

## In Defense of Honor: Women and Terrorist Recruitment on the Internet<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Until today there have been no women in the core leadership of Al Qaeda (*Al Qaeda al Sulba*). While the organization is frequently described as patriarchal and exclusive of women, women are among its most fervent supporters. A significant recent development in women's participation in violent extremism has been the dissemination of radical ideologies online as recruiters and propagandists. In particular, online female recruiters shame men to enlist in *jihād* by demanding that they protect their sisters in Islam from sexual trespass, particularly by male non-believers. In addition to propagandists, a new generation of *jihadi* leaders is looking to women to ensure the survival of the organization by devising new religious justifications that would allow women to participate in violent *jihadist* activities. An ideological schism over women's participation in *jihād* reflects a generational shift within the movement as well as differences between the core of Al Qaeda and its regional affiliates globally.

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We will stand, covered by our veils and wrapped in our robes, weapons in hand, our children in our laps, with the Qur'an and the Sunna (sayings) of the Prophet of Allah directing and guiding us.

—*Al-Khansa'a Website, Biography of the Female Mujahedeen, August 2004*<sup>2</sup>

I use my pen and words, my honest emotions [...]. Jihad is not exclusive to men.

—*Umm Farouq, AP, May 2008*

Fifty-two-year-old Malika el-Aroud is serving an eight-year sentence for terrorist activities in Belgium. In May 2010, a Brussels court sentenced her to prison plus a €5,000 fine for establishing, leading, and financing a terrorist group. According to judge Pierre Hendrickx, Aroud used the internet to attract vulnerable web surfers, as well as to indoctrinate and recruit them for *jihadist* activities. Her website, *Minbar-sos.com*, at its

height routinely received 1,500 hits a day.<sup>3</sup> The court also found that Aroud had demonstrated “reckless disregard” for the deaths of young Europeans who went to Afghanistan and Iraq to engage in *jihad* at her urging. In private, one investigator noted: “We knew she would eventually make a mistake and this time, *this time*, we finally had her.”<sup>4</sup> After years of placing her under suspicion and house arrest, and subjecting her to investigations by the secret police, Belgian officials finally apprehended Aroud on a technicality.

The majority of Al Qaeda’s membership is male and its power base is decidedly masculine. Until today there have been no women within the core leadership of *Al Qaeda al Sulba*, otherwise known as “The Solid Foundation.” Beyond its core, however, is an amorphous movement with loosely connected, affiliate organizations in countries all over the world and with sympathizers who do not necessarily engage in violence. It is here that women have played a significant role. While Al Qaeda is frequently described as a patriarchal organization that excludes women,<sup>5</sup> the reality is more complicated. Women are among its most fervent supporters and participate in the affiliated organizations in ways unthinkable for the core. Indeed, Al Qaeda has come to consist of an army of female organizers, proselytizers, teachers, translators, and fund-raisers—many of who enlist with their husbands or succeed male family members who have been jailed or killed. It is still relatively rare for women to be on the frontlines (for example, a few highly visible female suicide bombers in Iraq), and although there is historical precedent for women to be involved in combat, there is none for them to engage in direct battle.<sup>6</sup> A significant development in women’s participation in the global *jihad* has, thus, been the

dissemination of radical ideologies online as recruiters and propagandists for Al Qaeda.

Some analysts doubt whether exposure to the internet can “turn someone into a terrorist” by arguing that it is an elective medium that is more likely to reinforce existing worldviews.<sup>7</sup> Marc Sageman (2008) contends that certain kinds of networks can transform ordinary and disgruntled people into actual terrorists.<sup>8</sup> Until a few years ago, these networks necessitated face-to-face interactions. In the 1980s and 1990s, these groups might team up at Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, Chechnya, or Bosnia. Within the Muslim diaspora, face-to-face groups encompassed groups of immigrants, student associations, sports clubs, and study groups that met at radical mosques. Friends radicalized and mobilized each other as a cohort. Sageman explains:

The group acts as an echo chamber, amplifying grievances, intensifying bonds to each other, and breeding values that rejected those of their host societies. These natural group dynamics result in a spiral of mutual encouragement and escalation, transforming a few young Muslims into dedicated terrorists willing to follow the model of their heroes and sacrifice themselves for comrades and cause.<sup>9</sup>

With the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the disruption of the global *jihād*, face-to-face mobilization has been largely supplanted by virtual radicalization via the internet. Yet the same support and validation that people derived from their offline peers is found online, as Sageman observes: “These forums, virtual marketplaces for extremist ideas, have become the ‘invisible hand’ that organizes terrorist activities worldwide.”<sup>10</sup> The nature of the internet—its ease of access, decentralized structure, anonymity, and international makeup—all provide terrorist organizations with an effective arena for action.<sup>11</sup> The internet appears to have made signing up for Holy War easier than ever before. People who might not have even considered becoming a *jihadi* can now do so with the click of a

mouse.

The Pentagon stresses that militant and terrorist groups use the internet to streamline their recruiting, radicalization, and training processes. The current leader of Al Qaeda, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, has argued that the internet is crucial in order to get Al Qaeda's message to the masses and to break the media siege imposed on the *jihad* movement: "This is an independent battle that we must launch side by side with the military battle."<sup>12</sup> Al Qaeda has emphasized online self-radicalization using websites, virtual magazines, and other forms of social media.<sup>13</sup> One of the savviest *jihadi* recruiters, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) leader Anwar al-Awlaki (d. September 2011), explained why the internet was advantageous for broadening the global *jihad*. In his treatise, *44 Ways to Support Jihad*, Awlaki wrote:

The Internet has become a great medium for spreading the call of jihad and following the news of the Mujahideen. Brothers and sisters can themselves become 'internet Mujahideen' by establishing discussion forums for posting information relating to jihad, establishing email lists to share information with other interested brothers and sisters, and posting jihad literature and news.<sup>14</sup>

Awlaki encouraged his followers to set up individual websites focusing on the plight of Muslims and the exploits of the *mujahideen*, and to post graphic videos concerning *jihadi* propaganda to *YouTube* and other social networking sites.<sup>15</sup> Awlaki also specifically addressed women's capacity for involvement in Al Qaeda's *jihadist* activities. In recent years, more and more women have heeded his call to join *jihad* and have become involved in online violent extremism (such as Colleen La Rose) as well as militant activities (such as Roshonara Choudhry). As internet radicalization and recruitment have

skyrocketed, the role played by women has become vital in this enterprise. The leaders of the movement, especially those in the younger generation, are slowly recognizing women's strategic and tactical value.<sup>16</sup>

According to Gabriel Weimann (2009): “[T]he terrorists target women to encourage them to let their husbands and sons join the jihad [...]”<sup>17</sup> Sageman writes that women have been largely absent from the ranks of the global Islamist terrorists. Those few references to women advocate a strictly supportive role for them.<sup>18</sup> A leaderless *jihad* involves “radicalized bunches of guys” without considering how women fit in.<sup>19</sup>

Other analysts make the case for traditional female involvement in terms of support. Tuty Raihanah Mastarom and Nur Azlin Yasin (2010) argue that the online Islamist movement “stresses traditional roles provided by women: guides on how to become good Muslim women, wives and mothers, conforming to the Islamist ideal that a Muslim woman should prioritize and devote her life to nurturing her family and supporting her husband.”<sup>20</sup> Such guides include producing a new generation of fighters. In this context, women are expected to produce (or, rather, reproduce) the next generation of militants and to raise children to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Elsewhere (2005) I argue that the “revolutionary womb” was a common theme in many of the post-colonial and insurgent movements in the Global South and has been a consistent theme across many cultures. I concluded that the “revolutionary womb,” whereby women give birth to the next generation of fighters, has been replaced in some conflicts by an “exploding womb,” in which women themselves carry out militant activities in the capacity of

suicide bombers who disguise their PBIEDs (person-borne improvised explosives) as a late-term pregnancy (for example, Tamil Tiger Anoja Kugenthirarsah in April 2006).<sup>21</sup>

In analyzing forty-six incidents perpetrated by women globally between 1969 and 2005, Jessica Davis (2006) noted that female terrorists were frequently cast in stereotypical and support roles.<sup>22</sup> While some scholars acknowledge women's activities in *jihad*, they often denude them of political rationale—portraying the women primarily as pawns of men—manipulated, drugged, or coerced in a variety of ways.<sup>23</sup> For these scholars, women's involvement in terrorism can only be interpreted as peripheral and secondary to men's.

