the one hand, and Arab media on the other, with the latter often being immersed in propaganda and security directives and 'pre-packaging' of news stories to fit the narratives and agendas of official entities that fund and operate them.

In a quest to overcome these obstacles, we followed a complex methodology based on diversifying news and information sources as much as possible and then compare between them, after which we would extract what is agreed upon in these sources insofar as facts, names, developments, dates, and issues, and try to rid them of the propaganda and subjectivity that mar them.

Our research method often snowballed, where reaching one source leads us to another, and then another. For example, researching the name of one of the case studies of female jihadists in news outlets often leads us to

research into direct sources in the social media accounts of these jihadists, such as on Facebook and Twitter, which help us in identifying the person, analyzing the personality, and tracing the development and transition towards jihadism both chronologically and circumstantially. With more exploration, we discover networks of social relations surrounding the person, her friends and family members and their inclinations and potential influence. The snowballing of information that is obtainable through investigative and ‘social cyber’ techniques help us explore various aspects of each case, but it requires substantial efforts in filtering and screening the facts that can be substantiated in order to be used in building the analysis of each case on a solid data base.

Undoubtedly, this sort of process is difficult and complex, filled with gaps and spaces that need to be filled like a board puzzle in order to reach the full picture. In many cases, we may not reach the full picture, as some aspects remain vague or unknown, but it remains that filling the main parts of the picture helps us in drawing a rough understanding of the remaining parts.

Statistically, it is difficult to reach an accurate number of how many females are ‘jihadists,’ especially considering the difficulty of differentiating between a member, a follower, a sympathizer, or a female who is inspired by jihadist ideology. In this section, we attempt to present several representative cases that serve as models of categories of female jihadists, which may be divided and categorized as follows:

First, the Arab models: We have chosen the case of Sudanese medical students, which received significant media attention and shocked the elite segments of society in Sudan after they chose to leave their studies and affluent families to join IS. Another case model is that of Fatiha el-Mejjati, the Moroccan woman who transitioned from Al-Qaeda to IS. Chapter One of this section delves into the details of these two cases, and touches on other Arab representative cases such as the Jordanian female ‘returnee’, Iman Kanjou from Palestine, and Hussa Abdullah Mohammad al-Mhailani from Kuwait.

Second, the Saudi models: Chapter Two focuses on the cases of Saudi female jihadists, around 22 of them, and attempts to analyze the causes and factors that contribute to the rise of female jihadism in Saudi Arabia.

Third, the female jihadist ideologue model: Chapter Three addresses the case of female jihadist theorization and propagation, with a focus on the case of Iman al-Bugha, who is considered one of the most prominent female jurists and doctrinal ideologues defending IS and framing its ideological thought and jurisprudential religious choices.

Fourth, the European model: Chapter Four addresses European female jihadists, divided into two cases representing British and francophone female jihadists.

Fifth, the American model: Chapter Five addresses a range of key cases of American females who joined or were inspired by IS ideology.

The criterion we used to classify each case as a ‘female jihadist’ is based on the presence of one or more of the following key conditions:

- Joining a jihadist group or migrating to territories controlled by a jihadist group.
- Attempting to join a jihadist group or migrate to its territories.
- Clear and explicit activities via the internet or other means to propagate jihadist ideology and ideas.
- clear adoption of jihadist ideas and ideology. We did not consider that arrest or trial of a female to be a sufficient condition to classify the case as a female jihadist within the scope of this study, so as to avoid the possibility of error in the trial or accusation.

To substantiate the above conditions, we delved into analyzing the texts and language used by the females under study. Where the discourse expresses conviction in Jihadi Salafist ideology, it is an indicator of potential affiliation to jihadism. Examples of such discourse includes explicit call for jihad – in accordance with the Jihadi Salafist doctrinal tendencies – against Shiites, the West, or Israelis, or explicit support and justification of IS ideology or activities, or labeling Arab governments, militaries, and security forces with common jihadist terminology such as *kuffar* (unbelievers) and *tawaghit* (tyrants), labeling jihadist detainees as *asraa* (captives), and other such indications that point to jihadi discourse.

Chapter One

Arab Models of Female Jihadism

It is a complex endeavor to understand the stories and narratives of Arab women who support jihadist groups such as IS, particularly those who migrate to IS territories from various Arab countries. Some cases are clear: the females are confirmed to have supported and migrated to IS lands, such as the case of Moroccan national Fatiha el-Mejjati and the Sudanese medical students. Other cases are shrouded with obscurity, with stories being more akin to fiction, aggrandizement, and media propaganda than they are to facts. Such cases often lack substantiating evidence, documentation, or investigative reporting.

One of the most widely circulated stories in the media during the past few years has been the so-called *jihad al-nikah* (marriage or sexual jihad), such as the case of Tunisian female jihadists. Tunisian and Arab media spoke widely of the ‘phenomenon’ and the term *jihad al-nikah* became commonplace in discussing the topic of female jihadism. Yet we have not found any objective impartial studies into the alleged phenomenon that are founded on at least minimal facts and indicators of real narratives and statistics to substantiate that the phenomenon exists, let alone be widespread.

Hazem al-Amin, a prominent Arab journalist in the field of investigative journalism, was drawn by the controversial statements of former Tunisian Minister of Interior, Lotfi ben Jeddou, made before the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly on September 15th, 2013, claiming that Tunisian women have travelled to Syria to wage *jihad al-nikah* and have come home pregnant after having “sexual relations with 20, 30, 100 militants” there.³²⁴ Al-Amin, like dozens of Arab and foreign journalists who went to Tunisia to investigate this hot topic, found no evidence, facts, or narratives to substantiate the claims. Unable to find a single case of a Tunisian woman returning from Syria’s *jihad al-nikah*, al-Amin met with the Minister of Women’s Affairs who told him that what her colleague (Interior Minister) had stated is

³²⁴ See: “Tunisiyaat Marasn ‘Jihad al-Nikah’ fi Suriya Ya’udna ila Biladihin Hawamil” “Tunisian Women Practicing ‘Sexual Jihad’ in Syria Return to their Country Pregnant”, *France24*, September 20, 2013, go.gl/7sH5kC

“nottrue.”³²⁵

Despite the great media debate on *jihad al-nikah*, access to accurate and reliable information to confirm or deny this phenomenon is quite difficult especially amid conflicting political and media agendas that mix fact with fiction.³²⁶

Another obstacle facing researchers studying female jihadism in Arab societies is that these societies often deal with the phenomenon as a disgrace to the family. Arab authorities often try to placate these feelings by redacting names, covering up the stories and preventing the publication of information about females who join jihadist groups. We observed this in most Arab societies, and when media does happen to leak such stories, the reports mostly discuss general descriptions and figures, rather than precise names and details about these women.

Other difficulties in dealing with research sources on Arab female jihadists include media bias and the tendency to hype. There is an absence of investigative journalism on this topic, with Arab media sources relying heavily on “copying and pasting” stories without attempts to substantiate the claims. Media stories are often hyped with inaccurate terms and descriptions of female jihadists, leading to confusion between fact and fiction. One notable example is the case of Husna al-Mhailani (Umm Abu Turab), a Kuwaiti woman who topped news headlines as the extremist radicalized mother in her seventies who recruited her two sons into IS and pushed one of them to carry out a suicide mission.³²⁷ The case of al-Mhailani garnered wide media attention in July 2016 after Kuwaiti authorities discovered IS-affiliated cells in the country. Within a few weeks, however, a Kuwaiti criminal court released al-Mhailani on bail after she testified in court that she does not sup-

³²⁵ See: Hazem al-Amin, “Jihad al-Nikah Bayna Ziyaratayn: Laysa Khurafa Mashriqiyya” “Sexual Jihad Between Two Visits: It is not an Eastern Myth”, *Al-Hayat*, November 2, 2014.

Also see: Diana Muqallad, “Suqut Kathibat Jihad al-Nikah” “The Collapse of the Sexual Jihad Lie”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 7, 2013.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ See for example, “Imra’a Kuwaitiyya Tushaji` Ibnaha `ala Tafjir Nafsih fi al-`Iraq!” “Kuwaiti Woman Encourages Her Son to Blow Himself Up in Iraq!”, *Qanat al-Alam*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.alalam.ir/news/1837306>

Also see: “Qissat al-Mar’a al-Kuwaitiyya ‘Hussa’ allati Jannadat Awladaha ma` Da`ish” “The Story of the Kuwaiti Woman, Husna, Who Enlisted Her Children with IS”, *Al-Bawaba*, July 5, 2016, goo.gl/j4zj2a.

“Kuwait foils 3 terror attacks, arrests suspects in raids,” *Russia Today*, July 3, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/349400-kuwait-foil-isis-plot/>

port IS, but had traveled to IS territories in Syria in an attempt to bring back her son Ali al-`Osaimi (AKA Abu Turab) after the death of her elder son while fighting alongside IS. Details on al-Mhailani revealed that she was born in 1964, is in her fifties, and was not a radicalized extremist as the media had portrayed her earlier.³²⁸

It is true, however, that this Kuwaiti woman had traveled to al-Raqqa and taught there, yet the hype and allegations disseminated by the media varied widely from the information stated in court, which created a completely different scenario than the reality of the story. For the Kuwaiti authorities, if al-Mhailani was as dangerous as the media had portrayed her, she wouldn't have been released by a court order.

We find many similar cases and examples in the maze of Arab media. What further complicates the study of female jihadists who actually join IS is that IS itself addresses the women who join the organization, particularly after arriving in IS territories, using aliases and noms de guerre rather than real names, for security reasons. This makes it more difficult to trace the stories of these women and substantiate the details of their involvement and activities.

A notable example of this is Umm Muhajir al-Tunisiyya: security leaks to the media reported that she is a Tunisian woman who traveled with her husband from Iraq to Syria, married her daughters to IS fighters, and has a leadership role in al-Khansaa' Brigade. Yet no other information is available on the woman, neither her real name nor details about her life. The few details about her mentioned above are repeated in most media reports on IS female leaders, giving researchers insufficient clues to trace and verify her story.³²⁹

³²⁸ See: "Abu Turab Yarwi Qissat Indimamih li Da`ish: Tajannadt Iliktruniyyan bi Fatawa Thalathat Du`aa Kuwaitiyin" "Abu Turab Tells the Story of Joining IS: I was Recruited Electronically via Three Fatwas of Kuwaiti Preachers", *Al-Siyasa al-Kuwaitiyya*, July 20, 2016.

Also see: "Al-I`tirafat al-Tafsiliyya li al-Khalaya al-Irhabiyya" "The Detailed Confessions of Terror Cells", *Al-Anbaa'*, July 5, 2016.

"Umm 'Abu Turab' Bakiya Amam 'al-Jinayat': A`uthu Billah min Da`ish.. Dhahabtu ila Suriya li U`ida Ibnii Faqat" "Abu Turab's Mother Crying before Criminal Court: I Seek Refuge in God from IS..I went to Syria only to bring back my son", *Kuwait News*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.q8news.com/152916.html>

³²⁹ See: "Bel Asmaa' Sittat Nisaa' Qiyadiyyat fi Da`ish wa Umm Miqdad Amiratuhun" "In Names: Six Leading Women in IS, and Umm Miqdad is their Leader", al-Masalah, March 10, 2016, <http://almasalah.com/ar/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=37522> Also see: "Akhtar 9 Nisaa' fi Da`ish: Man Hunna? Wa Ma Hiya Jinsiyaatuhun?" "The Nine Most Dangerous Women of IS: Who Are They and What are their Nationalities?", Alchourouk, September 3, 2014, goo.gl/1dcBF "Mahaam Akhtar Nisaa' Da`ish..Umm Miqdad wa Umm Muhajir wa al-Qahtani" "The Tasks of IS' Most Dangerous Women: Umm Miqdad,

Despite the aforementioned obstacles, we were able to muster important information on certain cases of Arab female jihadists (in addition to the cases of Saudi female jihadists and Dr. Iman al-Bugha, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of Part II). Most prominent of these cases are the Sudanese students, most of whom were studying medicine at a private university in Sudan, hailing from affluent families and most of them carrying British passports, in addition to Sudanese citizenship. Although most of the students had been living in the West for some time, yet we saw it fit to deal with their case within the cluster of Arab female jihadists, rather than the European migrant jihadists, considering that the direct recruitment and travel to IS territories occurred from an Arab country (Sudan).

Another notable case for which we were able to access substantial information for research is that of Fatiha el-Mejjati, a Moroccan woman who became famous in Jihadi Salafist circles, particularly in Morocco, and is considered one of the most prominent female figures in IS.

There are many other cases of Arab women and girls who have joined IS, but their real names are not publicly known, often because of social and familial sensitivities, or there isn't enough information available about them, leading us to suffice mentioning them briefly in this introduction. Among these cases:

1 – The Returning Jordanian Woman: A female from the southern Jordanian city of Karak, aged about 25 years old, she completed a bachelor's degree in psychology at Mu'tah Civil University in 2011. Her father and brothers work for Jordanian security forces. She met IS operatives abroad on the internet, and after nearly a year and a half in recruitment attempts, she was convinced of traveling to al-Raqqa in Syria via Turkey. IS secured a sum of money and a plane ticket for her through a veiled woman whom she did not know. Upon arriving in Istanbul, she contacted her family to inform them of her *hijra* to IS territories. Her family moved quickly, using the help of a former Jordanian member of Parliament, Mazen al-Dhalain, who contacted the girl through the mobile app WhatsApp while she was staying at a house in Istanbul secured by IS for Arab migrant women en route to Syria. After convincing her to return, she managed to escape from the house with the help of the Parliamentarian and the Jordanian Embassy in Turkey, and

Umm Mujahir, and Al-Qahtani", Sudan Motion, August 18, 2014, <http://sudanmotion.com/home/1325.html>

was returned to her family in Jordan. Due to sensitivities with her family, her name was not disclosed in Jordanian media. In statements made to Jordanian authorities upon her return, she said that reasons for her attempt to join IS include unemployment and boredom, search for a better life, and the organization's promise to secure for her a home and a job in IS lands "governed by Islamic Shariah." She noted that her female online recruiters managed to convince her of the need to join IS after presenting her with refutations of religious fatwas and political propaganda against IS.³³⁰

The characteristics of this case were of concern to the Jordanian authorities, and to the public opinion in general, because it represents the case of the first Jordanian female to officially and publicly join the organization, and because she is the daughter of a well-known clan in the city of Karak. Of further concern is the fact that she hails from a family that includes several members working for Jordanian security forces, and that she had earned a university degree particularly in Psychology, which, according to the prevailing hypothesis, would have made her less susceptible to falling for such radicalized thought. Nonetheless, she did almost reach al-Raqqa.

Furthering Jordanian authorities and public opinion concerns is that she stated that during her stay at the safe house in Istanbul prepared by IS for female migrants en route to Syria, she met three other Jordanian females, but she did not know their real names, only their aliases.³³¹

After the incident with the "Jordanian returnee," other cases were mentioned, albeit with near complete media blackout. One case involved a female Jordanian engineer from the southern port city of Aqabah who was engaged and about to get married. Upon arriving in Turkey, she contacted her family informing them of her intent to travel to IS territories. She also spoke with her fiancé asking him to break off the engagement. No more information is available about the woman, and it is unclear whether authorities were able to bring her back or whether she managed to reach IS territories.³³²

³³⁰ For more details, see: Hassan al-Sarayra, "Tafaseel Ifshal Tajneed Aawwal Urduniyya bi Da'ish" "Details on Foiling the Recruitment of the First Jordanian Woman to IS", *Khaberni*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.khaberni.com/news/158824> Also see: "Al-Urduniyya al-Ta'iba Takshif Asrar Tanzimiha wa Tajnidiha fi Da'ish min al-Karak" "The Repentant Jordanian Woman Uncovers Secrets of Her Organization and Recruitment into IS from Karak", *Garaa News*, November 22, 2015, goo.gl/BqIU6

³³¹ See: Hassan al-Sarayra, "Tafaseel Ifshal Tajneed "Details on Foiling the Recruitment of the First Jordanian Woman to IS", op. cit.

³³² See: "Tafaseel Ikhtifa' Muhandisa Urduniyya Tuhawil al-Indhimam li Da'ish" "Details on the

2- Iman Ahmad Kanjou: A PhD student in Islamic Shari`ah at al-Azhar University in Cairo. She is a Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel from the city of Shefa Amr. She was born in Nazareth, Galilee, and was about 44 years old at the time of reporting her story, and has five children, three of which are university students and graduates. Her husband, Dr. Ali Sa`id, is an Imam and preacher at a local mosque, and holds a PhD degree in Islamic Shari`ah from al-Azhar University.

Kanjou was known in surrounding social circles for her religious advocacy and preaching activities, and for hailing from an academic and scholarly family. After communicating with IS members via Facebook, she decided on August 19th, 2015 to join IS, travel to Syria, and to teach at IS educational and religious advocacy centers. She had convinced her father to accompany her to Turkey to join IS, and upon arriving there, she disappeared. Her husband reported her missing, prompting Israeli authorities to inform Turkish authorities of the possibility of her attempt to join IS. Her father returned to Israel without her allegedly having changed his mind about joining IS and having lost contact with her. Shortly after, she was arrested by Turkish authorities at a border region during her attempt to cross into IS territories in Syria, on August 28th, 2016 carrying nearly \$11,000 in cash.

Kanjou was sent back to Israel, where she was tried and sentenced to 22 months in prison, a NIS 30,000 (\$7,750) fine, in addition to a one-year suspended prison sentence. She is serving her sentence at the Sharon women's prison.³³³

During her trial, Kanjou repeated the slogan ““(IS) Shall Remain and Expand” in the courtroom, underscoring the depth of her loyalty and support for the Islamic state organization. IS Supporters were preoccupied with

Disappearance of a Jordanian Female Engineer Attempting to Join IS”, *Al-Diyar*, January 20, 2016.

Also see: “Muhandisa Urduniyya Taltahiq bi Da`ish Muhawalat li Isti`adatiha” “Jordanian Engineer Joins IS.. And Attempts to Return Her Back”, *Amman1.net*, January 2, 2016, <http://wqw.amman1.net/jonews/jordan-news/107621.html>

³³³ See: “Iman Kanjou fi Mahkama Isra`iliyya Turaddid ‘Baaqiya wa Tatamadad” “Iman Kanjou Repeats in Israeli Court: (IS) Shall Remain and Expand”, *Arabi21*, September 20, 2015, goo.gl/kzyImf

Also see: “Iman Kanjou Walida li Khamsat Atfaal min al-Dakhil al-Filastini Mutahama bi al-Indhimam li al-Dawla al-Islamiyya Turadid bi al-Mahkama al-Isra`iliyya ‘Dawlat al-Islam Baaqiya wa Tatamadad” “Iman Kanjou Mother of Five from Palestinian Arab Israelis Accused of Joining IS, Repeats in Israeli Court ‘The Islamic State Shall Remain and Expand”, *Rai al-Youm*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=319557>

“Al-Hukm `ala Iman Kanjou min Shefa `Amr bi al-Sijn al-Fi`li li Muddat 22 Shahr” “Iman Kanjou from Shfar`am Sentenced to 22 Months in Prison”, *Ishraqa*, July 7, 2016, <http://ishraqa.co.il/26608>

Turkey's action in extraditing her to Israel, and accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of hypocrisy and complying with Israel's dictates, meanwhile celebrating her repeated shouts of IS slogans inside the Israeli courtroom.³³⁴

3- IS women in Sirte, Libya: After IS forces were defeated in Sirte, several female IS members were arrested, and Libyan media outlets broadcasted videos of them. Arab media further reported numerous cases of other women from Tunisia, Libya and Syria, but these media reports lacked sufficient details in explaining the motives behind these women's involvement in IS. Nonetheless, the common denominators in many of these cases discussed in the media, particularly cases of the IS female detainees in the women's prison in Sirte, include their young age, absence of an ideological depth in motives behind joining IS, and the presence of the element of marriage and kinship relationships as one of the dynamics behind joining. Another common element is these women and girls describing their shock upon joining IS, a reality that ran contrary to what they were promised by its supporters. They witnessed how women who considered escaping were punished and tortured, put with their children in underground wells in harsh conditions.³³⁵

It is difficult to ascertain the accuracy and credibility of such published stories, especially with the absence of independent and impartial sources, and the lack of details that allow researchers to trace the given names of female members within the information available on female jihadists and in the interviews conducted with alleged IS women in prisons.

In this chapter, in addition to what we have presented briefly about cases of Arab female jihadists, the focus will be on the case of the Sudanese female medical students and the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati, followed by derived conclusions and analysis to further understand the phenomenon.

³³⁴ See: Wa'el Awwad, "Iman Kanjou bayna al-Khalifa al-Baghdadi wa al-Khalifa Urdugan" "Iman Kanjou between the Caliph al-Baghdadi and the Caliph Erdogan", *Noon Post*, September 28, 2015, goo.gl/Jx0sCg Also see the footage of Iman Kanjou repeating IS' slogan "Shall Remain and Expand" and IS' supporters celebrating her, November 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLPfSpwYCzs>

³³⁵ "Sirte: Qissat Umm Umar al-Tunisiyya Kama Rawat-ha" "Sirte: The Story of the Tunisian Umm Omar as She Narrates It", *Libya al-Mostakbal*, November 30, 2016, goo.gl/rFpObZ Also see: Jamal al-'Aribi, "Fatima Tarwi Ayyam Da'ish al-Akhira fi Sirte" "Fatima Narrates IS' Last Days in Sirte", *Akhbar al-Aan*, December 17, 2016, goo.gl/w3MxD9 Jamal al-'Aribi, "Qissat Nusayba min al-Lujou' ila Da'ish" "The Story of Nusayba From Refuge to IS", *Akhbar al-Aan*, December 11, 2016, goo.gl/QBuFMn

The Affluent Sudanese Medical Students

In 2015, three groups of Sudanese students and graduates of the University of Medical Sciences and Technology (UMST), a private university in Khartoum known by the name of its owner the Sudanese Minister of Health Ma'moun Hamida, left Sudan to territories controlled by IS in Iraq and Syria reportedly to work as medics there.

The first group left for Istanbul on March 11th, 2015, it included nine students (five females and four males) who also hold British citizenship. Most of their parents live in the UK and work in the medical field there.

The second group included 18 students, several of them females, and left in June 2015. One of the female students carries a British passport, and the other is the daughter of the Spokesperson for the Sudanese Foreign Ministry. The third group left in late August of the same year, and included four female students.

There are shared characteristics in common between the students, both males and females, including that they all come from prominent wealthy families, their ages range between 18 and 23 years old, most of them carry British passports, and almost all of them study medicine at the same university. They are high academic achievers, given the nature and qualifications of studying medicine. Their parents are mostly doctors, business men and women, or figures of notable social status.

This puts us before a model that clashes directly with the stereotypical description that links those who join violent extremist groups, particularly jihadist groups, with factors such as poverty, unemployment, and low educational achievement or opportunities.

What happened with these Sudanese medical students? What are the factors behind their decision to migrate to IS territories? Is the university atmosphere a factor in their indoctrination and recruitment? Or is it a problem of identity, as is the case with many European migrants who join IS? Or is it related to the current influence of IS activists and propagandists in Sudan? Was their recruitment direct in person at the university, or did they reach conviction of IS and jihadist ideology via the internet and social media, as their families claim?

Who Are the Girls?

The first group that left in March 2015 included five female students, they are:

1. Nada Sami Khider, a Sudanese-British dual citizen, second year Medical student. Her parents are doctors who live and work in the UK. She went to Sudan from the UK to study Medicine at UMST, and lived there with her brother and sister. Her brother, who graduated from the same university, left for IS territories with her.³³⁶
2. Lena Mamoun Abdelgadir, 19 years old, a Sudanese-British medical student at the same university. Her father is an orthopedic surgeon, and her mother is a pediatrician in the UK.³³⁷
3. Rawan Zine El Abidine, a student of dentistry, also a Sudanese British citizen who lived in the UK and moved to Sudan to study medicine at UMST. She was in her third year of dentistry school.³³⁸
4. Tasneem Suliman Huseyin holds a MSc in Medicine, a Sudanese-British citizen. Her father is a medical doctor and director of a university hospital. Her mother is also a medical doctor working at a police hospital in Khartoum.³³⁹
5. Lujayn Ahmad Abu Sabh graduated from the medical school at UMST. She is also a Sudanese-British citizen. Both her parents are medical doctors in the UK. She left for IS territories along with her brother.³⁴⁰

The second group, which left in June 2015, included several female students, among them:

6. Zubaydah Emad al-Din al-Haj Wadda`a, a medical student at UMST.

³³⁶ See “Those believed to be in Syria or Iraq 83”, *BBC*, <https://goo.gl/eufw2t>

³³⁷ Marga Zambrana, Hazar Aydemir and Emma Graham-Harrison, “Nine British medics enter Isis stronghold to work in hospitals,” *The Guardian*, March 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/21/british-medical-students-syria-isis?CMP=share_btn_fb

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ See details on Lujayn’s parents in Muhammad Khalaf, “Khawfan min Indhimamihim ila Da`ish: Tafaseel Bahth `A`ilat Sudaniyya Biritaniyya `an Abna`iha fi Turkiyya” “Fearing their Joining IS: Details on Sudanese-British Families Searching for their Children in Turkey”, Republic of Sudan Ministry of Defence website, goo.gl/2WXFkR

Some reports indicated that she was returned to Sudan from the Turkish border.³⁴¹

7. Saja Muhammad Othman, a student at UMST, she is a Sudanese and US citizen.³⁴²
8. Safinat Ali al-Sadeq, a medical student at UMST, 18 years old, she is the daughter of the Sudanese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ambassador Ali al-Sadeq. There are no confirmed details as to whether her father was able to bring her back to Sudan before she reached Syria, or whether she entered IS territories.³⁴³

The third group left Khartoum in August 2015, and included four female students:

9. and 10. Twin sisters Manar and Abrar Abd al-Salam al-`Eidarus, 19 years old, both study medicine at UMST. Their father is a businessman who owns a large spare parts company.³⁴⁴
11. Aya al-Laythi al-Haj Yousef, 18 years old, a second-year medical student at UMST. Both her parents are medical doctors working in Sudan.³⁴⁵
12. Thuraya Salah Hamed, a third-year medical student. Her family lives in an Arab Gulf state and her father works in Fujairah, UAE. She lived with her younger sister and maternal aunt in Khartoum.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ See: "Al-Mutahaddith bi Ism al-Kharijiyya al-Sudaniyya Yu'akid Indhimam Ibnatih li Da'ish" "Sudanese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Confirms His Daughter Joined IS", *Erem News*, June 29, 2015, <http://www.ereemnews.com/news/arab-world/305257>

³⁴² *ibid.*

³⁴³ "Ibnat al-Natiq al-Rasmi li Wizarat al-Kharijiyya Tughadir al-Khartoum wa Tandham li Da'ish" "Daughter of Foreign Ministry Official Spokesperson Leaves Khartoum and Joins IS", *Radio Dabanga*, June 30, 2015, goo.gl/h2M5Ka

³⁴⁴ There are sources that stated the twin studied at the University of Medical Sciences and Technology, while other sources reported that one of them graduated and works as a medical doctor at a hospital while the other is still studying. Yet, other sources reported that both of them are still studying, according to an interview with their father. See: "Banat Da'ish al-Sudaniyyat: Qissat al-Taw'am Abrar wa Manar. Hikayaat Ghariba" "The IS Sudanese Girls: The Story of the Twin Abrar and Manar. Strange Stories", *Al-Tayyar*, November 4, 2015, <http://www.alnilyn.com/12729350.htm>

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*

³⁴⁶ Al-Zayn `Uthman, "Min Saalat al-Wusul ila Saalat al-Mughadara li al-Majhoul" "From the Arrivals Terminal to the Terminal of Departure to the Unknown", *Al-Youm al-Tali*, April 11, 2014, <http://www.alyoumaltali.com/shownew/15142>

The Road to the Caliphate Land

Despite the limited information available on the Sudanese students before leaving for IS territories, several indicators reveal a common ‘turning point’ that took place in the lives of many of them upon enrolling in UMST. Their families were witnessing transformations in their thought and behavior, as confirmed by statements made by their parents.

According to Nada Sami Khider’s parents, Nada was not deeply religious before joining the university. She dressed in ‘liberal’ clothes and was open to society. Changes in her behavior began in her first year of college, when upon returning to visit her family in London, her mother noticed the changes in her ideas and choice of clothing. The mother reports throwing Nada’s modest clothes away, and buying her new ones to reflect her previous style, but Nada threw away the new clothes upon returning to Sudan and bought new modest, loose fitting clothes that conform to religious fatwas to which she adheres.³⁴⁷

Aya al-Laythi’s parents also reported noticing changes in Aya’s behavior, particularly during her second year of college, as she began to spend long hours browsing the internet. Their concerns heightened after her friend, Saja Othman, joined IS in June 2015. They began to monitor her closely, and her father spoke to her at length about IS ideology. She reassured them that she does not embrace extremist thought, lessened the time she spent on social networking sites, and spent more time with her family.³⁴⁸

After a short while, Aya gradually returned to social networking sites, spending long hours particularly on Instagram. After a short while, on August 29th, 2015, Aya asked her mother to drive her to a restaurant where she would have lunch with her friends, the twin sisters Manar and Abrar al-`Eidarus. Upon returning to pick her up in the evening, the mother did not find her daughter or her friends, who had also turned off their phones. The three girls had left for the airport, where they met a fourth friend, Thuraya Hamed, who arrived from UAE the same day and joined her friends in the

³⁴⁷ See: “Tullab Juddud min Jami`a Wahida Yatawajahuna ila Da`ish” “New Students from Same University Head to IS”, *al-Rakoba*, June 7, 2015, <http://www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-200828.htm>

³⁴⁸ See: Abd al-Rahman Saleh, “Al-Tafaseel al-Kamila li Indhimam Aaya li Da`ish” “The Full Details of Aaya Joining IS”, *Al-Rakoba*, June 9, 2015, <http://www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-207875.htm>

departure terminal heading to Turkey, and then to the Syrian border.³⁴⁹

Safinat al-Sadeq, the daughter of the Sudanese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, was a shy person, strongly attached to her father and always eager to accompany him to work when she was young. According to Lina Yaqoub, a writer and family friend, changes in Safinat's behavior began when she started at UMST, she became more overtly religious, wearing loose modest clothing and veiling her face, and had made new friends. These changes alarmed her father, who asked her to change her friends and began to watch her more closely and spend time with her. Yet that did not prevent her departure to IS lands, via Turkey, in June 2015.³⁵⁰

There is not much detail about Tasneem Suliman Huseyin, a Master of Sciences of Pharmacy student who left for IS territories in March 2015. But one of her friends told the BBC she had "radically changed" a few years ago and had "shocked a lot of their friends" in the British Sudanese community.³⁵¹ Lena Mamoun Abdelgadir, the 19-year-old daughter of respected Sudanese British doctors, was reportedly a "furiously bright" student who engaged in school activities, was a member of the student council, and played hockey, according to the head of Wisbech Grammar School in Cambridgeshire where Lena was previously enrolled, and where the fees range about £12,000 a year.³⁵²

Lena's Twitter account (later suspended), shows that the changes were becoming apparent in her attitude, language, and thought. She discussed the armed attack on Charlie Hebdo, appearing to support the attack in comparison to the "horrific" cartoons published by the satirical weekly newspaper. Her Twitter account shows her criticizing arrests of alleged extremists in the UK, calling for Shari'ah Law, and retweeting "Fighting is not violence. Violence is tyranny, oppression, suppression & injustice. Only thru FIGHT-

³⁴⁹ See: "Al-Rihla li Ardha Da'ish.. al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya" "The Journey to the Land of IS.. The Beginning and the End", *Al-Nilin*, September 3, 2015, <http://www.alnilin.com/12717103.htm>

³⁵⁰ Lina Ya'qoub, "Heina Tu'minu bi Fikra" "When You Believe in an Idea", *Al-Sudani*, July 11, 2015, via Sudaress, <http://www.sudaress.com/alsudani/29704>

³⁵¹ See "Those Believed to be in Syria or Iraq 83" *BBC*, <https://goo.gl/VLioBd>

³⁵² Claire Ellicott, "British medic helping treat Isis killers praised Charlie Hebdo attacks on Twitter and also called for Sharia law," *The Daily Mail*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3008623/British-medic-helping-treat-Isis-killers-praised-Charlie-Hebdo-attacks-Twitter-called-Sharia-law.html>

Also see the website of the Wisbech Grammar School at <http://www.wisbechgrammar.com/>

ING can we get OUT of VIOLENCE. #peace.”³⁵³

The available information about the rest of the students also indicate that there had been a noticeable change in their personalities, wearing more modest and loose dress, changing friends, adhering to strict fatwas prohibiting singing, dancing, smoking, and watching television. For some families, the changes appeared to be positive, a sign of religiosity and moral commitment, but for others, the changes were alarming of religious extremism. The families reached a real level of fear and concern when the first group left in March 2015, indicating that this shift could lead to indoctrination and ultimately to joining IS, physically, in its territories.³⁵⁴

Thus, we cannot say that the transformations witnessed in the girls are superficial or transient, or related to particular emotional factors, or influenced solely by the desire to treat the injured and wounded Iraqis and Syrians in these conflict zones, as their parents tried to justify in a press release they issued after failing to bring back the students from the Turkish-Syrian borders. There are clear cultural and intellectual changes related to religious conceptualization, reflected in the girls’ behavior, dress, and circle of friends, followed by recruitment efforts that facilitated their travel to IS territories through precise planning. This is confirmed by the father of the twins Abrar and Manar, who found in their room details related to their departure and communications with others discussing their plans. This is also evident in Aya al-Laythi’s attempt to evade her parents’ concerns by convincing them that she has returned to her old lifestyle, and that she does not think of joining IS as her friend had done before her.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ See: Abd al-Rahman Saleh, “Al-Tafaseel al-Kamila li Indhimam Aaya li Da`ish” “The Full Details of Aaya Joining IS”, op. cit.

³⁵⁵ See: “Banat Da`ish al-Sudaniyyat” “The IS Sudanese Girls: The Story of the Twin Abrar and Manar. Strange Stories”, op. cit. Also see Abd al-Rahman Saleh, “Al-Tafaseel al-Kamila li Indhimam Aaya li Da`ish” “The Full Details of Aaya Joining IS”, op. cit.

The Controversy: Responsibility and Reasons

When considering the reasons behind why a group of female – and male – wealthy, highly educated, and Western-raised students would adopt the extremist ideology of IS, and then join the organization in conflict zones, we find in this case two common key elements: The first is the environment at UMST, known as Ma'moun Hamida University, a private university with expensive tuition rates, attended by Sudanese, Arab, and African well-achieving students, that allows no political activities with the exception of a few varied cultural activities. The second common element is that all the students study in the field of medical sciences. There are recent studies and approaches that link the study of fields such as medicine, engineering, and applied sciences, which require high academic achievements, with extremist tendencies. One such study reported in 2009 found that in broadening the course of the study to engineering, medicine, and science, 56.7 percent of the sample of “violent Islamists” had studied these fields.³⁵⁶

It is difficult to find a logical conceptual link between the study of medicine and violent extremist tendencies, whether through hypothesizing weakness of religious scholarly culture (since there are doctors and engineers who are well-informed in this religious knowledge), or through factoring in the sharp and disciplined mentality of those who study these fields, who tend to seek practical and direct solutions. The equation (medicine, engineering, and extremism) is still a weak and limited theory, at best, and we cannot construct facts from it, but we may deduce common characteristics that indicate high levels of intelligence, awareness, and modern education, all of which directly contradict the orientalist conceptualization that links radicalization and terrorism to religious schooling (*madrasas*) in the Arab and Muslim world, and to particular economic and social factors. Counter to this premise, we find that most of the cases of individuals (who studied in these fields) who joined extremist groups such as IS, had received a Western progressive education, and come from economically and socially stable families.

³⁵⁶ See: Elias Groll, “There’s a Good Reason Why So Many Terrorists Are Engineers,” *Foreign Policy*, July 11, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/11/theres-a-good-reason-why-so-many-terrorists-are-engineers/> Also see: Sulaiman al-Dhuhayan, “Ayy al-Takhasusat al-Jami’iyya Akthar Qabiliyya li al-Tattarruf” “What University Fields are Most Susceptible to Radicalism”, *Makkah*, March 9, 2016, Cf. Shaher al-Nahari, “Takhassus al-Attibaa’ wa al-Tashaddud wa al-Irhab” “The Study of Medicine, and Radicalism and Terrorism”, *Makkah*, March 17, 2016.

If we look at the first element, the university environment, university officials and some of the parents of the students point the blame at a former student, Mohammed Fakhri al-Khabass, a British citizen of Palestinian origin. Al-Khabass is from Middlesbrough, and grew up in north-east England before enrolling in UMST in Khartoum, where he became an activist in the Islamic Cultural Society at the university. The parents blame the Society for spreading extremist ideology through hosting figures and preachers from the Sudanese Jihadi Salafist current, and “brainwashing” the male and female students there.

The irony is that, by going back to Mohammed al-Khabass’ profile, we find that he shares common characteristics with UMST students who left to join IS. His father is a medical doctor with NHS in the UK, he comes from an economically well-off family, and reportedly did not have any serious problems before joining the university. His father later declared that his son has brought shame on the family.³⁵⁷ It is believed that al-Khabass is now an IS member living in al-Raqqa, and is blamed for recruiting UMST students into IS.³⁵⁸

It is possible that there is a vital and effective role played by Mohammed al-Khabass in convincing or indoctrinating students in IS ideology, and in urging them to go to IS territories, but such a decision made by female students from this social and cultural background is a decision that results from psychological and intellectual transformations first, and a readiness and acceptance of such transformations, which were evident through the changes in their personalities and behavior reported by their families.

There is a tendency among parents and observers to blame ‘the Internet,’ through sites that propagate IS ideology and publish its images and videos, which would have influenced their daughters and changed their personalities. This influence is undoubtedly noticeable, but a stronger and more important influence that we find in this case is the influence of the actual physical network of social relations, not the virtual; there are strong friendship bonds between these students, and it is evident that this network of

³⁵⁷ See: Muna al-Sanhaji, “Mus`if Biritani Yujannid al-Tullab al-Biritaniyyin li al-Indhimam ila Da`ish fi Suriya” “British Medic Recruits British Students to Join IS in Syria”, *Khabar Press*, June 17, 2015, goo.gl/GYHSGfl

³⁵⁸ Daniel Sandford, Steve Swann and Mohanad Hashim, “UK medical student ‘recruited for IS’ at university in Sudan,” *BBC News*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-33502534>

friendship played a role in convincing – or pressuring – the students to embrace these transformations. The decision was taken in consensus among the students. We note how their families reported concern of the girls' changing circles of friends, forming new friendships, and how the students left for Syria in groups made up of males and females, not individually.

There is also a role for siblings influencing each other, such as the twin sisters Abrar and Manar al-`Eidarus, and the brother and sister Nada and Mohammed Sami Khider, among others. There are also marriage relations, such as the case of Rawan Zine El Abidine, who married a male colleague and they both went to Syria together. Zine El-Abidine reportedly had a child with her husband before she was killed in an airstrike in Iraq in July 2016.³⁵⁹

In searching for reasons and responsibility in the case of these students, another element that may be analyzed is whether the Sudanese or European Western factors related to identity may be behind the transformations witnessed in those who joined IS. Issues of identity commonly emerge in discussing cases of females who join extremist groups, as will be discussed later in the case of European and American female migrant jihadis.

It is probable that there is interplay between the two factors, the European and Sudanese environments. Muslims growing up in Europe are prone to generate the question of identity in their contact with both the Western environment they live in, and the Islamic environment their families and communities espouse, in search for the self and personality amid what may be construed as a dichotomy. This factor has no direct relation to the level of success and excellence in study, work, or manifest assimilation of individuals. There are other conditions that push individuals to search for their identities and define the value system and culture to which they belong. This may explain the return of the girls to Sudan, with the blessings of their families, to draw nearer to the Islamic and local Sudanese culture, after spending many years in the West. These rationales then reacted with other considerations, namely developments related to the overall environment with which these

³⁵⁹ See: "Ta'arrafa' `ala Atibaa' Da'ish al-Sudaniyyin" "Get to Know IS' Sudanese Doctors", *al-Sudan al-Yaum*, August 29, 2016, goo.gl/TfjEzZ

Also see: "Man Hiya Tabeebat Da'ish al-Sudaniyya allati Qutilat fi al-`Iraq" "Who is IS' Sudanese Doctor who was Killed in Iraq?", *Ra'i al-Yaum*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=474607>

students came to identify themselves: the catastrophic conditions in Iraq and Syria, and the great humanitarian crisis facing the people there, amid a lack of Western effective measures to stop it. Meanwhile, frictions associated with religious and sectarian identity are constantly increasing, as was the case in Charlie Hebdo and others, coupled with the presence of an influential Sudanese Jihadi Salafist current that encourages and drives the trend towards radicalization, as several of their religious preachers openly support IS and other violent extremist groups.

Another issue of significance in this analysis is the age group. In addition to the medical students, many other young Sudanese nationals went to Iraq, Syria, and Libya to fight there. The youthful age of these individuals drives their enthusiasm for this ‘adventure,’ amid absence of important and complex calculations that face older generations, such as family, social and financial responsibilities, etc.

IS and similar radical groups capitalize on this element. IS presents a project dedicated to the youth, offering them a goal and a purpose. This project encapsulates a utopian vision that presents itself as the land of the Caliphate: the land of true Muslim dreams and aspirations. It is this vision that stimulates and reinforces the question of identity among young people who witness political and cultural conditions and a historic moment that gears them towards this direction. This concoction of factors, conditions, and motivations, and the interplay between them, helps explain the phenomenon of the affluent Sudanese young women, and men, who left everything behind to join IS.

Fatiha el-Mejjati: An Exceptional Case

The case of Fatiha al-Hassani, known as Umm Adam el-Mejjati, or Fatiha el-Mejjati, is an exceptional story of a woman described as ‘intercontinental,’ a ‘jihadist legend,’ and as the Moroccan equivalent to the wife of Abdullah Azzam.³⁶⁰

Her legendary status is not about her having a prominent role in IS, or about significant acts that she performed, as is the case with other notorious

³⁶⁰ See: Mshari al-Dhayedi, “Wa Tahaddathat Fatiha” “And Fatiha Spoke”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 21, 2015.

Al-Qaeda or IS female leaders, but rather about the extraordinary journey and stages she has undergone: transforming from a liberal ‘Westernized’ young Moroccan woman to a avid hijab struggler and then to Jihadi Salafism, beginning in Afghanistan, passing through her experience living under the Taliban regime, then her imprisonment under harsh conditions, her Moroccan activism, and ultimately, to landing in the lands of the caliphate to join her son there.

How did Fatiha el-Mejjati become a legend in Al-Qaeda then IS circles? What are the psychological, intellectual, and social turning points she experienced? Who are the people who played the leading role in recruiting, or creating this model? And, how does el-Mejjati’s model reflect on the phenomenon of female jihadism?

The First Turning Point: In Search of an Identity

Fatiha Mohammad Tahir al-Hassani is a Moroccan woman born in 1961. She grew up in Casablanca, where she was steeped in Western culture in attitude and behavior. She studied law at the University of Hassan II, in the French language, and had prepared a graduation research that presented a critical view of polygamy, considering it incompatible with women’s rights.³⁶¹

Fatiha had exhibited liberal and Westernized leaning in her thought, behavior, culture, and dress. The initial turning point, or first shock, to change her perspective in life emerged during the 1991 Gulf War, with the defeat of the Iraqi Army, horrific images of the bombing of al-Amiriyah Shelter for civilians, and the feeling of defeat and failure, generating in her the sense of needing to search for her identity, a ‘self’ that is distant from her previous lifepath.³⁶²

She began to pray and wear the hijab while praying, until she met a friend at the mosque who congratulated her for wearing the hijab. Fati-

³⁶¹ See: Tariq Banhida, “Fatiha.. Hikayat Maghribiyya `Aashat fi Mu`askarat wa Baya`at al-Qa`ida” “Fatiha: The Story of a Moroccan Woman Who Lived in Training Camps and Pledged Allegiance to Al-Qaeda”, *Hespress*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.hespress.com/femme/150431.html>

³⁶² See: Tawfiq Bou`ishrin, “Aailat El-Mejjati Qissa Tastahiqqu ann Turwa” “The El-Mejjati Family. A Story Worth Telling”, *Al-Yaoum24*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.alyaoum24.com/172646.html>

ha however noted that she only wears the hijab during prayers, so that she would not be fired from her job at a private institute, run by a Frenchman. Influenced by her friend, Fatiha began to wear it all the time, including at work, which prompted the Institute's management to ask her to resign, and threatened to call the police to escort her out of the building, because the French boss rejected the new attire. This created the roots of subsequent transformations Fatiha would experience, as she began to feel isolated and helpless after leaving her job, and resented the Moroccan state's bias against her in siding with her previous job rather than guaranteeing her rights and freedom to dress as she pleased.³⁶³

One of the students at the Institute where Fatiha worked was Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati, a handsome young man from a well-off liberal Westernized bourgeois family. His father worked in commerce, and his French mother worked in the field of cosmetics. Abd al-Kareem studied at a private school, and enrolled at the Institute while barely speaking any Arabic. He witnessed the quarrel between Fatiha and the Institute's management, and had asked her: "why do you stir up trouble for yourself?" She responded that the hijab is mandated in the Qur'an, and began to recite Qur'anic verses to him, only to notice that his Arabic language is poor. She gave him a copy of the Qur'an translated into French, where he would begin to learn about the religion and manifest the first turning point in his own life.³⁶⁴

During the following months, Fatiha remained home, feeling lonely and wronged. Some of her colleagues and students stood in solidarity with her, but only for a brief period of time, with the exception of Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati, who's sympathy towards her turned to liking. He ultimately asked her to marry him, and she agreed, on the condition that he does not tell his family about their marriage until it was official. She had felt his family would reject the marriage for two reasons: first is the age difference, she was seven years his senior, and second is her religiosity, considering that his family was

³⁶³ See: "Liqa' Sahafi ma' Zawjat al-Shaheed `Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati" "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati", July 27, 2015, <http://documents.tips/documents/-557203e3497959fc0b8b5035.html>

³⁶⁴ Ibid., Also see: Nabil Draiwish, "Zawjat `Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati: Dakhalna al-Sa`udia bi Jawazat Qatariyya Muzawarra.. Wa la `Alaqat Lahu bi Ta`sees al-Jamaa'a al-Maghribiyya al-Muqatila" "Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati's Wife: We Entered Saudi Arabia with Fake Qatari Passports, and He Has No Relation to the Founding of the Moroccan Fighting Group", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 18, 2005, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=306243&issueno=9699#.WSMyWmjys2x>

notreligious.³⁶⁵

After they married, they struggled to secure a source of income, and lived off what Fatiha had saved from her previous work at the Institute. Abd al-Kareem rejected the idea of his wife working outside the home, which exacerbated their financial concerns, especially that Fatiha was by then pregnant with their first child.

The Second Turning Point: Finding Comfort in Islamist Circles

The couple moved to France in 1992, where Abd al-Kareem, who was a French citizen, tried to find work. During this time, an Islamic conference was held in France, where religious preachers and advocates lectured and a famous Islamic Nasheed (vocal religious music) group, al-Yarmouk, performed. The couple attended the conference, enjoyed its atmosphere, and met several other participants who later became close friends and associates (as noted in el-Mejjati couple's own description of their psychological state at the time). This was juxtaposed with the isolation and chilled relations the couple had with their families back in Morocco, and the difficult financial situation they experienced. In finding warmth, comfort, and security in relations with participants at the conference, the couple sought to draw nearer to Islamic circles that were in line with their newfound culture, religiosity, and intellectual leanings.³⁶⁶

Another influence they experienced at the Islamic conference was learning about the war in Bosnia between Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. They were deeply affected by the religious discourse that spoke of the plight of Muslims in Bosnia, particularly the discourse of Saudi religious preachers. They watched video footage and images of the war, which ultimately prompted Abd al-Kareem to express his desire to join the fight alongside Muslims in Bosnia. The decision shocked Fatiha, who felt that their experience and relations with Islamic circles had not yet reached the point of making such critical decisions. But after watching further videos and listening to impassioned lectures by renowned Saudi Salafi preacher, Sa`ad al-Barik,

³⁶⁵ See: "Liqa' Sahafi ma` Zawjat al-Shaheed `Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati" "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati", op. cit.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., Also see: Nabil Draiwish, "Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati's Wife: We Entered Saudi Arabia with Fake Qatari Passports, and He Has No Relation to the Founding of the Moroccan Fighting Group," op. cit.

describing the massacres of Muslims in Bosnia, and urging Muslims to support the fight there, Fatiha changed her mind and urged her husband to go and help the Muslims in Bosnia. Meanwhile, Fatiha was awaiting the birth of their first child.³⁶⁷

Her husband went to Bosnia and lived with the Arab fighters there. Because of his lack of military experience, his role was dedicated to founding a Qur'anic school. This was Abd al-Kareem's first encounter with Arab jihadists, where he found himself in harmony with the new life. He returned to France to bring his wife back with him to Bosnia, but because of logistical problems in reaching Bosnia at the height of the war, he returned alone and was detained by Croatian authorities for nearly a month. During the time, he hid his identity as a Muslim, praying solely through his eyes, out of fear that the Croats would know he's a Muslim. He was later released after the French Embassy interfered, since he was a French citizen, but he was barred from entering Croatian territories for five years.³⁶⁸

During this period, Fatiha had given birth to their first child, Elias, and was moving from one job to another to secure a livelihood. Meanwhile, her husband's involvement in jihadist circles was deepening, and he left for Afghanistan in 1994 to receive training in armed combat. He soon returned, however, after experiencing symptoms of malaria, and was treated in Morocco. Shortly after, his wife was diagnosed with cancer, and after recovering, she suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis, and later osteoporosis; that is, she suffered multiple consecutive illnesses, which affected her health and psychological condition. In addition, she gave birth to their second son, Adam, and continued to struggle financially while living in Morocco. All the while, her husband was moving between jihadist circles in Bosnia and Afghanistan. In 1997, Abd al-Kareem left for the United States, where he planned to establish investment opportunities with his father in New Jersey, but he soon changed his mind and returned to Afghanistan after the Taliban regime took control there.³⁶⁹

In 2001, he returned to Morocco to bring his family back with him to settle in Afghanistan. It was clear that he had established a network of

³⁶⁷ See: "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati," *op. cit.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Also see: Mshari al-Dhayedi, "Wa Tahaddathat Fatiha" "And Fatiha Spoke", *op. cit.*

relations with jihadist circles, particularly with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, although his wife Fatiha denies that he had joined Al-Qaeda before the war in Afghanistan was launched towards the end of 2001.³⁷⁰

From the above, it appears that Abd al-Kareem had experienced profound changes in his personality and ideology, moving back and forth from Bosnia to Afghanistan, receiving combat training, and becoming deeply involved in jihadi communities. The story relays that Fatiha, meanwhile, remained mostly in Morocco, raising her children and working to secure a living. But it becomes also evident that she was heavily influenced by her husband and his experiences, she supported his ideas and shared his new-found ideology. She agreed to move with him to Afghanistan and live under Taliban's strict Islamic regime. The transformation in her thought is also evident in the disputes she later had with one of the most prominent sheikhs of Moroccan Jihadi Salafism, Abu Hafs, and her criticism and rejection of the Moroccan Jihadi Salafist current's revisions and reversal of opinions towards jihad. These disputes indicate that both Fatiha and her husband were in direct contact, if not involvement, with the Jihadi Salafist current in Morocco, and that her husband's experience abroad affected their relations with this current.

The Third Turning Point: From 'Dreamland' to 'Hell'

During the second half of 2001, Fatiha and her two children, Elias and Adam, went to Spain in preparation to travel to Iran, where they would cross into Afghanistan.

Her account of the waiting period for the Iranian embassy in Spain to issue their visas reveal the first indicators of her husband's strong connections with Al-Qaeda supporters. She recalls concerns about the arrests and pursuit of jihadists, and how she was afraid of being exposed. Upon receiving the visa and traveling to Iran, she and her sons crossed into Herat across the land border. They stopped in the Afghan city of Kandahar, where her husband met and greeted Osama bin Laden.³⁷¹

Fatiha speaks with great enthusiasm and a remarkable passion about

³⁷⁰ See: "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati," op. cit.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

her arrival in Taliban territory, about a month before the September 11th, 2001 attacks. She expresses feeling relieved at seeing women veiled and their faces covered. They were warmly greeted by Al-Qaeda and Taliban supporters in Kandahar, and spent a month in Kabul in a luxury villa, where her children were enrolled in an Islamic school there. Then the September 11th attacks happened, days that she describes as “the most beautiful days of my life.” Her family was moved to Kandahar, where they lived in primitive mud houses with no electricity or bathrooms, under US bombardment. They continued to move from one place to another, from mud houses to a villa where the Pakistani ambassador used to live. Fatiha and her sons joined dozens of other Arab families in experiencing harsh living conditions, while her husband was in the battlefield in Kandahar fighting alongside Al-Qaeda, which he joined – according to her account – after the launch of the war in Afghanistan.³⁷²

Shortly after the war began, Al-Qaeda’s leadership decided to move the families of Arab fighters to Pakistan, a decision that left her shocked and dismayed. She felt a sense of belonging to the experience of living under the Taliban regime, and felt that this lifestyle is the one she wants for herself and for her family, a lifestyle that represents her identity and life goals.

Under harsh conditions across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, Fatiha and her two sons accompanied dozens of families of Arab Al-Qaeda fighters in the move to Pakistan. The journey was fraught with the fear of traveling under bombardment, and the concern of being exposed and detained in Pakistan. They were hosted in remote villages on the border before moving to Quetta and later to Karachi, where her husband later joined them after the war ended and Al-Qaeda’s leadership and fighters were dispersed, and the Taliban regime officially ended in Afghanistan. Fatiha recalls that the decision to move the families of Arab fighters was issued by Mullah Muhammad Omar, and that Taliban fighters had resorted to the mountains after it became clear that the only alternative is complete destruction of entire villages and cities.

