

## The Terror of Sex: Significations of Al Qaeda Wives<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of military wifeness has been examined time and again in the fields of International Relations and Security Studies. In militaries around the world, idealized notions of the model military wife militarize women's lives, influencing their lifestyles, activities, and political and moral priorities. In turn, those women's militarized lives play crucial roles in the functioning of militaries ideologically, socially, and professionally. As Cynthia Enloe has argued, "patriarchal militaries need feminized military wives." This article explores the question of whether a similar symbiotic relationship exists between marriage and terrorist organizations, specifically Al Qaeda. Is there such a thing as an ideal "Al Qaeda wife"? If so, is that ideal wife a crucial signification for the success and institutional structure of Al Qaeda? Does it differ across the diverse organization? How are the wives of members of Al Qaeda portrayed by the organization itself and by the media that covers them? How are the women with members of Al Qaeda signified? How are they represented? How are they treated? In order to address these questions, this chapter looks at Al Qaeda wifeness through the lens of its "signification"—discursive public presentation and performance in political context. It starts with a brief discussion of its method of analyzing the signification of Al Qaeda wives, interpreting discourses about the women, their roles, and their characteristics through the social and political contexts of their performance. After laying this methodological framework, it identifies three story-lines about wives of Al Qaeda operatives: one about what is termed in this paper as an idealized "terrorized" femininity; another about wifeness as a criminal act; and a third that casts wives as fancied players in an Orientalist story of exotic polygamy. I argue that each narrative identifies and assigns womanhood and cultural membership on the basis of wifeness. Together, narratives of wifeness sustain the discursive representation and organizational capacity of Al Qaeda.

### Introduction

A woman married to a soldier has to cope with the demands particular to being a military wife: she is defined by society not only by her relationship to a particular man, but by her membership in a powerful state institution; she is seen not just as a particular soldier's wife, but as a military wife [...] the military wife becomes a political "problem" [...] [and] divorce becomes an issue of national security.<sup>2</sup>

During the Afghan jihad, while men fought on the battlefield, women played key roles as mothers, daughters and wives of male jihadis. Traditionally, they provided logistics and facilitation support to their men . [...] a woman indicated, "We stand shoulder to shoulder with our men,

supporting them, helping them [...]. We educate their sons and we prepare ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon of military wifehood has been examined time and time again in the fields of International Relations and Security Studies.<sup>4</sup> In militaries around the world, idealized notions of the model military wife militarize women’s lives, influencing their lifestyles, activities, and political and moral priorities.<sup>5</sup> In turn, those women’s militarized lives play crucial roles in the functioning of militaries ideologically, socially, and professionally.<sup>6</sup> Military wives maintain the household while their husbands are away at war, serve to calm and soothe stressed soldiers, create a sense of home at every new station or base, encourage their husbands to re-enlist, and encourage their children to join the military.<sup>7</sup> They are integral in “cheering their men off to war and stitching them together when they get home.”<sup>8</sup> Military wives have been characterized as “married to the military” and as a linchpin in maintaining military order and enthusiasm.<sup>9</sup> As Cynthia Enloe has argued, “patriarchal militaries need feminized military wives.”<sup>10</sup> Military wives in idealized roles are a key part of militarized society.<sup>11</sup>

This article is a preliminary exploration into the question of whether a similar symbiotic relationship exists between marriage and terrorist<sup>12</sup> organizations, specifically in the case of Al Qaeda. Is there such a thing as an ideal “Al Qaeda wife”?<sup>13</sup> If so, is that ideal wife a crucial signification for the success and institutional structure of Al Qaeda? How are the wives of members of Al Qaeda portrayed by the organization itself and by the media that covers them? How are the women *with* members of Al Qaeda signified? How are they represented? How are they treated?

In order to address these questions, this article looks at Al Qaeda wifedom through the lens of its “significations”—discursive public presentation and performance in political contexts, both from “inside” Al Qaeda and its supporters, and from “outside” Al Qaeda and its opponents. The exploration starts with a brief discussion of its method of analyzing the signification of Al Qaeda wives, interpreting discourses about the women, their roles, and their characteristics through the social and political contexts of their performance. After laying this methodological framework, it identifies three story-lines about wives of Al Qaeda operatives: one about what is termed in this article as an idealized “terrorized” femininity; another about wifedom as a criminal act; and a third that casts wives as fancied players in an Orientalist<sup>14</sup> story of exotic polygamy. I argue that each narrative identifies and assigns womanhood and cultural membership on the basis of wifedom; together, narratives of wifedom sustain the discursive representation and organizational capacity of Al Qaeda, which rely both internally and externally on the existence of a feminized other. The article concludes by arguing that, like images of idealized militarized femininity, it is likely that images of wifedom are a linchpin both for the structure of Al Qaeda and to onlookers’ readings of the organization.

### **Signification as a Framework to See Al Qaeda Wifedom**

In order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign; that is, in some way it must become external to a relation which it now only signifies, signed arbitrarily and non-coherently to this concrete relation, yet obtaining its coherence, and consequently its meaning, from an abstract and systematic relation to all other object-signs.<sup>15</sup>

Given the infinite information in the world and humans' limited time and cognitive capacity, our comprehension of even the parts of the world we "know" is based on abbreviations, metaphors, and inherited conceptions.<sup>16</sup> In such a situation, our understandings of the world around us are often based on shorthand and second-hand accounts. These accounts are not random, but are often structured by a theme that warrants their telling and a "punchline" that underscores their importance. Maarten Hajer has called these accounts "story-lines," which are "narratives on social reality through which elements from many different domains are combined and that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding."<sup>17</sup> It is these sets of symbolic references that bestow story-lines with common meaning(s) and enable their acceptance and interpretation by diverse actors with diverse political, social, and economic positions and interests. These sets of symbolic references have been identified as "significations," indicating the production of signs.<sup>18</sup> As the passage from Baudrillard that opens this section explains, signification is a key process on the road to public consumption of information. Objects' signification provides them with coherence, meaning, and relational value.<sup>19</sup> The process of assigning this meaning, however, is not standard, random, or apolitical.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Hajer explains, "story-lines are political devices that allow the overcoming of fragmentation and the achievement of discursive closure."<sup>21</sup>

Signification, then, is the (intentional or unintentional) telling of a coherent story with wide acceptability to manufacture commonality and produce a desired reaction—"analysis, then, the sorting out the structures of signification," as Geertz explains.<sup>22</sup> Because the structures of signification of Al Qaeda wives are not unified

or unidirectional, this sorting out is not a linear process. Instead, structures of signification between Al Qaeda and its “enemies” show what Homi Bhabha terms “ambivalence,” neither the complete acceptance nor the complete rejection of the identity of the other.<sup>23</sup> As such, the discursive result is some sort of “melting pot” where nothing actually melts—it is hybridity between the actor (here, Al Qaeda) and its “Others.” The self (and external) significations of Al Qaeda wives are relational. As John Hall argues, “[a]ctual inquiries’ depend on *hybrid* practices that involve extra-logical mediations and formative discourses employed *in relation to* one another.”<sup>24</sup> These extra-logical mediations include emotion, cultural context, gender perceptions, and other socially constituted actions and reactions. Given this complexity and hybridity of meaning of the story-lines around Al Qaeda wives, the method by which the story-lines are analyzed and deconstructed must also be complex.

