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### Women Who Run With The Wolves

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# **Women Who Run With The Wolves**

**Online stories and roles  
of Spanish-speaking jihadist women**



# **Women Who Run With The Wolves**

## **Online stories and roles of Spanish-speaking jihadist women**

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan Tilburg University  
op gezag van de rector magnificus,  
prof. dr. E.H.L. Aarts,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een  
door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie  
in de Ruth First zaal van de Universiteit

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 Field significance

Wolves are resilient species. They quickly adapt to new environments, striving and resisting throughout different kinds of grounds. Wolves are cursorial species. They run for as long and for as far as they need to capture their prey. Wolves run with wolves. They have and they cultivate strong social ties (Schuurman et al. 2017: 3):

Social ties do more than contribute to the adoption of violent beliefs. Many of the individuals that we have come to think of as 'lone wolves' are, on closer inspection, better understood as alone largely and only with regard to the actual commission of the act of violence. For most lone actors, connections to others, be they virtual or physical, play an important and sometimes even critical role in the adoption and maintenance of their motivation to commit violence, as well as the practical skills that are necessary to carry out acts of terrorism.

Terrorism continues to evolve in its many layers of definition, actors, typologies, motivations. And there are many unanswered questions and a significant gap in the literature in specific areas, including the radicalization of women in online environments and the utilization of Facebook as a radical violent environment. These questions relate to the dynamics aroused by online processes of engaging with violent contents and networks, and their relationship to terrorist attacks. The questions can be traced back as far as to Walter Laqueur's considerations in 1999 (1999: 262, as cited in Conway et al. 2017: 8) and persist in present research. The questions can be framed as involving three categories of concerns (Conway et al. 2017):

- adoption of extremist ideology – i.e. so-called (violent) online radicalization;
- recruitment into violent extremist or terrorist groups or movements;
- planning and preparation of attacks.

From a gendered perspective, recent studies guided by Pearson and Winterbotham (2017: 67) and García-Calvo (2017: 6, 7) indicate that in comparison to male jihadists, women's preferred space for engaging with processes of radicalization is the online space. The results in Spain are in this sense clear: from the 148 jihadist individuals

arrested between 2013 and 2016 (García-Calvo 2017: 3), 55.6% of the women radicalized online whereas only 30.8% of men (2017: 7) were exposed to online violent radicalization. There is a clear indication of an actual relationship between online activity and engagement with online violent extremism, but the data is confined to individuals who were arrested and more analysis is necessary to explain the online radicalization processes while they are still in progress. More work is necessary to harvest data that positions the individual's stages of engagement with violent online contents.

One fact is certain, IS created an extra 'online territory of terror' (Prucha 2011) with the specific task of keeping the jihadist ideology circulating, alluring and recruiting an expanding audience. However, since 2016 all major social media platform administrations have been 'disrupting Daesh' (Conway et al. 2017), aiming to prevent the consumption and dissemination of online violent contents. While these actions and preventive measures delivered effective results, Conway et al. (2017: 1) alerts that although the ability to produce and consume online violent contents may have decreased, it is not possible to guarantee for how long this situation will continue nor is it possible to completely disrupt jihadist digital archives. Nevertheless, every digital cloud has a silver lining because these jihadist digital archives will enable analysis on the reconstitution of social patterns, social trends, and organizational evolution, resulting in critical information for assessing future scenarios and for producing preventive, predictive models.

The year 2017 was pivotal in introducing a 'differential disruption' to ISIS online propaganda (Conway et al. 2017: 20). Indeed, several social media owner companies coordinated their strategies via the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism consortium as so to monitor, identify and ban violent content from their online platforms. Particularly relevant for the current study, Facebook installed new and detailed measures in June 2017 to outline their counter-violent extremism fight (Conway 2017: 15).

Another significant disruption to IS's field of action was the physical loss of the Caliphate. Manufactured and declared in June 2014, as a physical Islamic controlled land, the Islamic Caliphate was a place to where individuals could aspire to migrate and live under the ruling of a 'pure' Sharia government.

However, in the case of Spain there is an actual physical territory that it is portrayed as worthy to fight for, the Al-Andalus (denomination of the Spanish territory and that includes parts of Portugal), as we will see in the next section. It is a historical space filled with the crucial emotion, bonding and religious affiliation to convince jihadists to act for the sake of its re-conquest.

Continuing to explore the field significance, namely physical territory, it is important to consider the significance of the Moroccan milieu for the development of online radicalization processes and the subsequent terrorist attacks. A central position is taken by the Spanish enclave territories of Ceuta and Melilla located in the

North of Morocco (see Figure 1.1), as they have historical connections to the development of jihadism in Spain (see Chapter 4, Section 6).



**Figure 1.1** Central position of Spanish enclave territories of Ceuta and Melilla

These jihadist ‘hotbeds’ are fed by poor social and economic conditions and by their proximity to Salafi-jihadist currents in Morocco. Their passage to Spain is facilitated by the extension of Spanish nationality, the easy geographical access via the Strait of Gibraltar, and the commonly understood need to migrate. As for the latter factor, there are both social-economic reasons (the search for jobs or better-qualified and better-paid positions) and political-religious reasons (the government’s treatment of the Salafi-jihadist movement). This situational context dates back to the 1980s and has helped the Salafi-jihadist ideology, as it ‘resonated well with broad sectors of the population who lived in crowded and poor neighborhoods and shantytowns’ (Boukhars 2005). In line with this reasoning, Pargeter (2008) argues that factors such as kinship and social networks, the implications of the regime’s action to combat Salafi-jihadist Imams, the feeling of social alienation and unfair treatment have been significant contributors to the uprising of violent extremism in the country.

The terrorist attacks in Casablanca in 2003 executed by Al-Qaeda affiliated members were the material culmination of all the above-mentioned factors and ‘marked the end of ‘Moroccan Exceptionalism’ (Hashas 2013; Palmer 2014). In other words, Rabat was no longer the poster regime in the fight against jihadist acts. Springing from these events, the Moroccan government proceeded to arrest several Salafi-jihadist preachers and followers. The perceived unfair treatment of these prisoners,

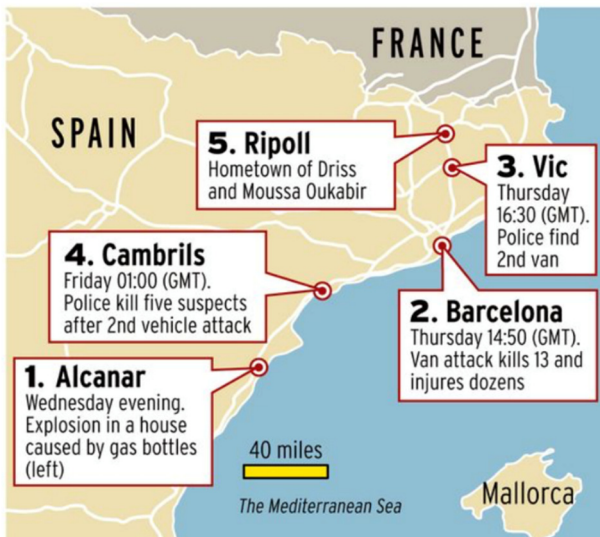


the ban on creating their own political party, and internal disputes among the Salafi-jihadist leaders ended up aggravating the problem of violent radicalization in Morocco (Masbah 2017).

The migration flows from Morocco to Spain, in particular to Catalonia, that started in the 1970s and increased with the passage of time, implied the entrance of Salafi-jihadist Moroccan Imams and the spreading of their violent message. As a matter of fact, Catalonia, with its significant number of radicalized individuals, was already a selected target of jihadist terror since 1990 (Reinares & García-Calvo 2018: 4).

The attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid, the first jihadist strikes to succeed on Spanish territory, highlighted in a concrete way the dangerous liaison between Salafi-jihadist Moroccan preachers and the processes of radicalization in Spain.

Years later, and after previous failed attempts such as the thwarted jihadist assault on the metro of Barcelona in 2008, Catalonia became the epicenter of coordinated jihadist acts. In the afternoon of the 17th of August 2017, a jihadist drove a van through the Ramblas area, in the center of Barcelona taking the lives of more than 13 people. Later that day, five men were killed by the police forces while trying to carry out another terrorist assault in Cambrils, a coastal town, circa 130km south of Barcelona, as shown on the map below (Figure 1.2). All of the involved jihadists were of Moroccan origin.



**Figure 1.2** Locations of the jihadist attacks of August 2017<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/they-were-good-guys-school-11013221>

Online, IS claimed the authorship of the violent events and warned that Al-Andalus would persist as a jihadist target. Thus, both the online and physical fields continue to have significant impact on jihadist phenomena in Spain.

## 1.2 Al-Andalus

In the summer of 2014, when ISIS<sup>2</sup> (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) declared the constitution of its Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, Abu Tamima, or Saladine Guitone, a French-Moroccan foreign fighter with ties to Spain (presumably connected to Abdelhamid Abaaoud, leader of the Paris attacks) declared in a video message:<sup>3</sup>

I say it to the world as a warning: We are living under the Islamic flag, the Islamic Caliphate.<sup>4</sup> We will die for it until we liberate those occupied lands, from Jakarta to Andalusia. And I declare: Spain is the land of our forefathers and we are going to take it back with the power of Allah.

Andalusia, as mentioned above, also sometimes referred by the name of 'Al-Andalus' is an historical territory that covers large parts of what we today call Portugal and Spain (Reinares 2016: 14; Torres Soriano 2014). In fact, Spain represents in jihadist ideology an occupied territory that should be recaptured and restored to its former glory of a Caliphate (Coolsaet 2005: 3), back in the time when much of the Iberian Peninsula was under the control of the Islamic Caliphate of Cordoba.

The idea of conquering Al-Andalus and submitting it to an Islamic governance was first branded by the jihadist organization Al-Qaeda (Coolsaet 2005: 3) and included in their propaganda machine as both a strategic military target and a religious obligation (Holbrook 2014: 159). Furthering down the tactical maneuver of transforming Spain into a geographical target, Al-Qaeda included in their list of claims, the political situation of Ceuta and Melilla (both Spanish enclaves in the North of Morocco) as a matter to be solved by war.

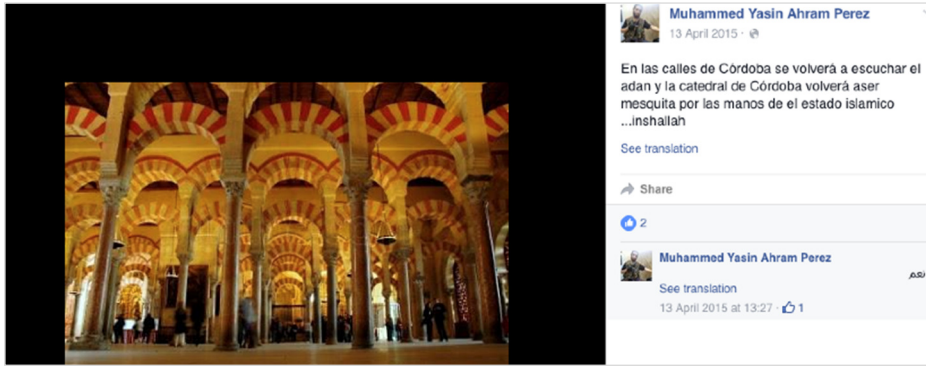
This violent take on Al-Andalus resulted in the mind-set behind the Madrid train bombings of 2004 with its material authors naming themselves the 'brigades in Al-Andalus'. Thirteen years later, IS's own violent take of Al-Andalus led to the terrorist events of 17 August in Barcelona and Cambrils, with the terrorists using the name of 'Soldiers of the Islamic State in the lands of the Al-Andalus'.