Anat Berko (2006) has focused on the role of women in Palestinian militant movements (such as *Hamas*, *Palestinian Islamic Jihad* [PIJ], and the *Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade*). For Berko women are not the agents of their involvement. Like the historical depictions of women in the *Red Army Faction* in Germany or the *Red Brigades* in Italy, women are assumed to be involved in terrorism primarily as a result of their relationships with men also involved in those movements.<sup>24</sup> Berko explains women's involvement in terrorism:

There are women who were drawn into terrorism through Internet chat groups with men from the Arab world. Their communications began innocently as male-female exchanges, and the men used romantic manipulation to recruit the women to terrorist activities [...]. Among the women interviewed, only one actively took the initiative (although supported by men), and planned and carried out a murder.<sup>25</sup>

Berko's approach might reflect both a narrow bias as she focuses on only one case (Israel) as somehow representative of all women's experiences and on inherent cultural

assumptions that Israelis have about Palestinian women.<sup>26</sup> Sue Mahan and Pamala L. Griset have categorized women's roles in terrorism into four dimensions: sympathizers, spies, warriors, and dominant forces (Sutten, 2009).<sup>27</sup> Dee Graham, Edna Rawlings, and Roberta Rigsby (1994) suggest that women's social relationships with men constitute a form of "Stockholm Syndrome." In this fashion, women's violent behavior can be explained as being caused by men.<sup>28</sup> While there are clear instances of coercion to induce women's cooperation, it appears that women involved in political violence and recruited via the internet are rarely coerced and, in fact, might be the ones recruiting others (including other men).

Women are exposed to the same *jihadi* propaganda as are men. Women contribute postings to chat rooms and other virtual resources. On the internet, women can become radicalized and move others to radicalism without revealing who they are because they are located in the private spaces of society, such as their homes.<sup>29</sup> As such, the internet affords women the opportunity to manipulate cultural gender norms as well as to disguise their gender while participating in traditionally male-sanctioned *jihadi* activities. While for some the virtual world is inherently egalitarian in terms of access and impact, women can (and do) engage in radicalization without mentioning their gender or using their real names. In doing so, they can assume a masculine voice if they want. The virtual world bypasses physical prohibitions. In contrast to training camps in Sudan and Afghanistan that served to bolster the *jihadi* movement in the past, on the internet it is the individual who chooses whether (or not) to reveal his/her gender.

According to Maura Conway (2006), although women may hide behind false

names and fake identities in the virtual world,<sup>30</sup> they might still betray their gender by using colorful fonts or by adding stereotypical feminine flourishes to their postings.

Conway and Lisa McInerney explain:

Typically though not always, profile styles differ among genders. For example, a typical female profile will have a pink or purple background, and the avatar will depict a female character. Typical female profiles also contain embellishments and motifs such as butterflies, or a close-up shot of an eye (often with mascara visible on the lashes). Usernames of those who claim to be female include a female first name and will use terms like princess, girl, veiled, and beauty.<sup>31</sup>

Articles, communiqués, and online chat rooms offer women the freedom to express their support for Al Qaeda and its affiliates. American Colleen Renée LaRose, commonly known as “Jihad Jane,” was arrested in October 2009 for encouraging *jihadis* in Ireland to assassinate cartoonist Lars Vilks in Sweden. A series of insulting drawings in 2007 Vilks drew made him public enemy number one for Islamists globally, and Al Qaeda placed a \$100,000-bounty on his head.<sup>32</sup> The arrest and investigation of Colleen LaRose, a.k.a. “Jihad Jane” and of her accomplice Jamie Ramirez, a.k.a. “Jihad Jamie,” demonstrated that women’s ability to mobilize recruits online has become a powerful force within the global *jihad*. However, assumptions about women and violence continue to influence how such cases are appreciated. LaRose was indicted in March 2010 for conspiring to commit murder and for providing material support to terrorists. U.S. Counter Terrorism Officials, however, continued to discredit LaRose’s political activities and radicalization by the internet by maintaining that “she trolled the Internet while she was housebound, caring for her boyfriend's ailing father, and that signing up for a holy war was something that attracted a lonely woman. It gave her something to belong to

[...]” rather than providing an understanding of the significance of the online radicalization process in which women are increasingly engaging.<sup>33</sup> Shiffman’s in depth report depicted LaRose as a victim of incest, rape, prostitution, lured and manipulated by the men around her.<sup>34</sup> Women’s roles remain poorly understood and the increasing role of women in terrorist recruitment has (re)activated the debate regarding women’s appropriate role in *jihād*.

### Women’s “Obligation” for Jihad

Whereas much of the recruitment online is targeted at enlisting men for *jihād*, increasingly some religious authorities are condoning women’s frontline involvement in political violence. Numerous *jihād*ist websites already support women’s political mobilization for a variety of nonviolent causes, including videos of women speaking on contemporary issues, calling on Muslim women to defend wearing the *niqab* (full veil) in Europe, and demonstrating for Islamist initiatives.

Such online images of women’s protest and mobilization may reflect the shifting debate on the permissibility of female participation in *armed jihād*.<sup>35</sup> Several prominent Islamic scholars have joined the debate, citing that women’s obligation for *jihād* is equal to that of men. Yusuf al-Uyari posted a treatise entitled the “*Role of Women in the Jihad against the Enemies*,” in which he encourages women to take an active and enabling role in *jihād*.<sup>36</sup> Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi insists that women, as well as men, can serve as suicide bombers.<sup>37</sup> In an interview in 1995, Sheikh Hassan al-Turabi (Sudan’s Islamist leader) advocated women’s equality in his “Treatise on Women’s Rights” and,

more specifically, addressed the question of women's position in *jihad*: "At the times of the Prophet, women used to fight alongside with him, and were in charge of the logistics and medical services. There were even female Companions (*sahaba*) who were dispatched overseas to wage Jihad and die as martyrs."<sup>38</sup> In 2007, Hamas Cleric and Member of Parliament, Dr. Yunus al-Astal, similarly traced the lineage of women's participation in *jihad* to the time of the Prophet. For example, he pointed to how Um Umara Al-Ansaria fought at the Battle of Uhud, was wounded thirteen times, and lost her hand for Islam. On *al-Rafadein* television Astal explained: "When Jihad becomes an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) it is also the duty of women. Women **should** participate if the Islamic Army was weakening and the enemy was gaining the upper hand [emphasis added]."<sup>39</sup> Huda Naim, a prominent women's leader in Gaza agreed: "[W]e don't have a special militant wing for women [...] but that doesn't mean that we strip women of the right to go to jihad."<sup>40</sup> In 2008 Sheikh Mustafa Abu Yazid, Al Qaeda's leader in Afghanistan, posted an appeal on the website *al-Ekhlaas* in which he called on women to join the holy war even though the Taliban have traditionally repudiated the idea of women's participation.<sup>41</sup>

### **Recruitment and Shame**

Women's efficacy as recruiters has to do largely with the deliberate manipulation of societal norms as well as playing on the construction of masculinity within traditional society. In particular, the groups manipulate gender norms and the stigma associated with deviating from those norms. Taunting men for not doing their manly duty (with respect to

traditional masculine gender norms) is a strong provocation.<sup>42</sup> In such honor-bound societies, when women imply that men are *unmanly* they challenge men's honor by questioning their ability to act as protectors and defenders of the family. In some instances, unmanly men may also be assumed, not only to live up to social standards of masculinity, but to be effeminate.<sup>43</sup> This potential tactic of de-masculinization alleges that "unmanly men" fail to fulfill their roles in society.<sup>44</sup> For V.G. Julie Rajan:

The women recruiters act in ways that support traditional feminine social roles of wife and mother. The wife demands that her husband rise to his masculine authority in the home and community by defending the family and the community. As the mother, the woman recruiter is nurturing her nation, protecting it by speaking in its defense but she is also reinforcing the male patriarchy.<sup>45</sup>

One of the original founders of Al Qaeda, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (also known as Dr. Fadl), has elaborated on men's lack of *murwa* (manliness), a pre-Islamic Arabic cultural virtue. Manliness was demonstrated through a man's bravery, resilience, and courage that would address wrongdoings perpetrated against his family or community. Fadl argued that Muslims have grown accustomed to loving life and hating death and, therefore, have abandoned *jihad*. In doing so, they have ceased to be "real" men.<sup>46</sup> Thus, by challenging or questioning men's masculinity, Fadl's purpose was to taunt and goad men into action. Throwing down the gauntlet by accusing men of hiding behind women or by allowing women to do the job of men became a clarion call to men to engage in *jihad*.<sup>47</sup> Many of the websites (designed by men) post pictures of women holding weapons or cartoons of *mujahedahs*, or "female fighters," to suggest that women are taking up the cause of *jihad* because men are not.<sup>48</sup>

Goading men into *jihad* by questioning their masculinity is neither new nor unique to the Muslim world. Joshua Goldstein (2001) explains that after the 1917 Revolution, the new *Russian Ministry of War* created a “Battalion of Death” composed of several hundred Russian women. The government used images of the militant women to shame men into action. A photo of the brigade was entitled accordingly, *Shame*.