This study uses hermeneutic deconstruction to look for explicit and hidden meanings in story-lines about Al Qaeda wifhood and to read them through their contexts in local and global politics. As Hall explains it, “*hermeneutic deconstruction* balances the power of deconstruction to unmask hidden meaning with the interpretive power of hermeneutics to identify coherent meaning in cultural context.”<sup>25</sup>

Hermeneutic deconstruction is “fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in knowledge” and aspires to “investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized, and so on by language

use.”<sup>26</sup> This article looks to analyze the significations of Al Qaeda wives using the tools of hermeneutic deconstruction.

This critical investigation, then, emphasizes three parts of the signification process. It deals with the characterizations of Al Qaeda wifehood by examining the story-lines’ meanings at face value. It analyzes their descriptions, predications, and commonly produced themes to broadly address the question: What is an Al Qaeda wife signified as? Second, it addresses the performance of and reaction to that utterance in a specific personal, cultural, and relational context. This “contextual” view is necessary because the discourses that identify and assign roles to Al Qaeda wives are cross-cultural, and different contexts assign different meanings to similar concepts. Discourse analysis that does not pay attention to context takes “for granted an object domain which is in fact the product of a complex set of social, historical, and political conditions of formation.”<sup>27</sup> In such an analysis, “the political conflict is hidden in the question of what definition is given to the problem, which aspects of social reality are included and which are left undiscussed.”<sup>28</sup> Third, this analysis gives attention to the reception of the discourse. A discourse is consumed only to the degree that it is reacted to—a discourse constructing a role for Al Qaeda wives does not affect either women’s lives or global politics until it is accepted and/or acted upon. The discourse itself is a constructing move, but the construction occurs if and only if the audience reacts to the story-line as such.<sup>29</sup>

At the outset, it is important to note that exploration of the dominant significations of women who are Al Qaeda wives or the role of wifehood in Al Qaeda should not be read as an attempt to normalize or essentialize either the experience of

womanhood/wifehood or the experience of relating to/with Al Qaeda as an organization. Just as Al Qaeda itself is diverse, disjointed, amorphous, and constantly changing, so, too, are gender norms and gendered experiences. Rather than understand what *the experience of Al Qaeda wifehood is/the experiences of Al Qaeda wifehood* are, this is an attempt to understand how those experiences are read and signified, and therefore what Al Qaeda wifehood is *imagined to be* and how that relates to the organizational structure(s) of the organization and the perceptions of its opponents.

### **Al Qaeda**

Though it is important to note that Al Qaeda is neither a single, monolithic organization nor the only organization involved in terrorism in the twenty-first century, it is equally important to see that it has both claimed and received a significant amount of attention both in the media and in the global political arena. In many discourses “Al Qaeda” has become a synonym for “Islamist terrorist,” which itself has become a stand-in for terrorism more generally. That Al Qaeda is best described as “a networked transnational constituency rather than a monolithic, international terrorist organization with identifiable command and control apparatus” is often a catch-22, because its opponents read it as such despite its obvious and increasing decentralization.<sup>30</sup>

What historical documentation that we have about Al Qaeda shows that it evolved organically and moved fluidly from Saudi Arabia to Sudan to Afghanistan. From its early days, Al Qaeda was not one organization but a network of associates,

affiliates, cells, and support networks where the leaders of the movement were involved only in coordination and planning. Even at its height of organization, Al Qaeda's core group was small and worked in networks rather than together as a whole, totaling perhaps only a few thousand people.<sup>31</sup> The group split from Saudi politics and radicalized in response to the Saudi acceptance of American military aid (and rejection of its military aid) in defending Saudi Arabia from a potential attack on from Iraq after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After that point, the group has claimed responsibility for hundreds of terrorist attacks across the world in the name of radical Islamist and anti-imperial ideas, combining religious and nationalist calls for change through violence.

There was once evidence that Al Qaeda "central"<sup>32</sup> had a number of committees focusing on public relations, media, finance, and military operations.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the links between Al Qaeda "central" and those who self-identify as part of Al Qaeda across the globe have always been weak and appear to be getting weaker. Bruce Hoffman has described Al Qaeda's organization in four parts: Al Qaeda central (leaders, in charge of high-value, "spectacular" attacks); Al Qaeda affiliates and associates (other established groups in different regions in the world adopted and funded by Al Qaeda with some common goals); Al Qaeda locals (small terrorist cells that have had some contact or training from Al Qaeda); and the Al Qaeda network (people who are not and never have been involved in the organization but are sympathetic to its aims and willing to act on that sympathy).<sup>34</sup>

Al Qaeda, then, is complicated and incoherent but shares elements of a common discourse of purpose and cause. On the one hand, one should expect



discourses about what it means to be in Al Qaeda, to be a part of the movement, or to be dedicated to the cause, then, to have some common elements and some divergent elements, and expect that to be replicated in “internally-produced” understandings of what it means to be a wife in and around Al Qaeda, to the extent there is such a thing. On the other hand, reactions, audiences, and opponents have two discourses of Al Qaeda: one as the disjointed organization and movement it seems to be; and one as a tightly organized, homogenous, global organization that could be understood as the driving force for twenty-first century global violence. In these “outsider” views, then, one would expect to see two accounts of what it means to be involved in Al Qaeda: one that, although from a different perspective, mirrors internal understandings of similarities and differences across the organizations; and another that frames being “in Al Qaeda” as something universal and similar for all participants. Those divergent approaches would also be reproduced in narrativized accounts of Al Qaeda wifedom.