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<sup>2</sup> The terms ISIS, IS and/or Daesh will be used intertwined throughout this book.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-99>

<sup>4</sup> As in the first note, the terms Khilafat, Khalifate or Caliphate will be used intertwined throughout this book.



**Figure 1.3** Screenshot from Facebook (13 April 2015)

The claim was performed in a video message by Muhammed Yasin Ahram Perez, the son of Tomasa Perez, a Spanish female converted Muslim who migrated to Syria in December 2014 together with her children. Muhammed Perez, as seen in the above Facebook screenshot (Figure 1.3), had already communicated in April 2015 his wish that "at the streets of Cordoba the *adhan* will be heard again and the cathedral of Cordoba will be a mosque again, by the hands of the Islamic state ... *inshallah*."<sup>5</sup>

The message expresses IS's continuous reference to the ideological and historical importance of the area in the hope of attracting more Spanish-speaking individuals to join their jihadist networks. It is IS's first Spanish-spoken message and its contents are a tailor-made message for the Spanish-speaking audience. Indeed, the jihadist contents endorsed by IS are tailor-made, constantly updated and available in all social media platforms. Once the potential jihadist is engaged in obtaining more information, the recruiters step in to offer 'frame alignment' (Neumann 2008: 75), between the potential jihadist perspective and the jihadist 'master narrative' (Bernardi et al. 2012: 34). In other words, the jihadist recruiters develop a coherent connection between their contents and their individual audience through a selected jihadist narrative. Jihadist narrative or 'single narrative' (Schmid 2014) is a communication system aiming at sharing, disseminating and promoting a coherent line of violent contents using for that purpose all manners and tools available. By creating their own IS-affiliated contents, online jihadists bring a new layer to the 'single narrative', the layer of the 'singular narrative', an online storytelling that adapts entirely to the individual that is being aimed as target of recruitment. The story is then told to resonate the receiver's own 'motivational causes' (Bjørge 2005: 3) such as expectations and grievances (Ramakrishna 2007: 129; Sageman 2008: 41).

<sup>5</sup> The quotes presented throughout the dissertation are my own Spanish translations to English. Arabic transliterations follow a plain system, that is to say they do not have diacritical marks, contrast between long or short vowels. However, Chapter 6 is an exception to this simplified system, as in here I follow Brill's simple Arabic transliteration system.

While this is the general process on how online jihadist propaganda allures the Spanish-speaking individuals through the central theme of Al-Andalus, it is crucial to shed light on how Spanish-speaking female jihadists engage with jihadist mobilization.

### **1.3 ‘*Degüello al policía*’<sup>6</sup> – A brief comparison of Spanish female terrorist mobilization**

The Madrid terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 claimed by Al-Qaeda marked a shift in Spanish counter-terrorism strategy. Long before this jihadist plot, Spain was in arms with the Basque separatist group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna).

While I was growing up during the 1980s and the 1990s in the North of Portugal, close to the Spanish border, it was frequent to hear the debates and the news about ETA, and of their terrorist activities, which were usually directed at police and security agents. Constituted at the ‘end of the nineteenth century’ (Reinares 2010: 466), ETA is responsible for devising several terrorist and guerilla strategies such as ‘*kale borroka*’ or ‘urban fight’ (Reinares 2001: 22) to achieve their goal of independence from Madrid’s government. Their members, or *Patriotas de la Muerte* (‘Patriots of Death’, Reinares 2001) were in the vast majority male and inserted in a ‘conservative gender rhetoric’ (Hamilton 2007: 3), yet due to ideological stances and socio-economic conditions women were able to construct their own space and role with the separatist group (2007: 3). Female engagement with ETA’s militancy would occur due to ‘close affective ties’ (Reinares 2010: 467), followed by a timeline evolution of their roles inside the organization. As so, in the first moment their roles would primarily be framed in the recruitment narratives as the guardians of culture and language (Hamilton 2007: 3), then as the mothers of the new generation of fighters, and then finally these gendered roles would evolve to active, direct and violent military roles because of the lack of male fighters (Hamilton 2007: 3-4).

ETA’s decades of terrorist activities in Spain have been the subject of academic studies. The findings have a scientific application that goes beyond the spectrum of nationalist terrorism. The contributions of the works of Reinares (2001, 2010) and Hamilton (2007) reveal, as a matter of fact, that the key categories of female mobilization into ETA’s violent activities are similar to the ones found in female mobilization into jihadist-inspired terrorist groups. In every step of the way they coincide and in both cases, empirical evidence supports the similarities between them because both emerge from particular cultures and subcultures, patriarchic principles, extremist ideology, romantic and emotional engagement, guardians and disseminators of critical knowledge, motivation to acquire a higher status, motherhood and violent military functions.

---

<sup>6</sup> ‘I will behead the police man.’ Translation from Spanish.

There are indeed similarities between the constructed gendered roles within the two groups, between the processes of engagement, and of course, between their ground of action, Spain.

The above elements of the jihadist mobilization process can all be observed in Samira Yerou, the first woman convicted in Spain, in the end of 2016 for jihadism activities (Mickolus 2016: 350; Reinares, Garcia-Calvo & Vicente 2017: 32). Because her case is so particular, her life and activities are explored in different moments of this study, inclusive the fieldwork developed in Rubi (Catalonia) where interviews were conducted with a group of Muslim women belonging to her community. Samira was born in Tetouan, Morocco (subculture and patriarchic principles) and after a first failed marriage, she moved to Rubi where she re-married a Spanish-Moroccan Muslim man. In the summer of 2013 and while on holidays in her hometown, she got in direct contact with Salafi-jihadist preachers who initiated her engagement with jihadist networks. When Samira returned to Rubi from her holidays in Tetouan, she carried in more than just luggage; she carried also the determination on proving herself as a female jihadist (motivation to acquire a higher status). Her proof of commitment to the jihadist cause was achieved when her son, at the time still a toddler said on the phone to a ISIS element: "I want to go with the *muhajedeen*", "I'm going to cut the throat of a police man", '*deguello al policia*' in Spanish.

Being a woman, a mother, *mujahida* ('fighter') and a *muhajira* ('migrant') Samira's example is important for the empirical proof of this study as she represents a new gendered perspective of the evolution of women's roles in the jihadist organization. Furthermore, the subjects of this study are Spanish-speaking jihadist women, which includes both Spanish and Moroccan nationalities, a combination that it is to be found in Samira, as well.

This research focuses on conferring a description of the construction of online female-jihadist roles providing a better understanding on how "environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms" (Tilly 2001: 24) illustrate the formation of female jihadist processes of engagement and recruitment. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation was to answer the following central question:

### **How do Spanish-speaking jihadist women construct their online roles?**

Answering this question requires answering as well the following sub-questions:

- a) evaluating how female jihadists make sense of online jihadism – sisterhood;
- b) determining the symbolic value of online spaces for violent extremist processes;
- c) establishing how female jihadists foster online authority;
- d) analyzing imagery as an online recruitment strategy;
- e) settling the role of children in jihadist online messages – motherhood;
- f) discerning online female jihadists' roles;

- g) estimating the social jihadist network structure and women's roles within those structures.

Indeed, social digital settings (environmental), online learning (cognitive) and virtual networks (relational) are less exposed categories of female radicalization trajectories. This study by exposing those categories offers therefore a specific contribution to the field of Jihadist Strategic Studies.

Before introducing the next section entitled 'Conceptual Issues', a brief note stating that they will appear in the subsequent chapters and they will be further detailed in the manner that they best explain the subjects in cause. That means that there are theoretical and conceptual reappearances to provide a more independent reading of the dissertation.

## 1.4 Conceptual issues

I will briefly approach the following conceptual issues in the manner that they best represent the purposes of the present study. They will be used in a descriptive and general manner to inform the collected data and to enable the task of specifically approach the online roles of Spanish-speaking jihadist females. A cautionary note on the complexity of the phenomena and on its theoretical challenges must be advanced, or as Hegghammer (2017: 5) announced: "(...) whatever we are dealing with is slippery and is not easily captured by existing terminology." The phenomenon is complex due to the violent nature of its ideology and due to the legal consequences of its criminal activities. Paraphrasing Boaz Ganor (2002), "one woman's jihadist is another woman's religious fighter", that is, all these concepts have the power to mean all, or nothing. In the grey area of inconclusiveness, these concepts find a space where their dark and ambivalent nature gives room to an enlightened and irrefutable argument. However, people find comfort in labels and so do scholars who try to build definition fences around porous and elusive terms.

In the next section, I will discuss these 'conceptual ridges' (Atran 2004: 267) that move along the academic fault lines and their own 'ideological fissures' (Moghadam & Fishman 2011) blocking definition alignments.

### 1.4.1 Radicalization

Radicalization is the first contested concept that relates to terrorism in terms of background and in terms of absence of a consensual definition. In fact, both concepts are a "concept-attrape-tout" (Ducol 2015: 127), that is stretched too thin while trying to cover a myriad of situations, events and individuals that do not fit in one single taxonomy. A brief review of the existing academic works about radicalization reflects its complex, polarization and sensitiveness. Browsing through the titles on radicalization, we may find expressions that better translate the difficulty of the subject: *The Trouble with Radicalization* (Neumann 2013); 'Radicalization what does

it mean' (Mandel 2009); 'The radicalization puzzle: A theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism' (Hafez & Creighton 2015); 'The concept of radicalization as a source of confusion' (Sedgwick 2010); 'Why conventional wisdom on radicalization fails: The persistence of a failed discourse' (Githens-Mazer & Lambert 2010); 'Exclusion or culture? The rise and the ambiguity of the radicalization debate' (Hörnqvist & Flyghed 2012). Trouble, meaning, puzzle, confusion, failure and ambiguity are noticeable categories in these titles that offer plenty of discussion space. The wide-spread dimension of the meaning of radicalization leads as well to the distinction between cognitive and behavioral radicalization, that is acquiring radical knowledge and being actively involved in violent acts (Brandon & Vidino 2012: 9; Marone 2017: 8). The separation between having radical ideas and being actively engaged in violent activities is the major scientific discussion in the field of radicalization (Neumann 2008; Ashour 2009; Veldhuis & Staun 2009; Bartlett, Birdwell & King 2010; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010; Ranstorp 2010; Borum 2011; Schmid 2014).

The debate between following pathways or profiles<sup>7</sup> to better define the involvement to individuals with terrorism is extent and has different currents of opinions.

Notwithstanding these debates, I want to emphasize that 'all radicalization is local' (Coolsaet 2016), supported by local stories, local cultural references and local cultural capital. Spanish-speaking female jihadists promote their violent messages with practices that have symbolic references to their local audience and that ultimately distinguish them from other jihadist groups. This distinction creates bonding, reinforces close and enclosed relationships and structures social rankings. All categories are key to understand the engagement, the recruitment efforts, and the motivation to participate in jihadist networks.

