

**DANGEROUS DISSONANCE:**  
ARMED GROUPS THAT VIOLATE WOMEN'S RIGHTS,  
AND THE WOMEN WHO SUPPORT THEM

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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## Women as Perpetrators and Supporters of Violence

In the wake of accounts surfacing of American and European women joining the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and reports of ISIS raping and forcing women and girls into marriages, the notion of women supporting armed groups that violate women's rights has been particularly perplexing. Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and ISIS are three militant Islamist groups that face accusations of severely curtailing women's rights, doing so by such measures as kidnapping and selling women and girls,<sup>1</sup> barring women's participation in commerce,<sup>2</sup> and strategically raping, enslaving and forcing into "marriage" minority women and girls.<sup>3</sup> Even still, these groups have women supporters and funders, and many of them speak proudly of their involvement. Why?

The purpose of this policy report is to explore how and why girls and women lend their support to these three groups with mandates and actions that seek to restrict girls' and women's rights. The three groups were selected primarily because they are relatively well-known to the international policy community for posing serious security threats in their respective regions, and potentially beyond. They all commit grave atrocities against women and girls, and operationalize them in multiple, sometimes non-traditional ways. Lastly, these groups are spurring or exacerbating humanitarian crises and contributing to the failure of the states within the borders they operate.

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<sup>1</sup> Abubakar, Aminu, and Josh Levs. "I Will Sell Them,' Boko Haram Leader Says of Kidnapped Nigerian Girls." CNN. May 6, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/05/world/africa/nigeria-abducted-girls/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia." Human Rights Watch. April 19, 2010. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2010/04/19/harsh-war-harsh-peace>.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, Chris. "ISIS Sex Slaves: Captured Iraqi Women Strangling Each Other and Killing Themselves to Escape Rape." Daily Mirror. December 22, 2014. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-sex-slaves-captured-iraqi-4857970>.

Another characteristic that unites these groups is that they represent a current global trend of violent, non-state armed groups that employ Islamist rhetoric for recruitment, radicalization and justification of their actions, especially the treatment of females. This report is not intended to reinforce, or comment on, any notion of Islam as an inherently violent or undemocratic religion. In fact, violent crime in Muslim-majority countries trails behind that of Christian-majority countries like Venezuela and South Africa.<sup>4</sup> A Pew survey also found “clear majorities of Muslims [in the countries polled] oppose violence in the name of Islam” and that “ about three-quarters or more in Pakistan (89%), Indonesia (81%), Nigeria (78%) and Tunisia (77%), say (...) acts of violence that target civilians are *never* justified.”<sup>5</sup> Academics and religious scholars alike still hotly debate the topic but that debate is not the focus of this report. Instead, it is meant to recognize religious rhetoric in general as a powerful tool of persuasion for men and women alike that is frequently misappropriated to justify violent acts, and for the purpose of this report, acts against women.

Nimmi Gowrinathan attempts to shed some light why women support groups that ostensibly violate their rights as dictated by international law: the right to achieve legal, social, political, civil, cultural and economic equality in society and freedom from physical, sexual and psychological violence.<sup>6</sup> In her piece on women in ISIS, she asserts that the question itself reveals more about those asking it than those it is asked of. She writes, “those who ask it assume, first, that women are more peaceful than men by nature; and second, that women who participate

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<sup>4</sup> Fish, M. Steven. "No, Islam Isn't Inherently Violent, And The Math Proves It." The Daily Beast. February 15, 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/15/no-islam-isn-t-inherently-violent-and-the-math-proves-it.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "Muslim Publics Share Concerns about Extremist Groups." Pew Research Center. September 10, 2013. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/10/muslim-publics-share-concerns-about-extremist-groups/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women." United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/48/104. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>.

in armed rebellion are little more than cannon fodder in a man's game, fighting foolishly for a movement that will not benefit them."<sup>7</sup> Both are oversimplifications of women's roles in, and motivations to join, non-state armed groups including, but not limited to, ISIS. In many cases, women are forced or coerced into joining these groups. In the cases that women join voluntarily, it is primarily because their interpretation of what will benefit them is inconsistent with international norms regarding women's rights.

The traditional notion that women do not naturally "belong" in certain roles, echoed in the Gowrinathan quote above, is frequently challenged when discussing dynamics of women in conflict and war, as women are primarily viewed as the group needing protection, not doing the protecting or violating. The most apparent exception to this is women as protectors of children, a group with whom they are naturally associated as the protectors. Furthermore, women are rarely presented as the group from whom others need protection in situations of armed conflict. This is not an entirely unfounded stereotype: while males primarily make up the majority of combatants and combat-related fatalities and injuries, more women die in the long term from conflict,<sup>8</sup> and are usually not combatants. Even still, women have exhibited an enormous capacity for brutality and cruelty, repudiating the conventional gendered assumption that women are not capable of the same atrocities as men.

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<sup>7</sup> Gowrinathan, Nimmi. "The Women of ISIS: Understanding and Combating Female Extremism." *Foreign Affairs*. August 21, 2014. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141926/nimmi-gowrinathan/the-women-of-isis>.

<sup>8</sup> Plümper, Thomas, and Eric Neumayer. "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy." *International Organization* 60 (2006): Pp. 723–754. [https://www.gdnonline.org/resources/SSRN\\_Plumper\\_Neumayer\\_GenderWar.pdf](https://www.gdnonline.org/resources/SSRN_Plumper_Neumayer_GenderWar.pdf).

A historical look at state-level conflicts also lends credence to the argument that women cannot be expected to disassociate from violence and other war crimes simply because of their femininity. Within a year of the end of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, African Rights, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) published an extensive report detailing the significant role women played in the conflict. Although women were not allowed to serve in the army and militia (referred to as the “interahamwe”), women of all ages, education levels and statuses were involved directly as perpetrators, or indirectly as accessories, informants or “cheerleaders.”<sup>9</sup>

Accounts of survivors of the Rwandan genocide detailed in the report describe how women would turn family members over to soldiers, or that mothers and grandmothers “refused to hide their own Tutsi children and grandchildren.”<sup>10</sup> Female teachers identified Tutsi girls in their schools for intimidation, beatings or rape by other teachers or students.<sup>11</sup> Nuns participated in the burning of victims, and refused to provide sanctuary to Tutsis in churches, monasteries and convents, and sometimes called armed soldiers on refugees who had forced their way in, seeking sanctuary from the violence.<sup>12</sup> Female doctors and nurses showed soldiers where others were hiding, handed over their patients, or refused to care for wounded Tutsis.<sup>13</sup> Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, who at the time was the Minister for the Family and Women’s Empowerment, used her authority to order the rape and murder of thousands of Tutsis who had sought refuge in government offices and schools. Nyiramasuhuko’s role in the conflict is at least partly a

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<sup>9</sup> Some women reportedly were seen “singing and ululating the killers into action” if they themselves were not doing the killing. “Rwanda, Not so Innocent : When Women Become Killers.” African Rights (Organization). 1995. Pg. 1

<sup>10</sup> “Rwanda, Not so Innocent : When Women Become Killers.” African Rights (Organization). 1995. Pg.4

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 48

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pg. 5

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg. 142



reflection of the intense controls and norms that Rwandan society imposed on both men and women to follow orders as dictated by superiors. However as the Nuremberg Trials introduced the international norm that following an unlawful order is not a legitimate defense against charges of war crimes,<sup>14</sup> Nyiramasuhuko became the first woman charged with genocide by an international court in 2011.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the most disturbing images to come out of the Iraq War in 2003 were those of the scandal involving the treatment of Iraqi detainees by U.S. soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Prisoners held at Abu Ghraib reported that they were “subjected to electric shocks, sexual violence, forced nudity and other assaults on their bodies and dignity”<sup>16</sup> by U.S. soldiers in charge of the prison and photos show U.S. soldiers torturing and abusing prisoners, and raping both male and female detainees.<sup>17</sup> As horrifying as the accusations were against a country that has long espoused ideals of human rights, even more horrifying to the general public was when photos emerged of female soldiers smiling with naked prisoners on leashes, giving the thumbs-up next to corpses and naked Iraqi men who had been forced to masturbate, a form of sexual torture.

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<sup>14</sup> "Principles of International Law Recognized in the Charter of the Nürnberg Tribunal and in the Judgment of the Tribunal." United Nations. 1950. [http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/draft\\_articles/7\\_1\\_1950.pdf](http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/draft_articles/7_1_1950.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> "First Woman to Be Charged with Genocide Sentenced to Life in Prison." The Telegraph. June 24, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/rwanda/8596121/First-woman-to-be-charged-with-genocide-sentenced-to-life-in-prison.html>.

<sup>16</sup> "Abu Ghraib, 10 Years Later." New York Times. April 22, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/opinion/abu-ghraib-10-years-later.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/opinion/abu-ghraib-10-years-later.html?_r=0).

<sup>17</sup> Gardham, Duncan, and Paul Cruickshank. "Abu Ghraib Abuse Photos 'Show Rape'" The Telegraph. May 27, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/5395830/Abu-Ghraib-abuse-photos-show-rape.html>.

The graphic nature of the photos and undeniable involvement of female soldiers had a profound effect on Iraqis, Americans, and feminists around the world. “The photos did something else to me, as a feminist:” said author Barbara Ehrenreich, “they broke my heart. I had no illusions about the U.S. mission in Iraq -- whatever exactly it is -- but it turns out that I did have some illusions about women.”<sup>18</sup> A columnist for the St. Petersburg Times, Mary Jo Melone, made similar statements about how these images revealed perceptions about what women were *supposed* to do. Talking about one of the photos showing Army reservist Lynndie England abusing a prisoner, Melone says, “I can't get that picture of England out of my head because this is not how women are expected to behave.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, even some feminist scholars struggle with the notion that given the chance, women can display the morally reprehensible and violent behavior that had long been attributed to men.

Evidence shows women's capacity for violence, brutality, extremism and cruelty on an individual level, so it should come as no surprise that women also commit these acts as members of militant non-state armed groups. In fact, modern trends in militant non-state armed groups (NSAGs) show that women provide a significant amount of support. According to Dr. Christopher Harmon, a professor at the Institute of World Politics, “females are central to membership rosters and operational roles in nearly all insurgencies.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara. "Feminism's Assumptions Upended." Los Angeles Times. May 16, 2004. <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/may/16/opinion/op-ehrenreich16>.

<sup>19</sup> Melone, Mary Jo. "We've Come a Long, and Wrong, Way." St. Petersburg Times Online. May 7, 2004. [http://www.sptimes.com/2004/05/07/Columns/We\\_ve\\_come\\_a\\_long\\_an.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2004/05/07/Columns/We_ve_come_a_long_an.shtml).

<sup>20</sup> Dyer, John. "International Arrests Show Women Are Playing an Active Role in Al Shabaab." Vice News. July 25, 2014. <https://news.vice.com/article/international-arrests-show-women-are-playing-an-active-role-in-al-shabaab>.

Scholars in gender and security studies, such as Mia Bloom, Laura Sjoberg and Anne Speckhard, have written extensively on women's involvement and support in NSAGs. Bloom states, "most often, the primary contribution expected of women has been to sustain an insurgency by giving birth to many fighters and raising them in a revolutionary environment."<sup>21</sup> While true, exceptions indicate women's roles in NSAG's are neither ubiquitous nor consistent, can manifest in multiple ways, and change throughout the course of an NSAG's existence.

Women may provide remote support such as by sending money, or may physically join non-state armed groups. In the NSAG, women may hold positions within the groups that are traditionally reserved for men such as recruiters, guards, prison wardens and, more rarely, suicide bombers. Women may also hold more feminized roles in NSAGs as wives of fighters, who cook, produce children and look after the house while their husband/fighters are away. Another crucial role women play in NSAGs is that of mother to a new generation of young men and women who will assumedly further the cause.

Women in armed groups date back to the Celts and ancient Romans, and "historic accounts of girls' active participation goes back at least as far as the fifth century"<sup>22</sup> Bloom notes, "Women have played prominent roles in the Russian Narodnaya Volya in the nineteenth century, the Irish Republican Army, the Baader-Meinhof organization in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)."<sup>23</sup> Leila Khaled of the PFLP became the first female face of the conflict between Israel and Palestine when, in 1969

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<sup>21</sup> Bloom, Mia. "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend." *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (2007): 94-102.

<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/daed.2007.136.1.94>

<sup>22</sup> Mazurana, Dyan et al., "Women, Girls and Non State Armed Groups," in Carol Cohn (editor) *Women & Wars*, Polity Press: Cambridge (2013), pp. 146-168.

<sup>23</sup> Bloom, Mia. "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend."

she was involved in the hijacking of TWA Flight 840.<sup>24</sup> Palestinian groups had initially banned the use of women as suicide bombers and fighters, but eventually changed strategy and “found ways to reconcile militarized patriarchal beliefs with the use of females to carry out their armed struggle.”<sup>25</sup> The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade “even set up a special unit to train female suicide bombers” and named it after the first female suicide bomber in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Wafa Idris.<sup>26</sup>

In the Chechen region in Russia, women have been active in suicide bombings since 2000, when Khava Barayeva carried out a suicide mission at a Russian military base.<sup>27</sup> The group of Chechen women who organized to follow suit were quickly dubbed “Black Widows,” as many were allegedly acting out of revenge for the killings of their husbands, sons and brothers by Russian forces.<sup>28</sup> Since then, Chechen female suicide bombers have carried out dozens of attacks that have killed and injured thousands,<sup>29</sup> inciting fear in Russia.<sup>30</sup>

A Japanese woman, Fusako Shigenobu, was one of the most wanted terrorists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for coordinating terrorist attacks, bombings and hijackings in the 1970s. Shigenobu

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<sup>24</sup> Bloom, Mia, “My daughter the terrorist, Sari soldiers, and Leila Khaled: Hijacker, Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward terrorism and genocide, 2:2, (2009) 138-141, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17467580903305531#abstract>.

<sup>25</sup> Mazurana, 163.

<sup>26</sup> Bloom, Mia. "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend."

<sup>27</sup> "Terrorist Organization Profile: Black Widows." University of Maryland National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. March 1, 2008. [http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/terrorist\\_organization\\_profile.asp?id=3971](http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=3971).

<sup>28</sup> "Black Widows - Chechen Republic – General Terminology." Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium. <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/black-widows-chechen-republic>

<sup>29</sup> Anne Speckhard. "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:11, 2008. Pgs. 995-1023.

