

"Producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle": Gender and Terrorism between Revolution and Jihadism

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Abstract:

Violence is generally considered as a male thing in both academia and patriarchal societies. However, the history of violence demonstrates that despite the dominance of men in different forms of violence we do know women who also took part in both: state violence and terrorism and revolutionary violence. Women were victims of violence, but also fighters and terrorists. This article will demonstrate that the gender dimension concerning violence of non-state actors depends not only on ideology but also on the opportunity of women and the use of women for an armed or terrorist struggle and explores the debates about women in combat by contemporary jihadist groups. The role of women within terrorist organizations and the reasons for women to join such organizations depend more on the ideology and the strategic usefulness of women than the use of terrorism by certain groups.

Paper:

When writing about terrorism there should a definition first as there is no internationally accepted scientific definition of terrorism. Legal documents like the Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) of the US department of state, the list of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts and subjects to restrictive measures by the European Union or the UN Security Council resolution 1989 (2011) on the freezing of funds of persons and entities associated with Usama bin Laden, the Al-Qaida network, the Taliban and the so called Islamic state - all just list organizations and persons who are considered as terrorists, but never clearly define what terrorism means and how it is defined. It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss different attempts to define terrorism. However, it is important to clarify the terminology that is based on this essay that discusses gender aspects in terrorism and the role of women in terrorist organizations.

Terrorism, as it is used in this essay, does not mean any kind of non-state political violence. There are numerous armed non-state actors who try to respect international humanitarian norms and law of war and on the other hand we know a lot of examples where states did not do that and committed war crimes and acts of terrorism. With the increase of armed non-state actors worldwide the acceptance of international humanitarian norms by violent non-state actors became increasingly important and the international NGO Geneva Call tries to convince such armed non-state actors to commit themselves on international humanitarian law in armed conflicts, in particular those related to the protection of civilians and culture. A number of armed non-state actors agreed on international humanitarian norms such as the ban on land mines or child soldiers but also the ban on targeting civilians and sexual violence.

Thus, not every armed non-state actor is necessarily a terrorist. Especially in times of increasing numbers of failed states and regions with civil wars, there is also a growing number of armed militias, guerrilla movements or national liberation armies who do not necessarily use terrorist methods as their main form of violence.

Moreover, we have a lot of former armed non-state organizations who became states or took over states, although they were called terrorists by their enemies before. Especially national liberation movements like the Algerian FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), the ANC (African National Congress), the Việt Cộng, or the Haganah who became the Israeli Defence Forces after the independence of Israel are examples of armed non-state actors who were violent non-state actors who became national armies or leading political parties of states. Many of these national liberation movements did largely, but not completely, abstain from violence against civilians and concentrated their armed struggle against the armed institutions of a state, especially its police and army.

Many of the present day national liberation movements see themselves as armies of a not-yet existing state or at least a certain entity. From the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) until the Free Papua Movement (OPM) today's armed national liberation movements follow a similar path. Although some of them are considered as terrorist organisations by some states, this can't be the basis of a solid scientific definition of terrorism. To avoid the old adage that one person's terrorist is simply another's freedom fighter, we have to avoid defining terrorism by political sympathies but rather define terrorism by its actions and

methods. Based on that, I suggested to define terrorism as a method of political communication that can be used by both, state- and non-state actors and that is defined by violence against civilian soft targets to produce fear and consternation (terror) in a population (Schmidinger, 2012: 16). This definition means not only that both, state and non-state actors can subscribe to methods of terrorism, but also that organizations with different ideologies can use methods of terrorism under certain circumstances.