Online radicalization aiming at engaging in violent acts, conducted either individually or via the recruitment of others, is the scope and the theoretical delimitation of the present thesis. In this sense, I will adopt the definition presented by Brian M. Jenkins (2007: 2-3), where he distinguishes recruitment from radicalization but most

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<sup>7</sup> **Pathways** (Moghaddam 2005; Precht 2007; Gill 2008; Horgan 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko 2008; Silke 2008; Bowman-Grieve 2010; Lennings et al. 2010; Coolsaet 2011; Vidino 2011; Bakker, Grol & Weggemans 2013; Edwards & Gribbon 2013; Hegghammer 2013; Torok 2013, 2015; Koehler 2014; Weggemans, Bakker & Grol 2014; Reed, De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2015; Soufan & Schoenfeld 2016; Marone 2017), or **profiles** (Russell & Miller 1977; Crenshaw 1988; Silke 1998, 2000, 2002; Borum 2003, 2011, 2013; Charlesworth 2003; Ellmann 2003; Horgan 2003; Taarnby 2003; Reinares 2004; Nesser 2005, 2012; Victoroff 2005; Bakker 2006; Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006; Conway & McInerney 2008; Jacques & Taylor 2008, 2013; Bakker & De Graaf 2010; Spaaij 2010, 2012; Kydd 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko 2011; Pantucci 2011; Rae 2012; Simon 2013; Gill, Horgan & Deckert 2014; Gill 2015; Van Vlierden 2015; Gill et al. 2017).

importantly where the author encompasses all the key conceptual elements that will be analyzed throughout this study,

Radicalization comprises internalizing a **set of beliefs**, a **militant mindset** that embraces **violent jihad** as the paramount test of one's conviction. It is the mental prerequisite to recruitment. **Recruitment** is turning others or transforming oneself into a weapon of jihad. It means **joining** a terrorist organization or **bonding** with like-minded individuals to form an autonomous terrorist cell. It means going operational, seeking out the means and preparing for an **actual terrorist operation** – the ultimate step in jihad.'

Applying the above concept of radicalization to the female jihadist study would deliver the approximate definition, *radicalization involves recognizing Salafi-jihadism (set of beliefs), disseminating its principles in a constant manner (militant mindset), engaging with violent behaviors, belonging to jihadist networks and directly contribute to its terrorist goals.*

#### 1.4.2 Terrorism

Terrorism is the second "contested concept" (Schmid 2004: 378) in terms of legal, political, religious, academic and military frameworks and within those same frameworks has produced countless works that in order to portray all the diverse categories have "climbed too high on the ladder of abstraction" (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004: 787).

Until the present time, there is still an absence of definition that englobes all its historical transformations (Laqueur 1987: 1) because as any social phenomena it is constantly evolving, changing tactics and introducing new elements to its definition, therefore making the "struggle to define terrorism (...) sometimes as hard as the struggle against terrorism itself" (Ganor 2002: 304). If distinguished as a social phenomenon, Peter Neumann advanced three main features to characterize terrorism: that is structure, aim and method (Neumann 2009: 14-16). In contrast, if understood as a method, Neumann suggests a possible definition of terrorism: "the deliberate creation of fear, usually through the use (or threat of use) of symbolic acts of violence, to influence the behavior of a target group" (Neumann 2009: 8). Bruce Hoffman, determined the causality between religious terrorism and the increase of fatal terrorist attacks (2006a: 88) attributing it to its "transcendental dimension" (2006a: 88), to the legitimation of violence as "sacramental act or divine duty" (2006a: 88) and to a deadly "sense of alienation" (2006a: 89).

Along these theoretical lines, Peter S. Henne conducted a quantitative study to evaluate the role of religious violence upon suicide terrorism and the conclusion clearly confirmed his hypothesis that religious terrorism is indeed deadlier than other politically driven terrorist acts (Henne 2012: 52). James Piazza considers these violent performances as a 'purifying act', and a way of publicly communicating their



support of their ideological values (Piazza 2009: 64). This radical use of moral standards and extreme use of religious violence (Hoffman 2006a: 87) was seen in the morning of 9/11 in the United States, when large-scaled terrorist attacks marked the surge of a "new terrorism" (Tucker 2001: 1) by the hands of Al-Qaeda. "New global terrorism" says Charles Kegley (2008: 90-91) because of the deep transformations in its aim (exponential increase of indiscriminate violence), in its structure (global networks) and its methods (different and more lethal weaponry and high-tech communication, immediate publicity).

Other authors developed the argument of the 'new terrorism' to the post-9/11 and to the advent of globalization (Neumann 2009: 48; Spencer 2006: 38) and inherent to it, the transition to a "new transnational superterrorism" (Stepanova 2008: 100). In fact, the advent of the terrorist networks or "networked terrorism" (Tucker 2001: 9), electronically connected, sharing a "kind of ethnic cyberspace" (Juergensmeyer 2000: 197) with close-knit bonding (Juergensmeyer 2000: 211; Stepanova 2008: 136) and a grassroots process of recruitment resulted in a "leaderless jihad" (Sageman 2008: viii) in clear contrast to Al-Qaeda's hierarchical organization. However, it was in the fatidic morning of 11 March 2004 in Madrid, when the capital's commuting trains were targeted by explosives, 'Al-Qaeda's revenge' (Reinares 2016), that the concept of terrorism was altered once again. It altered the nature, the composition and the structure of both the terrorist threat and of the terrorist networks who were involved in the attacks (Reinares 2010: 100). Moreover, it gave a new boost to the jihadi terrorism allowing it to enter its third wave<sup>8</sup> (Coolsaet 2016: 19). The fourth wave that starts in 2012 with the Syrian war (2016: 20) will be treated in the next section.



**Figure 1.4** Screenshot from Facebook (27 March 2016)

Women's direct participation in jihadist activities, either as entrepreneurs, gun holders (Figure 1.4) or recruiters, will exercise an influence on how scholars approach the issue of terrorism.

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<sup>8</sup> The first wave corresponds to 1996-2001, the second ending in 2005 (Coolsaet 2016: 19).

### 1.4.3 Jihadism

Jihadism is therefore the third concept representing a fragmented phenomenon (Brachman 2009: 9), divided through its 'endogenous fault lines', identity, locations, cultures, networks, activities and doctrines (Moghadam & Fishman 2011: 3, 234).

The fourth wave of jihadi terrorism or jihadism brings together "individuals from different groups" (Reinares 2010: 100), "through kinship and friendship bonds" (Coolsaet 2016: 19). The 11 March attacks were authored by "various bands of radicals based in Spain" (Jordán 2014: 7), who linked to Al-Qaeda and whose elements had personal and family connections (2014: 7). Amer Aziz, a Moroccan residing in Spain was the 'middle manager' (Neumann, Evans & Pantucci 2011: 829) between Al-Qaeda (leadership) and the terrorist network (grassroots) that authored the 11 March attacks (Reinares 2012: 1). He was also part of the Abu Dahdah cell (Spanish Al-Qaeda filial) and he was "a protegee of Setmarián's at the Al Ghuraba training camp" (Cruickshank & Ali 2007: 9). Setmarián, or al-Suri (as he was born in Syria) is a key figure to understand the evolution of jihadi terrorism. Indeed, the 'pen Jihadist' (Nesser 2011: 191) lived and got married in Spain where he was accused of recruiting and training individuals to join Al-Qaeda. He later was considered the mastermind behind the 'architecture of global jihad' (Lia 2008) by introducing new strategies to the jihadist cause (Lentini 2013: 41-42). Chief among them, the urban guerrilla categories of 'light gang warfare', 'urban terrorism' (Abu Musab al-Suri 2004) and the long lasting cornerstone category of 'individual terrorism' (Cruickshank & Ali 2007: 8). Al-Suri's 'Islamic jihadist manifesto' (Lacey 2008) is believed by scholars and police forces to have been the inspiration to the Madrid attacks and to the subsequent attacks of London, in July 2005. There were more ideological inspirations behind the 11 March operations, among them the Jordan, scholar, Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, Ibn Taymiyya and Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, thus reinforcing the influence of the doctrines of Wahhabism and Salafism (Nesser 2011: 31-34). Since the cell that attacked Madrid was largely composed by Moroccan jihadists (Alonso & Rey 2007: 581), it is logical that these were their points of reference. As a matter of fact, Wahhabism and Salafism entered Morocco through Saudi sponsorship and developed as an "endogenous radical Islamist ideology" (Alonso & Rey 2007: 573) that was directed to form a strict belief and practice of Salafi-jihadism (Alonso & Rey 2007: 580).

Zooming into this specific concept, Salafi-jihadis are those who pursue Salafism, an Islamic current of thought built upon the core center theme of returning to the pious behavior of the Companions of the Prophet, or "(...) a philosophy that believes in progress through regression" (Maher 2016: 7). Salafism is a generic denomination that conceals a wide subset of ideological categories that differ in terms of strategy, propaganda (quietists or purists), political elections (politicos) and endogenous jihad (jihadis) but that subscribes jihad as a permissible Islamic principle (Wagemakers 2012a: 9). In the strict vision of Salafi-jihadis "(...) Jihad should not just be waged against invading or aggressive non-Muslim enemies but should also be

used in a revolutionary way against the ‘apostates’ rulers in their own midst” (Wagemakers 2012a: 9). However, Salafi-jihadists retrieve the spectrum of “intra-Muslim violence” (Maher 2016: 76) by employing the legal Islamic act of excommunication, or *takfir*, to expel the “nominal Muslims” from the “genuine Muslims” (Hafez 2010: 22), thus the individual is expelled because he was no longer a proper believer (Sedgwick 2012: 366). He is declared impure and “his blood is forfeit” (Kepel 2006: 31). It is an ideological and self-contradicting strategy to religiously support violent acts that otherwise would not be theologically acceptable (Hafez 2010: 20).

Women’s own emic definition of violent jihad is constructed upon the mandatory religious principle of exerting individual jihad. More than a women’s right to fight, the women understand jihad as their own duty to fight for, either in the role of disseminators, brokers or recruiters to the jihadist movement.

#### 1.4.4 Violence

All concepts do find common ground on the subjective notion of legitimate use of violence, that in the field of religion finds another layer of subjectivity as they are viewed as “battles for justice” (Selengut 2003: 20). In a study from Schmid and Jongman (1988: 5), the authors came to the conclusion that violence represented 83.5% of the defining categories of political terrorism. In turn, French sociologist, Farhad Khosrokhavar, worked with the principle that the culture of violence is “deeply ingrained in the jihadists’ minds” (Khosrokhavar 2016: 60) and religiously justified by the idea of a perpetual war between the Self and the Other. Violence in the Salafi-jihadist current is the relevant definition to this study. It encounters its reasoning in selected passages of the Qur’an (Moghadam 2008), and in scholars such as the ones from Saudi Arabia who “(...) provided the ideological justification for violence” (Al-Sarhan 2015: 190). The Spanish academic Rogelio Alonso also attributes intellectual credits to radical theological Islamic sources to the validation, of a violent identity and a violent lifestyle (Alonso 2012: 473).