<sup>30</sup> "Volgograd Bombs: Second Blast Kills 14 a Day after First Attack." *The Australian News*. December 31, 2013. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/volgograd-bombs-second-blast-kills-14-a-day-after-first-attack/story-e6frg6so-1226791724702?nk=ff5cb4f83f22c96cea4bab2890db2f5a>.

founded the Japanese Red Army in 1970, a militant leftist group calling for the overthrow of the Japanese government.<sup>31</sup> Under her leadership, the Red Army carried out an attack at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel that killed 26 people and injured 78 in 1972.<sup>32</sup> Shigenobu is currently serving a 20-year sentence after being arrested in 2000.<sup>33</sup>

Women's voluntary involvement in armed conflict comes from a combination of factors, and can be influenced by the type and aggressiveness of the recruitment rhetoric employed by the NSAG. Women may join out of political or religious ideology, or with the hope that they will exact revenge on the opposing group for a personal trauma or grievance. Recruitment campaigns by the NSAG may also convince women that they will find protection within the group, or that they have no other alternatives for protection or income. Groups may also recruit women as they become fractured or begin to lose popular support, hoping that a female face to their struggle will attract sympathy and increase support.<sup>34</sup> Women are also recruited for their ability to more adeptly evade security checkpoints. This is particularly true for groups operating in more traditional societies, exploiting "traditional sensitivities of the human body and restrictions upon which males have access and can touch individual females."<sup>35</sup>

For those who do not join voluntarily, women and girls may be coerced, tricked or forced into participation in an insurgent group, or abducted from their homes. However for women who

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<sup>31</sup> "Japanese Red Army (JRA)." Espionage Information: Encyclopedia of Espionage, Intelligence and Security. January 1, 2014. <http://www.faqs.org/espionage/Int-Ke/Japanese-Red-Army-JRA.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Japanese Red Army Leader Arrested." BBC News. November 8, 2000. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1012780.stm>.

<sup>33</sup> McCurry, Justin. "Founder of Japan's Red Army in Final Appeal for Freedom." The Guardian. December 12, 2008. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/13/japan-fusako-shigenobu-red-army>.

<sup>34</sup> Mazurana, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 159.

voluntarily join or support militant armed groups with nationalistic, ethnic, religious or territorial aims, they largely do so for the same reasons as men. Anne Speckhard, when discussing female suicide bombers, indicates that motivational sets for the sexes are not profoundly different, including: physical or psychological trauma, revenge, lack of positive identity, desire for adventure, and/or desire to redeem the corrupted self, among others.<sup>36</sup> Less examined, however, is the support that groups with strong anti-feminist rhetoric and activities receive from women.

In this report, each case study will explore the armed group in two parts. The first section examines the group itself: who makes up the group, what is their end game, and what these groups are doing vis à vis women in terms of rights violations. The second section examines the role of women in these groups: who are the women lending their support, what their roles are in the group, and what evidence lends explanations for the involvement. The case studies and concluding analysis examines how justificatory religious rhetoric is employed in recruiting and justifying treatment of women and girls, along with political, economic and social features of the relevant conflicts. It will also present possible motivators for the women supporting these groups, taking into consideration the extent to which they are likely providing their support voluntarily. Through greater understanding, I not only challenge traditional notions of appropriate roles for women in conflict, but also provide a more nuanced view of these armed groups and their supporters.

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<sup>36</sup> Anne Speckhard. "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:11, 2008. Pgs. 995-1023.

## Case Study: Boko Haram

Nigeria today is the strongest economy and most populous country in Africa. Yet speaking of Nigeria as one country belies not only its history but many underlying causes for its internal issues. Under the British sphere of influence in the late nineteenth century, before it was an official colony, modern Nigeria consisted of multiple distinct territories with their own rulers, religions and customs; the northern territories were predominantly Muslim and the southern territories were predominantly Christian. The British consolidated these territories into two protectorates, Northern and Southern Nigeria, and in 1914, it merged the two colonies into one for administrative convenience. In 1960, when the British granted independence to the large colony as “Nigeria”, it became one country with internal tensions and divisions that trace back centuries.<sup>37</sup>

These divisions remain relevant today. As former United States Ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell states, “broad differences between North and South are a Nigerian historical, political and religious reality, and, as such, the distinction between the two provides a legitimate analytical lens.”<sup>38</sup> Since the time of colonization, the northern and southern regions of Nigeria have been distrustful of each other, with disparities in economic growth rates fueling animosity. As the continent’s largest oil producer, most investment in Nigeria is concentrated in the south

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<sup>37</sup>Ochonu, Moses. "The Roots of Nigeria's Religious and Ethnic Conflict." GlobalPost. March 10, 2014. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/nigeria/140220/nigeria-religious-ethnic-conflict-roots>.

<sup>38</sup>Campbell, Amb. John. "Why Nigeria's North South Distinction Is Important." Huffington Post. February 7, 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amb-john-campbell/why-nigerias-north-south-b\\_817734.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amb-john-campbell/why-nigerias-north-south-b_817734.html).

where oil is extracted.<sup>39</sup> Although corruption and mismanagement, especially in the security sector,<sup>40</sup> remain significant problems for the country overall, investments in health and education are substantial in the south compared to those in the north.<sup>41</sup> The religious bifurcation of Nigeria has also contributed to tensions, as leaders on both sides invoke religious rhetoric to condemn the other.<sup>42</sup>

Although Nigeria's GDP is \$510 billion dollars, 70% of the population lives in poverty<sup>43</sup> and the country ranks in the top 20 of the Failed States Index,<sup>44</sup> prompting some political observers, notably former Ambassador Campbell, to contend that it is on the brink of collapse.<sup>45</sup> This has been attributed to multiple factors: "its history of perpetual ethno-regional and religious clashes, bulging youth population, bad governance, endemic elite corruption, poor health care, environmental degradation, decrepit and underdeveloped infrastructures, international criminality, political instability...."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Nigeria." U.S. Energy Information Administration. December 30, 2013.  
<http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=NI>.

<sup>40</sup> Ikita, Philip. "Corruption in Nigeria, Not Just Boko Haram, Is at the Root of Violence." The Guardian. July 11, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/jul/11/boko-haram-nigeria-violence-corruption-security>.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell.

<sup>42</sup> Ochonu.

<sup>43</sup> Faul, Michelle. "Nigeria: Economy \$510B, Biggest in Africa." USA Today. April 6, 2014.  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/04/06/nigeria-economy-510-billion-biggest-in-africa/7389395/>.

<sup>44</sup> "Failed States Index Five-Year Trends, 2008-2013." Fund for Peace. April 6, 2014.  
<http://ffp.statesindex.org/fsi-trends-2013>.

<sup>45</sup> "Collapse of Nigerian State Would Threaten U.S. Interests in the Region, Cautions Former Ambassador John Campbell in New Book." Council on Foreign Relations. November 18, 2010.  
<http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/collapse-nigerian-state-would-threaten-us-interests-region-cautions-former-ambassador-john-campbell-new-book/p23445>.

<sup>46</sup> Maiangwa, Benjamin, Ufo Okeke Uzodike, Ayo Whetho, and Hakeen Onapajo. "'Baptism by Fire': Boko Haram and the Reign of Terror in Nigeria." Africa Today 59, no. 2 (2012): 41-57.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/africatoday.59.2.41>.



The northern parts of Nigeria seem to suffer from underdevelopment particularly:

In Borno State, the birthplace of Boko Haram: Only 2% of children under 25 months have been vaccinated; 83% of young people are illiterate; 48.5% of children do not go to school. Another recent report by the National Population Commission found that literacy rates were much lower among states in the north, and that 72 percent of children around the ages of 6–16 had never attended schools in Borno State. Also, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data on poverty in Nigeria shows that looking into each specific zone, the highest poverty rate of 64.8 percent is recorded in the North-East zone. On the other hand, the lowest poverty rate of 31.2 percent is recorded in the South-East.(...) As for the poverty index in Nigeria, the poorest five states are all situated in the northern areas.<sup>47</sup>

As Blattman and Miguel analyze, the correlation between poverty and internal conflict “is one of the most robust empirical relationships in the literature”, showing that “countries towards the bottom of the world income distribution—many in Africa—have several times more wars than those in the top quartile.”<sup>48</sup> It is within this context that Boko Haram emerged in northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram’s official name is “Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad”, which translates to “People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad.”<sup>49</sup> The shortened version, Boko Haram, comes from the colloquial Hausa phrase that translates to “Western education is forbidden”. Although religious extremism in Nigeria has been present since before independence, most sources identify 2002 as the year Boko Haram was founded by Mohammed Yusuf, a radical Muslim cleric.<sup>50</sup> Yusuf opposed education that he perceived to be

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<sup>47</sup> Agbiboa, Daniel E. “Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37:1, 41-67, 2014. DOI:10.1080/1057610X.2014.853602.

<sup>48</sup> Blattman, Christopher, and Edward Miguel. “Civil War.” *Journal of Economic Literature* 48, no. 1 (2010): 3-57. <http://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2010.CivilWar.JEL.pdf>, pg 4

<sup>49</sup> Aly Sergie, Mohammed, and Toni Johnson. “Boko Haram.” Council on Foreign Relations. October 7, 2014. <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/boko-haram/p25739>.

<sup>50</sup> Agbiboa.

“Western”<sup>51</sup> and interpreted much of Nigeria’s problems, especially those in the north, to be caused by “Westernization” that led to the exploitation of resources and related corruption and inequality plaguing the north.<sup>52</sup> The initial goals of the group were “to uproot the corruption and injustice in Nigeria, which it blamed on Western influences, and to impose Shari’a, or Islamic law.”<sup>53</sup> To that end, Yusuf built a “religious complex” with a mosque and Islamic school where poor, Muslim families from Nigeria and surrounding countries would send their children.<sup>54</sup>

There is little information available about the school itself- who attended, how many students were there, and their ages. However, it seems the school and religious complex allowed Yusuf to provide an Islamic education for those who disagreed with the secular education available in government-funded schools, and indoctrinate students with vehemently anti-Western views.<sup>55</sup> The nascent group quickly expanded its support base, as Yusuf “was able to exploit the frustration and disappointment and blend it with an Islamist agenda that rejected the failings of secular government”.<sup>56</sup> According to the Council on Foreign Relations, “Before 2009, the group did not aim to violently overthrow the government....But violent clashes between Christians and Muslims and harsh government treatment, including pervasive police brutality, encouraged the

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<sup>51</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Who Are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?" BBC News. May 20, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501>.

<sup>52</sup> "Boko Haram." Encyclopaedia Britannica. May 20, 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1581959/Boko-Haram>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Who Are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?"

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, David, and Gillian Parker. "Nigeria Falls into 'a State of War' as Islamist Insurgency Rages." The Guardian. March 8, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/08/nigeria-state-war-islamist-insurgency>.

group to radicalize.”<sup>57</sup> In a climate of poverty, corruption and police brutality, followers of Yusuf’s teachings began attacking police stations and security forces.<sup>58</sup>

Clashes between Boko Haram and security forces reached a head in July 2009, when 700 Boko Haram members died in a violent confrontation with the Nigerian army, and Mohammed Yusuf was killed while in police custody.<sup>59</sup> After this event, the group slipped underground, factions broke away, moved across borders and/or reportedly received further training.<sup>60</sup> Boko Haram announced its re-emergence in 2010 under Abubakar Shekau. Although Shekau leads the main bloc, Boko Haram itself doesn’t appear to represent a monolithic entity under his leadership. The U.S. Congressional Research Service reports,

there are apparent disagreements over tactics and the group’s civilian death toll. Like Al Shabaab, an Islamist insurgent group in Somalia, some Boko Haram leaders appear focused on building ties with “core” Al Qaeda and affiliated groups and pursuing a transnational agenda, while others remain focused exclusively on a domestic insurgency. It is unclear to what extent the group’s leader, Abubakar Shekau, exerts operational control over its various cells.<sup>61</sup>

Although central Boko Haram command does not appear to be directly linked with Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015, a move which may be largely symbolic or “an act of desperation.”<sup>62</sup> That being said, it could result in greater coordination between the two groups’ common aim of establishing an Islamic state. Prior to the emergence of ISIS, reports speculated that Boko Haram’s fundamentalist Islamist-oriented goals had attracted

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<sup>57</sup> Aly Sergie, Mohammed, and Toni Johnson.

<sup>58</sup> Agbiboa.

<sup>59</sup> "Boko Haram." Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>60</sup> Maiangwa, Benjamin, Ufo Okeke Uzodike, Ayo Whetho, and Hakeen Onapajo.

<sup>61</sup> Ploch Blanchard, Lauren. "Nigeria’s Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions." Congressional Research Service. June 10, 2014. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43558.pdf>. Pg 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ostebo, Terje. "Boko Haram's Allegiance to ISIS Isn't Nearly as Scary As It Sounds." New Republic. March 20, 2015. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121340/boko-harams-pledge-allegiance-isis-doesnt-mean-anything>.

funding and training from other Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in the continent, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).<sup>63</sup> In February 2010, a statement signed by an AQIM “emir” was published in Reuters declaring, “We are ready to train your people in weapons and give you whatever support we can in men, arms and munitions to enable you to defend our people in Nigeria.”<sup>64</sup> This may explain, at least in part, how Boko Haram undermines the ability of Nigerian security forces to confront the persistent threat the group poses.

Nigeria’s security forces have long been accused of extrajudicial killings, human rights violations, and excessive force towards not only Boko Haram but civilians, which further galvanizes support for the groups’ attacks against the security sector.<sup>65</sup> Corruption within the Nigerian police and military at the senior levels also inhibits the effectiveness of combating any threats to security. The Nigerian public widely distrusts police, as reported by Transparency International, “nine out of 10 people said the police were corrupt...and 45 per cent said the military was corrupt.”<sup>66</sup> One account revealed that troops, during one of Boko Haram’s raids, dropped their weapons, stripped off their uniforms and fled in civilian clothes.<sup>67</sup> Considering security forces are among the most targeted in Boko Haram raids, they were likely primarily fleeing for their lives. Having said that, the soldiers reportedly were angry that their salary had been abruptly cut in half, fueling anger towards senior leadership over perceived corruption and

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<sup>63</sup> Forest, James J.F. "Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria." Joint Special Operations University Report 12, no. 5 (2012). <https://jsou.socom.mil>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pg. 78

<sup>65</sup> Maiangwa, Benjamin, Ufo Okeke Uzodike, Ayo Whetho, and Hakeen Onapajo.

<sup>66</sup> "Nigeria: Corruption and Transparency." Transparency International. May 21, 2014.

[http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/nigeria\\_corruption\\_and\\_insecurity](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/nigeria_corruption_and_insecurity).

<sup>67</sup> Mbachu, Dulue. "Nigerian Troops Say Corruption Saps Will to Fight Islamists." Bloomberg. July 16, 2014. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-15/nigerian-troops-say-corruption-saps-will-to-confront-islamists>.

minimizing incentives to stay and fight.<sup>68</sup> A lance corporal echoed this sentiment, “Somebody is sitting comfortably in Abuja stealing our money, and we are here facing Boko Haram fire every day,”<sup>69</sup>

Since its re-emergence in 2010, Boko Haram has committed to a broader mission: avenging the deaths of their compatriots, demanding the release of prisoners, and overthrowing the Nigerian government and putting an Islamic state under Sharia law in its place.<sup>70</sup> Attacks since 2009 have targeted not only security and police forces, but churches, schools, Christian neighborhoods, government buildings, banks, politicians and civilians.<sup>71</sup> According to a report published by National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, about a quarter of all Boko Haram targets are private citizens, both Christian and Muslim.<sup>72</sup>

Boko Haram has seized territory throughout much of Nigeria’s north-eastern corner,<sup>73</sup> where President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in 2013.<sup>74</sup> For Nigerians living in the approximately 20,000 square miles of Boko Haram territory,<sup>75</sup> fear is a perpetual

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<sup>68</sup> Mbachu, Dulue.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Agbiboa.