Female Terrorists

Women did commit violence against civilian soft targets as armed non-state actors long before the present wave of jihadist terrorism. However, it is not by surprise that women who actively fought in groups who targeted also civilians were predominantly part of left wing guerrilla groups. Leila Khaled who made history in 1969 by becoming the first woman to hijack an airplane, was and still is a member of the left-nationalist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (Cragin/Daly, 2009: 81). Her armed struggle was not only an armed struggle against Israel, but she also became a role model of an armed women not only in the Middle East, but also in Europe. The Japan Red Army (JRA), a close cooperation partner of the PFLP at that time, was entirely led by a women. Fusako Shigenobu who became a legend also because of her unique position as a female terrorist led the JRA until her arrest in Japan in November 2000. Although the JRA's historic goals has been to overthrow the monarchy in Japan and the establishment of a socialist regime, it also became part of a global armed struggle closely linked with the Palestinian PFLP. It was Fusako Shigenobu who did not only play a crucial role for the contacts to the Palestinians, but also set up cells in Europe, especially in Berlin and Paris (O'Ballance, 1979: 151).

The German Red Army Faction (RAF) of the 1970s had a large number of female members as well. With Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof two of the most prominent founders were female. Also the second and third generation of the RAF had a significant number of female members. The strong presence of women in the RAF both fascinated and shocked the German public and created a different picture of militancy in the radical German left. Nevertheless the presence of women inside the RAF and their important role in the public appearance of the group, does not mean that patriarchy vanished within the group. Especially RAF-Co-Founder Andreas Baader was well known for his sexism and misogynist

mindset and even “in Ensslin’s writings we find the same abusive, antiwomen subdialect used by Baader, Vesper and many others on the Far Left; Ensslin appropriated these terms for herself and deployed them toward the end of honing the group’s inner core into killer unit.”(Scribner, 2015: 49) Nevertheless it was Ensslin and Meinhof who acted as the brains of RAF’s first generation.

The German state took the women of the RAF even more serious than the men, at least that’s what the advice supposedly given to the snipers in Germany’s anti-terrorist squads, to shoot the women first, tells us how serious the German state took the female RAF members (Riegler, 2009: 194).

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from Sri Lanka had not only a lot of armed female fighters, but also became infamous for using female suicide bombers (see: Herath, 2012), of whom Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, also known as Dhanu, who committed the suicide bombing against Rajiv Gandhi, became the most known (Narozhna / Knight, 2016: 57). All female suicide bombers of the LTTE came from their elite fighting unit, the Black Tigers. Women comprised up to 50% of the Black Tigers. From the 1990s until their end in 2009 up to 50 suicide attacks of the LTTE were committed by female fighters of the Black Tigers.

All these historic examples of terrorism by female fighters are examples of left wing revolutionary organizations and this is not a coincidence. Equality of men and women is part of left wing ideologies, even in their most ridiculous forms. There are cases of female terrorists in right wing and jihadist terrorism, but they are a few exceptions and if these are considered more closely, there are not only quantitative but also qualitative differences of the role of women in these organizations.

Beate Zschäpe, the sole known survivor of the German Nazi-terror group “Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund” (NSU) played rather the emotional and logistic backup for her male accomplices than a leading ideological and strategic role, like the women of the RAF. Although she was definitely as much a convinced Nazi as her male companions, she cooked for them and washed their clothes and thus mainly fulfilled her role as a women in the patriarchal mindset of her Co-Nazis.

Another exception are the Chechen female suicide bombers who were called ‘black widows’ by the Russians and Shakhidkas (female martyrs) by many Chechens. On June 7, 2000, the first Chechen women, Khava Barayeva and Luiza Magomadova, drove a truck with explosives

into a building in the Chechen town of Alkhan-Yurt that was used by Russian special forces. Although the victims of this attack were combatants and therefore we can't speak about a terrorist action as defined at the beginning of this paper,¹ this was the first suicide attack committed by Chechen women and other followed, including attacks against civilian targets. Khava Barayeva and Luiza Magomadova therefore became role models for other women who did not only attack combatants, but also civil targets.