Al-Qaeda’s leadership struck a deal with Iranian authorities to receive families of fighters who were fleeing US bombardment, and although the

³⁷² Ibid., also see: Nabil Draiwish, “Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati’s Wife: We Entered Saudi Arabia with Fake Qatari Passports, and He Has No Relation to the Founding of the Moroccan Fighting Group,” *op. cit.*

families were practically in a state of detention, they nonetheless were living in comfortable homes and safe conditions. The el-Mejjatis eyed moving to Iran, but were unable, and eventually remained living in hiding in Bangladesh for nine months, until they managed to travel to Saudi Arabia using forged Qatari passports under the pretext of performing the Hajj pilgrimage. A closer look at her account indicates that her husband had become deeply involved in Al-Qaeda and its activities. The family was warmly received by Al-Qaeda members and supporters at the airport in Saudi Arabia, and was secured an apartment, where they lived briefly along with Khaled al-Jahni, one of the most wanted individuals in Saudi Arabia for connections with Al-Qaeda.³⁷³

After spending nearly three months with her husband and sons in an apartment in Riyadh, she was arrested by Saudi authorities, along with her 10-year-old son Elias, in June 2003, while waiting at a clinic. Al-Jahni was supposed to pick them up from there, but he did not show up, and it became clear that it was a set up. During her detention in Dhahban Prison in Jeddah, Fatiha was interrogated repeatedly and suffered psychological stress during her detention, especially in the Saudi authorities' attempt to get her to provide information about Al-Qaeda, her husband Abd al-Kareem, and Khaled al-Jahni.³⁷⁴

From her questioning, Saudi authorities learned that Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati was present in Saudi Arabia. He was portrayed as dangerous and having a leading role in Al-Qaeda, and he was put on the most wanted list for terror connections in Saudi Arabia, in Spain (in connection to the 2004 Madrid bombings), and in Morocco (in connection to the 2003 Casablanca bombings). He was also wanted by US authorities for connections with Al-Qaeda, and was considered among the most dangerous terrorists, dubbed "the Moroccan Osama bin Laden." Naturally, Fatiha el-Mejjati became a high-valued detainee for being the wife of one of the most dangerous jihadists.³⁷⁵

After a period of detention and interrogation, and relatively comfortable prison conditions (compared to what she would experience later), Saudi

³⁷³ See: Mshari al-Dhayedi, "And Fatiha Spoke," *op. cit.*, Also see: "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati," *op. cit.*

³⁷⁴ See: "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati," *op. cit.*

³⁷⁵ See: Nabil Draiwish, "Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati's Wife: We Entered Saudi Arabia with Fake Qatari Passports, and He Has No Relation to the Founding of the Moroccan Fighting Group," *op. cit.*

authorities decided to extradite her to Morocco. She was transported through a private plane to a private prison in Morocco, where she was detained until March 17th, 2004. Her experience in the Moroccan prison was, in her words, the most tragic. She describes experiencing pain and psychological pressure in bitter months she spent in solitary confinement with her son.³⁷⁶

The prison treatment in Morocco was severe. The conditions of the cell were unhealthy, causing her many ailments, including skin blisters, suffocation from the extreme heat of summer and then extreme cold conditions in the winter. She also faced harsh treatment from prison personnel and interrogators.

The cruel drama in Fatiha's experience manifested in severe deterioration of her son Elias' health during detention. He suffered from a hormonal imbalance, caused by psychological pressure and denial of the most basic human rights, which led to mental disability and health problems. In solitary confinement with his mother, he began to experience nervous breakdowns and panic attacks, and he attempted to commit suicide. The son's plight spilled over to his mother, who also began to experience nervous breakdowns and poor psychological conditions. She repeatedly pleaded to prison authorities to release the son and send him to his father's family, but her requests were repeatedly denied.

It is difficult for the researcher or the reader not to feel sympathy for this bitter human experience in prison. Whatever the exaggeration that may be painted by Fatiha of that experience, it is at the minimum capable of generating great psychological consequences for her and her son, and consequently, generating a sense of hostility and resentment at the Moroccan state and security authorities, and solidifying her sense of belonging to jihadist circles and her identification with the Islamist and jihadist circles that shared her plight. Her detention continued for nearly nine months. She summarizes her bitter experience with her son in prison by saying: "I came out of prison with a 10-year-old child who was mentally disabled and hormonally imbalanced after he was a bright child who memorized 45 parts of the Holy Qur'an...and was leading people in Ramadan nightly prayers when he was only 9-years-old."³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ See: "Press Interview with the Wife of the Martyr Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati," *op. cit.*

³⁷⁷ See: Tariq Bahida, "Fatiha: The Story of a Moroccan Woman Who Lived in Training Camps and Pledged Allegiance to Al-Qaeda," *op. cit.*

The Fourth Turning Point: Rising to the Jihadi Stage

Fatiha el-Mejjati was released from prison, along with her son, in March 2004, in a poor physical and psychological state. She tried to treat her son from the mental illnesses, but was turned away by doctors who feared associating with her and her son. Meanwhile, after her release from prison, the continued security surveillance of her movements led to her isolation from her family and her husband's family. She later settled with her son in an apartment, and began to work in simple trading to earn a living.

Upon her arrest in 2003 in Saudi Arabia, her husband had disappeared along with their younger son Adam, considering that Abd al-Kareem was wanted by Saudi authorities. About a year after her release, her husband and their son Adam were killed on April 5th, 2005 during confrontations between Saudi authorities and an Al-Qaeda-affiliated cell in the city of al-Rass in al-Qassim province in Saudi Arabia.³⁷⁸

After her husband's death, Fatiha appeared on the jihadi stage, and became known to Moroccan and Arab media for her active demand of the bodies of her husband and son (which did not happen until 2007). Later in 2011, Fatiha became active in Jihadi Salafist circles in Morocco, and participated in peaceful demonstrations calling for humane treatment of jihadist prisoners. During this time, she married Maulai Omar `Amrani, a detained member of a jihadist movement, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison.³⁷⁹ Fatiha became a leading member in the Committee for the Defense of Jihadist Detainees, and became active in the media. She launched a blog in which she expressed her opinions of developments in the region and in defense of jihadist prisoners.³⁸⁰

Fatiha later engaged in a fierce dispute with a number of Jihadi Salafist leaders, led by Abu Hafs (Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab Rafiqi), who headed

³⁷⁸ See: "Intahat Muwajahaat al-Rass bi Maqal 14 min Qadat al-Qa`ida al-Khatireen wa I'tiqal 5" "The Al-Rass Confrontations Ended with the Death of 14 Dangerous Al-Qaeda Leaders and Arrest of 5 Others", *Al-Arabiya Net*, April 5, 2005, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/04/05/11892.html>

³⁷⁹ See: "Akhbar `an Ta`arrudh al-Mu`taqal Maulai `Umar al-`Amrani Hadi li al-Ta`dhib `ala Yadd Hurras Sijn Tulal 2" "News about Detainee Maulai Omar al-Amrani Hadi being Tortured by the Tulal 2 Prison Guards", *Fes News*, March 28, 2013, <http://fesnews.net/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B3/2-17/72654>

³⁸⁰ See: The Blog of Umm Adam (the Martyr) el-Mejjati, http://oumadamelmejjati.blogspot.com/2013/02/blog-post_18.html#more

the process of religious and intellectual revisions in opinions on jihad and fighting. The dispute stirred controversy among members of the Committee for the Defense of Jihadist Detainees. El-Mejjati stood against the revisions, which was in contrast to other members of the committee, prompting her to resign. The dispute was attempted to be mediated by Hani al-Suba`i, an Egyptian leader of a Jihadi Salafist circle allegedly supporting Al-Qaeda in Britain.³⁸¹

In early 2014, her son Elias, then about 21 years old, went to Syria to fight alongside the Islamic State organization. El-Mejjati reportedly bid him farewell by saying “I hope he will not come back, and I will not see him except in Paradise.”³⁸² The mother soon followed her son, arriving in IS territories in July 2014. She published a photograph of herself upon arriving there, and her arrival was celebrated by various IS-affiliated websites, considering her history and reputation with jihadism and the media presence and attention “Umm Adam el-Mejjati” enjoyed in jihadist circles in general, and IS circles in particular.³⁸³

Upon arriving in IS territories, Fatiha tweeted “Praise be to God Who blessed me with migrating in his path. My greetings and prayers from in front of the Islamic Court in Tripoli, in the blessed land of the Levant “Syria.”³⁸⁴

Since her arrival, Fatiha became active on Twitter, expressing her opinions in support of IS and attacking former US President Barack Obama. There were numerous media reports about her marriage to Abu Ali al-Anbari (before his death), the second-in-command of IS. Her statements and role with IS became controversial, garnering much attention in Moroccan and Arab media on the one hand, and the attention of Jihadi Salafist circles on the other hand. Nonetheless, there is no concrete evidence that she played

³⁸¹ Ibid., see articles and reports on her blog about the ruling of Al-Suba`i and the conflict between her and leaders of the jihadi Salafist current at <http://oumadamelmejhati.blogspot.com/2013/08/blog-post.html>

³⁸² See: Tawfiq Bou`ishrin, “The El-Mejjati Family..A Story Worth Telling,” op. cit.

³⁸³ Sukayna Asnib, “Armalat Qateel al-Sa`udiya Tanshur Sura Laha fi Manatiq Da`ish” “The Widow of the Man Killed in Saudi Arabia Publishes a Picture of Herself in IS Territory”, *Al-Arabiya Net*, July 15, 014, <http://ara.tv/j38fg>

³⁸⁴ See: “Al-Muqatilat al-Maghribiyyat fi Sufoof Da`ish Mu`zamuhunna Jami`iyat” “Most Moroccan Female Fighters in IS Ranks are College Graduates”, *Assakina*, June 7, 2015, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/71530.html>

any clear role in IS, and there are no substantiated reports or details about her life there.³⁸⁵

In sum, it is evident that the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati represents a “gradualist” model of transformation into jihadism through time and thought. In the early 1990s, she transitioned from a liberal, non-religious woman to a veiled religious one. The ‘hijab battle’ was the first turning point that pushed her further into identifying with a religious identity, at a time that coincided with the 1991 Gulf war and the sentiments towards it; indicating underlying political and ideological factors. Then came her marriage to Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati; she influenced him first, and then he influenced her later, further ingraining the transformation in the lives of the couple. The difficult financial conditions facing the family at the time, coupled with meeting and associating with Islamic and jihadist circles amid the narrative of the plight of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, worked to deepen her husband’s association with Jihadi Salafist circles. Fatiha’s path towards jihadism proceeded in parallel with that of her husband, albeit at a slower pace and in the shadows.

Other factors played into their transformation: the illnesses suffered by Fatiha, Abd al-Kareem, and later their son Elias, the estrangement from their families, and their struggle to provide for their livelihood, all led the couple to search for warm relations and safe surroundings where they felt they belonged, a milieu that was in line with their religious identity. The journey to the ‘Islamic’ land of Taliban’s Afghanistan was a new phase in life, and for her husband, was a solidification and sanctification of his jihadist belonging and a formation of his new personality after the journey towards religion.

³⁸⁵ See: “Al-Maghribiyya Umm Adam el-Mejjati Tasil Manatiq Da’ish wa Tuhajim Nahsh `Irdirha biShaa’f at Tazwijjha li Musa`id al-Khalifa” “The Moroccan Woman Umm Adam el-Mejjati Arrives in IS Territory and Attacks Rumors Dishonoring Her, Claiming Her Marriage to the Caliph’s Aide”, *CNN Arabic*, July 30, 2014,

<https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/07/30/morocco-islamic-state-new>

Also see: Tariq Banhida, “Dawlat al-Baghdadi Tahtafi bi Fatiha el-Mejjati ba`da Hijjariha ila al-`Iraq” “Al-Baghdadi’s State Celebrates Fatiha el-Mejjati’s Migration to Iraq”, *Hespress*, July 14, 2014,

<http://www.hespress.com/orbites/235746.html>

Tariq Banhida, “Hakatha Tawarat el-Mejjati Khalfa al-Baghdadi ba`da Dhajji Mustamir fi al-Maghrib” “This is How el-Mejjati Hid Behind al-Baghdadi After Continued Uproar in Morocco”, *Hespress*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.hespress.com/marocains-du-monde/269823.html>

At a later stage, the bitter experience of imprisonment and detention was exceptional and harsh, and contributed to crystalizing her final and complete orientation towards jihadist, first to Al-Qaeda, and then to the Islamic State, and her outright hostility towards the Moroccan state and the US. These sentiments were deepened further with the death of her husband and beloved son Adam in 2005, and the psychological and physical illnesses experienced by her eldest son Elias in prison, along with the isolation she felt from her family and social surrounding in Morocco.

She had no recourse but Jihadi Salafism. Her activism in demanding the bodies of her husband and son, and her transformation into a leadership role in such activism in defense of jihadist detainees, along with her engagement with the media and blogging, made her the ‘spiritual mother’ of Moroccan jihadists. She became renowned in the media, and among Al-Qaeda and jihadist circles worldwide as the wife of Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati, her defense of jihadists, her strong stance against revisions within Moroccan Jihadi Salafist circles, and ultimately for her support of IS’ leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. She solidified her jihadist identity by naming herself “Umm Adam,” the mother of the Martyr Adam who was killed with his father in Saudi Arabia, despite Adam being her youngest son, while traditionally mothers would name themselves as the mothers of their eldest son, in this case, Elias. Nonetheless, her story is exceptional, as she describes it: “My life is not normal, I spent a significant period of my life with my son “Elias” in secret detention centers, which is abnormal.”³⁸⁶

Remarks

In examining the previous models, such as the affluent Sudanese medical students, Fatiha el-Mejjati, or even the cases discussed briefly in the introduction of this chapter, we come out with a set of conclusions and observations, including:

First, there is a scarcity and limitation of information and reports that are unbiased and independent of the phenomenon of female jihadism. Most of what is published in Arab media on female jihadists is influenced by state security narratives, and are often hyped, or even swooped by unbridled imag-

³⁸⁶ See Jalal Rafiq’s report on Fatiha el-Mejjati on Madar24, at <http://www.madar24.net/news1554.html>

ination and exaggeration of the phenomenon, as is clearly evident in the case of the unsubstantiated rumors surrounding *jihad al-nikah*, or the case of the Kuwaiti woman, Husa al-Mhailani.

Second, there are reciprocal factors represented by direct social and kinship relations, and the virtual world, as factors of influence and recruitment of jihadist women and girls. Yet in most cases, we find that the social surrounding plays the greater role in influence and recruitment, such as the case of the Sudanese students, where friendship and the college campus environment were the most direct factors. In the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati, her husband was the direct influence. For Husa al-Mhailani, it was her son who was killed fighting alongside IS. In other cases, such as the Jordanian Returnee and the Palestinian Iman Kanjou, it appears from available information that recruitment happened primarily through IS supporters on the internet.

Third, in reviewing most of the previous cases, there are clear signs of psychological vulnerability to jihadist ideology and thought, which takes course through sudden religiosity, change of ideas and behavior, followed by a tendency towards religious extremism and a search for a social environment that is compatible with this new inclination. Here comes the offer of migrating to the “Islamic lands,” as the only geographical area that applies Islamic Shari’ah law, whether it is Taliban’s regime, Al-Qaeda, or the Islamic State.

Fourth, it is difficult to reduce what happened in these previous cases to a process of ‘brainwashing.’ We are talking about models of a high degree of education, intelligence, and achievement. The Sudanese students enjoyed experience and knowledge of Western life, education, and a level of intelligence and studiousness to study medicine. The same goes for Iman Kanjou (a PhD student), and Fatiha el-Mejjati (Law degree in the French language), and the Jordanian Returnee (Psychology degree), and the other Jordanian female engineer. Brainwashing, in these cases, requires readiness, acceptance, or solid conditions in each given case to be influenced by the narratives, concepts, and ideology coming their way by the supposed brainwashing agents.

There is no doubt that the question of identity is one of the most important approaches to understanding the phenomenon, which is quite clear in the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati. Her transformation from liberal Westernized

attitude to staunch position towards wearing the hijab at work became her battle of identity against the institute where she worked, which represented not only her place of work, but the surroundings that she came to reject in both state and society.

As for the Sudanese students, despite the absence of any signs of social and psychological problems in their lives prior to joining IS (within the limits of what is often published about them, particularly the British citizens among them), yet this does not negate the emergence of the question of identity in their case, particularly with the tendency towards religiosity and keen interest in what is taking place in different places around the Muslim world, and finally, in their search for an objective or project that transcends the academic or professional element but is in line with the lofty message of medicine, all the while engaging with the question of religion and identity of Muslims in the West, the critical stance towards Western modernity in terms of values and religion. All this perhaps bridges the gap between the students and religion first, and then draws them closer to identifying with jihadi ideology.

Fifth, economic and social conditions do appear to play a role, despite not being an initial factor in many cases. In the case of the Jordanian Returnee, she admitted that what encouraged her to go to al-Raqqa in the first place, despite the dangerous nature of the trip, was the promise of a job opportunity and a new life away from the boredom and vacuum she felt from the lack of a job prospective at home. In the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati, the financial conditions she faced with her husband early in their marriage, along with the lack of support from their families, and the sense of alienation they felt both living in Morocco and then in France, and the husband's refusal of his wife to work, all these economic and social conditions led them to search for an alternative community that would embrace and support them, rather than isolate or punish them for their newfound religiosity.

Sixth, it is clear that some families had noticed the seriousness of the changes experienced by the girls and women in these cases, and tried to stop the chain of influence by jihadi ideology, and attempted to prevent the girls' migration to jihadist lands. Yet in the cases discussed here, the attempts failed, and efforts to monitor and de-radicalize them and distance them from their friends all failed. In the case of the Sudanese students and the Jordanian girls, for example, it is notable how the girls tried to circumvent their

families, and pretend that they are submitting to the desires of the families to reject such thought, changing their behaviors momentarily to reassure their families, all the while preparing and arranging their journey to IS lands.

Seventh, the evolution of the jihadi groups' communication and recruitment tools. In most of these cases, there are notable efforts by jihadist supporters, particularly IS, to convince the girls and women not only to embrace the ideology, but to physically migrate to territories controlled by these groups. The affiliates facilitate the travel, arrange the route and exit plan at every stage. In the case of the Sudanese students, there was an organized process of escape and circumvention of the families. In the case of the Jordanian Returnee, those who recruited her online were patient with her for over a year and a half until she became convinced, and finally took the step to travel. They arranged her travel, bought her tickets, and facilitated her stay in Turkey. Without such systemized processes of communication, recruitment, and facilitation of movement, the path to jihadi lands would not be as easy for these women.

Eighth, all the cases discussed in this chapter are related to the Islamic State organization, except for Fatiha el-Mejjati, who began with Al-Qaeda and later transitioned to IS. The cases of the Sudanese students, the Jordanian girls, and the Libyan women of Sirte all belong to the new generation of female jihadists who migrated to IS, and not Al-Qaeda. This is due, naturally, to two main factors:

The first factor, as mentioned earlier in part I, is the major shift in perspective towards women and their role in jihadist circles, from Al-Qaeda to IS. Al-Qaeda had been reserved about the issue of women's migration, and dealt with women's roles in secondary terms and traditional outlooks. There were numerous fatwas and opinions against women's migration (particularly without a male *mahram*), and against engaging women in combat operations and suicide missions. But with the advent of IS, the situation became quite different, as IS created a surge in female recruitment, roles, activities, and status within the organization.

For Fatiha el-Mejjati, for example, her 'jihadi' role during her marriage to Abd al-Kareem el-Mejjati and his involvement with Al-Qaeda was secondary and in the shadows. But things began to shift after her detention and subsequent release from prison, and particularly following the death of

her husband and son, where she transitioned into playing a direct and leading role on the Moroccan jihadist stage, and became one of the renowned female jihadist figures in Moroccan and Arab media, followed by her migration to IS territories, where she was celebrated as a 'spiritual mother' of jihadists.

The second factor is that IS presents a paradigm and a project that is essentially different from that of Al-Qaeda. IS presents the land of the caliphate, the land of dreams, which engages the aspirations of many female jihadists, who dream of living under an Islamic state that conforms to the laws, culture, public and private life espoused by the religious ideology of these women, and a model that contrasts with the prevailing Arab or Western societies they come from. Al-Qaeda did not present or even espouse this model, the model that was ultimately adopted and practically quasi-realized by IS. This paradigm tempted women and girls, propagated to them in the most ideal fashion in the virtual world. Even though we find many of the women who joined IS, such as the case of the Libyan women in Sirte, were shocked at the reality they found in IS and their status in it, the ideal model nonetheless continues attract women and girls throughout the world.

Chapter Two

Saudi Female Jihadism

My dear husband, the wounds of Muslims are making me bleed. I have two choices: either to part with you and depart for jihad, or stay in humiliation and wailing with those sitting still.” To my dear husband: I have buried my longing “for you”, and turned my course towards jihad; my role model is Nusayba, who defended the Prophet until she was bloodied while the men ran away.”

Arwa Baghdadi (April 1st, 2013)

On Wednesday morning, March 28th, 2012, members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP, the union between Al-Qaeda's Saudi Arabia and Yemen branches) kidnapped the Saudi Consul Abdullah al-Khalidi from his house in the southern Yemeni city of Aden. 20 days later, a Saudi Al-Qaeda member in Yemen called the Saudi ambassador in Sana`a confirming that they are holding the Consul hostage, and demanding the release of a number of detainees in exchange for al-Khalidi's release.

The caller named several Saudi detainees, but the surprise to public opinion and observers of jihadi activities in Saudi Arabia was that he demanded the release of a number of female Saudi detainees. Yet for those following the media battle and social networking activism in support of the campaign for detainees in the kingdom, the names were anything but surprising: Haila al-Qusayr, Hanan Samkari, Najwa al-Sa`idi, Arwa Baghdadi, Haifaa al-Ahmadi, May al-Talaq, and Amina al-Rashidi were well-known politically, socially, and in the media.³⁸⁷ The women became a phenomenon in a conservative social scene, like Saudi Arabia, where women's names are rarely publicized. Their names were now trending widely on Twitter accounts of thousands of Saudis.

The women's names began to appear in 2004, when Saudi security authorities announced the arrest of Fawzia al-`Aufi, the wife of a senior Saudi Al-Qaeda leader, and later the arrest of Wafaa al-Yahya (who later married Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq), Umm Osama al-Misri (editor of AQAP's al-Khansaa' women's magazine), and Wafaa al-Shihri (wife of AQAP's second-in-command). Later in 2007, the wives and female relatives of male jihadist detainees launched a campaign to demand the release of the detainees. In more recent years, Saudi women began to physically mobilize and depart for jihad lands (*nafir*). Saudi media has been reporting on stories of girls surrendered by their families to authorities out of fear of their joining IS, and other stories of females who managed to flee Saudi Arabia and travel to IS territories.

³⁸⁷ For details on the kidnapping of the Saudi Consul, see: Majed Hazza, "Al-Khalidi Munthu Ikhtitafih Hatta `Awdatih" "The Story of Al-Khalidi From His Kidnapping Until His Return", Alarabiya Net, March 2, 2015, <http://ara.tv/72fpm>

Over the past decade, a major leap took place in the role of Saudi women and the nature of their participation in jihadist groups. Saudi female jihadism transformed from isolated cases to a striking phenomenon that has been preoccupying Saudi media and society. These women became icons in the world of female jihadism, such as Haila al-Qusayr, known as Umm al-Rabab, who is serving a 15-year prison sentence in Saudi Arabia. She became so iconic that IS named a school in the Syrian city of al-Raqqa after her.

This chapter discusses the phenomenon of female jihadism in Saudi Arabia through the cases of 21 females, Saudi citizens or women living in the kingdom, who have been engaged in the jihadist community in various ways and roles. The discussion seeks to understand the conditions that surround these experiences and the factors that pushed these women toward this current. The chapter presents the underpinnings of this phenomenon and identifies common features among these cases, such as the social background, networks of relations, the course of affiliation, age, education, stages of development, and place of residence, among other variables useful in examining the phenomenon to reach a more in-depth analysis of the Saudi model of Al-Qaeda and IS female jihadists.

It is important to clarify here the criteria adopted for classifying particular cases as belonging to female jihadism in general, and Saudi jihadism in particular. Some cases are clear-cut, such as the women who publicly declare their allegiance to a jihadist group or physically migrate to jihadist territories. Other cases are more problematic, particularly the women who were charged – or suspected – by Saudi authorities of belonging to jihadist groups or supporting their ideology. The credibility of these cases is a topic of debate among researchers and observers. In these cases, we take into account the Saudi authorities' narratives and court judgements against the women, but dig further into the case study to ascertain whether each case belongs, in the minimum criteria, to the Jihadi Salafist space, by analyzing the discourse and rhetoric used by these women. For example, do they use key jihadist terminology and concepts, such as using *Asir* or *Asira* (captive) in referring to jihadist male and female detainees, or describe the government and security forces as infidel, or espouse clear positions towards known jihadist groups, such as IS, Al-Qaeda, or al-Nusra Front (renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham).

Indictments and detention does not necessarily mean, in the context of this study, validation of the Saudi judiciary judgement, or automatic classification of the case as a female jihadist, particularly amid an absence of independent sources and impartial civil society and rights organizations in the kingdom. All the cases discussed in this chapter are of female figures known in Saudi Arabia, and not the cases censored by the authorities, which is another problem we faced during our research: information blackout. Many of the Saudi news reports speak of anonymous names, while merely supplying information about the incidents involving in the case rather than the individual in question, using the pretext that the Saudi society is conservative and doesn't mention women by name per their families' request. Furthermore, most of the names involved in cases appeared first in the jihadist cyberspace, typically using pseudonyms, and then Saudi media follows suit, which further complicates the research endeavor.

Understanding the phenomenon of Saudi female jihadism requires knowledge of the general developments that took place during the course of the Jihadi Salafist movement in the kingdom, which has extended for over three decades since the Afghan Jihad era. Women are one of the components of this scene, and the phenomenon has been taking new dimensions and manifestations in the last decade, especially since 2007 with the launch of female protests to release jihadi detainees linked (according to Saudi authorities) to Al-Qaeda. Tracing the historical evolution of Al-Qaeda's course in Saudi Arabia, and the context of the rise of IS in more recent years is our gateway and foundation into understanding Saudi female jihadism.

Similar to the study of other cases in this book, we encountered research difficulties and scarcity of reliable and impartial information. Most of the information available is either from Saudi security narratives and its media leaks, or from the sources of the jihadist current. Meanwhile, investigative journalism and independent and objective scholarly studies are practically non-existent. There remains a substantial lack of information about many hidden stories, and our attempts to communicate with Saudi researchers and media to obtain further information were futile, since they also are not privy to the details.

1. Fawzia al-`Aufi: The Traditional Model

Fawzia al-`Aufi is the first female name to become publicly known in Saudi media in connection to jihadist activities. She is the wife of Saleh al-`Aufi, a senior Al-Qaeda leader in Saudi Arabia, who was killed in 2005 during a raid by Saudi forces on his hideout.³⁸⁸

Saudi Authorities arrested Fawzia and her children in July 2004, during a raid on a villa in King Fahad neighborhood in Riyadh. Several Al-Qaeda leaders were present in the house, two of them were killed, and three others were wounded. The severed head of an American hostage, Paul Johnson Jr., was found in the freezer of the villa where the Al-Qaeda members, along with Fawzia and her children and other women, were staying.

Fawzia was interrogated and a number of charges were brought against her, including her presence in a location where suspects were hiding and arms were stored, covering up for the suspects' activities, and endangering the lives of her children by agreeing to stay in a dangerous location. A Saudi court order, however, later released her from prison considering that she is a woman and her children needed her for care and psychological rehabilitation.

Information available on Fawzia al-`Aufi indicate that her role was secondary, connected to jihadist activities by virtue of her marriage to an Al-Qaeda leader. Although Al-Qaeda's leader in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf al-`Ayeri had encouraged women to play a greater role in supporting the jihadist movement in Saudi Arabia, and authored a prominent essay entitled "The Role of Women in Jihad against the Enemies,"³⁸⁹ the role of women in jihadist activities inside the kingdom remained secondary, unclear, and there were

³⁸⁸ Saleh Muhammad al-`Aufi (died at the age of 38 years old), attended high school in Al-Madinah al-Munawara and left for Afghanistan to join the fight briefly after his marriage, and later left for Tajikistan before returning to Saudi Arabia. He became one of the most wanted individuals by Saudi security forces. See the pro-Al-Qaeda report on the life of Al-`Aufi at: <https://justpaste.it/iiffx>
Also see: "Saleh al-`Aufi: Maqtalah Yuwajjih Darba Muji`a li Tanzim al-Qa`ida fi al-Sa`udia" "The Killing of Saleh al-`Aufi Deals a Heavy Blow to Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia", *Alarabiya Net*, August 18, 2005, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/08/18/15997.html>

³⁸⁹ "Sirah Mukhtasara li al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Yusuf al-`Ayeri (Rahimahu Allah)" "A Brief Biography of the Jihadi Sheikh Yusuf al-`Ayeri, May God Have Mercy on Him", *Shabakat al-Ummah al-Yawm* (Umah Today) network, July 15, 2011, <http://www.umahtoday.net/arabic/?Action=Details&ID=6785>

no known female leaders in the ranks of Al-Qaeda until recent years, when things began to change, radically.

This is due to the nature of the vision that dominated Al-Qaeda's reserved position toward women's participation. In the early days, 'jihadist' women raised their children and cared for the family, and at times, merely accompanied their husbands and families to conflict zones. Their role evolved with the phase of electronic jihad, as mentioned previously, with the emergence of female online activism and magazines dedicated to the women of the jihadist community, beginning with *al-Khansaa'*, AQAP's women's magazine edited by Umm Osama al-Misri, who was later arrested.³⁹⁰

Saudi women's jihadism took a quantum leap forward with the rise of the phenomenon of female jihadist *nafir*; that is, mobilization and physical departure for jihad in battle zones, particularly areas where Al-Qaeda had a strong presence, and later the territories controlled by IS in Iraq and Syria.

2. Wafaa al-Yahya: Al-Nafir al-Sirri (Secret Mobilization for Jihad)

The first Saudi woman known to break with the traditional female jihadist model is Wafaa al-Yahya. Born in 1968, al-Yahya held a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies, a master's degree in Islamic *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), and was a lecturer at King Sa`ud University. She was married and later divorced from a Saudi national who had fought in Afghanistan, but later returned to Saudi Arabia and worked in the military. They had two daughters and a son together.³⁹¹

Al-Yahya's story stirred wide controversy in the kingdom, particularly in the past few years, as her family remain convinced that she was arrested and detained since August 2005, along with her children, and remains in prison today. Her family continues to demand information about her fate.

³⁹⁰ "Baynahum Umm Osama, Al-Tilfizyon al-Sa`udi Yabith I`tirafat al-Mutaraji`in `an al-Tawajuh al-Takfiriyya" "Among Them Is Umm Osama, Saudi Television Broadcasts Confessions of Those Retracting from Takrifi Approaches", *Al-Ajel*, June 28, 2008, <http://www.ajel.sa/local/1057096>

³⁹¹ See: "Nisaa' al-Qa`ida fi al-Sa`udiya wa Muhamatum al-Tanzimiyya" "The Women of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Their Organizational Role", *Assakina*, May 11, 2013, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/24637.html#ixzz4OHqcQxpS>

The official government narrative, however, seems more solid and based on tracing al-Yahya's jihadist activism. It finds that al-Yahya's interest in jihadist ideology began with the issue of the Afghan Jihad, and that her family knows of this interest considering her repeated public declaration of her support of the *mujahideen*.³⁹²

In 2005, al-Yahya became increasingly active on the internet. She would engage in commentary on topics raised in Islamic and jihadist websites and forums, particularly related to jihad and news from the fighters in various jihad fronts.

Saudi authorities began to take notice of her online activities, particularly her comments related to different countries' changed positions towards the *mujahideen*. She wrote in support of jihadists in Afghanistan and Iraq, and praised the acts committed by Al-Qaeda on Saudi Arabian soil.

Through internet forums, al-Yahya met an Al-Qaeda operative who went by the nom de guerre Abu Talha al-Bayhani. He proposed to her the idea of joining the fighters in Iraq to work in the Religious Committee considering her scholarly specialization in Islamic *Fiqh*. Al-Yahya reportedly asked for a period of time to think about it.

She became convinced of the idea of joining the ranks in Iraq, and began to plan her departure. She took a leave of absence from her work at King Sa`ud University and applied for passports for herself and her children. Meanwhile, she continued to exchange messages online with Abu Talha, who noted that if anything happens to him, she would receive messages from another person, dubbed *Ustadh* (teacher/Mr.), who would arrange and facilitate her travel to Iraq.

Shortly after, she heard an audio recording by the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, mourning the death of several fighters, including Abu Talha al-Bayhani. Al-Yahya then became sure that the person that had communicated with her was truly an associate of jihadists in Iraq.

³⁹² The official narrative was revealed in detail in a leak to the London-based al-Sharq al-Awsat Newspaper, published in an article entitled "Wafaa'..Akadimiyya wa Nashita Sa`udiyya Tahamasat li al-Tayyar al-Jihadi wa Kanat Turidu an Tusbiha 'Faqiha' li al-Qa`ida" "Wafaa.. A Saudi Academic and Activist Enthusiastic Towards the Jihadist Current, and Wanted to Become a Religious Jurist for Al-Qaeda", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 11, 2013, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12583&article=728067#.WSGTWjys2w>

The '*Ustadh*' soon began communicating with al-Yahya. Experts in jihadist groups believe that the person behind the nickname was none other than al-Zarqawi, whose jihadist personality was strongly admired by al-Yahya.

From that moment on, al-Yahya began to follow the instructions she received. She prepared to travel to Iraq via Syria, but faced the problem that her ex-husband, the children's father, refused to provide her with the children's passports. She later managed to issue new passports through a relative who got them issued in Riyadh.

In the meantime, al-Yahya was under security surveillance because of her online communication with leaders of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and jihadist activism. For security reasons, she was put on a travel ban list.

She booked plane tickets for herself and her children, but later cancelled her children's reservations and kept hers, out of fear of being exposed. She set out to travel to Syria on the pretext of conducting scholarly research, but upon arriving at King Abd al-Aziz Airport in Jeddah, she was prevented from traveling because her name was on the travel ban list.

On March 9th, 2005, she was summoned by the Saudi authorities, arrested, and detained for about a month. She was released and handed over to her father and brother's custody.

On August 1st, 2005, al-Yahya and her three children (a 13-year-old girl, a 12-year-old boy, and a 5-year-old girl) disappeared from their home and no information was available on their whereabouts.

Her family accused Saudi authorities of arresting her, while the authorities believed she was a fugitive. Indicators soon began to show that she had left Saudi Arabia, and was smuggled into Yemen through Saudi and Yemeni smugglers, and then traveled by air to Syria using forged passports. In Syria, Al-Qaeda operatives facilitated her cross over the border into Iraq.

According to this narrative, al-Yahya arrived in Iraq in late 2005, where she married al-Zarqawi before he was killed in June 2006. She was reportedly killed shortly after in al-Anbar province, according to testimonies by Saudi nationals who were fighting in Iraq and later questioned by Saudi authorities.

Al-Yahya's jihadist drama did not stop at this point. She married her eldest daughter Sarah to an Al-Qaeda fighter. She herself gave birth to a child from al-Zarqawi, before remarrying a Saudi jihadist (referred to by Saudi authorities with the initials "M. Th.") and had a daughter with him. After she was reportedly killed in Iraq, her Saudi husband M. Th. left for Afghanistan.

As for the fate of her children after her alleged death, her eldest daughter Sarah was married to an Al-Qaeda fighter, and nothing else is known about her. No information is available either on her other children from her first marriage, Abdullah and Najlaa. Later in 2012, Saudi authorities detained a Saudi national, Saleh al-Qar`awi, known as a prominent Al-Qaeda leader and one of the founders of the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. He was targeted by a US drone attack in Waziristan, on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and had sustained major injuries. He was extradited from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, along with his family, and was treated at a security forces hospital in the kingdom.

Saudi authorities discovered that one of the children accompanying him, a young boy, is not al-Qar`awi's son. DNA testing proved that he was the son of al-Zarqawi and Wafaa al-Yahya, and another young girl traveling with al-Qar`awi was also found to be al-Yahya's daughter from the Saudi jihadist, M. Th., whom she married after al-Zarqawi's death.³⁹³

Although al-Yahya's family still clings to the narrative that she is being detained, nonetheless, the discovery of al-Zarqawi and al-Yahya's son, along with sources from the Jordanian Jihadi Salafist current who were close to al-Zarqawi who confirmed the reports of her marriage and death in Iraq (in statements made to the authors during this study), make the Saudi authorities' account of her fate, travel to Iraq, and marriage to al-Zarqawi, closer to accuracy.

According to available information on al-Yahya's story, it is clear that the main factor in her jihadist experience, recruitment, and physical *nafir* to join jihad in Iraq did not come from her family. Perhaps her academic specialization first, and her online engagement in jihadist forums, second,

³⁹³ Ibid., the previous source includes detailed information. Also see: Muna Sa`ud, "Ma'lumat Jadida `an Wafa' al-Yahya wa Abna'iha..Tuwufiyat fi al-'Iraq wa la Zaala al-Bahth Jari `an Abna'iha" "New Information on Wafa al-Yahya and Her Children.. She Died in Iraq and Search is Still Ongoing for Her Children", *al-Ahsa al-Aan*, <http://now.ahsaweb.net/6906>

had a more direct influence on the course she took. She was influenced by al-Zarqawi as an icon of jihadism, and her religious and ideological convictions shaped during this phase led her to pursue not only communicating with Al-Qaeda in Iraq, but to physically join them in a fateful adventure she took along with her children.

Nevertheless, we cannot separate the great leap that Saudi female jihadism took, through the model of Wafaa al-Yahya, from the conditions and implications witnessed in Saudi Arabia and the jihadist current there during this phase, particularly after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, which were claimed by Al-Qaeda and carried out by 15 Saudi nationals out of the 19 hijackers that day. The historical interplay between Saudi Arabia and jihadism, from the Afghan Jihad era to 9/11, was further complicated by the dynamics of the War on Terror, the war in Afghanistan, the declaration of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia in 2002 (and later AQAP) and the numerous operations carried out inside the kingdom, followed by the occupation of Iraq, and the rise of al-Zarqawi, who managed to recruit and mobilize mass numbers of Saudis into Iraq. With the evolution of this interplay, so evolved the engagement of Saudi women in support of jihadism in various ways.

3. Haila al-Qusayr: The Icon of Female Jihadism

Haila al-Qusayr is one of the most prominent Saudi jihadist women, known as Umm al-Rabab (as the mother of her only daughter Rabab). She was arrested on March 24th, 2010 during a raid on a house in the city of Buraydah in northcentral Saudi Arabia, and sentenced to 15 years in prison for charges of affiliation with Al-Qaeda. Today, Umm al-Rabab is hailed as an icon of female jihadism by supporters of the Islamic State organization, which in recent years named a school in its stronghold in al-Raqqa after her, known as “Dar Umm al-Rabab Haila al-Qusayr for Religious Sciences,” in recognition of her status in female jihadist circles.³⁹⁴

Al-Qusayr was born in Buraydah, the capital of al-Qassim region in Saudi Arabia. Her father died when she was young, and she lived in her half-brother’s house. She was academically distinguished throughout her school and college years.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ For more on The Dar Umm al-Rabaab School for Religious Sciences, see: goo.gl/T6aZgf

³⁹⁵ “Al-Sa`udiyya al-Armala al-Yatima Umm al-Rabab Haila al-Qusayr” “The Saudi Orphaned Widow

She consistently impressed her teachers. Later in college, she majored in geography, as part of the Faculty of Education. It was during her college years that she began to take a more religiously conservative approach, avidly reading religious texts. She learned of a controversial religious figure in Buraydah, Abd al-Karim al-Humaid, who left a life of luxury and a job at Aramco, the Saudi giant oil company, for an ascetic life in a mud house in Buraydah, where he began to give religious lessons attended by a large number of youth influenced by his thought.³⁹⁶

Al-Humaid's character was multidimensional. His thought was close to that of Al-Qaeda and radical Jihadi Salafists, and had dozens of writings in support of Taliban and jihadist ideology. He was also an ascetic, living an austere lifestyle without electricity or cars, refused to deal with currency or other forms of modern life, and relied on horses in his movement.³⁹⁷

During her university studies, al-Qusayr was influenced by al-Humaid's writings, read all that he wrote and listened to his lectures. In a biography of her life published in Jihadi Salafist websites, we find important indicators of this initial turning point in her life, represented by the influence of al-Humaid. She had transitioned from interest in the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood movement to Salafi thought, as her biography states, "In a short period of time, she finished reading all that "al-Humaid" had written, which helped shift the course of her thought from the approach of the Muslim Brotherhood to the approach of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'a wa al-Salaf al-Saleh* "Salafists". By the time she graduated from college, she had formed her personality and drew her course and approach in life based on what she had benefited from the books and letters of Sheikh Abd al-Karim

Umm al-Rabab Haila al-Qusayr", *Ahrwal al-Muslimeen (Muslim Conditions)*, May 2, 2015, goo.gl/A74DLt Also see her interview with Al-Riyadh newspaper entitled "Haila al-Qusayr Tataraja" `an Ta'yeed al-Tanzim wa Tarfud al-Fikr al-Da'ishi" "Haila al-Qusayr Retracts from Supporting (IS) and Renounces IS Thought", *Al-Riyadh*, November 8, 2015, <http://www.alriyadh.com/1098304>

³⁹⁶ See: "The Saudi Orphaned Widow..." op. cit. The report includes testimonies of teachers who taught Haila al-Qusayr, noting that she was known for her good morals and academic excellence. Also see a biography written about her by Jihadi Salafist networks entitled "Al-Shahad al-Muthab fi Sirat Umm al-Rabab" at goo.gl/2e3htp

³⁹⁷ See: "Haila wa al-Humaid al-Zawaj bi Riyal wa al-Hadaf Dakh al-Malayeen" "Haila and al-Humaid Married for One Riyad With the Goal of Garnering Millions", *Al-Watan*, June 9, 2010, http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Local/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=5977&CategoryID=5 Also see Wikipedia page on Abd al-Karim al-Humaid at goo.gl/wir11K Also see: Mansur al-Nugaidan, "Abd al-Karim al-Humaid min Mutarjim fi Aramco ila Zahid Yaskun al-Tin wa la Yarkab al-Sayara" "Abd al-Karim al-Humaid: From a Translator at Saudi Aramco to an Ascetic Living in Mud House and doesn't Ride in Cars", *Al-Watan*, December 22, 2002, issue number 449.

al-Humaid.”³⁹⁸

She graduated from college with distinction, and began preparing for a master’s degree. She was hired as a supervisor of the prayer hall in a Buraydah school, and began giving religious sermons and lectures in various women’s prayer halls, associations, and clubs. Growing further influenced by al-Humaid’s thought, al-Qusayr neglected the idea of completing her master’s degree and tore her bachelor’s degree diploma, considering it to be a worldly matter.³⁹⁹

She rejected all her suitors, and stressed to her family that she wanted to marry Sheikh al-Humaid. One of the sheikh’s student learned of her interest, and facilitated the communication between them until the marriage took place. Her family rejected the marriage, considering that he was 22 years her senior (he was born in 1943), married, and had four children. Her family was considered of high social status, her brothers had all earned high academic degrees. Yet she persisted and eventually married him in 2003, when she was at the age of 38. She lived the ascetic lifestyle with him in the mud house for almost eight months, after which he divorced her.⁴⁰⁰

Al-Qusayr’s insistence on marrying al-Humaid, in his case of asceticism, austerity, and radicalism, reflects the nature of the spiritual and psychological transformation she underwent, particularly that she is from a well-off family. Her insistence to pursue this complex marriage reflects radical religious and intellectual convictions. In her thirties at the time, she was already giving religious lectures and preaching in women circles. Early indications of her radicalization emerge during this stage, that is, before her second marriage to an Al-Qaeda member.

She did not get the taste of married life in her short marriage to al-Humaid, as she herself admits. Al-Humaid himself arranged her second marriage to one of his students, Muhammad al-Wakil, towards the end of 2004. This period was witnessing intense confrontations between Saudi authorities and suspected Al-Qaeda members in the kingdom. Al-Wakil, himself an

³⁹⁸ See her biography written by jihadist supporters of Al-Qusayr in “Al-Shahad al-Muthab,” op. cit., goo.gl/2e3htp

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ “Haila al-Qusayr Mazzaqat Washita Takharujiha wa Hawalat al-Iyqa` bi Talibat Buraydah” “Haila al-Qusayr Tore Her Graduation Certificate and Attempted to Entrap the (Female) Students at Buraydah”, *al-Watan*, June 5, 2010, http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Local/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=5367

Al-Qaeda member, remained with al-Qusayr for no more than six months before he went into hiding for two months, and was later killed in armed confrontations with security forces in Riyadh. By then, al-Qusayr was pregnant with her daughter Rabab, who was born after her father's death. Al-Qusayr, an orphan herself, became known as Umm al-Rabab, the 'orphaned widow.'⁴⁰¹

Despite the short time she spent with her second husband, she loved him and was strongly attached to him. His death shocked and deeply affected her, pushing her further towards jihadism, where she became more active in Al-Qaeda circles to which her husband belonged. Saudi media and official statements imply the state's conviction that her recruitment came at the hands of her husband prior to his death.

Between 2004 and 2008, al-Qusayr became more active in jihadist circles, at the height of confrontations between authorities and jihadists and the wave of arrests, bombings, and assassinations in the kingdom. She would visit the families of jihadists killed in Saudi Arabia or abroad, and offer her support. Her relationship with the Saudi authorities was strained, especially after her friend Wafaa al-Shihri traveled to Yemen, and the Saudi authorities' conviction that al-Qusayr had a role in smuggling al-Shihri out of the country.

In 2008, al-Qusayr disappeared with her daughter Rabab, until she was arrested on March 24th, 2010 during a midnight security raid on a house in Buraydah, where several men and women were staying. Al-Qusayr and her daughter (then about five years old) were flown to Riyadh, where she was interrogated and detained. Saudi authorities announced arresting al-Qusayr as part of a terror group that included 101 individuals. She was initially detained with her daughter, but authorities later released the child.

Two years later, the Specialized Criminal Court, established by Saudi authorities to handle terrorism cases, sentenced al-Qusayr to 15 years in prison as a *ta`zir* penalty (a penalty in Islamic law issued at the discretion of the judge, which Saudi judiciary adopts). She was charged with 18 counts, including affiliation with Al-Qaeda, adopting Kharijite thought, aiding Al-Qaeda with logistical services, and money laundering through raising funds and sending them to Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

⁴⁰¹ "Al-Sa`udiyya al-Armala al-Yatima Umm al-Rabab..." "The Saudi Orphaned Widow Umm al-Rabab", op. cit.

News of al-Qusayr's arrest and imprisonment circulated widely among Al-Qaeda supporters at the time. Her friend, Wafaa al-Shihri wrote an impassioned article in AQAP's magazine *Sada al-Malahim* lamenting in it the detention of al-Qusayr.⁴⁰² Three months into her detention, AQAP's second-in-command, Sa'ud al-Shihri (Wafaa's husband), issued an audio recording threatening Saudi Arabia of assassinating important figures in revenge for al-Qusayr's arrest and detention.⁴⁰³

4. Wafaa al-Shihri: The First Public Nafir

Wafaa al-Shihri was the first Saudi woman publicly known to have migrated from Saudi Arabia to territories controlled by jihadist groups. Her *nafir*, physical departure for jihad as it is known in jihadist terminology, constitutes the first model of the phenomenon of Saudi female *muhajirat* (migrants). While Wafaa al-Yahya had allegedly departed before al-Shihri, nonetheless al-Yahya never declared her *nafir*. AQAP officially declared Wafaa al-Shihri's *nafir*, and her joining her husband, Sa'ud al-Shihri, as a member of Al-Qaeda. Her husband arranged for her and her children to move from Saudi Arabia to Yemen through an Al-Qaeda-affiliated cell.⁴⁰⁴

There are no documented details about Wafaa al-Shihri's life prior to her marriage to AQAP's second-in-command and her departure for Yemen in 2009. Her age is not exactly known, but she is estimated to be in her thirties today. She did not finish her education, and left during middle school to be married to Sa'ud al-Qahtani. She was later divorced from him after giving birth to her first child Yusuf. She later married Abd al-Rahman al-Ghamdi, who was killed by security forces in Ta'if in connection to his affiliation with Al-Qaeda cells. Wafaa had a daughter from her second marriage, named Wasayef.

⁴⁰² See: "Al-Qa`ida fi Jazirat al-`Arab Tatabanna Qadiyyat al-Mu`taqalah al-Sa`udiya Umm Rabab" "AQAP Champions the Case of the Saudi Detainee Umm Rabab", *Alarabiya Net*, May 20, 2010, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/05/20/109086.html>

⁴⁰³ See: "Haila al-Qusayr Akhtar Irhabiyya fi Qaida al-Amn" "Haila al-Qusayr the Most Dangerous Female Terrorist.. Now in the Hands of Security Forces", *Al-Riyadh*, June 4, 2010, <http://www.alriyadh.com/531976>

⁴⁰⁴ See: "Walidat Wafaa al-Shihri: Ibnati Istaghallat Ghiyabi wa Lan Usamihaha" "Wafaa al-Shihri's Mother: My Daughter Took Advantage of My Absence and I Will Not Forgive Her", *Ajel*, September 8, 2009, <http://www.ajel.sa/local/1083981>

She then returned to her father's home in Riyadh, where she had spent her childhood. During this time, her brother Yusuf was turned over by US authorities from Guantanamo Bay Detention Center to Saudi authorities. Along with him was Sa`id al-Shihri, who was later released from Saudi detention after undergoing the *Munasaha* (Counseling) rehabilitation program and married Wafaa before leaving for Yemen, where he would contribute to the founding of AQAP, which merged Al-Qaeda's branches in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and became its second-in-command, after the Yemeni national Nasir al-Wuhayshi.

In Yemen, Sa`id al-Shihri arranged for his wife to be brought there. On March 12th, 2009, Wafaa managed to evade her family while they were outside the house, and left along with her three children (Yusuf al-Qahtani, then aged 9, Wasayef al-Ghamdi, then aged 4, and her newborn son from Sa`id al-Shihri), along with her nephew Abd al-Ilah al-Shihri, who was then about 18 years old. Her brother, Yusuf, had preceded her to Yemen along with her husband Sa`id.

After arriving in Yemen, Al-Qaeda held an interview with her and published an article written by her in *Sada al-Malahim* magazine, after the arrest of her friend Haila al-Qusayr. The article, entitled "Were You Really Held Captive Umm al-Rabab?," published in an AQAP magazine, was considered by the authorities and the Saudi state-sponsored media as an official declaration of Wafaa al-Shihri's affiliation with AQAP.

Her brother Yusuf al-Shihri was killed during an attempt to infiltrate from the Yemeni border into Saudi Arabia in the Jazan area after a clash with security forces in October 2010.⁴⁰⁵ Her nephew, Abd al-Ilah al-Shihri was later killed in an airstrike in Ma`rib, Yemen in May 2012.⁴⁰⁶ Her other nephew, Abd al-Majid al-Shihri, who had followed them to Yemen two years later, was killed in January 2014, about a year after her husband Sa`id al-Shihri was killed in early 2013.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ See: "Al-Shihri min `Udu fi Firqat Ightiyalat ila Jutha Hamida bi Jazan" "Al-Shihri: From a Member in an Assassination Group to a Dead Body in Jazan", *Alarabiya Net*, October 20, 2010, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/10/20/88697.html>

⁴⁰⁶ See: Nasser al-Haqbani, "Maqatal Asghar Matlub Amni fi Qa'imat al-85 bi Ghara bi al-Yaman (Abd al-Ilah al-Shihri)" "The Death of the Youngest Wanted Individual in the List of 85 (Abd al-Ilah al-Shihri) in an Air Raid in Yemen", *Al-Hayat*, Saturday, May 19, 2012, <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/403703>

⁴⁰⁷ See: Nasser al-Haqbani, "Maqatal al-Matlub Abd al-Majid al-Shihri" "The Death of the Wanted Individual Abd al-Majid al-Shihri", *Al-Hayat*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/593750>

There is little verified information on Wafaa al-Shihri and her children after this point, except for some conflicting Yemeni and Saudi Arabian reports. Some reports indicate that she was arrested to handed over to Saudi authorities, while other reports note that she was injured in an airstrike. Some witnesses reported that her son Yusuf had joined the camps of Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

It is known, however, that in Yemen, Wafaa al-Shihri hosted Rima al-Jraish and Arwa Baghdadi, two Saudi female jihadists who followed her example in jihadist *nafir*.

In analyzing the jihadist model of Wafaa al-Shihri, we are looking for the turning point that led to her affiliation with Jihadi Salafism and how she became a fugitive jihadist ‘migrant.’