Goldstein writes:

Botchkareva [a Russian woman involved in the Battalion of Death] argued that “numbers were immaterial, that what was important was to shame the men and that a few women at one place could serve as an example to the entire front [...]. [T]he purpose of the plan would be to shame the men in the trenches by having the women go over the top first.” The battalion was thus exceptional and was essentially a propaganda tool. As such it was heavily publicized [...]. This picture of the women [entitled *Shame*] topped big posters pasted all over the city.” Bryant wrote in 1918: “No other feature of the great war ever caught the public fancy like the Death Battalion, composed of Russian women.”<sup>49</sup>

Similar visual propaganda was designed throughout Europe to motivate men to fight the Great War. In an Irish poster from World War One, an Irish woman’s inquiry of an Irish man, “Will you go fight or shall I?,” was intended to motivate Irish men to join the Triple Entente.<sup>50</sup> Women would publically hand men white feathers as symbols of cowardice to remind them of their masculine duty. In 1914 British Vice Admiral Charles Penrose Fitzgerald organized a group of thirty women called “The Order of the White Feather” in Folkestone to distribute white feathers to men not in uniform. This tactic was widely reported in the British press and rapidly spread to other countries.<sup>51</sup>

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (d. 2006), former head of AQI (Al Qaeda in Iraq), sought to shame men who had not taken up *jihad* by calling on Muslim women to enter the battlefield. In one of his missives, Zarqawi stated: “[W]ar has broken out [...] if you

[Muslim men] are not going to be chivalrous knights in this war (*fursan al-harb*), make way for women to wage it [...]. Yes, by God, men have lost their manhood!”<sup>52</sup> In another communiqué Zarqawi asks:

Has the honor of your women become so trivial in your eyes? Beware. Have you not heard that many of your chaste and pure sisters from among the Sunnis of Tel'afar had their honor desecrated, their chastity slaughtered, and their wombs filled with the sperm of the Crusaders and their brothers? Where is your religion? Moreover, where is your sense of honor, your zeal, and your *manliness*?<sup>53</sup>

Men proved themselves *unmanly* by refusing to join the fight. Furthermore *jihadis* demanded that men step up to guard women's honor to recoup their masculinity. The suggestion is that a man's refusal to fight means that women in his family and religious community will be sexually attacked explicitly because of his cowardice. That link is further stressed in online *jihadi* propaganda that accuses U.S. soldiers and NATO troops of sexual impropriety against Muslim women.<sup>54</sup> French terrorist Mohammed Merah, responsible for the killing spree in Toulouse and Montauban, France, in March of 2012, posted a similarly-themed rationale on the website, *Forsane Alizza* (“Knights of Glory”) that called for “soldiers” to defend Muslim women.<sup>55</sup> Shumona Dasgupta (2011) explains how sexual trespass (actual or constructed in nonfiction) and the thought of miscegenation can inflame men especially if perpetrated by an “Other.” Zarqawi warned: “Sunnis who managed to escape from the hell of the Crusader bombing were seized by the treacherous hands of the treacherous corps and others [...] desecrated the women's honor [...]”<sup>56</sup> In *jihadist* rhetoric, female sexuality and bodies become a fetish in the discourse demonizing Western men.<sup>57</sup>

### Malika el-Aroud: Holy Warrior for the Twenty-First Century

One of the most effective online propagandists to date has been Malika el-Aroud, noted earlier. Aroud's website, *Minbar-sos.com*, is a superb example of how women are capitalizing on the gender norms of Muslim society to successfully goad men into participating in *jihad* in order to protect their Muslim sisters.

Aroud, also known as "Oum Obeyda," is the epitome of the new women of Al Qaeda. These women's agenda is not specifically local but encompasses a view in which the "World of Islam" (*Dar al-Islam*) opposes the "World of War" (*Dar al-Harb*). In this world the internet plays a crucial role in women's involvement in terrorist activities—which range from simply supporting the movement to recruiting others for front-line action.

Aroud's path to radicalization was partially a reaction to the excesses of her youth. She gravitated toward the *Centre Islamique Belge* (CIB) in Saint Jans Molenbeek, which was founded in 1997 by the radical Syrian cleric Ayachi Bassam.<sup>58</sup> The Center was a breeding ground for extremism for Sheikh Bassam who indoctrinated his followers with a Salafi interpretation of Islam.<sup>59</sup> Aroud married and divorced twice before meeting her third husband, Abdessater Dahmane. According to *CNN*'s Paul Cruikshank, Aroud was particularly impressed by Dahmane's dark prayer callus that indicated he was a man of faith.<sup>60</sup> After a short courtship they wed and the Sheikh officiated.<sup>61</sup>

The virtual world of the internet provided supporters like Aroud with access to Osama Bin Laden that would inspire many to join the *jihad*. Aroud, like LaRose and Muriel Degauque, were all radicalized in this fashion.<sup>62</sup> Aroud and Abdessater watched

Bin Laden's videos and listened to his taped sermons. They felt as if Osama was talking directly to them through the computer—instigating them to act.<sup>63</sup>

On September 9, 2001, in an act that would foreshadow the 9/11 attacks in the United States, Aroud's husband Abdessater assassinated the Taliban's chief rival, Ahmad Shah Massoud, then leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance (Afghanistan), through a suicide attack in which he also died. On September 12, 2001, Malika learned of her husband's death when she stepped out of her house and someone congratulated her on being the wife of a martyr. Although Aroud was initially tried for complicity in Massoud's death, she persuaded the court that she knew nothing of her husband's intentions despite the fact that she had received \$500 in cash and a personal letter of congratulations from Osama Bin Laden after the attack. Indeed, investigations at her 2010 trial showed that Aroud had known about the attack well before September 12 and had returned to Belgium a few weeks prior to pick up her husband's laptop computer and to deliver medicine to him, as well as two envelopes full of cash to cover the costs of the operation. Belgian authorities hoped that by dropping the charges of accessory to murder against her, Aroud might become a valuable confidential informant (CI); however, she turned out to be the opposite. Once acquitted, Aroud was propelled to fame, glory, and *jihadi* stardom as the "Martyr's wife." One *jihadi* website, the "*Voice of the Oppressed*," described Aroud as a "female holy warrior for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Her status as the wife of a *shahid* ("martyr") provided her both the *bona fides* and contacts with which to launch a new career in online *jihad*. Aroud became a role model for *jihadi* women everywhere.

Malika later remarried a Moroccan man several years her junior named Moaz

Garsallaoui whom she met online in a *jihadi* chat room. They moved to a small Swiss village where they ran four French language pro-Al Qaeda websites that carried the unabridged speeches of Osama Bin Laden and the terror “snuff videos” of Zarqawi’s hostage beheadings.<sup>64</sup> Aroud commented: “God willing, I wait for Afghanistan to be purified of those pigs’ stains so that I may some day again return and join Garsallaoui in jihad.”<sup>65</sup> Aroud did not believe that it was a woman’s duty to set off bombs or to participate in a suicide attack, yet as a woman she had a potent weapon at her disposal—her pen (or laptop) that proved mightier than any sword. Her self-described mission was “to write, to speak out. That’s my jihad. You can do many things with words. Writing is also a bomb.”<sup>66</sup> Aroud conceded that she did more than report on the events of the war: she urged her readers to go to the conflict zones and encouraged women to support them in *jihad*. For Aroud, it was important that women participate in the struggle.