The Historical Dictionary of the Chechen Conflict describes these female suicide bombers: "Some of these women have lost family members due to Russian atrocities, others have been raped, and most probably, they have all been actively brainwashed by the militants. Grieving for their loved ones and determined upon revenge, black widows can be recruited and trained by the extremists with relative ease. Arguably, no serious training is necessary to become a suicide bomber since it does not require any technical skills. Psychological readiness is the only essential part." (Askerov, 2015: 68)

Authors from the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, have analysed every Chechen suicide attack since they began in 2000 and summarised in an article in 2010 about the attackers: "The majority are male, but a huge fraction — over 40 percent — are women. Although foreign suicide attackers are not unheard of in Chechnya, of the 42 for whom we can determine place of birth, 38 were from the Caucasus. Something is driving Chechen suicide bombers, but it is hardly global jihad." (Pape / O'Rourke / McDermit, 2010)

In fact the emergence of these female suicide bombers is a result of the combination of the jihadization of a former secular nationalist movement (see.: King, 2008: 241) and the disastrous consequences of two wars with Russia with many civilian casualties. Pape, O'Rourke and McDermit (2010) mainly see the female suicide bombers as a consequence of the heavy civil losses in the Chechen wars and the way civilians were treated by the Russian forces. The costs of lives of civilians, the wide spread of sexual violence against Chechen women and the treatment of such female victims of sexual violence in the patriarchal Chechen society laid the base for the recruitment of these victims of war and sexualized violence for suicide bombing. Sexualized violence is perceived as a kind of guilt of the victims

1 Even a suicide attack against combatants, in this case Russian special forces, is not violence against civilian soft targets to produce fear and consternation (terror) in a population, but an act of war against an armed force.

in patriarchal societies. This made it an even more effective weapon for Russian soldiers and Chechen thugs. Victims of rape ‘lost their honour’ as much as women who ‘misbehaved’ in the eyes of the Chechen patriarchal society and especially in the eyes of the newly emerging extremely patriarchal jihadi groups.

Thus one of the reasons for the appearance of these ‘black widows’ was that “jihadis were able to manipulate the ostracization of women who break sexual mores in traditionalist Islamic societies, like those that still held sway or re-emerged in the post-Soviet North Caucasus.” (Hahn, 214: 260)

However, it would be too simple to see these female suicide bombers just as victims. Like other armed women, they also have an agency. Although Gordon Hahn admits that, “nearly half of all female suicide bombers have had relatives killed by Russian forces 2010 Moscow subway shakhidkas had been wives of leading Dagestani amirs as the latter organized terrorist attacks across the republic. In such cases, the mujahed’s partner is almost certainly a convinced mujahed herself, a point underscored no less by shakhidkas’ forcefully demonstrated willingness to detonate themselves.” (Hahn, 2014: 129)

Although Chechen shakhidkas were a novelty in jihadist terrorism, they are not an exemption anymore. The Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram started to use women as suicide bombers in 2014. Within the following 18 months Boko Haram used no less than 90 female suicide bombers, “claiming at least 500 lives and injuring further 700 people in Nigeria and Cameroon.” (Varin, 2016: 81) Besides that we also know some rare cases of suicide attacks committed by women in Iraq, beginning with an attack on a US-base in Tal Afar in 2005. (Spinner, 2005)

Although women were much stronger present in left wing and secular nationalist terrorism and although women who were active in extreme right wing terrorist groups like NSU were rather used as laundress and cooks than as terrorist in combat, women started to become used as suicide bombers in jihadist terrorist organizations with the Chechen ‘shakhidkas’ and the suicide bombers of Boko Haram.

Nevertheless there is an important qualitative difference between jihadist and extreme right wing female terrorists and left wing female terrorists. While women were used as suicide bombers by Chechen and Nigerian Jihadis and while women were used as laundress and cooks by extreme right wing terrorist groups, they did never get any important position in

one of these organizations. Suicide terrorists are killed after their action and thus can become a myth but never an important political figure. In the leadership of terrorist groups we only know women in left wing and left wing nationalist groups. Women in fact have been “largely absent from the ranks of global Islamist terrorists.” (Sageman, 2008: 111)

Women in Jihadi movements

Traditionally jihadist ideologists and preachers “refrained from calling on women to make their presence felt on the battlefield as warriors or have explicitly excluded them.” (Lahoud, 2014: 780)

Nevertheless, after the declaration of the so called Islamic state not only men, but also thousands of European women travelled to Syria and Iraq to live within what they expected to be the caliphate. Mainly young girls and women from different parts of Europe started what they called the hijra to the Islamic State (IS).