### **Gender and (Militarized) Wifedom**

In order to understand the story-lines around Al Qaeda wifedom, we first need an understanding of what gender is and how it might be signified particularly in the area of wifedom. *Genders* are socially assigned expected roles on the basis of perceived membership in implicitly natural<sup>35</sup> sex groups: male and female.<sup>36</sup> *Genderings* are times where the influence of those socially assigned expected roles is obvious in reactions to and descriptions of the world.

Gender representations are generally divisible into masculinities and femininities—stereotypes, behavioral norms, and rules expected of people based on

their perceived maleness and femaleness. There is more than one “masculinity” and more than one “femininity;” different expectations are based on different temporal, social, political, and cultural contexts. Gender is lived differently in different places, bodies, and locations. What masculinities and femininities share is an understanding of who or what a person is or ought to be based on his or her sex group. People’s signified genders, then, are not constant, but contingent and changing social processes, told, performed, and received in story-lines.

The storied nature of gender does not mean that it is artificial. Instead, social genders are lived by people throughout the world. For the purposes of this analysis, gender “is a set of discourses that represent, construct, change, and enforce meaning.”<sup>37</sup> One of the focal points for discourses of gender centers around marital and family relationships, a topic that is often at the intersection of political and moral debates about how people ought to live and the extent to which the “other” ought to be imposed on to change his/her values. If femininity is a constitutive Other to masculinity, that opposition/pairing is reproduced and reinforced in representations (if not conceptions) of marriage in many cultures and many times across the global political arena. What many of these narratives have in common is some sense of roles based on gender. If a “husband” is provider, citizen-soldier, and the public face of the family, then the “wife” is often posited supporter, the subject of protection, and constitutive of the private sphere. While the opposition between and symbiosis of “husband” and “wife” can often be characterized in gendered terms of constitutive Otherness, the content of those roles is often specified for the particular social and political context in which it is embedded.

Feminist analysis of American militarized femininity gives an example of such a contextualization. That of idealized militarized femininity has developed an understanding of the roles expected of military wives. In militarized femininity, women are “viewed as symbols of the family”<sup>38</sup> and “serve as social reproducers of group members and cultural forms.”<sup>39</sup> In its organizational and social structures, the military indoctrinates wives and socializes children in terms of “beliefs, behaviors, and loyalties that are culturally appropriate.”<sup>40</sup> This is related to the role of women as biological and cultural reproducers of state and/or nation in gendered nationalisms.<sup>41</sup> The ideal military wife “unites with kindred spirits and strangers to raise families, maintain homes, and uphold the most positive attitude when facing the fears of losing a loved one.”<sup>42</sup> She can “overcome fear and anxiety while concerned for the safety of her loved ones, protecting our freedom.”<sup>43</sup> She is independent enough to survive, but still a brave supporter of her man and a member of a gendered military culture.

Militarized femininity, then, is militarism that relies on negotiating and controlling femininity generally and women specifically to perpetuate its organizational culture.<sup>44</sup> This control is over women as well as over the particular norms of sex and sexuality that are assumed to be related to proper femininity (and therefore proper masculinity). Militarized femininity is a gendered element of military culture; idealized military wives are a product of idealized militarized femininity. This article compares the American/Western idealized military wifhood to the (self-proclaimed and designated) notion of wifhood in Al Qaeda.

### **Al Qaeda Wifhood**

A number of studies about Al Qaeda have pointed out its explicit misogyny.<sup>45</sup> This is a feature of a number of self-identifying discourses of members of Al Qaeda, and arguably a constitutive feature of the organization as a whole. Still, some scholars have contended that this is a political tactic of the West; for example, Michael Kimmel writes: “[T]he equation of Al Qaeda and misogyny seems to have more to do with the rhetorical vilification of the terrorists than it does with analytical perspicuity.”<sup>46</sup> Either way, the explicit misogyny of Al Qaeda juxtaposed with the explicit inclusiveness of American (and most Western) military rhetoric might be used to argue that a comparison between idealized military wifehood and idealized Al Qaeda wifehood is inappropriate. That would perhaps be true if the argument were that the experience of being a “military wife” and an “Al Qaeda wife” were similar or the same. That is not the point or the focus of this article.

Instead, this article makes the argument that significations of idealized militarized femininity, which call for support or complicity, structure family interactions, rely on political calls for service to define personal relationships, and constitute the marital relationships of “soldier” and “soldier-wife” both ideally and to a lesser extent actually in significations of Al Qaeda wifehood as well. Certainly, rising curiosity in the American mainstream media about Al Qaeda wifehood surfaced in American media narratives about Amal Ahmed al-Sadah, the wife of Osama bin Laden who was injured in the raid on his compound that resulted in his death. That interest suggests that the question is worth pursuing.

Al Qaeda operative Rashad Mohammed Saeed Ismael described what Osama bin Laden had “ordered” in the search for his last wife, that she must be “pious,

dutiful, young, well mannered, from a decent family, but above all patient” because “she will have to endure my exceptional circumstances.”<sup>47</sup> Media and intelligence fascination with Amal was high in the months after her husband’s death and has become the center of a debate about intelligence and information between the United States and Pakistan.<sup>48</sup> Questions of what Amal did as bin Laden’s wife, whether or not she is to be implicated in his criminal actions, and the spectacle of her engagement in bin Laden’s polygamous marriage have been a feature of news coverage and political discussion.<sup>49</sup>

This article, then, explores the question of how Al Qaeda wives are represented and received—in interviews with and in statements by Al Qaeda leaders and members. The article focuses on the three story-lines—idealized “terrorized” femininity, wifhood as a criminal act, and the Oriental exoticism of polygamy—that are gendered discourses. The idealized “terrorized” femininity story-line represents and constructs the gender identities performed by wives of Al Qaeda, often from inside the organization. The criminality and exoticism story-lines are told from outside of the organization by those who receive and react to their performances and who construct others’ ideas of Al Qaeda wives’ gender identities.

### **A Note on Method**

To understand how Al Qaeda signifies wives in the organization as well as how wives of Al Qaeda members are understood in media and political reactions responding to and opposing Al Qaeda, this study casts a broad net to find both Al Qaeda-authorized statements, local news coverage, and international news coverage.