When speaking in terms of identity, ‘many young second-generation Muslims born or raised in Western European countries’ are more prone to be allured by ‘inward-looking Salafist congregations’ (Reinares 2017: 73) in social environments that include homes, mosques or prisons. Mark S. Hamm who developed a thorough study (2013) on the processes of radicalization in prisons has alerted to the critical ideological role of Salafi-jihadism in terrorist mobilization. A corollary the author designates by “prison Islam” (Hamm 2013: 60). Indeed, Hamm argues that ‘cultural communes’ that is, segregation, aggregation in jail wings by ethnicity (2013: 109) together with poor prisoner’s conditions and the circulating message of ‘prison Islam’ are vital factors to the conversion of inmates to violent principles. Furthermore, ‘prison Islam’, or jail wing jihadism, as I frame it, “provides a safe haven for gang members who have absolutely no interest in faith” (Hamm 2013: 145). If we take into consideration that returned jihadists are arrested upon their arrival in Europe, we can assess the magnitude which jail wing jihadism may reach in the coming years.

On the one side, on the ideological level, IS (and the terrorist cells affiliated to them) stands aligned with the Salafi-jihadist group, on the other side, on the operative level, they represent extreme violence and jihad in its defensive and offensive dimensions (Bunzel 2015b: 10). Prior to the declaration of the institution of the Islamic State in June 2014, Hans Kippenberg (2011: 164) had already advanced that the declaration of an Islamic state would be surrounded by the violent conviction that it "(...) is the execution of a divine commandment, and the believer is not responsible for the consequences that then ensue." Nevertheless, in the words of (Lia 2015: 35-37) the lethality of the Islamic state "(...) is not necessarily suicidal behavior by religious fanatics (...)" but a tactic "(...) for future territorial expansion (...)." In fact, "the primary aim of the jihad is not, (...), the conversion by force of unbelievers, but the expansion – and also defense – of the Islamic state" (Peters 1977: 3). To better sum up IS's ideology and the state-of-the-art of the concept of jihadism, the words of Peter Nesser (2011: 174) apply perfectly to the present study, and more importantly they coincide with the perception of the women here portrayed:

Sunni Muslim militant ideologies and movements calling for armed struggle 'in the cause of God' (*jihad fisabil Allah*), aiming to defend Muslim territories, to establish Islamic Emirates, and to re-establish the Caliphate.

Female jihadists aligned with IS's take on jihad in the path of God, but they carved their own way and their own meaning of violence. They are not the brides but the bridge-builders of jihadist networks. They are violent online jihadist entrepreneurs who deliberately run with the wolves.

#### 1.4.5 Digital jihadism

Three years after the publication of the above-mentioned definition of jihad by Peter Nesser, the Caliphate was re-established and declared active. However, the most expressive part of the Caliphate continues to be its 'online territories of terror' (Prucha 2011), its virtual form of existence (Winter 2015a) and perpetuation of its violent propaganda, "between the sword and the pen" (Torres Soriano 2012: 782).

A prior work by Dutch scholar Ruud Peters (1979: 119) named the last type as *djihad al-lisan* or *djihad al-qalam* ('jihad of the tongue' or 'jihad of the pen'). 'Jihad of the pen' relates to *djihad al-da'wa* ('peaceful educational jihad for non-Muslims') and to *djihad al-tarbiyah* ('educational jihad among Muslims'). Al-Qaeda's or IS's doctrines have however retrieved its original peaceful character and have attributed it a violent religious symbolism fastened with the principle of being an individual obligation (*jihad fard al-ayn*). Furthermore, "loyalty and disavowal" to the jihadist norms is common to both jihadist fighters and "internet jihobbyists" (Brachman 2009: 22) as both types "obsess about the ways in which they can better apply *al-*

*Wala wal-Bara* in their daily lives” (Brachman 2009: 22). In fact, internet, namely social media platforms have fostered ‘violent radical milieus’ since 2004 when al-Zarqawi (Jordanian jihadist affiliated with Al-Qaeda) moved the fields of battle to the fields of bytes (Conway 2012: 6). For that reason, it adds the digital dimension to the three ‘constitutive dimensions’ elaborated by Armbrorst (2009: 52) of active dimension, discursive dimension and military dimension. By this logic, jihadism gained an unlimited territory with continuous production and a global audience that act as pull factors to engage more individuals. Those who indeed engage in jihadist networks have a ‘loose affiliation as media *mujahideen*’ (Fisher 2015) “and the distinction between supporter and membership is blurred” (Winter 2017: 9). Nevertheless, they are considered and rewarded as full-fledged physical jihadist fighters (Winter 2017: 12-14). Hence, online jihadist narratives through its “simplicity, plasticity and virtual” nature (Filiu 2011: 201) assure the omnipresence of jihadism online.

Women as documented in the example above are confident in their roles of propagating digital jihad and through it recruiting other women to the jihadist cause. They have established their own digital method of alluring, grooming and recruiting new elements to the jihadist networks.

#### 1.4.6 Ritualization of jihad

The main categories of Islamic rituals are the ‘*shahada*’, or the declaration of faith by which one becomes officially a Muslim, the ‘*salat*’ or prayer (performed five times a day), the ‘*zakat*’, the act of giving to the poor people of the Muslim community, ‘*sawm*’, fasting, and ‘*hajj*’, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic rituals can be studied in the basis of three principles: spiritual submission, body conformity and purity. Blood determines family ties, birth and death. It purifies or stains the individual, it shapes rituals and it represents violence. The sanctity of blood is frequently depicted in the images of the dead jihadists where the bloody spilling reflects their highest physical religious tribute (Amrani 2015: 51). The images as the one below (Figure 1.5) serve the purpose of praising the death and inspiring others to follow the same jihadist path.



**Figure 1.5** Screenshot from Facebook (23 June 2016)

The 'ritualized body' was defined by Catherine Bell as "a body invested with the 'sense' of ritual" (1992: 98), the 'ritualized body' is in her vision a product of the dynamic relationship between ritualization and the 'structuring environment' (1992: 98). Online space is the 'structuring environment' where ritualization occurs and produces the online 'ritualized body', however the task of describing the online embodied is a theoretical challenge.

Following online body representations and the communication through physical manifestations, Nanako Hayami questions "the significance of the ritualized body in the contemporary society" (2004: 5). He directs the answer to applications such as the 'emotion icons', symbols that represent 'human facial expressions of feelings' (2004: 6) because "even in the absence of the physical human face, the importance of the face remains."

Indeed, the representation of embodied in an online space is the subject of the works of Christine Hine. The author considers that 'being online' is another example of the "embodied ways of being and acting in the world" (Hine 2015: 14) and therefore "the Internet user is an embodied user" (2015: 43). David Bell (2001) in his book on cyber culture addresses the online body presence (2001: 156) with the terms 'digital meat' and 'the flesh made code'.

According to the Islamic dogma, the performance of the rituals is anticipated by the act of voluntarily submitting ('*ibada*') them to the will of Allah, in other words, the believer engages the worship activities with the feeling of wanting to obey the divine laws.

The feeling of obedience and respect for the rituals is succeeded by the physical ability to perform all the five pillars of Islam. The believer needs to have a sane body to the extent that Islamic jurisprudence dispenses people who have body disabilities or problems. At the same time, the body discipline required to execute the prayers is also an instrument to conform mind and spirit to the sake of the faith. The respect for and of the body is inserted in Islamic living via the Qur'an and maybe seen in themes such as funeral rites or the covering of intimate parts of the body ('*awra*').

The last principle, the principle of purity ('*tahara*') concerns mind, physique and environment in a more specific form, all Muslims should have pure intentions ('*niya*'), pure bodies ('*ghusl*') and a pure Islamic community ('*umma*'). Here enter the utterances of jihad and of martyrdom as commands of Allah that belong to the 'ritual-purity' themes (Gauvain 2013: 169). The linkage between purification rituals, blood and jihad shape the justification that the Salafi-jihadist ideology was in need to promote religious violence.

I borrow the term 'ritualization' as defined by Catherine Bell (2009) because she achieved the grand task of analyzing and interrelating all relevant ritual theories and developing a holistic approach to ritual studies from which she developed the term 'ritualization'. It relates to the online performance developed by Spanish-speaking

jihadist women and to their digital strategy to foster power and authority relationships with their audience, by distinguishing what is sacred and profane (Bell 2009: 74).

It is important to assess the role that religious arguments play online in a different manner than offline, and why do they serve as an online tool for promotion of processes of radicalization and recruitment in predominant female digital environments.

## 1.5 Local stories, local networks

The above review of conceptual issues is a critical selection of notions and correspondent theoretical frameworks that define and delimit the scope of this study. The concepts have the general purpose of providing the reader with contextualization and tools for understanding the online roles and stories of Spanish-speaking female jihadists.

I begin with a transnational story. There is considerable and generalized interest in IS as a general category referring to all jihadist groups. The transnational story of IS becomes the transnational story of current jihadism in general. However, that is incorrect, some groups are rivals, others cooperate, and at times, alliances and rivalries change and invert their initial status. In that sense, during my research I encountered data stating the online connections between Spanish-Moroccan jihadists with the Free Syrian Army group and with the Ahrar al-Sham group, among other jihadist factions operating in the territories of the Caliphate. In fact, there are different kinds of jihadist groups and IS represents one faction of the global jihadist movement. Within IS there are several subgroups that are distinguished by different aspects, such as ethnicity or language. Reinares and García-Calvo (2018: 5) mention the 'francophone cadre' that promotes a transnational connection between French-speaking jihadists and the jihadist attacks in Spain in 2017. The convergence of these jihadists with Spanish-speaking jihadists was visible in their joint presence in the Emni structure of IS. Emni was the 'intelligence' gathering service and it was "the crucial cog in the group's terrorism machinery" (Callimachi 2016) and direct involvement in terrorist attacks around the globe (Vidino, Marone & Entenmann 2017: 66). One example of the practical results of this linguistic connection can be observed in the online role played by Guitone (as seen in Chapter 1, Section 1.2). As a French-Moroccan foreign fighter who was fluent in several languages, including Spanish, Guitone produced videos and online stories that continue to be sources of 'inspiration' for other jihadists. His social status was objectified in his appearance (good looking young man), embodied in his foreign-fighter behavior (he was the individual that other jihadists wanted to be around) and later immortalized in his death (according to witness reports he died 'bravely' on the battlefield). His online media role due to his social status keeps on being determinant to bring together the 'francophone cadre' jihadists with the Spanish-speaking jihadists, using for that purpose

the argument of their common ethnicity link, to Morocco. As it was previously mentioned in Section 1.2, in one of Guitone's videos he threatened Spain and promoted the re-conquest of the lands of Al-Andalus. What is remarkable about this video is that Guitone speaks in Spanish, a deliberate act to engage Spanish-speaking jihadists, and invoked kinship (*'nuestros abuelos'*, our grandparents in Spanish) to establish the emotional bonding between his audience and his message.

It is therefore important to observe how language co-determines subcultural capital (social status), how it correlates with the flow of information (social interaction) and how it structures networks (social hierarchies). The higher the density and the cohesion of the network, the more it relies on 'local linguistic norms' (Beyer & Schreiber 2017) to communicate and share local experiences and stories.