Although most of the European states consider all these women as members of a terrorist organizations, most of them did not commit a terrorist attack but rather wanted to live with a jihadi fighter in the Islamic state. However, it is without any doubt that these people had strong sympathies with an extreme form of jihadist thought and a political system that rigorously oppressed all opponents and all other forms of religious or political dissent.

In its heydays from 2014 to 2016, some estimates placed “the number of foreign fighters, who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join violent extremist groups (the overwhelming majority of whom will have joined IS) to be anywhere between 27,000 and 31,000 individuals from no less than 86 different countries” (Awan, 2016: 183f). The circles of sympathisers with the ideology of the IS was even much larger.

Working with sympathisers of the so called Islamic State in Austria I could find a lot of parallels between men and women who developed political sympathies with IS and considered to go there. However, there are also significant differences.

Jihadist positions have developed into a rebellious youth culture in 2014 in Europe, which attracted not only young adults from Muslim families. The thesis falls too short in assuming that this concerns only socially marginalised groups and those from underprivileged

educational backgrounds. Among European Jihadists, one can find also educated graduates, students and children from middle class families. What the different biographies of jihadist adolescents and young adults have in common is that they all have experienced various forms of alienation from this society and were then picked up by jihadist groups. Social problems constitute here only one of several concrete possibilities which might lead to such alienation.

At least for the Austrian case where I got to know many young women and men who were fascinated about IS I can say that there are significant differences between men and women who were fascinated by IS. Among young men, a certain fascination with violence, including sexualized violence, clearly plays an important role. Many are impressed by IS not despite, but precisely because of its display of brutal violence. In on-line debates among jihadist young men, they debated about also the possibility of sexual violence, the rape of women and girl prisoners of war. In 2014 young men from Vienna discussed about the price of Yazidi women who were kidnapped and the possibilities to “enjoy the spoils of war”. A striking fact is that almost all the young men missed a father figure and were looking for one in the form of jihadist preachers.

On the other hand, young women are often exaggeratedly altruistic, they want to “help poor children” persecuted by the Assad regime, and dreamed of becoming a nurse or kindergarten teacher in Raqqa or Mosul. Many of the young girls were recruited through flirting in order to then marry their jihadist fighter in Syria. The dreams of these young, mainly teenage girls, also had a sexual connotation, but rather they dreamed of “real men” they saw in their jihadi heroes, than of sexualized violence. (see: Schmidinger, 2015: 82)

While many men come from families where a male figure was missing, many young women suffered under a patriarchal father. For young men of Chechen background, who made up a significant number of jihadis of countries with large Chechen diasporas, also the lost war of their fathers played a significant role in their involvement in Syria. (see: Schmidinger, 2018: 224) This was even more important as Russia was and is directly involved in the Syrian civil war. Thus some Chechens did see the possibility to continue their war with Russia inside Syria. This longing for revenge for the lost war in Chechnya was mainly a male thing, while Chechen women who travelled to the “Islamic State” mainly followed their men or thought that they might have a better live with less discrimination in an “Islamic society”.

Most of the women followed classical gender roles and did not see their role in the role of a fighter or a terrorist, but rather in comforting the fighters and in raising children, including future fighters, for the caliphate. A woman we interviewed for a study about radicalisation in prison for the Austrian ministry of justice, who was convicted as a member of a terrorist organization defined herself not as a fighter and even less as a terrorist, but more as a settler of the caliphate, dreaming of an utopian Ummah, the community of “real” believers living together in peace under the strict law of Sharia (Hofinger / Schmidinger, 2017: 18). Women also described their migration to the IS as a process of emancipation from their strictly patriarchal – but not jihadi – family (Hofinger / Schmidinger, 2017: 24). Although some of these women were also ideologised and not all just young naïve girls, their dreams of a harmonic live under Sharia law were much less violent and more according to their gender role within patriarchal jihadi ideology, than the violent phantasies of young jihadi men.

Patriarchal gender roles and early marriage

For both, men and women their gender roles and the patriarchal standardisation of their gender roles, played an important role for their radicalisation. However, other than left wing ideologies, jihadi ideology in general does not see a role for women in the armed struggle. That’s why most jihadi women are not terrorists in a narrow definition but still active supporters of terrorism.