Saudi authorities talk of the influence of her marriages to Abd al-Rahman al-Ghamdi and Sa`id al-Shihri on her thought and adoption of Al-Qaeda’s ideology. Other sources speak of the role of her brother, Yusuf al-Shihri, who arranged for her to marry Sa`id al-Shihri. But her first husband, Sa`ud al-Qahtani, perhaps holds a more precise thread in speaking of her being deeply influenced by her brother Sa`ad al-Shihri, who was in Afghanistan during the time of her marriage to al-Qahtani. Sa`ad was a prominent figure in Al-Qaeda, a personal guard of Osama bin Laden and an associate of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. He is believed to have been killed in an airstrike in Waziristan in 2010.⁴⁰⁸

Yet in reviewing the profile of the entire family, it seems that sources of influence on Wafaa go beyond her brother Sa`ad, who left for Afghanistan at a young age during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Her other brother, Yusuf, had a similar experience, having left for Afghanistan before the September 11th attacks, was arrested there when he was short of 15 years old, and spent six years in Guantanamo Bay Detention Center, being one of the youngest detainees there, before being handed over to Saudi Arabia in 2007, later released, only to rejoin jihadism again and establish AQAP with his friend Sa`id al-Shihri and others.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁸ For details on the life and death of her brother Sa`ad see the report on “Sa`ad bin Muhammad al-Shihri.. Haris Bin Laden wa Murafiq Hekmatyar” “Sa`ad bin Muhammad al-Shihri.. Bin Laden’s Bodyguard and (Gulbuddin) Hekmatyar’s Associate”, *Ana al-Muslim*, October 5, 2010, goo.gl/04YUer

⁴⁰⁹ See the report on Alarabiya on media reports of the detention of a Saudi child in Guantanamo, April 24, 2006, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/04/24/23130.html> Also see: “Al-Shihri Asghar al-

The case also extends to her nephews Abd al-Ilah and Abd al-Majid, both of whom were killed in Yemen after joining their aunt there. Wafaa al-Shihri also has three other brothers (Faisal, Mustafa, and Riyadh) who have been in prison since 2003 on charges of affiliation with jihadist movements, in addition to Wafaa's other nephew, Rayyan Mustafa al-Shihri, who was arrested in 2009 (then aged 15) during his attempt to leave Saudi Arabia to join jihadist groups.

The irony in the al-Shihri family makeup is that their father, Muhammad Mubarak al-Shihri, is a medical doctor and retired colonel in the Saudi Armed Forces. Yet all five of his sons were closely tied to Jihadi Salafism, at least according to the official Saudi narrative, along with their maternal uncle Farhan Amer Farhan (detained since 2000), his son Amer (detained since 2003), and Wafaa's sister's husband Abd al-Ghani Sa`ad al-Shihri (detained since 2003). Other family members also connected to the jihadist current include Sami Hmoud al-Shihri (son of Wafaa's cousin), and Omar and Muhammad Muhsin al-Shihri (sons of Wafaa's other cousin), and Musa Ali al-Shihri (husband of Wafaa's cousin).

This manifests a network of first, second, and third-degree kinship, and a social environment that surrounded Wafaa' al-Shihri from the onset. This helps us understand her embracing of Jihadi Salafism from an early age, even prior to her marriage to Al-Qaeda members Abd al-Rahman al-Ghamdi and later to Sa`id al-Shihri. The influence was present throughout the family network, and was further deepened and solidified in her marriages and friendships with other female jihadists as well.

Reinforcing this interpretation is that the younger generation in the family, including Wafaa's nephews Rayyan (detained) and Abd al-Ilah and Abd al-Majid (killed in Yemen), along with her cousins' sons, have taken the same path. We learn from various sources, including both the Saudi government's and the Jihadi Salafist current's narratives, that Wafaa's brothers Sa`ad and Yusuf, and her two nephews killed in Yemen, were indeed active members of Al-Qaeda. The family maintains that Saudi authorities have cleared the other family members from terrorism related charges, but nonetheless refuses to

Mu`taqalin fi Guantanamo.. `Aada Dhimna al-Duf'a al-`Ashira wa Khada`a li al-Munasaha fi Barnamij al-Amir Muhammad bin Nayef" "Al-Shihri is the youngest detainee at Guantanamo. He returned among the 10th batch and underwent the Prince Muhammad bin Nayef Counseling program", *Assakina*, October 20, 2009, <http://www.assakina.com/news/4518.html>

release them from prison. This prompted the al-Shihri family to bring their case to the media and raise awareness of their poor treatment in prison, and took part in the protests carried out by women and relatives of jihadist detainees that began in 2007 and escalated during the ‘Arab Spring’ years. The family resorted to hanging a huge banner outside their home in Riyadh calling for the release of their sons from prison, before Saudi authorities removed the banner by force.

5. Demolishing Walls: Nada al-Qahtani, Arwa Baghdadi, Hanan Samkari, Najlaa al-Rumi, and Bint Najd

After Wafaa al-Yahya and Wafaa al-Shihri broke the taboo of female *nafir* and *hijra* by departing for jihad, the ideological, social, and religious bricks that make up the psychological wall obstructing female jihadism in Saudi Arabia began to wither and collapse. One after another, Saudi women were inspired to take the path of *nafir* and migrate to territories controlled by Al-Qaeda affiliated groups, whether in Yemen or Iraq. By 2014, IS’ declaration of forming a ‘state’ in Iraq and Syria gave stronger impetus to the phenomenon, and provided further incentives for female jihadists to migrate to the lands of the caliphate, envisioned as the true land of Islam where Islamic law and society prevail. *Nafir* and *hijra* out of Saudi Arabia became more pressing for both male and female jihadists, particularly after the jihadist discourse of groups such as Al-Qaeda and IS shifted classification of the Saudi regime from being *Dar al-Islam*, an ‘abode of Islam’ (as it was considered in this discourse in the 1980s and 1990s) to *Dar al-Kufr*, an infidel abode of unbelief. This shift comes from the jihadist view that the Saudi regime is not adhering to correct implementation of Islamic Shari`ah, and is violating the principle of *al-Wala’ wa al-Bara’* (loyalty to Muslims and disavowal of enemies of Islam) by fighting jihadists and allying with the United States. Among the prominent women who became active in Saudi female jihadist circles:

Nada al-Qahtani: She calls herself *Ukht Julaybib*, relative to her brother Julaybib (real name is Abd al-Hadi al-Qahtani), who left for Syria and joined IS there. Nada followed him to Syria in late 2013,⁴¹⁰ and publicly announced

⁴¹⁰ “Nada al-Qahtani Mujahida Sa`udiyya Tandham ila Da`ish bila Mahram” “Nada al-Qahtani: A Saudi Female Jihadist Joins IS without a Male Kin”, *Hadath*, <http://www.hadth.org/39240.html>

her arrival in IS territories. She was also followed by her husband, who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Muhammad al-Azdi (real name unknown), a religious jurist in support of IS. Al-Azdi was previously detained in Saudi Arabia, and had authored a book defending IS entitled *Ahwal al-Mu'aridin li Dawlat al-Muslimin* (The Status of Opponents to the Muslims' State).⁴¹¹ Nada's father also joined them in Syria, and had previously been detained in Saudi Arabia on charges of connections to Al-Qaeda. In addition to referring to herself as the sister of Julaybib, Nada also described herself as the "daughter of a great man, the wife of a meritorious man, a graduate of the University of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him), and sister of a *mujahid dawlawi* (a jihadist of the Islamic 'Dawla' State)." There isn't much available information on her father, but it is known that his name is Mu'idh al-Qahtani, and that he was one of the leaders of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia before he was arrested and detained.⁴¹²

Nada al-Qahtani's *naf'r* and *hijra* to IS territories stirred wide controversy in Saudi circles, and even in jihadist circles. She is one of the first women to publicly declare her migration to IS lands, and had traveled without a *mahram* (male kin). She left two children in Saudi Arabia, after which she tweeted on her Twitter account "I have been reunited with my brother, then husband, then father. As for you "her children", you are a piece of my heart, we shall meet in Paradise."⁴¹³

The available information indicates that her father, brother, and husband were all members of Al-Qaeda before switching sides and joining IS. We do not have adequate information on the ideological and practical motivations behind their shift from Al-Qaeda to IS, an uneasy path that commonly requires defection and personal and intellectual travails. Yet comparing the story of Nada with other female Saudi jihadists leads us to conclude (as will be discussed further) that the dividing space between Al-Qaeda and IS is not substantial for Saudi females, where the transition is quite commonplace.

⁴¹¹ His name was among the list of names of religious jurists and scholars supporting IS, published by a pro-IS website, <http://www.muslm.org/vb/archive/index.php/t-544950-p-2.html>

⁴¹² See: "Qawa'im al-Matlubeen.. Silah Sa'udi li Dharb al-Irhab" "The Most Wanted List: A Saudi Weapon to Strike Terrorism", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 10, 2015.

⁴¹³ "Al-Dakhiliyya li al-'Arabiya Net: Al-Qahtani Shaqeeq Ukht Julaybib" "Interior Ministry Tells Alarabiya Net: Al-Qahtani is the Brother of Ukht Julaybib", *Alarabiya Net*, June 4, 2015, <http://ara.tv/657ua> Also see: Rima Shirri, "Awwal Intihariyya Sa'udiyya Tandham ila Da'ish fi Suriya wa Tuthir al-Jadal" "The First Saudi Female Suicide Bomber to Join IS in Syria and Stirs Controversy", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, December 4, 2013, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=110069>

We do not know the details of Nada's educational or social background. Yet some media reports describe her as a university student, probably in her early twenties. Nada herself describes her life before migrating to Syria as an "affluent life."⁴¹⁴

Other reports claim that she had been detained by Saudi security forces, and that her brother Julaybib (who was around 21 years old) was on the most wanted list by security forces, before both of them left Saudi Arabia.⁴¹⁵

Saudi political and media sources consider Nada al-Qahtani one of the most famous IS women. Meanwhile, some – unverifiable – reports claim that she has a commanding role in the all-female al-Khansaa Field Brigade, and that she has a special status within IS. It is difficult to ascertain her position within IS considering that reliable facts are commonly meshed with exaggerated narratives and state-sponsored media propaganda that aim to vilify such individuals.⁴¹⁶ We do know, however, that upon arriving in al-Raqqa, she declared on her Twitter account her desire to carry out a 'martyrdom' operation.

Saudi authorities accused her brother Abd al-Hadi (AKA Julaybib) of having a leading role in plotting several attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2015, most notably the bombing in the town of al-Wadih and the bombing of al-`Anoud Mosque in Dammam. He was put on the most wanted list along with 15 others in connection to these attacks.

In the wake of the Saudi accusations, Nada launched a series of threats to the Saudi-backed al-Arabiya channel through her Twitter account, and threatened to carry out a suicide attack with her brother against Saudi Shiite citizens, Saudi rulers, and al-Arabiya channel, stating "I ask Allah to bless me and my brother Julaybib with a martyrdom operation to strike your rafidah "rejecter Shiites", then your tawaghit "tyrant rulers", then you "al-Arabiya"

⁴¹⁴ "Ukht Julaybib Fataa Jami'iyya Sa`udiyya Tanjah bi al-Indhimam ma` Akhiha li al-Qital fi Suriya" "Ukht Julaybib: A Saudi University Students Succeeds in Joining the Fighting in Syria Along with Her Brother", *Ikhbariyat Rafhaa*, December 7, 2016, <http://www.rafha-news.com/news-action-show-id-17731.htm>

⁴¹⁵ See: Huda al-Saleh, "Ukht Julaybib Tuhaddid Qanat al-`Arabiya fi Akher Taghridatiha" "Ukht Julaybib Threatens Al-Arabiya Channel in Her Latest Tweets", *Alarabiya Net*, June 5, 2015, goo.gl/Fh3CbV

⁴¹⁶ "Al-Mar'a al-Qawiyat fi Da`ish li al-Da`ishiyat: Harridna Azwajukunna" "The Strong IS Woman Tells IS Women: Incite Your Husbands", *Alarabiya Net*, February 28, 2016.

who are deceitfully misrepresenting Muslims through your media.”⁴¹⁷

The most prominent features of this model of Saudi female jihadists, represented by Nada al-Qahtani, is her strong personality, manifested in her boldness to declare her *nafir* and *hijra*, and in her clear ideological discourse against Shiites and opponents of the Islamic State. This indicates that she belongs to the ideological milieu, her family and social surroundings, that most probably had a direct influence in indoctrinating her in Jihadi Salafism and later recruiting her into the folds of IS. Prior to, and during her physical presence with IS, she used social networking sites to disseminate both her ideological and personal affiliation and support of IS.

Arwa Essam Tahir Baghdadi: a university graduate, she migrated to Yemen in early 2013, and publicly declared her *nafir* and *hijra* four months later (in April 2013), along with her brother Anas, her children (Osama, about two and a half years old, and Khadija, about nine months old), her niece Huda (about two and a half years old, the daughter of Arwa's slain brother, Muhammad Baghdadi).

Her exact age and what she studied in college are not known. It is known that her father Essam Tahir Baghdadi is an engineer with Saudi Arabian Airlines, and his father (Arwa's grandfather Tahir Baghdadi, who died in June 2015) hails from a well-known elite family in Mecca, and was the leading figure in Mecca's real estate industry and a mayor of Ajyad district in Mecca. Arwa's paternal uncles, Hisham and Ahmad Baghdadi, are well-known businessmen as well.

Arwa's mother is Huda al-Ahdal, an educational supervisor. The al-Ahdal family is also a well-known family of *ashraf* (nobility hailing from the Prophet's family). Arwa has four brothers, most notable of them is Muhammad Baghdadi, who was killed by Saudi security forces in December 2010. He was a fugitive from the law, and Saudi authorities claimed that he was disguised in women's clothes during the pursuit.

Her brother Muhammad perhaps represents an important key to understanding the transformation of Arwa into jihadism. He was born in the mid-1980s in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu'. He studied in Jeddah and enrolled in Umm al-Qura University, an Islamic university in Mecca, but

⁴¹⁷ See: Huda al-Saleh, "Ukht Julaybib Tuhaddid.. "Ukht Julaybib Threatens Al-Arabiya...". op. cit.

during his second year in college (in 2004) he was arrested during a raid on his family home. According to his family and wife, the cause of the arrest is suspicion over having on his phone the phone number of another wanted individual. But his uncle, Hisham Baghdadi, admitted in a later interview with the press that Muhammad was an extremist from a young age, and that his family noticed his extremist jihadist tendencies, causing his uncle to kick him out of the family home on several occasions for criticizing pictures of his uncle with a US Vice President, and accusing his uncle of *kufri*.

At age 20, Muhammad was imprisoned for four years, and after his release, he stayed for a year at a home run by the Interior Ministry dedicated for rehabilitating former terrorism detainees. During that year, he married Afnan, an Egyptian girl, whose family was deported over security issues related to terrorism, but was later returned to Saudi Arabia. Six months after their marriage, Saudi intelligence forces asked to question Muhammad again, leading him to run away out of fear of arrest. He was put on a terror list, and his father was arrested in an effort to pressure Muhammad to turn himself in. Muhammad was later killed by security forces in December 2010, a day after his daughter Huda was born.

Muhammad's death was a turning point for the whole Baghdadi family, but indicators of Arwa's 'rite of passage' into Jihadi Salafism had been evident much earlier. She was arrested the first time during the month of Ramadan in 2004, taken from her maternal grandfather's house days after her brother Muhammad was arrested, according to supporters of the family. She was detained at a young age (precise age not known) for about one month before she was released. The reason for her arrest was her having been influenced by jihadist ideology, or the ideology of *al-fi`a al-dhaala* (the misguided category), as Saudi authorities label them.⁴¹⁸

According to this account, Arwa Baghdadi was influenced by Jihadi Salafist thought from an early age, and perhaps had been influenced by her brother Muhammad, considering that she continued to put his picture on her Twitter profile and labeling herself the sister of a martyr. After Muhammad was released from prison, he convinced her to marry a Saudi man who had been in prison with him, named Yassin al-Omari. Al-Omari is a Saudi jihadist who went to Afghanistan at a young age and fought alongside the *Mujahideen*

⁴¹⁸ For details on her arrest and the arrest of family members, see the short film in their support: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbKUW0-KyiQ>

there against Soviet forces, before moving on the Bosnia and later returning to Saudi Arabia in 2001 where he was arrested at the airport and remains in prison until today. Family sources note that al-Omari had already completed his 10-year prison sentence, but Saudi authorities refuse to release him.⁴¹⁹

We argue here that the death of her Brother Muhammad was a ‘turning point’ for the whole family in general, and Arwa in particular, because nearly all members of the Baghdadi family had been arrested at different occasions during Muhammad’s escape from security forces, and after his death. The father, Essam Baghdadi, was arrested upon his son’s escape, and was detained until six months after his Muhammad’s death. Muhammad’s wife was also arrested and detained for several months (shortly after giving birth) along with her father and mother. Arwa Baghdadi’s whole family was arrested and detained, including the female Moroccan maids who had been working for the family, and who were deported months later to Morocco after the Moroccan embassy intervened for their release.⁴²⁰

Arwa herself was arrested again on the day her brother was killed. She was eight months pregnant at the time (with the son of her detained husband Yassin al-Omari), and gave birth to her son Osama in prison. Her newborn baby was later taken from her and given to the custody of her mother. She got pregnant again (during her detention) with her daughter Khadija. Her brother Anas was also detained over charges of attempting to join Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The body of her brother Muhammad was held by the Ministry of Interior since he was killed in 2010, and was not turned over to the family until mid-2013. Meanwhile, Arwa had been taking care of three orphans (Mustafa, Yassin, and Walid), who had been living with them in the family home. The orphans were returned to an orphanage after Arwa was accused of attempting to recruit them, even though they were young children.

The tragic narrative alleges that Arwa was subjected to psychological abuse during her detention from December 2010 until June 2012, after female prison guards accused her of insulting them. Regardless of the claims, undoubtedly her imprisonment was difficult; her newborn son was taken from her, one brother was killed, and another was detained, her husband was serving a long-term prison sentence, and she was pregnant with her daugh-

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ See her mother’s narrative in the report “Arwa Baghdadi Dhahiyyat al-Sulutat al-Sa’udiyya” “Arwa Baghdadi: The Victim of Saudi Authorities”, *Kashkool elKhalij*, April 8, 2013, goo.gl/IG11RG

ter Khadija.⁴²¹

A large campaign on social networking sites and repeated sit-ins succeeded in pressuring Saudi authorities to release Arwa on bail posted by her father and brother Jamil (who was studying education in Jordan), with the condition that she would be tried by the Criminal Court specialized in terror-related cases. She was accused of belonging to *al-fi`a al-dhaala* (the misguided), recruiting young children to join misguided groups, *takfir* of the Saudi regime, and covering up knowledge of the travel of her friend Hanan Samkari's sons abroad to fight with Al-Qaeda.⁴²²

During the six months of trial, Arwa became active on Twitter in expressing the suffering she endured during her detention, her hostility toward the Saudi state, and how she was facing continued problems during the court sessions she was supposed to attend.

During the month of August 2012, Arwa tweeted excessively about her bitter experience in prison, details of her arrest, her tribulations in Dhahban Prison in Jeddah, how she was transported by air while she was pregnant to al-Ha'ir Prison in Riyadh for a court trial along with Hanan Samkari, how she was beaten during her detention, her hunger strike, how her newborn son was taken from her and given to her mother (after Arwa's mother was released from detention), and how prison authorities violated their promises to allow her to see her baby twice a week.

In dozens of tweets, Arwa explained the details of the prison phase, which apparently left considerable psychological scars on her, and further incited her hostility towards the Saudi regime. She later stopped tweeting for nearly three months until January 2013, when she returned to insinuate in her tweets that her absence from Twitter was due to pressures by Saudi authorities on her and her family not to speak of their experiences.⁴²³

She stopped tweeting again from January until April 1st, 2013, when she announced arriving in Yemen, tweeting a message to then Interior Minister Muhammad bin Nayef expressing her anger and hostility towards the

⁴²¹ See: "Arwa Baghdadi: Mann Hiya wa Ma Qisatuha?" "Arwa Baghdadi: Who is She and What is Her Story", goo.gl/iE3iL6

⁴²² Arwa Baghdadi discusses these charges on her Twitter account, https://twitter.com/arwa_baghdadi?lang=ar

⁴²³ Ibid.

Saudi state. In it, she stated: “A message to the perishing tyrant, Muhammad bin Nayef: I bring you good tidings that I have departed “*nafir*” for jihad in the land of Yemen and its free jihadist tribes, in spite of your nose and the nose of your masters.”⁴²⁴

On the same day, Arwa wrote several tweets expressing feeling a sense of freedom and dignity in migrating to Yemen, and for the presence of what she called *Ansar* (supporters) and clans that “do not turn their women over to apostate regimes.” She explained motives behind her *nafir*, stating that she was no longer satisfied with “jihad from behind computer screens.” She spoke of the role of women, addressing men by saying “I inform the young men of my Ummah who have left the battlefields of jihad empty, that you have left them empty for us to fill your vacuum.”

She revealed her urge for revenge, stating: “We will revenge your blood dear brother Muhammad, and we will get your body out of their hands and you will come out alive and a martyr, God willing.” In a tweet dedicated to female Saudi detainees, she said: “To my sisters in the prisons of the “Arabian” Peninsula, we shall take revenge for you, and free you through people who love death more than life, so have hope for the good that is coming.”

She tweeted messages to her father and mother, and in messages to her husband, she stated: “My dear husband, the wounds of Muslims are making me bleed. I have two choices: either to part with you and depart for jihad, or stay in humiliation and wailing with those sitting still.” She added, “To my dear husband: I have buried my longing “for you”, and turned my course towards jihad; my role model is Nusayba “female companion of Prophet Muhammad”, who defended the Prophet until she was bloodied while the men ran away.”⁴²⁵

She spoke with her mother by phone in April 2013, according to the mother’s account, and confirmed that she was in Yemen with her brother Anas, his wife, and children, and slain brother Muhammad’s daughter Huda. Nevertheless, her mother remained insistent that Arwa was held in detention by Saudi security forces, and that it was the Saudis who made Arwa contact her mother and make the claims that she is in Yemen.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

Her tweeting stopped from April 1st, 2013 until January 16th, 2014, after which she returned to write three tweets reaffirming that she had migrated, and that she was with her brother Anas and his family. She further wrote: "I ask God to support our brothers in Sham "Syria", unite their word, and to fight the Jews; their Arabs and foreigners the Aal-Sa`uds."⁴²⁶

Since then, and until the publishing of this study, no reliable information is available on Arwa or her brother Anas. It is difficult to ascertain whether she migrated to Syria (as her friend Rima al-Jraish had done), or had remained in Yemen (with Wafaa al-Shihri), or that the latter had also migrated to Syria after her husband Sa`id al-Shihri was killed.

In attempting to identify the prominent feature of Arwa Baghdadi's model, we find that she is the daughter of a rich elite family of businessmen in Mecca, who are loyal to the Saudi royal family, as affirmed by statements made by her uncle.⁴²⁷ Her maternal family are from the noble *Ashraf*, financially well-off, who care for orphans. Both her parents are educated, and so was she. Arwa herself is a US citizen, born in Worcester, Massachusetts, according to leaks made by Wikileaks of US State Department cables mentioning a request to see Arwa Baghdadi in Saudi prison, considering that she is a US citizen.⁴²⁸

It is clear that the case of her brother Muhammad was key in influencing her course towards jihadism, and in affecting the fate of the whole family. The family felt victimized as a result of harassment, arrest, detention, and collective punishment of all members of the family. The three members most closely affiliated with the jihadist current were Muhammad, Arwa and Anas. Later, we find that Muhammad's wife Afnan, who came to label herself Umm Huda al-Baghdadiya, would join her late husband's path. After her husband's death, Afnan changed her Facebook profile picture to the flag of Al-Qaeda, and has been in hiding since early 2014. It is not known whether

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ See: "Al-Matlub al-Baghdadi Iltahaqa bi Qism al-Shari`ah bi Jami`at Umm al-Qura wa al-'Aila Tabara'at Minh" "The Wanted Individual al-Baghdadi Joined the Shari`ah Islamic Law Department at Umm al-Qura University and His Family Disowned Him", *Al-Madina*, December 29, 2010, <http://www.al-madina.com/article/62744/>

⁴²⁸ See: "Aham 5 Barqiyat Musaraba min Wikileaks `an al-Siyasa al-Kharijiyya al-Sa`udiyya" "The 5 Most Important Cables Leaked by Wikileaks about Saudi Foreign Policy", *elbadil*, June 20, 2015. goo.gl/MY86pL The report discusses the US State Department's request to see Arwa Baghdadi in Saudi prison, since she is a US citizen.

she left for Yemen along with Arwa and Anas, or that she remains in Saudi Arabia.

In terms of considering her brother Muhammad's arrest and later his death as a 'turning point' for Arwa, it is difficult to dissect whether the trials and tribulations that the family went through as a result of Muhammad's involvement in Jihadi Salafism would have been reversed had Saudi authorities handled the situation differently. If there were clear legal standards and adherence to human rights in terms of not inflicting punishment on the family for the actions of one member, would such a scenario have changed Arwa's course towards jihadism? The difficulty in reaching such a hypothetical conclusion lies in the fact that she had been influenced by Jihadi Salafist ideology from an early age, prior to her brother's arrest and later death. It remains, however, that her expression of hostility towards the Saudi state reflects that the state's handling of her brother's case and the collective punishment against the whole family exacerbated her tendency towards jihadism, and gave further impetus for radical reaction, such as her *nafir* and *hijra* to Yemen to physically join Al-Qaeda, rather than remain a "cyber jihadist."

Hanan Samkari (Umm Turki): She was arrested on December 24th, 2010 from her home in Mecca, along with her three minor children (Numur 13, Jana 8, and Abd al-Rahman 5 years old). Her husband, Muhammad Faruq al-Jaza'iri, has been detained since 2004.

She was detained in Dhahban prison in Jeddah for nearly a year and a half, along with her children. She was charged with aiding terrorism, including sending her sons Turki and Nawwaf to jihad fronts, preparing her son al-Yazan (who was arrested in 2010 at a checkpoint in Wadi al-Dawasir) to carry out a suicide operation, supporting Afghan jihadists, aiding families of slain Al-Qaeda jihadists in Saudi Arabia, adopting jihadist ideology, and preventing her children from education in public schools.⁴²⁹

She was also charged with luring and arranging the marriage of a number of girls to detainees imprisoned on terrorism charges, including her elder daughter Hanin, who married Hatem al-Luhaibi, a prisoner in Dhahban Prison since early 2011.

⁴²⁹ See: Abdullah al-Barqi, "Hanan Samkari.. al-Udu al-Haraki al-Nasheet allati La'ibat Dawran Mifsaliyyan fi Da'm al-Qa'ida" "Hanan Samkari: The Active Member Who Played a Pivotal Role in Supporting Al-Qaeda", *Al-Sharq*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.alsharq.net.sa/2012/04/18/227090>

Other charges include her intention to migrate to Afghanistan with her children to join the jihad there, and attempting to arrange the marriage of her daughter Numur to an Arab militant commander there. She was also charged with opening businesses that served as fronts to raise profits to finance terror operations, browsing and participating in suspicious sites on the internet, and inciting wives and female relatives of jihadi detainees to protest at Ministry of Interior branches in various regions in the kingdom.⁴³⁰

In 2014, the Special Criminal Court for terrorism cases sentenced Samkari to ten years in prison, and banned her from traveling for another ten years. Her son al-Yazan was sentenced to 22 years in prison.

Her older sons had already fled to conflict zones abroad. Her eldest son Turki carried out a suicide attack at a market in a Shiite-dominated area in Baghdad in 2007, killing dozens of civilians. Her son Nawwaf (nom de guerre al-Farouq, or Abu Mus`ab), was killed in Paktika province in Afghanistan in 2010.

There is no detailed information about Samkari's age or educational background. According to the Saudi government's charges against her, she allegedly took her children out of public schools, sent her older sons Turki and Nawwaf to Iraq and Afghanistan, and is active in the jihadist community and in arranging marriages to jihadists. Based on these charges, Saudi authorities and state-sponsored media describe her as an "active member" of the Saudi female jihadist movement.⁴³¹

She is also a close friend of Arwa Baghdadi and the two had shared a prison cell during their detention. Their close connection led Saudi authorities to charge Baghdadi with knowledge and cover up of Samkari's son's travel to Afghanistan and Iraq, and for failing to inform the authorities. Samkari's son al-Yazan, then 15 years old, was injured and arrested during confrontations with security forces in October 2010 at the Wadi al-Dawasir checkpoint, the same confrontations where Arwa Baghdadi's brother Muhammad was killed.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² See: "Al-Sulutat al-Sa`udiyya Tuhakim Qaasiran bi Tuhmat al-Irhab" "Saudi Authorities Try a Minor with Terrorism Charges", *Noon Post*, November 1, 2013, <http://www.noonpost.org/content/839>

Najlaa al-Rumi: Known as Umm al-Zubayr, she was a resident of Mecca, arrested in 2011 when she was 24 years old. Her husband, known by the nom de guerre Abu Haydara (real name unknown), had been a fighter in Afghanistan, and is currently detained in Saudi Arabia. Accounts by female detainees mention that al-Rumi was detained in solitary confinement for the first six months, and had a nervous breakdown from the harsh treatment in prison. Her supporters claim that she was arrested for her connections to Arwa Baghdadi and Hanan Samkari.⁴³³

The official Saudi narrative accuses her of adopting jihadist ideology, having been trained to use weapons, covering up her husband's meetings with suspected individuals in their home in al-Khalidiya neighborhood in Mecca, and possession of weapons. She was released in 2012 and later tried by the Special Criminal Court in 2014, and sentenced to nine years in prison.⁴³⁴

Bint Najd: In late November 2010, Saudi authorities announced dismantling 19 terror cells and the arrest of 13 women out of a total of 149 suspects. While the number of the women arrested during this incident is significant, Saudi authorities nonetheless took particular interest in one of them, and considered her role to be influential and dangerous, particularly on the internet. The woman used three screen names: Bint Najd (daughter of Najd region), al-Asad al-Muhajir (the migrant lion), and al-Najm al-Satî` (the shining star). The arrest of Bint Najd was considered a grand security achievement, but her real name was never disclosed. Media reports indicate that she was released and turned over to her family's custody, without giving further details.⁴³⁵

According to Saudi authorities (the only official account available), Bint Najd is a woman in her thirties (at the time of the arrest), is highly skilled in navigating and using the internet for jihadi propaganda and is

⁴³³ See: "Seerat al-Sajina Najlaa' al-Rumi – Umm al-Zubayr" "The Biography of the Female Prisoner Najlaa al-Rumi, AKA Umm al-Zubayr", <http://archive.omaniaa.co/showthread.php?t=468674> Also see: "Qam' al-Sa'udiyya Yasilu ila Mustawa Ghayr Masbuq bi I'tiqal al-Nisaa" "Saudi Repression Reaches Unprecedented Level in Detention of Women", *Noon Post*, October 13, 2014, <http://www.noonpost.org/content/4132>

⁴³⁴ Maryam al-Sughayyar wa Su'ad al-Shamrani, "Najlaa' al-Rumi Silatuha Wathiqah bi Arwa al-Baghdadi" "Najlaa al-Rumi's Connection with Arwa al-Baghdadi is Strong", *Okaz*, April 18, 2012, <http://okaz.com.sa/article/471125/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A3%D9%8A>

⁴³⁵ Huda al-Saleh, "Mas'ul Sa'udi Yakshif 'an Tawarrut 13 Sayida Khilal Talfik Khalaya Irhabiyya" "A Saudi Official Reveals 13 Women are Implicated during Dismantling of Terror Cells", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 29, 2010.

highly educated. Saudi authorities had attempted to dialogue with her prior to her arrest by contacting her screen names, but she rejected the attempts.⁴³⁶

As for the other 12 women arrested during the incident, their ages ranged between 28 and 37 years old, according to Saudi official sources.

6. The Women of Buraydah: Rima al-Jraish, May al-Talaq, and Amina al-Rashid

The phenomenon of sit-ins and protests led by the wives and female relatives of detainees represents one of the most important factors in the evolution of Saudi female jihadism. The demonstrations began in 2007, then escalated with the ‘Arab Spring,’ particularly in 2012 and early 2013. A wave of arrests of women and children taking part in the demonstrations exacerbated the crisis experienced by these women, and prompted widespread sympathy and solidarity with their cause within Saudi Arabia’s social and media circles.

The protests escalated with the efforts of Rima al-Jraish, May al-Talaq, and Amina al-Rashid, and a wide social network of wives and relatives of detainees served to organize and support the women in their protests in various regions of the kingdom. Hundreds of Saudi women dared to demonstrate, sign petitions, and form online forums and support groups to rally for their demands for fair and transparent legal trials, release of prisoners who completed their sentences, and improve the conditions of detainees in prisons.⁴³⁷

The Saudi authorities dealt with the protests by attempting to intimidate and deter the organizers, taking pledges from their families that they would stop their activism, and by arresting and charging them. Yet the protests did not cease, rather they came to represent a challenge between the state and families of detainees. Three key factors reinforced the impact these protests had on the closed conservative society in Saudi Arabia:

⁴³⁶ Ibid. Also see: “Al-Sa`udiyya Ta`taqil 149 `Unsuran min al-Qa`ida wa Tuhbit 10 Mukhatataat Irhabiyya” “Saudi Arrests 149 Al-Qaeda Members and Foils 10 Terror Plots”, *Alayam*, November 27, 2010, <http://www.alayam.com/alayam/first/432809/News.html>

⁴³⁷ See a detailed special report on protests by female relatives of detainees, “Arsheef I`tisamat Ahali al-Mu`taqaleen fi al-Sa`udiyya” “Archive of Protests by Families of Detainees in Saudi Arabia”, *Wa`i*, May 7, 2013, <https://w3iteam.wordpress.com/2013/05/07/setinhistory/>

The first factor is the absence of independent, impartial media institutions. Two narratives emerged in the media: the official narrative of the state, which controls and censors most print and audio-visual media outlets within the kingdom and even throughout the Arab region (by way of pressuring neighboring regimes to control their media), with very few exceptions. The other narrative is that of the families of jihadist detainees, their supporters, and the newly founded human rights organizations in the kingdom, who depend heavily on social media in their activism. Twitter served as the most widespread and interactive outlet among Saudis, becoming a hotbed of media and propaganda wars between the two narratives. Female relatives of detainees excelled in utilizing Twitter and YouTube in disseminating and publicizing their causes and demands.

The second factor is the special interaction with women's issues by the Saudi society. Women going out in public to protest was unheard of in Saudi Arabia, and at the same time, represented a challenge to men in a society where protests and demonstrations are uncommon by any segment of society (even considered to be religiously unlawful by the state-backed religious institutions). The activism stirred widespread sympathy, a key element that the activist women realized. They used emotional discourse and inciting slogans, particularly related to female detainees, prompting even prominent figures among religious and political leaderships to voice support for their cause, which – initially – managed to put pressure on the Saudi authorities.

The third factor is the emergence of a strong social network among the women and families of detainees, which boosted their ability to mobilize and encourage more women to protest. This is evident in the continued increase in numbers of participants, breaking the barrier of fear despite the strict measures and punishments imposed by the state to put a stop to this phenomenon.

The most prominent of these protests were in the city of Buraydah, the capital of al-Qassim region in northcentral Saudi Arabia. In Buraydah, the activism of Rima al-Jraish, May al-Talaq, and Amina al-Rashid, along with their co-activists, is prime material for analysis of this phenomenon. The first clash with security forces in 2007 did not discourage or deter them from moving forward in organizing and escalating their protests in physical demonstrations, and virtually in the media and social networking sites.

Rima al-Jraish (born in 1978) was orphaned at an early age and did not know her father. In 1994, at the age of 16, she married Muhammad Saleh al-Hameli, a nurse who worked at a health center in Buraydah. According to her mom, al-Jraish wanted to get married because she didn't want to continue her education. Later, in early 2004, her husband was arrested and detained on charges of harboring fugitives and facilitating their operations.⁴³⁸

Despite her family's attempts to convince her to seek a divorce, al-Jraish continued to visit her husband in prison and remained attached to him.⁴³⁹ Three years into his detention, she decided to break the silence and demand his release. In June 2007, she organized a protest in front of the General Investigations Directorate (the Saudi intelligence agency), which led to her arrest along with other participating women and human rights advocates who were observing the protest. She was detained for four days, then released, only to be arrested again in 2011 over her attempts to distribute pamphlets to spread awareness of the cases and conditions of detainees in Saudi prisons.

Her name became widely known in media and social circles in the kingdom and abroad. In an interview with al-Hurra TV following a protest at the al-Tarfiyya Prison in September 2012, she spoke about her husband's case, stressing that she contacted then Minister of Interior, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, following her husband's arrest in 2004. She noted that the Minister reassured her that no charges were brought against her husband, and that he would be released soon. By the time of her interview in 2012, her husband had been detained for eight years, and remains in prison as of the writing of this study.⁴⁴⁰

During the protests and arrests, al-Jraish was subjected to severe pressures. She was arrested with her children, and her son Mu`az al-Hameli was detained in early 2013. The harshest experience she endured was the detention following a protest in March 2013, where she was arrested with her children, and subjected to torture and humiliation (until she fainted) at the

⁴³⁸ See an interview by Asmahan al-Ghamdi with Rima al-Jraish's mother in Al-Riyadh Saudi Newspaper, "Walidat Rima al-Jraish li al-Riyadh: Ibnati Hayya Turzaq.. Wa Ana Bari'a Minha wa Min Fikriha al-Dhal" "Rima al-Jraish's Mother to Al-Riyadh Newspaper: My Daughter is Alive, and I Repudiate Her and Her Misguided Thought", *Al-Riyadh*, February 24, 2016, <http://www.alriyadh.com/1131545>

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ See interview with Rima al-Jraish on Al-Hurra TV on September 28, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-83cFrAZ84>

hands of female prison guards, according to the testimony of other female detainees. She was released from prison a month later.⁴⁴¹

Observers of al-Jraish's case note that the great pressure on her, her family, and her husband's family, escalated her frustration and led her to take the decision to migrate to Yemen and then Syria where she would join IS.

Her son Mu`az al-Hameli, then 15 years old, joined IS and left for Syria in early 2013. By early 2014, al-Jraish decided to follow Wafaa al-Shihri and migrate to Yemen, taking along her four children (Maria 14, Abd al-Aziz 13, Sarah 8, and Ammar 6 years old). She was hosted by al-Shihri in Yemen, where she remained for nine months under the care of then AQAP leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi. As IS declared the founding of the 'Islamic Caliphate State,' al-Jraish decided to leave for Syria to join her son, and arrived there in November 2014, according to her own narrative in tweets she wrote on Twitter and sources close to IS who confirmed her arrival in IS territories.⁴⁴²

In her tweets, she explained her decision to migrate, stating: "When the near fought me before the distant, and my arrests increased because of my legitimate demands to "release the captives" from among the scholars and the righteous, and to demand the release of my husband from detention; when I witnessed much neglect in my support of the righteous and true scholars in prisons; I resolutely decided to migrate. And since there was no way, and since I was forbidden to travel, and I do not have a passport to begin with, I decided to go to Mecca with my children to perform Umrah "lesser pilgrimage"."

She added: "I lived days that I will never forget their bitterness and sweetness at once. I was awaiting the hour of *nafir* "departure for jihad". I was yearning to migrate in the path of God. There was no way for me to go, and the matter was difficult for me. The relief came after a long wait, but the coordinator told me that the waiting will be long, and that my path is to Yemen and from there to Syria...I do not hide the extent of my grief, but I surrendered my issue to God, the most important thing is to survive. We reached the land of Yemen and were received by our Mujahideen brothers."

⁴⁴¹ See testimony of the female detainee, Latifa `Aboudi (Umm Abdullah) on torture of Rima al-Jraish in prison, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc3YWO7NxG8> Also see another testimony by Hanan Muhammad Msallam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThZk5keYxfA>

⁴⁴² Munira al-Hadib, "Rima al-Jraish Takhtasar Rihlat Farariha min al-Mamlaka fi 27 Taghrida" "Rima al-Jraish Summarizes Her Escape from the Saudi Kingdom in 27 Tweets", *Al-Hayat*, November 19, 2014.

On her stay in Yemen, al-Jraish noted: “I met the beloved Wafaa al-Shihri, and I was happy to see her. I spent the most beautiful days of my life, I learned from her the lessons of pride, and I do not forget the generosity of Sheikh Basir “Nasir al-Wuhayshi”; I ask God to open his heart to pledge allegiance “to IS leader” in order to unify the ranks. Although I was happy to serve the Mujahideen in Yemen, yet I continued to await, eagerly, migration to the land of the Levant “Syria”. In Ramadan, and after the declaration of the Caliphate in the Levant, my insistence on joining the Caliphate increased, no matter what it costs me. Since that day, I began to prepare, and although the path was near impossible, I did not lose hope. After nine months of waiting, God blessed me with migrating to the land of the Caliphate and joining the Mujahideen in Syria.”⁴⁴³

In her decision to leave Saudi Arabia, she wrote a letter to her husband expressing her refusal to live a “life of humiliation,” and deciding to “migrate to where there is pride and dignity. I put my trust in God that we will meet soon in the lands of the Islamic State.” Upon arriving in Syria in November 2014, she published a picture of her children carrying weapons. Her son Mu’az, who was already in Syria, celebrated her arrival on his Twitter account.

Similar to the cases of other Saudi female jihadists, we do not have adequate verified information about al-Jraish’s role in IS, and about her fate and the fate of her children after joining IS. Most analyses speak of a media role she played, and of her taking command of al-Khansaa’ Brigade’s cyber propaganda. Sources close to IS note that she is responsible for recruiting girls and women on the internet and facilitating their migration to IS territories. Some media outlets reported that she was killed in February 2016 in a US airstrike in the Syrian town of al-Hasaka during an IS commanders’ meeting, and that she was buried in Syria. Her mother, however, denies the reports, and stresses that her daughter is still alive.⁴⁴⁴

From her story, we can deduce two main factors that marked a turning point in the course of Rima al-Jraish’s transformation toward jihadism. She was married at an early age to a man who adopted Jihadi Salafist ideology.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ See: Huda al-Saleh, “Al-‘Arabiya Net Takshif Tafasil Maqalt al-Da’ishiyya Rima al-Jraish” “Alarabiya Net Reveals Details of the Death of IS Member Rima al-Jraish”, *Al-Arabiya Net*, February 24, 2016, <http://ara.tv/4krk8> Also see her mother’s denial of her death in an interview with Al-Riyadh Newspaper, “Rima al-Jraish’s Mother to Al-Riyadh Newspaper: My Daughter is Alive...” op. cit.

Even if the charges were not true, his arrest and continued detention nonetheless came on charges of his espousing such ideology. The second factor is the phase of struggle and clash with Saudi authorities for over a decade, beginning with her activism in demanding the release of her husband following his arrest in 2004, then the escalation of protests starting in 2007, and culminating in the last protests she organized in 2013, which led to her arrest and detention in conditions that – according to her testimony and that of other female detainees – subjected her to beatings and humiliation. Her hostility towards the Saudi authorities exacerbated with the pressures put on her, her family, and her husband’s family, leading her to take the decision of *nafir* and *hijra*.

But unlike previous cases, her mother, brothers, and uncles were completely opposed to the course and ideology that al-Jraish and her husband took. Her mother recalls attempting to pressure her, bringing her and her children back to the family home to try to control her after her repeated arrests and detentions. They signed pledges to the authorities that she would not participate in the protests. Her escape from the kingdom materialized after she evaded her family, pretended to have changed and repudiated her jihadist thought, and managed to disappear before they found out that she had arrived in Yemen.⁴⁴⁵

It is also clear that there was a strong and effective network of contacts and friendships that influenced her and encouraged her initial activism and later *nafir* to Yemen hosted by AQAP, Al-Qaeda’s branch in Yemen, and later IS in Syria, including her friends May al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashed, who co-organized the Buraydah protests with her.⁴⁴⁶

Her friend May Abd al-Rahman al-Talaq shares a similar story. She was born in Buraydah, but we know little information about her family life, except from her own account.

Al-Talaq tells the story of her marriage to Abd al-Malik al-Muqbil, who has been detained in Saudi Arabia for nearly 15 years on charges of connections to Al-Qaeda. She notes that her father was friends with al-Muqbil’s father, and the two families agreed to their engagement (while she was still in school), and that the marriage would take place following her graduation

⁴⁴⁵ “Rima al-Jraish’s Mother to Al-Riyadh Newspaper: My Daughter is Alive, and I Repudiate Her and Her Miguidded Thought,” op. cit.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

from high school. But halfway through the school year, her fiancé al-Muqbil was arrested a month after returning from Afghanistan following the September 11th, 2001 attacks, and charged with connections to Al-Qaeda (al-Talaq's insists that he had went to Afghanistan for religious preaching (da'wa), for he was a religious person who memorized the Qur'an and volunteered in Islamic relief projects).

Al-Talaq was strongly attached to her fiancé and the idea of their marriage. After his arrest, she recalls that many suitors came to ask for her hand, but she would refuse and "would not think of any other man no matter how long it takes." Under pressure by her father, she enrolled in college. She adds that her father would tell suitors that she did not want to get married before finishing her college education, and while some would say that they will wait for her, her father would refuse and makes excuses.

In narrating her story, she states: "I finished college in four years, walking into the university a body without a heart, for my heart is behind bars while my body enters and exits the university...After graduating, I did not apply for any jobs, I wanted to dedicate my time to resolve my problem. I thought a lot, and waited a lot. My father and his father would discuss the problem until they finally reached the solution that instead of waiting, which lasted five years, we would be married behind bars. I accepted without hesitation... it was the only solution before me and I preferred that than the flames of waiting."⁴⁴⁷

The authorities facilitated their marriage, behind bars, giving them two weeks together and allocated a private place for them to stay together. After that, the couple were allowed periodic conjugal visits, which is the Saudi authorities' policy with prisoners in general.⁴⁴⁸

From her account, we estimate that al-Talaq was born in the late 1980s or early 1990s, a college graduate who excelled in school, comes from a religious family, and that it was her father who introduced her to her husband and agreed to her marriage to a detainee charged with connections to Al-Qaeda. As her father was friends with al-Muqbil's father, al-Talaq grew up hearing about her future husband, and had grown attached to him from a young age since she was a teenager in school.

⁴⁴⁷ See details of May al-Talaq's account of her marriage to Al-Muqbil, <https://justpaste.it/f6mb>

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

In addition to these ‘religious’ elements in al-Talaq’s character, the religious family surrounding her, and her religiously-fundamentalist fiancé and later husband (who according to Saudi authorities adopts Al-Qaeda jihadist ideology), it appears that there is another factor that contributed to her growing attached to jihadist ideology; that is her brother Sulayman. Sulayman al-Talaq was killed in confrontations with Saudi security forces in February 2006 in Riyadh. He was 21 years old at the time, and had been a fugitive from the law, accused by the authorities of actively propagating jihadist *takfiri* thought on the internet, and for participating with a group (five individuals killed with him in the confrontations) to carry out an attack on a factory in Riyadh.⁴⁴⁹

Al-Talaq stresses that the courts acquitted her husband twice from charges of the Riyadh bombing (which occurred while he was detained), but the authorities continued to refuse his release. Al-Talaq joined Rima al-Jraish in the first protest in al-Qassim in 2007 to demand the release of her husband and dozens of other detainees who were acquitted or who completed their sentences but remained behind bars. Al-Talaq’s relationship with the wives and family members of detainees belonging to the Jihadi Salafist current grew stronger, until she became one of the most prominent female figures challenging the regime in Buraydah protests from 2011 until 2013. She also became active on social media in spreading awareness of their cause, a campaign they entitled *Fukku al-`Aani* (Release the Captives). Al-Talaq was arrested several times for her activism.

Al-Talaq had two children from her husband al-Muqbil while he was in prison. Her sons Abdullah and Abd al-Rahman often accompanied their mother in the protests.

Al-Talaq was briefly detained after taking part in a protest in front of al-Tarfiyya Prison on September 22nd, 2012, and released hours later after she posted bail and received warnings against taking part in further protests. She nonetheless returned to organize another protest a few weeks later in front of the Investigation Commission in Buraydah.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ See: Turki al-Sahil, “Al-Sa`udiyya: al-Kashf `an Hawiyyat Qatla Muwajahat Hay al-Yarmouk bi al-Riyadh” “Saudi Arabia: Identities of Those Killed in Confrontations at Yarmouk Neighborhood in Riyadh Revealed”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 1, 2006, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=350717&issueno=9955#.WVR9Ymjys2x>

⁴⁵⁰ See: “Archive of Protests by Families of Detainees in Saudi Arabia,” op. cit.

During the protests, her younger brother Muhammad al-Talaq (a second-year college student studying law) worked to transport women to avoid their arrest, which ultimately led to his arrest and detention for 10 days. He was sentenced to receive 90 lashes (an appealable ruling), but soon left for Syria and joined Al-Nusra Front there, where he was later killed. May al-Talaq was the first in the family to be informed of his death, upon which she remarked “I prostrated to God with joy” that her brother died a martyr in Syria. A short documentary about him published on the internet after his death notes that he was not religious prior to his participation in the women’s protests and getting arrested, after which he “let his beard grow, quit smoking, and left for Syria to fight.”⁴⁵¹ A press report claims that he was killed a few days after reaching IS territories in Syria as a result of his lack of combat experience.⁴⁵²

May al-Talaq was arrested again after a protest at the Ombudsman Bureau in Buraydah on January 5th, 2013, and was later transferred to al-Ha’ir Prison in Riyadh for several days. Al-Talaq and other female detainees claim to have been ill-treated in prison, and issued a statement detailing their ordeal in detention.⁴⁵³ She was later arrested again, amid escalating pressures and punitive measures by Saudi authorities against the women and families of detainees.

Towards the end of April 2013, al-Talaq and her friend Amina al-Rashid decided to leave for Yemen and join Al-Qaeda there. Their escape was facilitated by Yemeni smugglers. Al-Talaq took with her a 14-year-old brother and her two sons Abdullah (then 6 years old) and Abd al-Rahman (then 4 years old). On her part, Amina al-Rashid brought along her young son (from ex-husband) and a 14-year-old nephew. The women and children were taken to a rugged border region where they met the smugglers, but Saudi authorities managed to detect them and arrested the women, children, and the smugglers. Al-Talaq and al-Rashid and their children were transported by a private plane to Riyadh, where they were photographed by the media. The women were tried and sentenced to 13-years each in prison, in addition to charges that reach a total of up to 24 years each in prison for attempting

⁴⁵¹ See the short film on the life and death of Muhammad Al-Talaq, May Al-Talaq’s brother, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQPXBV4Czm0>

⁴⁵² Abdullah Sulayman Ali, “Al-Muqatilun al-Sa’udiyoun fi Suriya min al-Khalaya al-Ula ila al-Nafir” “Saudi Fighters in Syria: From the First Cells to ‘Departure for Jihad’”, *Al-Safir*, December 3, 2013.

⁴⁵³ See: “Archive of Protests by Families of Detainees in Saudi Arabia,” op. cit. Also see video of female detainees describing their ordeal in detention, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5-G1HyIU0Q>

to smuggle children to Yemen, and attempting to smuggle funds and gold to Al-Qaeda there.⁴⁵⁴

In May 2015, al-Talaq's other younger brother, Abdullah al-Talaq, was captured along with a cell allegedly connected to IS. He was 15 years old at the time of the arrest, making him one of the youngest detainees held in connection with IS in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵⁵

Amina al-Rashid's case is also not much different from al-Talaq or al-Jraish. Her husband, Adnan al-`Atwi (goes by the nom de guerre Abu Saleem al-Tabuki), is one of the earliest Saudi fighters with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. He was arrested in the UAE en route to Iraq from Afghanistan and turned over to Saudi Arabia, where he served seven years in prison before he was released in early 2012. Shortly after, he traveled to Syria using a fake passport and joined IS there.⁴⁵⁶

Her brother, Muhammad Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid (known as Abu Salman, or Abu Abdullah), was one of the most prominent figures of Al-Qaeda in Yemen. Born in Buraydah in 1983, he left to the UAE in December 2004 using a passport issued using a fake ID that has his picture but his brother's name. From there, he left for Iraq where he joined Al-Qaeda fighters there, then later moved to Yemen, where he was killed in a bombing in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, along with several other Saudi fugitives in September 2009.

Muhammad al-Rashid was wanted by Saudi authorities for links to Al-Qaeda operatives inside and outside the kingdom, and for planning to carry out terror attacks inside Saudi Arabia with a group of Al-Qaeda operatives targeting oil installations. Other charges against him included forging documents to obtain a passport, going to Iraq to fight, providing material support to a terrorist group, and links to operatives who facilitate Al-Qaeda

⁴⁵⁴ Hani al-Safyan, "Bi Al-Suwar: May al-Talaq wa Amina al-Rashid fi Dhiyafat al-Dakhiliyya" "In Pictures: May al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashid 'Hosted' by Interior Ministry", *Al-Arabiya Net*, April 23, 2014, <https://goo.gl/9dkeL4> Also see: Issa al-Shamani, "May al-Talaq wa Amina al-Rashid min Nuzha al-Qassim ila al-Hudud al-Yamaniya" "May Al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashid from the Excursion in Al-Qassim to the Yemeni Borders", *Al-Hayat*, May 7, 2014.

⁴⁵⁵ See: "Shaqiq May al-Talaq..Asghar Mutaham bi al-Irhab" "May Al-Talaq's Brother: The Youngest to be Charged with Terrorism", *Assakina*, May 25, 2015, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/70605.html#ixzz4OHsW10cM>

⁴⁵⁶ Issa al-Shamani, "Qannas Hukumi Yaqtul al-Sa`udi al-Atwi Zawj Amina al-Rashid" "Government Sniper Kills the Saudi national Al-Atwi, Amina al-Rashid's Husband", *Al-Hayat*, November 4, 2015.

members to go abroad, according to reports by Saudi-backed media outlets.⁴⁵⁷

Amina al-Rashid also has three brothers who have been detained for nearly eight years (Khaled, Yassir, and Saleh al-Rashid). Her two other brothers, Sulayman and Abdullah al-Rashid were killed in Iraq fighting alongside Al-Qaeda.

Amina was active in the Buraydah protests with Rima al-Jraish and May al-Talaq. At first, her activism was for the release of her husband (who was later released and left for Syria), and later she advocated the release of her brothers, who were being detained without charges, according to the family.