<sup>71</sup> “Thematic Issues: Severe religious freedom violations by non-state actors.” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. April 30, 2013. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51826edc27.html>

<sup>72</sup> “Background Report: Boko Haram Recent Attacks.” National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. May 1, 2014. [http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/STARTBackgroundReport\\_BokoHaramRecentAttacks\\_May2014\\_0.pdf](http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/STARTBackgroundReport_BokoHaramRecentAttacks_May2014_0.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> Hogan, Caelainn. “Nigeria Losing Control of Northeast to Boko Haram.” Washington Post. September 5, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/09/05/will-boko-haram-beat-the-islamic-state-to-establishing-a-caliphate/>.

<sup>74</sup> Ross, Will. “Nigeria: Goodluck Jonathan Declares Emergency in States.” BBC News. May 15, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22533974>.

<sup>75</sup> Blair, David. “Boko Haram Is Now a Mini-Islamic State, with Its Own Territory.” The Telegraph. January 10, 2015.

state. An extreme form of Sharia law is enforced where Boko Haram operates, and videos have shown the group carrying out public lashings, stonings and amputations for alleged crimes.<sup>76</sup> In addition to the widespread looting, burning and abductions in villages, militants and military clash frequently, while in some cases the Nigerian security forces are completely absent. According to one account, villages in Adamawa state were attacked by insurgents in September of 2014 and police never responded.<sup>77</sup>

While Boko Haram now is internationally known for its kidnapping of more than 200 girls from their school in Chibok in 2014, Boko Haram did not specifically target females as a strategic means to an end prior to 2012.<sup>78</sup> This shift can be traced back to late 2011 and 2012, when Nigerian police detained over 100 female family members and children of Boko Haram, including one of Shekau's wives. Boko Haram also directed allegations of sexual assault toward the Nigeria security forces. In a video message, Shekau responded to the latest detainment, "...they have continued capturing our women.... In fact, they are even having sex with one of them. Allah, Allah, see us and what we are going through".<sup>79</sup> This is a lamentably common tactic among Nigerian local police, who frequently detain friends and family members of suspects to use in prisoner exchange deals or to extract information about suspects.<sup>80</sup>

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/11337722/Boko-Haram-is-now-a-mini-Islamic-State-with-its-own-territory.html>.

<sup>76</sup> "Nigeria: A Nation Divided." *The Economist*. October 25, 2014.

<http://www.economist.com/node/21627646/print>.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>78</sup> "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp" Human Rights Watch. October 27, 2014.

[http://features.hrw.org/features/HRW\\_2014\\_report/Those\\_Terrible\\_Weeks\\_in\\_Their\\_Camp/index.html](http://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2014_report/Those_Terrible_Weeks_in_Their_Camp/index.html).

<sup>79</sup> Zenn, Jacob, and Elizabeth Pearson. "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram." *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (2014). ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/jtr/rt/printerFriendly/828/707.

<sup>80</sup> Zenn and Pearson.

Targeting the wives and children of Boko Haram members was especially significant, as it was meant to “strike at the heart of Boko Haram,” in an effort to weaken the group as a whole.<sup>81</sup> This marked a turning point in the tactical use of women as Pearson states, “this is something that Shekau appears to have taken very personally, because it is something that he repeatedly referred to in video messages throughout 2012 before kidnapping really started in 2013.”<sup>82</sup> In response, Boko Haram has since targeted civilian females through various means, from kidnapping and detaining them for prisoner exchange deals, to targeting females in gender-based violence, forcing them into marriages with fighters, and at times using women and girls in staged attacks or suicide bombings.

One of Boko Haram’s early kidnapping missions was in May 2013, when an attack in Bama, Nigeria led to the abduction of approximately 12 women and children.<sup>83</sup> Pearson and Zenn contend:

All these women were targeted for instrumental purposes, as none of those captured on either side had any direct involvement in the conflict. The women abducted by Boko Haram at Bama, for example, were visiting relatives working at the police station. After they were released several weeks later in exchange for the release of the wives of Boko Haram members, the women were interviewed by Al-Jazeera. They said that the Boko Haram members told them explicitly that their abduction was a response to the government’s detention of their own wives and children.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “Gender Has Always Been a Component of the Way [Boko Haram] Violence Has Happened, and It’s Become More Explicitly So” Testimonial Archive Project. January 1, 2014. <http://testimonialarchiveproject.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/gender-has-always-been-a-component-of-the-way-boko-haram-violence-has-happened-and-its-become-more-explicitly-so/>.

<sup>83</sup> Cruickshank, Paul, and Tim Lister. “Boko Haram Has Kidnapped before -- Successfully.” CNN. May 12, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/12/world/boko-haram-previous-abductions/>.

<sup>84</sup> Zenn and Pearson.

This account demonstrates how both sides use women and children as collateral in prisoner exchange deals and the reciprocal violation of rights by both Boko Haram and Nigerian police.

Boko Haram attacks civilians indiscriminately on some occasions, as a recent raid on Baga, Nigeria in January 2015 left around 2,000 Christian and Muslim men, women and children dead.<sup>85</sup> Although some attacks appear untargeted, that tactic is by no means ubiquitous. Frequently, Boko Haram targets Christians and Muslims differently, and when it does, violence against the groups is highly gendered. Now a trademark of Boko Haram, victims are often told to separate into two groups, Muslim and Christian.<sup>86</sup> Both Muslim males and females have been spared in past attacks,<sup>87</sup> while in other cases males are killed if they do not join Boko Haram.<sup>88</sup>

Muslim civilians are specifically targeted if they are perceived to be Christian sympathizers or those “engaged in what it deems un-Islamic behavior, such as gambling and drinking alcohol in bars.”<sup>89</sup> Further demonstrating that Muslims are not exempt from Boko Haram’s vehemence, the group bombed a mosque in November 2014, killing hundreds.<sup>90</sup> The mosque, a symbol of the “Muslim ‘establishment’ in Nigeria,” was targeted for “not defending the interests of Nigeria's 80 million Muslims, of corruption and of ‘perverting’ Islam” according

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<sup>85</sup> McCoy, Terrence. "Boko Haram May Have Just Killed 2,000 People: ‘Killing Went on and on and On’." Washington Post. January 9, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/09/boko-haram-may-have-killed-2000-people-in-one-attack/>.

<sup>86</sup> Murphy, Tom. "Beyond Chibok: Boko Haram’s Kidnapping of More than 500 Nigerian Girls and Women." Humanosphere. November 6, 2014. <http://www.humanosphere.org/human-rights/2014/11/beyond-chibok-boko-harams-kidnapping-500-nigerian-girls-women/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ahmed, Ibrahim, and Mike Eckel. "In The Home of Peace, A Siege of Fear." Voice of America News. [http://www.voanews.com/MediaAssets2/projects/boko-haram/index\\_en.html](http://www.voanews.com/MediaAssets2/projects/boko-haram/index_en.html).

<sup>88</sup> Murphy, Tom.

<sup>89</sup> “Thematic Issues: Severe religious freedom violations by non-state actors.”

<sup>90</sup> Lister, Tim. "Boko Haram Steps up Attacks Aimed at Islamic 'establishment' in Nigeria." CNN. November 30, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/28/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram/>.



to Boko Haram.<sup>91</sup> Among the more than 200 girls kidnapped from Chibok, some of them were Muslim.<sup>92</sup> In November 2014, Shekau declared that the Chibok girls, the majority of whom were Christian, have “converted to Islam and been married off,” likely to Boko Haram fighters.<sup>93</sup> Shekau’s lack of mention of those Muslim girls suggests that perhaps they shared the same fate regardless of religion.

Although Boko Haram slaughters and kidnaps Muslims, the group overwhelmingly targets Christians for the gravest atrocities when the two groups are separated. In August 2013, Boko Haram attacked a university dormitory, killed all the men, and raped the Christian women after segregating them from the Muslim women.<sup>94</sup> Christian men, if not massacred on the spot, are sometimes given the chance to convert but failure to convert leads to immediate death.<sup>95</sup> Christian women suffer the overwhelming majority of Boko Haram’s attacks against women, as approximately 90% of Boko Haram’s female victims are Christian.<sup>96</sup>

Numerous reports detail accounts of Christian women being beaten, shot, kidnapped, forced to convert, and/or raped by Boko Haram.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Nigeria’s Political Violence Research Network indicates that gender-based violence is on the rise in Northeastern Nigeria and

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<sup>91</sup> Lister.

<sup>92</sup> Okeowo, Alexis. "Nigeria’s Stolen Girls." *New Yorker*. April 29, 2014.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/nigerias-stolen-girls>.

<sup>93</sup> "Missing Nigerian Schoolgirls 'married Off'" *Al-Jazeera*. November 1, 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/10/boko-haram-says-schoolgirls-married-20141031222536853563.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Zenn and Pearson.

<sup>95</sup> Moore, Jack. "Nigeria: Boko Haram Declares Sharia Law, Beheads Christian Men and Forces Women into Islam in Gwoza." *International Business Times*. August 29, 2014. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/nigeria-boko-haram-declares-sharia-law-beheads-christian-men-forces-women-into-islam-gwoza-1463185>.

<sup>96</sup> Sanghani, Radhika. "Inside Boko Haram - Where Women Persuade Men to Rape Kidnapped Young Girls." *The Telegraph*. October 27, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11190098/Boko-Haram-Nigerian-women-persuade-men-to-rape-kidnapped-young-girls.html>.

<sup>97</sup> "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp"

is committed not only by Boko Haram members but citizens and has emerged “indirectly due to the situation created by the conflict, and largely motivated by the Sunni ultra-Salafi ideology that seems to suppress women, more so Christian women.”<sup>98</sup> Christian females are “physically abused in some places for not covering their heads,” by “beatings, rapes or having acid thrown in their unveiled faces, which is becoming a common form of assault” by Boko Haram or others influenced by the extremist ideology.<sup>99</sup> In a report by Human Rights Watch, Christian women caught wearing pants were shot in the leg, and then “left to die” by Boko Haram.<sup>100</sup> In individual interviews with survivors, women relayed stories of being repeatedly raped by Boko Haram members as a punitive method for refusing to convert to Islam or marry a Muslim.<sup>101</sup> Some convert as a means to escape; in several cases, insurgents released captives who were forced to convert to Islam “on the condition they keep their religion and spread it in their village.”<sup>102</sup>

Although great strides have been made in the political, social and economic status of women in Nigeria, perceptions of women as the “weaker” sex are still remarkably prevalent. The social mobility of females in Nigeria is largely dependent on whether or not she marries, as she “gains her social class or social status from the relative class position of her husband.”<sup>103</sup> Boko Haram’s targeting of females is rooted not only in its ultra-extreme interpretation of Salafist

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<sup>98</sup> Barkindo, Atta, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku, and Caroline Katgurum Wesley. "Our Bodies, Their Battleground: Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999." Nigeria's Political Violence Research Network. November 1, 2013. <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/3117403>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp"

<sup>101</sup> Barkindo, Atta, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku, and Caroline Katgurum Wesley.

<sup>102</sup> Sanghani.

<sup>103</sup> Omadjohwoefe, Ogege Samuel. "Gender Role Differentiation and Social Mobility of Women in Nigeria." *Journal of Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary Reflection of Contemporary Society* 27, no. 1 (2011): 67-74. <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSS/JSS-27-0-000-11-Web/JSS-27-1-000-11-Abst-PDF/JSS-27-1-067-11-1045-Omadjohwoefe-O-S/JSS-27-1-067-11-1045-Omadjohwoefe-O-S-Ab.pdf>.

Islam but existing traditional cultural norms, which Boko Haram inflames through their gendered attacks on both Muslim and Christians.<sup>104</sup> To that end, Boko Haram targets businesses and shops run by Christian and Muslim women in bombings and burnings to reinforce the notion that a woman's place is in the home.<sup>105</sup>

Some women and girls are abducted and taken across the border to neighboring countries,<sup>106</sup> likely sold into well-established human trafficking rings for domestic service and/or prostitution.<sup>107</sup> Or, if kept in Nigeria, are forced to convert to Islam and marry Boko Haram fighters, where they serve in traditional gender roles by cooking and cleaning for the group, marrying fighters and raising children.<sup>108</sup> Regarding abducted women and girls, Shekau has publicly declared that God "instructed me to sell them" and referred to women as "properties" that should be married instead of attending school.<sup>109</sup>

While reinforcing gender roles on the one hand, Boko Haram also exploits them, using women to pose as victims in need to lure targets into traps.<sup>110</sup> Knowing that they will be better able to evade security checks under loose clothing, Boko Haram has used women and girls to smuggle weapons or, more recently, as suicide bombers. In 2014, women affiliated with Boko Haram carried out at least five suicide bombings. When security forces arrested two girls with

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<sup>104</sup> Barkindo, Atta, Benjamin Tyavkase Gudaku, and Caroline Katgurum Wesley.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Abubakar, Aminu, and Josh Levs.

<sup>107</sup> Jekowsky, Lauren, and Oliver Kaplan. "Beyond Boko Haram: Nigeria's Human-Trafficking Crisis." *The National Interest*. May 19, 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/beyond-boko-haram-nigerias-human-trafficking-crisis-10482>.

<sup>108</sup> Zenn and Pearson.

<sup>109</sup> Muhammad, Muhammad Kabir. "Boko Haram 'to Sell' Nigeria Girls Abducted from Chibok." *BBC News*. May 5, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27283383>.

<sup>110</sup> Masters, Sam. "Boko Haram 'told Kidnapped Woman to Cut Man's Throat'." *The Independent*. October 27, 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/boko-haram-told-kidnapped-woman-to-cut-mans-throat-9821960.html>.

explosive belts attached to them in July 2014, one of the girls was only 10 years old.<sup>111</sup> News reports have widely speculated that the women and girls were forced to carry out these attacks after being abducted; moreover “it is not clear if the girls were coerced or were even aware they were strapped with explosives, which may have been detonated remotely.”<sup>112</sup> It is also speculated that some of the women and girls who carried out the suicide bombings in 2014 were the same kidnapped in Chibok, but this remains unconfirmed.<sup>113</sup>

Although Boko Haram commits egregious crimes against women and girls, the group can still count women among their supporters. Some wives of Boko Haram fighters support the brutal attacks on other women, as one reportedly encouraged a commander to rape an abducted woman.<sup>114</sup> In July 2014, Nigerian security forces arrested three women for recruiting widows and girls to join Boko Haram and marry fighters.<sup>115</sup> The arrests spurred theories, fueled by the Nigerian military,<sup>116</sup> that a female wing of the group had been established. It was initially thought that since one of the women arrested was the leader of this female wing, that “these arrests might have disrupted a group committed to involving more women.”<sup>117</sup> Indeed since the arrests in July until the end of 2014, attacks had not been carried out by females and it appeared

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<sup>111</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Boko Haram Crisis: Nigeria's Female Bombers Strike." BBC News. August 5, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28657085>

<sup>112</sup> Smith, Alexander. "Boko Haram Appears to Be Using Abducted Girls as Suicide Bombers: Experts." NBC News. January 16, 2015. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/missing-nigeria-schoolgirls/boko-haram-appears-be-using-abducted-girls-suicide-bombers-experts-n284456>.