On November 9, 2005, Muriel Degauque, a white, Belgian convert to Islam, did just that. When Degauque rammed an explosive-laden Kia into a U.S. military convoy in Baquba, Iraq (the capital of Diyala province), she became the first Western female suicide bomber for Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Degauque, like Aroud, had been radicalized on the internet and had connected with Aroud’s *jihadi* network via chat rooms. On her website, Aroud posted her admiration for Degauque. Aroud wrote that Degauque (whom she called “Maryam”) “had the courage to go to Iraq and kill Americans when men failed in their duty to do so.”<sup>67</sup> Like so many other terrorist groups, part of the logic for women’s participation is to shame men to not sit idly by when *jihad* is imperative. Echoing this sentiment, Aroud writes: “There are men who don’t speak out because they

are afraid.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, the general theme of Aroud’s web postings were shaped by Degauque’s martyrdom operation. When she began to highlight that it was a Degauque, a woman, who had done something that men should be doing, Aroud implied that Muslim men were derelict in their masculine duties and responsibilities when they allowed women to fight in their stead.

To the women Aroud writes: “[S]top sleeping and open your eyes.” Her mantra is that it is better to die than to live in humiliation.<sup>69</sup> During her court testimony in 2010, Aroud argued that the West and Israel inflicted suffering on Muslims worldwide. Ultimately this suffering was her inspiration for *jihad*.<sup>70</sup> For Aroud, resistance against the occupation was an Islamic obligation equal to any other religious obligation such as like prayer, charity, and fasting, and that remaining silent in the face of *jihad* was tantamount to cowardice. Aroud’s contentions are consistent with Robyn Torok’s findings that:

Oppression against Muslims and the promotion of grievances was perhaps the most significant theme found on the Islamic group [web] pages. What was also interesting here is the interfacing with other forms of media [...]. Posts included graphic photos of victims including children, YouTube videos and news stories of war crimes or abuses.<sup>71</sup>

Aroud’s propaganda efforts promoted suicide terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as supported domestic terror cells throughout Europe. Counter-terrorism officials recognized her influence early on. Claude Moniquet, a European counter-terrorism expert stated: “Malika is a role model, an icon who is bold. She plays a very important strategic role as a source of inspiration. She’s very clever—and extremely dangerous.”<sup>72</sup> In response to Aroud’s chronic arrests, Aroud’s husband at the time, Garsallaoui, posted a message in May 2009 stating: “If you thought you could pressure me to slow down by

arresting my wife, you were wrong. It will not stop me from fulfilling my objectives. My wife's place is in my heart and the heart of all mujahedeen and it is stronger than ever."<sup>73</sup>

The case of Aroud emphasizes to *jihadists* that Muslim women are being attacked by the West, and that Muslim men need to step up and take responsibility to protect them. Aroud symbolized the maximum threat to a Muslim woman's chastity and implied this as the core reason why Muslim men must go to Iraq and Afghanistan to protect Muslim women.

### **In Defense of Women's Honor: Rape and Terrorist Mobilization**

The extent to which the sexual abuse of Muslim women has become part of the rhetoric calling for the radicalization and mobilization of Muslim men has differed across recent conflicts.<sup>74</sup> Although the "defense of women's honor" has been the lynchpin of Al Qaeda's ideology since before the war in Iraq (March 2003),<sup>75</sup> the necessity of protecting Muslim women from the evil occupiers has taken an increasingly central role in the male mobilization for *jihad* in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*Jihadi* websites focus on women's chastity and its violation by (foreign) Occupiers. In its address to women, *Al-Qimmah*, a *jihadi* forum, stresses: "We see women who lives the life of fear and hunger in homes frightened after the missing of the [sic] loved ones and the absence of the guardian [...]. She fears that the enemy's soldier will break off the door [...] violate the honor of the beloved one."<sup>76</sup>

Aroud accentuated the dangers to Muslim women by Western occupying forces following Abir al-Jenabi's attack in Mahmudiya in March 2006. She repeated allegations

that U.S. soldiers raped and impregnated Iraqi women detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.<sup>77</sup> Not all of the allegations were manufactured propaganda, as there were a handful of exceptional cases in which soldiers engaged in sexual violence against Iraqi women. In addition to the crimes perpetrated against men at Abu Ghraib that were publicized globally, women prisoners were also subjected to sexual atrocities. One female Iraqi activist has alleged that as many as 2000 women were raped by coalition troops between 2003-2006.<sup>78</sup> Amnesty International's interviews of several women released from Abu Ghraib reveal: "Many complained of having been beaten, threatened with rape, verbally abused and held in solitary confinement for long periods of time. One Amnesty report states that since the invasion in 2003 women in Iraqi jails have been routinely threatened with rape."<sup>79</sup> The March 12, 2006 U.S. military's sexual violation of Iraqi teenager Abir al-Jenabi, was one of the most widely reported events in the Arab press. Newspapers and television news reports carried explicit and detailed descriptions of the young girl's attack, rape, and murder, and the subsequent cover up of those crimes.<sup>80</sup> *Al Rafidayn News* reported:

Steven Green, a human monster wearing the uniform of the occupation [...] raped an innocent girl not more than 15, and then killed her after he killed her father, mother, and little sister. After drinking wine with three other occupation soldiers, Green headed for the girl's house in Al Mahmudiyah, where he killed her three family members in cold blood. He and another friend raped the girl before shooting her twice.<sup>81</sup>

*Jihadi* websites exploited the crime to mobilize new supporters throughout the Islamic and Arab world. The websites described how the occupiers' *vileness* should inspire Muslim men to rise up and join the *jihad* against the nonbelievers. A statement issued on

the website of the *Media Office of the Mujahideen Army in Iraq on the Islamic Renewal*

*Organization* stated:

Their latest crime [...] they violate the honor of Muslims in their houses and raping them and then following up their horrible crime by burning the bodies to conceal it from the people as if the crimes of the oppressors, which the Glorious Qur'an told us about [...] the more the enemy persists in its tyranny and contentiousness, the more we persist in continuing on the road of Jihad, which is our way of raising injustice from all Muslims [...] and destroying the signs of infidelity and disbelief.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, internet propaganda has the ability to shame Muslim men into participating in the global *jihad* by warning them that if they neglect their duty to their Muslim women, their sisters, mothers, and daughters will be sexually violated. That said, neither Aroud nor AQI leader Abu Musab al Zaraqawi turned women away who wanted to volunteer for martyrdom operations in Iraq or engage in other militant activities against those who *humiliate* the faith. The result was the equation of the “Purity of the Islamic Faith” to “the (sexual) Purity of Muslim women.”

Al Qaeda and its affiliates have addressed Muslim women specifically online and in their publications. Ansar al-Mujahidin added a “women’s section” to its website.<sup>83</sup> In 2004 a webzine magazine called “*Al-Khansa’a*,” which was—named for the Pre-Islamic female poet,<sup>84</sup> was published by the Women’s Information Office in the Arab Peninsula. The issue, with a bright pink cover page and gold embossed lettering, appeared in August of 2004 with the lead article entitled, “Biography of the Female Mujahedeen.” The webzine was designed specifically to appeal to women and its contents included a range of articles from the proper social behavior of women to how women should support their male *jihadi* relatives to exercises to strengthen women’s bodies to handle women’s

domestic duties to the occasional recipe.<sup>85</sup> Despite its exploration of the woman mujahedeen, *Al-Khansa 'a*, however, stopped short of calling for women's military participation in *jihad*.

However, a number of online *jihadi* forums proliferated after the release of *Al-Khansa 'a*. Those forums sought to involve women, not just in supportive roles in the *jihad*, but also as front-line fighters for it. One such forum, *Al-Hebah*, asked women: "Sister, do you fear the horror of death? Don't you wish for such an end—an easy transition from this world to paradise?"<sup>86</sup> Al Qaeda's *Al-Shamikhha Magazine* (2011), geared toward Muslim women, explained the need to incorporate women into *jihad* and ensure their support for the cause of *jihad*:

Because women constitute half of the population—and one might even say that they are the population since they give birth to the next generation—the enemies of Islam are bent on preventing the Muslim woman from knowing the truth about her religion and her role, since they know all too well what would happen if women entered the field of *jihad* [...]. The nation of Islam needs women who know the truth about their religion and about the battle and its dimensions and know what is expected of them.<sup>87</sup>

By 2007, Zarqawi's innovation of female suicide bombers ensured that female suicide bombers became the weapon of choice for Al Qaeda in Iraq even after he was assassinated. As the tactic has become more commonplace, the groups have altered the bombers' profile to include older women, younger women, and even children. Suicide bombings against Shi'ite civilians are the trademark of AQI, and women bombers are used to penetrate targets to kill other women and children.<sup>88</sup> These attacks occur despite the massive security operations mounted by Iraqi authorities to combat the martyrdom operations. Iraqi sources claimed that other than Degauque, all the female bombers have

been ethnic, native Iraqis.