During the arrests, Amina al-Rashid and her family were subjected to strong pressures by the authorities to stop her activism.⁴⁵⁸ The authorities attempted to intimidate her to stop, but she persisted, until she was arrested at the border region in April 2013 during her attempt to leave for Yemen with May al-Talaq and their children.

Not much is known about Amina al-Rashid, her age, or her education. It is known that she was divorced from another man before marrying al-`At-wi, and had a son with her first husband (the son she attempted to smuggle into Yemen when she was arrested at the border region).

The families of May al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashid hold steadfast to their claims that what happened to the two women was a ‘theatrical plot,’ and that the two were detained but the story of their attempted ‘migration’ was fabricated to demonize and vilify them in front of public opinion.⁴⁵⁹

In sum, we find several solid factors in common in the cases of May al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashid. They are both from Buraydah, their brothers and husbands had close connections, or were members (according to the offi-

⁴⁵⁷ See: “Al-Sa`udiya Tu`lin `an Maqatl 3 min Qa`imat al-85 wa al-Qa`ima Tataqalas ila 75 Matlouban” “Saudi Arabia Announces the Death of 3 from the 85 Wanted Persons List, and the List Lessens to 75 Wanted Persons”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 19, 2010. Also see “Al-Rashid wa Al-Jataili wa Al-Dalbahi wa al-Hadyan.. Al-Qa`ida Ta`tarif bi Maqatl 4 Sa`udiyin Baynahum ‘Muhandis’ Qanabiliha” “Al-Rashid, Al-Jataili, Al-Dalbahi, and al-Hadyan.. Al-Qaeda Admits to the Death of Four Saudis Including the ‘Engineer’ of Its Bombs”, *Ajel*, July 25, 2010, <http://www.ajel.sa/local/1101326> The report notes that Amina al-Rashid’s brother Muhammad was among the prominent names in Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Amina al-Rashid’s father on March 7, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sf74WYhWGE>

⁴⁵⁹ See the family’s claim on the Twitter Account of Amina al-Rashid’s sister, Mawaheb bint Abd al-Rahman, <https://twitter.com/mawahebabdurhmn>

cial Saudi narrative) of the Saudi Jihadi Salafist current (between supporters of Al-Qaeda and others who later joined IS). Rima al-Jraish, however, came from a different background. Her family did not support her activist or jihadist tendencies, and from an early stage attempted to convince her to divorce her detained husband. But the three of them were stubbornly active in demanding the release of detainees and fighting for fair trials and better prison treatment. For these women, the protests represented their challenge against the state. They faced arrests, detention, harassment and strong pressures to stop, all the while being continually under surveillance and constantly being summoned for questioning by intelligence agents. While al-Jraish succeeded in her *naḥir* and *hijra* to Yemen and then Syria, al-Talaq and al-Rashid's attempts were thwarted.

7. The Complex Family Network: Haifaa al-Ahmadi and Najwa al-Sa`idi

Haifaa Dhyab al-Ahmadi: Known as Umm Suhaib, she earned a bachelor's degree in Islamic *Aqidah* (Doctrine), and enrolled in – but didn't finish – a master's program in Islamic Shari`ah. At age 14, she began to be influenced by magazines and articles about the Afghan Jihad, and by age 16, she started giving lectures in school about the importance of jihad. When she turned 17, she got married to Saa'id al-Hazimi, a fighter in Afghanistan. She moved to Pakistan, where she stayed at a home for orphaned girls. Her husband would visit her from time to time when returning from the battle front. She spent her years there living with women from Pakistan and other nationalities, mostly wives and families of fighters.⁴⁶⁰

After the end of the Afghan War, she returned to Saudi Arabia with her husband, where she enrolled in university and completed her bachelor's degree. She prepared a master's thesis, but did not defend it to complete her degree because she felt it wasn't "purely dedicated to God," according to her daughter.⁴⁶¹ Meanwhile, she was active in *da`wa* and religious preaching in Qur'an centers in Mecca, as she was a *hafizah* (memorizer) of the Qur'an.

⁴⁶⁰ See an article about her, written by her daughter Khawla al-Hazimi (Umm Ammar), entitled "Al-Asira Umm Suhaib al-Ahmadi fi Sujun Aal-Sa'ud," "Umm Suhaib al-Ahmadi: A Captive in the House of Sa`ud Prisons", October 8, 2011, <http://www.tawawya.ar.nf/?p=650>

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

Her husband was arrested in 2001 and detained for three months. He was detained again in 2002, and was transferred to several prisons before settling in Dhahban Prison in Jeddah.⁴⁶² Her daughter Khawla's husband, Yassir Hamid al-Sa`idi was also detained in 2004 on charges of connection to jihadist groups. Haifaa al-Ahmadi began to take part in the women's campaign calling for the release of detainees (in her case, her husband and son in law). She was arrested in June 2011 and charged with undermining the security of the state and supporting terrorist cells.⁴⁶³

A Special Criminal Court sentenced her to eight years in prison, and barred her from traveling for another eight years after convicting her of various charges, including espousing *takfiri* ideology in violation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, *takfir* (casting judgement as unbelieving infidels) of Arab regimes, her belief in the obligation of fighting in conflict zones, connecting an individual with an Afghan to facilitate the travel of young men to conflict zones, and for providing nearly 80,000 Saudi riyals in installments to facilitate the participation of young men in jihad. She was also accused of receiving funds from other female defendants, uploading print, audio, and visual material related to jihad on internet sites affiliated with jihadist groups.⁴⁶⁴

As for Najwa Hamid al-Sa`idi, known as Umm Sulayman, she is the sister of Yassir al-Sa`idi, the husband of Haifaa al-Ahmadi's daughter Khawla. She holds a master's degree in Islamic Jurisprudence, and was a lecturer at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. She is originally from Mecca, where she was socially known as a writer, religious preacher, and a cultured intellectual.⁴⁶⁵

Al-Sa`idi's story began in 2001, when her husband Khalid al-Harbi was arrested, followed by the arrest of his brother Samir al-Harbi two weeks later, then the arrest of her own brother Muhammad al-Sa`idi. Her other

⁴⁶² See: "Khawla al-Hazimi: Utalib Muhammad bin Nayef bi Itlaq Sarah Walidi wa Walidati" "Khawla al-Hazimi: I Call on Prince Muhammad bin Nayef to Release My Father and Mother", *Aafaq*, September 2, 2011, http://www.aafaq.org/news.aspx?id_news=8777

⁴⁶³ See: Huda al-Saleh, "Nisaa' al-Irhab `Ashr Sanawat Bayna Dahalaz al-Internet wa Saradib al-Yaman" "Women of Terrorism: Ten Years Between the Internet Chambers and the Underground Tunnels of Yemen", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 16, 2013.

⁴⁶⁴ Maryam al-Sughayyar wa Su`ad al-Shamrani, "Najlaa' al-Rumi's Connection with Arwa al-Baghdadi is Strong," op. cit., Also see: "Saudi Repression Reaches Unprecedented Level in Detention of Women," op. cit.

⁴⁶⁵ See: "The Women of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Their Organizational Role," op. cit.

brother Hamad al-Sa`idi was arrested shortly after in 2003. Then successively, her brothers Imad and Yassir al-Sa`idi were also arrested, in addition to her brother-in-law Hasan Bawazir (husband of her sister Maram).⁴⁶⁶

In 2003, Najwa al-Sa`idi was arrested and detained for two days in an effort to pressure one of her brothers (accused of terrorist acts) to surrender himself. She was arrested again in June 2011, along with her sister Maram, from their home in Mecca for their participation in the women's campaign of protests demanding the release of detainees.⁴⁶⁷

In reviewing the media leaks about al-Sa`idi's arrest, there weren't any clear or specific charges against her to merit her arrest. The reports, however, mention the authorities' concern over her connection to *takfiri* thought. She was tried by the Special Criminal Court (that tries terrorism cases) in 2014 and sentenced to six years in prison. Her husband Khalid al-Harbi was sentenced to the time he already served in prison, but was not released despite the court's ruling. Her brother Hamad was sentenced to 23 years in prison, and her brother Yassir was sentenced to six years in prison, despite having already served 10 years.

Najwa al-Sa`idi and Haifaa al-Ahmadi share many characteristics in common; they are both interested in culture, knowledge, and education. Najwa earned her master's degree and worked as a lecturer, and although Haifaa prepared her master's thesis, she nevertheless never earned her degree, but turned instead to lecturing and giving religious lessons in Qur'an centers in Mecca. They both live in the same neighborhood in Mecca, are close friends, and both their husbands have been detained for nearly 15 years. Najwa's brothers are also detained, and Haifaa's daughter is married to Najwa's brother, who was also detained over connections to jihadist ideology.

There is a close relationship between the two women, and an intertwine in their families. While they maintained a religious preaching role within the kingdom, they did not reach the radical extent of *nafir* and *hijra*

⁴⁶⁶ See the video report on the detainees of the same family in "Asra al-Sa`idi fi Sujun al-Mabahith" "Detainees of Al-Sa`idi Family in the Investigations' Department (Intelligence) Prisons", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txtvWCEOCPA>

⁴⁶⁷ "Al-Sulutat al-Sa`udiyya Ta'taqil Imra'a li al-Dhaght `ala Akhiha al-Matloub" "Saudi Authorities Arrests a Woman to Pressure Her Wanted Brother", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, May 26, 2003. Also see: "Sayidat Qadahuna 'al-Fikr al-Dhaal' ila Khalf al-Qudhban" "Women's Misguided Thought Leads Them to Behind Bars", *Al-Madina*, April 19, 2012, <http://www.al-madina.com/article/149941/>

that the women of Buraydah reached. It may be construed that the family circumstances and personal experiences of both women played major roles in placing them in a context close to the Jihadi Salafist current in the kingdom, which ultimately led to their arrest, trial, and imprisonment.

8. The Neo-Female Jihadists: From Al-Qaeda to the ‘Islamic State’

Until 2014, most of the charges brought against alleged female jihadists in Saudi Arabia were related to their affiliation with Al-Qaeda. In most cases, the charges are made in connection to the affiliation of their husbands, brothers, or male relatives to Al-Qaeda, prior to the emergence of IS in its newest form as the ‘Islamic Caliphate’ and its eventual split with Al-Qaeda in 2013. Since then, the label of *Da`esh* or the Islamic State Organization began to emerge clearly in the charges brought against male and female detainees. This coincided with IS claiming responsibility for several attacks within the kingdom, such as the bombings of Shiite mosques, the attack on an Army mosque, and another attack on an emergency center in Medina.

The role of the new generation of jihadist women, or women who espouse jihadist ideology, in this new wave that saw their shift from Al-Qaeda to IS varied in form and quality, including media and mobilization propaganda, traveling or attempting to travel to conflict zones, directly participating in the fighting, or indirectly by providing logistical support. Three main models represent the new dimensions the phenomenon of female Saudi jihadism has taken in recent years, they include:

The First Model: Media Propaganda and Mobilization

Umm Uwais is the first woman to be tried in Saudi Arabia on charges of pledging allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Her real name is unknown, but the official narrative of the Saudi authorities notes that she was 27 years old at the time of arrest, holds a graduate degree, is from `Un-aiza governorate, and that she was influenced by her maternal uncle during her visits to him in prison, where he was held over charges of connections to Al-Qaeda.

With her uncle's influence (where she used to smuggle written pieces of paper from him to outside the prison), she became active on the internet, communicating with the online accounts of jihadists and supporters of jihadist groups, and began advocating for the release of jihadist detainees. She would hang leaflets in `Unaiza calling for supporting the detainees (the campaign of 'Release the Captives'). She had online contacts with an account by the name of *Munasiroun* (Supporters), accused by Saudi authorities of inciting protests and demonstrations.

The qualitative transformation (based on the official narrative) is Umm Uwais' shift from supporting Al-Qaeda to pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi and celebrating IS' operations in the kingdom. She allegedly communicated with IS members online and asked them about how to pledge her allegiance and loyalty to IS and its leader.

Umm Uwais is described as an activist and computer expert. At the request of IS, she produced videos of debates between IS and Ahrar al-Sham group, which IS later published online. She also produced documentary films about jihadist detainees in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶⁸

Another case is that of al-Muhajirah, a 25-year-old Saudi woman whose real name is not publicly known. She finished high school, and was also influenced by her maternal uncle who was serving a nine-year prison sentence. She celebrated her brother's departure to Yemen, where he joined Al-Qaeda. She had made contacts with Abd al-Majid al-Shihri (Wafaa' al-Shihri's nephew in AQAP in Yemen), who informed her of Arwa Baghdadi's arrival in Yemen and her joining Al-Qaeda.

She is known as *al-Muhajirah* (the migrant) because she had been estranged and hiding from her family for nearly a year, because of disagreements with her father who rejected her jihadist thought. She was arrested and tried by the Special Criminal Court in early 2016, which issued an initial ruling against her and sentenced her to six years in prison, convicting her of working as a media arm for Al-Qaeda and IS and espousing *takfir* of the Saudi regime and royal family.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ "Man Hiya al-Da'ishiyya al-Sa'udiyya Umm Uwais Warithat Umm al-Rabab?" "Who Is the Saudi IS Member Umm Uwais, The Successor of Umm al-Rabab?", *Dar al-Akhbar*, October 10, 2015, goo.gl/Eiyp5u

⁴⁶⁹ "Al-Sa'udiyya Tasjin Muwatina Ishtabsharat Bikhuruj Shaqiqiha li Sira` al-Yaman" "Saudi Arabia Jails a Female Citizen Who Rejoiced Her Brother Leaving to Join the Conflict in Yemen", *Erem News*, January

The Second Model: Nafir and Hijra

This model is represented by women who took the *nafir* decision to physically depart for jihad in conflict zones and to migrate there. One example is a woman who became known in the media as “The divorcee of Sajir.” She is a 40-year old divorced woman who lived and worked as a teacher in Sajir, an area northwest of the capital Riyadh. She arrived in al-Raqqa in Syria in June 2015 with her three children (a girl aged 15, and two boys aged 13 and 11).⁴⁷⁰

According to the Saudi official account, the woman took a vow to witness the month of Ramadan that year in al-Raqqa (the land of the caliphate). Upon arriving there, she announced her intention to carry out a suicide attack.

According to Saudi security sources, the woman is known for her religious extremist tendencies. She had been detained in al-Ha’ir Prison in Riyadh for publicly supporting jihadists. It is in prison that her relationship with the activist women of al-Qassim solidified.

On how she managed to leave for Syria, she had gone to Mecca with her children, mother, and brothers to perform *umrah* (lesser pilgrimage) in June 2015. From there, she evaded her family and left with her children. Hours later, she contacted her mother and told her that she was in King Abdulaziz Airport in Jeddah, en route to Syria.⁴⁷¹

A second example is Hind Ali al-Qurashi, a college student at Ta’if University who left school before completing her education (reportedly out of fear of being kidnapped by intelligence forces for questioning). She left for Yemen in early 2014, she was 24 years old at the time. She is married to Ahmad `Awadh al-Qurashi (31 years old), who has been detained since 2012 without trial. The couple are residents of the city of al-Ta’if in Mecca gov-

26, 2016, <http://www.aremnews.com/news/arab-world/gcc/422923>

⁴⁷⁰ See the report: “Mulakhas Dirasa Akadimiyya `an al-Tattaruf al-Nisaa’i” “Summary of an Academic Study on Female Extremism”, *Assakina*, October 20, 2015, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news1/78951.html#ixzz4PbwKxVdz>

⁴⁷¹ Issa al-Shamani, “Mu`alima Sa` udiyya Mutalqa Tahrub bi Atfaliha min Makkah ila Da`ish” “Divorced Saudi Teacher Escapes with Her Children from Mecca to IS”, *Al-Hayat*, July 2, 2015, <https://goo.gl/q3GQC>

ernorate.⁴⁷²

According to the scarce information known about her, her husband was abroad and was wanted by the authorities. Hind was repeatedly interrogated by intelligence services until her husband returned to Saudi Arabia and was arrested in 2012. She was later arrested in August 2014, and is believed to be detained in Dhahban Prison in Jeddah.⁴⁷³

A third example is a female visual artist. Saudi authorities refuse to reveal her name (as is the case with many others). She is 28 years old and holds a bachelor's degree in Art Education. She has previously participated in art exhibitions in Riyadh, and was – according to her father – a liberal open-minded person who loved art and drawing. She was previously married, but after problems with her husband, she insisted on getting a divorce and returned to her family home.

Her father worked as a government employee in a local municipality before resigning a few years ago. She has two brothers and one sister.

Since her divorce and return to her family home in Riyadh, her father began to notice signs of religious extremism in her behavior. She was trying to impose a pattern of religiosity on her family. Her father notes that she “remained isolated, avoided socializing with others, spent long hours browsing the internet before she began to move slowly and take initiative and control in the house, imposing her extremism, deleting all news and arts and entertainment channels, and keeping only the religious channels,” which left him “confused,” according to his narrative.⁴⁷⁴

Her father adds that he was shocked one day while going through her cell phone that she saved audio and video files of battles fought by terrorist groups. In confronting her, she said that she had watched them by coincidence, and that she doesn't believe in the legitimacy of the horrific scenes in the videos.

The father believed that his daughter was hiding something out of

⁴⁷² See some details on her case in the report “Al-Suwayd.. Hikayat Intihari Sa`udi Ikhtaratuh al-Qur`a li Tafjir Nafsih” “Al-Suwayd: The Story of a Saudi Suicide Bomber Chosen by a Toss to Blow Himself Up”, *Al-Hayat*, August 2, 2014.

⁴⁷³ See the following link on the “kidnapping of Saudi women” hashtag, <https://justpaste.it/jkkah>

⁴⁷⁴ Issa al-Shamani, “Sa`udiyya Tatrak al-Fan al-Tajmili li Tandam ila al-Tanzim” “A Saudi Female Leaves Visual Arts to Join IS”, *Al-Hayat*, December 13, 2015, <https://goo.gl/D45bxH>

fear that he would report her or threaten to ground her at home, as he had done before. He tried to get one of his religious relatives to talk to her about her extremist thoughts, but she rejected the counseling attempts. In mid-2015, she asked his permission to go to Mecca to perform *`umrah* with a group of female acquaintances she knew from Qur'anic memorization circles. Ultimately, the group of females accompanied the 'visual artist' from Riyadh to Jeddah to Turkey, and upon arriving in IS territories, she sent a text message to her father informing him of her arrival in Syria and joining IS.⁴⁷⁵

The Third Model: Involvement in Operations

The name of Abeer Abdullah al-Harbi was revealed in the context of the Saudi authorities' investigation into the attack on the Abha Emergency Forces' Mosque in the southern region of *`Asir*, which took place on August 6th, 2014 and killed 15 Saudi soldiers and injured 33 others. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to Saudi security authorities, Abeer is the wife of Fahd Falah al-Harbi, who planned and supervised the suicide attack with an IS-affiliated cell. The husband reportedly put the explosive belt used in the attack under her feet while transporting it in his car from Riyadh to *`Asir*. The authorities considered her role logistical support to her husband, who was later detained.⁴⁷⁶

There is no further explanation or details about Abeer al-Harbi, whether she shared her husband's jihadist ideology, had a criminal record, or whether she knew about the explosive belt or not.

Another case is that of Banan Issa Hilal, a Saudi woman who was killed when Saudi security forces raided an apartment harboring fugitives, including Sweilem al-Ruwaili, in al-Jawf region on March 13th, 2016. According to the authorities, Hilal 'initiated' by firing on the security forces from a machine gun, which led to her injury and eventually her death.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ "Al-Dakhiliyya: Tafjir Masjid Tawari' Abha bimusa'adat Jundi Kha'in Baa'a Watanah" "Abha Emergency Forces' Mosque Blown Up with the Help of a Traitor Soldier", Al-Madina, February 1, 2016. Also see Omar al-Dhabayban, "Zawjan wa Khiyanat Jundi.. Khalifa Irbah Masjid Tawari' `Asir" "A Married Couple and a Traitorous Soldier behind the Terror Attack on `Asir's Emergency Forces' Mosque", Al-Hayat, February 1, 2016.

The security forces did not know of her presence in the apartment, since she had disappeared from her family home over a year and a half before the raid. Reasons for her disappearance are unknown, and the authorities did not reveal whether she had been wanted or was a fugitive. During the raid, the apartment owner and al-Ruwaili were also arrested in connection to terror operations in the kingdom.

Official records indicate that Hilal was married to a man who was fighting in a ‘conflict zone,’ believed to be Syria. However, al-Ruwaili alleges that he married Hilal a few months before the raid, and that the apartment owner was a witness to their matrimony. Investigations revealed that Banan Hilal is the daughter of a wanted Saudi jihadist, Issa Hilal al-Ruwaili (goes by the nom de guerre Abu Hamza al-Tabuki), who was tried in absentia in Jordan in 2014 and sentenced to 15 years in prison on charges of belonging to an Al-Qaeda affiliated cell that plotted attacks in Jordan. The father is believed to be in Syria fighting alongside IS.⁴⁷⁷

What is new in this model – although the details of the incident are vague and limited, emerging only from the authorities’ narrative – is that Banan Hilal directly and physically took part in the incident by attempting to fire on security forces. The story of her unofficial marriage to al-Ruwaili is also obscure, as it is an unusual case in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Jihadi Salafist community, amid a lack of any *fatwa* that would support an undocumented marriage in the case that the husband is alive and abroad, or the scenario that the husband divorces the wife in order to give her freedom of movement, for example, with another fugitive, considering the need for a mahram for women to travel.

A third example is Khulood Muhammed Mansur al-Rukaibi, known as Umm Muhammad, a Saudi woman in her forties, has four sons and two daughters, believed to have only completed elementary school. According to leaks by Saudi authorities, al-Rukaibi’s husband has a “weak personality, and

⁴⁷⁷ See the report “Banan Issa Hilal,” *Assakina*, April 30, 2016, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news1/88117.html> Also see: “Al-Sa’udiyya: Al-Qabdh `ala Al-Ruwaili al-Mutawarrit bi Ahdath al-Dalwa” “Saudi Arabia: Capture of Al-Ruwaili, who was Involved in the Dalwa Attacks”, *Al-Arabiya Net*, March 13, 2016, <http://ara.tv/y57vu> “Ma`loumat Jadida `an Banan Hilal..Sa`udiyya wa Ibnat Matloub li al-Amn al-Urduni” “New Information on Banan Hilal: A Saudi National and the Daughter of a Person Wanted by Jordanian Security Authorities”, *Al-Weeam*, March 16, 2016, <https://goo.gl/t51FDh> “Al-Luwa’ al-Turki li al-Arabiya Net: Banan Hilal Sa`udiyat al-Jinsiyya” “Major General al-Turki to Al-Arabiya Net: Banan Hilal is a Saudi Citizen”, *Al-Arabiya Net*, March 13, 2016, <http://ara.tv/p5t5f>

is negligent of his family.”⁴⁷⁸

Al-Rukaibi was arrested in September 2016 and charged with plotting to carry out terror attacks in Saudi Arabia targeting religious figures, security forces, and vital oil installations. Saudi authorities had announced in September 2016 dismantling an IS-affiliated cell of 17 individuals, including Khulood al-Rukaibi and her two sons Hamad Abdullah al-Musa and Nassar Abdullah al-Musa, in addition to her brother Nasir al-Rukaibi.⁴⁷⁹

Saudi authorities claim that Khulood has a central and pivotal role in propagating IS ideology, and in directly participating in their operations by encouraging and pushing her sons to carry out attacks, and that she physically took part in the plots and preparations for the attacks. She reportedly equipped one of her sons to carry out a suicide attack inside the kingdom, under the guidance of her other son who is fighting with IS in Syria.⁴⁸⁰

A fourth example is Umm `Atika, as she is known on social networking sites. Saudi authorities accuse her of being a member of an IS-affiliated cell that consists of nine Saudi citizens active in propagating IS ideology on the internet. Umm `Atika was arrested in April 2015 and accused of attempting to participate in a combat operation by attempting to lure a Saudi soldier and kill him. The plot failed and the woman was arrested. The Saudi authorities did not disclose further details about the incident.⁴⁸¹

Remarks

The Evolution of Saudi Female Jihadism: Conditions and Factors

The basic structure for understanding the rise of Saudi female jihad-

⁴⁷⁸ “Man Hiya al-Da`ishiyya Khulood al-Rukaibi” “Who is the IS Member Khulood al-Rukaibi”, Assakina, September 22, 2016, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news1/92772.html#ixzz4Pbru5DE9>

⁴⁷⁹ “Al-Dakhiliyya: Al-Qabdh `ala Shabaka Irhabiyya Tadhun 17 Fardan Baynahum Imra’a” “Interior Ministry: Capture of a Terror Network Involving 17 Individuals, Including One Woman”, Al-Masara Online, September 19, 2016, goo.gl/z6jWnO

⁴⁸⁰ “Man Hiya al-Da`ishiyya Khulood al-Rukaibi” “Who is the IS Member Khulood al-Rukaibi”, op. cit. Also see “Al-Dakhiliyya: 12 `Amaliyya Fashila wa Suri Yukhatit li Tafjir Madinat al-Amn al-`Aam” “Interior Ministry: 12 Failed Attacks and a Syrian Plots to Blow Up the Public Security City”, Assakina, September 21, 2016, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/92724.html#ixzz4QjB1iZ00>

⁴⁸¹ See: “Al-Qabdh `ala 93 Shakhsan Baynahum Imra’a Dhimna Khalaya Tabi`a li Da`ish” “Capture of 93 Individuals Including One Woman in IS-affiliated Cells”, *Al-Riyadh*, April 28, 2015.

ism is the concept of the “social club” – as dubbed by French-American anthropologist Scott Atran, that is; first, the primary network of social relations, including parents, siblings, spouses, children, and aunts and uncles, then the clusters of interface relationships that form based on the primary network, such as intermarriage, friendships, neighbors, and social activities shared among these groups.⁴⁸² Female jihadism has become an essential component of the jihadist community that has formed in Saudi Arabia, from the jihadist men, to their wives, mothers, sisters, and children as well.

This network of relationships is observed on several levels: First, kinship. In the majority of the cases discussed in this context, siblings (mostly brothers, but also sisters) were an important factor in influencing the female jihadists, such as the cases of Wafaa al-Shihri, Arwa Baghdadi, Amina al-Rashid, Haifaa al-Ahmadi, Najwa al-Sa`idi, Hanan Samkari, and al-Muhajirah. Second, the influence of husbands: most of the husbands of women discussed in this context are alleged jihadist fighters, supporters, or detained on charges of connections to jihadism, such as the cases of Rima al-Jraish, May al-Talaq, and Nada al-Qahtani. In some cases, the influence comes from both brothers and husbands, as in the case of Arwa Baghdadi, Haifaa al-Ahmadi, Wafaa al-Shihri, and Najwa al-Sa`idi. In cases where the husband does not approve or share his wife’s jihadist ideology, this can be grounds for divorce and later marriage to another man who shares this inclination, as in the cases of Wafaa al-Yahya, Amina al-Rashid, and the divorcee of Sajir. In several cases, we witness influence from third-degree kinship, such as the detained uncles of Umm Uwais and al-Muhajirah.

Mothers also play a significant role in inciting and indoctrinating their children in jihadist ideology, as in the cases of Hanan Samkari and Khulood al-Rukaibi, both of whom allegedly incited their sons to partake in jihadist operations. Women also have an influence in inciting their sons or brothers to embark on *nafir* and *hijra*, to physically depart to conflict zones, especially after enduring arrests and detention inside the kingdom as a result of their family relationships, such as the case with Muhammad al-Talaq (May al-Talaq’s brother), and Mu`az al-Hameli (Rima al-Jraish’s son), both of whom were arrested for helping their female relatives in the campaign of protests in support of detainees.

⁴⁸² For more details, see: Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Religion, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*, New York, NY: Ecco Press, 2011.

Saudi authorities cast charges on female Saudi jihadists in connection to attacks that took place inside the kingdom in which male relatives are suspected of involvement. May al-Talaq's name emerged in connection to the bombing of al-Qadih Mosque in al-Qatif, where her 15-year-old brother Abdullah was mentioned as a suspect in the attack. Nada al-Qahtani's name emerged in connection to a bombing involving her brother Julaybib. In another case, Saudi national Fahad Sulayman al-Qabba` carried out a suicide bombing at al-Imam al-Sadiq mosque in Kuwait while his mother Umm Abdullah al-Qabba` was active in the female protests demanding the release of her husband (the suicide bomber's father). Shortly before the Kuwait bombing, Saudi authorities arrested her two sons Abdullah and Abd al-Rahman.⁴⁸³

The relational entanglements and interfaces in the jihadist community are also evident in intermarriages, as is the case of Haifaa al-Ahmadi and Najwa al-Sa`idi (Najwa's brother is married to Haifaa's daughter). Another factor is friendship and neighborly relations, as in the case of two main groups that emerged in Saudi female jihadism: the first is the Buraydah/al-Qassim women, including Haila al-Qusayr, May al-Talaq, Amina al-Rashid, and Rima al-Jraish. The second is the Mecca group, including Arwa Baghdadi, Najwa al-Sa`idi, Haifaa al-Ahmadi, Hanan Samkari, and Najlaa al-Rumi. The groups formed social solidarity networks, reinforcing their activism in the campaign to defend detainees, but also in propagating and inciting further involvement in jihadist activities. There are also groups of women in Riyadh, connected to Wafaa al-Yahya, and other cases in Jeddah, northern governorates, and other regions in the kingdom.

In terms of the educational level, the cases are varied. The majority of the women are educated, and many have earned higher education degrees, such as Wafaa al-Yahya and Najwa al-Sa`idi, both of whom earned master's degrees and lectured in universities. Haila al-Qusayr and Haifaa al-Sa`idi both enrolled in master's programs but did not complete the degrees for their lack of belief in the merit of the diploma. Umm Uwais was also a higher education student, and Bint Najd is described as having earned an 'advanced educational level.' May al-Talaq, Nada al-Qahtani, Hind al-Qurashi, the divorcee of Sajir, and the Visual Artist are all college graduates. Meanwhile, Rima al-Jraish completed high school, while Wafaa al-Shihri left her education in middle school, and Khulood al-Rukaibi only attended elementary school.

⁴⁸³ Huda al-Saleh, "Shabah Umahat Da'ish Khalifa Tafjirat al-Kuwait wa al-Sa`udiyya" "The Phantom of IS Mothers Behind Bombings in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia", *Alarabiya Net*, June 29, 2015, <http://arab.tv/4agwz>

In terms of age, there are relatively different ages, although most of these women were in their twenties and thirties at the time of their involvement and arrest, and some were in their forties. The economic background of the female cases also varies, but most cases appear to come from affluent to well-off and financially comfortable families (upper-middle and lower-middle classes). We do not find, generally, any case in the Saudi female context in which the conditions of poverty or deprivation – in the apparent sense – played a role in the female’s involvement in jihadism.

In sum, the majority of the cases in this context are educated, middle class, influenced by Jihadi Salafist ideology (whether Al-Qaeda or IS) through kinship, in the primary degree, friendship and neighborly relations in the secondary degree, and by linking these connections among individuals of this jihadist community to form a “social club,” the members of which know each other, communicate and coordinate campaigns, protests, and cyber activism. Others were involved together in operations and departure (or attempted departure) to territories controlled by jihadist groups, as in the case of the confrontations at the Wadi al-Dawasir checkpoint where Arwa Baghdadi’s brother Muhammad was killed, and Hanan Samkari’s son al-Yazan al-Jaza’iri was injured, or the case of *nafir* and *hijra* of May al-Talaq and Amina al-Rashid before they were captured at a border region en route to Yemen. For those who succeeded in departing, such as Rima al-Jraish and Arwa Baghdadi, a major role was played by Wafaa al-Shihri in receiving the female migrants in Yemen and helping facilitate their travel to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.

Saudi female jihadists became an essential component of the new jihadist community that formed in Saudi Arabia, a key point to understanding the phenomenon in the kingdom, yet it is also important to recognize that this community was not formed coincidentally or overnight. The phenomenon is part and parcel of the evolution of the overall Saudi jihadist movement, which passed through multiple stages and developed its ideology until it reached its current stage.

The roots of this community began in the era of the Afghan Jihad, where thousands of Saudis participated, some of whom returned and re-integrated into Saudi society, while others remained abroad, fighting in other jihad fronts such as Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kosovo before returning to Afghanistan again after Taliban took control, and particularly with the return

of Osama bin Laden and the founding of Al-Qaeda. During these eras, the wives and families of these fighters were directly affected by the men's decision to join the jihad. Some women accompanied their men to Afghanistan and Yemen, or lived with families of jihadists in Pakistan and other safe havens. Other women were affected upon the return of their husbands and male relatives to Saudi Arabia and their arrest and detention, culminating in the activism of the female-led campaign "*Fukku al-'Aani*" (Release the Captives).

With the eruption of the conflict in Iraq following the US invasion in 2003, the number of Saudi nationals involved in Al-Qaeda and insurgency groups increased, and they constituted the majority of 'migrant' foreign fighters in Iraq. With the escalation of violence in Iraq and Syria, and the emergence of the Islamic State organization and Al-Nusra Front, Saudis became key players and vital elements in these groups, which had further influence on the phenomenon of female Saudi jihadism.

There are no confirmed and precise statistics on the numbers of Saudis who have gone to the battlefields, or the numbers of those who returned, remained there, or were killed there. There are also no confirmed details on the number of Saudis being detained in connection to jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and IS, and terrorism in general. Human rights organizations talk of an alarming number reaching 50,000, while the official Saudi account speaks of around 5,000 detainees. In the end, we are talking about a Saudi jihadist community that includes tens of thousands of Saudi jihadists, their families, women and children, and networks of friends and social relations.

Saudi Arabia's policies contributed significantly to the formation, solidification, and ascendancy of this jihadist community, in more than one aspect. *First*, it initially encouraged Saudi men to join the jihad in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. Thousands of Saudis joined what is dubbed "solidarity jihad," but at the time, they (along with Osama bin Laden) were not espousing the *kufir* of the Saudi state or royal family, or had any hostility towards what came to be known as the 'near enemy' (Arab regimes). But the shift towards hostility began to crystallize with the return of Bin Laden to Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s, the use of U.S. forces (particularly with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1990 Gulf War), the establishment of US military bases in the Gulf states, and the rise of the *Sahrwa* (Awakening) movement represented by religious scholars such as sheikhs Safar al-Hawali

and Salman al-`Odeh and others inside the kingdom.

This stage also witnessed increasing friction between new Islamist generations and the Saudi state, especially with the dissemination of a book written by jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi entitled “*Al-Kawashif al-Jaliyya fi Kufr al-Dawla al-Sa’udiyya*” (The Illuminating Evidence of the Kufr “unbelief” of the Saudi State), written in 1989, which clashed with the perspective of those who fought in the Saudi-backed Afghan jihad, who considered Saudi Arabia to be an Islamic state that implements Islamic Shari`ah. But with the rise of Al-Qaeda and the founding of the Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders in 1998 and the increased influence of the United States in the Arabian Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, al-Maqdisi’s position towards the *kufir* and apostacy of the Saudi state became the adopted position of the Saudi jihadist movement. Al-Qaeda, in a sense, was founded on the basis of confrontation with the Saudi state, which did not genuinely embrace the Islamic model, in the view of jihadists.

The ideological transformations against the Saudi state reached their zenith with the new millennium, particularly following the September 11th, 2001 attacks. Terror attacks inside the Saudi kingdom escalated, killing and injuring Saudi and foreign nationals. Fierce clashes also escalated between jihadists and security forces, leading to thousands of arrests. The Saudi security policies of arrests, detention, and harassment gave rise to the campaign to defend detainees, particularly amid the absence of transparent legal standards, national regulatory and oversight institutions, clear legislations that regulate the processes of detention, trials, and imprisonment, and access to legal representation. In reviewing the provisions of court rulings against detainees, we find that many of the rulings were issued as *ta`zir*, a loose classical Islamic Shari`ah punishment that gives discretion to the judge to determine the type, extent, and length of punishment without any real and transparent controls or regulations.

The Jihadi Salafist current has become a ‘ticking bomb’ in the hands of the Saudi government. Dealing with it has become more difficult, and the number of detainees has increased significantly, many of them have not been charged with any legally-specific charges, and have been serving long prison sentences without institutional and legal references that regulate the security and judicial fields. All this has generated and reinforced the dynamics of the female jihadist movement in the kingdom, the development and spread

of which are difficult to understand without linking it to the issue of jihadist detainees there. After all, the phenomenon grew out of a personal dimension; the detainees are the husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons of these women.

Moreover, the Saudi authorities' handling of the wives and female relatives of detainees, and the handling of protests and activism in the physical and cyber spaces in relation to this movement, had a major role in fueling the tensions between the two parties; the families and the state, culminating in the arrest and detention of women and children, accusations of mistreatment, beatings, and humiliation in detention, all of which contributed to further involvement of women in jihadist activities. This was reflected in a chaotic media handling of the developments, between state-backed media outlets that vilified the women, and jihadist-backed media propaganda that vilified the state. Female jihadist activism on the internet also significantly increased, with screen names and trending hashtags that expressed the dynamics of the conflict between the state and the jihadist current. This conflict received widespread attention and interaction from Saudi society, particularly on Twitter, one of the most popular social networking sites among Saudis. Women of the detainees, many of whom themselves later became detainees, succeeded in publicizing and promoting their cause and publishing videos and information about the male and female detainees, which further increased the pressure on the Saudi government.

This media battle and the political confrontations between the two sides played an active role in generating the phenomenon of the Saudi female jihadism, which engaged in a real challenge with the authorities. The government and its media began to accuse women of being terrorists, followers of the 'misguided category,' and of affiliation with Al-Qaeda and IS, prompting the women to react with harsh rhetoric against the state, a rhetoric more akin to that of Al-Qaeda against the Saudi state and the royal family, with particular emphasis of attacking the character of then Minister of Interior, Muhammad bin Nayef, who had jurisdiction over the cases. Bin Nayef survived an assassination attempt by a suicide bomber in 2009, and later negotiated the release of jihadist detainees in 2012, including several female detainees.

This phenomenon is unprecedented in the ultra-conservative Saudi society, where women have no place in public spaces and are still not allowed to drive, and where key determinants are imposed to control their work, clothing, and public behavior. Through this phenomenon, names and nicknames

of jihadist females were popularized in the media and in cyberspace. This perhaps explains the specificity of the Saudi case, compared to other cases such as Tunisia, where we do not find prominent names of female jihadists. The case of female Saudi jihadist activism manifested bipolarity in the reaction of the media and society, between those who vilified them and those who sympathized with their cause.

The conflict was exacerbated by the absence of independent civil society and human rights organizations in Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities considered any activity in support of the male or female detainees – even on the level of human rights’ advocacy – to be tantamount to inciting sedition, disobedience to the ruler, and overstepping the authority of the state. In this context, founders of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (HASM, founded in 2009)⁴⁸⁴ were arrested and some received lengthy prison sentences. In 2013, a Special Criminal Court ordered dissolving the association, confiscation of its properties, and considered its activities illegal.⁴⁸⁵

The position of the Saudi authorities towards ‘electronic campaigns’ advocating the causes of jihadist male – then female – detainees was no different. Mere browsing or engaging in discussions on sites affiliated with the campaign, such as the sites *Y’tiqal* (Detention) and *Munasiroun* (Supporters), became itself a charge that may lead to arrest and detention. Support for the cause of detainees, particularly female detainees, by opposition media outlets became tantamount to evidence to condemn these detainees of pro-jihadist activities, as was the case with Arwa al-Baghdadi when discussed by a London-based YouTube channel run by Sa`ad al-Faqih, a known Saudi opposition figure.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁴ The Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights was founded in 2009 by 11 rights activists, mostly academics, aimed to defend human rights in Saudi Arabia. The association was shut down and its properties confiscated by a court order. Some of its members were sentenced to prison on charges of establishing an illegal association.

⁴⁸⁵ For more information on the association, see “Al-Mamlaka al-`Arabiya al-Sa`udiyya: Istimrar al-Istihdaf al-Mumanhaj li A`dhaa’ Jam`iyyat al-Huquq al-Madaniyya wa al-Siyasiyya fi al-Sa`udiyya” “Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Continued Systemized Targeting of Members of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights”, Saudi Organization for Rights and Freedoms, January 30, 2016, <http://www.saorf.org/?p=453>

Also see a varying perspective on the association at Assakina website, affiliated with Saudi authorities, in the report entitled “Jam`iyyat al-Huquq al-Madaniyya wa al-Siyasiyya (HASM)” “The Association for Civil and Political Rights ‘HASM’”, Assakina, March 10, 2014, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/22693.html>

⁴⁸⁶ See: “Qadiyat Arwa Baghdadi... wa Musharakaat al-Jumhour,” “The Case of Arwa Baghdadi... And the

It cannot be ascertained that the Saudi authorities' handling of the case of male jihadi detainees, then their wives and female relatives, is alone what led to the transition of these women from the context of political activism in support of detainees to the context of becoming themselves jihadists. But what can be directly deduced from these stories is that the actions and policies of the authorities towards the detainees indeed contributed to the emergence and rise of the phenomenon of female Saudi jihadism and escalated their hostility towards the state, manifested in the decision of a number of them to migrate and depart abroad, join jihadists groups in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, or simply become cyber jihadists.

A paradox in this context is that despite the lack of clear legal and human rights' standards for criminal trials in terrorism-related cases, and in the handling of the detainees' issue, nonetheless, Saudi authorities allowed and facilitated an element prohibited in many other countries; that is, conjugal visitation. This facilitation alleviated some dimensions of the problem, but exacerbated it in other dimensions, as it allowed many of the detainees from behind bars to get married and form families that from the outset felt deprived of the husband and father, families that came to form solidarity networks that ultimately expanded the base of the Saudi jihadist community.

The specificity of the Saudi case vis-à-vis the phenomenon of jihadism in general is paradoxical. Saudi Arabia contributed to the rise of the phenomenon through a series of foreign and domestic policies and inclinations across the previous few decades. In foreign policy, Saudi Arabia adopted the cause of jihad in Afghanistan, opened the door wide for thousands of young Saudis to go fight there, it also offered wide support for Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya and opened the door wide for volunteer and charity work that also facilitated the departure of Saudis for battle fronts. Politically and diplomatically, it later embraced the cause of Sunni Muslims in confronting the 'Iranian expansionist and interventionist project,' through a political-religious inciting discourse, which encouraged large numbers of Saudis to depart to conflict zones where Iranian influence was growing, such as Iraq and Yemen. While state-sponsored religious figures instigated this jihadist activism, they would soon turn their backs and shift towards criminalizing (legally and religiously) affiliation with jihadist groups, once jihadist discourse turned against the Saudi state itself.

Audience's Participation", May 21, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdTVgThObpg>

Domestically, the specificity of the Saudi situation manifested in the influence wielded by the Salafist school of thought, and the reciprocal power relationship between it and the Saudi regime, and the state's adoption of Salafism in educational, religious, cultural, and legislative policies. This made the process of transition from state-sponsored Traditional Salafism to Jihadi Salafism not so difficult, since both ideologies stem from common roots and religious authoritative references. While traditional Salafism adhered to non-interference in politics, obedience to the rulers, and prohibited political and oppositional activism, such adherence was growing difficult to actualize amid the Saudi state's domestic and foreign policies that facilitated and encouraged the contrary, but exclusively abroad.

Both Traditional Salafism and Jihadi Salafism share common ideological, jurisprudential, and religious grounds. They agree on the rejectionist position toward democracy and political pluralism, and the position toward Shiites (ranging from considering them 'misguided' Muslims to outright *takfir* in considering them non-Muslim infidels). Both trends espouse implementation of Islamic Shari`ah in its Wahhabi version. The area of common grounds is large and wide, while the differences lie in practical details, such as the position toward the Saudi government and the United States. Hence, it is quite a difficult task for Saudi authorities to build a religious and political narrative counter to that of Al-Qaeda, IS, and Jihadi Salafism in general, because the legitimacy of the state itself stands on the fundamentals of the same Wahhabi Salafi school of thought upon which Al-Qaeda and IS are founded.

Some scholars believe that the jurisprudential and ideological sources of jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda and IS do not stop at the limits of the Salafi school, but extend to sources of the overall Islamic jurisprudential heritage. This is true in whole, but it remains that the Salafi school in particular is the most influential source in the jihadist ideology espoused by Al-Qaeda and IS. This will be discussed further in the next chapter through the analysis of the model of Iman al-Bugha, who declared in an essay: "I am a Daeshite (IS supporter) before Daesh (IS) existed."

In moving from the conditions and factors behind the rise of Saudi female jihadism to the main features of this phenomenon, we find a set of common features that characterize the case of Jihadi Salafism in general, both males and females. First is the apparent ease and smooth transition

from jihadist inclination, to support for Al-Qaeda, and then support for IS. Since the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria in 2013, the number of cases of females being arrested and tried for affiliation with IS has grown significantly, and in many cases, the same women being monitored and tried for Al-Qaeda affiliation are now being hunted for their support of IS, as is the case of Rima al-Jraish and others, without real solid boundaries to demarcate the transition between the two stages.

Furthermore, we find that most Saudi detainees for which the campaign of activism was launched were affiliated with Al-Qaeda (based on the charges and official narrative). But we are growingly seeing their wives and children migrating and joining IS, despite the schism and bitter conflicts that erupted between the two groups in Iraq and Syria. We witness this in the case of Rima al-Jraish, who went to Syria to fight with her son alongside IS, while her husband is detained in Saudi Arabia for affiliation with Al-Qaeda. Meanwhile, her friend Wafaa-al-Shihri, who hosted al-Jraish in Yemen while she was en route to Syria, is affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and is the wife of the organization's second-in-command, Sa' id al-Shihri, who was killed in Yemen.

Another striking feature is the transformation in the role of the jihadist woman, from a mere wife who may join her husband in migrating to jihad fronts without carrying out any particular jihadist role, to the virtual activist on the internet propagating jihadist discourse and support for jihadist groups, to the extent that Saudi official statistics estimate that 40 percent of Saudi jihadist online forums are run by women. Women's jihadist role progressed to logistical support, and even to direct engagement in confrontations with Saudi authorities, and *nafir* and *hijra* to battle fronts.

Paradoxically, some of the Saudi women departing abroad to join jihadist groups are leaving without a *mahram*, a male relative of the first degree, in a country where women are still not allowed to drive, and in the context of a general Salafist discourse that continues to discourage women's travel alone. This led many of the jihadist women to bring along in their travels their younger brothers, mostly minors, who would serve as their *mahrams* since they have reached adolescence, which is considered by jihadist to be the age of manhood.

Chapter Three

Female Jihadi Ideologues: The Case of Iman al-Bugha

“I left my huge salary and joined the service of the Islamic Ummah to fight the unjust tyrants” - Iman al-Bugha

Iman al-Bugha's name was not widely known before she declared her migration to Mosul in October 2014 by way of al-Raqqa. It was however known that her father, Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha, is one of the most prominent religious scholars in Damascus whose silence towards the revolution-turned-civil-war in Syria was perceived to be in support of the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Hailing from a scholarly family, Iman al-Bugha's brothers and sisters are also prominent figures in Islamic scholarship, holding doctoral degrees in Islamic Shari`ah sciences. Her brother Muhammad al-Hassan al-Bugha was the Dean of the Faculty of Shari`ah at Damascus University, and is also perceived to be in support of al-Assad's regime. Iman herself earned a PhD degree in Shari`ah Sciences from Damascus University, and was a professor of Islamic Law at the University of Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

This chapter discusses the unique case of a female Shari`ah professor, daughter of a prominent religious scholarly family, who turned into a prominent jihadi ideologue, left her well-paying job at a prestigious Saudi university, and joined the Islamic State Organization in Mosul, all the while her extended family renounced her *takfiri* thought and forsaken her for joining IS.

Meanwhile, a 15-year-old girl who goes by the pseudonym Ahlam al-Nasr, known within IS circles as the "poetess of jihad," declared arriving in the 'land of the caliphate' and marrying prominent jihadi leader Abu Osama al-Gharib, an Austrian of Egyptian origin fighting alongside IS in Syria. News reports soon began to connect the dots, claiming that the poetess is the daughter of none other than Dr. Iman al-Bugha. In the context of this study, we cannot ascertain this claim, considering that al-Bugha herself indirectly denied that Ahlam al-Nasr is her daughter. Her denial however was not categorical, leading us to believe that – in the case that Ahlam is her daughter – the denial was made for security reasons to protect her daughter.

In June 2016, al-Bugha's son Mustafa, known as Abu al-Hassan al-Dimashqi, was reportedly killed in confrontations in Syria while fighting alongside IS. He was 15 years old at the time, and had migrated to al-Raqqa at age 13.

An important aspect to be explored here in the life of Iman al-Bugha

and her decision to join IS and migrate along with her children is whether her decision came as a result of swift transformations in her ideological views, or social and psychological factors, or was a decision that compounded and crystallized over time.

The significance of al-Bugha's model lies not only in her advanced educational level and renowned social background, but also in her prominent position in IS' legal and jurisprudential apparatus. She is viewed as the icon of female jihadism within IS, and is exceptionally active in espousing jihadi ideology, particularly on social media, compared to many other IS members who are prohibited from using these online networks upon arriving in IS territories.⁴⁸⁷ She became known as the ideological and jurisprudential 'lawyer' representing IS and its political positions. She presents an idealistic depiction of life inside the territories, and engages avidly in responding to criticisms targeting IS, particularly from rival jihadi groups.

This chapter seeks to analyze the model of Dr. al-Bugha, search beyond the reasons of her joining IS and into her intellectual, political, and ideological positions that manifest her jihadist convictions. It also looks at the influence of her social and religious milieu, represented by her father and brothers, in addition to her children.

Family and Social Upbringing

Although Iman al-Bugha's family, particularly her father, is well-known in Syria and other parts of the Arab world, yet little is known about their private lives, especially when it relates to Iman's nuclear family, where basic information about them such as her husband's name remain missing.⁴⁸⁸

This does not preclude our quest to draw a closer picture with the available information and sources about her social environment and family upbringing, then about her religious and intellectual journey prior to her *nafir* to IS-territories. We are aided in this attempt by her avid and direct ex-

⁴⁸⁷ IS issued a memo on June 26, 2014 prohibiting its members from communicating with media outlets or social networking sites without obtaining prior permission from the leadership, with the exception of a few officials tasked with media and propaganda roles.

⁴⁸⁸ The authors attempted repeatedly to communicate with the family through social networking sites to obtain basic information. The family evaded the attempts, and refused to answer simple questions about her husband's name and whereabouts, particularly after al-Bugha's migration to Mosul.

position of her views and positions on her accounts on Facebook and Twitter after her migration.

Iman al-Bugha is estimated to be in her forties, according to sources close to the family.⁴⁸⁹ Her father, Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha, had four wives and many children. Among the well-known siblings of Iman are Dr. Muhammad al-Hassan al-Bugha (the eldest child, earned a PhD from the University of Jordan and later became the Dean of the Shari`ah Faculty at Damascus University), Dr. Anas al-Bugha (active in *da`wa* and religious preaching alongside his father in Syria and abroad), her sisters Dr. Hanan al-Bugha (who lives with her husband in Saudi Arabia, both are Islamic Shari`ah professors), Dr. Sumaya al-Bugha (married to Dr. Bassam al-Shaykh, both are Shari`ah professors at Damascus University), and Dr. Asma al-Bugha (who lives with her husband in Turkey). In addition to the scholarly family, Iman's circle of brothers-in-law are also well-known in Damascene circles as Shari`ah professors, most of them having been students and disciples of Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha.⁴⁹⁰

The father, Mustafa al-Bugha, was born in 1938 and lived in al-Midan neighborhood in Damascus. He graduated in 1953 from the Islamic Guidance Institute, founded by prominent Damascene religious scholar Shaykh Hasan Habanaka al-Midani. He then earned a bachelor's degree in Islamic Shari`ah from Damascus University, and went on to earn master's and PhD degrees in *Usul al-Fiqh* (Fundamentals of Islamic Jurisprudence) from al-Azhar University in Cairo. He then returned to teach at the Faculty of Shari`ah at Damascus University from 1978 to 2000.

Dr. Mustafa is known as a traditionalist scholar with keen interest in classical *fiqh* and verification of jurisprudential and doctrinal manuscripts. He is not keen on concepts of contemporary Islamic thought, religious renewal, or reconciling modernity with Islamic heritage, rather is a firm adherent of classical *fiqhi* sciences, according to his students.

His doctrinal and epistemological positions are closer to the Shafi'i school of thought, and the Ash`ari theology in particular. He also manifests

⁴⁸⁹ Her Facebook page says that she was born in 1967, but al-Bugha herself shies away from stating her exact age, considering that to be unbecoming.

⁴⁹⁰ Syrian sources close to the family and the circles of the Shari`ah Faculty at Damascus University refused to give further details on the sons-in-law of the family.

moderate Sufi inclinations, especially the Naqshbandi *Tariqa*. He studied at the hands of prominent Syrian scholars, including Hasan Habanaka, Mustafa al-Khan, Mustafa al-Suba`i, `Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, Khairo Yassin, and Shaykh Kareem Rajeh (the prominent Syrian Qur`anic reciter).

Mustafa al-Bugha became one of the most prominent preachers and scholars in Damascus, giving sermons in various mosques, and owned the publication house Dar al-Mustafa, which prints his books and publications taught to his students at Damascus University. He taught at several schools and universities in various Syrian cities.⁴⁹¹

He left in 2000 to teach in Qatar, then to teach in Jordanian universities before moving to Dagestan, at the request of its President, to contribute to *da`wa* and religious education in the North Caucasus republic, which in recent decades faced a growth of jihadist movements active in Central Asia.⁴⁹² He later moved to Jordan in the wake of the Syrian revolution.