<sup>113</sup> Akinsuyi, Temidayo. "Nigeria: Chibok Girls and Young Female Bombers." All Africa. August 4, 2014. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201408050020.html>.

<sup>114</sup> "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp"

<sup>115</sup> Gigova, Radina. "Nigeria: Arrested Women Recruited for Boko Haram." CNN. July 5, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/04/world/africa/nigeria-women-suspected-boko-haram/>.

<sup>116</sup> "Boko Haram Crisis: Nigeria Arrests 'female Recruiters'" BBC News. July 4, 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28168003>.

<sup>117</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth. "Nigeria's Female Suicide Bombers: A Show of Strength." War on the Rocks. October 14, 2014. <http://warontherocks.com/2014/10/nigerias-female-suicide-bombers-a-show-of-strength/#>.

that Boko Haram's use of female suicide bombers was short lived. But when at least five female suicide bombers carried out attacks in January 2015 alone, Boko Haram demonstrated that its strategy still included using females to carry out attacks, if intermittently.<sup>118</sup>

Information is scant on the motivations behind women's involvement in Boko Haram activities; and it is unclear if the attacks conducted by women were carried out "of their own volition or were forced, or paid."<sup>119</sup> Clearly in the cases of suicide bombers being girls of merely 10 or 13 years of age, they are unable to fully understand what they are doing and its consequences. Given that multiple reports reveal Boko Haram's execution of non-cooperative males and females, many women and girls likely do not have much choice than to do what they are ordered, or be killed. Additionally, the children may be those of Boko Haram militants.

Pearson asserts that the use of girls specifically is further indication "of a widespread intimidation or coercion campaign."<sup>120</sup> While this is likely the case, other reports indicate that Boko Haram attracts street children,<sup>121</sup> who may not need much coercing as "children who lack a protective social environment are more likely to be exploited" and are more "vulnerable to extremist views."<sup>122</sup> It is nearly impossible to tell to what extent women and girls are being forced or coerced to support Boko Haram activities, and who they are exactly. However,

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<sup>118</sup> Walsh, Michael. "Boko Haram's Use of Girl Suicide Bombers Intensifies amid Terror Campaign." Yahoo News. January 16, 2015. <http://news.yahoo.com/boko-haram-forces-girls-to-perform-suicide-bombings-in-latest-terror-tactic-173310903.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Pearson.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Dixon, Robyn. "In Nigeria, Child Beggars Are Easy Recruits for Boko Haram Extremists." LA Times. August 17, 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-nigeria-economy-boko-haram-20140817-story.html#page=1>.

<sup>122</sup> Onuoha, Freedom C. "Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?" United State Institute of Peace: Special Report 348. June 1, 2014. [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why\\_do\\_Youth\\_Join\\_Boko\\_Haram.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf).

considering Nigeria's unraveling social fabric, especially in the north, and the group's increasing financial resources, it ostensibly provides a more secure alternative for those children begging in the streets<sup>123</sup> suggesting that rigorous coercion may not be necessary in some instances.

Boko Haram's financing has undergone a transformation in a period of only five years, exhibited by the increasing sophistication of its weaponry, having "shifted from relatively cheap AK-47s (...) to desert-ready combat vehicles and anti-aircraft/anti-tank guns".<sup>124</sup> This drastic increase in funds can largely be attributed to kidnapping, which "has become one of the group's primary funding sources,"<sup>125</sup> especially since Nigeria is a "hub for human trafficking" making it relatively easy to sell women and girls both within Nigeria and to neighboring countries.<sup>126</sup> Kidnapping ransoms have also proven to be a lucrative way to fill coffers: in 2013, Boko Haram "secured \$3 million in exchange for a French family of seven it seized in northern Cameroon."<sup>127</sup> Raids on towns also leave banks and security establishments vulnerable to robbery.<sup>128</sup>

Boko Haram's financing network thus provides it with enough money to pay fighters and females providing operational support, reportedly giving \$30 to \$312 per smuggling mission to female smugglers.<sup>129</sup> In a country where 69% of the population in the northeastern corner of

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<sup>123</sup> Dixon, Robyn.

<sup>124</sup> Weber, Peter. "Who's Financing Boko Haram?" *The Week*. May 12, 2014.  
<http://theweek.com/articles/447032/whos-financing-boko-haram>.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Jekowsky and Kaplan.

<sup>127</sup> Weber.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Drăgulescu, Teodora. "Gender-based Violence: Women Employed as Terror Tools by Boko Haram." *Consultancy Africa Intelligence*. October 3, 2014.  
[http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1719:gender-based-violence-women-employed-as-terror-tools-by-boko-haram&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296](http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1719:gender-based-violence-women-employed-as-terror-tools-by-boko-haram&catid=91:rights-in-focus&Itemid=296).

Nigeria lives on less than \$1/day, Boko Haram provides females with a lucrative livelihood option, proving to be an effective recruitment tactic.<sup>130</sup>

It's nearly impossible to discern who of the females in Boko Haram have joined voluntarily and who were forced; considering the Nigerian context within which Boko Haram operates though, the line between voluntary and forced participation is blurry. Some women may have been forced into marriages with fighters in their youth and then indoctrinated with Boko Haram's principles; others may have joined voluntarily and now are unable or even unwilling to escape. As the economy of Nigeria is deeply bifurcated and females' social mobility is limited, Boko Haram is able to recruit and inculcate women and girls with its views and may provide an income exceeding that of the average Nigerian, let alone for females, despite the atrocities it commits against them.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.





## Case Study: al-Shabaab

With the ouster of Mohamed Siad Barre, who ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1991, armed opposition groups rushed to grab power. In 2004, the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) was established, emerging out of the weakest of the groups fighting for control of the country.<sup>131</sup> Even as the internationally-recognized government, backed by regional players such as Kenya and Uganda, the UN, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and United States, the TFG only holds a small part of the capital Mogadishu and less of the country, Control of territory waxes and wanes in the conflict and armed groups, many of them promoting a radical brand of Sunni Islam, assumed control of the rest of the capital and countryside, where open conflict rages among groups. Except for the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland in the north, numerous armed militias control much of the remaining parts of country, all of which strive for political dominance.

Fighting between armed Somali factions and the government has been bolstered by financial and military assistance from neighboring countries such as Eritrea and Ethiopia, which are using the conflict to further their own priorities,<sup>132</sup> resulting in a violent ongoing civil war and protracted humanitarian crisis.<sup>133</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in October 2013 that of the approximately 7.5 million

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<sup>131</sup> "The World Factbook: Somalia." Central Intelligence Agency.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Lyons, Terrence. "Ethiopia-Eritrea Proxy War in Somalia Risks Broader Regional Conflict, Warns New Council Report." Council on Foreign Relations. December 14, 2006.  
<http://www.cfr.org/somalia/ethiopia-eritrea-proxy-war-somalia-risks-broader-regional-conflict-warns-new-council-report/p12216>.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, Paul D. "Horn of Africa: Webs of Conflict & Pathways to Peace." Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. October 1, 2011. [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Horn of Africa Conflict Mapping Doc- FINAL.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Horn%20of%20Africa%20Conflict%20Mapping%20Doc-FINAL.pdf).

people in Somalia, about 1.1 million of them are internally-displaced people (IDPs) and more than half, about 3.8 million, are in need of “life-saving assistance”.<sup>134</sup> Malnutrition is pandemic, and occurrences of rape and sexual violence are thought to be extremely high, although underreported.

Of the warring parties, the militant Islamist organization al-Shabaab has become the most powerful, controlling more territory than any other armed group in the country.<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch refers to it as the “de facto governing body in much of Somalia”.<sup>136</sup> Although recognized as a singular group, “al-Shabaab is not a monolithic entity but rather an alliance of factions that have rallied under its banner.”<sup>137</sup> With many leaders controlling various villages throughout southern and central Somalia, al-Shabaab largely lacks consistent and explicit guidelines for those living under its rule. What is consistent, however, is that al-Shabaab imposes a severe interpretation of Sharia through violence and intimidation.

Radical interpretations of Islam in Somalia, and the emergence of al-Shabaab, can trace its roots to the 1970s. Before the fall of the Siad Barre regime, many Somalis were attracted to the Salafi and Wahhabi schools of Islamic thought, and created organizations for adherents.<sup>138</sup> In 1982, these organizations merged to form The Islamic Union (al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya or AIAI),

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<sup>134</sup> 2014 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Somalia. Prepared by OCHA on Behalf of the Humanitarian Country Team, Sept. 2013. [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/HNO\\_2014\\_Somalia.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/HNO_2014_Somalia.pdf)

<sup>135</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia."

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Shinn, David. "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia." Published by Elsevier Limited on Behalf of Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2011, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2012/08/al-shabaabs-foreign-threat-somaliaqz>

which sought, among other nationalistic goals, to establish an Islamist regime in Somalia.<sup>139</sup> This mission attracted the attention of other extremist leaders seeking to spread their brand of Islam throughout the Horn of Africa, particularly Osama Bin Laden.

AIAI received training and support from Al-Qaeda in the 1980s and 1990s, and both groups assisted each other in carrying out suicide bombings and terrorist attacks throughout the region.<sup>140</sup> AIAI was effectively dissolved in the early 2000s but its legacy continued through Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the former head of AIAI, who left his position to join the increasingly, albeit briefly, popular Union of Islamic Courts (UIC).<sup>141</sup> The UIC, a “loose formation of Islamic judicial systems” was the first group to bring some stability to Somalia since Siad Barre’s departure more than ten years before.<sup>142</sup> The stability was short-lived though, as further divisions between moderate and extremist leadership within the UIC led to the dissipation of the court system by the end of 2006, and the subsequent advent of several radical groups, including al-Shabaab.<sup>143</sup>

As the UIC was collapsing and the TFG struggled to endure, al-Shabaab, like other groups, was looking for public and financial support to continue its violent resistance of the TFG. It received its opportunity when Ethiopian troops entered the country in 2006 in an effort

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<sup>139</sup> "Al Ittihad Al Islamiya." Stanford University: Mapping Militant Organizations. July 18, 2012.. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/99>.

<sup>140</sup> Shinn.

<sup>141</sup> "Profile: Somalia's Islamic Courts." BBC News. June 6, 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm>.

<sup>142</sup> Wa Ngugi, Mukoma. "How Al-Shabaab Was Born." The Guardian.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/04/kenya-westgate-mall-attacks>.

<sup>143</sup> Shinn.

to bolster the TFG, a move widely unpopular with the Somali public.<sup>144</sup> al-Shabaab became “the only group mounting serious resistance to the unpopular Ethiopian military presence” from 2006 until the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in 2009.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, the nascent group received “material support from the Eritrean government,” which was “eager to undercut rival Ethiopia’s interests in Somalia and throughout the region”.<sup>146</sup> al-Shabaab has since been credited with its brand of “bringing peace and order to communities that had been plagued by crime and insecurity since the collapse of the Somali state nearly two decades earlier.”<sup>147</sup>

To the extent that al-Shabaab’s goals coincide with those of al-Qaeda, the groups remain closely tied. Shinn outlines the goals of al-Shabaab as seeking to: “topple the TFG, seize power throughout Somalia, re-incorporate Somali-inhabited areas of Kenya and Ethiopia, and create an Islamic caliphate.”<sup>148</sup> That said, al-Shabaab has diverse leadership and is not a singular entity; some leaders have ties to al-Qaeda but the group itself is not exclusively a proxy of al-Qaeda.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, Human Rights Watch notes that “some analysts believe there is growing tension between al-Shabaab leaders with transnational agendas and those with purely national ambitions.”<sup>150</sup> Confusion surrounding the relationship between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda failed to dissipate in February of 2012 when the groups officially merged.<sup>151</sup> al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda do

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<sup>144</sup> Plaut, Morgan. "Ethiopia in Somalia: One Year on." BBC News. December 28, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7155868.stm>.

<sup>145</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia"

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Shinn.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, pg. 205

<sup>150</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia"

<sup>151</sup> Berger, J.M. "Al-Qaeda's Merger." Foreign Policy. February 14, 2012. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/al\\_qaedas\\_merger](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/al_qaedas_merger).

engage in similar tactical strategies such as suicide bombings and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, which al-Shabaab continues to use against AMISOM and the TFG.

In the portions of south and central Somalia where al-Shabaab's influence is concentrated, the group rules out of fear. Its draconian interpretations of Sharia law require swift and brutal action against alleged criminals without due process. Whippings, executions and amputations happen publicly to send a message of deterrence: "refugees in Kismayo and Mogadishu also described seeing amputated hands and legs of alleged thieves or spies hanging from public areas in al-Shabaab controlled areas, such as the doorways of a police compound or a market."<sup>152</sup> Life for both men and women under al-Shabaab is incredibly restrictive, as even hair styles and the content of cell phones are scrutinized, and public gatherings, dancing at weddings, Western movies and music are prohibited.<sup>153</sup> Similar though to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, from whom al-Shabaab is thought to be modeling many of their tactics, their restrictions imposed on women's movement, dress and behavior are even more prohibitive.<sup>154</sup>

Due to the protracted civil war, many women throughout Somalia were widowed and lost other male family members, effectively making them the head breadwinner. Under al-Shabaab, the mixing of men and women is strictly prohibited, which constrains their livelihood options, even to the point that women are not able to run tea stands, come to the market or set up shops. Refugees reported to HRW that "al-Shabaab enforcers did not hesitate to punish working women

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<sup>152</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia"

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Straziuso, Jason, and Mohamed Olad Hassan. "Somalia Resembling Afghanistan Under Taliban." NBC News. August 22, 2010. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38802019/ns/world\\_news-africa/t/somalia-resembling-afghanistan-under-taliban/#.VKxLpGc3NaQ](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38802019/ns/world_news-africa/t/somalia-resembling-afghanistan-under-taliban/#.VKxLpGc3NaQ).

who were infirm, elderly, or pregnant, or who had lost all other breadwinners in the conflict.”<sup>155</sup> With already nominal employment options, women’s restricted movement under al-Shabaab drastically diminishes their earning power and thus the well-being and health of their entire family.