There was an all-female religious enforcement unit Al-Khansaa Brigade in the so called Islamic State that was used to police other women, but not groups of combatants. In 2015 a manifesto uploaded by Al-Khansaa Brigade’s media wing was published to “clarify the role of Muslim women and the life which is desired for them, that which will make them happy in this world and the hereafter.” (al-Khansaa, 2015: 12)

The manifesto focuses on traditional gender roles: “The problem today is that women are not fulfilling their fundamental roles, the role that is consistent with their deepest nature, for an important reason, that women are not presented with a true picture of man and, because of the rise in the number of emasculated men who do not shoulder the responsibility allocated to them towards their ummah, religion or people, and not even towards their houses or their sons, who are being supported by their wives. This idea has not penetrated the minds of many women.”(al-Khansaa, 2015: 17)

The manifesto does however not prevent women from learning and argues that Muslim man have to treat their women kindly because they are weak: "The average Muslim man is characterised by goodness and sympathy towards the weak. This was the normal way for the average man, even infidels, which would mean they should rise above harming women and criticise those who do, detract against and vilify them. This is women's fundamental role and rightful place. It is the harmonious way for her to live and interact amidst her sons and her people, to bring up and educate, protect and care for the next generation to come. She cannot fulfil this role if she is illiterate and ignorant, though. Hence, Islam does not ordain the forbidding of education or the blocking of culture from women."(al-Khanssaa, 2015: 18)

It sharply criticises western emancipation and feminism, especially the mix of gender and the unclear gender roles in the west: "If roles are mixed and positions overlap, humanity is thrown into a state of flux and instability. The base of society is shaken, its foundations crumble and its walls collapse."(al-Khanssaa, 2015: 19)

Marriage and motherhood are seen as the primary goals of Muslim women and girls need not wait until they're in their 20s to attain these goals. The "Islamic State" offered halal sex by early marriage which is not an unattractive offer for young Muslim girls who grew up in a contradictory world between very patriarchal families with a strict prohibition of any sexual activity before marriage and a society where sex is present nearly everywhere. As a wife of a future martyr sex is not only perceived halal, but even a way of taking part in the jihad of the husband. In fact the manifesto declares it as legitimate for a girl to be married at the age of nine and advises "pure girls" to be married "by sixteen or seventeen, while they are still young and active."(al-Khanssaa, 2015: 24)

The manifesto strongly focuses on different roles of men and women and does not see a role for women in direct combat, but rather in the "education" of the next generation and in preparing future fighters for the "Islamic State". Thus the contribution of women to jihad is considered not as an active participation in combat, but in creating the next generation of fighters and in creating comfort and physical and psychological recreation of their husbands, the active fighters and terrorists.

In fact this was not just theory. From my contacts with parents of European jihadists who left for Syria, I know that young European girls were very soon remarried, when they lost their husbands. Young women called their parents in law in Austria about to cook the favourite

recipes of their husbands and tried their best to create a family home in Raqqa or Mosul. Pictures sent home to their parents often remind on family idylls rather than on war zones. Only after the so called Islamic State lost most of its territory and when the European housewives had to leave their luxurious apartments and houses that were confiscated from Shiites, Christians and opponents of IS, they started to complain to their parents that they only have bread and water for their kids.

However, the reinforcement of extremely patriarchal gender roles does not mean that the women who try to migrate to the “Islamic State” and become part of the IS are just victims and not also actors for their own right. Although IS had mainly non-combat roles for women, violence is an essential part of their embraced ideology. Anita Peresin and Alberto Alberto Cervone argued in an article in 2015 that it is “unlikely that it would accommodate such aspiration, at least in the areas of the proclaimed caliphate. It could be different in the West, where women returning from conflict areas or those, even more numerous, anxious to join but unable to travel, could engage in violent acts.”(Peresin / Cervone, 2015: 495)

Should Jihadi women fight?