He married four women, but his family relations were not entirely stable. He faced embarrassment on several occasions by one of his wives in mosques in front of worshipers, or in the Shari`ah Faculty in front of his students, and later divorced her. He also married one of his students. His unstable relationship with his wives, however, did not reflect much on his children, as most of his sons, daughters, and their spouses express admiration and pride in him on their social media accounts.⁴⁹³

Mustafa al-Bugha did not gain political or social advantages from the Syrian regime, as did other famous Syrian religious scholars like Ahmad Kaf-taru and Ahmad Hassoun (former and current Grand *Mufti* of the Syrian Republic), and others. He refrained from assuming official religious positions in the state. Nonetheless, he did not take an opposing position toward the regime, neither before nor after the revolution. Sources close to the family note that he renounced some of his students who engaged in confrontations between the Muslim Brotherhood movement and the Syrian regime in the early 1980s, and since then, chose to refrain from having any public stance.

⁴⁹¹ See his official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/sh.prof.moustafaalbougha/about/>

⁴⁹² For details on his work in Dagestan, see the page of his publication house, Dar al-Mustafa, run by his son Dr. Anas al-Bugha on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100003327396129&fref=ts>

⁴⁹³ Based on statements made to the authors by students of Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha and his children, who did not want their names disclosed.

This made him ‘accepted’ by the regime, albeit without gaining any favors. His neutral positions also did not garner him antagonism from Islamist or Syrian opposition movements, since he did not engage in intellectual or political confrontations with them. Nevertheless, he delivered a sermon in the early days of the Syrian revolution expressing support for the Assad regime against the rebels, describing Assad as a “just leader,” which provoked hostility from Islamists and opposition movements toward him.⁴⁹⁴

He is known for his religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. His students note that he was keen to separate between male and female students during his classes. Growing up in a religiously conservative family and environment, Iman al-Bugha inherited the religious zeal of her father, and received her studies in Islamic sciences at the hands of her father and a number of other prominent scholars in Damascus.

On her upbringing, Iman expresses an absence of a playful childhood, which was replaced by a lot of reading. She states: “When I was young, entertainment was impossible, because my father refused to buy us a television so that it would not be an idol that we cling to. He put in our hands all that is useful of books and stories.” She recalls that the ‘boring’ environment led her to become an avid reader, reading the biographies of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. On reading Najib al-Kilani’s *Layali Turkestan* (Turkestan Nights), she notes feeling that she “lived in a repressed Ummah, and was pained by the glory lived by the infidels at the expense of our torn bodies.” She recalls enjoying sports and activities, loved swimming and tennis, and while playing “I would make myself forget the humiliation and only remember the glory and celebrate “Islamic” conquests.”⁴⁹⁵

On her favorite subjects to read, she notes her interest in languages, history, poetry, and philosophy, but on her religious interests, she states: “I came to recognize that the real science is *fiqh* “religious jurisprudence”, so I consumed it with an insatiable appetite.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ See segments of his sermon on April 17, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhARfOgQusU> Also see: Ibrahim al-Jabin, “Iman al-Bugha Umm Da’ish al-Fiqhiyya fi al-Mosul wa Waliduha Yad’u li Bashar al-Assad fi Dimashq,” “Iman al-Bugha: The Jurisprudential Mother of IS in Mosul, while Her Father Prays for Bashar al-Assad in Damascus”, *Al-Arab*, November 29, 2015, <http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=67407>

⁴⁹⁵ From her posts on her personal Facebook account, which was subsequently deleted, <https://www.facebook.com/dremanelbogha?fref=ts>

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

In examining her own narrative, we find that we are before an ideological and psychological formation that began early in her life. She grew up in a religious surrounding that renounced the products of Western modernity. Her avid reading of religious books and stories of the Prophet, his companions, and early Muslims submerged her intellectual imagination in that culture, until she “absorbed their stories into my own essence,” according to her description.

In other Facebook posts, she describes her neglect for everything that was taught in school that violated that culture, noting that she preferred to sleep during these classes. This religious upbringing delineates her zealous religious and later extremist course, as she herself states: “this is my upbringing, and perhaps it explains that it is not strange for me to head towards the lands of the caliphate, for this has been my wish.”⁴⁹⁷ Nonetheless, her father’s political positions in appeasing the regime does not directly explain her radical opposite orientation, a gap that she herself tries to understate in highlighting her father’s role in her religious upbringing and education in Shari`ah sciences.

It is clear that she is very proud of her personality and her religious upbringing, and of her interest in the books of Islamic thought, particularly those of prominent religious scholars such as Abu al-A`la al-Maududi and Abu Hassan al-Nadwi and the poet Mustafa al-Rafi`ie, which was reflected later in her discourse and language. She studied under the tutelage of prominent religious scholars, and received Qur’anic studies and memorization at the hands of the Grand Reciter of Syria, Kareem Rajeh, who reportedly said about her (according to her own account): “A large number of scholars came together in the forming of this girl’s mind, and I have seen in her manifestations of all their minds.”

In college, she was known to be distant from the students’ social atmosphere, and unlike her sisters (Hanan, Sumaya, and Asma) who also earned PhD degrees in Shari`ah and married men who hold similar Shari`ah degrees, she did not marry a disciple of her father or a Shari`ah graduate, but rather married a pharmacist. Sources close to the family note that he was known to be religiously conservative and a memorizer of the Qur’an, a student of Shaykh Kareem Rajeh as well. Not much else is known about her

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., dated January 24, 2016.

husband (until the writing of this study), except that he is from the Haddad family in Damascus.

After receiving a PhD degree in Islamic Shari`ah from Damascus University, with a specialization in *Usul al-Fiqh*, she moved to Saudi Arabia in 2001, where she worked as a professor in Islamic Culture at the University of Damman.⁴⁹⁸

Turning Point or Evolution?

Iman al-Bugha spent 15 years in Saudi Arabia, teaching at the University of Damman. This context is significant in analyzing her ideological development and positioning, especially that the Saudi religious scene is dominated by the Wahhabi Salafi school of thought, while she herself claims to adhere to the Shafi`i Ash`arite school of thought, to which her father and most of Syria's scholars belong, particularly the school of Shaykh Hasan Habanaka. On the other hand, the jihadist ideology that she came to espouse, particularly that of IS, is clear-cut Wahhabi Salafi, and although she does not directly speak of 'transitioning' from Ash`arism to Salafism, her later discussions (after migrating to Mosul) manifest that she was influenced by the Salafi creed during her time in Saudi Arabia and her engagement in the religious, scholarly, and *da`wa* circles there.

Al-Bugha tries to downplay the differences between the two schools, and finds no contradiction in transitioning from one to the other. In her discussion of matters of creed, God's names and attributes, and *ta`wil* (esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an), matters that represent a divergence between Ash`arism and Salafism, she states: "A person asked me once: I want to perform Jihad, but IS rejects Sufism and Ash`arism. I told him: So, what is the problem? Leave your Sufism...and you become a Dawlawi "IS follower". The issue is simple for you, al-Ash`ari himself said it, then recanted it..let them leave the issue.. The Companions "of the Prophet" were neither Sufis nor Ash`arites, and the Imams "of schools of thought" were neither as well.. So why the headache and the dispute?"⁴⁹⁹

She does not consider that there was a turning point in her own tran-

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

sition from Ash`arism to Salafism, she merely “reconsidered” her position toward doctrinal aspects of disagreement between schools of thought (such as *ta`wil* of God’s attributes). As for religious *ahkam* (rulings) and *fiqhi* methodology, she does not find contradiction between the Saudi Salafi school and her belonging to the Syrian school of Hasan Habanaka. She affirms that she has maintained her conservative religious views, and perhaps found common space between Salafism and the school of her religious upbringing, in terms of rejecting Western modernity and disregard toward attempts of religious revival and renewal (which she calls ‘polishing of religion’), adherence to the heritage of classical Islamic *fiqh*, and literal understanding of religious provisions, where she finds that rigidity in religion is better than laxity, and that “how beautiful is rigidity in the religious law that has great answers for every dilemma.”⁵⁰⁰

In an effort to bridge the gap between moderate Damascene Sufism and the Salafi school, she puts herself in confrontations with hardliners of both schools, and considers herself a representative of the universal unified view on religion. She states: “God has afflicted me with the animosity of the Sufis and the ignorant hardliners of Salafism. I did not find them to be different from each other in their ardent ignorance.” She expresses receiving indignation from both sides, she states: “Excuse me for explaining my ordeal since I began teaching, coming at me from ignorant individuals who do not want from a committed person to exceed their abilities. The problem of both parties is their negligence in seeking knowledge because of the weakness of their vigor... Woe to ignorance; if the ignorant becomes a Sufi, he becomes doubly deplorable, and if the ignorant becomes a fundamentalist Salafi, he becomes extra doubly horrific.”⁵⁰¹

In Saudi Arabia, in addition to her teaching position at the University of Dammam, al-Bugha worked as a supervisor of the Cultural Department of the International Commission on Scientific Signs in the Qur’an and Sunnah (*Ijaz*, or Qur’anic inimitability), where she was active in lecturing and Islamic *da`wa*. During this phase, manifestations of her religious extremism were beginning to reflect in her lectures and discussions with students.

In following her ideological and political positions and her social out-

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., dated November 7, 2016.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

look on her Facebook page, it does not appear that there was a distinct intellectual shift or a specific turning point that led to her transformation from one religious orientation to another. It appears that her transition to Salafism emerged smoothly and quietly, as she appeared to be in harmony with the Saudi Salafi circles. Yet, it is evident that her experience in Saudi Arabia, since 2001, and her smooth transition to Salafism ultimately reinforced the evolution of her radicalism to the extent of taking the decision to migrate to Mosul and join IS there, a decision that reflects a psychological motivation in her, much more than an intellectual or ideological shift that she may have experienced.

The Syrian revolution and the escalation of the conflict in Syria between opposition factions (particularly Islamist and jihadist movements) and the Iranian-backed Syrian regime constituted another catalyst in her radicalism, one that combines both intellectual and personal dimensions at once. In considering her Syrian origin on the one hand, and her extremist Salafi ideology on the other, we would find it natural that she would side with the Syrian revolution. However, the mild position of her father and brothers in support of Bashar al-Assad would soon create a rift between al-Bugha and her family. Her position toward the conflict in Syria corresponds to her espoused religious and intellectual convictions, but it is the position of her father and brothers that is quite difficult to justify, particularly in a majority Sunni society in Syria amid an Arab social and political climate that is charged with sectarianism and factional civil wars that resulted in an overhanging “Sunni crisis.”

According to sources close to the family, al-Bugha came to visit her father in Jordan prior to her departure for Syria. The visit was reportedly a final attempt to bridge the gap between them, but it appeared that her father remained unyielding in his position. Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha’s history reflects that he always sought to steer away from clashing with the Syrian regime, both during the reign of the father Hafez al-Assad and now with his son Bashar, particularly considering that some of Mustafa al-Bugha’s sons remain in Syria today and work at Damascus University. It is difficult to generalize that the father’s position is clearly pro-Assad, considering that he remained distant from the political scene, and does not have any clear positions for or against the regime, with the exception of the sermon he gave in the early days of the revolution in April 2011. Nonetheless, in a politically and

militarily charged climate like the Syrian conflict, it is difficult for involved parties and observers to justify neutral or silent positions, positions that may be construed to mean lack of direct support for the revolution.⁵⁰²

Despite the clear contrast in political positions between Iman and her father, and although her family eventually repudiated her joining IS leading to a complete estrangement between them, yet Iman continually hints that she is still on her father's course, and that she is an extension of his school, as if to insinuate that she is completing what he did not accomplish. Commenting on a discussion she had with an individual from what she calls "children of scholars," who maintain a reserved position toward IS, she states: "What do people benefit from you, the children of religious scholars, if they do not find you in the front rows at the time of jihad, and when the Caliphate State is established and you are not the first to support it? You, them, and myself enjoyed the respect of people, and lived a life of eminence because of our fathers, all this because people saw in our steps a path towards their Hereafter and they followed us... So shall we leave them today to say "to us": For what did we respect and venerate you?" She then adds, "The Ummah today does not need the preaching of my father and your father. The Ummah needs jihad when its rights and sanctity have been violated. The Ummah needs elucidation of the most important "religious" ruling; that jihad has become an individual duty on them all, otherwise, humiliation awaits them in this life, and God's punishment awaits them in the Hereafter."⁵⁰³

But why did Dr. Iman al-Bugha choose to join IS, and not another jihadi faction, such as Al-Nusra Front, for example? There are two factors that may contribute to answering this question, the first is objective, and the second is subjective.

First, the objective factor is evident in her repeated reference to her intellectual agreement with IS' ideology and discourse. She states, "I came to the Islamic State because it is in accord with all that I believe and have learned. The Islamic State did not change any of my thoughts, and I have not learned anything new in IS that I did not know before. I repeat, I came to "IS" because it implements what I know and what I learned from Islamic law.

⁵⁰² Reliable sources that are close to the family met with the authors on December 10, 2016 at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan.

⁵⁰³ Post on her Facebook page, op. cit., dated February 1, 2016.

I have discovered that I am a Daeshite before Daesh “IS” existed.”⁵⁰⁴

In responding to a comment on her Facebook page on why she chose to join IS rather than any other faction, including Al-Nusra Front, she notes that she believes that IS is the “most correct.” She says, “When I came to IS and chose it, I already knew al-`Ar`our, al-Muhaisani, al-Zawahiri, and al-Jolani “Salafi and Al-Qaeda leaderships”, and I knew they were against IS. I did not know al-Baghdadi, al-Adnani, Abu Hamza, or Omar al-Shishani or any other “of IS’ leadership”, but I chose them because their approach is correct, although I do not know them personally. I distanced myself from those whom I know because they are wrong.”⁵⁰⁵

Her intellectual and doctrinal congruence with IS’ ideology is clear in her social, political, and religious views. She is harshly critical of Islamists who are opponents of IS’ positions and policies, declaring that she disagrees with a group of Islamic scholars and thinkers, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi⁵⁰⁶ and Abd al-Karim Bakkar,⁵⁰⁷ noting that she does not regard them as true jurists because they seek to merely “embellish Islam.” She strongly supports IS’ implementation of what they perceive to be obligatory Islamic laws, such as commanding prayer, Islamic penal rulings, application of the Shari`ah, and imposing the face veil (*niqab*) on women (a jurisprudential issue of disagreement among jurists, even in Salafi circles). She argues that these socio-religious policies have resulted in a ‘pristine’ life under IS.⁵⁰⁸

Her religious position toward social and cultural issues is also in line with extremist ideology. She finds watching TV, music, Western culture, and modernity in general to be sinful. She prohibits celebration of Christian religious holidays, and considers other occasions, such as Mother’s Day, to be unlawful in religion.⁵⁰⁹

Hence, it is not surprising that al-Bugha would embrace IS ideology and declare her belonging to the organization. In a famous essay entitled

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., in response to a comment on her Facebook page, dated November 6, 2016.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., dated December 31, 2016.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., dated February 7, 2016.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., dated December 25, 2016.

“I am a Daeshite before Daesh existed” (which IS published in a booklet although its size does not exceed the length of an article), she declares her loyalty and allegiance to IS, justifying her decision by saying, “Since I began reading about the plight of Muslims...and I had read the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), the companions, and Islamic conquests, I read them dozens of times, and I read history in all its revolutions, and I studied the jurisprudence of jihad at the hands of senior scholars. Since I did all that, I have been a Daeshite “IS-follower” in thought and method; I was a Daeshite before Daesh “IS” existed, and I have known since then that the only solution for Muslims is jihad.” She later adds, “I know the thought and approach of IS from observing it, by God, “IS” is right in everything that it does.”⁵¹⁰

In sum, before us is a woman who is fully convinced, intellectually and religiously, of IS’ thought, armed with a religious upbringing and an ideological orientation that feeds these convictions.

It remains to question whether her keenness to bridge the gap between Salafism and the Syrian school of Hasan Habanaka is merely a psychological attempt to circumvent her differences with her father, downplay her transformation toward Salafism, and to avoid manifesting the clash between her spiritual and jurisprudential heritage and her new school, to be able to say that she has not changed and has not been influenced by the Saudi Salafi environment. Or, on the other hand, is there truly ‘common ground’ between Wahhabi – and later jihadi – Salafism and her previous school of thought?

In this context, a student of her father says: “Those who studied at the Faculty of Shari`ah at Damascus University under renowned Syrian scholars would not be really surprised that Iman al-Bugha would become a Daeshite. This also applies to a large number of students who have this intellectual predisposition. Classical *fiqhi* sciences are taught at the Faculty, and her father in particular is known for his keen interest in verifying classical *fiqhi* manuscripts, and for his rigidity in *fiqhi* rulings in general. The *fiqh* that is taught is textual, its method is based on literal and exoteric interpretation of the text, which is consistent with the Salafi methodology. Even if the two “Ash`arism and Salafism” differ in some aspects of doctrine, nonetheless there is great similarity in jurisprudential issues and Shari`ah rulings. Moreover, the Ash`ari school in Damascus sanctifies the heritage of classical

⁵¹⁰ Iman Mustafa al-Bugha, *Ana Da`ishiyya Qabla an Tujad Da`ish* “I Am a Daeshite (IS-follower) Before Daesh (IS) Existed”, Dar al-Ghurabaa’, Publication of the Islamic State Organization, 2014.

Islamic *fiqh*, which is also the frame of reference of Daesh “IS”, which has not brought any new jurisprudential rulings, but adhered to the traditional rulings in Islamic heritage, and applied them to the current conditions.”⁵¹¹

This premise is supported by Dr. Muhammad Habash, a prominent Syrian Shari`ah scholar who was a member of Syria’s People’s Council (parliament) before switching to the ranks of the Syrian opposition abroad. He finds that Iman al-Bugha is most congruent with her religious background and with what she learned from her father and teachers. He states, “Iman al-Bugha does not practice flattery or lip service to al-Baghdadi, rather she presents him in a defined fiqhi language as a pioneer in implementing God’s law. She presents a series of coherent fiqhi evidences to every behavior practiced by the Islamic State organization. She affirms that IS’ implementation of these rulings is exactly God’s law...I am convinced that, among her family, she is the most congruent with what she has learned and taught. I do not believe she suffers from a psychological disorder or any social complex, she rather practices exactly what she learned throughout her studies and what she taught her students in universities and schools.”⁵¹²

He adds, “Iman al-Bugha is not an exceptional phenomenon, nor is she an astray woman, rather she is committed to faithfully applying what she had learned and taught. Perhaps we are the astray who continue to teach these atrocious things and insist on teaching the “false unverified saying” ‘I have been ordered to kill people until they witness that there is no god but God and to practice prayer and pay zakat,’ or that ‘whoever changes their religion kill them,’ and we say that this is the Law of God and His Prophet, but we get angry when this crazy generation practices it exactly how we narrated and taught it. “Al-Bugha” is not an exception, she is merely one of hundreds of specialists in fiqh who joined Daesh.”⁵¹³

In short, according to this premise, what happened with al-Bugha is that she moved from theory to practice, and she moved her intellectual, doc-

⁵¹¹ The source preferred to remain anonymous, interviewed by the authors at the University of Jordan on December 10, 2016. Compare with: Mohammad Abu Rumman, “Hakatha Tashakalat Ideolojiyat al-Tawahhush” “This is How the Ideology of Savagery Formed”, *Al-Arabi al-Jadid*, October 6, 2014, <https://goo.gl/qKEtaa>

⁵¹² Muhammad Habash, “Musarahat fi Wujub Islah al-Manahij al-Diniyya: Iman al-Bugha Namuthajan,” “Frankness in the Necessity of Reforming Religious Curricula: Iman al-Bugha as a Model”, *Shahedon website*, November 24, 2015, goo.gl/wgPYKG

⁵¹³ Ibid.

trinal, and cultural convictions to another stage; that is, to practical implementation starting by taking the decision to migrate to IS territories. Nevertheless, in terms of her *hijra* decision, while logical in light of the above, it remains that there are other psychological and sociological conditions that would either push towards this decision or stand against it, which brings us from the objective factor to the subjective one related to al-Bugha's own personality.

Second: the subjective factor. In contrast to the large volume of al-Bugha's published opinions and positions, there is nonetheless scarcity of information about her private life, her marriage, and her family.

In observing the social networking accounts of al-Bugha's siblings and their families, it appears that the relationship between her and them is cold, not only are they geographically distant (some live in Saudi Arabia, others in Dagestan and Turkey), but socially as well.⁵¹⁴ Despite their active engagement on their accounts, there is barely any interaction or exchanges between them and Iman, online at least. Her account does not even appear on the friends' lists of any of their accounts.

There are other indications of this divergence. Her family does not discuss Iman's migration with her children to al-Raqqa and then Mosul, except for a brief hint by her sister Hanan, who resides in Saudi Arabia, noting on Facebook that the family, and particularly the father, rejects Iman's actions.⁵¹⁵ Otherwise, we do not find any other references or comments about Iman, even when her son Mustafa was killed in Syria in July 2016. It is unclear whether this online estrangement came before or after her migration, but it is evident that the family has taken the decision to remain silent in her regard, severing their relationship with the rebellious sister, perhaps a result of fear of risking danger to the family and their interests, particularly those living in Syria or Saudi Arabia.

⁵¹⁴ The authors reached this observation by monitoring the family members' personal accounts on social networking sites, particularly her sister Hanan and her husband Khaldun al-Maliki, her sister Sumaya and her husband Bassam al-Shaykh, her sister Asma, her brother Dr. Anas al-Bugha, and even her father's official page that publishes his activities, sermons, and writings.

⁵¹⁵ See: Rahma Dhiyab, "Akadimiyat Jami'at al-Dammam Tu'akid Da'ishiyataha wa Ustratuha Tatabara' min Mawqifiha" "The Professor of the University of Dammam Confirms Her IS-Belonging and Her Family Renounces Her Position," *Al-Hayat*, October 22, 2014, <http://www.alhayat.com/m/story/5199640#sthash.3m5i4fam.dpbs>

Another indication of the subjective factor is the family's vague position toward the Syrian revolution, evident in their posts on social media and public statements. Iman's sister Hanan and her husband, in addition to the other sister Asma, display indirect support to the revolution, or at least disapproval of the regime's actions. Her brother Anas generally avoids any engagement with this topic and focuses on his *da'wa* activities inside and outside Syria. Meanwhile, the eldest brother Muhammad al-Hasan clearly declared his position in support of the Syrian regime. The father, Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha, prefers to remain silent, and if it wasn't for the sole sermon in which he supported al-Assad, his position would not be known, although religious circles in Syria know of his support of the regime.⁵¹⁶

It could also be that her geographical distance from her family while she was living in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, her adaptation to the environment there and integration into Saudi Salafi circles, and the presence of a group of friends and students who were influenced by her, were all contributing factors in her mental and emotional preparedness to migrate. These factors put her in a climate away from the influence of her father and family, and closer to the vast space of the Salafi milieu.

One of the most important missing links in this analysis is her husband. Despite all the efforts made by the authors to gather information about him, through contacting family members and family friends, no clear information was found, except that he is a pharmacist and an expert memorizer of the Qur'an. Neither Iman al-Bugha nor her alleged daughter Ahlam al-Nasr mention him in any of their posts. There are reports in some online jihadi sites, in addition to sources close to the family, who claim that al-Bugha and her husband were divorced after she considered him an apostate, an indication of her influence by IS ideology. The husband is not mentioned except in the will of her son Mustafa, which was published after his death. In it, Mustafa notes that his father raised him well and that he was named 'Mustafa' after his grandfather in hopes that he would become a scholar as well.⁵¹⁷

During her time in Saudi Arabia, she was known for deep involvement in Saudi Salafi circles and for her religious fundamentalism, according to her

⁵¹⁶ Syrian sources close to Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha and his family, interviewed by the authors, but preferred that their names remain anonymous.

⁵¹⁷ Her son Mustafa's will is published on her Facebook page, op. cit. The source close to the family preferred to remain anonymous.

students. Her alleged daughter, Ahlam al-Nasr, studied at a private school in Khobar, and was known to have rejected the principles of the Syrian revolution, considering that it was launched in demand of freedom and democracy, while she herself holds the conviction of the necessity of founding the Islamic State and the caliphate system.⁵¹⁸

Furthermore, al-Bugha is a Syrian woman immersed in a Salafi environment that has blurred lines between state-sponsored Wahhabi Salafism and Jihadi Salafism. The influx of thousands of Saudis to Syria, along with dozens of Saudi women who joined IS in Syria and Iraq or Al-Qaeda in Yemen, could have created an encouraging climate and impetus for her to take the step by migrating, to finally actualize her theories into practice.

Two other important personal elements are noteworthy here. First, the influence of her children on her decision. By the time she left Saudi Arabia for Syria in 2014, al-Bugha's three children had already migrated before her to al-Raqqa (IS' Poetess Ahlam al-Nasr,⁵¹⁹ then 15 years old, a 14-year-old daughter, and her son Mustafa, then 13 years old). The three children became involved with IS despite their young age. Her son Mustafa joined IS fighters at the battlefronts before he was killed two years later. Ahlam al-Nasr married Muhammad Mahmoud, an Austrian-Egyptian IS fighter who went by the nom de guerre Abu Osama al-Gharib (who was imprisoned in Austria for affiliation with Al-Qaeda before leaving for Syria and joining IS).⁵²⁰ Her other daughter also married an IS fighter in Syria.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Rahma Dhiyab, "Talibat Jami'at al-Dammam Yutliqna Mubadarat al-Tabligh 'an A'dhaa' Hay'at al-Tadris al-Mutatarifin," "Female Students of University of Dammam Launch Initiative to Report Extremist Faculty Members", *Al-Hayat*, October 23, 2014, <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/5219853>

⁵¹⁹ Although there is discrepancy on whether Ahlam al-Nasr is al-Bugha's daughter, nonetheless, al-Bugha herself notes that her children had followed her path in joining IS.

⁵²⁰ Muhammad Mahmoud grew up in Vienna and attended an Islamic school there. Austrian newspapers dubbed him the "boy terrorist." He was imprisoned for four years convicted of being a member of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. After his release, he moved to Germany where he founded the Salafi organization Millatu Ibrahim. He was expelled from Germany and later left for Egypt. In 2013, he appeared in a video while burning his Austrian passport and threatening terror attacks. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and detained in Turkey for almost 6 months before he was released. He later disappeared and joined IS in Syria. He married Ahlam al-Nasr in October 2014. Mahmoud published a video online with his new name, Abu Osama al-Gharib, while in the Syrian city of Al-Raqqa, showing bodies with severed heads. See: "Muhammad Mahmoud Yanshur Video ma' Juthath Tamm Qat' Ru'usiha," "Muhammad Mahmoud Publishes Video with Bodies with Severed Heads", *Euro Arab Press*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.eapress.eu/eap/?p=852>

⁵²¹ See: "Sha'irat Da'ish al-Sa'udiyya Ahlam Tatanzawaj min Abu Osama al-Gharib fi al-Raqqa al-Suriyya," "The Saudi IS Poetess Ahlam Marries Abu Osama al-Gharib in al-Raqqa, Syria", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, October

Her children's activities in support of IS indicate that they were influenced by the path and ideology of their mother. Such influence does not appear to be superficial or transient, but rather deep-rooted to reflect that they were indoctrinated in this culture and thought since childhood. Ahlam al-Nasr's poetry, articles, and online comments, particularly about the conflict in Syria, manifest strong belief and sense of belonging to IS and its ideology. She wrote a poem in defense of Haila al-Qusayr (Umm al-Rabab, who is detained in Saudi Arabia), and other poems in praise of IS and its leaders. She wages harsh criticism of other opposition and jihadi factions rivaling IS, writes against Al-Qaeda's leader al-Zawahiri, and attacks the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic Front (*al-Jabha al-Islamiyya*), and others. Despite her young age, she exhibits mastery of rhetoric and prose and use of emotional and inciting language, or as her mother describes her "She was born with a dictionary in her mouth."⁵²² Ahlam's texts manifest that her convictions stem from ideological awareness, which generated her widespread popularity within IS circles and earned her the title "poetess of the Islamic State." Her poetry and essays are published by IS' media institutions, and her social media accounts have thousands of followers, despite the repeated attempts by these outlets to censor and delete her accounts.⁵²³

Al-Bugha's children were born in Saudi Arabia during her tenure as a professor at the University of Dammam. On her Facebook page, the mother expresses her keen interest in religious and doctrinal education of children, and it is evident that they were influenced by the prevailing Salafi climate that their mother was engaged in. Many observers previously believed that the young poet is a Saudi national, because of the strong Salafi influence she exhibits. Then came the Syrian revolution at the prime age of their awareness as adolescents, charging their convictions with strong emotional undercurrents that exploded in the form of Ahlam's poetry and intellectual and political interests.

14, 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=234717> Also see: "Sha'irat Da'ish al-Sa'udiyya Tasil Suriya wa Tatazawaj al-Gharib," "The Saudi IS Poetess Reaches Syria and Marries Al-Gharib," *Arabi21*, October 14, 2014, goo.gl/Ixvhvo Muhammad Mahmoud Asbaha Za'im Da'ishi wa Tazawaja min Sha'irat Da'ish," "Muhammad Mahmoud Became an IS Leader and Married Poetess of IS", *Euro Arab Press*, October 15, 2014, <http://www.eapress.eu/eap/?p=307>

⁵²² Robyn Creswell and Bernard Haykel, "Battle Lines: Want to understand the jihadis? Read their poetry," *the New Yorker*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/08/battle-lines-jihad-creswell-and-haykel>

⁵²³ On Ahlam al-Nasr's migration to Syria and her life there, her tours of al-Raqqa, and the first time she fired weapons, see: "The Saudi IS Poetess Reaches Syria and Marries Al-Gharib," *Arabi21*, op. cit.

Although there is no firm evidence that Ahlam is the daughter of Iman al-Bugha, media reports leaked by the Saudi authorities confirm this relationship, as is the case with sources of Jihadi Salafist movements. In her account of the final hours before her *nafir* and leaving Saudi Arabia for Syria, Ahlam tweets on her Twitter account that her mother stood in front of her room crying, only to be consoled by Ahlam who reminded the mother that she raised her children on the dream of living in this ‘genuinely Islamic’ setting and on the love of jihad. Media reports note that Ahlam left for Syria via Turkey with her brother Mustafa, and that her marriage to Abu Osama al-Gharib took place on October 11th, 2014 at an IS court. Meanwhile, al-Bugha’s resignation from the university came on October 21st, 2014, that is, the children migrated before their mother, and not the opposite as mentioned in several media reports.⁵²⁴

The second element is al-Bugha’s own personality. Her discourse and views expressed on her social networking accounts, including her personal and official pages on Facebook,⁵²⁵ reflect a strong level of self-confidence, which some may interpret as arrogance and a superiority complex. Despite the differences in views and ideology with her father, she nonetheless speaks with pride that she is the daughter of Shaykh Mustafa, and a student of his school and the school of Hasan Habanaka. She asserts on various occasions that she earned an advanced degree of knowledge and Islamic Law at the hands of senior religious scholars in Damascus. In order not to lose the spiritual and intellectual legacy that garnered her important status from a young age, she astutely tries to bridge the gap between her father’s school and her embrace of Saudi Salafi culture and later IS ideology, considering them to be integrative and complementary.

Her self-centered and egotistical tendencies manifest in her constant praise of herself and her knowledge, and in her sarcastic – and often harsh – responses to differences of opinion or belief, and in her ridicule of prominent Islamic jurists and intellectuals. She even attacks prominent Syrian scholars

⁵²⁴ Compare with: “The Saudi IS Poetess Reaches Syria and Marries Al-Gharib,” *Arabi21*, op. cit. The report mentions that the marriage ceremony took place on Saturday, October 11, 2014, and that guests tweeted about it. Also compare with: “The Professor of the University of Dammam Confirms Her IS-Belonging and Her Family Renounces Her Position,” *Al-Hayat*, op. cit., reporting that her resignation came on October 21, 2014.

⁵²⁵ Iman al-Bugha had two accounts on Facebook, a personal one which we have used as the main source in this study, and an official page that contains Islamic fatwas and rulings.

who are pro-revolution, pro-jihad, and anti-regime, but are also anti-IS, such as Shaykh Osama al-Rifa`i, shunning him for rejecting the idea of foreign fighters. She states sarcastically, "It is certain that Shaykh Osama al-Rifa`i decided to send his children to fight al-Assad in what he calls Syria, therefore he sees that jihad in Syria does not need migrant "jihadis"." Her tirade then goes on to emphasize the important role of the *muhajirin*, the migrant foreign fighters mostly fighting alongside IS and Fateh al-Sham Front (formerly Al-Nusra Front), in the conflict in Syria.⁵²⁶

These personal traits, coupled with determination and ideological convictions, had an active role in reinforcing her personal decisions, such as her disagreement and estrangement from her family and later her migration to Mosul. Upon arriving in Mosul, she wrote: "I left my huge salary and joined the service of the Islamic Ummah to fight the unjust tyrants."⁵²⁷ She then addresses her female students, saying "I am absent from you because I was searching for a cave to resort to where I can speak the word of truth, that is why I left my beloved university."⁵²⁸

In Dreamland

While there are numerous prominent names of women in IS, the most prominent and public face of female jihadism within the organization is that of Iman al-Bugha. Her religious and propaganda role is reinforced by her active engagement on social media, which makes her an exceptional case, considering that IS prohibits its members of engaging with media outlets or social networking sites without special permission. One of al-Bugha's most significant tasks is counter-narrative and debate in defense of IS, and disseminating on the internet religious justification of IS' jurisprudential fatwas and actions.

Another significance of al-Bugha within the organization is her status as one of IS' most prominent religious jurists. Her name tops the list of a group of IS leaders and pro-IS Shari`ah specialists who issued a statement

⁵²⁶ Her personal Facebook page, dated November 6, 2016.

⁵²⁷ Ibrahim al-Jabin, "Iman al-Bugha: The Jurisprudential Mother of IS in Mosul, while Her Father Prays for Bashar al-Assad in Damascus," op. cit.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

upon the declaration of the caliphate, presenting in it arguments in defense of IS and the inauguration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as caliph of all Muslims, and calling on Muslims to pledge allegiance to him and migrate to the lands of the ‘Islamic State.’⁵²⁹

The statement came shortly after al-Bugha’s arrival in Mosul. Although she is a woman, and IS rarely includes women in its senior leadership, nonetheless her name topped the list of religious leaders who signed the statement. From the outset, IS gave al-Bugha an important jurisprudential authoritative role in its religious and media apparatuses, and granted her ample discretion in her media and propaganda role on the internet.

In moving from theory to practice upon arriving in IS territories, al-Bugha conveys a rosy image of life under IS. She describes it as the “utopia” and the “promised Islamic city” that every Muslim dream of, where Islamic law rules supreme and everyone adheres to Islamic ethics and morals, where economic problems are solved and social problems alleviated because of the Islamic spirit that prevails and the application of Islamic penal codes, and where jihad, fighting, and power are the hallmarks of victory.

On her first impression upon arriving in Mosul, she writes: “The streets of Mosul are cleaner than those of Dammam because of the laws applied by the Islamic State.” She notes that upon her arrival, she asked State officials to issue a law regulating women’s work outside the home, adding that they promised her that the law would be issued soon.⁵³⁰

Al-Bugha defends the idea of establishing the Islamic Caliphate State, noting that Muslims have long waited for this dream, “but when it came to fruition they deemed it excessive.” She believes that IS was founded to apply Islamic Shari`ah and the *hudud* (punishments) mandated in Islamic Law, to create the climate for a genuine Islamic life, and to declare jihad in confronting the enemies.⁵³¹ Certainly, these key concepts and terms are used to play on the collective religious and sentimental imagination of wide segments of

⁵²⁹ See: Munira al-Hudaib, “Da`ish Yuhay`i Iman al-Bugha li Mansib Muhim fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya” “IS Prepares Iman al-Bugha for an Important Position in the ‘Islamic State,’” *Al-Hayat*, November 15, 2014.

⁵³⁰ See: “Ustatha Sabiqah fi Jami`a Sa`udiyya: Shawar` Da`ish Anzaf min Shawar` al-Dammam bisabab Tawliyat al-Kafa`at,” “Ex-Professor at a Saudi University: The Streets of IS are Cleaner than the Streets of Dammam Because of the Appointment of Qualified People”, *Watan*, January 31, 2015, <http://www.watan.com/archive5/2015/01/31/>

⁵³¹ Her personal Facebook page, op. cit., dated November 2, 2016.

Muslims in general, and Islamists in particular, who see this characterization as an integral part of fulfilling Islam.



A copy of IS' announcement of the death of al-Bugha's son, Mustafa (nom de guerre Abu al-Hasan al-Dimashqi), after sustaining fatal injuries from Syrian regime air strikes. In the announcement, al-Bugha is described as "one of the luminaries of the Islamic State. Her pledge of allegiance to the State was a huge shock to the circles of the Sultans' sheikhs." On her role in IS, the announcement stated that she worked in the all-female al-Hisba Department in various IS wilayat (provinces), and took part in many studies conducted at the Research and Iftaa' Department in Wilayat al-Raqqqa,

“specializing in research on the topic of al-Wala’ wa al-Bara’ “loyalty and disavowal” and exposition of the shirk “sin of deification of any other than God” that many armed groups in Syria fell into, while thinking that they were performing jihad.”

On life under IS, she says: “No matter how hard a Muslim tries to make his life as God pleases, his efforts remain confined to his home, and he will continue to suffer from the corruption of society, and the lack of a power that protects rights and punishes the unjust. Hence, Islam was in dire need of a ruler that would defend the religion and govern worldly affairs by it. I thank God for blessing me with life under a ruler that governs by God’s law. Life in the caliphate is the finest life in the light of God’s law, despite the infidels’ attacks.”⁵³²

On the nature of IS’ governance and services, she adds: “The system here is better than in Europe, there is no bribery or nepotism, the law is applied on everyone, taxes are almost non-existent, there are offices for employment but they are not charities, rather they take what they need for labor. Job opportunities are wide open with the condition that work is done within the limits of Shari`ah; people are free to open businesses in their homes or elsewhere but must preserve public street facilities... There are no taxes on work except for Zakat “alms-giving”, which is based on the level of work and profits. This Zakat is then distributed to the poor... In terms of the State’s view on poverty, it leads me to gloat over the misfortune of worldly people, for whoever has a place to stay, his day’s food, a bed and cover, they say to him: You should thank God for you are in a transient life, and what God has for you is better... They speak from the standpoint of their method and lifestyle, for the homes of Emirs and officials contain only their daily needs. What impresses me most is adherence to politeness and civility, even a written complaint must be free of insult... In short: the corrupt, the profane and the lewd are stifled to the greatest extent.”⁵³³

On the one hand, this rosy depiction of life under IS seeks to arouse in Muslims’ imagination the ‘selective’ historical model of the Islamic state, as it is depicted in Islamic history books or in the prevailing Islamic discourse, and on the other hand, it presents a model that completely contradicts the

⁵³² Ibid., dated December 22, 2016.

⁵³³ Ibid.

reality that the masses of the Arab and Muslim worlds complain of: bribery, corruption, nepotism, poverty, unemployment, injustice, etc. She also plays on the imagination of non-Muslims, recent converts, or Muslim communities in the West by repeatedly comparing life under IS with that in Europe, for example.

She often defends IS' application of Shari`ah and carrying out *hudud* penalties – according to its interpretation, and she refutes the accusations and criticisms targeting IS by counter-criticizing the social culture in the Arab world, and comparing it to the ideal culture in the caliphate. She states, “The problem in our societies is that the media corrupted the thought of some of these societies before corrupting their morals, whereby minds were turned upside down, knowing the Shari`ah but applying it in reverse, so that when a person comes to apply it correctly and its correct results appear, they deplore and reproach him.”⁵³⁴

She gives an example of this perceived contradiction in the Arab world in the aspect of marriage. She says, “They want marriage in the standards of media culture: a mature girl in her twenties, a man several years older than her, they must have a house, furniture, financial resources enough to buy hamburgers and eat it at the beach boardwalk, and most probably a car, and love between them with the blessings of the whole family... This is how marriage is for them, otherwise, the misfortunate who do not fit these descriptions miss out. Then they wail at spinsterhood and moral corruption, and bemoan the divorcee and the widow. Women are nervous of polygamy... While men are happy with the idea of polygamy... You want to tell me that they should accept the Islamic State? How? Where some of them consider it cataclysmic that the State forces people to pray!! Is this what they think the Islamic State is? OK, then where can we find a state that makes people pray out of love and conviction? Please search for it, and until we find such a state, there is no objection to accepting governments that kill, violate people, fight God's law, detain, and open their lands to the unbelievers. Alright, we accepted it, or rather adapted to it. But as for a state that forces people to pray and shorten their garbs, prohibits smoking, imposes paying Zakat, cuts off the hands of thieves, and throws homosexuals off roofs, this we have not tried yet.”⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Ibid., dated October 18, 2016.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

IS' chief female jurist dedicates important space in her discourse to addressing Muslim women and discussing women's affairs in IS territories. She speaks of the importance of early marriage and considers it a solution to the problem of 'spinsterhood.' On polygamy, she presents an ideal rosy perspective, a model that is the solution to the problems facing Arab social environments where large numbers of women remain unwed, divorce rates are high, and there are complex and burdensome conditions on marriage. She also fiercely defends imposing on women to cover their faces by wearing the *niqab* (face veil showing only the eyes) or the *khimar* (full face veil), stating: "One of the most beautiful aspects in the Islamic state is imposing the niqab on women; covering the hair is not enough, in fact it may increase temptation. Women in the niqab have become respectable and revered with no difference between one and another. They go about their business without being harassed by an obscene person. In the past, the tyrants forced people towards immorality and prevented them from "practicing" their religion amid a lack of protest. For the day to come that people are forced to adhere to everything commanded by Shari`ah is a blessing from God."⁵³⁶

In this debate, she attempts to frame an Islamic culture (as she understands it) in the face of modern culture by saying that the former transcends the real problems facing the latter, and that the prevailing culture in Arab societies is the product of Western culture and media, and that it does not emanate from Islam. She notes, "TV shows taught you that marriage should be in a particular fashion or none at all, so adultery and moral corruption spread, the percentage of unwed men and women rose to unprecedented levels, not to mention that female divorcees and widows do not get remarried. In the Caliphate State, corruption and spinsterhood ceased. As for family problems to end, and marriages to become like the marriages of princes and princesses, we have not gone to paradise yet!"⁵³⁷

On another occasion, she says, "In the Caliphate, marriage takes place within hours, the problems of marriage have ended, spinsterhood ceased. One woman was married when she was 46 years old. Another was approached by her son who told her: Mother, I have married you to someone, if you do not like it, tell me to annul it. She accepted, and I attended her wedding party, a party for two celebrations, one for her and one for her son who got married

⁵³⁶ Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., dated October 18, 2016.

three days before that. They were lovely, the two brides, the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law.”⁵³⁸

In the context of propagating IS ideology, strategies, and positions toward other Sunni armed factions, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the West, among others, she presents jurisprudential, intellectual, and political justifications. On IS’ position on fighting other factions, such as the Free Syrian Army or the *Sahawat* (Awakening forces in Iraq), she considers fighting them justified because they are ‘apostates and traitors, there is no other punishment for them except death.’ She also justified the burning alive of Jordanian pilot Mu`az al-Kasasbah because he was part of the coalition against IS. She accuses other factions of submission to the US and Turkey’s orders and of receiving funds from abroad to fight IS,⁵³⁹ and for this, she declares their *kufir* equally with their allies, where “for us, there is no difference between the atheists, the Crusaders, the *Nusayriyya* “Alawites”, the apostates, and the traitors from among those cowardly *Sahawat*.”⁵⁴⁰

She also defends a speech that IS leader al-Baghdadi gave in early November 2016 in which he attacked Turkey. She defines the shift in IS’ position toward Turkey from considering it a “rational enemy” that IS avoided armed confrontations with, to a “deranged enemy” that began to attack IS and aid other factions against it. Turkey, she states, supports the rebels in taking over IS territories, but does nothing against Iran and Russia.⁵⁴¹ She also gives religious justification for IS’ publication of a video showing the burning alive of two captured Turkish soldiers.⁵⁴²

On the other hand, why didn’t al-Baghdadi attack Iran or incite against it? Al-Bugha justifies that Iran is the main enemy that IS is fighting against in Syria and Iraq, and therefore, there is no need to go to Iran to fight them there. She also justifies the lack of IS attacks on Russian soil at a time that IS cells are active and carrying out attacks in Europe and the US, she states: “Russia is like the monster Bashar “al-Assad”, 30 operations would not budge it because it is fighting out of a crusader military doctrine in its Leninist or Stalinist approach. It does not care if a million of its people are killed,

⁵³⁸ Ibid., dated January 17, 2016.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., dated October 13, 2016 (made in a comment to a post on her page).

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., dated April 8, 2016.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., dated November 4 and 5, 2016.

⁵⁴² Ibid., dated December 23, 2016.

whereas the Western world is capitalist, founded upon crusader companies but with a capitalist mentality interested in profit and loss.⁵⁴³

Based on the above texts and her extensive activities on social media, we find that we are before constant arguments in defense of IS' thought and its political, ideological, and religious positions on the one hand, and an effective rosy depiction of the ideal life under the caliphate on the other hand. Her approach is that of political and media propaganda in service of IS' agenda and narrative, and in countering rival and opposing narratives that expose IS' extremism and brutality, and also in confronting the positions of Islamic currents that, in general, consider IS' ideology and actions to be deviation from Islam. Al-Bugha stands at the forefront of the intellectual, doctrinal, and media battles against the majority of Islamic trends in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and against the spectrum of Syrian opposition factions, and against the stereotypical depiction of IS that has prevailed in world media and public opinion.

Remarks: Iman al-Bugha's Ideological and Self-Positioning

This chapter relied heavily on Iman al-Bugha's own writings and discourse for many reasons. Her texts reflect her deep belief in the project of the 'Islamic State' and her identifying with it ideologically and religiously. They also expose the propaganda role that she plays in defending IS in the cyber world, and her marked ability to infiltrate the religious imagination of Muslim populace on the one hand, and her attempts to undermine the stereotypical image that the media portrays about IS on the other hand.

This ideological and self-identification with IS and its political project, coupled with her estrangement from her family, the death of her son while fighting alongside IS, and the marriage of her two daughters to IS fighters, reinforce the conclusion that she has tied her fate – definitively and wholeheartedly – to the organization. She found in IS the final resort for her strong personality, religious orientation, and personal, intellectual, and ideological identity. We find this in her answer to those who are worried about her and her fate in the event that IS is defeated and the 'caliphate' ceases to exist; she responds: "Believe it or not, this question has not come to my mind, because

⁵⁴³ Ibid., dated November 4, 2016.

I am here in the Islamic State, I have taken its identity and became one of its citizens, all thanks be to God, and that's it! "IS" shall remain, God willing, and if God forbids, it ceases, then I shall not go to you or to the likes of you because I do not like humiliation and disgrace, I love eminence much more."⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., dated November 5, 2016.

Chapter Four

Female Jihadists of Europe

The Islamic State organization has brought about major transformations in the phenomenon of jihadist movements, among the most significant of which has been its ability to attract and mobilize women in unprecedented numbers to assume various roles. IS has attracted more female members, followers, and sympathizers compared to previous jihadist movements. Western, particularly European females, have come to constitute one of the largest percentages of incoming female jihadists joining extremist groups.

This influx of female European jihadists to IS raises the puzzling question: what causes these women, and often teenage girls, to leave their countries and migrate to IS territories, where they would live in conflict-ridden conditions that are certainly not materially comparable to the comfortable and stable conditions in Europe, and where they would give up many rights and privileges they enjoyed in their home countries; countries where people from other parts of the world dream of migrating to in search of a safer and better life, to escape poverty, war, and absence of rights or democracy? This is even more puzzling when we find that many of the women joining IS come from families who had fled their home countries (mostly Muslim-majority countries) and came to Europe seeking a better life.

Various theories emerged to answer this question. Some theories consider the internet to be the main culprit, focusing on the role of the internet in brainwashing and recruiting girls who are addicted to social networking sites. Other theories speak of the role of 'boyfriends' and the tempting idea of marriage particularly for teenage girls. Multifaceted aspects also emerged in answering this question, such as the thrill sought by the adventurous young generation, indoctrination by family or friends, and/or the question of religious identity in Western societies, among others.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁵ See for example: Simon Bonnet, "Western women in jihad, triumph of conservatism or export of sexual revolution?" - *Géopolitique de l'Europe*, 2015, <https://www.diploweb.com/Western-women-in-jihad-triumph-of.html> Also see: Florian Flade, Carolin George and Per Hinrichs, "Why 2 'Normal' Teens Joined ISIS," *OZY*, February 22, 2016, <http://www.ozy.com/true-story/why-2-normal-teens-joined-isis/61629> Sa'eed al-Kahl, "Dirasa Tahliliya-Mutarjama-`an Dawafi` Musharakat al-Nisaa' Ma` Da`ish" "A Translated Analytical Study About Why Women Participate in IS", *Assakina*, November 14, 2014, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/57276.html#ixzz4PbyiSG3U>

There are no precise statistics on the number of European females who left for Iraq and Syria to join IS, but many reports suggest that the number has reached around 550 females from several European countries, notably from France, Belgium, UK, and Germany. Most estimates find that these females account for nearly 10 percent of the total number of European jihadi migrants, including males and females.⁵⁴⁶

Around 40 females from Germany went to Syria, representing over 10 percent of 378 Germans who migrated there (nearly 60 percent of the total number are under the age of 25). Recent reports note that the number of female jihadi migrants from France surpassed 200, from Belgium over 100, and from Britain over 100 as well.⁵⁴⁷

This chapter studies several representative cases of female European jihadism, mostly from the new generation of IS followers, but also the model of the Al-Qaeda women in Europe, such as the case of Malika el-Aroud. It searches for reliable information about their lives and social and cultural backgrounds prior to their joining jihadist groups in an effort to identify whether particular psychological or ideological turning points drove them towards the path of female jihadism. This chapter delves into the question of how this happened (recruitment methods), but also more significantly why this transformation emerged and whether the answers shed light on prospective cases.

There have been several cases of Western female jihadists that attracted wide media attention, such as Tara Nettleton, an Australian woman who left for Syria to join her husband Khaled Sharrouf, an IS fighter, and took along her children, including her daughter Zaynab Sharrouf. There is also the case of their close friend Zehra Duman, an Australian of Turkish origin who announced her arrival in Syria in December 2014,⁵⁴⁸ and Saman-

⁵⁴⁶ “Mi’at al-Europeat Yaltahiqna bi Tanzim al-Dawla al-Islamiyya,” “Hundreds of European Females Join the Islamic State Organization”, BBC Arabic, January 28, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2015/01/150128_female_jihadists_report, Also see: Ahmad Mamdouh al-Laythi, “Taqrir: 550 Sayida Ajnabiya bi Da’ish Aghlabahun Ingliziyat Murahiqat,” “Report: 550 Foreign Women in ISIS, Most of Them British Teenagers”, Insider Pro, July 1, 2015, <http://www.al-madina.com/article/389074/>

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, these figures will be discussed further throughout this chapter.

⁵⁴⁸ Erin Marie Saltman, Melanie Smith, “‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, p27-36. https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf

tha Lewthwaite who is dubbed the ‘White Widow,’⁵⁴⁹ in addition to several American women and girls, to be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter discusses female European jihadism through two models, the first are the British females, mostly teenagers, including Aqsa Mahmood, Kadiza Sultana, Shamima Begum, Amira Abase, Sharmeena Begum, and the teenage twin sisters Zahra and Salma Halane. The second is the model of Francophone female jihadists from France and Belgium, including Hayat Boumeddiene, Hasna Aït Boulahcen, Inès Madani, and Malika el-Aroud, dubbed ‘the Black Widow.’

British *Muhajirat* to the Utopian Caliphate

Among the notable cases of British female jihadism is the case of Aqsa Mahmood, one of the first of British girls to depart for IS territories when she was only 21 years old. Other cases include the twin sisters Zahra and Salma Halane, 28-year-old Malaysian doctor Shams (who lived for a while in the UK), 47-year-old Sally Jones (who worked as a perfume saleswoman and played guitar in a punk band before converting to Islam and migrating to IS territories, fleeing with her 10-year-old son in 2013), and then 24-year-old Grace ‘Khadijah’ Dare (a British Catholic girl who converted to Islam in her teens, and was one of the first British women to travel to Syria in 2012 with her babyson).⁵⁵⁰

Other cases that garnered media attention include the “Dawood Sisters,” Khadija (30), Zohra (33), and Sugra (34), who left in June 2015 to join IS in Syria with their nine children (five girls and four boys then aged between three and 15 years old). The sisters left their husbands behind in the UK, claiming to plan to perform *umrah* pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, after which they boarded a flight to Istanbul and crossed into Syria instead of tak-

⁵⁴⁹ Julian Robinson, “British white widow terror fugitive Samantha Lewthwaite ‘mentored all-female team of jihadists’ who attacked Kenyan police station,” *Daily Mail*, September 15, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3791189/British-white-widow-terror-fugitive-Samantha-Lewthwaite-mentored-female-team-jihadists-attacked-Kenyan-police-station.html#ixzz4VjCG9Bz3>

⁵⁵⁰ Lizzie Dearden, “‘Isis’ British brides: What we know about the girls and women still in Syria after the death of Kadiza Sultana,” *The Independent*, August 12, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/isis-british-brides-kadiza-sultana-girls-women-syria-married-death-killed-aqsa-mahmood-islamic-state-a7187751.html>

ing their scheduled journey home.⁵⁵¹

There are other names reported in the media not only of migrants, but also of returnees,⁵⁵² and others accused of trying to carry out attacks inside the UK,⁵⁵³ but the information available on these cases is not extensive enough to allow for analyzing the foci of psychological and ideological transformations to draw a more representative understanding of the phenomenon of British female jihadism.