The use of Spanish is an important delimitation of the scope of my research. On the one hand, this was an intentional decision as little research has focused on Spanish-speaking jihadists. On the other hand, Spanish is also intentionally used as a jihadist tool, because it is employed by jihadist women to unify and expand their audience. As is well known, the Moroccan language situation is complex, with several actively used languages and dialects that are not understandable to everyone. Therefore, in the same way that jihadist propaganda is disseminated in English to capture a wider group of people on social media platforms, the Spanish jihadist women use a lingua franca to expand their audience. The strategy aims in general at including all Moroccan women living in Spain but also, and in particular, at including Spanish women and among them, first and foremost Spanish women who converted to Islam. The strategy also allows reaching out to Latin-American Facebook users who share the knowledge and the use of the Spanish language.

As a result, Spanish is being employed as an efficient linguistic tool for communication and the recruitment of other women into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network.

In the specific case of this study, ability to speak Spanish, having Moroccan ethnicity, having a migration background and knowledge of local shared stories characterize this specific network in terms of their subcultural capital. In the expression of Ken Gelder (2005: 187) "subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the beholder" and combined with network communication skills ensures the transfer of information among individuals. In other words, subcultural capital confers online social ranking to female jihadists, and their selected social media platforms generate networks of power and knowledge (Gelder 2005: 188). It is therefore, important *to understand how they achieve that status* and how this status is used for *engagement and recruitment into online processes of radicalization*.

Before we advance into the specific mechanisms of engagement and online recruitment it is important to note that these processes breed social structures that reflect 'real world' acquaintances, based on trust and honor codes. They contribute to the formation of a dense, closed network with strong emotional bonding and strong ties.



Online group identity construction in the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network was based on sharing posts on local cultural products and in repeated online performances that reinforced the distinctive features of their local network and reinforced their cohesion. However, I have to point out that once in the Caliphate, women would be 'hidden' and their presence could only be inferred by gendered categories such as birth (photos of newborn babies) or food (preparation of meals as a primarily female task).

Birth was displayed in multiple posts with men holding their newborn babies. It was to them important to present a new generation of fighters being born in the Caliphate, a clear online propaganda gimmick to positively advertise life in their controlled territory. Indeed, men would be showcased smiling, cuddling, proudly posing alongside their babies, and/or alongside small children. Among the Spanish-Moroccan jihadists, these emotive displays of babies and/or children would be without direct violent references. But the same could not be said for example about the Tunisian jihadists who were eager to picture their babies and/or children surrounded by hand-grenades and weapons.

Food, understood as a cultural product, was also differentiating jihadists and their shared stories. For example, Nutella's availability in the Caliphate was not relevant to the Spanish-Moroccan jihadists, as they did not have previous cultural references to it, in opposition to jihadists who were coming from France, or Belgium. For Spanish-Moroccan jihadists it was important, at the end of the week, to post images of steaming trays of couscous, a reference to the Moroccan custom of eating this traditional plate, every Friday after the '*al-jumm'ah*' prayer. Other common food imagery reflecting local cultural products in the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network would be mint tea, bread and barbeques. French female jihadists, on the other hand, would display photos of crêpes, and Dutch female jihadists of the national favorite licorice candy, '*dropjes*'.

Football was revealed as another important and male cultural category. Those who had not yet travelled to the Caliphate territory would post pictures of games and tag the foreign fighters who had already left. It was also frequent to see profile names and images indicating a football club affiliation (Real Madrid and Barcelona were the most popular), admired football players (usually from the Spanish Football League) or preferred football coaches (Jose Mourinho as the 'special one'). Although France, The Netherlands and Belgium are also known for their predilection of football, I did not encounter similar posts among their jihadists.

Fishing and swimming were other sports-related male categories that appeared frequently in Spanish-Moroccan jihadists' Facebook accounts. Activities that they used to engage in before their migration seemed to carry a symbolic meaning for them, and contributed to their group bonding function. The constant tagging between those who had not yet migrated and those who were already in the Caliphate was important for promoting and maintaining a sense of normalcy of life in a war scenario, a sense of bridging the online and real worlds, and above all a perpetuation

of local performances. Upon their enactment, these local performances reproduced local stories and strengthened network cohesion because they resonate familiar situations using familiar language. It is a clear soft power strategy with direct recruitment impact. At the same time, some of them, reflect gendered online constructs and offer a glimpse of the actual life of these women after their migration.

In what refers to literature on subcultural capital, there is a gap concerning the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network. In the specific case of the Moroccan contingent that was estimated by the local authorities to number circa 1,500 foreign fighters, publications on the matter are not abundant. Moreover, these publications are normally based on secondary sources or focused on 'push and pull factors' that explain the roots of jihadist affiliation and the routes Moroccan jihadists followed until they became part of IS's network structure (Mashab 2015). Empirical studies on the daily life and online activities of these fighters, as well of the Spanish-speaking fighters, are only represented in two publications, 'Nuestros Jihadistas – part I', 'Nuestros Jihadistas – part II', by the investigative journalist Chema Gil (J.M.G. Garre) in 2014, proving the valuable of the present thesis.

While subcultural capital, local cultural products and shared language distinguish jihadist groups from each other, support their local stories and build up strong ties among them, it would be useful for future studies to consider the stories that returned foreign fighters bring with them and share with like-minded people.

It is useful to discuss this problematic in the context of the next waves of jihadism. Picking up where we left off in Section 1.4.3, with the concept of a fourth wave of jihadism, we can advance to those new waves. According to Neumann (2016: 173), a new fifth wave came to shore in 2014 when the war against IS became a global enterprise and its consequences were deeply felt by Counterterrorist Forces in Europe (Neumann 2016: 174). Now that the physical war is no longer that significant, a new set of problems emerged from the (possible) return of foreign fighters to Europe. Legal, social, intelligence and security problems aggravate the already complex work of counter-terrorism services.

Consequently, critical reflections will also be necessary to grasp the amplitude of the breaking wave caused by the return of foreign fighters to domestic European soil. As the report of the AIVD (General Intelligence and Security Service) suggests, the return of female jihadists is a 'threat not to be underestimated' for three reasons (AIVD 2017: 8):

1. They were in the combat zone for a longer time;
2. They were exposed to jihadist ideology longer;
3. They have a bigger international jihadist network.

The added challenge is the acute need to contextualize the (mis)use and (mis)interpretation of Islamic terms, the 'live-streaming' ability of IS to produce current, updated violent contents, and the persistent gap in the literature on online gender

jihadism. This last point leads us to the next section where I propose a new branch of terrorism studies.

## 1.6 Gender jihadi strategic studies

Finally, this study in a general sense is an empirical exploitation of the subject of online gender jihadism. Deconstructed into separate units, gender jihad and online jihad have been the object of previous scientific studies; however, the study of online gender jihad is still limited in number of produced studies.<sup>9</sup> It is of course important to note in between these works the ones that actually attribute agency to the jihadist women online and those who identify them as passive participants.

In May 2004, just after the Madrid jihadist attacks, the Norwegian scholars, Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer (2004: 369), suggested in a co-written article that more attention should be given to the genre of online jihadist militant literature.

In the line of the suggestion of Lia and Hegghammer, this dissertation contributes in general to the genre of *online jihadism studies* and gives a more specifically contribution in order to create a new topic of study, the *online gender jihadist strategic studies*. The topic may further the existent knowledge on how female online jihadist roles are an important part of the asymmetrical jihadist militant strategy.

As any strategy studies, gaining direct intelligence on the enemy, or 'skyping with the enemy' (Erelle 2015) are crucial because "knowledge must become capability" (Von Clausewitz 1984: 147). However, in order to establish reliable scientific productions, future studies should keep the empirical methodological trajectory, that is they have to keep on being supported by primary data. Along these methodological lines, online gender jihadist strategic studies, as any other new branch of research, will have the capability of generating original methodologies, results and of opening up new venues of discussion.

## 1.7 Facebook – Newsfeed update

Facebook was chosen as the digital environment for this study because of the few available studies and the corresponding gap in the literature. Even to this day, the great majority of academic works tend to be anchored on Telegram and/or Twitter. In terms of the literature produced in 2017 on digital jihadism, we can see that most studies have looked mostly at Twitter.

Facebook is more than an online space constructed as sacred, as it will be discussed in Chapter 2, Section 3. Facebook is, similar to Twitter, an official administra-

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Lamia, Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2012; Halverson & Way 2012; Bloom 2013; Pearson 2015; Alexander 2016; Conway 2016; Huey & Witmer 2016; Manrique et al. 2016; Peladeau 2016; Witmer 2016.

tive province of the Online Caliphate, a '*wilayat*' (Pearson 2017: 5). Online, its members declared their own allegiance, '*baqiya*', to IS ideology and activities on several occasions, by posting photos of themselves against the background of IS's black banner, with the right hand indexed finger raised indicating their belief in the oneness of God (*tawhid*). This is a ritualistic performance which explains why, after any jihadist inspired terrorist attacks, academics rush to find evidence of this meaningful moment as it will attribute authorship of the attack to IS.

Another important aspect, and inherent limitation to conducting research on Facebook, is the fluctuation of the number of active members online. Due to the sensitive and violent character of the contents that are produced, shared or commented on by Spanish-speaking jihadist women, two scenarios occur on Facebook. On the one hand, their accounts are subjected to temporary and/or permanent disruptions but on the other hand, the female users anticipate this and open simultaneous accounts. This second scenario, multiple accounts being managed by one singular user, is in general easily verified because the user explicitly identifies herself and announces the opening of new accounts in order to keep the same 'friends' and/or 'followers'.

The variation of numbers of users represented in the research mirrors the evolution of Facebook as a social media platform, the constraints of surveillance and censorship, and increased online control of violent content production and dissemination. Despite the technical disruptions of jihadist content, an important notion emerges from this context: the coherence, consistency and continuity of the core violent message. These communication features step up their 'online resilience', the strive to keep, preserve and manage an online active presence in spite of the also coherent, consistent and continuous efforts by Facebook administrators to delete them and to halt their viral online dissemination.

Allied to the notion of 'online resilience' is the notion of 'online survivability': leaving a digital footprint that surpasses the longevity of the Facebook account. In a nutshell, online jihadist profiles may be long gone but the contents that promote processes of radicalization will still be available online to allure and engage others. The silver lining is that this digital archive also aids researchers in their task of conducting reflexive practices with the objective of achieving preventive, predictive and prescriptive analysis.

In order to better grasp the online roles of Spanish-speaking female jihadists on Facebook, I have combined techniques emanating from *Digital Ethnography* with elements of *Grounded Theory*. The combination of Virtual Ethnography and Grounded Theory was labeled 'virtual grounded theory' by Carmen Becker, who conducted online research on Dutch and German Salafist forums (Becker 2013: 72). Although I agree with the concept, I prefer to name it *Digital Grounded Theory*.

Nevertheless, and as other authors suggest, "there is no grand theory of radicalization that can explain all processes (...) the soundest approach in trying to understand radicalization is a multidisciplinary one" (Vidino, Marone & Entenmann 2017: 77).

Taking this in mind, we can adopt the view that "ethnography as an approach is always methodologically flexible and adaptive, regardless of its context" (Varis 2017: 61) and that these are advantages "of particular use to us now, considering the speed and scope of change that digitalization has brought to social interaction" (Varis 2017: 63).