In 2009, al-Shabaab mandated that all women in its held territories in south and central Somalia must be fully veiled in public.<sup>156</sup> Women have been killed for violating this edict, with one woman reportedly shot by al-Shabaab in front of her home for not wearing the veil.<sup>157</sup> Further restrictions in some locations mandated that all women wear a specific type of black abaya that is made “of a particularly thick cloth and that touches the ground and hides all physical contours.”<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the approved type of abaya is imported and very expensive, so women within families or clusters of families will share one between them, leaving only one woman able to leave home at a time.<sup>159</sup> Venturing out, even under the black abaya, can prove dangerous for women and girls.

In the state of lawlessness that has engulfed most of Somalia, sexual violence and rape are widespread, both in and outside of al-Shabaab controlled areas. Women in government and AMISOM-controlled camps for IDPs, and refugee camps outside Somalia remain at great risk,

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> "Harsh War, Harsh Peace: Abuses by Al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government, and AMISOM in Somalia"

<sup>157</sup> Saul, Heather. "Somali Woman Killed by Gunman 'for Not Wearing Veil'" The Independent. July 30, 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/somali-woman-killed-by-gunman-for-not-wearing-veil-9637620.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

and the persistent crime of rape has largely gone unaddressed.<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in 2014 that IDPs in government camps were subjected to rape “at the hands of government forces, allied militia, and private individuals.”<sup>161</sup> Managers of IDP and refugee camps not only have allegedly raped female IDPs and refugees but also diverted aid intended for the camps.<sup>162</sup>

AMISOM soldiers, tasked with peace-keeping and the protection of civilians, are widely accused of sexual exploitation. Exploiting the vulnerability of these women and girls, many without male family members to protect them, “AMISOM soldiers have used humanitarian assistance, provided by the mission, to coerce vulnerable women and girls into sexual activity”.<sup>163</sup> Several women and girls interviewed in the report said “they were initially approached for sex in return for money or raped while seeking medical assistance and water on the AMISOM bases.”<sup>164</sup>

The Human Rights Watch report, “No Place for Children” documents credible allegations of women and girls being abducted by al-Shabaab, raped and/or forced into marriages with soldiers, forced to perform domestic labor, and sometimes forced to engage in combat operations.<sup>165</sup> al-Shabaab tends to target girls and young women in the age range of 11 to the

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<sup>160</sup> Shannon, Lisa. "The Rape of Somalia's Women Is Being Ignored." The Guardian. October 11, 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/11/rape-somalia-women-famine>.

<sup>161</sup> "World Report 2014: Somalia." Human Rights Watch. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/somalia>.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> "The Power These Men Have Over Us" Human Rights Watch. September 8, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/09/08/power-these-men-have-over-us-0>.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> "No Place for Children." Human Rights Watch. February 20, 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/02/20/no-place-children>.

early 20's,<sup>166</sup> because their “younger age and mental and physical development...enables the insurgents to more easily influence their thinking and behavior.”<sup>167</sup> Girls and young women are given traditionally female tasks in the training camps, and are “made to clean, cook, and wash their [al-Shabaab's] clothes.”<sup>168</sup> During combat, some girls carried “bullets, water, milk, and food to the front lines” and pulled “bodies and wounded fighters from the battlefield”.<sup>169</sup> The report does not indicate how al-Shabaab determines whether an abducted female was given domestic duties, forced into marriages with soldiers or serve in a support role for combat operations.

Girls and young women are also targeted by al-Shabaab for forced marriage and rape, which happens both inside and outside the context of forced marriage.<sup>170</sup> Forced marriages are used by al-Shabaab to secure allegiance of citizens, with many girls being taken on their way to school or removed forcibly from their homes. According to Sudi Mohammed Ali, former financial director for the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, the tactic is "an easy way to raise declining morale among their fighters."<sup>171</sup> Punishment for resisting can mean death: “a 16-year-old girl who refused to marry an al-Shabaab commander who was three times her age was killed by his men and beheaded. Her head was brought back to the school as a warning to others.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>167</sup> Mazurana, 147.

<sup>168</sup> “No Place for Children,” pg 37

<sup>169</sup> “No Place for Children,” pg 32

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>171</sup> "Kenya: New Al-Shabaab Magazine Spins Horrors of Westgate, Threatens Kenya With More Attacks." All Africa. November 18, 2013. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201311190082.html>.

<sup>172</sup> Spillius, Alex. "Al-Shabaab Militia Abducting Teenage Girls to Marry Fighters." The Telegraph. February 21, 2012.



A girl or her family's complicity in the marriage to al-Shabaab soldiers remains unclear, as the girl may be abducted if her parents refuse a soldier's request to marry her. In one instance, a woman was threatened with death if she did not allow her daughter to be married to an al-Shabaab fighter.<sup>173</sup> One male interviewee said, "Usually they [al-Shabaab] were in town and when they would see girls from school they would find one, confront her, say they want to marry her. Sometimes they would go to the parents but if the parents refuse they just take her. I saw it all the time. If she accepts, good. If she refuses, she's kidnapped. Either way, it's better to take the option of agreeing."<sup>174</sup> Multiple reports of family members killed for resisting attempts by al-Shabaab soldiers to take girls and young women has created an environment where parents may agree to a marriage out of fear, making it difficult to discern who, if anyone, enters the "marriages" voluntarily. Fleeing to TFG-controlled areas or neighboring countries may be the only option for families hoping to protect their unmarried female relatives, where they then face the risks in an IDP or AMISOM camp that are described above.

Rape by al-Shabaab members outside of forced marriages is also thought to be widespread, although difficult to ascertain its extent due to the taboo nature of rape in Somali society. One woman "described attending the funeral of a girl who had been shot dead by an al-Shabaab fighter after he tried to rape her and she resisted."<sup>175</sup> Speaking out about being the

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/9096315/Al-Shabaab-militia-abducting-teenage-girls-to-marry-fighters.html>.

<sup>173</sup> "No Place for Children," pg 56

<sup>174</sup> "No Place for Children," pg 55

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 60.

victim of rape and sexual violence also carries stigma and shame in Somalia's traditional culture, leading many women to refuse medical care where available or suffer in silence.<sup>176</sup>

The case of Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow demonstrated to Somali women (and the international community writ large) that justice in al-Shabaab's response to sexual assaults and rape by their own forces or others appears to be nonexistent, potentially emboldening other would-be perpetrators. Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow, a girl from the al-Shabaab-controlled Kismayu, was stoned to death in 2008 for reporting that she was raped by three men while visiting her grandmother.<sup>177</sup> Initial reports stated that she was 23 years old, admitted to committing adultery and as al-Shabaab reported, "officially confirmed her guilt, while she told us that she is happy with the punishment under Islamic law."<sup>178</sup> Eye witness accounts and reports from Aisha's father exposed that the girl was actually 13 years old, and had been arrested when her family approached the al-Shabaab authorities with her account of being raped.<sup>179</sup> The alleged rapists were neither identified, nor brought to trial, and the girl suffered a slow, gruesome death in front of 1,000 people in a stadium.<sup>180</sup>

Likely intending to send a message, al-Shabaab ensured through the murder of Aisha that victims of sexual violence remain silenced. Given the brutality of the response, it is also

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<sup>176</sup> Ali, Nada. "And what about Somali Women?" Human Rights Watch. December 9, 2008.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/12/09/and-what-about-somali-women>.

<sup>177</sup> "Rape Victim Stoned to Death in Somalia Was 13, U.N. Says." New York Times. November 4, 2008.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/world/africa/05somalia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/world/africa/05somalia.html?_r=0).

<sup>178</sup> "Press Release: Somalia: Girl Stoned Was a Child of 13." Amnesty International. October 31, 2008.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/somalia-girl-stoned-was-child-13-20081031>.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Howden, Daniel. "'Don't Kill Me,' She Screamed. Then They Stoned Her to Death." The Independent. November 9, 2008. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/dont-kill-me-she-screamed-then-they-stoned-her-to-death-1003462.html>.

conceivable that the perpetrators were al-Shabaab militants, although no reports reveal the identity, nor if the rapists were affiliated with al-Shabaab. Rather than carry out an investigation, Aisha's sentence effectively erased any chance to connect the group to the rape, thus empowering its members to rape and sexually assault women with impunity.

A similar story incriminating al-Shabaab militants appeared on the website of Sister Somalia, the first rape crisis center in Mogadishu with the mandate of supporting survivors of sexual violence in Somalia.<sup>181</sup> As relayed by the co-founder, Fartuun Abdisalaan Adan:

a woman in a region controlled by al-Shabaab was maliciously raped. Her husband was so angered that he took the matter to the al-Shabaab court. The court superiors ordered his wife to be inspected to verify whether she was raped or if the activities were consensual. He was ordered to wait in a different room while she went through the inspection. An hour later, the husband was invited into the room, only to find his wife beheaded on the floor. The al-Shabaab superiors expressed that the woman was at fault for making false accusations against the brothers of al-Shabaab.<sup>182</sup>

The final sentence suggests that the woman's rapists had been al-Shabaab militants, and their swift and duplicitous response again silenced a victim of sexual violence while forestalling the implication of al-Shabaab militants.

Furthermore, appropriate responses to the subsequent physical and emotional trauma of rape are lacking in al-Shabaab-controlled areas. Medical care and aid is elusive as al-Shabaab has failed to lift a ban on certain aid agencies as promised and instead added 16 more to the list, severely limiting their reach to those in need.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> "Homepage." Sister Somalia. 2012. <http://www.sistersomalia.org>.

<sup>182</sup> "About Us." Sister Somalia. 2012. <http://www.sistersomalia.org/about-us/>.

<sup>183</sup> "No Place for Children," pg 16

In spite of al-Shabaab's treatment of citizens in its territories, especially women and girls, the group can still count women as supporters. Information on women within Somalia voluntarily supporting al-Shabaab activities remains scant, but women supporting al-Shabaab from outside Somalia seem to do so mostly through financial support. Somali women and women of Somali descent in the United States and Europe have been convicted of sending regular wire transfers, and actively recruiting for the group.<sup>184</sup>

The Anti-Defamation League published a report in 2013 listing the approximately 50 American citizens who were identified, up to that point, as supporting al-Shabaab.<sup>185</sup> The names listed are overwhelmingly legal permanent residents or United States citizens, male, and between the ages of 18 and 33. Several women also made the list, who were primarily charged with providing material support and soliciting their nearby Somali diaspora communities for financial support.<sup>186</sup> In 2014, five more women were indicted by the United States Department of Justice for their involvement in a fundraising ring, mostly comprised of women, for al-Shabaab; three were arrested and two others remain at large.<sup>187</sup>

The support afforded al-Shabaab through Somali men and women likely stems from the position al-Shabaab takes on the TFG rather than its treatment of women. Seeing al-Shabaab as the primary agitator against the unpopular TFG, many men and women have been convicted of

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<sup>184</sup> "Al-Shabaab's American Recruits." Anti-Defamation League. October 1, 2013. <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/combating-hate/al-shabaabs-american-recruits.pdf>.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 14 and 16.

<sup>187</sup> "Three Defendants Arrested on Charges of Providing Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization." The United States Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs. July 23, 2014. <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/three-defendants-arrested-charges-providing-material-support-foreign-terrorist-organization>.

sending money to support al-Shabaab, and many more likely remain undetected. Those with personal connections to Somalia are invested in the political outcomes of the conflict, and thus endow their preferred side to the extent of their means. It is also possible that financial contributions are made to support the ideological goals of al-Shabaab, but at least in the case of Americans supporting al-Shabaab, “by 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) replaced al Shabaab as the terrorist group of choice for U.S. recruits,”<sup>188</sup> signifying that those still providing support to al-Shabaab may be doing so out of political objectives or personal attachment to Somalia in addition to, or rather than, religious ideology.

Similarly to the arguments presented by Speckhard regarding why individuals become suicide bombers, the motivational set for those providing financial support to al-Shabaab remotely are likely the same for men and women: “despair among the first to third generation immigrant communities; areas with ethnic and religious tensions, or societal oppression and serious frustration.”<sup>189</sup> This in combination with a belief in al-Shabaab’s political or ideological aims creates both motivation and justification for an individual removed from the conflict on the ground to support al-Shabaab. Instead, the research seems to support one hypothesis for why women lend their support remotely: al-Shabaab’s treatment of women remains a distant consideration in the minds of those not directly living under its influence, or is justified under radical interpretations of Sharia law. Or, rather, the expected benefits to *the country* by supporting al-Shabaab, no matter how misguided, are conceivably prioritized over the group’s brutal affront to women’s rights currently.

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<sup>188</sup> Al-Shabaab's American Recruits."

<sup>189</sup> Speckhard, Anne. The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:11, 2008. 995-1023, DOI: 10.1080/10576100802408121

Female converts to Islam have also provided support to, or joined, al-Shabaab. The most documented case is that of Samantha Lewthwaite, a British woman who converted to Islam as a teenager.<sup>190</sup> She married Germaine Lindsay in 2002 who, three years later, was one of four who carried out one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom.<sup>191</sup> Lewthwaite, who is now wanted by Interpol and Kenya for “being in possession of explosives and conspiracy to commit a felony,”<sup>192</sup> has since remarried another jihadi man and is associated with both al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab activities in East Africa.

Lewthwaite’s role in these terrorist networks remains disputed; some reports indicate that she was instrumental in the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013, but there is a dearth of evidence regarding her direct coordination or planning of the attack.<sup>193</sup> Despite her celebrity-level status as the widow of a suicide bomber, her role in al-Shabaab is likely to be that of a wife, “propagandist, morale raiser,” and a mother “raising her children with the love of jihad.”<sup>194</sup> Unlike the Chechen “Black Widows”, al-Shabaab does not seem to use women in combative or operational roles beyond support functions mentioned above.

Samantha Lewthwaite’s reasons for involvement in al-Shabaab are quite different from Somalis in Europe or those of Somali descent. With no personal connection to Somalia

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<sup>190</sup> Williams, Zoe. "The Radicalisation of Samantha Lewthwaite, the Aylesbury Schoolgirl Who Became the 'white Widow'" The Guardian. June 27, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/27/what-radicalised-samantha-lewthwaite-77-london-bombings>.

<sup>191</sup> Muir, Hugh, and Rosie Cowan. "Four Bombs in 50 Minutes - Britain Suffers Its Worst-ever Terror Attack." The Guardian. July 8, 2005. [http://web.archive.org/web/20071217222740/http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk\\_news/story/0,,1523819,00.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20071217222740/http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1523819,00.html).

<sup>192</sup> "Samantha Louise Lewthwaite." Interpol. <http://www.interpol.int/notice/search/wanted/2013-52018>.

<sup>193</sup> Liston, Enjoli. "Was the White Widow in Westgate Mall? The Evidence Is Scant." The Independent. September 25, 2013. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/was-the-white-widow-in-westgate-mall-the-evidence-is-scant-8839393.html>.