Umm Salamah lead the *Dhat al Nitaqayn Brigade*,<sup>89</sup> a commando unit composed exclusively of women. According to AQI the Brigade has the equivalent of one thousand fighting companies and includes women who will “overturn the satanic alliance.”<sup>90</sup> The group announced plans to create a special “*Abir al-Jenabi Unit*” named after the fourteen-year-old girl raped and killed by U.S. soldiers in 2006, discussed earlier. The propaganda highlighting the sexual atrocities against sisters in Islam has both goaded men into *jihād* by shaming them and has also led to the creation of an all-woman suicide bomber unit. Women account for almost one-third of the suicide bombings in Iraq and as many as 60% in Diyala Province.<sup>91</sup>

### **Not So Fast, Ladies!**

While AQI proudly acknowledges its female bombers (although not always by name), *Abdullah Azzam*, one of the early Al Qaeda ideologues, insisted that there was no place for women in *jihād*. Azzam contends that from a strictly fundamentalist perspective, war remains a male affair and that women can participate in *jihād if there is dire need* but only provided that they are not captured. So, women's *jihād cannot* involve direct combat, fighting, as Azzam states: “All this is to honor the woman and protect her, to give her time to educate generations and create heroes. So, the roles of men and women are complementary and without this balance, life will be spoiled. Allah knows best.”<sup>92</sup>

In his treatise *Ilhaq bil-qawafilah* (“Join the Caravan”) Azzam argues that

women's roles should be limited to nursing, education, and assisting refugees. He further insists that any woman must be accompanied by a male *mahram* ("guardian") at all times. In the Al Qaeda and Taliban military training camps in Afghanistan, women were separated from their husbands and asked to care for their children to allow men to dedicate their lives completely to *jihad*. Women could contribute to the *jihad* by supporting their men, in particular, by helping them to endure the hardships associated with the frequent moves, difficult terrain, and living conditions, and also by raising the their children to follow in their father's footsteps. Women were restricted to logistical support and, hence, tended the wounded and supported their male family members for the *jihad*. Not every *jihadi* wife was able to "stand by her man" while on the run from aerial bombardment and global pariah status. Osama bin Laden's first wife, for example, had severe difficulty acclimatizing to a Spartan existence in Afghanistan and eventually left him, taking the children with her.<sup>93</sup>

The Islamic Army in Iraq posted a communiqué entitled, "This Is How Women Should Be," which comments on how a Muslim woman should "be ready for any service the mujahedeen need from her." Yet Ayman al-Zawahiri advised against women traveling to a war front like Afghanistan without a male guardian. Islamist hardliners ever since Azzam have banned women from participating actively in *jihad*. Zawahiri emphatically insists to this day that there are no women in Al Qaeda's ranks. While the core of Al Qaeda refuses to permit women's participation, Zawahiri acknowledges that women have played in a role in the other areas of the *Dar al Harb* ("House of War") and in the global *jihad*. In Algeria, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb uses women in bombing

campaigns as evidenced in the (March 2012 attack at Tamanrasset. In Sudan, women march and perform military maneuvers. In Somalia, some women have even become martyrs, as exemplified by the April 2012 attack on the Somali National Theater.<sup>94</sup>

The *jihadi* groups occasionally open up discussion boards to field questions from (and to provide clarification for) their supporters worldwide. In 2008 (at the height of AQI's female suicide bombing campaign) a female supporter asked Zawahiri whether she should participate in *jihad* in the Maghreb. He responded by stating that while *jihad* was a universal obligation for both men and women, if by joining the *jihad* she would have to abandon her children then she should not do it. Online, female supporters pleaded with Zawahiri for the right to get more involved. One woman who listened ten times to his speech against women's engagement in direct battle wrote: "How many times have I wished I were a man [...]. When Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri said there are no women in Al Qaeda, he saddened and hurt me. I felt that my heart was about to explode in my chest [...]. I am powerless."<sup>95</sup> For *jihadi* women, Zawahiri's response came as a shock and a disappointment.

To further muddy the waters, within a year Zawahiri's wife, Umayma Hasan, released a letter identifying three kinds of Muslim women: female *jihadis*, sisters in Islam who had been imprisoned, and the rest. In the letter she called on the female *jihadis* to remain steadfast in the path of *jihad* as "victory is near!" God, Hasan assured women, is not about to forsake them, and they shall either be rewarded with victory or martyrdom, which she described as being "each is sweeter than the other." She also argued: "[J]ihad is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman." Hasan

acknowledged that, although the path of fighting is not easy for women because it requires a male companion or *mahram* to chaperone them at all times. She lauded the many sisters who had executed martyrdom operations despite the obstacles against them as women in Palestine, Iraq, and Chechnya, and who “caused the enemy high costs and caused the enemy a big defeat. We ask from Allah to accept them and connect us with them with goodness.”<sup>96</sup>

Hasan recalled the female companions (*sahaba*) who fought alongside the Prophet Muhammad, many of whom showed greater courage than the men. She observed that the requirement for a *mahram* was not a legal constraint; and that the legal doctrine of “defensive *jihad*” was designed for extraordinary circumstances that relieve women from having to seek anyone’s permission before taking up *jihad* and that the requirement was a cultural constraint.<sup>97</sup> Nelly Lahoud (2010) extrapolates further on the link between women and the defensive (rather than the offensive) *jihad*. She concludes that the traditional and conservative elements of Al Qaeda ultimately do not support mobilizing women militarily:

The question is not whether the jihadis would or would not condone a military role for women. Rather, the more compelling question is why they have **not already** called on women to fulfill their individual duty of *jihad*. This issue has immense implications on the credibility of their *jihad*: if the battle the jihadis are confronting today does not necessitate women’s participation in *jihad*, then this raises doubts as to whether they are in fact engaged in a defensive war they have rallied Muslims worldwide to join. If the jihadis can afford to carry out *jihad* without the assistance of all Muslims, women included, they undermine their arguments for the urgency and credibility of the *jihad* they espouse.<sup>98</sup>

Umayma Hasan, however, insists that women are critical for the success of *jihad*. She explains that there are many ways in which women can fulfill their obligation for *jihad*:

“Put yourselves in the service of the jihadis, carry out what they ask, whether in supporting them financially, serving their [practical] needs, supplying them with information, opinions, partaking in fighting or even [volunteering to carry out] a martyrdom operation.”<sup>99</sup> She urges the rest of Muslim women in the world to engage in *jihad* by observing Islamic law, wearing the veil, and bringing up their children to love *jihad*.