The Grounded Theory principle that "all is data" (Glaser 2001: 145) implies the inclusion of previous literature on the subject being studied, hence the continuing impact of the key classical works that have created theories that have withstood the test of times and that in our case above all withstood the test of terrorism's fast evolution. Literature review has been inserted into the various chapters, and references were selected to illustrate their specific scopes. Nevertheless, there is a recognized gap on literature related to the nexus of gender and violence in general and on online gendered violence in particular. In 2015, Edwin Bakker and co-author Seran de Leed addressed the literature gap in the title of their article, labelling it as 'under researched'. A year later, the problem remained (Conway 2016: 13), and 2017 brought no visible changes in the opinion of Pearson (2017: 4), "Studies on how gender factors in online radicalization are still in their infancy, and there are calls for further research."

In the specific case of Spain, one crucial reference to the concepts of gender-violence-digital is the work of Carola García-Calvo (2017), 'There is no life without jihad and no jihad without hijrah': The jihadist mobilisation of women in Spain, 2014-2016'.

Related to the fast pace of jihadism is the idea that 'all is data at all time', meaning that practicing digital ethnography implies being aware of the "24-hour news cycle" (Conway et al. 2017: 22) of online jihadist production. It also implies immersing oneself in the data to know "what is going on in the research scene is the data" (Glaser 2001: 145), being online to "read and watch on the screen (...) all the time, even on the go" (Varis 2017: 63). These mobile and digital practices require being in the field in a disciplined, frequent and "sensorily embodied" (Postill & Pink 2012: 128) way in order to capture the immediacy feature inherent to jihadism.

However, the urgent pace of jihadism should not impose a fast pace of academic analysis. Time is needed for reflective practices that encompass this historical present phenomenon in the optimal way. In June 2017, the following sentence was valid, "51 successful attacks throughout Europe and North America from June 2014, when the Caliphate was declared, until June 2017" (Vidino, Marone & Entenmann 2017: 15). Fast-forward a couple of months and the number of jihadist attacks increased to 55 (assuming the authors did not include the stabbings in London, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2017). The number of occurrences and the reduced time distance

between them are producing profound changes in society, “as some of the details and even core facts of many of the attacks that have taken place in the West over the last three years are still unknown, not just to academics and analysts but also to law enforcement and intelligence agencies” (Vidino, Marone & Entenmann 2017: 21).

The motivations, the causes and the processes surrounding jihadism as a current violent phenomenon are not entirely disclosed, nor fully understood, thus empirically based analysis seemed a fitting, sensitive and maximally comprehensive approach. Throughout the various chapters, I will mention the methodological steps that were employed to approach Facebook as an online field of research.

This unique online field is dynamic and complex and thus a singular method approach would deliver a monochromatic analysis and would never give us a comprehensive study. There are of course pitfalls in employing a multimodal approach, such as the dispersion of techniques, the effort needed to execute all methods perfectly and with equal dedication, and the necessity to prove the validity of new methodological designs. True to the matter, new methodological designs are the fruit of the researcher’s own identity, the capacity to seize the scientific opportunities, the courage to select different paths, and the creativity to generate new forms to harvest data in the least expected fields.

By noting the methodological limitations I experienced while conducting research on Facebook, I will further the understanding of this online environment and highlight its potential for both research possibilities and new digital ethnographic practices. The sum of the application of these methods, practices and creative solutions may in general inspire new scientific venues for digital ethnography, and in particular, it may prompt the surge of more studies centered primarily on Facebook.

## **1.8 The structure of the dissertation**

These introductory considerations bring us to the foundational principles that have guided the structure of the present thesis. Though various sub-topics will appear, the overarching theme is that the online radicalization processes of Spanish-speaking female jihadists are built upon violent Salafi-jihadist beliefs that promote terrorism. In Chapters 3 to 7, I have indicated each time the role of this ideology in the processes of online radicalization.

As the screenshot in Figure 1.6 shows, the invitations to Salafist groups were unspectacular and lacked any specific violent ideological attributes. They attract an audience by inviting them to learn more about ‘true’ Islamic principles.

Significantly, Salafi-jihadism is a neologism according to Shiraz Maher (2016: 16), a Western construction that reinforces security measures. The same can be said about jihadism and terrorism as both serve the need to label criminal acts against society. Indeed, as previously mentioned, there are different classifications of Salafi-jihadism: for some it is a violent branch of Salafism that endorses terrorism, while

for others it is a social movement that rebels against Western societies and that rejects 'coconut Muslims' (IS's denomination for Muslims who reject their extremist views).



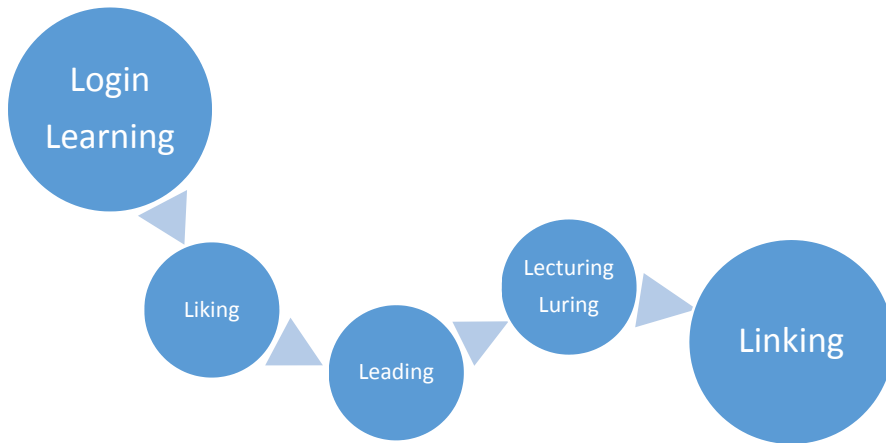
**Figure 1.6** Screenshot from Facebook (October 2014)

However, in whatever category it may fall, “anyone who goes looking for potential terrorists will find them among the Salafists” (Neumann 2016: 5). To which I will add: “they will find them among the Salafi-jihadist supporters”, a sentence that I heard frequently when I conducted a new fieldwork incursion in Spain in October 2017. I intentionally chose to interview two leading figures of Muslim communities who were not in any way connected with Morocco. Both (one a Mauritanian Imam and the other a Spanish converted woman) were outspoken in their criticism of Salafi-jihadist Imams in Spain, to whom they attributed full responsibility for disseminating violent messages to their followers. With the terrorist attacks of August 2017 still very fresh in their minds, their testimony and opinion were clearly infested by emotion and repudiation of Salafi-jihadist sermons. This leads us to the conclusion that both digital data as well as the ‘real-world’ data that were collected at the beginning of this study keep their analytical value.

Taking this into consideration, the structure of the thesis displays on the one hand the chronological elaboration of this research, and on the other hand a timeline of the online processes of radicalization of Spanish-speaking jihadist women that are anchored in Salafi-jihadist ideology. The online processes of radicalization could be synthesized in Figure 1.7.

As it happens, we will observe the life-cycle events that transform these women from ‘online *okhti*’ (*Login and Learning*) to ‘online recruiters’, while at the same time pondering how they position themselves in the digital environments (*Liking*), how they construct their online authority (*Lecturing and Luring*) and how they make sense of their biographical stand as mothers and educators and their own pursuit of violence (*Leading*).

In the final phases of the process of online radicalization (*Linking*), the women perform their roles as jihadist entrepreneurs, recruiting new individuals and connecting them to the jihadist networks. This ties up perfectly, in terms of chronological sequence, with the existent literature that focuses on data emerging from arrested and convicted women for the crimes performed while occupying jihadist roles.



**Figure 1.7** The online processes of radicalization

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters and a conclusion, and follows the chronological development of female online jihadist roles. As a matter of fact, the structure mirrors the chronological development of the research project, a timeline that basically coincides with the 'real time' online process of radicalization of Spanish-speaking jihadist women in general, and in particular, with the process of Samira Yerou. The story of Samira, the first Spanish woman convicted for her jihadist role and her activities in a jihadist network, is shared with the objective of offering a real case scenario that the readers can relate to the different chapters, hence gaining a privileged insight into the subject. Chapter 3 to Chapter 7 include a page that contains a simulation of a Facebook timeline to display the chronological sequence of the chapters and the related situational context.

After the completion of the methodological part, and the situational survey, I move on to the ethical implications of doing online research on such a sensitive subject.

It is noteworthy to point out the decision to conduct digital and classic ethnographic incursions and as so to illustrate the intrinsic value of multimodal approaches and the unique value of having empirical material that reports crucial



phases of jihadism as we know it today, that is, the pre-Caliphate phase, the Caliphate and the downing of the Caliphate phase.

In fact, using a multimodal methodological approach I evaluated and assessed the representative moments and the mechanisms these women pursue to engage jihadist roles, from the moment that they have an open account on a social media platform and start to participate in online activities, up to the moment that they construct their own online jihadist roles as brokers and entrepreneurs within their networks.

The chapters examine how women make sense of their online jihadist roles and activities, how they assume control of their messages and of their own violent path to God. In specific, the chapters examine how the female online jihadist propaganda persuades Spanish-speaking women to be involved with jihadist networks and to pursue violent jihadist objectives.

In the conclusion, I will reflect upon the empirical findings, the results, the hope for impact of this study on further expansion of the field of online gender jihadism, and possible intervention strategies.

Academic works are valid as long as they offer analytical tools and pragmatic measures that have valorization potential. Hence, I use the last two sections of the conclusion to reflect on intervention strategies. Understanding society means understanding the limitations of our knowledge.

| Table 1.1 Overview of Chapters 3-7   |   | Process of Radicalization  | Field  | Data  | Method   | Category |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|----------|
| Research question  |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where online are the female jihadists?</li> <li>• How do female jihadists make sense of violent online rituals?</li> <li>• What does it mean to be a Muslim in Catalonia?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Login</li> <li>• Learning</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• 50 participants</li> <li>• Catalonia</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online data collection</li> <li>• Offline fieldwork</li> <li>• Invisible and participant observation</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnography</li> <li>• Digital ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Login in a radical digital environment</li> <li>• Salafi-jihadist principles</li> <li>• Gendered construction of jihad as an online violent ritual</li> <li>• Sisterhood</li> </ul> |          |
| <b>Chapter 4</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the importance for female jihadists of Facebook as a sacred space of jihadist communication?</li> <li>• How do women construct their violent online identity while at the same time deal with questions of how to avoid surveillance and censorship?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liking</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• 50 participants</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online data collection</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Invisible observation</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gendered online positioning in the jihadist space</li> <li>• Local narratives</li> <li>• Local roots causes of terrorism</li> </ul>   |          |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the mechanisms that enable female Islamic authority online?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• 50 participants</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online data collection</li> <li>• Invisible observation</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online female jihadists</li> <li>• Jihadist propaganda</li> <li>• Online female jihadist authority</li> </ul>   |          |
| <b>Chapter 6</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How different social media platforms are used by self-proclaimed jihadists to communicate their violent messages?</li> <li>• What is the role of imagery in the framing of the jihadist discourse online?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecturing</li> <li>• Luring</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tumblr</li> <li>• 12 blogs</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online data collection</li> <li>• Invisible observation</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gendered constructions of jihadist identities</li> <li>• Online violent imagery</li> <li>• Motherhood</li> </ul>  |          |
| <b>Chapter 7</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the roles of women in the jihadist networks?</li> <li>• What are the organizational structures of the Spanish-Moroccan networks?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• 360 profiles</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online data collection</li> <li>• Invisible observation</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> <li>• Social network analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Jihadist network structure</li> <li>• Online female jihadist</li> </ul>  |          |