Although the majority of female supporters of jihadi terrorism did not see their own role as fighters or terrorist, there was a discussion about a more active role of women in combat inside the IS. As described earlier, there are certain cases like Chechnya or Boko Haran, where jihadist groups did use women as combatants, but nearly all of them were just used as suicide bombers and we don't know a single case where a jihadi woman could get an important political or military position inside any jihadi organization. Women played a role as emotional and organizational backup for male combatants and terrorists. However, other than in left wing guerrilla groups, like the guerrillas connected with the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerê Kurdistanê, PKK) (see: Flach, 2007) or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo, FARC—EP (see: Sanín / Franco, 2017) who practise their involvement in armed struggle “as an active practice of citizenship” (Felices-Luna, 2007), jihadist women did not fight for specific women rights and are not known for establishing combat units of women.

Nevertheless, such an active participation of women in combat was discussed within jihadist circles until “a broad consensus has emerged that it is permissible for them to fight, but only in certain highly restricted circumstances. Despite this, to date, most jihadi groups have steered clear of mobilising them for battle.” (Winter, 2018) These highly restricted circumstances were the justifications for using women as suicide bombers. Nevertheless Chechen guerrillas, Boko Haram and some Iraqi jihadists were somehow the exceptions in jihadi circles until 2018. Although Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of the predecessor organization of IS did allow female suicide bombers (see: Zarqawi, 2005) his organization never used women as combatants other than as suicide bombers. Pictures of armed women in niqab that were published by media networks close to the “Islamic State” were sole propaganda until recently. Interviewing Kurdish commanders of Peshmerga Units, Yazidi militias and People’s Mobilization Forces (PMF) from Iraq and of People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) in Syria during my different field research trips between 2013 and 2018, I never found a single group who ever met female fighters of the “Islamic State” or any other jihadi group² in Syria or Iraq.

In the most important media of the so called Islamic State, its journals Dabiq and Rumiyah, both of which were al-Hayat Media Center products, and an-Naba’, which was published by the IS Central Media Diwan the role of women were still seen mainly in the civil support of male fighters. In an Interview with Hayat Boumeddiene, the former wife of Amedy Coulibaly, who killed four civilians in an attack on a grocery store in Paris in January 2015, she announced: “The absence of an obligation of jihad and war upon the Muslim woman—except in defense against someone attacking her—does not overturn her role in building the Ummah, producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle.” (Muhajira, 2016: 41) Umm Basir al-Muhajirah, how Boumeddiene was called in the “Islamic State”, did not ask women to fight by themselves, but to encourage and support men to do so. After all it seems that was her role in her husband’s attack in Paris 2015 as well. According to media reports and to Coulibaly’s attorney, Boumeddiene was the more radical of the two, but her role was to support and encourage Coulibaly and not to commit the attack herself.

2 In Syria also other jihadi militias had encounters with Kurdish units, like the al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (until 2016) or Ahrar ash-Sham. During my field research for books on Afrin, Rojava and Sinjar, I asked several commanders of different units who thought these jihadi groups, if they ever met female jihadi fighters and all of them denied that.

An extended analyses of IS-media concluded in 2017 that “female supporters were told to stay at home and maintain a sedentary and reclusive lifestyle; second, they were advised to support the Islamic State through money and words, rather than deeds; and, third, they were instructed to have as many children as their bodies would permit and be open to remarriage if their husband was killed on the battlefield. For years, this tripartite message—which largely conforms to the traditional jihadi reasoning regarding women and war—was consistently and clearly disseminated by the Islamic State from multiple official channels in multiple languages. Women in the caliphate were cherished as necessary parts of the jihadi project but never encouraged to engage in violence, and on the rare occasion that they did, the organization’s ambivalence was clear.”(Winter / Margolin, 2017)

However, soon after this analyses a text was published entitled “The obligation on women to engage in jihad against the enemies” an-Naba’, the Arabic language magazine of the IS Central Media Diwan. Now the author argued that women were now obliged to actively engage in jihad in the name of the caliphate. (an-Naba, 2017: 11) As a justification for this position the author drew on the example of women that had fought at the area of Prophet Mohammad. Already in summer 2017 an article in Rumiyah did go into a similar direction. In a video called “Inside the Khilafah 7” from February 2018 IS finally illustrated that position with pictures of jihadi fighters wearing women’s cloths. A voice from the off referred to the fighters shown as “chaste mujahid” women who are “journeying to [their] Lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for religion and for the honour of [their] sisters imprisoned by the apostate Kurds” (al-Hayat Media Center, 2018)