Warnings about the growth of the phenomenon of British girls joining IS came as British officials released alarming figures in early 2016 showing that the number of girls and women reported missing by families who are ‘feared to have travelled to Syria’ shot up to 56 during 2015, while 43 females are thought to have fled to join IS during 2014. The figures continued to grow as more stories emerge of girls and women who fled during 2016, culminating in a phenomenon of dozens of “girls, young women, and also families who are taking the decision to go to Syria” among nearly 700 British citizens estimated to have joined the organization.⁵⁵⁴

Several specialized studies and research efforts made by think tanks contribute significant details and analysis of this phenomenon, most notably the study entitled “Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon,” published by the London-based think tank, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). The study uses data from an extensive female migrant database run between ISD and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) that tracks and archives social media material on over 100 female profiles across online platforms and social networking sites coming from 15 different countries. Another significant study on the phenomenon in part of ISD’s Women and Extremism Programme, launched in January 2015, is entitled “Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² “British woman Tareena Shakil guilty of joining IS,” *BBC*, January 29, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35443884>

⁵⁵³ Owen Bowcott, “Couple found guilty of 7/7 anniversary London bomb plot,” *The Guardian*, December 29, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/29/couple-guilty-july-7-anniversary-bomb-plot-london>

⁵⁵⁴ Charlie Peat, “Number of women leaving UK for ISIS on the rise, chilling figures show,” *Sunday Express*, January 12, 2016, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/633746/Women-joining-ISIS-Syria-from-UK-rise-chilling-figures-show>

⁵⁵⁵ Erin Marie Saltman, Melanie Smith, “Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon,”

The importance of these studies is that they transcend stereotypical and preconceived notions about the phenomenon, and engage instead in studying it through its main variables, beginning by explaining the factors and processes that lead Western women toward radicalization, represented by ‘push factors’ that prime certain women to be more vulnerable to extremist propaganda, and ‘pull factors’ indoctrinating these women into subscribing to IS’ jihadist ideology, to the point that they are willing to leave their homes and migrate to the so-called caliphate.⁵⁵⁶

Such studies reject from the outset the assumptions propagated in Arab and Western media alike about ‘jihadi brides,’ and focus instead on objective push factors such as the women’s feeling isolated socially and/or culturally, including questioning one’s identity and uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture, and feeling anger, sadness, and frustration at the persecution of the Muslim community and the perceived lack of international action in response to this persecution. On the other hand, pull factors operated by IS include the propagation of a new jihadist project more in tune with the ‘imagined’ identity and idealistic goals of religious duty and building a utopian caliphate state, where they would live in the bliss of belonging and sisterhood, a propaganda that plays heavily on romanticizing the adventure of joining IS and finding romance in the form of a husband or wife. Overall push and pull factors even play on a humanitarian role that can be played by joining and migrating to the caliphate, and contributing to creating a society in harmony with puritanical religious identity and a life governed by religious laws and values.⁵⁵⁷

The phenomenon of Western female migrants cannot be defined by fixed features, such as particular age, educational, or social background grouping, for there is “significant diversity within the profiles of women radicalised and migrating to ISIS territory. Profiles “of Western female migrants to ISIS territory” show a high level of nuance and complexity, making it impossible to create a broad profile of females at risk of radicalisation based on age, location, ethnicity, family relations or religious background.”⁵⁵⁸ Hence, there is significant amount of variation in the factors that supposedly

Op. cit. Also see: Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, Ross Frenett, “Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, <https://goo.gl/6exLN4>

⁵⁵⁶ Erin Marie Saltman, Melanie Smith, “‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon,” Op. cit., pp. 8-18.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

push these women and girls to become radicalized in the first place, and to then take the crucial step to join the group and migrate to IS territories.

With these variations in mind, there remains significant space of common features that relate to age and social background, for example, notwithstanding the different psychological experiences. The case of the four teenagers from Bethnal Green, along with the case of Aqsa Mahmood, reflect new dimensions in female jihadism, particularly in its IS version: their age, gender, and the ease and speed with which the girls were recruited and eventually disappeared from their homes only to emerge days later in Syria.

The girls were all reportedly living normal lives and exhibiting normal teenage behavior in thought and interests before the radical changes and transformations began to emerge only short months before they departed for IS territories. They left behind comfortable settings coming from economically middle-class families, to varying degrees.

Aqsa Mahmood, for example, came from a socially and economically stable family. Her father moved to Glasgow, Scotland from Pakistan in the 1970s. The family owns a house in an upscale neighborhood in Glasgow, where Mahmood grew up with her parents, brothers, and sisters. Her father was the first Pakistani Cricket player for Scotland.

She attended Craigholme private girls' school, an upscale private school with fees reaching £3,500 a term, before going on to Shawlands Academy, a state-school, after poor exam results in her early manifestations of transformation towards radicalization. Her friends remember her as a typical Western teenager who loved Western culture, shopping, listening to Coldplay, and reading J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and the Hunger Games series, an imagination full of adventure that turned from fiction to the surreal world of IS.⁵⁵⁹

After Shawlands, Mahmood enrolled to study diagnostic radiography at Glasgow Caledonian University (the university that appointed as its Chancellor Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladeshi social entrepreneur and banker who was awarded the Noble Peace Prize for founding the microcredit and

⁵⁵⁹ "Lihathi al-Asbab al-Fatayat al-Europeat Yaqa'na fi Shibak Da'ish" "For These Reasons European Girls Fall into the Trap of IS", *Sputnik News*, October 15, 2014, https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arabic.ruvr.ru/news/2014_10_15/278713626/

microfinance Grameen Bank).⁵⁶⁰ But Mahmood soon dropped out to travel to Syria, at age 19, where she would become known as an active IS recruiter and propagandist.

On the early signs of change in Mahmood's character, her father notes that she was a sweet girl who loved school and had no extreme ideas. But when she began her college studies, she became interested in politics, particularly the war in Syria, where "she became very emotional and would cry when she watched the news." Her father adds, "I remember after a chemical attack on the news, she burst into tears."⁵⁶¹

She stopped listening to music and quit reading fiction novels, but her family was not yet worried since she still accompanied her family on outings and watching movies at the theatre. Unlike the other British teens, Mahmood did not come from a religious family, but rather from a self-proclaimed secular family more interested in education and building a good life. Her mild character prior to her transformation is what mostly stunned the family and took them by great surprise. Her mother, Khalida, says her daughter was afraid of the dark and didn't even know what bus to take downtown, much less how to cross the border into Syria. "She didn't like shouting. I don't know when she became this brave. She was scared to talk, scared to fly, and this is a very big step -- her flying to Syria. I can't believe this," the mother remarks.⁵⁶²

The family's ordeal began months before her departure. In May 2013, her mother found a suspicious text from a person named Adeel Ulhaq, then a 21-year old English-based fanatic. The father spoke to Ulhaq on the phone and told him to leave their daughter alone, but the texts and online exchanges continued throughout the summer. One night, while the family had gone to a wedding in Manchester and Mahmood stayed home with her grandparents, the grandmother called the parents in tears saying the Mahmood had gone to meet Ulhaq's family. Upon their return to Glasgow, the two families

⁵⁶⁰ See the website of Glasgow Caledonian University at <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/> On the appointment of Muhammad Yunus as Chancellor, see <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/theuniversity/ourchancellor/>

⁵⁶¹ Gavin Madley, "Heartbroken and hopeless: Parents of Scottish jihadi bride Aqsa Mahmood tell of their devastation at losing her to ISIS brainwashing," *The Scottish Daily Mail*, February 22, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3457741/Heartbroken-hopeless-Parents-Scottish-jihadi-bride-Aqsa-Mahmood-tell-devastation-losing-ISIS-brainwashing.html>

⁵⁶² Atika Shubert and Bharati Naik, "CNN exclusive: From Glasgow to 'bedroom radical' and ISIS bride," *CNN*, September 5, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/index.html>

met at a local mosque where Aqsa Mahmood told her parents of her intention to marry Ulhaq. Her parents rejected the idea, for the two were young, did not know each other, and did not even have jobs. The girl agreed to return home with her family, manifesting remorse, crying and saying that she had made a mistake. The parents began to monitor her closely, checking her phone regularly but finding nothing to raise concern, only to realize later, as her father notes, “Now I know there were all sorts of ways of accessing social media I had no clue about.”⁵⁶³

The shock came on a November 2013 day when Mahmood hugged her father on her way out to school and said goodbye, “*Khuda hafiz*,” but never returned home. Four days after her disappearance, she made one last phone call to her parents before crossing the Turkish border into Syria, telling them “I will see you on the day of judgement. I will take you to heaven, I will hold your hands,” before adding ominously: “I want to become a martyr.” This shy, humble young girl – as her father describes her – had set her course to al-Raqqa to join IS, gave herself the jihadi name ‘Umm al-Layth,’ and soon became the notorious IS propagandist on social networking sites. News and leaks from jihadist sources inside al-Raqqa, while difficult to substantiate, speak of her holding a leading position in the all-female al-Khansaa Brigade, and her essential role in recruiting British and Western females online, and arranging the marriages of migrant Western females to IS fighters.⁵⁶⁴

In searching for a turning point that defines Mahmood’s radicalization, we find her parents blaming Adeel Ulhaq of grooming their daughter for jihad. Ulhaq was later charged with funding terrorism in Syria, planning to leave for Syria, and of engaging in preparation of terrorist acts by assisting another 17-year-old girl, Aseel Muthana, to leave the UK, and was imprisoned for six years.⁵⁶⁵ During the trial, Ulhaq claimed he had considered going to Syria to bring Mahmood home, calling her “an ex-girlfriend.” But the father cries foul, “‘Ulhaq’ knew she was married in Syria, it was total lies

⁵⁶³ Gavin Madley, “Heartbroken and hopeless: Parents of Scottish jihadi bride Aqsa Mahmood tell of their devastation at losing her to ISIS brainwashing,” op. cit.

⁵⁶⁴ Robert Mendick, and Robert Verkaik, “British female jihadis sign up to the Islamic State’s all-women police force,” *The Telegraph*, September 7, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11079386/British-female-jihadis-sign-up-to-the-Islamic-States-all-women-police-force.html>

⁵⁶⁵ For more on Adeel Ulhaq, see: “Old Bailey hearing for man accused of helping Cardiff teen Aseel Muthana join terrorists in Syria,” *Wales Online*, February 2, 2015, <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/old-bailey-hearing-man-accused-8561118>

he was going out to save her... There are others like Adeel out there. He got into her brain. Many young people followed him.”⁵⁶⁶

While British officials find a greater role for social media in propagating IS ideology, indoctrinating and recruiting young men and women, and although holding steadfast to the idea that Mahmood was ‘brainwashed’ by Ulhaq, her family nonetheless relay manifestations of her gradual transformation, beginning with increased interest in politics and the events in Syria, to her dress becoming more orthodox, which was not the family’s tradition. Mahmood even asked to wear *niqab*, the face veil, which her mother rejected. She began to pray and read the Qur’an, but these indicators did not set alarm bells for the family, for as the mother says, “For me, as the mother of a young daughter, it was much better she was interested in religion rather than partying or boys. I now wonder whether this was all her preparation for Syria.”⁵⁶⁷

Sharmeena Begum: Sharmeena was 15 years old when she left her family home in Bethnal Green, a London district with a large Muslim community, and headed for Syria in December 2014. Born in east London in 1999 as the only child to a Bangladeshi family, Sharmeena was largely brought up by her mother Shahnaz Begum until 2007, when her father moved to Britain. The mother was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in 2013, but kept her illness secret from her daughter. The mother died six months later in January 2014 at the age of 33. The father remarried in September of that year, after which the girl decided to live with her maternal grandmother and uncle in East London since she was not getting along with her father’s new wife.⁵⁶⁸

Before her mother’s death, Sharmeena was not particularly religious. She enjoyed pop music, loved Rihanna, shopping, and make-up, like many ordinary teens her age. But after her mother died, her behavior began to change and she took intense interest in Islam, spending most of her free time praying in her room. She stopped listening to music and spent more time watching the news and engaging in social networking sites on her phone. She began to wear hijab and attend the East London Mosque for prayers.

⁵⁶⁶ Gavin Madley, “Heartbroken and hopeless: Parents of Scottish jihadi bride Aqsa Mahmood tell of their devastation at losing her to ISIS brainwashing,” op. cit.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Vikram Dodd, “Sharmeena Begum - British girl left to join Isis after upheavals at home,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/13/shar-meena-begum-first-of-british-girl-isis>

Her father was not concerned about these changes, attributing them to feeling the emotional loss of her mother. One morning in early December 2014, Sharmeena told her father she was too sick to go to school, only to end up meeting with her best friends, Kadiza Sultana, Shamima Begum, and Amira Abase that evening. She vanished the next morning, having left for Syria via Turkey, and had been allegedly recruited over the internet by two pro-IS women who took her to the airport for her flight to Istanbul, according to Britishpolice.⁵⁶⁹

The four girls were very close friends, attending Bethnal Green Academy together, were known to have excelled in school and were not religious at the outset. Sharmeena's father knew of their close friendship, and had warned the school and police upon his daughter's disappearance in December to monitor the three remaining girls out of fear that they would join her. Police officers talked to the girls at school, and handed them letters to give to their families asking for permission to question them further, but the trio apparently hid the letters from their families, along with their plans to travel to join Sharmeena in Syria.

A few months later, on February 17th, 2015, during school break, the girls boarded a flight to Istanbul, and from there crossed the border into al-Raqqa, where they would join IS and reunite with Sharmeena. The sudden departure of the four talented teenage girls from Bethnal Green Academy came as a shock to their families and their school, and garnered wide media attention particularly because they were young girls who came from stable backgrounds.

On the night of February 16th, 2015, Kadiza Sultana, a British girl from a Somali family, was dancing and giggling in matching pajamas with her 13-year-old niece who had come for a sleepover at her home in Bethnal Green in east London. She offered her niece her room that night and shared a bed with her mother, to whom she was devoted particularly since her father had died. At 16 years of age, Sultana was known to her family and friends as joyful, sociable, funny and kind.⁵⁷⁰ But the next morning she boarded a Turk-

⁵⁶⁹ Emine Sinmaz and Sue Reid, "She loved Rihanna, clothes and make-up... then fell under the spell of Islamists: Meet the FIRST British schoolgirl who fled to join ISIS," *The Daily Mail*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2994085/She-loved-Rihanna-clothes-make-fell-spell-Islamists-British-schoolgirl-15-fled-join-ISIS.html>

⁵⁷⁰ Katrin Bennhold, "Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/world/europe/jihad-and-girl-power-how-isis-lured-3-london-teenagers.html>

ish Airlines flight to Istanbul, along with her 15-year-old friends Shamima Begum and Amira Abase, where they would cross the Turkish border into IS territories in Syria and join their friend Sharmeena Begum. Sultana got married to an IS fighter there, and was reportedly killed over a year later in an airstrike that took place around June 22nd, 2016 on a building where she had been living.⁵⁷¹

Prior to her *hijra* to IS territories, Sultana was recognized by her teachers as a bright student. She hadn't been particularly religious, although she came from a conservative family. But a few months before her travel with her friends, her family began to notice changes in her behavior and interests, and she began to wear more modest clothes. She would spend long hours browsing the internet on her iPad, and frequented a mosque in east London with her friends.

Amira Abase was born in Ethiopia, and spent her early childhood in Germany before her family moved to London when she was 11. She was a “star athlete and a respected public speaker, once debating the rights of Muslim women to wear veils. She was a regular at the local library, where she read voraciously. (After her disappearance, when the police went to check the list of books she had borrowed, one title, ‘Insurgent,’ briefly rang alarm bells - until the officer realized that it was part of a popular dystopian teenage trilogy set in Chicago).”⁵⁷² Abase was “in love with the idea of falling in love” and marriage. Living in a predominately conservative Muslim community in Bethnal Green, Abase was growing gradually religious, reflected in her posts on social media (which she later took to writing under the account name Umm Uthman al-Britaniya), where “typical teenage commentary about fashion, school, and sports increasingly mixed with posts inquiring about how to learn Arabic quickly and what behavior is or is not Islamic.” She spoke of leaving behind an immoral society to search for religious virtue and meaning. In one Twitter message, nine days before she and her friends left Britain,

⁵⁷¹ Jamie Grierson and Vikram Dodd, “British girl believed killed in Syria ‘was too scared to flee Isis’,” *The Guardian*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/12/british-girl-believed-killed-in-syria-was-too-scared-to-flee-isis> Also see: William Watkinson, “Bethnal Green schoolgirl who joined Isis believed to have been killed in an air strike,” *International Business Times*, August 12, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/bethnal-green-schoolgirl-kadiza-sultana-who-joined-isis-raqqa-believed-killed-airstrike-1575604>

⁵⁷² Katrin Bennhold, “Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls,” op. cit.

Abase wrote, “I feel like I don’t belong in this era.”⁵⁷³

After the girls vanished, media reports showed footage of Amira Abase’s father, Hussein Abase, attending an Islamist rally in 2012 where he can be seen chanting “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great) as an American flag is burned nearby. He reportedly took his daughter to marches, too. “Some parents create the atmosphere for their children,” said Haras Rafiq, the managing director of the Quilliam Foundation, an anti-extremism research center. But the father denies charges of influencing his daughter towards radicalization, stressing that he was completely shocked by what his daughter did, and that no one understands why she and her friends would leave to join IS.

In al-Raqqa, the three girls got married. Abase married Abdullah Elmira, a former butcher from Australia, who has appeared in several IS recruitment videos and has been named “ginger jihadi” for his reddish hair.⁵⁷⁴

As for Shamima Begum, their third friend who was also 15-years-old when she left, her family’s account of her life prior to her departure to Syria is not much different. Her sister Renu describes her as a typical girl who did “normal stuff that normal people do,” a brilliant student who loved reading and watching “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” on TV. The sister notes that Shamima was not particularly religious, and had started to wear a scarf in year 10 “around age 14-15” because their mom told her to, and Shamima had no problem wearing it because all her friends wore it and she felt like the odd one out. On February 15th, 2015, just two days before the three girls left, Shamima (who comes from a Bangladeshi family but is not related to Sharmeena Begum) sent a Twitter message to Aqsa Mahmood, who had allegedly become a prominent IS recruiter. Shamima traveled on February 17th to Turkey on the passport of her 17-year-old sister, Aklima.⁵⁷⁵

The summer before the trio girls of Bethnal Green headed to Syria, British twin sisters Zahra and Salma Halane, both 16 years old at the time, had already left Manchester and entered Syria via Turkey in July 2014. The study “Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon” pre-

⁵⁷³ Ben Ferguson, “Left in the Dark: The Story Behind the Families of Three Girls Groomed by the Islamic State,” *Vice News*, August 3, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/article/left-in-the-dark-the-story-behind-the-families-of-three-girls-groomed-by-the-islamic-state> Also see: Katrin Bennhold, “Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls,” *op. cit.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

sents a detailed description of their manifest radicalization through their social networking activities online. Their older brother, Ahmad Halane, then 21 years old, had already left the UK in 2013 to join IS, and is thought to be a primary influence in introducing the twins to IS ideology and leading by example with his *hijra* to IS territories.

The Halane family left Somalia for Denmark and then the UK when the twin girls were four years old. The girls' father is known in the local community as a prominent reciter of the Qur'an and runs an intensive school of Qur'anic studies. The Halane family has been described as very religious.

Despite the religiously conservative nature of the family, it appears the twin sisters grew steadily radicalized in the few months leading up to their departure, crossing the blurred line between religious conservatism and ideological extremism. On their lives prior to their departure, the Halane sisters are described by their friends and school officials as well integrated into the school community, well liked among their peers, and highly intelligent. While attending Whalley Range High School,⁵⁷⁶ the twins excelled academically, with media reports noting that together they hold 28 GCSEs and had both aspired to work in medical science.⁵⁷⁷

The sisters were married to IS fighters shortly after arriving in Syria, and were apparently separated from each other as each sister lived with her husband in a different IS-controlled region. The two quickly and efficiently became prime IS propagandists, mastering the use of social networking sites and circumventing censorship by changing Twitter handles and using 'shout-out' tactics to regain followers. They propagated the 'utopian' life commonly espoused by female migrants to IS territory. Zahra, by then living in al-Raqqa and going by the name 'Umm Ja`far,' had the stronger presence on Twitter, demonstrating higher level of political engagement and direct recruitment strategies, glorifying IS acts of terror, publicly celebrating the anniversary of the September 11th, 2001 attacks and celebrating the mass attack on Charlie Hebdo's Paris offices.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ About Whalley Range High School, see its website at <http://www.wrhs1118.co.uk/>

⁵⁷⁷ Erin Marie Saltman, Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part': Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," op. cit. pp. 19–27.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

While living separately from each other, the twins were both widowed in December 2014. Zahra was married to Ali Kalantar, a 19-year-old of Afghan descent from Coventry, UK, who was reportedly killed in Iraq on December 4th, 2014. Zahra announced Kalantar's 'martyrdom' two days later on her Twitter account. A week later, Salma's husband was reportedly killed in an airstrike on December 12th, 2014. The study of their online presence reveals that the content produced by both twins since the beginning of 2015 has become consistently and markedly more extreme, encouraging Western women to make *hijra* to IS territory, and capitalizing on the media attention generated by their disappearance.⁵⁷⁹

In examining the previous cases, we find that although there are differences between the girls in terms of their psychological and emotional state of mind at the time of radicalization, and the method of their recruitment, yet there are significant similarities that bring their cases to the forefront as alarmingly phenomenal: their young age (ranging between 15 and 21), coming from traditionally Muslim families (ranging from secular in the case of Aqsa Mahmood, to moderate, to conservative in the case of the Halane twins), all have been described as smart, brilliant academic achievers, enjoying different hobbies that reflect typical teenage interests: loved shopping, fashion, music, and constantly wired on social media.

The turning points and dynamics of recruitment are not entirely clear; the parents sum it up with the cliché of brainwashing and recruitment over the internet. While this may be true in terms of method, other details within the folds of these stories hold strong significance in understanding the gradual – yet rapid – radicalization. For Aqsa Mahmood, it was reflected in her initial reactions to political events, particularly the conflict in Syria, provoking in her the need to do something. In becoming growingly influenced by jihadi ideology, Mahmood underwent the turn from political awareness to religiosity to ideological extremism. The case is opposite for Sharmeena Begum, whose manifestations of religiosity emerged with emotional ordeal following the death of her mother and the remarriage of her father. She grew closer to her friends, the girls who she would soon lead on the path to Syria. Sharmeena's radicalization process reflects a transition to political ideology from the gateway of emotional ordeal turned religiosity.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

In the case of the four girls from Bethnal Green, it is clear that the close friendship between them greatly contributed to the dynamic exchange of influence and deep conviction in *hijra* and joining IS. Whereas in the case of the twin sisters, Zahra and Salma, strong influence may be attributed to their brother who preceded them in radicalization, followed by their own influence on each other, for the decision appeared to be mutually accepted, welcomed, and espoused by both.

As is usually the case with young female migrants, the four girls of Bethnal Green and the Halane twins were married and later widowed within a short period of arriving in IS territory. While none of them were reported to seek to return to their homes and families in the UK, the only one publicly known to have been in contact with her family was Kadiza Sultana, who expressed a state of frustration and despair at the conditions of life under IS, before she was killed there in June 2016.

Another common aspect is that the girls all come from Muslim immigrant families to Europe (Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somali, and Ethiopian), and in adding the case of the Sudanese medical students (most of them holding British citizenship and having grown up in the UK), it appears that this religious-ethnic background is prominent in the case of British female jihadism, alongside the British females who converted to Islam such as Sally Jones and Grace Dare.⁵⁸⁰

Francophone Female Jihadists of Belgium and France

On Sunday morning, September 4th, 2016, French police discovered an unmarked car loaded with several gas cylinders and petrol tanks parked nearby the Notre Dame Cathedral, a major tourist attraction in central Paris. French authorities believe that incident was part of a plan to carry out other attacks on Paris and local train stations, among other vital targets, planned by a cell consisting of four females, two of them were teenagers, and at least one of which had pledged allegiance to IS.

Inès Madani, then 19 years old and the daughter of the owner of the car, was known to French authorities to be a threat to security for her jihadist

⁵⁸⁰ Lizzie Dearden, "‘Isis’ British brides: What we know about the girls and women still in Syria after the death of Kadiza Sultana," *op. cit.*

inclinations and attempts to travel to Syria. She was considered the mastermind of the botched attacks, and had stabbed a domestic intelligence officer during a raid on a home in Boussy-Saint-Antoine, 25 kilometers southeast of Paris, in which two other women, aged 23 and 29, were arrested. Police found a letter Madani had allegedly written swearing allegiance to IS and saying the planned attack was to avenge the recent death of IS' spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani in an airstrike.⁵⁸¹

While this was not the first IS-related terror incident in which a woman was involved, it was the first time that an incident was linked to an all-female terror cell. The involvement of women in recent terror attacks in France has become commonplace amid a growing pro-IS current in France and Belgium, where large Muslim communities live in similar economic, social, and cultural conditions, creating a sort of network among IS supporters in the two Francophone countries.

Over the past few years, women's roles in IS-related activities in Europe expanded to include a wide range of support methods from internet propaganda and recruitment to carrying out domestic terror attacks, in addition to dozens of Francophone women and girls who migrated, or attempted to migrate, to IS territories in Iraq and Syria.

Official estimates by the governments of France and Belgium reveal that the number of French and Belgian women joining the ranks of IS are among the highest in Europe, and perhaps the world. A confidential report by French intelligence agencies shows that, by December 2015, women made up more than a third (35 percent) of French citizens travelling to Iraq and Syria to join jihadist groups, up from just 10 percent in 2010, with the numbers still rising. Over 220 French females are thought to have made the journey to join IS, one-third of them are converts to Islam rather than raised Muslim, compared to just one-sixth of French male fighting with IS in Iraq and Syria who are converts. 59 women have been charged with terrorism-related charges in France, of whom 18 were serving prison sentences, according to

⁵⁸¹ Henry Samuel, "Teenager who swore allegiance to Isil one of three women arrested for planning 'imminent attack' on Paris train station," *The Telegraph*, September 9, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/09/teenager-who-swore-allegiance-to-isil-one-of-three-women-arreste/> Also see: Ben McPartland, "What we know of failed Paris plot by women 'jihadists'," *The Local*, September 9, 2016, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20160909/three-three-women-terror-suspects-and-their-plot>

François Molins, the Paris prosecutor in charge of terrorism investigations.⁵⁸² In Belgium, official figures estimate that 104 Belgian women out of a total of 614 Belgian citizens have left to join IS in Syria and Iraq as of August 2016.⁵⁸³

While a majority of the cases of French and Belgian female jihadists and supporters are of females who come from Muslim Arab and North African backgrounds, there remains an alarming number of females who are French and Belgian in origin (at least one-third of those who left for Iraq and Syria are converts to Islam, in addition to significant numbers of others who remain in Europe). Such cases include, for example, 21-year-old French woman who calls herself Umm al-Zahraa, who left to join IS in Syria in 2014 and was arrested upon her return to France, charged for her role in recruiting French women and convincing them to travel to IS territories.⁵⁸⁴ Ornella Gilligman, a 29-year-old French woman and mother of three, and 23-year-old Sarah Hervouët, both converts to Islam, were arrested in part of the all-female terror cell with Inès Madani.⁵⁸⁵ There is also Laura Passoni, a 34-year-old Belgian mother of two young boys who converted to Islam from Catholicism when she was a teen. She left for Syria in June 2014 and later returned to Belgium and wrote a book about her experience with IS, called “In the Heart of ISIS With My Son.”⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸² See: “Women back from Syria ‘a danger’: French prosecutor,” *AFP*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/women-back-syria-danger-french-prosecutor-145636093.html>
 “Taqrir: Irtifa` Indhimam al-Faransiyat li ‘Da`ish’ Ila 35%” “Report: French Females Joining IS Rise to 35%”, *Assakina*, June 18, 2016, <http://www.assakina.com/news/news2/90162.html>

Sam Ball, “Rise in French women joining IS group ranks as jihadists target female recruits,” *France 24*, January 10, 2016, <http://www.france24.com/en/20160108-france-women-islamic-state-group-female-recruits>.
 Alissa J. Rubin and Aurelien Breeden, “Women’s Emergence as Terrorists in France Points to Shift in ISIS Gender Roles,” *The New York Times*, October 1, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/world/europe/womens-emergence-as-terrorists-in-france-points-to-shift-in-isis-gender-roles.html>

⁵⁸³ See: “104 Nisaa` Baljikiyat Indhamamna ila Jama`at Mutatarifa” “104 Belgian Females have Joined Extremist Groups”, *Russia Today Arabic*, August 31, 2016, goo.gl/FsQsbP

⁵⁸⁴ See: “‘Ilaqa’ al-Qabdh `ala ‘Umm al-Zahraa’ .. Al-Faransiya allati Tuzawwij Muqatili Da`ish min Europeat” “Umm al-Zahraa’ Arrested: The French Woman who Marries ISIS Fighters to European Women”, *CNN Arabic*, September 29, 2015, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/09/29/oum-azzahra-isis>

⁵⁸⁵ Alissa J. Rubin and Aurelien Breeden, “Women’s Emergence as Terrorists in France Points to Shift in ISIS Gender Roles,” op. cit. Also see: Emma Webb, “This is why Isis prefers to use home-grown terrorists over foreign jihadis,” *The Independent*, September 20, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/isis-terrorism-family-affair-france-attacks-why-you-should-be-worried-a7317991.html>

⁵⁸⁶ “Europe Wakes Up to Prospect of Female Terrorists,” *NPR*, October 17, 2016, <https://goo.gl/He3WNb>

This section discusses three cases of Francophone women whose details about their personal lives capture the turning point moments of their radicalization. Malika el-Aroud is considered among the ‘old generation’ linked to Al-Qaeda. The other two, Hayat Boumeddiene and Hasna Boulahcen share similar stories with IS, but faced different fates.

Malika el-Aroud is one of the most prominent female faces of global jihadism. The Moroccan-born Belgian woman was arrested numerous times and charged with terror-related activities, particularly propagating jihadi ideology on the internet. In May 2010, she was convicted in Brussels on terrorism charges and sentenced to eight years in prison. In September 2015, a constitutional court ratified a decision to strip el-Aroud of Belgian citizenship for failing in her duties as a citizen.⁵⁸⁷

El-Aroud earned many titles in Western media, such as the “princess of Al-Qaeda in Europe,” “the most dangerous woman in Europe,” “the face of Al-Qaeda’s European female jihadists,” “the mama of Al-Qaeda,” “the soft extremist,” and “the living legend,” considering her long history with Al-Qaeda since 2001, and her active role on the internet propagating Al-Qaeda ideology and recruiting fighters through the numerous websites she ran.⁵⁸⁸

On her active jihadist propagation and roles, Judge Jean-Louis Bruguere, who was France’s senior counterterrorism magistrate and had interviewed el-Aroud in the early 2000’s for her terrorism role, describes her as “very radical, very sly and very dangerous.” Glenn Audenaert, the director of Belgium’s federal police force says about her: “Her jihad is not to lead an operation but to inspire other people to wage jihad... She enjoys the protection that Belgium offers. At the same time, she is a potential threat.” Claude Moniquet, president of the Brussels-based European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, describes her as “a role model, an icon who is bold

⁵⁸⁷ See: Khaled Maher, “Baljika Tujarrid Armatat Qatil al-Afghani Shah Mas`ud min Jinsiyatiha” “Belgium Strips Citizenship from Widow of the Killer of Afghanistan’s Shah Massoud”, *Menara*, September 19, 2015, goo.gl/S5eK0D Also see: “Qissat Umm `Ubaidah al-Maghribiyya, Aw ‘al-Armaila al-Sawda’ Allati Sahabat Baljika Minha al-Jinsiyya” “The Story of the Moroccan Umm Ubaidah, the Black Widow Stripped of Belgian Citizenship”, *Febrayer*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.febrayer.com/250979.html>

⁵⁸⁸ See, for example, “The Mama of Al Qaeda,” *Gates of Vienna*, December 15, 2008, <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2008/12/mama-of-al-qaeda.html> Also see: Hadi Yahmad, “Malika al-Baljikiya.. al-Amira al-Europiyya li al-Qa`ida” “Malika the Belgian: the European Female Leader of Al-Qaeda”, *le jour d’Après*, October 2, 2012, <http://lejour-dapres.blogspot.com/2012/10/blog-post.html> Muhammad al-Shafi’i, “Malika Wajh al-Tataruf al-Na`im” “Malika: The Soft Face of Extremism”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 20, 2009.

enough to use her own name. She plays a very important strategic role as a source of inspiration. She's very clever - and extremely dangerous."⁵⁸⁹

El-Aroud was born in the Moroccan city of Tangier in 1960, and lived there with her grandmother before joining her family in Brussels in 1965. Her father was a laborer, and she had four brothers and sisters. Her family was traditionally conservative and restricted her movement as a young girl. She did not particularly excel in school and did not complete high school (unlike most of the cases previously discussed). She began to rebel against her family, living the life of partying, drugs, and alcohol, and integrated into Belgian nightlife. She got pregnant out of wedlock at age 18 and bore a daughter. Her first marriage, at 18, was unhappy and brief, ending two years later in divorce.⁵⁹⁰

The turning point towards religiosity in her life emerged after her divorce. She reportedly would sit in her room and listen to recitation of the Qur'an, and while her Arabic language was weak, she would read a French translation of the Muslim holy book. She began to embrace a fundamentalist version of Islam, pray regularly, wear modest clothes, and attend a local Islamic center where she became acquainted with Islamist circles, leaving behind her previous life of partying and her non-Muslim Belgian friends.⁵⁹¹

But the roots of her radicalization and embrace of Jihadi Salafism came around 1991. She relays that during this year, "God gave me guidance, I was mature and had a daughter. I was seeking to learn more, which brought me closer to my sect. This was in 1991 when I began to follow international events more closely. I was finding that nothing has changed with the Palestinian cause, and afterwards I learned about the war in Chechnya where the hypocrisy of the international community became more evident to me. This led me to discover that I belong to an Ummah "nation" that has been fought since the dawn of Islam. I was ignorant about everything in Muslim history, which made me feel guilty. I began to search and I had no more doubt that the

⁵⁸⁹ Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/world/europe/27iht-terror.4.13257511.html>

⁵⁹⁰ See: Jamal el-Khanoussi, "man Takun Fi'lan Malika el-Aroud" "Who Really Is Malika El-Aroud", *Jamal el-Khanoussi Blog*, December 26, 2008, http://jamalelkanoussi.blogspot.com/2008/12/blog-post_26.html

⁵⁹¹ Muhammad al-Shafi'i, "Malika Wajh al-Tataruf al-Na'im" "Malika: The Soft Face of Extremism", op. cit.

war against Islam and Muslims will never end. With years, I began to notice this war developing more and more; the Jews in Palestine, the Russians in Chechnya and Afghanistan, in addition to the sanctions against Iraq where over a million children have died, while the world's public opinion remained silent."⁵⁹²

During this period, el-Aroud met Abdessatar Dahmane, a Tunisian loyal to Osama bin Laden. Dahmane was born in 1962 and studied journalism in Tunisia before immigrating to Belgium where he continued his college education, and later associated with a group of jihadists. Dahmane and el-Aroud were married in 1999, after which the husband left for Afghanistan to receive combat training in 2000. In 2001, a few months before the September 11th attacks in the US, el-Aroud followed her husband to Afghanistan, and while he trained at an Al-Qaeda camp, she lived in homes prepared for foreign wives and families of Al-Qaeda fighters in Jalalabad.⁵⁹³

Her marriage to Dahmane and move to Afghanistan was another turning point in her life. She found her comfort zone in Taliban and Al-Qaeda's Afghanistan, where she viewed the Taliban as a model Islamic government. El-Aroud negated reports of their mistreatment of women, "women didn't have problems under the Taliban, they had security," she says, echoing the sentiment of story of Fatiha el-Mejjati, the other Moroccan woman who shares with el-Aroud a similar life experience in jihadism. But that 'golden phase' did not last long. Two days before the attacks of September 11th, 2001, her husband disguised himself as a journalist in Afghanistan and, at the behest of Osama bin Laden, blew himself up using a bomb implanted in the camera in a tent where he was allegedly interviewing Afghan anti-Taliban warlord Ahmed Shah Massoud.

A few days before, her husband had told her that he might not return, and that she may not see him again. She learned of his death on the day after the September 11th attacks, when a friend of hers provided her with an audio recording of his will and intention to carry out the assassination.

⁵⁹² See: "Malika el-Aroud Zawjat Qatil Shah Mas'ud..Abraz al-Wujuh al-Nisa'iyya al-Musanida li al-Qa'ida" "Malika el-Aroud, Wife of Shah Massoud's Killer: The Most Prominent Female Aiding Al-Qaeda", in interview with her by Muhammad al-Khudhairi, http://ayubalyamni.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_2111.html Also see: Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web," op. cit.

⁵⁹³ "The Mama of Al-Qaeda," op. cit. Also see: Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web," op. cit.

She listened to the recording dozens of times, admitting that she loved him strongly, and took to the internet describing herself as the wife of a martyr.

After the US attack on Afghanistan, el-Aroud fled with a number of Al-Qaeda women but was captured by forces of Shah Massoud and detained for 19 days. She pleaded to the Belgian authorities to release her, and had promised to cooperate with them but apparently deceived them upon her safe passage home, a matter she personally denies.⁵⁹⁴

Upon her return to Belgium, el-Aroud was tried with 22 others for complicity in the Massoud assassination, but she managed to persuade the court that her presence in Afghanistan was for humanitarian work and that she knew nothing of her husband's plans. She was acquitted for lack of evidence.⁵⁹⁵

Since her return from Afghanistan, a new turning point took place in el-Aroud's life. She earned the title of 'widow of a martyr,' a title she cherished as it gave her esteemed status in jihadist circles. She focused her jihadist activism on the internet, began to operate pro-jihad websites that propagated fighting against the US and the West in the Iraq War. Her candor and daring discourse began to gain wide popularity among jihadist circles worldwide.

Through online jihadi chat forums, she met another Tunisian man, Moez Garsallaoui, who was about seven years her junior and was a rug salesman awaiting political refugee status in Switzerland. They got married in 2003 and moved to a small Swiss village where they ran several jihadi websites and internet forums in support of Al-Qaeda.⁵⁹⁶

The couple's online activities were being monitored by Swiss authorities, and in April 2005, the couple was arrested during a raid on their home. They admitted to running the websites, but argued that they are not responsible for what is published there. El-Aroud received a six-month suspended sentence, and her husband was released about three weeks later. El-Aroud then decided to return to Belgium, while her new husband disappeared. Her

⁵⁹⁴ For more on her life and transformations, see: Muhammad al-Shafi'i, "Malika Wajh al-Tataruf al-Na'im" "Malika: The Soft Face of Extremism", op. cit. Also see: Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web," op. cit.

⁵⁹⁵ Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, "Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web," op. cit.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. Also see: "The Mama of Al Qaeda," op. cit. Also see: Muhammad al-Shafi'i, "Malika Wajh al-Tataruf al-Na'im" "Malika: The Soft Face of Extremism", op. cit.

arrests and trials were garnering much attention from the media, with news outlets vying to interview the “black widow” and “Al-Qaeda’s most notorious woman in Europe.” She was being offered large sums of money for media interviews, meanwhile, she was receiving £1,100 a month in unemployment payments from the Belgian government.⁵⁹⁷

Her online jihadist activism was becoming increasingly troublesome for the Belgian and European governments, and in the eyes of security and intelligence services, she represented a threat to European security for her role in propaganda and online recruitment for Al-Qaeda, and her open declaration of her support for the organization and hostility towards Europe. Across her jihadist journey, she was arrested and tried numerous times, including charging her with attempting to facilitate the escape of Tunisian professional soccer player-turned jihadist, Nizar Trabelsi, from a Belgian prison where he was serving a sentence on terror-related charges. In December 2008, she was arrested again, and in 2010 was sentenced to eight years in prison.⁵⁹⁸

Her husband, Moez Garsallaoui, who disappeared following his release from prison in Switzerland and was notorious for recruiting and training jihadists to carry out attacks in Europe, was reportedly killed in a US airstrike in 2012 in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region of Waziristan. El-Aroud published two books, “Les soldats de lumière” (Soldiers of Light), and another with a Belgian editor, entitled “Her Husband Killed Shah Massoud.”⁵⁹⁹

The question that imposes itself in the story of el-Aroud is how she justifies waging a propaganda war on behalf of Al-Qaeda against Europe, while living in a European country and receiving a monthly stipend from its government to support herself there?

El-Aroud answers this question herself, insisting that she does not violate Belgian laws, but is speaking about lawful resistance practiced by

⁵⁹⁷ See: In`am Kaja Ji, “Zawjat Ahad Qatili Mas`ud Tarwi Tajrubataha fi Mu`askarat al-Qa`ida” “Wife of One of Massoud’s Killers Tells of Her Experience in Al-Qaeda Camps”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 26, 2002.

⁵⁹⁸ Nadya Ali, “Terrorizing Women: Re-Thinking the Female Jihad,” in Christina Hellmich and Andreas Behnke, *Knowing Al-Qaeda: The Epistemology of Terrorism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p145-165.

⁵⁹⁹ See: Hadi Yahmad, “Mo`ez al-Gharsalawi.. al-Tunisi allathi Asbaha Ahad Rumuz al-Qa`ida” “Moez Gharsallaoui: The Tunisian who Became One of Al-Qaeda’s Icons”, *Le Jour d’Après*, November 9, 2013, http://lejour-dapres.blogspot.com/2012/11/blog-post_9.html

Al-Qaeda, and hence, she had viewed that the Belgian government would not find in her behavior anything unlawful. But when she was finally arrested and tried, she considered this proof of the lack of credibility of Western governments and their contradiction towards human rights and freedom of speech and opinion.

Her discourse is quintessentially that of female jihadism. She speaks proudly of her role, and places the role of female jihadists, indirectly, in a parallel position to that of male jihadists. She describes herself as “a jihadi woman warrior for Al-Qaeda,” noting that “Normally in Islam the men are stronger than the women, but I prove that it is important to fear God - and no one else.” She adds, “It is important that I am a woman. There are men who don’t want to speak out because they are afraid of getting into trouble. Even when I get into trouble, I speak out.”⁶⁰⁰

Malika el-Aroud represents is the old generation of Al-Qaeda female jihadists. With the emergence of IS and its vying for representation of global jihadism, the new more viciously-evolved organization has drawn hundreds of women and girls from Europe and has been France as a special target.

Hayat Boumeddiene is among the new generation of European female jihadists willing to go to the extreme in defense of IS. She is the common law wife of Amedy Coulibaly, a Frenchman of Malian origin who is the main suspect in shooting an unarmed French policewoman in a Paris suburb before taking hostages in the Porte de Vincennes siege in which he killed four hostages and was himself later killed by police in January 2015. Having pledged allegiance to IS, Coulibaly coordinated his attack with Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, the brothers who carried out the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris the same day.⁶⁰¹

French authorities accused Boumeddiene of having helped Coulibaly in preparing the attacks, and she has become ‘France’s most wanted woman’

⁶⁰⁰ Elaine Sciolino and Souad Mekhennet, “Belgian woman wages war for Al Qaeda on the Web,” op. cit. Also see: “Belgian police arrest ‘al Qaeda legend,’” *CNN*, December 11, 2008, http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/12/11/belgium.terror.arrests/index.html?eref=ib_topstories

⁶⁰¹ See: “Rihlat al-Shaiqain Kouachi ila al-Tataruf” “Kouachi Brothers’ Journey to Extremism”, *Al-Hayat*, January 28, 2015. Also see: “Terror from the Fringes: Searching for Answers in the ‘Charlie Hebdo’ Attacks,” *Spiegel Online*, January 19, 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/charlie-hebdo-attackers-radicalized-in-search-for-identity-a-1013475.html>

believed to be the more radical of the two and an accomplice in the attacks. Currently a fugitive from justice, Boumeddiene had left France for IS territories in Syria at the request of her husband, crossing from Turkey to al-Raqqa five days before the attacks along with other French jihadists. She appeared in a photo next to IS fighters, and later spoke with her family in April 2015 informing them that she is in Syria, and that she did not take part in planning the hostage attack carried out by her husband.

It is not clear why her husband would have asked her to travel to al-Raqqa if she was not involved in planning his attacks. Yet she is believed to have embraced the Jihadi Salafist thought and ideology adopted by her husband, who himself became influenced by this ideology while serving a prison sentence in France on armed robbery and drug-related charges, where he met the Kouachi brothers.⁶⁰²

Boumeddiene was Born in 1988 in an eastern Paris suburb to an Algerian immigrant family of seven children. She had a difficult childhood, her mother died when she was six years old, and her father, working in furniture delivery, struggled to raise his children on his own. Boumeddiene and some of her siblings were taken into foster care. Her father remarried when she was 12 and did not have a close relationship with his children. Boumeddiene moved between foster homes during her childhood, reportedly having been troublesome and violent. She later worked as a cashier in a Paris supermarket, earning minimum wage.⁶⁰³

She had a relationship with Coulibaly before he was sentenced to prison in 2005. At the time, neither of them was religious, but upon his release from prison in 2009, he emerged a different – religiously radical – man. He had a strong influence on Boumeddiene, who quit her job in 2009 because it would not allow her to wear the veil. It was around the time of Coulibaly's release from prison that the first manifestations of a turning point in her life begin to appear, Boumeddiene married Coulibaly (unofficially in an Islamic ceremony) in 2009 and was transitioning from a non-religious bikini-don-

⁶⁰² "Hayat Boumeddiene Tarwi Tafasil Yawmiyatihā fi Dhiyafat Da'ish" "Hayat Boumeddiene Tells Details of Her Daily Life Hosted by IS", *Radio Sawa*, April 28, 2015, <https://www.radiosawa.com/a/hayat-boumeddiene-paris-isis-/269903.html>

⁶⁰³ "Qissat Hayat Boumeddiene al-Kamila.. Min al-Maytam ila Barathin al-Hob wa al-Tashaddud," "Hayat Boumeddiene's Whole Story: From Orphanage to the Clutches of Love and Extremism", *Al-Hurra*, January 10, 2015, <https://www.alhurra.com/a/who-is-hayat-boumeddiene/264731.html>

ning liberal girl to a deeply religious *niqab*-donning wife more attuned to the conditions of Muslims around the world and engaging along with her husband in the social and religious circles of Muslim extremists in France.⁶⁰⁴

In 2010, she was questioned by French police after large amounts of assault rifle ammunition was found in her home. Indirectly justifying some terror attacks because “innocent people were being killed by the Americans and needed to be defended,” she also admitted that she joined her husband on a visit to Djamel Beghal, a French-Algerian radical jihadist preacher under house arrest in southern France. During the visit, they apparently practiced shooting with crossbows, and a picture was taken of her donning the *niqab*, a face veil showing only her eyes, aiming the crossbow at the camera.⁶⁰⁵

In December 2013, Coulibaly was sentenced to five years in prison for attempting to break out from prison a radical French-Algerian jihadist, but was released early in March 2014 and required to wear an electronic bracelet until May 2014. Reunited with his wife, Coulibaly and Boumeddiene lived a quiet life, according to their neighbors, in the months before he emerged to carry out his attacks between the 7th and 9th of January 2015, as she disappeared from France to emerge later in IS territory in Syria.⁶⁰⁶

These are some of the milestones in the transformation of Boumeddiene’s life, heavily influenced by her husband’s personality and espoused ideology. Upon arriving in al-Raqqa, an IS French language magazine, *Dar al-Islam*, interviewed Boumeddiene and spoke at length about the Paris attacks. She stressed that her husband’s heart “burned with the desire to join his brothers and fight with them against the enemies of Islam in the Caliphate’s land.” She expressed her happiness at safely arriving in IS territory and living in a “land which is ruled by the laws of Islam,” and called on Muslims migrate to the land of the Caliphate, to “cross the world and to act

⁶⁰⁴ Emma Graham-Harrison, “Hayat Boumeddiene: France’s most wanted person after Paris terror attacks,” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/10/hayat-boumeddiene-paris-terror-amedy-coulibaly-france> Also see: Kamal Qubaisi, “Al-Jaza’iriya al-Hariba Hayat Boumeddiene. Bikini wa Tataruf wa Irhab” “The Fugitive Algerian Woman Hayat Boumeddiene: Bikini, Extremism, and Terrorism”, *Al-Arabiya Net*, January 10, 2015, <http://ara.tv/g2grz>

⁶⁰⁵ Emma Graham-Harrison, “Hayat Boumeddiene: France’s most wanted person after Paris terror attacks,” op. cit. Also see: “Qissat Hayat Boumeddiene al-Kamila.. Min al-Maytam ila Barathin al-Hob wa al-Tashaddud,” “Hayat Boumeddiene’s Whole Story: From Orphanage to the Clutches of Love and Extremism”, op. cit.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

guided by the Qur'an."⁶⁰⁷

In addressing Muslim women, she urged them to be strong and giving and not to complicate matters for men; "Sisters, be the strong shield and good advisers to your husbands, your brothers, and your sons ... Know that the believers would not have been able to spread Islam since its dawn the way they did if it wasn't for the support of the women, their wives, sisters, and daughters... learn the religion, read the Qur'an, and apply what is mandated in it."⁶⁰⁸

Another example of the new wave of female European jihadism is Hasna Aït Boulahcen, a 26-year-old French woman of Moroccan origin, whose name became famous on the morning of November 18th, 2015 during a raid on an apartment in Saint-Denis, a commune in the northern suburbs of Paris, where the Belgian jihadist of Moroccan origin, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was hiding. Abaaoud is the suspected ringleader of the attacks that struck Paris on November 13th, 2015. Initial reports claimed that Boulahcen had detonated a suicide vest during the raid, but later French official admitted that she had been killed during the raid and was not a suicide bomber.⁶⁰⁹

Her name was not known prior to the raid. There were no links known between her and jihadist groups, contrarily, she had been living a life that completely contradicted that end. She was known among her friends as 'cow-girl,' a party girl who showed no signs of religiosity, let alone radicalism, until a few months before her death.⁶¹⁰

Boulahcen was born in 1989 to a Moroccan immigrant family who

⁶⁰⁷ Cyrus Engineer, "Wife of Paris supermarket terrorist gives chilling interview to Islamic State magazine," *Daily Star*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/425254/Hayat-Boumeddiene-Amedy-Coulbaly-interview-Islamic-State>

⁶⁰⁸ "Hayat Boumeddiene fi Liqaa' Nasharahu 'Da'ish': Zawji Kana Yatuqu li al-Dhabab ila Ardh al-Khilafah" "Hayat Boumeddiene In an Interview Published by IS: My Husband Yearned to Go to the Land of the Caliphate", Bahrain-Based *Al-Wasat News*, February 14, 2015, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/961312.html>

⁶⁰⁹ "Hajamat Paris.. Kayfa Tatarafat Hasna Aït Boulahcen Ba'dama `Urfat bi Hub al-Hayat wa Ihtifal?.. wa Mas'ul: Lam Tufajir Nafsaha bi Mudahamat Saint Denis," "The Paris Attacks: How did Hasna Aït Boulahcen become radicalized after she was known for loving life and partying? An Official: Hasna did not blow herself up in Saint-Denis", *CNN Arabic*, November 21, 2015, <https://arabic.cnn.com/world/2015/11/21/female-not-suicide-bomber-shubert>

⁶¹⁰ See: "Taqrir Muhzin `an Hayat Hasna Aït Boulahcen, Namuthaj li al-Shabab al-Ta'ih fi Europa," "A Sad Report on the Life of Hasna Aït Boulahcen: A Model of Lost Youth in Europe", *Tetouan News*, November 21, 2015, goo.gl/qPimgr

moved to France in 1973. Her father, hailing from a village near Marrakesh, had divorced his first wife with whom he had children, and married another woman, who bore Hasna and two boys before the couple separated.⁶¹¹ Hasna grew up in Clichy-la-Garenne, a suburb close to Saint-Denis, but had a difficult childhood. She witnessed family crises that ended in her parents' divorce and she was taken into foster care. She continued to have a relationship with her mother, but was estranged from her father who returned to Morocco and settled there after retiring.⁶¹²

Those who knew her agree that while she had been a good student at school, her later teenage years turned to a life of partying, smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs. She did not adhere to any religious or cultural boundaries before the recent changes emerged. Some attribute the turning point towards her radicalization and involvement with extremist groups to her having lost her job as a manager of a construction company, Beko Construction, which liquidated in 2014, while others find that she was influenced by Abaaoud, although there is discrepancy in defining the relationship between them.⁶¹³

Her family visited her in Paris months before the November 2015 attacks, and had noticed changes in her personality and attire. She donned the hijab and prayed regularly, but they did not realize that she had taken a course in the direction of radicalization and support for terror groups such as IS.