While it is limited to statements and articles either originally made in or translated into English, those sources dovetail with the goal of the article to understand Al Qaeda's public representations of and Western/U.S. responses to idealized Al Qaeda wifehood. The statements and articles were located through a Google News archive search for relevant terms.<sup>50</sup> I found the relevant articles from those searches and divided them into first-hand statements and outside analyses. I then took a two-step process to expand the database of articles evaluated. First, to find first-hand narratives, I searched names and events mentioned in the articles initially found for more information and data about those people's statements and the gender implications of those events. Second, to find reactions and outside characterizations, I searched the authors and newspapers from the relevant articles. I limited the collected data original statements and major-market news sources from September of 2000 to September of 2010.<sup>51</sup>

I then analyzed the articles and statements for significations of Al Qaeda wifehood. Those significations came from predications ("an Al Qaeda wife ought to be ..." or "this Al Qaeda wife is ..."), from adjectival descriptions ("... wife"), and from implications ("x government arrested x wife ..."). My research revealed three story-lines dominating these discourses: idealized "terrorized" femininity, wifehood as a criminal act, and the Oriental exoticism of polygamy, as explored.

### **Idealized "Terrorized" Femininity**

This article proposes that there is some analogy to be found between idealized militarized femininity and the idealized femininity of Al Qaeda wives. Building off

feminist work on idealized militarized femininities, this article argues that a similar phenomenon, termed here idealized “terrorized” femininity, that exists about wives of male members of Al Qaeda. As Christopher Dickey and Gretel C. Kovach explain:

In the cosmos as defined by Osama bin Laden, men and women have very clear roles. Men are the warriors, and the foremost among them become martyrs. For their sacrifice, they are promised 72 virgins in the afterlife. It's up to their mothers, wives and sisters to help guide them toward jihad, and then to mourn for them when they're gone. The men in turn should fight for the "honor" of the women.<sup>52</sup>

The theme of this passage, that women guide men toward *jihad* and mourn them after they are gone, is reminiscent of Joshua Goldstein's<sup>53</sup> wording about military wives who cheer their husbands off to war and then stitch them together when they return. This passage and several others like it<sup>54</sup> indicate that, as in state military organizations, wives of Al Qaeda members play a crucial role of psychological support for the male members of the group.

The ideal Al Qaeda wife, however, provides not only psychological support but also social and organizational support.<sup>55</sup> The social nature of the women's supportive role is highlighted in a passage in an August 2004 issue of *al-Khansa*, a magazine produced by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula for women *jihadis*: “[W]e stand shoulder to shoulder with our men, supporting them, helping them, and backing them up.”<sup>56</sup> Women should play a supportive role so that Allah will “know of the honesty of [their] intentions and of our good deeds, and [may He] choose [them].”<sup>57</sup> This social support is often characterized as being crucial to the organizational culture of Al Qaeda and a sustaining force for organizational survival. Given that the

magazine is named after Al Khansa, a seventh-century, Muslim woman who dedicated her sons' lives to *jihad*, Sebastian Usher observes:

The main objective of the magazine seems to be to teach women married to radical Islamists how to support their husbands in their conflict with the authorities. It also gives them specific advice on how to bring up their children in the path of *jihad*, how to provide first aid, and what kind of physical training women need to prepare themselves for fighting.<sup>58</sup>

Usher explains that the women's roles are to be supportive psychologically, socially, and organizationally. Both men and women associated with Al Qaeda have emphasized the importance of women's participation, both generally and in a supportive role as wives. Umaima Hasan Ahmad Muhammad Hassan (wife of Ayman al-Zawahri) spoke publically about the role of Al Qaeda wives. In 2009, she explained:

The role of Muslim women is very important for Islamic work; Women complement men—they must work alongside men to defend their religion, their land, and themselves [...] if you cannot do it physically, do it with your money. If you cannot do it with your money, do it by preaching to Muslim sisters in mosques and schools and institutes and homes. If you cannot, then do it through the internet [...] fighting may not be easy for women, because they need a male guardian at their side [...] but you can do that in many other ways: we should put ourselves at the service of the Mujaideen, and do whatever they require from us.<sup>59</sup>

Her comments represent a development of al-Zawahri's thoughts on the roles of Al Qaeda wives. In 2002, al-Zawahri had contended that "the role of the Mujahideen's wives should be to look after their homes, children, and anticipate the strikes of the crusaders."<sup>60</sup> While al-Zawahri's wife presents the actions expected of the "wife" in a slightly different manner, the expectation that the wife participates in *jihad* by supporting the husband remains constant in both observations, stressing in both the wife's dedication to the organization and organizational structure in comparable ways.



The “ideal” Al Qaeda wife as a social and psychological supporter of her husband and his organization is a public image projected by and performed by members of Al Qaeda, their wives, and those interested in understanding the organization with some sympathy. Much like the culture in which military wives live and interact separately from and in addition to their membership in the society at large, there is a social world and realm of activities reserved for wives of Al Qaeda operatives. A number of Al Qaeda wives suggested that this social world is an integral part of their social interactions and a structural part of the organization, such as it exists. Accounts of wifhood around Al Qaeda frame it like other militaries or large multinational corporations, where, as Kevin Perrano and Evan Thomas observe, “along with the wives of other bin Laden followers, [women] went to family picnics [...]. Al Qaeda offered good pay, company perks, and even family outings.”<sup>61</sup> An American woman who was married to an Al Qaeda operative explains that “she, along with wives of other bin Laden followers, went to picnics at bin Laden’s family farm on the banks of the Blue Nile.”<sup>62</sup>

In the story-line of idealized “terrorized” femininity, wives of Al Qaeda operatives have a very important support role in the survival of their husbands and the organization more generally.<sup>63</sup> They function, much like military wives in the United States and around the world, as sources of psychological support and unconditional love, stitches in the social fabric of a sub-culture with substantial independence, and servants of the organization as a whole. Most of the first-hand accounts of Al Qaeda wifhood note some supportive function that the wives served or were alleged to have served.

There are several significations of these portrayals of Al Qaeda wives. The first is a portrayal of the Al Qaeda family as “like” a Western family in the roles that its members play, the feelings felt, and the support needed. There is, then, a certain sense of normalcy and legitimacy being claimed in such a portrayal. The analogy between Al Qaeda wives and military wives may be more than incidental, both in terms of actual commonalities and discursive suggestion. The second is the performance of a certain variant of *jihad* as a total war, and therefore a family affair. Al Qaeda generally resists being portrayed as either solitary or extremist; the performance of support of women and children lends credence to the organization’s claim of a mainstreamed mission within the Islamic world. The third signification is a more universal one: that women (as men’s constitutive Others) play support roles to men’s active roles in any sort of military conflict. Finally, there is signification in the reception of this story-line by those who consume it outside of the organization. For the most part, those consumers reject the image of Al Qaeda wives as idealized supporters in favor of an image of baseness, defilement, and criminality.