Analyst Charlie Winter argues that, “even if ISIS’s recent signalling does not manifest in a mass mobilisation of female fighters, it is likely to have a long-term impact. The visual depiction of fighting women left many pro-ISIS jihadis shocked at best and disillusioned at worst, and if the reception of ‘Inside the khilafah 7’ proves to be lastingly negative, there is a distinct possibility that it could be the first and last time ISIS boasts of its female combatants. However, even if this is the case, that does not negate what has already come to pass, and absent a full retraction of this new policy position — which would be unlikely but not unprecedented —the group’s rhetorical stance on the permissibility of mujahidat still stands.” (Winter, 2018)

In fact the move towards an acceptance of female combatants by the IS is definitely a result of the decline of the “caliphate” as a para-state. With the decline IS as a para-state also the roles of women in the civil live of the “Islamic State” became limited. After the battle of Kobane and the loss of territories in both Syria and Iraq, “its state-building efforts appeared to be crumbling, as living conditions deteriorated across the territories under its control, exposing the shortcomings of a group that devoted most of its energies to fighting battles, enforcing strict rules, and meting out horrific punishments to those who violated its rules or were deemed treasonous or sinful.” (Hashim, 2018: 267) Although the organization is rebuilding its structures in many parts of Iraq and Syria as an underground terrorist network, the territory held by forces of the IS was reduced to a few minor pockets of land by the End of 2018. By the end of 2018 the “Islamic State” mainly needed fighters and terrorists and no more nurses or teachers. And finally the possibility to imitate an idyllic family life as a backup for their fighters are very limited if you control only a handful of villages anymore. In messages sent home to their parents female IS-members complained that they only have dry bread to feed their children anymore and that medical care for their children does not really work anymore.³ In the final battle of the Islamic State in the village of Baghouz the fighters of the Syrian democratic forces finally also faced female ISIS members fighting against them.

Although this situation encouraged many of these women to surrender and hand themselves and their children over to the Syrian Democratic Forces – led by the Kurdish People’s Defence Forces – the leadership of the “Islamic State” wants to prevent this and seems to search for new use of these women. Using them as fighters or suicide bombers would be more useful for the jihadis than surrender.

Conclusio

Other than in left wing or nationalist guerrilla and terrorist organizations women never played important roles in extreme right wing and jihadist terrorist organizations. Some jihadist organizations, like the Caucasus Emirate or Boko Haram, used women as suicide

3 These is information I got from parents of young women from Austria who travelled to the “Islamic State” and married there. I know the names of these women and their location. In some cases I even saw their text messages. However, this is confidential information and I can’t publish more about these persons and the reasons I got these information by now.

bombers, but they never played any role in the military ranks and political leadership of these organizations. Misogyny and patriarchal gender roles are an integral part of jihadist and extreme right wing groups, which hinders women to play an active part in their armed organizations. However, these groups still need women for their moral and logistic support.

Gender differences can be observed in the fanatization processes of young Europeans towards jihadism: While young women were attracted by ideology, sexual adventure and a perverted form of altruism and had not the intention to fight themselves, many men were attracted by the adventure of war and the possibility to carry out extreme acts of violence.

In the so called “Islamic State” women were finally needed for numerous civil functions and were never allowed to become active fighters. Only with the decline of IS as a para-state the use of women as fighters was declared as permissible by IS media. However, that does not yet lead to a larger number of women used in combat.

Thus we can observe strong differences in the mobilization and use of men and women in terrorist organizations with strong patriarchal ideologies. This was different for left wing and nationalist terrorist organisations in the 20th century, where women could even find a kind of emancipation in leading positions of terrorist organizations.

Eventually organizations with different ideologies used terrorist methods in history. However, the role of women within these organizations and the reasons for women to join such organizations depends more on the ideology and the strategic usefulness of women than the use of terrorism by certain groups.

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