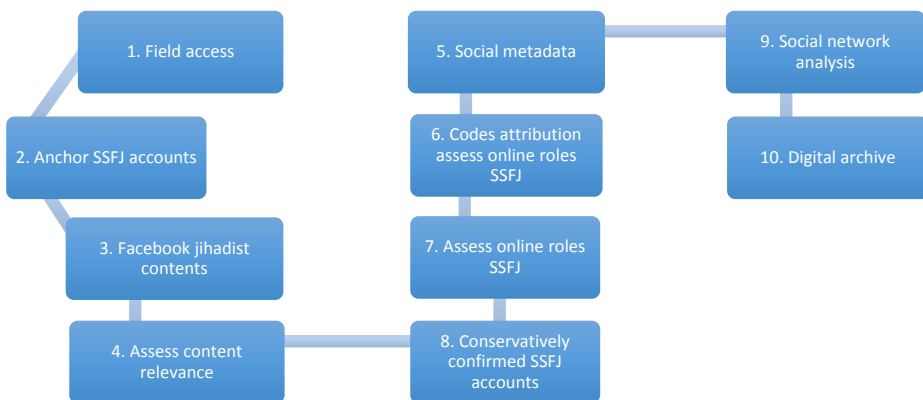
## CHAPTER 2

# Login – Gaining access to the field

## 2.1 Digital Grounded Theory

My dissertation is set to bridge the gap on how women become online jihadist entrepreneurs and therefore to disclose the mechanisms and contents that bring success to their violent goals. The alliance between online and offline fields of research provided a wide range of information and facilitated the triangulation of my data. I could in fact test the consistency, or not, between contents and narratives used in both fields (online and offline) in order to initiate processes of violent radicalization. Thus, a robust data collection was systematically collected during the period of five years delivering a unique insight into the underdeveloped theme of women as jihadist agents. Hence, and following the dynamic lines of Grounded Theory methods, ‘steady movement between concept and data’ (Lawrence & Tar 2013: 30) was performed, in both fields, offline and online, in order to code, compare, clarify, and control the results.

Grounded Theory was designed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) with the purpose of developing a suitable method for empirical studies. It is founded on the principle that data informs the theory from the moment that the researcher identifies the main question of the study. Figure 2.1 exemplifies the trajectory when using this combination of methods.



**Figure 2.1.** Spanish-speaking female jihadist digital analysis

The first step implies that the researcher enters the field (step 1) without pre-defined ideas or assumptions. The second step (step 2) is the most challenging: to find Facebook accounts that fit the jihadist affiliation criteria and that will allow the process of snowball sampling.

In the following step (step 3), the researcher's default attitude will be to assume that "all is data" (Glaser 2001: 145), from the visual aspects to the preferred forms of texts, all contents, all profiles, all online accounts contain meaningful social and behavioral patterns. That gives rise to a large data set, which needs to be filtered and assessed (step 4) according to its relevance to the scope of the research. Another strategy to collect data on Facebook is to trace and collect social metadata, tags, likes, sharing, and lists of friends (step 5). The patterns that emerge from the collected data, deliver critical codes (step 6) to analyze the online female jihadist roles (step 7) and to confirm in a conservative way the validity of their Facebook accounts as jihadist online profiles (step 8). Once these processes of engaging with violent extremism were determined and the profiles were validated, it is time to structure their jihadist network (step 9). The last step (step 10) is to conserve and keep data that will not be useful in the context of the research and that may be relevant in future studies.

## 2.2 Digital jihadist profiles

It comes with the territory while conducting Digital Ethnography that the researcher will be confronted with the perennial question about the authenticity of the informants. I find it interesting as 'deception and detection' are even found on the scientific study of natural sciences (Barnes 1994: 57) and they are for sure part of social sciences (1994: 59). There is of course, an element of 'fiction' (Geertz 1968: 154) in all performances, offline and online. But 'it is this fiction-fiction, not falsehood, that lies at the heart of successful anthropological field research (...).' Moreover, I was interested in learning about the meaning of their online performance on Facebook, the authenticity of their online production. Authenticity is as so, here understood in its emic sense, that is how these women perspective their online jihadist performance and the meaning they attribute to it.

Although the focus of this dissertation were female jihadists, I have also registered their interactions with male jihadists. The decision led to a better characterization of the data on female jihadists and to the inclusion of data concerning male children and male teenagers. I have only come across data concerning female children while conducting digital research on Tumblr, thus this is a clear and significant knowledge gap in jihadist Studies.

Once the observed individuals would match the criteria to be considered jihadists, their list of 'friends' (in the cases it was possible) was exhaustively analyzed reaching to a total of 72,665 profiles. A time-consuming task, especially when done manually, and simultaneously a task to be completed in a short time considering

that these types of accounts tend to be blocked/deleted also in a short period of time. The 72,665 profiles were analyzed to see if they could match the criteria and then they would be added to the network (snowball sampling method).

The number of informants varied according to the situational context that was playing at the time of the research. In the pre-Caliphate period and until the declaration of the institution of the Caliphate in the summer of 2014, the number of open profiles or individuals willing to talk about their jihadist affiliation was at the highest on Facebook.

After the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015, the number of open profiles, or of people willing to share their jihadist views, went down compared to the previous period. From then on, the only possible way to carry out my research was through the monitoring of public profiles accounts on Facebook. At the same time, many women at this stage of the events changed their privacy status from public to private. The women who maintained their profiles as public irrespective of the evolving situational context are the ones who perform online propaganda dissemination roles and who, for that reason, must keep reaching out to a wide online audience.

At this moment of my research, it made sense to try to visualize the entire Spanish-speaking jihadist network. That meant, of course, including male Facebook users who were part of this network.

From the sum of profiles, a conservative universe of 360 active profiles were considered as the most suitable sample group in accordance to the scope of the research. By conservatively, I mean I included only profiles that could be confirmed as sharing, producing, or consuming jihadist ideology in a consistent and frequent manner, and whose social metadata clearly indicated their jihadist affiliation.

To come to that number, I started with the first Spanish-speaking jihadist woman I had encountered on Facebook and whose online profile matched all featured items of the criteria exemplified in Chapter 3. I continued to filter and to design her lines of relationships in order to achieve a clear visualization of the online Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network. Once the visualization was complete, I gained thorough understanding of the importance of the sample of these 360 people and their connections to the terrorist attacks that occurred in Europe.

The limitations, such as possible loss of data not collected on time, or profiles that were overlooked, are the natural result of using only manual methods of profile selection and of it being a one-person task. In the end, a considerable amount of data was archived with a preliminary attribution of a code and it will be the basis of future analysis.

After repeatedly employing the method of snowball sampling throughout female jihadist accounts on Facebook, I started to come across the same profiles, meaning not only that this method applied to this specific group performing in this specific social media platform had exhausted its potential subjects but that it had also exhausted the coverage of their contents. What follows in the table below is a representation of the grand codes and their respective sub-themes who provide

orientation to understand the structure of the Spanish-speaking jihadist message circulating online.

**Table 2.1** Visualization of coding

| Gender            | Caliphate  | Digital                              | Religion                                   | Profiles         | Networks        |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Women             | Baqiya   | Mobile                               | Apocalypse                                 | Nationality      | List of friends |
| Men               |  |                                      |  |                  |                 |
| 🇪🇸 Spanish        | Banners  | Apps                                 | Islamic Feasts                             | Social metadata  | Ties            |
| 🇲🇦 Moroccan       | Communications   | Facebook                             | Hijra                                      | Gender           | Clusters        |
| 🇮🇹 Italian        | Weaponry   | Facilitators<br>🇺🇸 Male<br>🇺🇸 Female | Salafism                                   | Location         | Roles           |
| 🇫🇷 French         | Transports   |                                      | Female issues<br>🇺🇸 Clothing<br>🇺🇸 Advices | Education        | Extra notes     |
| 🇵🇹 Portuguese     | Administration   | Telegram                             | Prayer                                     | Profession       |                 |
| 🇬🇧 British        | Location   | Twitter                              | Advice                                     | Migration status |                 |
| 🇸🇦 South-American | Free Syrian Army<br>Ahrar al-Sham  | Surveillance                         | Sacred texts                               | Family ties      |                 |
| 🇺🇸 North-American | Children   |                                      |  | Last post        |                 |
| 🇦🇫 African        | Cookery  |                                      |  | Language         |                 |
| 🇦🇸 Asian          | Hobbies<br>🇺🇸 Fishing<br>🇺🇸 Swimming<br>🇺🇸 Football<br>🇺🇸 Stores<br>🇺🇸 Football<br>🇺🇸 Group photos |                                      |  |                  |                 |

In order to answer the main research question, on how do Spanish-speaking jihadist women construct their online roles, I have attempted to make sense of the contents produced, shared and consumed by jihadist women and to make sense of online environments as both 'radical milieus' (Conway 2012: 4) and as 'sacred spaces'. Thus, that led to how they used the digital affordances to construct their online religious authority roles.

As a matter of fact, digital affordances and online environments promoted the development of online female roles that in any other offline social context would be more difficult to achieve. Therefore, Facebook with its direct communication skills and communication exchanges made it possible for this particular set of population to gather themselves as a sisterhood with the digital concrete goals of disseminating

violent jihadist contents in order to engage and recruit new elements to the Global Jihad Front.

As so, I will analyze how jihadist women exploit the digital affordances of Facebook to establish robust 'online networking skills' (Hsieh 2012) that produce tight bonding, bridging and highly praised social capital that is reflected upon traditional, face-to-face relationships. In the regard of Wellman and Gulia (1997: 10) online communities have identical 'strong ties' that promote 'frequent, companionable and voluntary' contact among the participants.

## **2.3 Digital participation**

Before I delve into the importance of digital affordances, it is important to discuss the digital participation of Spanish-speaking female jihadists. First of all, they have to overcome cultural and religious obstacles that sanction spaces where inter-gender relationships are possible. Second, they have to overcome the economic circumstance of being able to afford the costs of smart technology devices and internet connection. Third, they have to overcome the educational obstacle of having enough computer, media and digital literacy in order to navigate through the different online systems.

The combination of computer literacy (capacity to work with computers and/or laptops), media literacy, or the evolving dynamic between discourse, skills and authority (Livingstone 2004: 12) and digital skills (how individuals 'engage with information and communication technologies' to achieve their goals (Hargittai & Walejko 2008: 252)) has indeed increased the digital participation of the female jihadists represented in this study. However, digital participation, easier access to technologies and digital affordances, as Hargittai and Hinnant (2008: 618) have suggested, will not deliver, per se, a solution to 'potential sources of inequality', nor to the digital divide experienced by female jihadists.

Despite these obstacles, female jihadists have bridged digital inequality and have generated social regard, belonging, knowledge among their digital connections, a fact that can be explainable via their 'strong motivations' (Van Deursen et al. 2017: 471) to attain their jihadist objectives.

Those strong motivations were part of Samira Yerou's staircase to mobilization. Her process of radicalization began in Tetouan, in a low-tech, local and face-to-face operation, a back-to-basics move, the type of strategy employed before the internet age (Hoffman 2006b: 1) when local mosques, prisons had the monopoly of the mobilization activities (Neumann & Rogers 2007: 33-39).