It is difficult to decisively determine the 'turning point' that led to this complete change in the direction in Boulahcen's life, perhaps there remains a missing link not picked up by the media or by those close to her. Yet it is known that she had led a complicated and contradictory life, which reflected on her personality and life decisions. Her friends note that she was cut

⁶¹¹ "Hasna Aït Boulahcen: Qadat `Eid al-Adha bi Ait Ourir wa Taradadat `ala Agadir Haythu Tatawajad Usrat Walidataha," "Hasna Aït Boulahcen Spent Eid al-Adha in Ait Ourir, Visited Agadir Where Her Mother's Family Stays", *Assarag 24 News*, November 20, 2015, goo.gl/O9zowD

⁶¹² Sam Webb, "Paris attacks: Suicide bomber Hasna Aït Boulahcen who died during police siege - 'had final meal at KFC,'" *The Mirror*, November 20, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/paris-attacks-suicide-bomber-hasna-6863389>

⁶¹³ "Taqrir Muhzin `an Hayat Hasna Aït Boulahcen, Namuthaj li al-Shabab al-Ta'ih fi Europa," "A Sad Report on the Life of Hasna Aït Boulahcen: A Model of Lost Youth in Europe", op. cit., Also see: "Hasna al-Maghribiyya kanat mudtariba wa lam taftah al-Qur'an yawman, kanat tukthir min shurb al-kuhul wa turafiq tujjar al-mukhadarat, kama kanat tulaqab bil cowgirl" "The Moroccan Hasna was unstable, hadn't opened the Qur'an ever, drank a lot of alcohol, befriended drug dealers, and was nicknamed 'cowgirl'", *Al-Arabiya net*, November 20, 2015, <http://ara.tv/we9us>

off from social media after her transformation towards religiosity, particularly after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, but later returned to express support for jihadist ideology on her Facebook account, expressing her admiration of Hayat Boumeddiene, the French-Algerian wife of Coulibaly, who ended up with IS in Syria. Boulahcen declared her intention to join IS there as well.⁶¹⁴

If we rely on the information available on Boulahcen, we find that her turning point is similar to that of many other French females who turned jihadists; that is, the presence of a man (boyfriend or husband) who led her first change of course in her life, beginning with giving up the “un-Islamic” lifestyle, embracing religiosity, and ending up espousing jihadist ideology and fighting for it.⁶¹⁵

Remarks

In studying these previous models, and comparing them with other cases of European female jihadists, three key questions emerge. The first relates to the shift from inclination of support from Al-Qaeda to IS among jihadi-inclined European women, the second relates to common traits in the cases that shed light on the phenomenon, and third, assessing whether there is a ‘Francophone factor.’

First: Why IS and not Al-Qaeda?

For the four major European countries (UK, France, Belgium, and Germany) witnessing a growth of the phenomenon of female jihadism in recent years, it is evident that the orientation of the new generation of jihadists is geared towards IS and not Al-Qaeda, compared to the previous generation who found in Al-Qaeda the beacon of global jihadism. This is due to several factors, foremost of which is the great efforts IS places on attracting

⁶¹⁴ Lizzie Dearden, “Hasna Ait Boulahcen: Family of woman wrongly accused of suicide bombing say she was ‘murdered’ during police raid,” *The Independent*, January 21, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/hasna-ait-boulahcen-family-of-woman-wrongly-accused-of-suicide-bombing-say-she-was-murdered-during-a6824516.html>

⁶¹⁵ “Qissat ‘Hasna’ al-Maghribiyya Awwal Imra’a Tunafith ‘Amaliyya Intihariyya bi Europa: Tashrab al-Kuhul wa Tuhib al-Haflat wa Lam Taqra’ al-Qur’an,” “The Story of the Moroccan Hasna: The First Woman to Carry Out a Suicide Mission in Europe: She Drinks Alcohol, Loves Parties, and Didn’t Read the Qur’an”, *Al-Wasat*, November 22, 2015, <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/1048406.html>

and recruiting women and giving them key roles in propaganda and in physically participating in attacks, compared to Al-Qaeda, which relegates women to secondary roles as wives and family members of male fighters (with few exceptions, such as Malika el-Aroud who took an active role in cyber propagation for the organization, albeit at her own initiative). Al-Qaeda also generally prohibits women from traveling without a *mahram*, making the journey from their home countries to jihad fronts difficult for many, whereas IS not only allows it, but facilitates and finances it.

IS also developed its administrative and organizational structures to accommodate the influx of female jihadists, giving them roles in the all-female *al-Khansaa* moral policing brigade, engaged them in vital roles in cyber propaganda, and employed luring and inciting discourse to encourage women to commit to *naḥīr* (mobilization for jihad) and *hijra* (migration) to its territories, which it presents as ‘the promised Islamic State,’ skillfully playing on the cord of Islamic symbolism and aspiration, Islamic identity, Muslim victimization, the reward of martyrdom, hostility towards the infidel West, and the dream of living under Islamic law, all the while making this discourse accessible to these women in their natives languages: English, French, German, Urdu, Russian, Turkish, and others.

Although most of the young *muhajirat* girls ended up married there and then widowed, and some of them remarried, yet describing them as “jihadist brides” is a reductionist, one-dimensional and superficial handling of the phenomenon, as the authors of the study “Till Martyrdom Do Us Part” stress. The real motives behind females – particularly Western – joining IS are a combination of push factors (out of Europe) and pull factors (into IS), most of which relate to the question of religious identity in Western societies and its interplay with and against Westernization. Among the push factors is the perceived inability of Western societies to integrate Muslim communities into their own, and Muslims’ sense of hostility and victimization from Western policies toward the Arab and Muslim worlds. IS comes in to fill the vacuum, declaring that it represents and champions Muslim identity, upholds Islamic Shari`ah, and provides for life under this aspired puritanical unadulterated Islamic atmosphere. Among significant pull factors as well is the desire for providing humanitarian aid and the constant images of wounded civilians, women and children, and chemical attacks in Syria, which attract the conscientious moral dimension for many girls, and becomes a gateway for

IS propaganda to reach and influence them.⁶¹⁶

Then, there are the other factors highlighted in the media: relationships of love, marriage, and friendships as dynamics that feed these females' decisions. Yet it is difficult to envisage that a female, woman or girl, would take the step to change the course of her life and embark on a dangerous adventure without strong convictions and other subjective causes and conditions that are related, perhaps, to a crisis of identity, humanitarian sympathy, and sense of victimization and injustice on many levels, whether it is in dealing with Muslims within Western communities, or on the level of international politics and affairs that relate to Muslim populations and the sense of solidarity, belonging, and urge for supporting the one, unified Muslim Ummah.

Second: Are there common traits that help us understand the phenomenon?

We find that most cases of the new jihadist generation of European females are young in age, with nearly 90 percent of them under the age of 30. There is a strong presence of teenage girls, those under the age of 20, such as the British girls from Bethnal Green.

While there is a significant proportion of European female jihadists who are converts to Islam, the larger proportion of them however are European females who come from immigrant Muslim families, but were born and grew up in Europe. In the UK, many of the females come from southeast Asian (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia) and east African (Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia) descent. In France and Belgium, most of the female jihadists come from North African descent (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), while in Germany, many of them come from Turkish and Caucasian descent. This element reflects the demographics of immigrant communities in these countries, which in turn relate to the dynamic of the colonial past and political interests of each respective country.

There is no solid social background basis to generalize across all cases of European female jihadism, in terms of economic level and family stability.

⁶¹⁶ See: Erin Marie Saltman, Melanie Smith, "‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," *op. cit.*, pp. 4-18.

We can reach, however, the preliminary impression that there is a noticeable difference between the British cases on the one hand, and the Francophone cases on the other. Most of the British cases come from middle class stable and religiously moderate families, the girls excelled in school, had active hobbies such as sports or reading, and exhibited normal teenage interests in music, fashion, and makeup. On the other hand, the cases discussed here from France and Belgium came from broken families, domestic crises, lived in foster care homes, and shifted from one extreme to another; from a life of partying, alcohol, and drugs, to donning full face veils and engaging directly in jihadist propaganda, and at times, physically participating in attacks.

Another difference may be seen in the effective dynamics that influenced the transformation towards jihadism. In the British cases, friendships, siblings, and the internet played major roles, whereas in the French and Belgian cases, the perceived greater influence came from a male significant other, a husband or 'boyfriend,' as is the case with Hayat Boumeddiene, Hasna Aït Boulahcen, Inès Madani, and Malika el-Aroud.

Third: Is there a Francophone Factor?

The above comparison leads us directly to the so-called 'French Connection,' posed by William McCants and Christopher Meserole (two researchers specializing in Islamist movements at Brookings Institution), referring to the influence of the French political culture on the rise and spread of radical jihadi movements in Europe. Their research finds that the best predictor of foreign fighter radicalization wasn't a country's wealth, education, health, or internet access, for example, but rather the top predictor was whether a country was Francophone; "As strange as it may seem, four of the five countries with the highest rates of radicalization in the world are Francophone, including the top two in Europe (France and Belgium)." They note that "Knowledgeable readers will immediately object that the raw numbers tell a different story," where English-speaking United Kingdom or Arabic-speaking Saudi Arabia, for example, have produced far more foreign fighters than French-speaking Belgium. "But the raw numbers are misleading. If you view the foreign fighters as a percentage of the overall Muslim population, you see a different picture. Per Muslim resident, Belgium produces far more foreign fighters than either the United Kingdom or Saudi

Arabia,” and France even more so.⁶¹⁷

But what does the French language have to do with Islamist violence? The authors suspect that it is really a proxy for something else: French political culture. They find that “the French approach to secularism is more aggressive than, say, the British approach. France and Belgium, for example, are the only two countries in Europe to ban the full veil in their public schools. They’re also the only two countries in Western Europe not to gain the highest rating for democracy in the well-known Polity score data, which does not include explanations for the markdowns.”⁶¹⁸

In connection to our previous comparison in terms of social background, the ‘Francophone factor’ for the two authors does not stop at the limit of French secularism, but relates also to the level of social and economic integration. They note that an “important subplot within this story concerns the distribution of wealth. In particular, the rate of youth unemployment and urbanization appear to matter a great deal too. Globally, we found that when between 10 and 30 percent of a country’s youth are unemployed, there is a strong relationship between a rise in youth unemployment and a rise in Sunni militancy.” These findings seem to matter most in Francophone countries, “Among the over 1,000 interactions our model looked at, those between Francophone and youth unemployment and Francophone and urbanization both ranked among the 15 most predictive. There’s broad anecdotal support for this idea: consider the rampant radicalization in Molenbeek “in Belgium”, in the Paris *banlieus* “suburbs”, in Ben Gardane “in Tunisia”. Each of these contexts have produced a massively disproportionate share of foreign fighters, and each are also urban pockets with high youth unemployment.”⁶¹⁹

The authors add that as with the Francophone findings overall, “we’re left with guesswork as to why exactly the relationships between French politics, urbanization, youth unemployment, and Sunni militancy exist. We suspect that when there are large numbers of unemployed youth, some of them are bound to get up to mischief. When they live in large cities, they have more opportunities to connect with people espousing radical causes.

⁶¹⁷ William McCants and Christopher Meserole, “The French Connection: Explaining Sunni Militancy around the World, *Foreign Affairs*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-24/french-connection>

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

And when those cities are in Francophone countries that adopt the strident French approach to secularism, Sunni radicalism is more appealing.”⁶²⁰

Such a supposition, which the authors agree needs more examination and testing, has generated considerable controversy among researchers and specialists in the field. Some counteracted from different dimensions, questioning the credibility of the rates and numbers of McCants and Meserole’s study, and noting that Francophone culture constitutes only 45 percent of Belgian culture, which reflects the error in generalizations concluded by the two authors.⁶²¹

Apart from the debate and controversy related to the Francophone factor, what we do find in analyzing the case studies at hand is related to what we call ‘identity violence,’ which is most prominent in the French and Belgian cases of female jihadism. It is related to multidimensional factors, including the nature of French and Belgian cultures and their relationship with religion, and the strict pattern of secularism there, which reflects on these societies and the conditions of youth, particularly Muslim youth, in these countries.

Whereas in the British case, where there is a more moderate interaction between religion and secularism, we find that the transformations in the lives of the girls and women towards radicalization did not come about in the form of extreme identity overthrows, rather more smooth and gradual transitions. While the result in all cases ended with IS and violent extremist ideology, nonetheless the transition emerged in girls coming from relatively moderate religious families, where there was no hostile position vis-à-vis religion (even in the more liberal cases, such as Aqsa Mahmood, who comes from a self-proclaimed secular family). In the French cases however, we find that Hayat Boumeddiene, Hasna Boulahcen, and Malika el-Aroud experienced identity extremism in between their transformations, from complete identification and immersion in Westernized lifestyle and wholehearted distance from religion to sudden transformation to the other extreme of religious radicalism. It was a shift from a radical identity to another radical – com-

⁶²⁰ Ibid. Also see: “Hal Min `Ilaqah bayna al-Thaqafah al-Francophonica wa al-Tataruf?” “Is There a Relationship Between Francophone Culture and Extremism?”, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 26, 2016.

⁶²¹ Olivier Decottignies, “The French Disconnection: Francophone Countries and Radicalization,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 12, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2016-04-12/french-disconnection>

pletely apposite – identity that is hostile to the former one that represented a past these women wish to forget.⁶²²

⁶²² Compare with: Muhammad Turki al-Rabi`u, “Anthropologiun fi Share` Voltaire: Al-Bahth `an Dinamiyat al-Mahalli fi al-Jihad al-Francophoni,” “Anthropologists at Voltaire Street: The Search for Local Dynamics in Francophone Jihad”, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 28, 2015.

Chapter Five

American Daeshites: The Terrorism of Social Media

“When there are so few mujahideen, is it not our duty to fight regardless of our country of birth and/or residence?”

Shannon ‘Halima’ Conley

March 27th, 2014

The number of American males and females who joined IS in Iraq and Syria or expressed support for the organization lags far behind that in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. The FBI reported that by around the end of 2015, some 1,000 people in the US were under observation for having suspected ties to IS, and more than 250 people had already been apprehended as jihadi wannabes who had traveled or attempted to travel to join IS. Over 100 Americans managed to reach IS territories, and around 20 of them were killed there.⁶²³ In comparison, the number of Europeans involved in the IS jihadist project is much greater in terms of numbers, spread, and influence, where about 5,000 Europeans or residents of Europe succeeded in traveling to Iraq and Syria.

Nonetheless, and despite the modest quantitative presence of the phenomenon in the United States, there are concerning indicators of increased activity and influence of IS supporters in the country and particularly an increased role for American females, or female residents in the US. American women are playing a greater role in cyber propaganda, recruitment, logistical support, and in migrating to IS-controlled territories.

This increased activity garnered the attention of US think tanks and media. A study by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University reveals that, as of the fall of 2015, 900 active investigations against IS sympathizers were launched in all 50 states. 71 individuals have been charged with IS-related activities since March 2014, including 10 females. The average age of those charged is 26, and they are an incredibly heterogeneous group with their profiles differing widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background, and their motivations are equally diverse and “defy easy analysis.”⁶²⁴

⁶²³ Ilana Freedman, “Jihad!: Understanding the Threat of the Islamic State to America,” *The Center for Security Policy*, 2016, pp. 93-95, https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Jihad_Islamic_State.pdf

⁶²⁴ Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” *Program on Extremism, George Washington University*, December 2015, p. ix, p. 7. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/downloads/ISIS%20in%20America%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

While the phenomena of terrorism and extremism are not entirely new to the US, studies are tracing disturbing new indicators related to the characteristics of those influenced by IS ideology, particularly by its propaganda disseminated over the internet and social media. With around 300 Americans and/or US-based IS sympathizers active on social media, some of them eventually make the leap from “keyboard warriors to actual militancy.” The study finds that the greatest threat to US homeland is now posed not so much by groups operating overseas, but from self-radicalized, homegrown extremists in the United States. Approximately 40% of those arrested are converts to Islam (in its Jihadi Salafi version). The study argues that, “given that an estimated 23% of the American Muslim population are converts, it is evident that converts are overrepresented among American ISIS supporters.”⁶²⁵

Within the context of female American IS jihadism, the new generation of jihadist activists and sympathizers have been gravitating toward IS, rather than Al-Qaeda, as the new representative of global jihadism. We attempt to answer the essential question in this context: Is the internet’s social media the prime factor in indoctrinating, recruiting, and mobilizing American female jihadists, or is it merely the medium through which these individuals pursue their jihadist ambitions, after having been radicalized by other factors and conditions?

This chapter discusses five models of American and US-based IS supporters who have played different roles in actualizing IS agenda, some of whom succeeded in migrating to IS territories, others attempted but failed and were arrested. The models here also reflect that the phenomenon of American female jihadism includes both Americans of Muslim descent, and American converts to Islam.

There are numerous other cases that garnered the attention of the media and counter-extremism experts, many of whom communicated with each other in their role to propagate IS ideology, such as Keonna Thomas from Philadelphia (who was arrested for her role in IS propaganda and recruitment and attempt to travel to IS territories),⁶²⁶ and Radwah Abdisalaam (who goes by the name Umm Waqqas, a college student studying journalism

⁶²⁵ Ibid., pp. 2, 5-7.

⁶²⁶ See an overview profile on Keonna Thomas on the Counter Extremism Project website, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/keonna-thomas>

in Seattle and became an active IS supporter on Twitter in convincing Muslim Americans to migrate),⁶²⁷ in addition to the three teenage girls of Somali descent from Colorado who were arrested in Germany after leaving the US in an attempt to reach IS territories in Syria via Turkey,⁶²⁸ among other cases.

Tashfeen Malik: The Mystery Woman

Residents of San Bernardino, California, were shocked by the news of a mass shooting in their city on Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015, in which 14 people were killed and 22 were injured at a local county Public Health training event and Christmas party held at a rented banquet room. Adding to the shock, police announced shortly after that the attackers were a husband and wife who had a six-month-old baby they left at home with her grandmother that day. Police announced killing the couple during a shootout while pursuing the couple's rented vehicle less than 2 miles away from the location of the original shooting.⁶²⁹

The shooting was the deadliest terror attack to occur on US soil since the September 11th, 2001 attacks (until the Orlando gay nightclub shooting on June 12th, 2016 that left 49 people killed).⁶³⁰ The San Bernardino shooting received considerable attention from the US administration, the FBI, media and researchers. While security forces managed to quickly identify the alleged shooters, Syed Rizwan Farook (a 28-year-old US-born citizen of Pakistani descent) and his wife Tashfeen Malik (a 29-year-old Pakistani-born lawful permanent resident of the US), many questions remain puzzling regarding their motives to carry out the attacks, how they became radicalized,

⁶²⁷ "Rawdah Abdisalaam identified as Seattle college student recruiting for ISIS," *The Global Dispatch*, May 15, 2015, <https://goo.gl/gcsjDA> Also see: Erica Wenig, "Fun-Loving, American Girl Is Probably A Prolific Undercover Agent For ISIS," *Daily Caller*, April 29, 2015, <https://goo.gl/yFdEQm> "Senior female ISIS agent unmasked and traced to Seattle," *The Counter Jihad Report*, April 30, 2015, <https://counterjihadreport.com/tag/rawdah-abdisalaam/>

⁶²⁸ Matthew Blake, "Three Denver girls were lured by ISIS who used 'Disney-like' versions of extremism on social media," *Daily Mail*, October 24, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2804934/Girls-journey-renews-fears-terror-recruiting.html#ixzz4Ub9dMyig>

⁶²⁹ Pierre Thomas, Josh Margolin, and James Gordon Meek, "Female San Bernardino Shooter Pledged Support to ISIS, Sources Say," *ABC News*, December 4, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/female-san-bernardino-shooter-pledged-support-isis-sources/story?id=35579983>

⁶³⁰ See: Ashley Fantz, Faith Karimi and Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Orlando shooting: 49 killed, shooter pledged ISIS allegiance," *CNN*, June 13, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting/index.html>

and who radicalized whom?

The peculiarity of the case is that it was planned and perpetrated by a married couple. Criminal profilers find that it was highly unusual for a woman – especially a new mother – to engage “in a form of visceral, predatory violence that the clinical literature associates almost exclusively with men.”⁶³¹ The veneer of normality was a key component of the couple’s plan and strategic behavior: they have a baby, making the family appear more normal and traditional to minimize the risk of discovery. US authorities nonetheless believe that their intentions to carry out violent attacks began early in their relationship, perhaps since they met online.

Although Tashfeen Malik is not a US citizen, and had only lived there for a little over a year before the attacks, the FBI and the US administration considered the attackers “homegrown violent extremists” inspired by foreign terrorist groups, considering that the theater of operation was in the United States, the couple were residing there, her husband is a US citizen born and raised, and because there are no indicators that she was recruited elsewhere (although authorities claim her early signs of radicalization came while she was living in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan).

The mystery in Malik’s case stems from the lack of information about her personality and social life. It is known that she was born in 1986 to a wealthy family of politically influential landowners in the city of Karor Lal Esan, about 450 kilometers southwest of Pakistan’s capital, Islamabad.⁶³²

She moved to Saudi Arabia with her family during high school, and later returned to the Pakistani city of Multan in 2007 to study pharmacy at Bahaudin Zakariya University until she graduated in 2012.⁶³³ While remaining busy in studies, Malik wasn’t known in college to be very religious. One of her former classmates notes that “she didn’t even pray five times a day. . . She was a colorful girl who spoke about boys, social networks and chatting

⁶³¹ “Tashfeen Malik: who was the ‘shy housewife’ turned San Bernardino killer?”, *The Guardian*, December 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/06/tashfeen-malik-who-was-the-shy-housewife-turned-san-bernardino-killer>

⁶³² Pat St. Claire, Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, “San Bernardino shooter Tashfeen Malik: Who was she?”, *CNN*, December 8, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/06/us/san-bernardino-shooter-tashfeen-malik/>

⁶³³ Adam Nagourney, Ian Lovett, Julie Turkewitz, and Benjamin Muellerdec, “Couple Kept Tight Lid on Plans for San Bernardino Shooting,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/04/us/san-bernardino-shooting-syed-rizwan-farook.html>

online.” Although she donned the hijab, which is not uncommon, one of her professors didn’t recall her being any more religious than other students.⁶³⁴

In 2013, Malik enrolled in al-Huda Institute in Multan, part of a chain of women-only religious schools in Pakistan. Al-Huda is known for its puritanical Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, but isn’t believed to be fundamentalist or to advocate violence. She attended the Institute from April 2013 until May 2014, and left without completing the diploma course before leaving for the United States on a fiancé visa in July 2014, married Syed Farook, and became a lawful permanent resident.⁶³⁵

Some of her friends began to notice signs of religious extremism during her last year in Pakistan. She began to cover her face with the *niqab* veil, became more extreme in her religious views, and spent long hours on social networking sites. It was during this year that she met Farook on the online matrimonial site iMilap.com, which reinforces the assumption that the two shared extremist ideas in some sort of mutual influence on each other.⁶³⁶

According to the FBI investigation, Malik met Farook in person in Saudi Arabia where Farook had went to perform the Hajj pilgrimage in late 2013. Farook returned to Saudi Arabia again in early 2014 where the couple were married in a religious ceremony, before returning to the US with his wife in July, where they held a marital ceremony at the Riverside Islamic Center in California, near where Farook lived and worked.⁶³⁷

Malik did not mix a lot with the local community. After their marriage, the couple led a private life. The director of the Islamic Center of Riverside recalls that Farook used to attend daily prayers at the mosque for two years, but following their marriage ceremony, Farook stopped attending the mosque. Malik was described as a shy, conservative housewife, and the couple lived in the same home with Farook’s mother. Malik gave birth to a baby girl

⁶³⁴ Pat St. Claire, Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, “San Bernardino shooter Tashfeen Malik: Who was she?,” *op. cit.*

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁶ Shashank Bengali and Aoun Sahi, “Where San Bernardino shooter Tashfeen Malik went to school to learn about Islam,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-school-san-bernardino-fundamentalist-20151207-story.html> Also see: “From ‘housewife’ to mass shooter: Friends say Tashfeen Malik’s life took a devout turn,” *The Associated Press*, December 6, 2015.

⁶³⁷ Salman Masood and Declan Walsh, “Tashfeen Malik, San Bernardino Suspect, Attended Conservative Religious School in Pakistan,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/08/world/asia/tashfeen-malik-attended-conservative-religious-school-in-pakistan.html>

in mid-2015, about six months before the attacks.⁶³⁸

The Radicalization Puzzle

The lingering question in Malik and Farook's story is whether one helped radicalize the other, or whether both held mutual extremist beliefs that helped bring the couple together in the first place.

One assumption finds that Malik influenced and radicalized her husband, considering her religious adherence, active participation in the attack, and considering the short period of time she spent with her husband in the US, reflecting that she may have harbored terrorist plans and used her marriage to Farook to come to the US where she would actualize her scheme.

On the other hand, a re-reading of the circumstances surrounding Farook's life reveals that he also may have harbored extremist beliefs and was self-radicalized. Farook was born in Chicago in 1987, and later moved to California where he attended high school and later California State University at San Bernardino, where he received a bachelor's degree in environmental health. He later enrolled in a graduate program in environmental engineering, but never completed the program. He worked as a food inspector for the local county Department of Public Health for five years before the shooting.

Farook lived his whole life in the United States. It appears he had a troubled childhood ridden with domestic violence by his father. Court documents reveal that his father was an alcoholic and negligent parent who repeatedly threatened to kill himself. The father was abusive to his wife and children, causing Farook's mother, Rafia, to separate from the father and move out with her three children. The mother eventually filed for domestic violence protection. Her divorce case was dismissed, but she later got a legal separation in 2008 based on irreconcilable differences. Rafia said that her son Farook often had to come in between to save her from her husband's abuse. While Farook's father reportedly returned to Pakistan, the mother remained with her children in California, and had been living with Farook and his wife

⁶³⁸ Dexter Thomas, "San Bernardino shooting suspect stopped attending mosque two years ago," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-san-bernardino-shooting-suspect-serious-about-studying-the-koran-20151203-story.html> Also see: "From 'housewife' to mass shooter: Friends say Tashfeen Malik's life took a devout turn," op. cit.

at the time of the attacks in 2015.⁶³⁹

Although Farook attended the mosque regularly for prayers, he was not known to have a close relationship with the local Muslim community. Congregants of the Islamic center note that he would come in for prayers and leave immediately afterwards, but describe him as a polite and devout Muslim. Farook's father reportedly told an Italian newspaper after the attacks that his son Farook shared al-Baghdadi's ideology and supported the creation of the Islamic State. But a local Muslim activist, speaking alongside the family's attorneys, later backtracked and said the elder Farook did not recall the comments he made about his son.⁶⁴⁰

IS announced responsibility for the San Bernardino attacks, mentioning in an initial statement that Farook and Malik are *Ansar* (supporters) of IS. The description of *Ansar* reflects that IS did not consider the couple as official members, but rather as having been 'inspired' by IS ideology, especially that investigators did not find any strong evidence or direct links that the couple received instructions from foreign entities or that they coordinated the attacks with IS or any other terror group. IS-affiliated radio station, al-Bayan, later came to describe Malik and Farook as "soldiers of the Islamic State," which added further confusion to US investigators in attempting to define the exact nature of their relationship with the terror group.

Since the shooting (and until the publishing of this book), IS did not publish any special videos about the perpetrators, as it commonly does with other operations carried out in Europe and other regions. Investigators found no proof of their direct contact with IS, with the exception of an alleged post on Tashfeen Malik's Facebook page declaring her allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, reflecting that the attacks were carried out voluntarily by attackers inspired by IS, or in the way of "lone wolves," rather than being part of a larger terror cell.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁹ Julia Glum, "San Bernardino Suspect Syed Farook's Troubled Childhood: Father Was Alcoholic, Mother Alleged Domestic Abuse In Court Papers," *International Business Times*, December 2, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/san-bernardino-suspect-syed-farooks-troubled-childhood-father-was-alcoholic-mother-2210359>

⁶⁴⁰ Richard A. Serrano, Sarah Parvini, Joseph Serna, and Richard Winton, "San Bernardino attacker was 'normal guy' while practicing at shooting range," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-san-bernardino-shootings-fbi-raid-20151207-story.html>

⁶⁴¹ Doug Stanglin and Kevin Johnson, "FBI: No evidence San Bernardino killers were part of a cell," *USA Today*, December 5, 2015, <https://goo.gl/gLkkJk>

Then FBI director James Comey noted in important remarks – perhaps the closest to a logical analysis of Malik’s case – that the findings of the investigation reflect the likelihood that Malik and Farook were self-radicalized over a period of time and had been “consuming poison on the Internet.” After meeting each other through the matrimonial site in early 2013, they used private online messages to express their “joint commitment to jihad and to martyrdom,” but did not make those communications on social media, Comey said. These early communications reveal that the couple may have harbored jihadist ideology when they met, which is prior to the emergence of IS and its later declaration of the Caliphate State.⁶⁴²

This premise seems consistent with the available information about their personalities; both are religiously conservative, yet neither of them publicly exhibited extremist tendencies or ideology prior to the attacks. Their actions came as a shock to those who know them both in the US and in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the self-radicalization theory does not answer key questions about the motives or factors that pushed Malik, particularly having been a new mother at the time of the attack, to physically engage in the shooting. What had been the turning point in her transition from religiously-observant to violent extremist? Could it have been jihadist material on the internet? Or the religious and social environment in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two countries where jihadist ideology is rampant?

There are no records that suspect or condemn Malik of extremism or terrorism in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Her security records in applying for a fiancé visa, and later for a permanent resident card in the US show nothing of concern to prevent immigration authorities from granting her such status. Officially, and for those who knew her, everything appeared normal, or as her father remarked in condemning her actions after the attack “only God knows why it happened.”⁶⁴³

It is clear, then, that the initial signs of radicalization began in 2013, reinforced with her meeting Farook online. Based on the chronology of their case, the two shared common ideas about jihad and martyrdom prior to their

⁶⁴² Al Baker and Marc Santora, “San Bernardino Attackers Discussed Jihad in Private Messages, F.B.I. Says,” *The New York Times*, December 15, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/us/san-bernardino-attackers-discussed-jihad-in-private-messages-fbi-says.html>

⁶⁴³ Richard A. Serrano, Brian Bennett and Corina Knoll, “Father of San Bernardino shooter Tashfeen Malik condemns daughter’s actions,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2015, <https://goo.gl/yVvhLp>

physical meeting, engagement, and marriage, and even prior to the emergence of IS itself in 2014.⁶⁴⁴ The missing link in Tashfeen Malik's case remains the question of whether she was the stronger influence in radicalizing her husband, or vice-versa, in the path from ideological radicalization to the point of planning and carrying out the attacks.

Ariel Bradley: In Search of Identity

A different model of female jihadism in the United States is the case of Ariel Bradley. Bradley is from the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, born in 1985 as the third of five siblings. Her father worked at a Coca-Cola factory and her mother was an evangelical Christian housewife who homeschooled her children on Christian fundamentalism.

Bradley lived with her family in a modest home 20 minutes outside downtown Chattanooga. She described growing up in poverty to her friends, saying "I grew up so poor that I forgot what milk tastes like." She had a strained relationship with her mother because of the latter's religious fundamentalism, depriving her children of attending regular school and opting to homeschool her with emphasis on religious beliefs to "keep her away from materials that would make her question Christianity."⁶⁴⁵

It can be said that the mother represents the main 'complex' in Bradley's personality, as Bradley herself commonly expressed embarrassment of her mother and blamed her for delayed learning, as the girl did not learn to read until she was a preteen. One of Bradley's oldest friends said that the girl described her education as lacking, "'Bradley" said that her mom got her a religious education, but that she was always trying to pastiche the whole thing together, just here and there. There were gaps in pronunciation, gaps in her knowledge, gaps in her experience and in her mind that should've been filled." Although Bradley's father spent more time at the factory than at home, the girl had a closer relationship with him and appreciated his quiet

⁶⁴⁴ Adam Goldman, Mark Berman and Missy Ryan, "San Bernardino shooter's former neighbor who bought rifles is cooperating with authorities," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2015, <https://goo.gl/Mmuu3s>

⁶⁴⁵ Ellie Hall, "How One Young Woman Went From Fundamentalist Christian To ISIS Bride," *BuzzFeed News*, July 20, 2015, <https://goo.gl/WXVnAR>

personality and gentleness.⁶⁴⁶

Bradley began to rebel against her parents and ran away from the family home when she was 15 or 16, according to her friends, after which “she would bounce from relationship to relationship, home to home, religion to religion, searching for the stability that had been missing during her childhood.” She worked in various low-paying jobs, due to her lack of education, inability to obtain an GED diploma, and her lack of reliable transportation.⁶⁴⁷

The main observation most of Bradley’s friends made about her personality is that although she left home early and relied on herself in securing a living, she nonetheless defined herself through her relationships. One of her friends describes her segmented life, “It was like, when I first met her she was a Christian, and then she was a socialist, and then she was an atheist, and then a Muslim. As far as I could tell it was always in relation to whatever guy she was interested in, so if she meets a guy that’s an atheist then she’s an atheist, falls into that for a year. Then the guy leaves and she meets somebody new, and it starts all over again. It seemed like whatever guy she was with, she would just crawl into his skin and kind of become him.”⁶⁴⁸ With a sponge-like personality, she always lived with boyfriends or roommates when she was not in a relationship.⁶⁴⁹

Throughout the decade after leaving home, she also bounced from interest to interest, becoming active in many social justice groups and describing herself as an activist, a feminist, protesting and raising awareness of issues facing the city’s working poor, teachers’ rights, or protesting against America’s overseas military actions. She turned to atheism, became a vegetarian, and would soon switch to different interests based on her respective relationships.

She also lived a life free from any restrictions. She drank heavily, smoked cigarettes and weed, experimented with drugs, and had multiple tattoos. Yet she wasn’t happy with her life, and her varied interests came to reflect her constant search for self and identity, and for stability and a sense

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., also see: Lauren McMaha, “The transformation of former devout Christian Ariel Bradley,” *news.com.au*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/social/the-transformation-of-former-devout-christian-ariel-bradley/news-story/b3ea65ba6b1bbfa48525d1879d9b7472>

⁶⁴⁸ Ellie Hall, “How One Young Woman Went From Fundamentalist Christian To ISIS Bride,” op. cit.

⁶⁴⁹ Lauren McMaha, “The transformation of former devout Christian Ariel Bradley,” op. cit.

of belonging.⁶⁵⁰

She did not hold steady relationships, rotating through a succession of “older, dominant men providing her a living space.” In 2009, she got pregnant and had an abortion without telling the baby’s father because he had defined the relationship as a casual one. In 2010, she moved into a house shared by her friend and her friend’s brother, and the two introduced Bradley to their employer, a Palestinian Muslim man who owned a pizza and deli restaurant, who hired Bradley as well. While working there, she met a young Syrian man studying engineering at the nearby University of Tennessee, Chattanooga and had a “big crush” on him. The two never dated, but talked occasionally about various things, including Islam. Bradley was trying to get closer to the student, and as he put it, “maybe she thought that, OK, if I convert to Islam, I will be closer to him,” but he said he also believed Bradley was trying to find something “to fill a gap” in her spiritual life. While the student was attempting to distance himself from her, Bradley told her friends that her crush expressed that their friendship couldn’t be taken to the next level because she wasn’t a Muslim, a matter denied by the student.⁶⁵¹

From her friends’ description, it appears that getting rebuffed by the man she grew to love was shocking to her, constituting a turning point in her interests and personality. She began to research the internet for information on Islam, stopped drinking alcohol and gradually removed herself from hanging out with her friends, began dressing more modestly and occasionally wore a scarf over her head. By the spring of 2011, she appeared to have made up her mind to convert. On March 18th, 2011, she posted a question to the Islam section of Yahoo Answers under the name “LadyAppleSeed,” asking “Is it okay to wear Hijab before converting?,” explaining that although she had not yet taken her *Shahadah* (declaration of faith to formally become a Muslim) she had been doing research on Islam for the past 4-5 months and wanted to make sure she knew all she could about Islam before making a choice as this.⁶⁵²

In a short period of time, she began to attend Friday prayer services at a local mosque and made friends with Muslims on Tumblr, a social network-

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

ing site. In the spring of 2011, she invited her boss and some friends from the restaurant to the mosque to witness her conversion. After the ceremony, Muslim women attending her conversion gave her hugs, welcoming her to a new phase in her volatile life.

The surprise was, even for Muslim women who knew her, that Bradley chose the strict version of Islam, and wanted to “follow the religion the way that the prophet’s wives had worshipped thousands of years ago.” Her life, behavior, and relationships all changed in accordance with this new conviction, she donned the hijab and began spending long hours on social networking sites, particularly Muslim matrimonial sites, actively searching for a husband that was a religiously practicing Muslim. On one occasion, her housemate’s brother recalls that an older man flew in to Chattanooga and came to the house to meet her for the purpose of marriage, but Bradley declined the offer.⁶⁵³

Her changed personality affected her relationship with her housemates, who did not share her new lifestyle, prompting her to move into the house of her older sister, Dara McIntyre, who was married and had a young daughter. Her sister notes that Bradley split her time between working at the restaurant and searching for a husband online, until late August 2011, when she met a potential match on the Muslim matrimonial site “Half Our Deen.” The suitor was Yasin Mohamad, a 22-year-old refugee from Iraq born to a Palestinian father and a Lebanese mother, and living in Borås, Sweden. Mohamad, four years younger than Bradley, was allegedly studying architecture and was not working at the time. The two began talking with each other over WhatsApp, and within a few months, Mohamad proposed and Bradley immediately accepted. But her friends, particularly her Muslim friends, were worried about her haste marriage decision. Mohamad did not have Swedish citizenship, and her friends were worried he was trying to get with her for her American citizenship. The friends were particularly worried because Mohamad had no social media presence, “She only ever had one picture of him,” one of her friends said. ““Ariel had to” beg him to send a picture, because she was like, ‘Everybody wants to see what you look like.’”⁶⁵⁴

Eager to get married, Bradley cut off those friends who objected to

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

her choice. Her marriage decision was posted on Half Our Deen’s “Success Stories” page, where the couple said they had been matched with a 70% compatibility rating. After her engagement, Bradley moved in with her parents in an attempt to rebuild her relationship with them after an estrangement following her conversion.

As soon as she agreed to marry him, Mohamad began to talk to Bradley about what he expected from her as a Muslim wife, asking her to change the way she dressed to become more observant with Islamic ideals, to not talk to men who were not immediate family members, and to stop listening to music, a matter that baffled her friends because Bradley played guitar and was a talented singer, “when she sang, there wasn’t anything else you’d want to listen to but her,” one of her friends remarked.⁶⁵⁵ These changes were worrisome to her friends, reflecting a bad indicator of her new phase in life.

Bradley left for Sweden on December 21st, 2011 and was married to Mohamad days later in a private religious ceremony. A few weeks later, she flew back to Chattanooga until her Swedish residency application was processed. Donning the hijab and *abaya*, a robe-like modest overdress, Bradley explained to her friends: “that’s what my husband wants.” She briefly resumed her job at the restaurant, but her husband soon urged her to quit and cut ties with all her Chattanooga friends, including her Muslim friends, making her “go through her Facebook and delete every guy she knew on there and make sure that they were only girls,” according to a close Muslim friend. He also told her to remove all pictures of herself from her account, including those posted by other people, because it is not religiously permissible.⁶⁵⁶

She returned to Sweden for almost three months, then returned in mid-2012 to Chattanooga again, this time pregnant and reportedly returned for prenatal care and the eventual birth of her child. She stayed with her parents and rarely left the house, except for her doctor’s appointments and Friday prayers at the mosque. Bradley’s friends were suspicious about the fact that Mohamad was unable to attend the birth of his first child, a matter she justified by his inability to get a visa to enter the US. She gave birth on December 8th, 2012, and after recovering for a few months, she returned to

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

Sweden with her newborn daughter, Aminah. To her friends' surprise, upon her return to Sweden, she deleted her Facebook and other social networking accounts and completely disconnected herself from her friends and family back home, "it was just like she didn't exist anymore," one of her Muslim friendssaid.⁶⁵⁷

Bradley's posts on social media indicate and she and her husband may have begun planning their trip to Syria in late December 2013. Along with their 18-month-old daughter and pregnant with her second child, Bradley left for Syria in mid-2014 along with her husband who joined the ranks of IS fighters there. She returned to her online activities on social media using various screen names and Twitter handles, including "Umm Aminah" and "Emarah bint Aljon," describing her life in the Syrian city of al-Bab and posting pictures of her children there. Her posts ranged from typical mother stories about her kids to pictures and descriptions of bombs falling nearby. In several posts, she describes not being afraid of death, but wishing to be granted martyrdom. On July 17th, 2015, Bradley took to Twitter to celebrate an attack in Chattanooga carried out by a young man, Mohammad Abdulazeez, who attacked a military recruiting center and military base, killing four marines and injuring several others before getting killed himself. She described Abdulazeez as a martyr, and remarked: "Gifted this morning not only with Eid but w/ the news of a brother putting fear n the heart of *kufar* "non-believers" n the city of my birth. *Alhamdullilah* "thanks be to God"."⁶⁵⁸

Little is known about how Bradley and her husband managed to get into Syria, or about her life there or her husband's position with IS. Yet her social media posts reflect that she integrated well into the new community there, especially with wives and families of foreign fighters in al-Bab, and indicate that she holds strong convictions in jihadist thought and IS ideology.

From Spongy-Rebellious, to Spongy-Extremist

In analyzing Bradley's personality, especially based on her friends' account of her life ordeals prior to her conversion to Islam and later marriage and travel to Syria, it is evident that her behavior was reflecting a state of re-

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., Also see: Lauren McMahan, "The transformation of former devout Christian Ariel Bradley," op. cit.

⁶⁵⁸ Ellie Hall, "How One Young Woman Went From Fundamentalist Christian To ISIS Bride," op. cit.

bellion against her primary upbringing. But a different aspect of her personality also reflects the opposite: a constant search for closeness, belonging, and a deep bond that would grant her security and stability and a solid spiritual foundation to make up for the emotional shortcomings due to her troubled relationship with her mother, the religious fundamentalism at home, and her having left home at an early age. She defined herself through others, particularly men, causing her to bounce from one world view to the next without finding a solid sense of her own self.

Psychotherapist Zoe Krupka finds this behavior to be not uncommon among people who have had a strict fundamentalist upbringing, “What happens is that you end up without a sense of your own self, because you’re so directed and you’re so controlled. That’s how you learn how to be in relationships — you learn how to follow orders, as opposed to having a gut sense of what you believe in, or what you like or dislike. When you have that destroyed as a child, by such a strict regimen, that’s what you know. Love means for you doing what you’re told.” Krupka applies this analysis to Bradley, adding that as the girl bounced from relationship to relationship, many of whom hold pretty extreme positions on one end or another, “her position has been just to attach to someone who feels incredibly certain about everything, because inside she doesn’t have that solid sense of self. Without that, you can’t have a healthy relationship because you can only be a sponge. That’s your only option.”⁶⁵⁹

Bradley’s friends indicate that the turning point in her life was in meeting the young Muslim engineering student at the restaurant where she worked, and having gotten rebuffed by him, and instead of distancing herself from him she instead dug deeper to search for sources of his personality (i.e. his religion) that would bring her closer to him. While this is perhaps accurate, it is aspects of Bradley’s own personality and tendencies that reflect her path towards radicalization through her search for a sense of identity and belonging. The shock of feeling rejected by her “big crush” took her on a new journey, after having bounced from different ideologies, religions, cultures, positions, and people, to finally reach Islam. Ironically, however, she did not embrace the version of Islam found in the guy, or in the nearby Islamic center and mosque, or in her Muslim friends both in person and online, but rather a fundamentalist radical version that perhaps reflects the heritage of

⁶⁵⁹ Lauren McMaha, “The transformation of former devout Christian Ariel Bradley,” op. cit.

the fundamentalist Christian version of her upbringing.

From this point of view, Ariel Bradley moved from evangelical Christian fundamentalism to Jihadi Salafi fundamentalism, and between these two stages, she crossed a turbulent and winding path in which she searched for spiritual, emotional, and intellectual stability. She moved from one fanatical opposite to the other, from faith to atheism to faith again.⁶⁶⁰

She may have finally found herself in her relationship with Yasin Mo-hamad and in her decision to live under IS. She may have found stability with her husband and children, and fulfilled her desire to have someone dominant in her life, who controls and guides her. Love, for Bradley, is to identify with the character and identity of the person she loves, it is a relationship of dependency not one of equals or rivals. She may have embraced the radical jihadist ideology and found emotional and ideological security in it. The question remains whether Bradley has finally come to terms with herself, crystallized her own personality, and anchored her religious, intellectual, and cultural convictions. We do not have a definite answer. Her previous experiences reflect that her faith in ideas and identities is fragile and artificial, self-serving and transient at best.

Hoda Mohammed Muthana: The Road Paved, Half-Way

Hoda Muthana is an American girl in her early twenties. Her parents emigrated to the US from Yemen in 1992 in search of a better life. 24 years later, Muthana migrated to the land of her dreams, the Syrian city of al-Raqqa, carrying with her the desire to be reunited with her parents in paradise.

She grew up the youngest of five siblings in the city of Hoover, roughly 20 minutes outside of Birmingham, Alabama, in a religiously strict household.

Upon graduating from high school in May 2013, her father gave her a smart phone as a graduation gift. Happy with her new phone, Muthana took

⁶⁶⁰ In the context of effects of fundamentalist upbringing, see: Amanda Marcotte, "What the "ISIS Bride" and Rachel Dolezal Have in Common," *Slate*, July 21, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/07/21/_isis_bride_ariel_bradley_her_story_has_echoes_of_rachel_dolezal.html

to Facebook, posting pictures of herself. The use of the phone, however, was limited by the family's conservative rules. The father objected to her pictures, and although he himself and Muthana's brothers have Facebook accounts with pictures of themselves visible, the women of the family were not to have social media accounts or use messaging apps to communicate with anyone besides family members. The father would often check his daughter's phone, causing disputes between them, with the young woman claiming privacy, while the father stressing the need to know what his daughter does in order to protect her.⁶⁶¹

But the family's concern about her identity and religion was completely opposite to her concern that her father would discover that she was communicating with other people, not boys or boyfriends, but supporters of the IS. Despite her family's strict monitoring of her online activities, Muthana nonetheless found a way around to communicate with jihadist sympathizers and propagandists, and with time, she became convinced of their interpretation of Islam and their ideological views.

Her family was reassured by her religious tendencies. Her phone was filled with Islamic apps, Qur'an, Hadith, and religious lectures, "nothing suspicious that makes me worried about her actions," her father recalled. Muthana had become visibly more devout over the year and a half before she left for Syria, watching Islamic lectures by scholars on YouTube and memorizing the Qur'an. Instead of concern, these behaviors were a source of pride for her parents, who found in her devotion a reflection of a true disciplined Muslim. She dressed and behaved more modestly, behavior that she describes as "helped me with my temper and made me a better person overall. They "her family" liked the change until they saw me getting 'jihadi'."⁶⁶²

While observers attribute Muthana's radicalization and recruitment to the role of the internet and jihadist websites and forums, accessed via none other than the smart phone gifted to her by her father, her father believes that she has been 'brainwashed.' Muthana herself, in a series of interviews with Ellie Hall from BuzzFeed News, notes that her interest in religious life began in 2012, even before getting her prized phone. "I felt like my life was

⁶⁶¹ Ellie Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview With An American In ISIS," *BuzzFeed News*, April 18, 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/gone-girl-an-interview-with-an-american-in-isis?utm_term=.qvaOjKRAM#.lk9yWJ2Ka

⁶⁶² Ibid.

so bland without “religion”. Life has much more meaning when u know why ur here,” she remarked.⁶⁶³

Yet the phone was instrumental in giving Muthana access to religious interpretations quite different from those prevailing in her family or local Muslim community, where the local mosque, Birmingham Islamic Society, posts frankly on its homepage “An Open Letter Condemning ISIS Ideology” and advocates a stance against terrorism. The varying interpretations she found on the internet influenced her much more than her local religious surrounding, as she herself remarked, she didn’t like her local Islamic community far too much. She began to distance herself from this community and her local friends, frustrated and unfulfilled by their version of Islam.

In the fall of 2013, she secretly set up a Twitter account, communicating through it with radical jihadist personalities and reflecting through it her own ‘jihadist alter ego.’ She gained thousands of followers, and met known IS members and supporters, including Aqsa Mahmood, who ran away from her home in Scotland and joined IS in Syria. By November 2013, she began planning her *nafir* and *hijra* for jihad in Syria, aided by the help of IS supporters online. She believed that every Muslim should move to IS-controlled territory, and her beliefs led her to lose all her friends, where she found none in her community “that desired to tread the path I was striving for.”⁶⁶⁴

She cunningly planned her departure, waiting for a day in which her father was out of town for work. She used her college tuition money (for classes she was taking at the University of Alabama at Birmingham) to pay for her plane ticket, and convinced her father to allow her to go on a supposed college field trip to Atlanta, about three hours away. She left the house on a November morning while her father was in Washington D.C. for work, and later in the evening, called her sister saying that she had accidentally gotten on the wrong bus for the girls who were staying overnight in Atlanta. Frantic, her father told his sons to go get their sister from Atlanta and not to return without her. But having given her sister no information on her whereabouts, the brothers waited for the bus to return the next day. But there was

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., also see: Kieran Corcoran, “The Alabama student who tricked her parents and fled to Syria to become an ISIS bride,” *Daily Mail*, April 21, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3048217/Why-abandoned-America-ISIS-College-student-20-tells-spent-tuition-money-flights-abandoned-family-wage-jihad-radicalized-online.html#ixzz4UUzZnHKM>

no bus, instead, Muthana's sister received a text message from an unknown number, with Muthana telling her that she was calling from Turkey, and that she was on her way to Syria to become a member of the Islamic State.⁶⁶⁵

The father immediately alerted the FBI, hoping that the authorities may be able to get to her before reaching Syria. But when he returned to Alabama the next day, he was able to call Muthana, she was already in Syria. A few days later, in her first tweet from Syria, she uploaded a picture of four passports, American, Canadian, British, and Australian, being held by covered hands of herself and other foreign female jihadist migrants, in preparation to burn them. "Bonfire soon, no need for these anymore, alhamdulillah," she captioned the image.

Her father tried to persuade her to return, and she expressed to him her desire to come home because IS was pressuring her to marry one of its fighters. She told him she needed money to help get her to the Turkish border, and the father insisted they money transfer would have to go through proper channels. Muthana stopped her messages, and the father realized she was not being honest with him. Muthana herself confirmed to BuzzFeed News that she did not intend to return, but wanted to see if her father would help her during troubling times. "It would never cross my mind to come back...It was just a test," she said.⁶⁶⁶

A month after her arrival in al-Raqqa, on December 20th, 2014, 20-year-old Muthana married a 23-year-old IS foreign fighter from Australia named Suhan Rahman (who went by the nom de guerre Abu Jihad al-Australi). The marriage took place without her father's consent, which was not needed under IS rules because, according to her, her father was against IS and did not adhere to its ideology. In March 2015, about 87 days after their marriage, her husband was killed in a Jordanian airstrike on al-Raqqa. The next day, Muthana tweeted "May Allah accept my husband, Abu Jihad al-Australi. Promised Allah and fought in the front lines until he attained shahadah "martyrdom"."⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁵ Ellie Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview With An American In ISIS, op. cit.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., also see: Tom Cleary, "Hoda Muthana: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know," *Heavy.com*, April 21, 2015, <http://heavy.com/news/2015/04/hoda-muthana-isis-hoover-alabama-buzzfeed-umm-jihad-zumarul-jannah-father-mother-parents/>

Her father tried again to convince her to return to the US, but she refused. She continued to post her opinions on social media, particularly expressing her contempt for the United States. “Soooo many Aussies and Brits here, but where are the Americans, wake up u cowards.” If other American IS supporters couldn’t make it to Syria, she said, “Terrorize the kuffar “derogatory term for non-Muslims” at home.” Shortly after her husband’s death, she tweeted, “Americans wake up! Men and women altogether. You have much to do while you live under our greatest enemy, enough of your sleeping!” She added, “Veterans, Patriot, Memorial etc Day parades..go on drive by’s + spill all of their blood or rent a big truck n drive all over them. Kill them.”⁶⁶⁸

The Road Paved, Half-Way

Unlike Ariel Bradley, Hoda Muthana’s rebellion against her family and strict religious upbringing was not in the opposite direction; running away from home in her teens, atheism, alcohol, drugs, and men, before finding radical religious fundamentalism in its Islamic version. For Muthana, it was a rebellion in the same direction, the Islamic direction, but through a very different version and interpretation than that of her family and the local Muslim community around her.

Muthana’s friends find that she had two personalities, the first in the real world: a shy, polite girl who did not exhibit religious fanaticism, but wore moderate Muslim attire and practiced her religion in the traditional sense. The other personality is in the virtual world, where she portrayed herself to her thousands of followers as a conservative adherent, posting radical and religious extremist views, things that “aren’t average Muslim women views,” as her friend put it. “I really think that her Twitter was her alter ego. What she lacked in her personality she would make up for on Twitter,” the friend remarked.⁶⁶⁹

The question of identity is instrumental in this context. As a teenager, Muthana had choices, she could rebel against her Muslim identity and her strict family upbringing by going in the opposite direction, or she could put her identity to counter American college life and Western culture. At this

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ellie Hall, “Gone Girl: An Interview With An American In ISIS, op. cit.

juncture, her strict religious upbringing was not fulfilling enough, she began to search for other interpretations of religion elsewhere until she reached IS ideology and its followers. It was not a difficult catch, for her religious frame of reference had paved the road, half-way, for her. There was no intellectual or cultural immunity or barrier facing her, and while her parents were keen to maintain a traditional religious education, and fear for her identity and culture, all she practically did was take this path to the end of the road.

It is not intended here that religion paves the way for violent extremism and jihadist ideology, but rather that strictness in religion and focus on religious identity, without building the required cultural awareness and ensuring integration of children into their local Western culture, or giving them the keys through which to harmonize their Islamic identity with their lives in light of Western values and society, may lead to such extreme path.

The theme of rebellion in Muthana's personality is also reflected in her decision to isolate herself from the Muslim community around her. She didn't have many friends in the real world, and is described by her family and acquaintances as shy and polite. She didn't have it in her to confront her family or Muslim community about their position towards IS or jihadi Salafism, and to debate her own views and convictions in the real world. She took to the virtual world, where she felt more comfortable and emboldened. And, while the internet facilitated her access to extremist thought and supporters of IS, it does not appear that she accidentally stumbled upon this path, but rather consciously sought it.