Following up on Hasan’s “Open Letter,” Al Qaeda’s media wing, which produces *Inspire* magazine,<sup>100</sup> released *Al-Shamikha* (“The Majestic Woman”) on March 13, 2011. Like the web-based *Al-Khansa ’a* before it, *Al-Shamikha*’s first issue was a thirty-one-page, glossy magazine featuring a *niqab*-clad woman posing with a sub-machine gun on its cover. Dubbed the “*Jihadi Cosmo*” by the Western press, the magazine advised women on finding the right man (“marrying a *mujahid*”) and how to achieve a perfect complexion (“stay inside with your face covered”). The magazine also debated the pros and cons of honey facials and urged against “towelng too forcibly.”<sup>101</sup> *Al-Shamika* further provided tips on first aid and etiquette, as well as what women could do to become more actively involved in *jihad*.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Beyond Recruitment***

Terrorists are exploiting every form of media to mobilize new recruits. According to Torok (2011): “Targeting female jihadists is a narrowcasting strategy that Al Qaeda has been increasingly developing in recent years using [...] websites, online magazines, and social media sites such as *Facebook*.”<sup>103</sup> *Facebook*,<sup>104</sup> *Twitter*, and other social

networking sites have been used to get people to “like” a particular group for recruitment purposes. Several organizations have taken multimedia approaches to brand specific attacks (and, thus, to deter other groups from making false claims of responsibility for those attacks) and to use the internet to encourage would-be *jihadis*. American Journalist Dina Temple-Raston observes: “These days, many of them are decidedly less religious. They look more like something that would appear on MTV.” To attract a new generation of younger Muslims, “*jihadi* rap videos” featuring thumping bass and forced rhymes and accompanied by verses about beheading non-Muslims to make them pay for the indignities are all over the internet. Temple-Raston writes:

The productions are clearly aimed at young people nursing resentments and looking for thrills. One video raps about the “angels in green, helping the mujahedeen” while cutting to photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and homemade videos of holy warriors firing rocket-propelled grenades in the desert and shooting up cars with machine guns.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusions

According to the strictest interpretation of *jihadi* ideology, a woman’s place remains in the home and not on the battlefield. However, the belief that women may be equal to men in the execution of *jihad* has been gaining ground among religious ideologues from both Sunni and Shi’a traditions. Grand Ayatollah Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah, the former leader of Lebanon’s Hizbullah (Party of God), emphasized that *jihad*, while “not obligatory for women,” was permitted them in the contexts of a defensive war where all members of a society are required in battle. Furthermore, he approved of martyrdom operations by women.<sup>106</sup> According to the leading Sunni religious authorities at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, *jihad* is not obligatory for women,

**but can be executed under three conditions:** first, if the enemy invades Muslim lands; second, if Muslim leaders (read: male) call upon the whole *umma*, or community of believers, to perform *jihad*; and third, if Muslim leaders appoint women to do certain tasks, such as monitoring the enemy, laying mines, and so on, that require them to enter into the public spaces in which combat operations take place. Under such conditions women must carry out the duty entrusted to them.<sup>107</sup>

Many of Al Qaeda's older generation of leaders continue to resist the interpretations promulgated by Fadlallah, who, as a Shi'a leader and Grand Ayatollah, may not have religious authority or credibility among Sunni Muslims. Instead, Qatari theologian (although Egyptian born) Sheikh Yusuf al Qaradawi's position (on women and other matters) reflects what is considered a more centrist (*wasatiyya*) interpretation. For him, *jihad* needs to keep up with new technologies and, hence, to adapt to a modern world. Qaradawi's vision of this, which he references as "*jihad* of the age," includes surfacing *jihad* through powerful media weapons such as TV, the internet, email, etc., rather than with guns. He also calls for a more prominent role for women in *jihad*, as in 2009 when he stated: "Persuading Muslims of the message of Islam and the importance of this jihad in the path of God should be the first priority. In this respect, the role of women in the service of Islam is not inferior to that of men, since she is equally responsible."<sup>108</sup>

The ideological split over what activities may be undertaken by female *jihadis* is one of the significant fault lines within Al Qaeda. The fact that Dr. Zawahiri's wife (Umayma Hasan) should address women directly to participate in *jihad* immediately after

her own husband had dismissed women's participation in the cause is significant. On the one hand, Al Qaeda's leadership may be on the cusp of changing its view regarding the role of women. What appears to explain the seeming inconsistency is the need to address two different constituent publics. While Zawahiri is aware of his conservative basis of support, he acknowledges the new generation might have different and more practical views of women in *jihad*. By playing both sides of the coin, it may be that the leadership is attempting to 'hedge its bets' by appealing to its broader membership: both the traditional conservatives and the younger progressives (who might be more supportive of women's engagement in *jihad*). Because of the generational shift emerging within the organization between the new and the old Al Qaeda, the organization is required to balance the desires of its younger members with the ideologies of its older conservative constituency, such as the Taliban, who do not believe women should play any role in *jihad* and who prefer to sequester women altogether. In contrast to the letters Zawahiri received from women challenging his position on their participation in *jihad*, he also received dozens of letters from men who insisted that women should stick to raising children according to Islamic principles and should eschew *jihad*.

Interestingly, suicide bombings perpetrated by AQI women increased exponentially during and immediately after Zawahiri claimed there were no women in Al Qaeda. In particular, AQI witnessed an increase of 800% of female bombers in Diyala province alone.<sup>109</sup> Women have emerged even in Afghanistan (two of Pakistani origin) as suicide bombers and on September 18, 2012, the very first Afghani female suicide bomber (allegedly named "Fatima") detonated on a highway near Kabul airport killing

sixteen people. The group Hezb e Islami claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>110</sup> Thus even the most conservative of the AQ affiliates appear willing to use women regardless of the apparent societal norms that might prohibit women's involvement. Additionally, there have been *fatwas* regarding women's honor, which have been used to justify a defensive *jihad* against the invaders. According to Awlaki's (allegedly) favorite source of religious rulings, Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Sālih Al-'Uthaymīn:

'If they rape our women then do we rape their women?' No, this, no, no we do not do it. Why? Because this is prohibited as a (whole) category [i.e., it is forbidden within itself], and it is not possible for us to do it [...] so it is not permissible for us to rape their women [...].<sup>111</sup>

While a useful propaganda tool, allegations of sexual trespass are complicated by reality. One affiliate organization, *Ansar al-Sunnah*, had over eighty Iraqi women raped in Diyala Province, Iraq; the women "chose" to become suicide bombers to deal with the social stigma of being raped and the certainty of bringing shame to their families as a result of an honor code that blames women who were raped for their crime. After her arrest, recruiter Samira Ahmed Jassim confirmed that the insurgents preyed on women in dire social and economic situations or those who were suffering from emotional or psychological problems or from abuse.<sup>112</sup> On *jihadi* websites, like the *Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance* (JAMI), Al Qaeda denied allegations of coercion to recruit female bombers. They claimed that Al Qaeda would never be involved in violence against the innocent Iraqi people.<sup>113</sup> Then Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki issued a statement that over 60% of suicide attacks perpetrated by women in Diyala were in fact coerced. Several women on their way to execute suicide attacks had changed their mind at the last

minute. As many as 40% of the women suicide operations were aborted, and the women were killed before reaching their target. Female bombers in Diyala were not always in control of their own suicide belts, and men occasionally detonated the women's belts remotely either before reaching or when they arrived at their target.<sup>114</sup>

To claim that the *jihadi* groups are inconsistent or disingenuous is neither wholly surprising nor unexpected. What is significant is that a significant fissure within Al Qaeda and among its affiliates revolves around the issue of women: whether to allow them to fight and how to “motivate” them to do so. The younger generation of Al Qaeda leaders—and especially its affiliate organizations—supports a role for women. This generational divide is appreciated by the less popular and uncharismatic Zawahiri. Awlaki inspired men and women (for example, Roshanara Chowdry, who attempted to stab British MP Stephen Timms, and Umar Farouk Abdul Muttalib, the Christmas Day underwear bomber). Somali al-Shebaab leader Omar Hammami has employed female suicide bombers in Somalia. Indian security officials claim that two-dozen Pakistani women are being trained to be suicide bombers for *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT) as a new unit, the *Dukhtareen-e-Taiba* (“Daughters of the Righteous”).<sup>115</sup> In order for Al Qaeda to maintain its position and primacy among the affiliated *jihadi* groups, a degree of flexibility will be required. This capitulation to innovation (*bida'a*) is evident in internet recruitment as well as who gets to be a martyr.

While women's frontline activities and online involvement might indicate that they are gaining ground in terrorist organizations, in fact, this has not been the case. Although women seem increasingly involved, the core leadership remains off limits to women and,

hence, the space of men. In other groups where women are engaged in front-line militant operations, women tend to play an insignificant role online because they are largely engaged in more activist pursuits in the field. In contrast to the experiences of women of Al Qaeda, women of the Sri Lankan LTTE (the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*) have separate fighting units led by female commanders. *Jihadi* women engaged in Al Qaeda take on traditional care-giver roles that do not stretch beyond a traditional interpretation of how women can/should be. For feminist scholars, the women of Al Qaeda are reifying gender norms by writing from the private sphere and speaking in defense of the nation; as such they are not acting outside of traditional female gendered roles even as they actively goad men into action most often to symbolically defend their imagined nations/nation-states—an image that is often conflated with the women themselves—from other masculine aggressors. As Rajan notes: “This kind of transgressive speech is sanctioned only when women speak in defense of the nation, and hence, their violence is directed to maintaining the nation.”<sup>116</sup>

As the new generation of *jihadis* emerges, applying the concept of “defensive *jihad*” may trigger the engagement of more women (and children) on the front lines. Al Qaeda will continue to employ an army of female supporters, propagandists, and recruiters in the meantime to keep the global *jihad* going.