<sup>194</sup> Williams, Zoe.

specifically, one may conjecture that her motivations are more a result of psychological vulnerabilities and emergent radical ideology. Several articles identify the divorce of Lewthwaite's parents as having a profound effect on her, and she found solace in a Muslim family within her community,<sup>195</sup> converting to Islam and marrying a Muslim man not long after.<sup>196</sup>

The British media largely paints her as the child of divorced parents merely seeking some semblance of family life. Her writing, according to *The Guardian*, "often feels like a quest for nothing more than a believable domesticity."<sup>197</sup> When recalling meeting Lindsay for the first time, she purportedly said, "I just wanted to find a Muslim husband and settle down" as reported by *The Telegraph*.<sup>198</sup> Painting Lewthwaite as a vulnerable young woman only wanting to fulfil her gender-normative duty of being a wife and mother may not be an entirely inaccurate portrayal. Nonetheless, it is likely an oversimplification that perpetuates the derogatory image of a woman desperate for love and acceptance, and is driven to extremes to get it.

Although this is one of the more popularized cases, Lewthwaite's narrative provides nuance when exploring why women chose to join groups to which they appear to have no obvious connection. A combination of her personal motivations and disconnection from Somalians living under al-Shabaab controlled territories may all contribute to explaining

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<sup>195</sup> Marsden, Sam. "Samantha Lewthwaite: The Quiet Home Counties Girl Who Now Tops the List of Terrorism Suspects." *The Telegraph*. September 24, 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/kenya/10332352/Samantha-Lewthwaite-The-quiet-Home-Counties-girl-who-now-tops-the-list-of-terrorism-suspects.html>.

<sup>196</sup> Hough, Andrew. "Samantha Lewthwaite: 7/7 Bomber Widow Previously a 'Home Counties' Girl." *The Telegraph*. February 29, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/9112824/Samantha-Lewthwaite-77-bomber-widow-previously-a-Home-Counties-girl.html>.

<sup>197</sup> Williams, Zoe.

<sup>198</sup> Hough.

Lewthwaite's motivations for involvement in radical Islamist groups such as al-Shabaab in spite of its treatment of women. These vulnerabilities are consistent with Speckhard's list of "vulnerabilities used to motivate individuals outside conflict zones into terrorism" where "psycho-social vulnerabilities resonate powerfully with the ideology of terror groups promoting violence."<sup>199</sup> Membership in al-Shabaab arguably provides Lewthwaite with a sense of belonging and purpose first and foremost, and ideological affinities are secondary.

Therefore, for women supporters of al-Shabaab who are not Somali or of Somali-descent, the evidence points to their motivations being more rooted in personal experiences and vulnerabilities unrelated to the plight of Somalia, rather than al-Shabaab's political or ideological aims. Without a personal connection to Somalia or the results of regional conflict, foreign women, even if they have converted, find disassociation between themselves and Somali women living under al-Shabaab uncomplicated. Or, rather, the expected benefits to *the self* by supporting al-Shabaab, no matter how misguided, are prioritized over the group's brutal affront to women's rights. Meanwhile, female supporters of al-Shabaab who are of Somali-descent may experience a similar disassociation between themselves and those living under al-Shabaab control, seeing the ends of resisting the TFG as justifying the means. In both cases, whether female supporters of al-Shabaab are Somali or not, women living in territories controlled by al-Shabaab and the atrocities they face are generally forsaken.

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<sup>199</sup> Speckhard. "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists." pg. 1005



## Case Study: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

What is now referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or ISIS, alternately called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), “Daesh”, or the self-proclaimed Islamic State)<sup>200</sup> emerged out of various merging and iterations of regional Islamist organizations. ISIS<sup>201</sup> can most directly trace its roots to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a native Jordanian who, by his early twenties, had been associated with violent street gangs, struggled with alcoholism, and reportedly served prison time for sexual assault.<sup>202</sup> In 1989, the young al-Zarqawi traveled to Afghanistan where he was introduced to Salafism and, after receiving training in one of Bin Laden’s camps, fought alongside the mujahideen.<sup>203</sup> After returning to Jordan in 1993, the newly-radicalized al-Zarqawi attempted to form an Islamist group with the goal of overthrowing the Jordanian monarchy and installing an Islamic caliphate in its place.<sup>204</sup> He was again arrested, this time for possession of illegal weapons, and recruited for his newly-formed Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ) while imprisoned.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> The international community has not reached a consensus on how to refer to this group without legitimizing its aspirations. The U.S. Department of State uses ISIL, although President Obama remarked, “ISIL is not ‘Islamic’ . . . and ISIL is certainly not a state.” French officials now refer to the group as “Daesh,” which is the acronym of the group’s name in Arabic, al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham, but can also be construed as an insult. Zeba Khan wrote in the Boston Globe, “Depending on how it is conjugated in Arabic, it can mean anything from “to trample down and crush” to “a bigot who imposes his view on others.” For that reason, ISIS strongly condemns the use of “Daesh,” even threatening to kill anyone under its controlled territory who uses it.

<sup>201</sup> For the purposes of consistency throughout this briefing, the group will be referred to as “ISIS”; however, the use of this acronym does not imply any endorsement or recognition of its identification as either a state, or Islamic.

<sup>202</sup> Weaver, Mary Anne. "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi." The Atlantic. July 1, 2006. [http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/?single_page=true).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> "Terrorism: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi." Anti-Defamation League. January 1, 2013. [http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/profiles/al\\_zarqawi.html#.VINP2DHF\\_md](http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/profiles/al_zarqawi.html#.VINP2DHF_md).

<sup>205</sup> Weaver.

The Jordanian monarchy released al-Zarqawi, among others, in an amnesty bid in 1999 and soon after, al-Zarqawi travelled to Afghanistan and met with Osama Bin Laden.<sup>206</sup> Multiple sources indicate that the meeting was strained: Bin Laden reportedly found al-Zarqawi to be “aggressively ambitious, abrasive, and overbearing.”<sup>207</sup> Additionally, Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi disagreed on whether Shiites should be targeted in attacks, with al-Zarqawi outright declaring “Shiites should be executed” while Bin Laden did not support such views, and indeed remained close with his Shiite mother.<sup>208</sup> In 2005, “both clearly subscribe to jihadist Salafism, but Zarqawi’s use of violence has been more extreme and graphic. Historically, whilst bin Laden in the last decade has focused on the far enemy of the United States, Zarqawi has focused on enemies nearer at hand like the Jordanian regime and now the interim Iraqi government.”<sup>209</sup> Despite ideological and strategic disagreements, Bin Laden provided al-Zarqawi with start-up funds to support his nascent organization, the JTJ, and al-Zarqawi set up a training camp in Afghanistan.<sup>210</sup>

During the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, al-Zarqawi shifted the focus of JTJ activities towards Iraq where he believed he could capitalize on the renewed sectarian tensions that Saddam had attempted to quell during his rule. al-Zarqawi was responsible for coordinating some of the deadliest Sunni-led attacks in the early part of the conflict, as well as multiple

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Weaver.

<sup>208</sup> Weaver.

<sup>209</sup> Corera, Gordon. "Unraveling Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda Connection." *Terrorism Monitor* 2, no. 24 (2005). [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5btt\\_news%5d=332&tx\\_ttnews%5bbackPid%5d=179&no\\_cache=1%22%20%22.VINUDjHF\\_mf%22%20%20h#.VTJ6MiFVhBc](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5btt_news%5d=332&tx_ttnews%5bbackPid%5d=179&no_cache=1%22%20%22.VINUDjHF_mf%22%20%20h#.VTJ6MiFVhBc).

<sup>210</sup> Lister, Charles. "Profiling the Islamic State." *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no. 13 (2014). [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling\\_islamic\\_state\\_lister/en\\_web\\_lister.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling_islamic_state_lister/en_web_lister.pdf).

beheadings of foreign civilians.<sup>211</sup> “Though Zarqawi and his fighters numerically make a small proportion of the resistance (estimates run from 50 to 500), they exercise an exaggerated degree of influence due to their coupling of extreme violence with an acute understanding of the power of the media.”<sup>212</sup> JTJ and al-Zarqawi quickly gained prominence in the insurgent fight against the American occupation, which maintained the interest of Bin Laden, who aspired to establish a presence in Iraq.<sup>213</sup>

In 2004, after previously refusing multiple requests by Bin Laden, al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to the al-Qaeda leader, in effect merging his network with that of al-Qaeda and giving rise to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).<sup>214</sup> Both sides likely saw this merging as beneficial even in the face of fundamental disagreements in ideology:

One explanation for this coming together of these two former antagonists was simple: al-Zarqawi profited from the al-Qaeda franchise, and bin Laden needed a presence in Iraq. Another explanation is more complex: bin Laden laid claim to al-Zarqawi in the hopes of forestalling his emergence as the single most important terrorist figure in the world, and al-Zarqawi accepted bin Laden’s endorsement to augment his credibility and to strengthen his grip on the Iraqi tribes. Both explanations are true.<sup>215</sup>

Given reports of early tensions between al-Zarqawi and Bin Laden, links between AQI and the broader al-Qaeda network were “limited”.<sup>216</sup> al-Zarqawi became the primary symbol of the insurgency in Iraq while Bin Laden was in hiding, leading many to speculate that he was Bin Laden’s rival and perhaps replacement.<sup>217</sup> Rivalry certainly seemed to exist, as several leaders in

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<sup>211</sup> "Terrorism: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi."

<sup>212</sup> Corera.

<sup>213</sup> Weaver.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Corera.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

al-Qaeda relayed messages to al-Zarqawi rebuking his tactics “namely, that al-Zarqawi’s hostage beheadings, his mass slaughter of Shi’ites, and his assaults on their mosques were all having a negative effect on Muslim opinion—both of him and, by extension, of al-Qaeda—around the world”.<sup>218</sup> al-Zarqawi’s death in 2006 saw an end to the jockeying between the two for leadership, even if merely symbolic. That said, the leaders’ differing tactics, namely al-Zarqawi’s intolerance of Shi’ites, persist and remains one of the main reasons al-Qaeda has distanced itself from ISIS since it coalesced and emerged on the international stage in 2014.<sup>219</sup>

The evolution of AQI to ISIS was characterized and influenced by several key events: the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq; the appointment of new leadership after al-Zarqawi’s death; and the recent Syrian conflict in 2011. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent end of Saddam’s twenty-four years in power stoked fears about Shi’a primacy in the new government. In January 2006, AQI and other insurgent groups<sup>220</sup> merged to form Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (MSM). The groups fought together against the presence of Western powers, and what they saw as the growing influence of Iran -- a Shiite-dominated country -- in Iraq’s power vacuum.<sup>221</sup> Civil unrest caused by Sunni and Shiite insurgent groups and militias reached a head in 2006, largely considered the worst year of the conflict.<sup>222</sup> In response, a U.S.-supported alliance between troops and Sunni tribal leaders led to the “Sunni

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<sup>218</sup> Weaver.

<sup>219</sup> Zelin, Aaron Y. "The War between ISIS and Al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement." Research Notes, no. 20 (2014).

[http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote\\_20\\_Zelin.pdf](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf).

<sup>220</sup> Jaysh al-Ta’ifa al-Mansura, Saraya ‘Ansar al-Tawhid, Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, Saraya alGhuraba, and Kataib al-Ahwal. Lister, Charles, pg. 8

<sup>221</sup> Beehner, Lionel, and Greg Bruno. "Iran's Involvement in Iraq." Council on Foreign Relations. March 3, 2008. <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-involvement-iraq/p12521>.

<sup>222</sup> Fearon, James D. "Iraq's Civil War." Foreign Affairs. April 1, 2007.

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/62443/james-d-fearon/iraqs-civil-war>.

Awakening”<sup>223</sup> from 2007 to 2010, from which the united insurgency, now referred to as ISI,<sup>224</sup> suffered significantly.<sup>225</sup>

During this setback, ISI made several changes in an effort to maintain relevance. Among them, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was announced as the new leader of the struggling group.<sup>226</sup> In 2008, al-Baghdadi moved the group’s headquarters to Mosul,<sup>227</sup> the second-largest city in Iraq with a diverse population and thus rife with sectarian tension, while other parts of the country were experiencing a longer period of calm.<sup>228</sup> al-Baghdadi reinvigorated the organization’s leadership by recruiting former military officers under Saddam Hussein’s regime, many of them from Mosul,<sup>229</sup> who were dismissed in 2003 by the U.S. Coalition Provisional Authority and, if above a certain rank, barred from participating in the new government.<sup>230</sup> Drastic geopolitical shifts with the advent of the Arab Spring in 2011, specifically in Syria, also provided new opportunities for ISI to broaden its operations and popular support. Furthermore, Iraqi Prime

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<sup>223</sup> Ricks, Thomas E., and Karen DeYoung. "Al-Qaeda In Iraq Reported Crippled." *The Washington Post*. October 15, 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/14/AR2007101401245.html>.

<sup>224</sup> Soon after al-Zarqawi’s death in 2006, AQI appointed Abu Ayyub al-Masri as its new leader, and four months later the MSM announced the establishment of (...) the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Several months after, Masri pledged allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISI. Lister, Charles, pg. 8

<sup>225</sup> Bruno, Greg. "The Role of the 'Sons of Iraq' in Improving Security." *The Washington Post*. April 28, 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042801120.html>.

<sup>226</sup> Arango, Tim, and Eric Schmitt. "U.S. Actions in Iraq Fueled Rise of a Rebel." *The New York Times*. August 10, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/world/middleeast/us-actions-in-iraq-fueled-rise-of-a-rebel.html>

<sup>227</sup> Lister, Charles, pg. 10

<sup>228</sup> Abouzeid, Rania. "In Mosul, Iraq's Insurgency Refuses to Be Tamed." *Time*. March 18, 2009. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1885771,00.html>.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Arraf, Jane. "U.S. Dissolves Iraqi Army, Defense and Information Ministries." *CNN*. May 23, 2003. <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/05/23/sprj.nitop.army.dissolve/>.

Minister Nouri al-Maliki's woeful attempts to fulfill promises of an inclusive government when he was re-elected in 2010 further alienated much of the Sunni population.<sup>231</sup>

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi's was killed in 2010, and his replacement Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi quickly picked up where he had left off in attempts to re-establish ISI as an influential group beyond Iraq.<sup>232</sup> The civil war in Syria created a power vacuum in which ISI could exploit sectarian tensions between the Sunni-majority and Syrian leadership, held in the hands of the Alawite minority since the 1960's.<sup>233</sup> Many fighters from Iraq went to Syria to support the popular revolution and its attempt to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, thereby strengthening already-existing networks<sup>234</sup> between ISI and Syria: "ISI and its antecedents had maintained links in Syria since 2003, when recruitment networks (...), funneled fighters from the Arab world into Iraq through Syria."<sup>235</sup> With new sources for funds and recruits, al-Baghdadi announced in 2013 that the emboldened ISI and its Syrian counterpart, Jabhat al-Nusra, were now the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS),<sup>236</sup> in effect blurring the Syrian and Iraqi borders in some places.<sup>237</sup>

Although ISIS and its antecedents were well-known in Iraq and surrounding countries since the U.S. invasion of 2003, it wasn't until ISIS captured Mosul in June 2014 that it grabbed the attention of the American intelligence community and the Iraqi government as an eminent

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<sup>231</sup> "Profile: Nouri Maliki." BBC News. August 12, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11733715>.