Shannon Conley: The Internet Recruit

Halima Conley was born Shannon Maureen Conley in 1995 in Denver Colorado, the youngest of four sisters. She attended high school in Arvada, a suburb of Denver, then studied nursing and became a certified nurse's aide. Her neighbors recall her being a "typical American teenager," who suddenly changed in 2013, and began wearing the hijab after her conversion to Islam.⁶⁷⁰

Online, she met a 32-year-old Tunisian man, Yousr Mouelhi, who

⁶⁷⁰ "How Typical Arvada Teen Turned Into Terror Suspect," *CBS4 Denver*, July 3, 2014, <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2014/07/03/how-typical-arvada-teen-turned-into-terror-suspect/> Also see: Snejana Farberov and Daniel Bates, "American nurse who was arrested for trying to join ISIS set her Facebook profile to 'slave of Allah'," *Daily Mail*, July 3, 2014, <https://goo.gl/m99bQM>

claimed to be a fighter with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, prior to its declaration of the Caliphate State). He helped convince her to travel to Syria where she would marry him and join the ranks of the organization there. She was active on social media expressing jihadist ideology and anti-US sentiment. She changed her name on Facebook and other social networking accounts to Halima, and described herself as a ‘slave of Allah.’⁶⁷¹

In November 2013, Conley was spotted by a security guard at the Faith Bible Chapel in Arvada, a church that witnessed a shooting of two missionaries in 2007. She was wearing Islamic clothing and taking notes on a notepad, prompting the pastor of the congregation to contact the authorities. In questioning her, Conley told federal agents that she was taking notes after noticing the church staff following her and pretended like she was diagramming the layout of the church to make them worry. “If they think I’m a terrorist, I’ll give them something to think I am,” she told investigators. In December 2013, she also told an FBI agent that she had signed up for the U.S. Army Explorers to train in military tactics in the hopes of passing on her knowledge to jihadist fighters.⁶⁷²

Over the course of about seven questioning sessions with the authorities, Conley did not hold back her opinions and convictions about jihadist ideology, stressing her desire to travel to Syria and use her training in nursing to help IS’ cause. Investigators tried to dissuade her several times from traveling to Syria, warning her that she would be arrested if she follows through with her plans, but the 19-year-old reportedly insisted that she’d rather go to prison than do nothing and turn away from jihad. Investigators tried to test her motives, asking her if she would rather join the Red Cross to help innocent Syrians, but she rejected the idea and insisted she did not want to work as a nurse, but rather as a jihadist fighter, stressing that jihad is the only approach to helping Muslims.

Court documents later revealed that she had went a long way with her Tunisian suitor in the recruitment process. The Tunisian man attempted

⁶⁷¹ “Al-Majalla Tanshur ʿtirafat Shannon Conley li al-FBI” “Al-Majalla Magazine Publishes Confession of Shannon Conley to the FBI”, *Al-Majalla*, November 10, 2014, <http://arb.majalla.com/2014/11/article55252433/>

⁶⁷² See the page on Shannon Conley on the Counter Extremism Project Website, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/shannon-maureen-conley> Also see: Snejana Farberov and Daniel Bates, “American nurse who was arrested for trying to join ISIS set her Facebook profile to ‘slave of Allah,’” *op. cit.*

to ask Conley's father for her hand, but the father refused, and Conley set course to travel to Syria and get married without her father's blessings. Over the next few months, her online activities reflected increased radicalization. She was influenced by the thought of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born Al-Qaeda propagandist who was killed in a US drone strike in Yemen in September 2011, to whom she remarked on Facebook "May Allah accept his martyrdom." She was also acquainted with the writings of Al-Qaeda propagandists and leaders, including Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin and his views on guerrilla warfare as a jihad approach. After her arrest, she told investigators that she likes the idea of guerrilla warfare "because she could do it alone," and did not hide her opinion that US military bases are legitimate targets because of the US war on Islamist movements. She found no problem in the death of innocent women and children if they are present at a legitimate target, reflecting to investigators that her jihadist convictions had reached an advanced stage.⁶⁷³

In the months leading up to her attempted travel and subsequent arrest, Conley was increasingly open about her jihadist and radical views on social media. She took keen interest in the Syrian conflict, the plight of Palestinians, and blasted Western media repeatedly. On her Google+ account, she wrote on March 27th, 2014 "When there are so few mujahideen, is it not our duty to fight regardless of our country of birth and/or residence?" Her Google+ page also has the words 'The Caravan of Martyrs' used by Osama bin Laden to describe those who give their lives for jihad. She criticized American women for what she considered immoral dress, and liked pages advocating for women's right to wear the *niqab* face veil.⁶⁷⁴

Over the course of an eight-month investigation, FBI agents reached out to Conley's parents and tried to warn them of the extent of her radicalization. The father noted that Conley could not be dissuaded and that he once walked in on the 19-year-old talking to her 'extremist boyfriend' on Skype. The Tunisian man used the opportunity to ask Mr. Conley for his blessing for the couple to marry and tried to convince him to let Shannon leave for Syria. Failing to get her father's blessing, Conley bought a one-way ticket to

⁶⁷³ See text of the Court Criminal Complaint against Shannon Conley, <https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Conley%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>

⁶⁷⁴ See the Facebook page of Halima Conley, <https://www.facebook.com/halima.conley?fref=ts> Also see: Snezana Farberov and Daniel Bates, "American nurse who was arrested for trying to join ISIS set her Facebook profile to 'slave of Allah'," *op. cit.*

Turkey, hoping to cross the border into Syria from there. The father discovered the ticket and contacted the authorities. Conley was arrested on April 8th, 2014 at the Denver International Airport while attempting to board a plane to Turkey.⁶⁷⁵

In January 2015, a federal judge sentenced Conley to four years in prison for conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization (IS). Before the sentencing, Conley wept as she read a statement saying, “It was after arrest that I learned the truth about the ISIS that I was taught to respect... Since my incarceration I have had a chance to read the entire Quran,” she said, concluding that “the scholars” she had been following in her online research about Islam had distorted the Qur’an. Her parents later released a statement online criticizing the U.S. legal system for making an example of their daughter in trying to discourage others from turning to extremism. If “the government is willing to sacrifice the future of a 19-year-old American citizen to drive the point home... then we feel the terrorists have won this particular battle in the war on terrorism,” the statement said. Despite giving her credit for cooperating with federal authorities, the judge felt that the prison sentence and subsequent restrictions are needed, “I am not taking any chances,” the federal judge, Raymond P. Moore, said.⁶⁷⁶

The judge and the prosecution doubted her sincerity in court. The judge said it is surprising that Conley suddenly is disavowing jihad and that she has seemed to do a 180-degree turn in a very short period. Her lawyer said she has gone through a complete transformation during her time in detention, arguing that “the things that she believed at the time she was arrested she does not believe now.” The lawyer argued that Conley changed her adopted Muslim name from Halima to Amatullah, because she is a different person now. Nonetheless, the judge found that there is “a string of defiance that rolls through her life that I have not seen change yet.” While the prosecutor described Conley as “pathologically naïve,” the judge interrupted to note “That woman is in need of psychiatric help.”⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ See text of the Court’s Criminal Complaint against Shannon Conley, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷⁶ Michael Martinez, Ana Cabrera, Sara Weisfeldt, “Colorado woman gets 4 years for wanting to join ISIS,” *CNN*, January 24, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/23/us/colorado-woman-isis-sentencing/index.html>

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Conley's case got much media attention that attributed her radicalization and recruitment to the role of the internet. Her father maintained that she had been brainwashed online. Yet the details that emerged focused on the timeframe from her conversion to Islam to her attempted *hijra* to Syria, and do not provide answers about important psychological and emotional aspects of her real life, her upbringing, and her personality, or the motives behind her conversion to Islam as a teen. While her father attributed her knowledge of Islam as based solely on her internet research, we do not have a clear picture of her emotional and intellectual state that not only linked her up with the Tunisian militant, but also led her to almost agree to marry three different people in a matter of months. And, while the Tunisian suitor did his part in indoctrinating her with jihadist ideology, he also exploited her sentiment towards the plight of Syrians and the persecution of Muslims around the world to garner her interest and commitment to this ideology. She herself describes this connection, noting in her statement before the sentencing that "even though I was committed to the idea of jihad, I didn't want to hurt anyone. It was all about defending Muslims."⁶⁷⁸

Jaelyn Young: The All-American Girl

Jaelyn Young was a 19-year-old second year chemistry college student at Mississippi State University when she converted to Islam in March 2015 after months of contemplating her religious transformation.

Young got engaged to an American young man of Palestinian descent, Muhammad Oda Dakhlalla, who graduated from the same university with a psychology degree in May 2015. The couple got married in June of that year, in order that their travel together be "religiously legitimate." On August 8th, 2015, Young and Dakhlalla were arrested at a regional airport in Columbus, Mississippi as they attempted to board a plane to Turkey en route to Syria to join IS. According to an FBI investigation, Young disguised her trip to Turkey as newlyweds going on honeymoon.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Jeff Amy, "Mississippi woman gets 12-year sentence on terrorism charge," *Associated Press*, August 11, 2016, <https://apnews.com/383e88cda66c44b6a66c9536a9eb0bbf/mississippi-woman-be-sentenced-terrorism-charges>

FBI agents had discovered early Young's expression of support for IS and jihadist ideology on her social networking accounts. Starting in May 2015, undercover FBI agents – disguised as IS supporters and recruiters – communicated with Young throughout her and Dakhllalla's planning phase to reach IS territory. It is not clear whether the undercover agents were the only ones Young was communicating with, or whether she had contacts with real IS recruiters as well.⁶⁸⁰

Then 19-year-old Young was identified by agents through social networking platforms as a supporter of IS. She expressed on her Twitter account that the only thing keeping her away from the *Dawlah* (Islamic State) is money, supplementing her comment with the hashtag #baqiya, referring to the IS slogan "*Baqiya wa tatamaddad*" (The Islamic State Shall Remain and Expand).⁶⁸¹ She told the undercover agent that "many of the family members and members of the community "around her" do not support Dawlah," and expressed that she disagrees with them, "Dawlah is correct," she said, announcing that she is preparing for *hijra* to the Islamic caliphate. She made contact with another FBI agent posing as an IS facilitator to help her and Dakhllalla cross from Turkey to Syria.

She discussed with the undercover agents the skills she and 22-year-old Dakhllalla possessed that would be useful for IS, including her skills in math and chemistry, and Dakhllalla's proficiency in computer science and media.

In the months leading up to their attempted *hijra*, Young's online posts were turning increasingly radicalized. In July 2015, in response to her frustration over the delay in the couple receiving their passports, Young remarked, "What makes me feel "better" after just watching the news is that an akhi "brother" carried out an attack against US marines in TN! Alhamdulillah, the numbers of supporters are growing." She expressed that her now husband, Dakhllalla was concerned that the couple would be arrested by Turkish authorities or that intel would be given to US authorities to arrest them before leaving, stressing that she reassured her husband that once they get there, he will "see all is fine."⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ See the page on Jaelyn Young on the Counter Extremism Project website, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/jaelyn-young>

⁶⁸¹ See the Twitter account of Jaelyn Young, <https://twitter.com/jaelynxyoung?lang=ar>

⁶⁸² See the text of the Criminal Complaint and Affidavit in support of criminal complaint by the FBI against Jaelyn Young and Muhammad Dakhllalla by the United States District Court, <https://www.>

Nearly a year after their arrest, in August 2016, a federal judge sentenced Young to 12 years in prison after she pleaded guilty to terrorism charges including attempting and conspiring to knowingly provide material support and resources to a foreign terrorist organization (IS).⁶⁸³

Federal authorities attribute Young's radicalization to jihadist material propagated on the internet. Young was reportedly influenced by this thought, and she searched for someone who would help her understand Islam, which she found in Dakhllalla. The court found that Young influenced Dakhllalla with IS ideology, and Young herself admitted in court that she was the planning force behind the couple's decision, rigorously communicating with the undercover agents posing as IS recruiters, and urged her husband to go on board with her plans despite his initial hesitancy and concern that they would be arrested before reaching IS territories. She stressed, both on social media and to the undercover agents, that the US media distorts the image of IS and that she wants her husband to work in the media arm of IS to correct this unfair caricature of the group.⁶⁸⁴

In attempting to analyze the social and psychological environment that led Young to extremist ideology, it doesn't appear that there are direct factors. Young was an honor student in high school, a champion gymnast, cheerleader, participated in robotics competitions, member of the homecoming court, and an aspiring physician. Submerged in American culture, she has been described as "an all-American girl."⁶⁸⁵

Her parents, however, noted during Young's trial that she had turned to Islam amid an emotional crisis she experienced while studying at the university, leading her to adopt the radical version of Islam espoused by IS and ultimately attempt to physically join them in Syria.

Her father, a police officer for 17 years and former Navy Reserve member who served in the military for over 20 years, blamed himself for being gone on multiple tours of duty, and for not having been there for Young on special occasions like her graduation and first day of college. Her mother

justice.gov/opa/file/705906/download

⁶⁸³ See the page on Jaelyn Young on the Counter Extremism Project website, op. cit.

⁶⁸⁴ See the text of the Criminal Complaint and Affidavit in support of criminal complaint, op. cit.

⁶⁸⁵ Catherine E. Shoichet, "Mississippi: Daughter of cop, son of imam accused of plan to join ISIS," CNN, August 13, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/12/us/mississippi-couple-isis/>

blamed herself for failing to adequately react to her daughter who was experiencing emotional troubles and feelings of isolation. The mother said she was too strict in reacting to her daughter's troubles as a college student, at a time when her daughter was turning to Islam for solace.⁶⁸⁶

We do not find that the circumstances of her fiancé, Muhammad Dakhllalla, are fundamentally different. His father emigrated to the United States decades ago and studied civil engineering at the University of Mississippi. Dakhllalla's parents owned a Middle Eastern restaurant in Starkville, Mississippi, and the father occasionally gave Friday prayer sermons at the local mosque. Dakhllalla's mother is an American convert to Islam, affectionately known as "the hummus lady" for the Mediterranean specialties she sold at the local farmers' market. The parents raised their sons with moderate religious beliefs and were known to be deeply ingrained in the life of the town.⁶⁸⁷

Young's fiancé is also described by his former teacher as being sharp-witted, a student who excelled in school, courteous and popular, mixed easily with non-Muslim students, and exhibited no signs of radical or extremist religious views. He worked at his parent's restaurant while studying psychology in college, earned black belts in taekwondo and judo, and is described by his former judo instructor as calm, attentive, and focused who doesn't get angry or upset.⁶⁸⁸

Young and Dakhllalla's actions baffled all who knew them, questioning what had gone wrong with this handsome young couple who "seemed to be on their way to sharing a 21st-century Mississippi success story." While the internet is an easy and direct catalyst to blame in influencing Young to embrace IS ideology, her parents nonetheless speak of a 'turning point' that pushed her towards this path as she underwent an emotional crisis as a college student. And while her father blamed himself for being absent while on military duty, the prosecution in Young's trial argued to the judge that "thousands and thousands of other servicemen have left their families and gone overseas to do their duty and their children didn't betray their country

⁶⁸⁶ Jeff Amy, "Mississippi woman gets 12-year sentence on terrorism charge," op. cit.

⁶⁸⁷ See Richard Fausset, "Young Mississippi Couple Linked to ISIS, Perplexing All," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/15/us/disbelief-in-mississippi-at-how-far-isis-message-can-travel.html?_r=0

⁶⁸⁸ Catherine E. Shoichet, "Mississippi: Daughter of cop, son of imam accused of plan to join ISIS," op. cit.

and try to join ISIS.”⁶⁸⁹

The judge told Young to own up to her actions. “You did it. You’re to blame and you have to be responsible.” The girl herself admitted to finding what she did to be “surreal,” feeling shame over her actions and sorrow for the humiliation she caused her family. “I wasn’t myself. I said and did things that were so contrary to me,”⁶⁹⁰ referencing the ‘turning point’ in her life that led her to embrace extremist ideology. Yet it cannot be definitively concluded that this emotional crisis alone is what led her to jihadism, considering that she had been raised in a Christian household and attended church, but had not been particularly zealous. Young’s friends said that Young converted to Islam in the spring of 2015 after being introduced to the religion by college friends. Young was drawn to “the Quran’s teachings because she believed it had been unchanged since it was first written. She thought the Bible, by contrast, had been translated so much that its original meaning was lost.”⁶⁹¹

Despite her enthusiasm to move to al-Raqqa, as described by the undercover agents who decoyed her online, and her emphasis on putting her skills and those of her fiancé to IS use, and her eagerness to join her “brothers and sisters” in the Caliphate State, yet her social media activities prior to her attempted *hijra* do not necessarily reflect a profound turning point in her life, behavior, or cultural expression towards religiosity or extremism. She did not wear the hijab or wear overly modest clothes, as Shannon Conley had done, for example. Even photos of her engagement and subsequent wedding ceremony in the Summer of 2015, weeks before her attempted departure, do not reflect such a transformation. Rather, she told her alleged IS recruiters online that she needed the facilitators to provide her with a veil upon arriving in Istanbul, noting that the ‘brother’ will identify her easily “I will stand out pretty well, especially my hair (big bushy curly hair).” She also did not seem to have done adequate research on other aspects of Islam, as Dakhllalla had voiced concerns to the undercover agents that they may be tested upon arriving to ensure they were Sunnis, and that Young isn’t proficient in this religious knowledge. Both the couple repeatedly asked the alleged recruiters whether they would receive classes in Islamic sciences and Shari’ah upon

⁶⁸⁹ Jeff Amy, “Mississippi woman gets 12-year sentence on terrorism charge,” op. cit.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Richard Fausset, “Young Mississippi Couple Linked to ISIS, Perplexing All,” op. cit.

arriving in IS territory.⁶⁹²

Young's enthusiasm was for IS ideology more than it was a profound religious transformation. In a very short period, she transformed from an "all-American girl" to an IS advocate without exhibiting signs of gradual radicalization as many other young Americans who took this route did. If her 'emotional crisis' as a college student was indeed the turning point, it was a deeply disturbing one of psychological and ideological shifts that turned her not only towards radicalizing herself, but radicalizing her fiancé as well.

Remarks

This chapter discussed four cases of American females, and one Pakistani resident of the US, who have been influenced by IS ideology, joined the organization or attempted to, or provided material support and propagation of its thought. In analyzing these models, and many other similar cases reported by the media, several observations are noteworthy:

First: The internet and social media/networking have played a vital, effective, and influential role in American female jihadism more than the role of kinship or friendship. In all of the cases discussed here, including Tashfeen Malik, internet recruitment has been a driving force in self-radicalization. While the girls' parents prefer to use the term "brainwashing" rather than "self-radicalization," nevertheless, it reflects the seriousness and danger posed by this factor in dealing with this phenomenon.

Second, there is a major role for men in most recruitment operations, mostly on social networking platforms or through online dating and matrimonial sites. Tashfeen Malik met Syed Farook online. Shannon Conley met her Tunisian militant suitor online. Ariel Bradley met Yasin Mohamad online. Jaeyln Young met her fiancé in college, but influenced him to join IS by connecting him with her alleged online IS recruiters. While Hoda Muthana did not have this type of online courtship, she nonetheless got married to an Australian IS fighter less than a month after arriving in Syria. Furthermore, she had communicated online with the Scottish girl, Aqsa Mahmood, who was already in IS territory and helped Muthana map her path to arrive there.

⁶⁹² See the text of the Criminal Complaint and Affidavit in support of criminal complaint, *op. cit.*

Despite the recognition of the role of the internet in recruitment, there remains a psychological and social context that contributes greatly to the political and ideological radicalization process in the first place. There are multifaceted factors involved, particularly related to the question of identity and one's internalization of religion. Ariel Bradley, for example, rebelled against her fundamentalist evangelical Christian upbringing, bounced from religion to religion and identity to identity, until she landed with Islamic fundamentalism, all in search for a sense of identity and belonging. Hoda Muthana, on the opposite spectrum, grew up in a Muslim conservative family, but her rebellion against this upbringing took her to the path of extremism within the same course of religion in search of a more solid, more committed, more extreme identity as a Muslim, as is the case of Tashfeen Malik. Shannon Conley's radicalization was in part of her yearning to defend Muslims, a community she converted into and embraced its identity. Jaelyn Young reportedly experienced an "emotional crisis" and a sense of isolation, leading her to find solace in Islam and researching the internet to find that sense of belonging among the "brothers and sisters of the caliphate." In all these cases, the search for a religious, emotional, or intellectual identity within Islam led them to an extreme version of the religion propagated by IS.

Another catalyst is the interplay between American culture, the communications revolution, and IS' exploitation of these two aspects. The young American generation is living its youth in constant virtual connection online, allowing it to be free from the surrounding social and familial constraints, and it finds in the virtual world vast space for various ideas and relationships. While many American youth have found Islam through this virtual world, the majority seems to ascribe to the moderate version of Islam espoused by the American Muslim community in general. But, with the lack of community awareness in building immunity and barriers against religious extremism, we continue to see cases of young Americans stumbling upon the radical, extremist, violent version of Muslims manifested in groups like IS. This is tied directly to the active efforts of IS to disseminate and propagate its ideology online through websites, chat forums, and social media. IS ingeniously broke the language barrier, presenting its propaganda (lectures, speeches, videos, and publications) in the respective languages of its online targets (such as IS' English-language Dabiq magazine). This gives IS wide points of contact and influence in the task of searching for new recruits and followers. Furthermore, IS exploits the 'humanitarian' element that draws in

many potential sympathizers, capitalizing on the suffering of Syrian, Iraqi, and other Muslim populations amid international neglect. Like their European female counterparts, American female jihadists are influenced by a set of ‘push’ factors that push them away from their current reality, and ‘pull’ factors that draw them in to IS.

Third, IS’ cadre of recruiters have distinct experience in online recruitment and cunning ability to convince female would-be-recruits of IS ideology. These recruiters – both males and females – are patient, attentive, and persistent, able to spend months at a time communicating with one recruit, painstakingly answering her questions, reassuring her of her concerns, and even luring her with marriage and job offers. As in one case of a 23-year-old Church Sunday school teacher turned IS supporter, Alex, IS recruiters collectively spent thousands of hours engaging her over more than six months, sending her money, gifts, and chocolate, indulging her curiosity and calming her apprehensions as they ushered her toward the hard-line theological concepts that IS is built on.⁶⁹³

Fourth, IS recruiters pry on the lonely and isolated, delight them with the prospect of living under one community, one faith, one ideology. In the process, they work to further isolate these young women from their own environments, step by step, luring them away from their families, friends, and social environments and into the virtual world of one IS ideology, and ultimately, to the physical world of the caliphate. Recruiters often urge the young women to hide their religious conversion, and particularly distance themselves from the local Muslim community, Islamic centers, and mosques where ‘moderate’ versions of Islam are espoused.

Fifth, there are no fixed features in the cases of American girls turned jihadis, rather there is significant diversity within their profiles in terms of age, location, religious, social, and economic backgrounds. Generally, however, the ages of these females range between 18 and 30 years old, with several cases reported of teenage girls attempting to join IS.⁶⁹⁴ Most of the cases discussed here come from average middle-class families, with the girls having received high school and college degrees (Hoda Muthana studied economics

693 Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American,” *The New York Times*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/world/americas/isis-online-recruiting-american.html>

694 Matthew Blake, “Three Denver girls were lured by ISIS who used ‘Disney-like’ versions of extremism on social media,” *op. cit.*

in college, Shannon Conley is a certified nurse's aide, Jaelyn Young studied chemistry, and Tashfeen Malik earned a pharmacy degree). There is the exceptional case of Ariel Bradley, for example, who grew up poor and did not receive an education because her mother homeschooled her on evangelical Christian teachings, but nonetheless Bradley herself attempted to step out of this cycle by taking GED classes. Also significantly, there does not appear to be a direct factor in terms of location, for the cases come from all over the US (US authorities report that there are open terror-related investigations in all 50 states). There is no correlation between the prevalence of female radicalization and the size of a local Muslim community either, where we find girls turning to jihadism from remote towns across America, finding extremist jihadi ideology by way of internet and social media.

CONCLUSION

RESULTS AND INDICATORS

In Part II of this book, we discussed around 47 cases of female jihadism from various parts of the world, with varying degrees of detail. The sample of cases is by no means wholly representative of IS or Al-Qaeda female jihadism, rather the choice of cases is determined by the amount of information available on each case. Due to the nature of jihadism, and female jihadism in particular, the global censorship it faces, and the media's coverage of this phenomenon, much of the information used in this study came from media reports and the individuals' own social media activities, which does not necessarily meet the scientific standards required for the identification and classification of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, important indicators and conclusions can be drawn from the studied cases that manifest general realities of the phenomenon of female jihadism on the global, regional, and local levels.

First: Between Al-Qaeda and IS

The new generation of female jihadism is more closely associated with IS than Al-Qaeda. IS has been more effective in recruiting women and girls compared to Al-Qaeda and other jihadist organizations, due to its concerted efforts in targeting, indoctrinating, and mobilizing women and facilitating their participation in jihadist activities at a much more profound level. IS utilizes the internet and heavily penetrates social media with its propaganda, disseminating its ideology and reaching women from various parts of the world using their respective local languages.

One of IS' pull factors is espousing the project of a 'state' and a 'caliphate,' attracting females to come live under its purported puritanical Shari`ah rule. While there were numerous cases of *nafir* and *hijra* of women under Al-Qaeda (particularly in Taliban-controlled territory), yet the majority of these cases were in the context of wives and families of Al-Qaeda fighters rather than cases of independent female migration. IS, on the other hand, created a powerful and effectual virtual propaganda to advocate

women's *hijra* to its lands, espousing it as a religious obligation (*fard `ayn*) on every male and female Muslim to come live in the caliphate and pledge allegiance to its caliph. IS has been remarkably successful in employing and exploiting religious symbols and sentiments to attract women searching for a deeper religious experience, such as the rule of Shari`ah, hijab and Islamic values, helping suffering Muslims and the plight of Syrians, and confrontation with the *kafir* world, particularly the West.

Second: Transformations in Female Jihadism

Resulting from the first point, the transformational shift of female jihadism from Al-Qaeda to IS manifested on various levels. Quantitatively, the number of females who join or attempt to join IS, and those who support and propagate its ideology, has grown exponentially compared to previous jihadist experiences. In terms of roles, numerous women have gained prominent positions within IS' various administrative, jurisprudential, and media arms, including Iman al-Bugha, Rima al-Jraish, Nada al-Qahtani, and Aqsa Mahmood. IS has given women a vital and active role, in addition to the secondary and limited role women assumed traditionally under Al-Qaeda (wives, taking care of children, nursing, fundraising, and logistical support). Women under IS are involved in education, nursing and medicine, religious and jurisprudential theorization and issuing fatwas, active propagation through 'electronic jihad,' *al-hisba* women's moral policing, and physical direct involvement in combat operations and attacks, including suicide bombings, a role generally dominated by men.

In this context, for example, Banan Hilal engaged in armed confrontations with Saudi security forces, and Hasna Boulahcen did the same with French police, ending in the death of both of them. Hayat Boumeddiene was accused of participating in planning attacks, while Inès Madani was accused of forming an all-women's terror cell with three others to carry out attacks in France. Before them, Sajida al-Rishawi was accused of attempting to detonate a suicide belt at a hotel in Jordan. More recently, Tashfeen Malik actively participated in the mass shooting in San Bernardino before she and her husband were killed by police.

In contrast, prominent female jihadists associated with Al-Qaeda only

emerged to prominence when they worked at their own initiative – independently from the organization – in spreading its ideology, such as the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati, who served her role as a wife of a fighter in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, but after ending up alone in Morocco, she worked independently to gain prominence as a propagandist before later switching sides and joining IS. Malika el-Aroud also worked independently of Al-Qaeda, compared to Iman al-Bugha, who was appointed to high religious authoritative positions in IS.

Another important difference between Al-Qaeda and IS is in the context of religious rulings and fatwas pertaining to women. Al-Qaeda was more reserved, conservative, and traditional in its view of women, whereas IS employed religious fatwas with remarkable flexibility to serve its propaganda and political agenda. A clear example is the fatwa, intrinsic to Islamic jurisprudence, barring women from traveling without a *mahram*. Al-Qaeda adhered to this edict, whereas IS was more flexible not only in allowing women to travel without a *mahram*, but also facilitating it and facilitating women's marriage without the permission of their male guardians, thus enabling thousands of women to join IS and make the *hijra* to IS territory.

There are also distinct skills used by IS male and female recruiters in luring women. In most of the cases discussed in this context, the women and girls managed to cleverly circumvent their families and stay under the radar of monitoring until they managed to escape. Their recruiters were effectively patient and attentive, in some cases, spending long months indoctrinating, convincing, reassuring, and facilitating these women's eventual *hijra*.

Third: Distinction between Causes and Dynamics

Of the faulty assumptions that have prevailed in Western and Arab media, and even among politicians and many researchers, is to blame the internet and social media for influencing and recruiting females through so-called brainwashing. While this is true as one of the *dynamics* used by IS in propagation and recruitment, it is distinctly different than the conditions and factors that encourage females to engage in jihadism in the first place. Dynamics are only part of the process, objective and subjective factors are another; explaining to us why X gets influenced by jihadist propaganda while Y doesn't, in the case where both are exposed to the same substance.

There is a great degree of variance in the said conditions and factors behind women's involvement in jihadism. There are, however, overarching themes that help us understand why IS has been appealing to many women. Among them, IS presents an alternative political project counter to the modernist Western context that many Western women live in, and counter to the Arab secular and dictatorial regimes in which Arab women live. This project, the 'Islamic State,' is key to analyzing the rise of female jihadism because it is related directly to the issue of identity. European and Western women and girls, from both Muslim and Western origin, search for a project that is in line with their ideas, beliefs, and view of their religious identity and an alternative to the 'un-Islamic' milieu in which they live. IS' ideology and propaganda presents this alternative in the form of the utopian caliphate, the promised Islamic state, purged of the diseases of modernity. IS exploits this crisis of identity and dedicates an army of online propagandists to disseminate this alleged alternative through various means, languages, and techniques to reach their targets.

We understand from the cases of female jihadism that most girls and women do not commit to their *nafir* and *hijra* to IS lands only for the sake of 'martyrdom,' but to be able to actually live in that environment first. This does not negate the desire of these females to kill and be killed, yearning to reach the rank of martyrdom, a symbolic religious rank of high esteem in Islamic culture. But it is also evident that many of these females were in search of an alternative society where they can live in accord with their particular view of religion, state, and society.

This aspect is reinforced by the political mayhem afflicting the Arab region and many parts of the Muslim world, and the feeling of weakness, frustration, and despair among many females towards the conditions in Syria and Iraq, the humiliation of Arab societies, and the absence of an Arab *Sunni* Muslim force in defense of Sunni causes in the face of increased Iranian influence that employs Shiite sectarianism in its political agenda. IS presents itself as the guardian and champion of Sunni identity, an alternative force to fill the Arab political vacuum. This plays on the political, ideological, and even humanitarian sentiments of females around the world, not just Arabs or Muslims.

There is an interplay between emotional, political, and religious sentiments. This interplay becomes a catalyst in these women's turning points

and transformation toward jihadism. For many, the gateway is political: the Syrian crisis, Palestinian cause, US and Western policies in the Middle East and Muslim world, or the Gulf War (such as the case of Fatiha el-Mejjati). Others found Jihadi Salafism through their religious and spiritual quest in moving from an unreligious to a religious life, such as Hasna Boulahcen and Malika el-Aroud. The Sudanese medical students were inspired by the urge to provide humanitarian help to people in war, whereas many others stumbled upon jihadism in their quest for love, such as Ariel Bradley, or after facing an emotional crisis, like Jaelyn Young.

The issue of identity is present in all cases, for political frustration, emotional crises, humanitarian sympathy, or quest for religious fulfillment are all varied manifestations, facets, and dimensions of the question of identity. IS' answer to this question is to present an imagined identity of the Muslim society living under Islamic Shar`iah, a force that confronts the 'Crusaders,' Shiites, and corrupt Arab regimes. These are all titles of chapters in IS' book of identity.

As for the dynamics, the internet and social media do indeed play a vital role, especially as we are talking about the generation of smart phones constantly wired and connected, making them easily accessible to propagandists and recruiters who diversify their rhetoric, imaging, and tactics to appeal to the interests and vulnerabilities of their targets.

While the internet became a key radicalization and recruitment dynamic, there are also significant roles played by real world relationships: kinship, marriage, and friendship. In the case of female jihadism in Saudi Arabia for example, we find that these relationships were the primary dynamics in radicalization, influencing women with jihadist ideology through direct and indirect means, leading to the creation of a quasi-jihadist society within the overall Saudi society. In most cases in this context, we were able to identify a key person who became the prime factor in radicalization: a husband, brother, father, uncle, etc., and in numerous cases, a mother.

Fourth: Social Background and Breaking the Stereotype

The findings of this study invalidate many of the stereotypical portrayals of jihadists in general, and female jihadists in particular. No longer is the presumption of poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and so forth direct indicators of radicalization. We find that female jihadism is represented in various economic, social, and educational backgrounds. In terms of age in this sample of 47 cases, based on the available information, 13 of them are less than 20-years-old, 12 are between the ages of 21-25, nine are between the ages of 26-30, ten are between the ages of 31-40, and four of them are over 40-years-old (at the time the incident of *hijra*, radicalization, attack, etc. took place). Statistically, the majority are in their twenties, followed by girls in their late teens, with very few cases of older women reported, meaning that the majority of female jihadists susceptible to join or be influenced by IS are in the age of high school and college.

In terms of education, two of the cases hold PhD degrees, four were in the graduate level, 22 in the bachelor's level, 7 were in high school, and 7 did not complete their high school education. College students and graduates constitute the majority of cases, debunking the stereotype that lack of education is a direct factor in radicalization. The fields of specialization in college also varied, with a majority in this sample having studied medicine, pharmacy, or chemistry and other scientific specializations. Others studied economics, business administration, nursing, and Islamic Shari`ah sciences.

On the economic level, the majority come from middle-class backgrounds, at varying levels. Most of the Sudanese medical students came from affluent families, the British teenagers came from upper middle-class families, as did most of the Saudi cases. The factor of poverty and deprivation appears more pronounced in the Francophone cases, whereas the majority of American cases came from middle class backgrounds, with the exception of Ariel Bradley.

Fifth: Responsibility between the Ideological and Social Factors

For decades, research on jihadism commonly considered religious education, or *madrastas*, to be a key factor in radicalization. This factor is no longer of primary relevance. On the contrary, we find that a wide range of female jihadists were educated in secular schools and universities both in the West and the Arab and Muslim world, such as the Moroccan Fatiha el-Mejjati who got her education in Law in French, the Sudanese students who grew up in Britain, the American cases, and the French and Belgian women who were brought up in the strict secularist French educational system.

At first glance, it may appear that the Saudi cases are an exception reinforcing the stereotype that religious education leads to radicalization, and reflect a direct correlation between the Saudi Wahhabi Salafi educational system and the phenomenon of jihadism. But a deeper examination reveals that this analysis is limited and unsubstantial. Many of the Saudi female jihadists were influenced directly by other factors, especially kinship. Furthermore, the sudden rise in jihadism among women in Saudi Arabia came as a result of the clash between them and the authorities in the context of the campaign in defense of detainees, and the Saudi policies that exacerbated the tensions leading to their arrest, detention, and at times alleged mistreatment and torture.

Overall, the factor of Wahhabi Salafi influence on the educational curricula in Saudi Arabia may reflect on the overall phenomenon of jihadism and the malleability of Saudi society to embrace such ideology, but it does not appear to be a direct and primary influence for female jihadism in particular. This does not deny the importance of critical thinking and moderation in the processes of education, upbringing, and countering extremism, but it is certainly not the cornerstone of the strategy to combat and prevent terrorism. There are numerous cases of women who were educated in a more secular, critical-thinking approach but ended up drifting into the world of female jihadism, and vice versa, where a greater number of women who receive a Salafi religiously-oriented education and grow up in conservative families do not gravitate toward extremist jihadi ideology and often reject it. There are a variety of complex and compounding psychological and sociological factors in explaining the rise of female jihadism that exceed simply the issue

of education and curricula.

Sixth: The Geopolitical Factor in Radicalization and Recruitment

This study did not deal with particular cases of Iraqi or Syrian female jihadism, despite many indicators pointing to the prevalence of the phenomenon within these two conflict-ridden societies. The main reason for this gap in the study is the lack of information on such cases and the difficulty of substantiating available information, considering the nature of the conditions there. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between the prevalence of female jihadism in countries plagued with conflict and internal struggles, on the one hand, and its prevalence in stable countries on the other. Jihadist groups' ability to radicalize, mobilize, recruit, and propagate their – particularly sectarian – ideology is much greater in conflict zones, where the religious and sectarian identity dynamic is more influential and personal, dividing the society itself on this basis. In these contexts, recruitment and mobilization happens in bulk, compared to individual cases in Europe, US, and more stable Arab countries.

In Syria and Iraq, a substantial percentage of women have joined IS for many reasons, including when their husbands and families join IS, and/or they live in areas that came under IS control where the mass of local population was forced into joining. Many of these women came under the spell of IS' religious discourse, political and media propaganda, and because for those areas – and for a number of years – IS' rule became a matter of reality. It is difficult to ascertain whether females in these areas, in general as a gender, are necessarily for or against IS. Media outlets have focused the spotlight on women celebrating the ouster of IS from their towns, but in contrast, we also find other women, many of whom lost husbands or relatives in the conflict, who closely identify with – and rally around – IS, particularly with the growth of identity discourse of reciprocal conflict between various factions within the greater chaos and civil war afflicting the two countries.

The motives for reprisal, the sense of injustice, and the severe humanitarian pressures fall much heavier on women in conflict areas than for women in other regions, making them more susceptible to not only join extremist organizations, but to also be prepared and willing to carry out militant operations and even suicide attacks. The models of Sajida al-Rishawi, the

Chechen widows, and Palestinian female suicide bombers are perhaps manifest examples of this effect.

Seventh: The Jihadi Phenomenon in the Feminine

One of the most equivocal statements made about the new generation of female jihadism is that IS ideology is not suited for women, or that women are less likely to gravitate toward such religious extremism, because its discourse goes against women's rights (in the contemporary human rights and feminist perspective), or that women are less likely to be enticed by scenes of killing and bloodshed, let alone be willing to participate in violent attacks.

Yet we have found this premise to be fundamentally unsound, and in many cases, the opposite stands on more solid ground. For those who argue women's 'emotional' nature, we cannot but rebut that 'emotions' is a double-edged sword. IS has effectively exploited and employed personal, humanitarian, religious, sectarian, political, and symbolic emotions to its favor, resulting in a surge in women's recruitment and employment as active participants in IS' project, compared to the previous Al-Qaeda generation of women who sufficed to a secondary role in the organization's jihadist project.

Perhaps a striking irony we found is that women, whenever they come from a social background that is closer to Western culture, middle class and educated, tend to be bolder, more aggressive and more capable of breaking traditional jurisprudential barriers and engage in jihadism as major actors, not secondary ones, compared to women who come from traditional religious upbringings and belong to local conservative cultures. This observation extends to Muslim girls who grew up and lived in the West, who found no hesitation in appearing in the media, flaunt themselves on social media, and travel without a male companion. In comparison, many cases in the Saudi female jihadism context faced the obstacle of *hijra* without a *mahram*, often prompting them to bring along teenage male relatives to serve that purpose to avoid violating traditional jurisprudential rules.

Eighth: What After the IS Female Surge

If we are talking about a surge in the status of female jihadism, then the hypothesis of 'return to norm' isn't plausible, especially if the political and social conditions that feed radicalism continue to be the new norm. This means that even if IS regresses and loses control of its territory, the next phase will likely witness an increasing presence of female jihadism, a phenomenon that has come a long way in rise and spread.

Reinforcing this 'rise and spread' argument is the fact that we are witnessing the emergence of a new sub-phenomenon of jihadist families and jihadist embryonic communities that have taken shape in some Arab and Muslim societies, especially in Iraq and Syria, and in particular in IS-controlled territories. There are large numbers of women including foreign migrants who got married under IS, had children, developed bonds of kinship, friendship, and solidarity. Many of them lost their husbands, became estranged from their families, and are unable to return to their homelands out of fear of prosecution. Furthermore, many of their children born under IS rule would become practically stateless, their education is not recognized or accredited, and have grown up to know nothing except IS life. As expressed by many of the women discussed here, IS life is the life they desired, the community they aspired to belong to, and the identity they embraced. What happens to them if and after IS dissipates depends on the political and social conditions that fed their radicalization in the first place.

Glossary

“Prepared by the Translator”

- **Da`wa:** Islamic call, the proselytizing or preaching of Islam. Literally meaning invitation or call, Da`wa refers to the duty of Muslims to invite others to submission to God and adherence to religious teachings. It may be directed towards non-Muslims to introduce them to the religion and call them to embrace it, or towards Muslims to urge them to remain firmly on this religion and abide by its commandments and avoid its prohibitions. A person who undertakes the task of Da`wa is a *Da`iyah* (pl. *Du`at*). Jihadist movements practice Da`wa to call on others to embrace their own version and interpretation of religion and ideology.
- **Fatwa** (pl. *Fataarwa*): An Islamic religious opinion, legal pronouncement, or ruling pertaining to a specific issue that requires interpretation where Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is unclear. A Fatwa is issued by a *mufti*, a scholar learned in Islamic Shari`ah or a religious authority in Islam, generally containing the details of the scholar's reasoning based on the fundamental sources of Islamic law. Because Islam does not have a hierarchical system of religious authority, a Fatwa is not binding to all Muslims. It may be considered a binding precedent by Muslims who bound themselves to the specific *mufti* or particular school of thought, such as Jihadi Salafism.
- **Fiqh:** Islamic jurisprudence, literally meaning deep knowledge or full comprehension. It refers to the Islamic legal science founded mainly on rules and principles developed by human reasoning (*ijtihad*) and the body of knowledge so derived from the primary sources of Islam. Fiqh may therefore vary from one jurist or school of thought to another. A jurist expert of Fiqh is called a *Faqih* (fem. *Faqiha*; pl. *Fuqahaa*).
- **Hakimiyya:** Sovereignty of God and God's Shari`ah Law on earth. The term acquired political connotation and association with political authority in the 20th century, elaborated by Sayyid Abul A`la Mawdudi (1903-1979) as the source of authority in an Islamic state, and was subsequently adopted and expounded by Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), becoming a key concept in the discourse of contemporary political Islamist and jihadist movements. The term is related to the legitimacy of *Hukm*, governance or rule, in the

context of *Hakimiyyat Allah* (divine sovereignty) as opposed to *Hakimiyyat al-bashar* (rule of people). Based on Hakimiyya, jihadist discourse evaluates contemporary Muslim societies as *Jahili* (ignorant) living in the *Jahiliyya* of pre-Islamic ignorance, and gave rise to the practice of *takfir* of those who do not rule by God's Law.

- **Hijab:** A general term for modest female Muslim dress worn in public or in the presence of non-*Mahram* adult males outside of their immediate family. Hijab usually covers the head and neck, but leaves the face uncovered. Etymologically, it refers to the Qur'anic notion of spatial partition or curtain, but also to the seclusion of women from men in the public sphere. Hijab standards vary widely. A minority of Muslim women supplement hijab with a further face covering as part of their particular interpretation of hijab's modesty requirements. Among hijab variations is the *Niqab* is a head covering that also covers the face, but leaves the eyes exposed, and the *Burqa*, a one-piece veil that covers the face and body, leaving just a mesh screen around the eyes to see through, often associated with Afghanistan during the Taliban rule. Some women extend it to wearing gloves, believing that no part of the skin should be visible. Hijab may be supplemented with a cloak or robe-like overgarment, such as the *jilbab* or *abaya*, worn over clothing. Muslim scholars and societies vary in their standards of acceptable female dress, often influenced by prevailing culture, heritage, and school of thought.
- **Hijra:** Migration. The act of leaving a place to seek sanctuary in another place. In Islamic Fiqh, it is the act of leaving a bad practice in order to adopt a righteous way of life. In the discourse of Islamist and jihadist movements, it is the process of moving from *Dar al-Kufr* (abode of unbelief) where regimes do not govern by God's Law, to *Dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam). Specifically, the *hijra* refers to the Prophet's journey from Makkah to Madinah in the Twelfth year of his mission, corresponding to June 622 C.E., the Islamic *hijri* calendar begins from this event (AH).
- **Hisba:** A classical Islamic system for regulating morality and proper conduct in public places, such as markets. The concept relates to the Qur'anic command of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice (*al-amr bil ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar*), which began as a volunteer vigilante effort stemming from strong sense of faith and concern for public interest, and then evolved into a regulatory administrative body tasked with maintaining security, overseeing integrity in markets, and enforcing public morals to regulate

social, economic, and cultural life within an Islamic system of governance. A person tasked with this role is known as a *muhtasib* (fem. *Muhtasiba*).

- ***Hudud*** (sing. *Hadd*): Limits or prohibitions. Specific punishments fixed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah for crimes considered to be against the rights of God, such as theft, illicit sexual relations, making unproven accusations of illicit sex, drinking intoxicants, apostasy, and highway robbery. Strict requirements for evidence (including eyewitnesses) severely limits the application of Hudud penalties. Punishment for all other crimes is left to the discretion of the court; these punishments are called *ta'zir*. In Islamist and jihadist discourse, the implementation of Hudud is a prime indicator of whether a regime governs by Shari'ah Law, and is thus labelled *Dar al-Islam*, otherwise, all systems that do not apply the Hudud are systems of *Kufr*.

- ***Inghimasi Operations***: the tactic of *inghimas*, a commando plunging himself or herself in the midst of the enemy with the intention of inflicting maximum harm. It is different from suicide that results from discontent and despair, and different from 'martyrdom' suicide operations where a fighter carries out the attack with the intention of being killed in the process. A tactic first used in Islamic history by the *Khawarij* (Kharijites), it requires a high level of combat experience, discipline, and courage for the *inghimasi* to plunge himself or herself within enemy lines to cause maximum damage, even if it ultimately ends up killing the perpetrator. Some jihadist movements sanction these 'martyrdom' acts even if they lead to killing non-combatant Muslim civilians, drawing an analogy with the issue of *tatarrus* (the 'barricading' principle in certain religious interpretations legitimizing and exonerating the death of civilians if they happen to be present at a legitimate target; i.e. legitimizing civilian collateral damage and using them as human shields) and the issue of *tabyeet* (attacking the enemy without prior warning and without differentiating between combatants and civilians), anchored on a jurisprudential rule of 'reciprocity.' Recent forms of *inghimasi* operations linked to terror organizations include public stabbings, deliberate vehicle-ramming into crowds, or vehicle ramming to breach buildings with locked gates before detonating explosives.

- ***Jahiliyya***: Literally, ignorance. Refers to the Pre-Islamic era of the Arabian Peninsula. In the discourse of 20th century political Islamist and jihadist movement, as elaborated by Sayyid Qutb (106-1966), *Jahiliyya* came to refer to contemporary Muslim societies who are not governed by the Divine

Hakimiyya and sovereignty of God's Law.

- ***Jihad al-Tadhamun***: Solidarity Jihad, a form of jihad that emerged during the Afghan Jihad era in the late 1970s, on grounds of defense of Muslim lands and in solidarity with Muslims in lands witnessing aggression by an enemy. Jihadi Salafist discourse considers this form of jihad to be obligatory on all Muslims, with examples recurring in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya and other lands facing foreign aggression. Solidarity jihad stands on the concept of deterring aggressors, a type of defensive jihad in traditional Islamic jurisprudence, but does not directly aim to establish an Islamic state or governance system. Instead, it aims to mobilize jihadists to support the jihad of Muslims in their respective regions.
- ***Jihad al-Nikaya***: Vexation Jihad, a form of jihad that uses the tactics of vexation, aggravation, and causing harm to the enemy, prioritizing attacking the “distant enemy” represented by the West, the US, and its allies, on the basis of its *kufir* (unbelief), support for local oppressive regimes (the near enemy), and support for Israel. Whereas it is difficult for jihadist groups to totally destroy and defeat the “distant enemy,” they rely on tactics that inflict harm on the enemy and its interests through guerrilla warfare, hit-and-run attacks, or suicide missions. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates used tactics of *jihad al-nikaya* in the 1998 twin embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen, and the September 11th, 2001 attacks to pressure the United States away from interfering in regional affairs in the Muslim world. This form of jihad does not directly aim to establish an Islamic state or governance system, rather aims to deter the enemy.
- ***Jihad al-Tamkeen***: Consolidation Jihad, a form of jihad that transcends solidarity, defensive, and vexation approaches and seeks to consolidate power, spatial control of land and resources, and enable and empower the jihadists to establish an Islamic ‘state’ and governance system based on Islamic Shari’ah that would form the nucleus for a global Islamic caliphate. This form of jihad emerged with the Islamic State Organization upon its swift takeover of territories in Iraq and Syria, expanding the jihad to other regions to consolidate power, garner the allegiance of local jihadist groups and populations, and declare the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate.
- ***Kafir*** (pl. ***Kuffar***): infidel, non-believing person or system, relating to the noun ***kufir***: unbelief in Islam.

- **Khilafah:** Caliphate, the political system and office of the head of the Muslim state after the Prophet. The term was used in the political context after the death of Prophet Muhammad to refer to his successor, Abu Bakr, as head of the Muslim community (*Khalifah*, pl. *Khulafaa'*, anglicized as Caliph, lit. steward, vicegerent, successor). Later it came to be designated for the head of the Muslim state across different dynasties in Islamic history. More recently, the Islamic State Organization declared the establishment of the Caliphate and changed its name to the Islamic Caliphate State '*Dawlat al-Khilafah al-Islamiya*.'
- **Mahram:** unmarriageable kin with whom marriage/sexual intercourse is considered *haram* (unlawful in Islam). For women, male mahrams include fathers, grandfathers, brothers, sons, grandsons, first uncles, fathers-in-law, sons-in-law, and nephews, among others, but not cousins. It is the group of male kin, excluding husbands, with whom a woman is not required to wear the hijab, and may mix with and be in seclusion with, especially serving as companions in travel, in adherence with a common jurisprudential ruling that a female requires a mahram if she is not traveling with her husband.
- **Nafir:** Physical departure and mobilization for jihad. The term became prominent in jihadist discourse to describe joining jihadist movements and traveling to areas under their control, on grounds of the Qur'anic verse: "Go forth "*Infiru*", (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive "*jaahidu*" with your wealth and your lives in the cause of Allah (Qur'an 9:41).
- **Niqab:** face veil, commonly with an opening that leave the eyes exposed (see under variation of *hijab*).
- **Shari`ah:** Literally, path; way. The body of Islamic Law.
- **Sunnah:** Literally, a clear path or beaten track. Refers to the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which consists of all that he said, did, approved of, or condemned. It is a source of Shari`ah and a legal proof next to the Qur'an. The Sunnah may corroborate a ruling that originates in the Qur'an, or may consist of an explanation or clarification of the Qur'an, and may also consist of rulings on which the Qur'an is silent.
- **Takfir:** The practice of excommunication in Islam; one Muslim declaring another Muslim as *Kafir* or a non-believer. The practice is prevalent in jihadi Salafist ideology, extended to labeling whole societies and systems

of governance as unbelievers based on the principle of *Hakimiyya*, God's sovereignty, whereby any person or regime that does not govern by God's law is liable to be declared a *Kafir* or an *Murtad* (Apostate). *Takfir* equates such Muslims with the *Kuffar*, the non-Muslim infidels, and judges them legitimate targets of jihad.

- ***Ummah***: Community, nation. Specifically, the community of believers or the universal Muslim community.
- ***Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'***: A key concept in the Salafi school of thought, it means loyalty (*wala'*) to the body of Muslims and disavowal (*bara'*) of non-Muslims. Prominent Salafi scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab considered it a key indicator of faith and Islamic identity. In its traditional Salafi sense, it is the act of loving and hating for the sake of Allah, holding fast to all that is pleasing to Allah and avoiding and opposing all that is displeasing to Him. Loyalty to Muslims is exhibited in solidarity, camaraderie, and defense of Muslims and their causes. Disavowal of non-believers is hatred towards them an aversion from them on grounds that they call for something other than submission to God. For Jihadist movements, the concept became a measure of whether a Muslim person or regime is considered among the faithful and obedient or an ally and traitor with the enemy, manifested in various dimensions of identity such as politics, culture, society, dress, and language.

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This Book

One of the main objectives of undertaking the writing of this book is to engage with, and address the reductionist, superficial perspective towards the jihadist phenomenon in general, and female jihadism in particular. For decades, the study of jihadism and jihadi organizations produced a field marred with confusion, disorder, and obscurity that hampered the understanding of the motives of jihadists and the attempt to approach the objective political, economic, and social causes, conditions, and factors behind the phenomenon of violent extremism. This field of study has, for years, yielded to reductionist and orientalist cultural-ideological approaches. And, if the study of jihadism in general suffers from misunderstanding, ill-intention, and confusion, and is coated with an orientalist aura, then the study of female jihadism suffers from all this twofold. For long, the study of Muslim women has constituted a rich and fertile theme for orientalist fantasies, and the issue of sexuality has been one of the paramount characteristics and distinctive themes of orientalist studies and imagination.

To achieve a better understanding of female jihad, this book attempts to answer two key questions:

1. How can the recent changes and developments in the role of “female jihadists” and the shift from secondary and traditional roles within jihadist groups – including Al-Qaeda – as housewives and child rearing to immigrants, to the “mobilization of women” phenomenon, and then to “female suicide bombers”, be understood from the conservative jihadist perspective? And how did jihadists cross numerous religious and doctrinal “dilemmas” to emigration from ISIS controlled lands, in addition to the emigration of hundreds of women from the Arab and Islamic world to the “Land of Khilafah”?
2. This question is about the female jihadists, emigrants, and suicide bombers themselves. It seeks to identify and understand the reasons why certain groups of women from all over the world join the Islamic State and accept to sacrifice everything to join ISIS controlled despite the group’s religious policy for a patriarchal society that lacks equality, freedom, full citizenship, and other modern values protected by international charters and conventions and included in the slogans of Arab revolutions.