While women have taken a leading role in online terrorist recruitment and radicalization, a number of international organizations have responded to help inoculate women against online radical messages and women are taking the leading role in countering violent extremism (CVE). Once such group, *Sisters Against Violence*

*Extremism* (SAVE), explains: “Women as mothers and sisters suffer when a member of the family loses his path and goes towards extremism. Extremists often impose their extremist beliefs on the female members in their families, preventing them from receiving an education and working.”<sup>117</sup> Early results from the grassroots organizations fighting violence extremism are promising, and a number of groups are trying to help counter violent extremism. Groups like *Women Without Borders*, *SAVE*, *USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation* (CMM), and the Organization for Cooperation and Security’s Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) have all created separate portfolios targeting women. Their main focus is to prevent women’s extremism in the first place such that women leaders do not become cannon fodder for terrorist organizations but rather provide sources of emulation for the next generation of young women and girls in ways that may impact their agency both within Al Qaeda and society in positive ways.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article are drawn from Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). This research is supported in part by a grant from the Office of Naval Research (ONR), US Department of the Navy No N00014-09-1-0557. Any opinions, findings, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Naval Research. I would like to thank John Horgan, Julie Rajan, Seung-Kyung Kim, and Ashwini Tambe for their help on earlier drafts, and Shireen Judeh for her research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> The *al Khansa'a* website is no longer available, however portions of it have been reproduced by a U.S. Army study, U.S. ARMY TRADOC G2 TRISA Threats, "Female Suicide Bombers," January 27, 2011 <<http://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-FemaleSuicideBombers.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Over a thousand of Malika el-Aroud's messages in French are available at: <<http://www.minbar-sos.com/forum/search.php?searchid=31511>>.

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce Davis, "Women and Terrorism in Radical Islam: Planners, Perpetrators, Patrons?," *Royal Military College, Dalhousie University* (2006), p.1.

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Shane, "The Web as al-Qaida's Safety Net," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 28, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror," *Foreign Policy*, vol. 165, (2008), pp. 36-42.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>12</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri quoted in Akil N. Awan, "Radicalization on the Internet? The Virtual Propagation of Jihadist Media and its Effects," *RUSI Journal*, vol. 152, no. 3, (2007), p.76.

<sup>13</sup> Amira Choueiki and Theodore Karasik, "Conduits to Terror—Classifying the Methods of Middle Eastern Terrorist Recruitment," vol. 11 (2010)

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<sup>15</sup> John F. Burns and Miguel Helft, "YouTube Withdraws Clerics Videos," *New York Times*, November 4, 2010 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/world/05britain.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/world/05britain.html?_r=1)>

<sup>16</sup> Roshonara Choudhry is a British student who stabbed British MP Stephen Timms in May 2010 and was found guilty of attempted murder. Colleen LaRose, better known as "Jihad Jane," is an American woman charged with conspiracy to commit murder as part of a plot to assassinate Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who had mocked the Prophet Muhammed.

<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Braw, "Terrorists Use the Internet to Actively Recruit Women," *Huffington Post*, March 12, 2009 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elisabeth-braw/terrorists-use-internetinternet-t\\_b\\_174427.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elisabeth-braw/terrorists-use-internetinternet-t_b_174427.html)>

<sup>18</sup> Marc Sageman. *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: U Penn Press, 2008), 111.

<sup>19</sup> Sageman writes: "[M]y View of Terrorism Is Known as the 'Bunch of Guys' Theory," however, he fails to discuss where women appear in his analysis (Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, "Does Osama Still Call the Shots?," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008 <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64460/marc-sageman-and-bruce-hoffman/does-osama-still-call-the-shots>>.) In *Leaderless Jihad*, Sageman makes explicit that women have been largely excluded even though they constitute as much as one-third of committed terrorists historically.

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- <sup>39</sup> In Christopher Sims, "Black Widows and Internet Videos: Employing Women in Islamist Insurgencies," Paper presented to the Gender and War Conference, Newcastle, U.K., March 12, 2011 <[http://kcl.academia.edu/ChristopherSims/Talks/45589/Black\\_Widows\\_and\\_internetInternet\\_Videos\\_Employing\\_Women\\_in\\_Islamist\\_Insurgencies](http://kcl.academia.edu/ChristopherSims/Talks/45589/Black_Widows_and_internetInternet_Videos_Employing_Women_in_Islamist_Insurgencies)>
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- <sup>53</sup> "Leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq Al-Zarqawi Declares 'Total War' on Shi'ites, States that the Sunni Women of Tel'afar Had 'Their Wombs Filled with the Sperm of the Crusaders,'" *Ibid*.
- <sup>54</sup> Several websites include graphic photos of women being raped (and gang raped) at Abu Ghraib. The authenticity of the photos has never been substantiated ("Rape of Iraqi Women by US Forces as Weapon of War: Photos and Data Emerge," <<http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2009/10/03/rape-iraqi-women-us-forces-weapon-war-photos-and-data-merge>>.
- <sup>55</sup> Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "French Killings Refocus Fears on 'Solo' Acts Of Terror," *CNN*, March 21, 2012 <[http://articles.cnn.com/2012-03-21/world/world\\_europe\\_france-solo-terror\\_1\\_french-nationals-french-intelligence-french-citizen?s=PM:EUROPE](http://articles.cnn.com/2012-03-21/world/world_europe_france-solo-terror_1_french-nationals-french-intelligence-french-citizen?s=PM:EUROPE)>.
- <sup>56</sup> Leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq Al-Zarqawi, MEMRI, *op.cit* note 52.
- <sup>57</sup> Shamita Das Dasgupta, "The Spectacle Of Violence In Partition Fiction: Women, Voyeurs And Witnesses," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, no. 1, (2011), pp.30-41.
- <sup>58</sup> Marie Rose Armesto, *Groot Bijgaarden de Standaard*, December 22, 2007 (in Dutch); see also, Marie Rose Armesto, *Mon Mari a Tue Massoud* (DRANCY, RP, France: 2002) (in French).
- <sup>59</sup> Mark Eeckhaut, "Bastin's Muslim Elite," *Groot Bijgaarden De Standaard*, November 23, 2004. <<http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=C11LOB4K>>
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- <sup>64</sup> Nic Robertson, "Belgian Al Qaeda Cell Linked to 2006 Airline Plot," *CNN* February 10, 2009 <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/02/10/belgium.terror/index.html>>; "Alerta en la Inteligencia europea ante posibles nuevos atentados de Al Qaeda en Francia y Bruselas," *Europa Press*, May 16, 2009 <[http://www.soitu.es/soitu/2009/05/16/info/1242458888\\_426371.html](http://www.soitu.es/soitu/2009/05/16/info/1242458888_426371.html)> and <<http://globedia.com/alerta-inteligencia-europea-posible-atentado-qaeda-francia-brusela>>.