<sup>232</sup> Lister, Charles, pg. 11

<sup>233</sup> Kaplan, Robert D. "Syria: Identity Crisis." The Atlantic. February 1, 1993. [http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/02/syria-identity-crisis/303860/?single\\_page=true](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/02/syria-identity-crisis/303860/?single_page=true).

<sup>234</sup> Lister, Charles, pg. 12

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, pg. 13

<sup>237</sup> "Two Arab Countries Fall Apart." The Economist. June 14, 2014. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21604230-extreme-islamist-group-seeks-create-caliphate-and-spread-jihad-across>.

threat to regional stability.<sup>238</sup> ISIS has since made great territorial gains-- accumulating weapons and cash as it takes control of banks and army bases.<sup>239</sup> ISIS also controls several oil fields, thus allowing for vast revenue accumulation and self-financing, buoying ISIS's efforts without relying on external sources, possibly with divergent goals, for funding.<sup>240</sup>

The mission of ISIS, which it declared in July 2014, is to establish a radical Sunni Islamic state, specifically a caliphate- "a unified Islamic government".<sup>241</sup> ISIS intends for the caliphate to span across the entire Muslim world, governed by an extreme form of Sharia law. ISIS is focused on gaining control of territory and resources in Iraq and Syria, committing widespread war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide against certain groups in the process. To illustrate, a report published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), published in early October 2014, concludes that 1.8 million Iraqis have been forced to leave their home as a result of ISIS-related activity,<sup>242</sup> contributing to the already severe refugee crisis resulting from the Syria conflict. ISIS reportedly carries out execution-style killings of Iraqi soldiers when they capture a town, in some cases forcing prisoners to lie in

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<sup>238</sup> Arango and Schmitt.

<sup>239</sup> "Two Arab Countries Fall Apart."

<sup>240</sup> Hawramy, Fazel, Shalaw Mohammed, and Luke Harding. "Inside Islamic State's Oil Empire: How Captured Oilfields Fuel Isis Insurgency." *The Guardian*. November 19, 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/19/-sp-islamic-state-oil-empire-iraq-isis>.

<sup>241</sup> "Areas Under ISIS Control." *The New York Times*. November 7, 2014.

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=0).

<sup>242</sup> Hubbard, Ben. "'Terrifying' UN Report Details ISIS War Crimes in Iraq." *RT*. October 2, 2014.

<http://rt.com/news/192692-un-isis-war-crimes/>.

ditches where they are killed en masse.<sup>243</sup> The UNHCR report also says that more than 9,000 civilians have been killed and more than 17,000 injured.<sup>244</sup>

ISIS targets any group or individual they see as an obstruction to their ultimate goal, justifying attacks and abuses not only on security forces, but Sunni's refusing to swear allegiance,<sup>245</sup> Shiite Muslims,<sup>246</sup> or members of minority groups who refuse to convert to Islam.<sup>247</sup> Attacks also include those "directly against women and children," along with "forced recruitment of children, destruction of places of religious or cultural significance, wanton destruction and looting of property and denial of fundamental freedoms."<sup>248</sup> Females are generally treated as inferior by ISIS, with those from minority groups suffering from particularly harsh forms of abuse, torture, sexual and gender-based violence and humiliation.<sup>249</sup>

Yazidi and Christian women and girls are especially targeted by ISIS, as reports have surfaced of females from these minorities being kidnapped, repeatedly gang raped, and sold as

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<sup>243</sup> "ISIS 'execute' 1,700 Iraqi Soldiers, Post Gruesome Pictures." RT. June 18, 2014.

<http://rt.com/news/166092-iraq-militants-mass-executions/>.

<sup>244</sup> Hubbard.

<sup>245</sup> Hasan, Sarmad. "ISIS Launches Offensive against Sunni Muslims in Iraq." The Muslim News. September 26, 2014. <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/world-news/isis-launches-offensive-against-sunni-muslims-in-iraq/>

<sup>246</sup> Harding, Luke, and Fazel Hawramy. "Isis Accused of Ethnic Cleansing as Story of Shia Prison Massacre Emerges." The Guardian. August 25, 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/25/isis-ethnic-cleansing-shia-prisoners-iraq-mosul>.

<sup>247</sup> "ISIS Killed 500 Yazidis, Buried Some Alive Incl Women and Children - Iraq." RT. August 11, 2014.

<http://rt.com/news/179280-iraq-islamic-kil-yazidi/>.

<sup>248</sup> Hubbard.

<sup>249</sup> Esfandiari, Haleh. "ISIS's Cruelty Toward Women Gets Scant Attention." Wall Street Journal. September 2, 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/09/02/isis-cruelty-toward-women-gets-scant-attention/>.



sex slaves.<sup>250</sup> Unmarried women and girls are sold as sex slaves to male youth as a means of enticing them to join ISIS as fighters, or are given to fighters and commanders as rewards.<sup>251</sup> The same UNHCR report states that “Women and girls are brought with price tags for the buyers to choose and negotiate the sale”.<sup>252</sup> An Iraqi judge also explained that some women raped by ISIS fighters are discarded once they are pregnant, leaving both she and her child to be ostracized from society: her for being “soiled goods” and her child for being illegitimate.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, women who are raped may become targets for honor killings by their families, adding to the horrors these women have already experienced.<sup>254</sup>

Furthermore, ISIS targets minority children. Witnesses describe seeing Turkmen and Yazidi children left at an orphanage “after they had witnessed the killing of their parents by the fighters. It appears some of the older children may have been physically and sexually assaulted.”<sup>255</sup> As another U.N. report published in November states, “in sexually enslaving Yazidi women and girls and forcing them to bear the children of ISIS fighters, the armed group views the offspring as belonging to the father, superior to the mother, and prevents another generation of Yazidis from being born.”<sup>256</sup> In effect, ISIS successfully communicates to Yazidi and other minority men through these atrocities that they cannot protect their women or children, or preserve their cultural and ethnic heritage.

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<sup>250</sup> Marcus, Jeffrey. "U.N. Report Details ISIS Abuse of Women and Children." The New York Times. October 3, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/04/world/middleeast/un-report-isis-abuse-women-children.html>.

<sup>251</sup> Marcus.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Esfandiari.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Marcus.

<sup>256</sup> "Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria." Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2014. [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC\\_CRP\\_ISIS\\_14Nov2014.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/HRC_CRP_ISIS_14Nov2014.pdf).

For those living in ISIS-controlled areas, women and men are subject to a harsh form of Islamic law, similar to the type that Boko Haram and al-Shabaab impose. The Washington Post reported that after ISIS seized control of Mosul, it circulated a list of 16 “notes” for civilians including that women should stay indoors as much as possible or be fully covered when in public,<sup>257</sup> and should be with a male member of their immediate family<sup>258</sup> if they venture outdoors. In interviews with over 300 men, women and children living under ISIS rule in Syria, the UN found that the punishments for violating the laws range from amputation to public lashings, execution, and stoning.<sup>259</sup>

Early marriage is also rising at an alarming rate in ISIS territories. The same UN report found that ISIS kidnapped unmarried females from their homes on multiple occasions, reportedly to be forced into marriages with fighters.<sup>260</sup> In reaction, parents are marrying their daughters to preferred suitors early to protect their unmarried daughters from being abducted by ISIS.<sup>261</sup> Early marriage produces its own host of problems: the World Health Organization reports that “complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in young women aged 15–19.”<sup>262</sup> Young brides experience frequent and premature pregnancies without prenatal care, leading to a higher rate of maternal and infant mortality, among other long term health problems for both mother and the baby.

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<sup>257</sup> Taylor, Adam. "The Rules in ISIS' New State: Amputations for Stealing and Women to Stay Indoors." The Washington Post. June 12, 2014.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/06/12/the-rules-in-isis-new-state-amputations-for-stealing-and-women-to-stay-indoors/>.

<sup>258</sup> "Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria."

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> "Child Marriages: 39 000 Every Day." World Health Organization. March 7, 2013.

[http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child\\_marriage\\_20130307/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child_marriage_20130307/en/).

However, ISIS can count some women, particularly foreign, as supporters. Early on, ISIS actively discouraged women from joining, preferring instead that they fundraise or encourage their male relatives to join.<sup>263</sup> ISIS soon changed its tune though, realizing that “women are necessary for a state to function,” and has since actively campaigned foreign females to join ISIS. One piece of recruitment propaganda, called “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansaa Brigade,” was published by the all-female wing of ISIS. The manifesto admonishes gender equality and “clarifies” 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.”<sup>264</sup>

Instead, ISIS prefers women to serve in support roles as wives to fighters with the promise of “devout jihadist husbands, a home in a true Islamic state and the opportunity to devote their lives to their religion and their God”.<sup>265</sup> TIME initially estimated in September 2014 that there are “some 30 European women in Iraq and Syria who either accompanied their jihadist husbands or has gone with the intention to marry members of ISIS and other militant groups.”<sup>266</sup> Emerging reports place the number at a more startling estimate of more than 500 Western women who have joined ISIS<sup>267</sup> and the number is growing due to ISIS’s rigorous recruitment of

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<sup>263</sup> Baker, Aryn. "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women From Around the World." Time. September 6, 2014. <http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>.

<sup>264</sup> Winton, Charlie. "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade." Quilliam Foundation. February 1, 2015. <https://redtaperelief.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>.

<sup>265</sup> Baker.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> "Women Joining ISIS Militants 'cheerleaders, Not Victims': Study." The Straits Times. January 28, 2015. <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/world/europe/story/women-joining-isis-militants-cheerleaders-not-victims-20150128>.

women.<sup>268</sup> Along with fulfilling traditional spousal roles of cooking, cleaning and taking care of the home while their husbands are away fighting, these women are also tasked with giving birth to, and raising, the next generation of jihadists.

Some foreign women have voluntarily traveled to Iraq and Syria to serve as “comfort women” to fighters in response to a Wahhabi edict issued in 2013 asking Sunni women “to offer themselves as comfort women to boost the morale of fighters”.<sup>269</sup> The edict, referred to as “jihad al-nikah” or sexual jihad, has attracted hundreds of women from Australia, Britain, Malaysia, and Tunisia who believe they are playing an important role in the establishment of the Islamic State.<sup>270</sup> Tunisian Interior Minister, Lofti Bin Jeddou, bemoaned, “They have sexual relations with 20, 30, 100 militants. After the sexual liaisons they have there in the name of ‘jihad al-nikah’ (sexual holy war), they come home pregnant.”<sup>271</sup> The edict has also justified human trafficking and kidnapping, as ISIS fighters are ordering families to hand over their daughters or be beaten or killed for “violating God’s will.”<sup>272</sup> Iraq’s Ministry of Health reported in December

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<sup>268</sup> Erlanger, Steven. "In West, ISIS Finds Women Eager to Enlist." *New York Times*. October 23, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/24/world/europe/as-islamists-seek-to-fill-ranks-more-western-women-answer-their-call.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/24/world/europe/as-islamists-seek-to-fill-ranks-more-western-women-answer-their-call.html?_r=0).

<sup>269</sup> Chastain, Mary. "Women Volunteer for Sexual Jihad with Islamic State." *Breitbart*. August 27, 2014. <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/08/27/women-volunteer-for-sexual-jihad-with-islamic-state/>

<sup>270</sup> Chastain, Mary. "The Women of ISIS." *Breitbart*. September 6, 2014. <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/09/06/the-women-in-isis/>

<sup>271</sup> Nelson, Sara C. "Sexual Jihad Sees Tunisian Women Return From Syria Pregnant By Rebels, Says Minister." *Huffington Post UK*. November 20, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/09/20/sexual-jihad-tunisian-women-return-syria-pregnant-rebels\\_n\\_3960370.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/09/20/sexual-jihad-tunisian-women-return-syria-pregnant-rebels_n_3960370.html).

<sup>272</sup> White, Stephen. "ISIS Fighters Tells Families "hand over Your Daughters for Sex" after Orders from Cleric's Fatwa." *Mirror*. June 22, 2014. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-fighters-tells-families-hand-3745434>.

2014 that over 150 women and girls were murdered in Anbar province and buried in a mass grave for refusing to marry or have sex with ISIS fighters.<sup>273</sup>

Women have also emerged in more operative roles, as enforcers of Islamic laws of dress and conduct. The al-Khansaa Brigade is the most well-known example, an all-female security force in Raqqa, Syria that checks “women passing through checkpoints, in case they were carrying arms for the opposition” and also ensures that local women comply “with Islamic laws of dress and conduct”.<sup>274</sup> “We have established the brigade to raise awareness of our religion among women,” said an ISIS official in Raqqa, “Jihad is not a man-only duty. Women must do their part as well.”<sup>275</sup> One female Syrian teenager relayed her interaction with an al-Khansaa fighter to local media, describing being stopped by the fighter for walking without an escort and wearing her hijab improperly. “You should be punished for taking your religion lightly,” she reportedly was told by an al-Khansaa fighter, “before threatening harsher punishment should she be arrested again”.<sup>276</sup>

The al-Khansaa Brigade, which is thought to be comprised of mostly Western women,<sup>277</sup> is tasked not only with enforcing ISIS regulations and publishing propaganda to lure women to join ISIS, but also “punishing” females for violating said regulations with detainments and

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<sup>273</sup> Chastain, Mary. “ISIS Slaughters 150 Females in Iraq for Refusing to Marry, Have Sex with Them.” Breitbart. December 17, 2014. <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/12/17/isis-slaughters-150-females-in-iraq-for-refusing-to-marry-have-sex-with-militants/>

<sup>274</sup> Baker.

<sup>275</sup> Gilsinan, Kathy. “The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women.” The Atlantic. July 25, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/the-women-of-isis/375047/>.

<sup>276</sup> Al-Bahri, Ahmad. “All-Female ISIS Brigade Cracks Down on Women in Raqqa.” ABC News. July 20, 2014. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/female-isis-brigade-cracks-women-raqqa/story?id=24622389>.