### **Marriage as a Criminal Act**

The U.S. occupation forces in Iraq have been arresting the wives of suspected resistance fighters in an attempt to force their husbands to turn themselves in.

“Surrender, we have your wife.” This type of threatening note has been found at the homes of many Iraqis. According to Al-Jazeera’s reporter in Baghdad, U.S. forces leave such notes whenever they raid the house of an Iraqi suspect and find him out. Scores of Iraqi women are believed to be in jail because U.S. forces suspect their husbands of being resistance fighters.<sup>64</sup>

—Ahmed Janabi, “Iraqi Women, Children in U.S. Custody,”  
*Aljazeera.net*, May 2007

A very different image is projected by Al Qaeda's enemies, who characterize wives, not as supporters and family sustainers, but as accomplices in the commission of a crime. If wives are a separate, but crucial, part of the culture of Al Qaeda, they are also a crucial part of the law enforcement counter-strategy against Al Qaeda as an organization in order to stop future terrorist attacks and to punish attacks already committed. As the passage noted shows, women have been arrested on no other evidence than the fact that they are married to a person who was potentially involved in an attack or a member of Al Qaeda or an affiliate organization.

It is not just the United States that is in the habit of arresting wives in connection to crimes that governments suspect their husbands committed.<sup>65</sup> In a survey of 117 separate suicide attacks in which Al Qaeda was suspected or implicated where data is available about arrests and punishments, wives or widows were arrested in 36, often on no further evidence than the fact that they were married to potential Al Qaeda suspects or those affiliated with Al Qaeda.<sup>66</sup> Wives have been detained for extensive questioning,<sup>67</sup> and several women have been sentenced for their husbands' crimes (*in lieu* of them or with them).<sup>68</sup> The United States, Morocco, Somalia, Iran, Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, Kuwait, Israel, Kenya, the United Kingdom, and Germany have all been reported to have arrested the wives of suspected Al Qaeda operatives at least once.<sup>69</sup>

Al Qaeda wives have also been a matter of international security concern and contention. One analyst discussed the importance of Al Qaeda wives to the relationship between the United States and Iran. As Dushmanthe Srikanthe

Ranetunge recounts: “[I]t was highlighted that Iran had detained several key Al Qaeda activists including a son and two wives of Osama Bin Laden. This position of Iran may change if the West’s relationship with Iran deteriorates.”<sup>70</sup> Wives of Al Qaeda are also part of formal diplomatic and media exchanges between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As Guy Dinmore and Roula Khalaf explain: “[A]cting under their bilateral security agreement, Iran sent to Saudi Arabia last year several hundred Saudis linked to al-Qaeda, including wives and children.”<sup>71</sup> Most recently, Amal Amhed al-Sadah (Osama bin Laden’s wife) has been the subject of contentious discourses both about United States national security and in U.S.-Pakistani relations.<sup>72</sup>

Women married to actual or suspected terrorists are often arrested, detained, questioned, and sometimes extradited without any reference to their personal guilt or innocence. Many accounts of women’s detention explain it as a direct result of the law enforcement authorities’ inability to locate their husbands, who are the subjects of the actual investigation. A 2005 *Al-Jazeera* report explained that:

“Syrian authorities arrested the wives of three men wanted in the Hama clashes, after they were not able to find (the suspects),” the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) said in a statement on Monday. Two of the women are pregnant and the third has a four-month-old child, the group said [. . .]. Their husbands are said to be wanted in connection with a firefight that broke out between radicals and security forces on 2 September in the village of Jibril, 210km north of Damascus.<sup>73</sup>

In some arrests, the crime that the wives committed was to have a relationship with the men who actually committed the terrorist attacks—a relationship that might indicate that the women had some knowledge of their husbands’ activities. In other

arrests, the women are used as bait in order to locate their husbands. In still others, the target society is looking for someone to punish in order to find closure, and the wives of the offenders are the best available substitute for their missing husbands. In each of these situations, women's *actual* knowledge about the attacks seems irrelevant to the decision to arrest them. For example, reporting on the 2004 suicide attacks in Turkey, the Associated Press explained that "two women were charged [. . .] their attorneys told the court that they travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan with their husbands years ago, but the women said they were not members of any Al Qaeda linked organization [. . .]. They said their husbands told them they were going abroad for work."<sup>74</sup>

There are several significations of this story-line about Al Qaeda wives. The first is the automatic nature of the understanding that women are involved with and guilty for the actions of the husbands, across cultures and forms of crimes, because women are subservient to their husbands and therefore blind followers. The second signification is that women are a prize husbands will hang on to; in situations where wives are arrested in order to flush out their husbands, it is assumed that husbands will play Prince Charming to their wives' damsel in distress. This implicates gendered narratives of men as chivalrous protectors and women as in need of protection and rescue.<sup>75</sup> Third, juxtaposing this storyline with the storyline that Al Qaeda presents of devoted and supportive "normal" wives shows that the Al Qaeda story-line is rejected by outsiders in favor of a criminalizing tale. This criminalization is based on the idea that the role of "Al Qaeda wife" is criminal insofar as someone playing the role of "wife" to a criminal "husband" is itself criminal. Fourth, the

performance of arresting wives for their husbands' crimes implies that wives do not have an independent identity or existence outside of their status as married to a member of Al Qaeda. Finally, there is a signification of cultural clash. On one hand, Western critics of Al Qaeda and like organizations portray the women married to the members as *so subordinated* to their Muslim husbands that they are incapable of choice or action.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, these women who are too subordinated to choose for themselves and even against their husbands can be held culpable when their husbands commit acts of crime or terrorism. This cultural ambivalence is manifested in the final story-line this article will explore concerning the exotic fetishization of polygamous relationships in Western responses to Al Qaeda.

### **The Orientalist Attraction of Polygamy**

The former New York doctor accused of swearing allegiance to Al Qaeda told a federal jury yesterday he was more interested in polygamy than terrorism [...].<sup>77</sup>

—Kati Cornell, “I Wanted Wives, Not Jihad: Doc”  
*New York Post*, May 11, 2007.

Perhaps one of the most sensationalized aspects about the men in Al Qaeda is that they often have more than one wife. More than half of the accounts of male suicide bombings surveyed for this article that mention the wives of the bombers or plotters also mention that the perpetrators had more than one wife. The polygamous relationships of Al Qaeda operatives are discussed often in news stories and academic analyses of their actions. In almost every story about Osama bin Laden, the fact that he is a polygamist has consistently ranked near or above descriptions of his terrorist

attacks.<sup>78</sup> This feeds into an Orientalist picture of the relationship between veiling, sexual deviance, and political violence. Osama bin Laden's many wives and their relationships to the Al Qaeda mastermind are the single biggest non-attack focus of news articles and blog posts on Al Qaeda.