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- <sup>71</sup> Robyn Torok, "Facebook Jihad: A Case Study of Recruitment Discourses and Strategies Targeting a Western Female," *Proceedings of the 2nd International Cyber Resilience Conference*, August 1-2, 2011, p.87 <<http://igneous.scis.ecu.edu.au/proceedings/2011/icr/>>.
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- <sup>79</sup> Al-Ahram, "The Height of Humiliation," June 22-28, 2006 <<http://weekly.ahram.org/2006/800/focus.htm>>; Amnesty International, *Trapped by Violence, Women in Iraq*, 2008 Report, Index: MDE 14/005/2009; see also Amnesty International, "The State of the World's Human Rights 2011: Iraq" <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/iraq/report-2011>>.
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- <sup>81</sup> *Al-Rafidayn News Channel* report, July 5, 2006, Accessed May 2009.
- <sup>82</sup> Posting by "Abu Hanifah" to the Islamic Renewal Organization website <[www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/](http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/)>, a website of the Saudi dissident group led by Muhammed al Ma'asari based in the U.K. The statement was issued by the Media Office of the Mujahideen Army in Iraq.
- <sup>83</sup> "Anṣār al-Mujāhidīn Arabic Forum adds a section for Women," *Jihadology: A Clearinghouse for Jihādī Primary Source Material And Translation* <<http://jihadology.net/2010/10/20/an%E1%B9%A3ar-al-mujahidin-arabic-forum-adds-a-section-for-women/>>
- <sup>84</sup> Al Khansa'a's four sons, Yazid, Mu'awiya, 'Amr, and 'Amrah, converted to Islam and fought at the Battle of Qadisiyah, where they were all killed. When al-Khansa'a received the news, she did not grieve, but exclaimed: "Praise be to Allah who honored me with their martyrdom. I pray for Allah to let me join them in heaven." "Al Khansa'a, Poetess of Courage and Pride." *Arab News*, May 27, 1998 <<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980527/1998052703.html>>
- <sup>85</sup> Umm al-Miqdad, *al-Khansa'*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>86</sup> Braw op.cit., *Huffington Post*. Accessed May 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Julius Cavendish, translation of *Al Shamika Magazine*, "Al-Qa'ida Glossy Advises Women to Cover Up and Marry a Martyr," *The Independent*, March 14, 2011  
<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/alqaida-glossy-advises-women-to-cover-up-and-marry-a-martyr-2240992.html>>.

<sup>88</sup> Bloom (2011), *op.cit.*

<sup>89</sup> "The name is derived from the *Qur'an* when Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter and Aisha's sister, cut a piece of cloth from her waist belt and tied the mouth of the leather bag with it. She tore the piece in two and gave one to the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). For that reason she was named *dhat al nitaqayn*, the One with Two Waist belts," Sahih al-Bukhari, vol.4, p.141, #222.

<sup>90</sup> Kaishan al Bayati, "Supervision Is Tightened against Women: Officials Fear Female Suicide Bombers in Baghdad," *Al Arab* online, (Doha) June 25, 2008, cited by Bloom, *Bombshell*, p.286.

<sup>91</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, "How Baida Wanted to Die," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2009  
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<sup>92</sup> "Women Fighting Jihad," *Islamwebnet*, Fatwa date: Thul Hijjah 3, 1421, Feb 27, 2001  
<<http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=82641>>.

<sup>93</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (NY: Knopf, 2006); see also Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century* (NY: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Farhana Ali, "Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq: Why the Trend Continues," *Counter-Terrorism Blog*, March 2008 <[http://counterterrorismblog.org/2008/03/female\\_suicide\\_bombers\\_in\\_iraq.php](http://counterterrorismblog.org/2008/03/female_suicide_bombers_in_iraq.php)>; Alex Perry, "Countering al Shabab: How the War on Terrorism Is Being Fought in East Africa," *Time*, July, 3, 2012 <<http://world.time.com/2012/07/03/countering-al-shabab-how-the-war-on-terror-is-being-fought-in-east-africa/>>; Karla J. Cunningham, "Terror's Invisible Women," *Rand*, April 4, 2012 <<http://www.rand.org/blog/2012/04/terrors-invisible-women.html>>; Mohammed Amlin Adow, "Bomb Kills Top Somali Sports Officials," *CNN*, April 4, 2012 <[http://articles.cnn.com/2012-04-04/africa/world\\_africa\\_somalia\\_blast\\_1\\_omar-jamal-somali-football-federation-somali-government?\\_s=PM:AFRICA](http://articles.cnn.com/2012-04-04/africa/world_africa_somalia_blast_1_omar-jamal-somali-football-federation-somali-government?_s=PM:AFRICA)>.

<sup>95</sup> "Women Plead with Al Qaeda to Join Jihad," *The Telegraph*, June 1, 2008  
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/2062430/Women-plead-with-al-Qaeda-to-join-jihad.html>>; see also "Al Qaeda to Muslim Extremist Women, Stay Home, Raise Kids."

<sup>96</sup> Umayma al-Zawahiri, "*Risalat illah al Akhawat al Muslimat* ('Letter to My Muslim Sisters')," <[www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/umayma-al-zawahiri-risala-jan-2010.pdf](http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/umayma-al-zawahiri-risala-jan-2010.pdf)> Accessed February 10, 2010; see also Lahoud, "Umayma al-Zawahiri on Women's Role in Jihad."

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Interview with the author, May 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Umayma al-Zawahiri, "*Risalat illah al Akhawat al Muslimat*," fn. 96.

<sup>100</sup> *Inspire* is believed to be edited by a U.S. citizen-turned-militant, Samir Khan, who is currently in hiding in Yemen. Before fleeing the U.S., Khan turned out a series of *jihadi* magazines called *Jihad Recollections*, which like *Inspire*, were broadcast by cyber *jihadis* across the web.

<sup>101</sup> Cavendish, *op.cit.*

<sup>102</sup> The recent issue of *Inspire* magazine (March 2013 cover story includes a story entitled: "Women of the Glorious Ummah" about women and Jihad <<http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/inspire-magazine-issue-10.pdf>>, Accessed March 1, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Torok, *op.cit.*

<sup>104</sup> Iftekhharul Bashar, "Facebook: The Online Recruiting Office for Jihad," Retrieved May 1, 2011 <<http://undhimmi.com/2011/02/17/facebook-the-online-recruiting-office-for-jihad/>>.

<sup>105</sup> Temple-Raston, *NPR, op.cit.*

<sup>106</sup> "Martyr Operations: A Means of Jihad," *Bayynat*, the website of the religious authority Sayyid Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah <[english.bayynat.org.lb/news/martyr.htm](http://english.bayynat.org.lb/news/martyr.htm)>, Accessed May 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Islam on-Line, "Ask a Scholar," Dr. 'Abdel Fattah Idrees, Professor of Comparative Jurisprudence, Al-Azhar University, "Muslim Women Participating in Jihad,"

<[www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask\\_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544310](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544310)>, Accessed May 2011

<sup>108</sup> Yusuf al Qaradawi, “*Fiqh al Jihad*,” posted by Marc Lynch, “Qaradawi’s Revisions” on Islamicdoctrines.com, July 9, 2009 <<http://www.islamicdoctrines.com/documents/Fiqh-Al-jihad.pdf>>, Accessed May 2011.

<sup>109</sup> “Increase in Female Bombers Raises Concern,” *CBS News*, July 19, 2009 <[http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500257\\_162-3677485.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500257_162-3677485.html)>

<sup>110</sup> Tom A Peter, “Female Suicide Bomber Kills Foreigners in Kabul in Response to Video,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 18, 2012 <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2012/0918/Female-suicide-bomber-kills-foreigners-in-Kabul-in-response-to-video-video>>, Accessed September 19, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> “The Verdict of Sheikh, Muhammad Ibn Sālih Al-‘Uthaymīn,” <<http://www.hoor-al-ayn.com/articles/Fiqh/Shaykh%20Ibn%20Uthaymin%20-%20Killing%20women.pdf>>, Accessed May 2011.

<sup>112</sup> Abdul Zahra, Qassim. and Murphy, Brian, “Iraq Arrests Female Suicide Bomber Recruiter,” *Huffington Post*, February 3, 2009 <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/03/iraq-arrests-female-suicid\\_n\\_163505.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/03/iraq-arrests-female-suicid_n_163505.html)>; see also Bloom (2011) *op.cit.*, 223-225.

<sup>113</sup> Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance, JAMI, August 8, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> *Al Arabiyah* Television, July 6, 2008.

<sup>115</sup> “LeT Raising Group of 21 Female Terrorists against India,” Rediff.com, January 3, 2012

<<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/let-raising-group-of-21-female-terrorists-against-india/20120103.htm>>; “Umi Hammad, the Chief of the Women's Wing of Lashkar, Personally Trained the Women...the Idea for Dukhtareen-e-Taiba Was Devised by Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the Mastermind behind the 2008 Mumbai Attacks,”; Chandan Das, “Lashkar Terrorists Training Female Group in Kashmir,” *Khabar South Asia in New Delhi*, January 24, 2012 <[http://www.khabarsouthasia.com/en\\_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2012/01/23/feature-01](http://www.khabarsouthasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2012/01/23/feature-01)>.

<sup>116</sup> Rajan, *op.cit.*

<sup>117</sup> Yassera Al Sahari, SAVE Yemen <<http://www.wluml.org/node/5917>, see also <http://www.women-without-borders.org/save/>>, Accessed May 2011.