<sup>277</sup> Mendick, Robert, and Robert Verkaik. “British Women Join ISIS Police Force Responsible for Punishing Muslims Who Break Strict Sharia Law.” National Post. September 7, 2014. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/09/07/british-women-join-isis-police-force-responsible-for-punishing-muslims-who-break-strict-sharia-law/>.

whippings.<sup>278</sup> Minority females are at times subjected to rape and torture while detained by ISIS, and the torture in some places may be carried out or backed by other women.<sup>279</sup> Details surfaced in September 2014 of brothels, run by the al-Khansaa Brigade, where thousands of female prisoners, mostly if not entirely from the Yazidi and Christian minority, are repeatedly raped and abused by ISIS militants.<sup>280</sup> One woman held in a brothel spoke of the abuse and accompanying trauma, begging for the brothel to be bombed to end her suffering, "If you know where we are please bomb us... There is no life after this. I'm going to kill myself anyway -- some have killed themselves this morning (...) I've been raped 30 times and it's not even lunchtime."<sup>281</sup>

The al-Khansaa Brigade, if comprised of a large number of highly-educated European women, is likely tasked with managing the brothel primarily to enforce ISIS's strict code of gender segregation, which would forbid men from regularly interacting with females. A more nuanced explanation relates to how ISIS recruits, relying "heavily on identity politics" by specifically "targeting young women who feel oppressed as Sunni Muslims" and will more readily vindicate the abuse of non-Sunni Muslim women.<sup>282</sup> For the Western women in the Brigade, if they indeed "felt alienated by Western life, mores and politics"<sup>283</sup> and have been

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<sup>278</sup> Al-Bahri.

<sup>279</sup> "British Women Oversee ISIS Abuse, Sexual Slavery of Yazidi Girls." RT. December 5, 2014. <http://rt.com/uk/211791-british-female-jihadi-khansa/>.

<sup>280</sup> "UK Female Jihadists Run ISIS Sex-slave Brothels." Al-Arabiya News. September 12, 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2014/09/12/UK-female-jihadists-run-ISIS-sex-slave-brothels.html>.

<sup>281</sup> Varghese, Johnlee. "ISIS News: 'Raped, Abused' Yazidi Women Beg West to Bomb Their Brothel and Kill Them." International Business Times. October 30, 2014. <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/isis-news-raped-abused-yazidi-women-beg-west-bomb-their-brothel-kill-them-video-612643>.

<sup>282</sup> Gowrinathan, Nimmi. "The Women of ISIS: Understanding and Combating Female Extremism."

<sup>283</sup> Erlanger, Steven.

persuaded to believe they are fighting for a utopian society,<sup>284</sup> may feel pressure to prove their loyalty and thus more likely to enforce their orders with more brutality.

Appallingly, ISIS and its al-Khansaa Brigade justify this treatment of non-Muslim females with a radical interpretation of Islam that effectively *others* these minority groups.<sup>285</sup> The October 2014 issue of ISIS's monthly magazine, Dabiq, contained an article boasting about the enslavement of "idolators," positing that ISIS is "reviving a practice of the companions of the Prophet Mohammad by enslaving enemies" and that "enslaving women and forcing them to become wives reduces sin by protecting men from being tempted into adultery."<sup>286</sup> According to this article, the abuse, enslavement and rape of Yazidi women and girls, even pre-pubescent children, is justified as it is, "permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse."<sup>287</sup>

While many women are joining ISIS from European countries, it is important to emphasize that it is nearly impossible to ascertain the extent to which local women chose to support the presence of ISIS and the laws it imposes. Syrian and Iraqi women may be joining and supporting ISIS of their own volition, or doing so out of fear or coercion. Additionally, if ISIS provides salaries to women as prison guards or policers of female dress, these women may be joining out of financial hardship. Alternately, male family members may force the women to serve in a supporting role out of ideology or fear. In much of Iraq and Syria, conservative

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<sup>284</sup> Gowrinathan, Nimmi. "Join ISIS, Marry a Jihadist." Ynet News. June 11, 2014. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4588892,00.html>.

<sup>285</sup> "UK Female Jihadists Run ISIS Sex-slave Brothels."

<sup>286</sup> "Islamic State Seeks to Justify Enslaving Yazidi Women and Girls in Iraq." Newsweek. October 13, 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com/islamic-state-seeks-justify-enslaving-yazidi-women-and-girls-iraq-277100>.

<sup>287</sup> "ISIS Releases Horrifying Sex Slave Pamphlet, Justifies Child Rape." RT. December 11, 2014. <http://rt.com/news/213615-isis-sex-slave-children/>.

familial structures follow patriarchal norms, such that a woman is bound by the decisions of her father or husband. Combined with the challenge in reaching local women for interviews and the consequences they face for speaking critically, it is unknown how many women truly support ISIS's goals and rule. For women who chose to make the trip to Iraq or Syria from Europe or the United States, this is not the case, and some very publicly declare their support for, and belief in, the mission of ISIS.

Although difficult to pin down exact numbers, the number of foreign women who have joined ISIS is thought to be in the hundreds, mostly under the age of 30 and as young as 13.<sup>288</sup> Many of these young women are first or second generation immigrants, either from Muslim families or recent converts to the faith, unmarried and lured with promises of a life of adventure and excitement in a “utopian” community.<sup>289</sup> ISIS has been actively recruiting foreign women, especially since October when ISIS launched an online group called “al-Zawra’a Foundation”.<sup>290</sup> The resource advises “Western women not only to watch training videos on handling weapons, but also to have their mothers teach them recipes and tailoring skills so they can cook for ISIS fighters and sew their combat uniforms.”<sup>291</sup> Dr. Katherine Brown concludes that attempts to recruit young foreign women are characterized by exploiting their naive romanticism, both for an ideal Islamic society and an ideal life as a “jihadi bride.”<sup>292</sup> Foreign women who have already

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<sup>288</sup> Sherwood, Harriet, Sandra Laville, Kim Willsher, Ben Knight, Maddy French, and Lauren Gambino. "Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters." *The Guardian*. September 29, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria>.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Walt, Vivienne. “Marriage and Martyrdom: How ISIS is Winning Women.” *Time*. November 18, 2014. <http://time.com/3591943/isis-syria-women-brides-france/>.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Brown, Katherine. “Analysis: Why are Western women joining Islamic State?” *BBC News*. October 6, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29507410>.



joined ISIS and moved to Iraq or Syria play an instrumental role in recruiting other foreign women.

An entire community has emerged on social media allowing Western women who have already joined up with ISIS to reach out to others considering the move. Women recruit others through tweets and blog posts, such as “from the battlefield on the joys of jihadi family life and the "honor" of giving birth and raising the future mujahideen (warriors).”<sup>293</sup> One British woman, Aqsa Mahmood, offers advice to other women considering joining through her blog: she tells her followers everything from what to pack (“For the winter you will most need a good pair of boots”), to how to prepare (“get all the shots and vaccinations that you require”) and highlights the pragmatic reasons for becoming “jihadi brides” – “The reality is that to stay without a man here is really difficult”.<sup>294</sup> Western women in ISIS are not only recruiting potential members with assurances of a good life, but also for new friendships and sisterhood among like-minded women.

The community of ISIS women may be a significant selling point for those feeling alienated or lacking positive identity, characteristics Anne Speckhard identifies as possible motivators for female suicide bombers.<sup>295</sup> At least publicly, this certainly is the case. “On the social media accounts, these women shower each other with love and affection. They treat each other as actual sisters and best friends, which could bring in any woman who longs for

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<sup>293</sup> Speckhard, Anne. “The ISIS Call for Women to Join Their Jihad: Love and Romance as Motivators.” Huffington Post:UK. September 5, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/anne-speckhard/isis-women\\_b\\_5762820.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/anne-speckhard/isis-women_b_5762820.html)

<sup>294</sup> Khaleeli, Homa “The British women married to jihad.” The Guardian. September 6, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/06/british-women-married-to-jihad-isis-syria>.

<sup>295</sup> Speckhard. “The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists.” pg. 1005

friendships.”<sup>296</sup> This sisterhood extends to all women supporting ISIS activities towards the establishment of the ideal Islamic state these young women have romanticized, even to the point of justifying the horrific crimes against other women and girls not so different from themselves.

As with the other groups, voluntary participation in ISIS is harder to distinguish among women, especially as forced marriages to fighters are extremely common. ISIS is unique in these cases though in that it attracts hundreds of foreign women and gives them assorted roles, as wives, mothers or part of the al-Khansaa brigade. A combination of the naive romanticism of youth and promises of a life of adventure in establishing the ideal Islamic society attracts many men and women from other countries to join ISIS. That combined with ISIS’s robust indoctrination tactics, especially through social media, these women and girls may be so disassociated from Yazidi and Christian females that they see crimes committed against them as not only justified, but necessary, in the furtherance of ISIS’s goals.

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<sup>296</sup> Chastain. “The Women of ISIS.”

## Concluding Analysis

The support females provide to non-state armed groups is neither ubiquitous nor consistent. Armed groups recruit girls and women for many reasons and to fulfill different roles; furthermore, the rate of recruitment, the reasons, and the roles females' play may change over the course of a group's existence. As the three previous case studies have illustrated, females may provide support voluntarily, or they may be tricked, coerced, or forced. They may provide the support remotely, or physically join the group. They may fill traditional roles as wives and mothers, as is the case in all three groups, or serve in more functional or operational roles as suicide bombers or recruiters, as is the case in Boko Haram, or ISIS respectively.

The extent to which girls and women lend their support to armed groups also varies, and there is an important distinction to be made among age groups. Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and ISIS all appear to primarily target girls and young women in their recruitment efforts and abductions as they are easier to influence and control. All three groups also target younger unmarried female for abductions as they are at lower risk for sexually-transmitted diseases and are more likely to have maintained their virginity: critical assets as the groups then give them to fighters as rewards, force them into "marriages" or sell the girls (in the cases of Boko Haram and ISIS), at varying rates.

It is nearly impossible in these three cases, and in other violent groups to which outside contact is limited, to determine the extent of which the support of females is provided voluntarily (with the exception of Western recruits to ISIS perhaps), and if that support can be revoked by leaving or disassociating with the group. For those who are providing their support by choice, the

research indicates several overlapping motivators, some gender-neutral and others not, and some specific to foreign females and others not. Females from the same country or region as the armed group in question may join for safety or financial hardship, as operational roles may provide a modicum of security, a salary and/or housing. Marrying a fighter may provide protection from much of the hardships associated with conflict such as, “material deprivation in refugee camps, daily harassment and fear in militarized zones, and a constant vulnerability to rape.”<sup>297</sup> This is not always the case of course, as it may still be possible for women who have joined voluntarily to be subjected to marital rape.

Foreign women may also be lured by promises of security although responding to less acute vulnerabilities, as ISIS paints itself as a “protector of women, rather than an oppressor of them.”<sup>298</sup> This motivator is highly gendered for both men and women, as McCants notes, “jihadist groups have often appealed to Arab men's sense of honor, by claiming that Muslim women had been raped and that joining the jihad was a way to avenge their mistreatment.”<sup>299</sup>

Women, both foreign and in country, may also be attracted to a group if it provides an opportunity for them to exercise a form of power or dominance not previously exercised. For the women in Al-Khansaa for example, the position provides them with power usually reserved for men. “Many of them [Al-Khansaa] are eager to portray themselves as strong women and often make fun of the Western stereotype of ‘the oppressed Muslim woman,’” says Thomas

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<sup>297</sup> Gowrinathan.

<sup>298</sup> Taub, Amanda. "No, CNN, Women Are Not Joining ISIS Because of 'kittens and Nutella'" Vox. February 18, 2015. <http://www.vox.com/2014/10/20/6987673/isis-women>.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

Hegghammer, an expert on Islamist militancy affiliated with the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.<sup>300</sup>

Like men, women may also join out a combination of trauma, revenge, feelings of alienation, desire for adventure, or belief in the primacy of a higher political, nationalistic and/or religious objective. Personal trauma suffered by Nigerians at the hands of security forces has galvanized support for Boko Haram, and may attract those seeking revenge. ISIS has recruited foreigners by appealing to those feeling alienated by employing rhetoric about the “failings of Western societies” and “restrictions on how they can practise Islam (for example, the ban on wearing the burqa in France).”<sup>301</sup> Again in the case of ISIS, “the perceived failure of Western states to give Muslims a sense of belonging, purpose and value as Muslims and citizens is striking in the online accounts of these women jihadis.”<sup>302</sup>

A desire for adventure may also be a component in the decision one makes to join an armed struggle, regardless of gender. Groups may attempt to sell, some more successfully than others, the promise of a “meaning-rich environment,” in contrast to the “quotidian struggle,” as ISIS has done to attract men and women.<sup>303</sup> Women are also attracted to romantic narratives, as adventure may come in the form of an unchartered life with a jihadi husband. This is a common recruitment tactic of ISIS, as men and women may meet through social media and develop a

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<sup>300</sup> Gilsinan.

<sup>301</sup> Brown.

<sup>302</sup> Ferran, Lee, and Randy Kreider. "Selling the 'Fantasy': Why Young Western Women Would Join ISIS." ABC News. February 20, 2015. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/young-women-join-isis/story?id=29112401>.

<sup>303</sup> Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." The Atlantic. March 1, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

relationship, while other foreign women who have already made the move to Syria encourage the relationship.<sup>304</sup>

Belief in the primacy of a higher political, nationalistic and/or religious objective appears to be one of the strongest motivators for men and women. Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and ISIS all heavily use religious rhetoric to outline their objectives, recruit male and female followers, and justify the strict regulation of women's behavior and bodies. For example, Shekau declared "God told him" to sell the Chibok girls<sup>305</sup> and ISIS enslaves minority women and girls in an effort to "revive" the practice from the time of the Prophet.<sup>306</sup>

The rhetoric employed for recruitment is highly gendered, as women are called to support groups out of religious duty to be good wives to fighters and give birth to their children, or provide fighters with sexual "comfort." This is particularly the case with ISIS, which uses religious rhetoric as much as a persuasive tool for the recruitment of women as it does for justifying atrocities against them. This is less so with Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, whose recruitment tactics don't appear to attempt to persuade but rather to force or coerce women into supporting the group.

All three groups though heavily rely on extremist interpretations of the Quran to *other* its targets of violent acts, whether it is against governments, minority groups, and private citizens who they see as obstructing their goals. The process of "othering" is often seen in ethnic and political conflicts, such as the propaganda used in the Rwandan Civil War to dehumanize and

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<sup>304</sup> Speckhard, Anne. "The ISIS Call for Women to Join Their Jihad: Love and Romance as Motivators."

<sup>305</sup> Muhammad.

<sup>306</sup> "Islamic State Seeks to Justify Enslaving Yazidi Women and Girls in Iraq."

demonize Tutsi's, encouraging acts of violence against them. Women are equally susceptible as men to this propaganda, regardless of the gender of the victims, which may explain in part the dissonance presumably required for women to ostensibly turn a blind eye to atrocities against other women.

Overall, the gendered assumption that women will refrain from supporting or participating in groups that commit violent acts towards other women fails to recognize two elements: the highly gendered ways in which violent armed groups attract and ensure female participation, either forced or voluntarily, and; the economic and political climates in Nigeria, Somalia, Iraq and Syria where the unraveling social fabric leaves women to seek money and security through terrorist groups in the absence of better options.





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