Bin Laden is not the only polygamist whose exploits get attention in Western coverage of Al Qaeda. Instead, the polygamous nature of the relationships of Al Qaeda operatives are exploited as related to their base and terrible violence *as terrorists*—the implication of many of these stories is that polygamy and terrorism are not coincidental, but are causally related and together are signifiers of a certain violent sort of person and/or group of people. In these narratives, polygamy is often listed as among the offenses of the terrorists, or as a precursor to terrorist violence. As one Nigerian newspaper explained, “perhaps our main savior is that Nigerians have not graduated into al-Qaeda type suicide bombing. Some of them may have just married new wives.”<sup>79</sup>

The signification of this attention to the polygamous relationships of Al Qaeda operatives is what Said would call Orientalism: a mystification of the non-West and its culture in a subordinating discourse that is reminiscent of colonialism in the postcolonial world. As Said explains:

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on [...] flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand [...] [and] aided and was aided by general cultural pressures that tended to make more rigid the sense of difference between the European and Asiatic parts of the world.<sup>80</sup>

The orientalism Said identified thirty years ago was one where the West identified itself (and its positive characteristics) on the basis of its difference from a non-Western, Oriental Other constituted by those characteristics the West transcended, either explicitly or latently. In explicit Orientalism, a tale of “our” [Western] superiority to the Othered “them” is a constitutive part of a self-identifying narrative. In latent Orientalism, the Orient is subconsciously seen as separate, eccentric, and backward.<sup>81</sup> This backwardness is at once assumed and romanticized; it Others the non-Western world generally and, as Said noted, the Islamic world specifically.

Feminist work has identified an important way in which Orientalist discourses have been applied to women affiliated with Al Qaeda. They note that women perpetrators of attacks and suicide bombings are often read as lacking agency, since one neo-Orientalist narrative distinguishes the Western self from the Oriental Other by the level of agency and equality women (are presumed to) have in each society.<sup>82</sup> In this narrative, the Muslim woman “Other” is supposed to be without the ability to make *political* or even *individual* choices to commit violence.<sup>83</sup> Caron Gentry traces this neo-Orientalist narrative to apply to Western women who participate in Al Qaeda’s violence, since audiences are shocked by their participation because women are presumed to prefer the liberal, emancipated West to the (characterized as) backwards and oppressive Islamic world.

These neo-Orientalist discourses comparing the West and the Islamic world are not limited to narratives about women’s violent participation in the conflict, however. In fact, one of the major significations of Al Qaeda wifehood is a neo-Orientalist fascination with the (actual or imagined) polygamous marriages of a



number of Al Qaeda operatives. Particularly, Western accounts look down on Al Qaeda polygamous marriages in a discourse of (sexual) behaviors that “we” would not participate in and that “modern” people would not do. These polygamous marriages are often predicated as culturally backwards and as symbols of moral corruption that both distinguish the (monogamous, “pure”) West from (polygamous, impure) Al Qaeda, while at the same time fetishizing the mystery of the relationship between polygamy and violence.

This signification perpetuates the us/them dichotomy prevalent between the West and non-West, where one of the assumed distinguishing factors is that the West does not subject “its” women to such terrible practices while the Orient does.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the Orientalist gaze on the polygamous nature of Al Qaeda wifehood distinguishes “the West” from its constitutive other Al Qaeda not only by condemning Al Qaeda’s *sexual* behavior (polygamy) but its implication of a lower social status for women. A second signification of the discursive prominence of polygamy in outside analyses of Al Qaeda is that one sort of symbolic excess (and hence deviance) is associated with another. As the passage from the Nigerian newspaper demonstrates, sexual excess (e.g., polygamy) and violent excess (e.g., terrorism) must be related, because radical Islamists are persons of excess. A final signification of this story-line is that women are, to Al Qaeda, possessions to be accumulated. Often, stories about Al Qaeda suicide bombers’ wives, children, and property are presented as if they were equally possessions in the minds of the subjects of the stories. This implies that the masculinity of Al Qaeda operatives is not only more excessive but also more base than Western masculinity.

### **The Significations of Al Qaeda Wifehood**

Individually, these story-lines have a number of important significations about global politics, cultural relations, gender relations, and human security. Taken together, they show a deeply hybridized portrayal of and reception of Al Qaeda as an organization generally and the role of women (wives) specifically in that organization. The similarities between Al Qaeda's presentation and performance of the ideal wife role and the Western notion of military wifehood suggests that Al Qaeda's rejection of Western (and perhaps specifically American) culture is incomplete. Target states' presentation of the story-line of marriage as a criminal act shows deep conflict about the understanding of women's roles in Islamist organizations and societies. On one hand, "the West" believes Islamist societies to be among the most gender-oppressive in the world; on the other hand, it frequently arrests women as if they would know something about their husbands' terrorist behavior. This shows that the "outside" rejects Al Qaeda (and Islamist) culture incompletely. The Orientalist attraction to the polygamous practices of Al Qaeda further demonstrates the incompleteness of the West's rejection of its culture.

As noted earlier, the demonstration of incomplete rejection of opposing cultures is one that Bhabha terms "ambivalence."<sup>85</sup> In ambivalent relationships, supposed enemies do not reject each other completely, but rather accept certain facets of enemy culture inadvertently and are changed by the relationship regardless of their explicit desire for intercultural exchange. This small exploration of the story-lines of Al Qaeda wives suggests several larger observations for the theory and practice of

global politics. First, it suggests that the relationship between Al Qaeda and its enemies is not black-and-white, but ambivalent and hybrid. Second, it suggests that global politics takes place at the level of individual relationships. The contested nature of the marriages of individual members of Al Qaeda shows that people's lives are often both the form and substance of global politics. Third, gender tropes influence and inscribe; and are influenced by and inscribed by global politics. As R. W. Connell notes, "gender is a way in which social practice is ordered."<sup>86</sup>

Finally, these story-lines suggest that the politics of presentation, performance, and reception are not fixed, but intersubjective, intertwined, and constantly changing. The juxtaposed story-lines of idealized Al Qaeda wives, the crime of wifhood, and the romance of polygamy show similarities and differences across the lines of Al Qaeda and its enemies. Most of all, they show hybridity. Like there is an idealized militarized femininity, there is an idealized terrorized femininity; like there are other images of Western femininity, there are also other images of Al Qaeda wives. This preliminary study points out some interesting implications of several story-lines, their relationships, and their differences. It can serve as a starting point for empirical and theoretical explorations of the wives of male Al Qaeda members, Al Qaeda–West relations, the social construction of Al Qaeda, and other cultural signifiers.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Here, the word “wives” is not meant to reify the traditional gender roles in marriage or to signify a support for the traditionally understood differences between husbands and wives. Here, it is used as an inherited conception: the story-lines examined in this paper are not of domestic partners, spouses, or any other critically re-examined notion of gender roles. Instead, these stories are of women *as wives*, told in terms of their relationships to *husbands* and the organizations those husbands are a part of. The use of the term in this essay, then, represents that discursive reality in the world, and is not meant to reproduce it or show support for it.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, CA: U California, 2000): 153, 170.

<sup>3</sup> Farhana Ali, “Dressed in Black: A Look at Pakistan’s Radical Women,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 5, Issue 8 (April 26, 2007). Available at [www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373351](http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373351). Accessed May 19, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Enloe (2000); Joyce Kaufman and Kristen Williams, “Who Belongs? Women, Marriage, and Citizenship,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2004): 416-435; see also John Modell and Duane Steffey, “Waging War and Marriage: Military Service and Family Formation, 1940-1950,” *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1988): 195-218; Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriages in the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984); and David Bell and Jon Binnie, “Sexual Citizenship: Marriage, the Market, and the Military,” in S. Seidman and D. Richardson, eds., *The Handbook of Gay and Lesbian Studies* (London: Sage, 2002), 445-457.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret C. Harrell, *Invisible Women: Junior Enlisted Army Wives* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000); Bonnie Domrose Stone and Betty Sowers Alt, *Uncle Sam's Brides: The World of Military Wives* (New York: Walker, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Chris Bourg and Mady Wechsler Segal, “The Impact of Family Supportive Policies and Practices on Organizational Commitment to the Army,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1999): 633-652.

<sup>7</sup> Enloe (2000), 164; Leora N. Rosen, Linda Z. Moghadam, and Mark A. Vaitkus, “The Military Family’s Influence on Soldiers’ Personal Morale: A Path Analytic Model,” *Military Psychology*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1989), 201.

<sup>8</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice-Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 310.

<sup>9</sup> Enloe (2000), 153; Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Looking for Women in the Age of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: U California, 2004); Lydia Sloane Klein, *Today's Military Wife: Meeting the Challenges of Service* (Washington, D.C.: Stackpole Books, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Enloe (2004); see also Deborah Harrison and Lucie Laliberte, *No Life Like It: Military Wives in Canada* (Montreal: James Lorimer & Co., 1984); Azza Karam, "Women in War and Peacebuilding: The Roads Traversed, The Challenges Ahead," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2000):416-435; and Amina Mama, "Khaki in the Family: Gender Discourses and Militarism in Nigeria," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (1998):1-12. These pieces argue that military wives give military men something to fight for and make their job-mandated lifestyles possible and manageable.

<sup>11</sup> Christie C. White and Laura Lee Weinstein, *Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1997); Denise Horn, "Boots and Bedsheets: Constructing the Military Support System in a Time of War," in Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, eds. *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> The word "terrorist," when used in this chapter, is put in quotes, to highlight the author's discursive skepticism of its usage. This is not to trivialize the security menace caused by groups classified as "terrorists" or the severity of their offenses, but to question the politics of the assignment of the title "terrorist." Alongside the literal meaning of the term, there is also a propagandistic usage, where it is used to refer to acts committed by enemies against us or our allies, while the same term is not applied to similar violence committed by us or our allies (see Noam Chomsky, "Chomsky Interview 5," Zmag.org, 2001. Available at [www.zmag.org/chomsky\\_interview\\_5.htm](http://www.zmag.org/chomsky_interview_5.htm). Accessed May 19, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> This paper discusses several idealized and expected roles of Al Qaeda wives. The trope that it does not discuss is Al Qaeda wives as fellow attackers. This is because the discourse of female recruitment, while sometimes tied to marriage, is often not directly related to the women's roles as wives of male members of Al Qaeda, which is the subject of this particular study. For information and analysis about women as attackers in Al Qaeda, see Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, and Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Claudia Brunner, "Female Suicide Bombers, Male Suicide Bombing? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Global Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2005): 29-48; Chok Tong Goh, "Uniting to Defeat Terrorism," *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2006); and Mia Bloom, "Mother. Daughter. Sister. Bomber," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 61, No. 6 (2005): 54-62.

<sup>14</sup> This is a reference to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), which argues that knowledge about the East is not acquired through factual observation, but through social constructs that set up the East as the "Other" to the West, which limits and frames literary texts and historical records.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, W. Poster, ed. (London: Polity, 2001), 134.

<sup>16</sup> An in-depth exploration of the discourse theory behind this point is inappropriate here, but the concept is derived from Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: U Chicago, 1980); Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford:

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Oxford UP, 1990); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Maarten Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 62.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); see also Charles William Morris, *Signification and Significance: A Study in the Relations of Signs and Values* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1964); Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1982): 777-795; Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993); and Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, 134.

<sup>20</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," From Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> John R. Hall, *Cultures of Inquiry: From Epistemology to Discourse in Sociohistorical Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak, eds., *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> This derivation comes from Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde's understanding of securitizing discourses and securitization in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>31</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*.

<sup>34</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>35</sup> This is meant to denote the unnaturalness of sex categories, including but not limited to the existence of more than two distinct biological sex categories (see Surya Munro, "Transgender Trouble: Legislation Beyond Boundaries," *Res Publica*. Vol. 8, No. 3 [2002]: 275-283); doubt as to the absolute clearness of the sex/gender dichotomy (see Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [New York: Routledge, 1990]; Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Bare Bones of Sex: Part I, Sex and Gender," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 2 [2005]: 345-370), and the "chicken-egg" question of which came first, subordination or difference (see Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989]).



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- <sup>36</sup> V. Spike Peterson, "Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1999), 38; Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, Justice, and the Wars in Iraq* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).
- <sup>37</sup> Laura Sjoberg, "Agency, Militarized Femininity, and Enemy Others," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2007), 86; R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: U California, 1995); R.W. Connell, "The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 41 (1990): 507-544; and J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Stuffed If I Know: Reflections on Post-Modern Feminist Social Research," *Gender, Place, and Culture*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1994): 205-224.
- <sup>38</sup> Vesna Nikolic-Ristanovic, "War, Nationalism, and Mothers in the Former Yugoslavia," In L. Lorentzen and J. Turpin, eds., *The Women and War Reader* (New York: New York UP: 1998), 234-239.
- <sup>39</sup> Peterson "Sexing Political Identities," 43.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.
- <sup>42</sup> Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Charles Preston, and Cindy Pedersen, *Chicken Soup for the Military Wife's Soul: Stories to Touch the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit* (New York: HCI, 2005).
- <sup>43</sup> Canfield et al., *Chicken Soup for the Military Wife's Soul*; see also Brenda Pace and Carol Mcglothlin, *Medals Above My Heart: The Rewards of Being a Military Wife* (New York: B&H Publishing Group, 2005); Meredith Levya, *Married to the Military: A Survival Guide for Military Wives, Girlfriends, and Women in Uniform* (New York: Fireside, 2004); and Karen M. Pavlicin, *Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families* (New York: Elva Resa, 2003).
- <sup>44</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley, CA: U California, 1993), 174.
- <sup>45</sup> M. S. Kimmel, "Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents: The Gendered Moral and Political Economy of Terrorism," *International Sociology* 18(3) (2003): 603-620; Valentine M. Moghadam, "Violence and Terrorism: Feminist Observations on Islamist Movements, States, and the International System," *Alternatives* 1(2) (2002): 8-27.
- <sup>46</sup> Kevin Ayotte and Mary Husain, "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 17(3) (2005): 112-133.
- <sup>47</sup> "'Find Me a Wife': Al Qaeda Matchmaker on How He Fixed Wedding Between bin Laden and Young Bride who was Shot Trying to Save Him," *Daily Mail* May 11, 2011, accessed November 22, 2011 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1385927/Osama-Bin-Ladens-wife-Amal-Ahmed-al-Sadah-Al-Qaeda-matchmaker.html>.
- <sup>48</sup> Tim McGirk, "The Real Housewife of Abbottabad: What bin Laden's Spouse Knows," *Time* May 6, 2011, accessed November 22, 2011 at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2069934,00.html>
- <sup>49</sup> e.g., Brian Ross, "Osama Bin Laden's Young Wife, Wounded in Raid, Identified," *ABC Nightline*, May 3, 2011, accessed November 22, 2011 at <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/osama-bin-ladens-wife-wounded-raid/story?id=13521534#.Ts3HsWBMycg>
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- <sup>50</sup> Terms included: Al Qaeda, wife, polygamy, al-Khansa, female, gender relations.
- <sup>51</sup> Database available on request to sjoberg@ufl.edu.
- <sup>52</sup> Christopher Dickey and Gretel C. Kovach, "Revered and Yet Repressed: The Deeply Ambivalent Role of Women in Bin Laden's World," *Newsweek*, January 14, 2002. Available at [www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-81469879.html](http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-81469879.html). Accessed May 19, 2007.
- <sup>53</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).
- <sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Kevin Periano and Evan Thomas, "Odyssey Into Jihad," *Newsweek*, January 14, 2002. Available at <http://nl.newsbank.com>. Accessed May 19, 2007; and Sebastian Usher, "'Jihad' Magazine for Women on the Web," BBC News, August 24, 2004. Available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3594982.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3594982.stm).
- <sup>55</sup> Neil Arun, "Women Bombers Break New Ground," BBC News, November 15, 2005. Available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4436368.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4436368.stm). Accessed May 19, 2007.
- <sup>56</sup> Arabian Peninsula Women's Information Bureau, *al-Khansa* (August 2004). This online magazine is no longer on the internet, but excerpts and more information are available from the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). See "Al-Qa'ida Women's Magazine: Women Must Participate in Jihad," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, No. 779 (September 7, 2004). Available at [http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP77904#\\_ednref1](http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP77904#_ednref1). Accessed September 13, 2007.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Usher, "'Jihad' Magazine for Women on the Web."
- <sup>59</sup> Khaled Wassef, "Al Qaeda Wives Club," *CBS Newswire* December 18, 2009 accessed November 22, 2011 at [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543\\_162-5994561-503543.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-5994561-503543.html).
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Perrano and Thomas, "Married to Al Qaeda," *Newsweek* January 14 2002, accessed November 22, 2011 at <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/newsweek-cover-married-to-al-qaeda-75284202.html>.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Nothing in this article should be read to imply that this wifhood role is unique to Al Qaeda among insurgent or terrorist groups, or unique to Islamist insurgent or terrorist groups among insurgent or terrorist groups.
- <sup>64</sup> Ahmed Janabi, "Iraqi Women, Children in U.S. Custody," *Aljazeera.net*, February 17, 2004. Available at <http://eng.ish.aljazeera.net/English/Archive/Archive?ArchiveID=1677>. Accessed May 19, 2007.
- <sup>65</sup> Bryson Hull, "Kenya Detains Wives of Somalia Al Qaeda Suspects," Reuters South Africa, January 11, 2007. Available at [http://ca.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-01-11T112749Z\\_01\\_HUN141213\\_RTRIDST\\_0\\_NEWS-SOMALIA-CONFLICT-COL.XML&archived=False](http://ca.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-01-11T112749Z_01_HUN141213_RTRIDST_0_NEWS-SOMALIA-CONFLICT-COL.XML&archived=False). Accessed May 19, 2007; "Wives Arrested in Moroccan Terror Plot," CNN.com, June 12, 2002. Available at <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD?africa/06/11/morocco.terror.wives/index.html>. Accessed May 19, 2007.
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<sup>66</sup> E.g., Hasna Ali Yahya, noted in Muhanand Mohammed and Serena Chaudhry, "Iraq Court Give Al Qaeda Leader's Wife Life Sentence," *Reuters* June 26, 2011, accessed November 22, 2011 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/26/us-iraq-violence-qaeda-idUSTRE75P0XC20110626/>.

<sup>67</sup> Guy Dinmore, "Iranian Security Forces Detain One of Bin Laden's Sons," *Financial Times*, November 4, 2000. Available at <http://search.ft.com/nonFtArticle?id=021104000893>. Accessed May 19, 2007; Pepe Escobar, "The al-Zawihiri Fiasco," *The Asia Times Online*, March 24, 2004. Available at [www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/FC24Df05.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/FC24Df05.html). Accessed May 19, 2007; Kelly Arena and Pam Benson, "Top Al Qaeda Leader in Custody," CNN.com, June 18, 2002. Available at <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/06/18/alqaeda.arrest/index.html>. Accessed on May 19, 2007.

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<sup>85</sup> Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders."

<sup>86</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 71.