When Samira returned to Rubi, according to the Spanish court documents, she acquires a tablet computer and a Samsung smartphone. Both devices have high-tech applications that give the users the possibility to install the latest social software with communication and interactive online applications. A smart-tech process of mobilization assuring a fast, steady and continuous stream of jihadist contents while



at the same time providing the user with an 'embodied, embedded and everyday life' (Hine 2015) jihadist experience. The amount of time spent online is proportional to the speed of radicalization of the individual, which was exactly what these devices meant for Samira, the experience of being constantly online, to become a touch-screen jihadist, constantly under the ideological influence of the jihadist narrative and under the surveillance of her IS regular contacts. Being frequently online results in offline social isolation, a condition that is 'critical for normalizing behaviors' (Torok 2013: 6), namely behaviors that involve acceptance and justification of extreme violence. Stern and Berger (2015) understand this behavioral path as similar to 'create a new human being' who includes violence as a normalized behavior. Violent behavior includes more than aggressive acts; it also includes aggressive communication. ISIS communication strategy has indeed revealed its power to ignite "an unusually high level of stimulation to those who might already be prone to violence" (Berger & Morgan 2015: 59). The proof of Samira's commitment to violence in the name of the jihadist cause was sealed over a phone conversation where she made her son say to her ISIS contact: 'I will cut the throat of a police agent.' This part of the behavior normalization process is denominated by Mbakwe and Cunliffe as "grooming" (2007: 224), (...) "'grooming' in this context defines a normalizing process, diminishing the user's resistance to the violent narrative."

## 2.4 Digital grooming

Grooming is a common strategy employed by jihadist recruiters not only upon possible jihadist candidates but also directed to researchers and to analysts. The grooming strategy initiated with the call to Islam (*Da'wa*) considered a duty to all Muslims and taken to a higher level of mandatory actions by the Salafi-jihadist scholars (Carvalho 2014).

I have witnessed it first hand in my online contacts with a female jihadist recruiter. First, she guided the conversation to inquire about my right intentions (*'niya'*) towards Islam. My answer was 'to gain more knowledge', 'to further my education' which she considered a pre-disposition to accept the true religion, Islam, and therefore she recommended important basic readings, Qur'an, Hadiths. The second step was to question me about what I learned so far from those readings, re-direct the learning process to the 'right, pure path of the Salafs' and to question about my personal life. The third step was to answer my questions on jihad (open questions about the theological Islamic definition of the term) by sending me PDF documents with relevant literature ('Join the Caravan' being the most frequent). A clear indication that in her mind frame jihad and jihadism were intertwined and that they were equally part of the Islamic religious literature. When confronted with the fact that jihad and jihadism are separate concepts, she would dismiss it as 'Western media propaganda' and forward my attention to important scholars from the classic Ibn Taymiyya to al-Ghazzali. The fourth step was to integrate closed discussion groups

either via Facebook messaging, Skype or WhatsApp. The condition to enter these debate groups was to be a Muslim or to become one directly (everyone needed to write the '*shahada*', the Muslim declaration of faith in their first intervention). I refused to do so which meant the end of her attempt to allure me into her network. A prominent member of a Spanish-Moroccan Islamic Association in Catalonia revealed to me in a Skype interview that a parallel process of grooming was followed by the Salafi-jihadist Imams in Tetouan. According to the same source, the Imams are developing jihadist narratives to mobilize women on two fundamentals, the Qur'an and the *fatwa* of Qaradawi, that women should be prepared to physically engage in the jihadist battle. The Imams share the opinion of the Egyptian scholar that women are less obvious subjects of suspicion and consequently women are receiving military training before departing to Syria. The whole process is taking between 1 to 4 years depending on the motivation and progress of the individual.

The arguments above exposed about the process of radicalization of Samira advocate the value of conducting offline fieldwork, to have direct contact with the social context, the physical structures and the individuals that are part of the Muslim communities in Spain, more concretely in Catalonia. The access to 'local cultures', 'local narratives' offers a private and particular lens to understand the roots and the routes of terrorism as illustrated in the next section.

## 2.5 Gaining access to the field

### 2.5.1 From Rubi to Rabat – 'The roots and the routes of terrorism'

In May 2014, I did fieldwork in Catalonia visiting Mosques, Islamic centers and interviewing Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. The aim of the research was to go beyond the Salafism presence in Catalonia and to reach a wider perspective of what it means to be a Muslim in the Spanish society, hence getting a more defined scenario on real 'root causes' (Bjørge 2005; Forest 2005; Newman 2006; Pedahzur 2006; Richardson 2006; Pick, Speckhard & Jacuch 2009; Veldhuis & Staun 2009; Canna 2011; Schmid 2013; Aziz 2016) of extremism.

The female community online did not match with the one I was observing offline in Catalonia, at least not in terms of their shared views on violence and meaning of jihad. A similar experience that Keeney (2011: 544) described about his own ethnographic fieldwork in Ceuta. On the same line of arguments of Keeney (2011), my research took a month, which, as the author defends, is unique when conducting terrorism studies and enough if the scope of the study is narrow and if the core site of research is online. To that, I can add that the contacts developed during this period were afterwards continued and followed-up online delivering more data and granting more research results. Indeed, online communications follow-up resulted in another critical contact, a young Moroccan man, living in Catalonia and working at a local Islamic institution who agreed to have lengthy conversations on Skype.

The detailed information he gave on the recruitment of young women in Morocco was determined to understand much of the online narrative and the formation mechanisms beyond the jihadist networks connecting Morocco and Spain.



**Figure 2.2.** Location of Rubi – Catalonia

Once in the region, gaining access to the local Imams as a non-Muslim woman was possible by using convenience-sampling methods. More exactly, using my football network was the key to open the doors of the Mosques in Catalonia. ‘Player X from Morocco that plays now in Barcelona is an acquaintance since he was 10 years old.’ The sentence repeated at the entrance of almost all Mosques was the ‘log-in’ password. Football is a shared culture phenomenon that runs close to Moroccan and Spanish jihadists, as we have seen previously. A question of ritualistic sacrifice (towards a common good and goal), ritualistic violence (pain, injuries, blood), discipline (control), delimitations (time and space) and group’s bonding are all part of both the football and the jihadist environment.

Although Salafism in its strict interpretation condemns any activities related with football, from its practice, to supporting teams or watching it (Wagemakers 2016: 173-174), the truth is that football is a recurrent topic of online contents. Inde-

pendently of the religious restrictions, football and foreign fighters are an overlapping cultural phenomenon that keeps on having an impact among the foreign fighters. The impact is visible in their Facebook accounts: from the images of professional football players or clubs being used as profile pictures (preferences for Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United), to the organization of football matches among themselves in the Caliphate, to the discussion of the latest results and performances of their local home teams, or to the bigger-than-life debate on who is the best player of the world.

Remarkably, accessibility to Salafi preachers, small mosques, or the entrance at the Mosque of Reus (visited by M. Atta, leader of 9/11 attacks) was possible due to the emotional attachment Spanish-Moroccan communities have to football. Being in direct contact with the football world, I knew about this emotional attachment, the same as I knew upfront the points in common that I had with Muslim women and that would enable me to approach and interview them with greater ease.

Relatability and knowledge of the local narratives are vital anchors to construct trust and respect during the first encounters. Trust is of course a sensitive matter when interviewing people that are under police scrutiny. Catalanian Mosques have long been battered by surveillance, suspicion and Salafi-jihadist association. As so, Muslim communities in Spain are endogamous, closed and not keen on contacts with strangers. A clear example of it is the difficulty to find the current location of the mosques or praying spaces, even if Spanish law requires their official registration.

According to the Organic Law of Religious Freedom, *Ley Orgánica de Libertad Religiosa* (7/1980), autonomous regions have full legislative powers in what concerns urban planning and funding. Therefore, specific construction and legality of each of the mosques or places of worship will depend on the specific legal implementation by regional and local administrations. To add to it, article 84 1.c) of Ley 7/1985 stipulates that religious organizations only need to communicate their existence and place of gathering to the local authorities, an official registration at the Ministry of Justice is not necessary. In practice, that means that most of the addresses indicated in 2014 by the Observatorio were incorrect.

Countless times, I asked: 'Where can I find the Mosque?' And countless times, local police included would answer, 'I do not know for sure.' 'I think I saw some women dressed as Muslims around that place.'

In fact, in 2016 the number of Muslims in Spain had reached 1.9 million (1,919,141) of which 42% (804,017) were Spanish, while 58% (1.11 million) of the Muslim population was foreign, according to the exploitation of the census of the Muslims in Spain made by the Andalusian Observatory, the autonomous body of the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain<sup>10</sup> (UCIDE). The study revealed that the community with the highest number of Muslim citizens was Catalonia with 515,482

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<sup>10</sup> <http://ucide.org/sites/default/files/revistas/estademograf16.pdf>

Muslims in total, from which 182,304 were Spanish and 333,178 were foreigners. Barcelona was the province of Catalonia with the highest number of Muslims, 324,483 in total.

The data collected during the fieldwork in Catalonia was treated and analyzed with the use of grounded-theory methods. The interviews and the field observation generated important codes and subsequent categories that unequivocally directed to root-cause theories of radicalization, as we can see from the graphic below:

**Table 2.2** Root causes of radicalization in Rubi

| Text  | Code                                | Category        |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <p>"99% is about behavior, education. Reinforcing the importance of good behavior and better education. The remaining 1% is about religion."</p> <p>"Our sermons are very modern, no radical or extremist references on them. The '<i>khutba</i>' is open to anyone who wants to listen to it."</p>   | Preaching                           | Religion        |
| <p>"Why talking only about violence? Jihad is to push us into being good." "The second aspect of jihad, he continued to answer, is to fight with the Qur'an, to show how society must be."</p> <p>"Jihad is not an attack you first send a message so that the others convert as they did in the times of the Prophet by sending warnings. It is only acceptable a jihad through words, that is to try to educate and talk, no violence or terrorism are permitted."</p>                      | Violence                            | Jihad           |
| <p>"The mosques here are always changing place, they get together in different apartments, houses. I cannot tell you where they are because women here do not go to mosques. Only men attend the prayers."</p> <p>"The community is rather scattered right now she said, due to all constant changes of location and the disagreement on where to place a new Mosque. People just divided themselves between different spaces. You will not find many people here, especially not women."</p> | Hidden women                        | Gender          |
| <p>"The problems of most Muslims in Europe is their lack of education, we need to educate them, to correct them, with need to reinforce the importance of behaving good with other people."</p> <p>"We need more Muslim people in higher places, with higher education."</p>  | Behavior                            | Education       |
| <p>"There is a huge crisis, you know? Our men work in commerce, stores, restaurants, and some of us also need to do cleanings."</p> <p>"We cannot forget the context of poverty here in Spain that goes together with poor education."</p>  | Unemployment/<br>Low qualified jobs | Economy         |
| <p>"People stop me in the street to tell me to take my scarf, to insult me, why don't they focus instead in the young people at the park using drugs?"</p> <p>"I have no idea where the Mosque is...There was one here but now I do not know anymore where it is.. I do not see so many Muslims...I have no contact with them..."</p>   | Integration                         | Social identity |

| Text  | Code                      | Category   |
|---|---------------------------|------------|
| <p>"If the Alcaide (Mayor) was Moroccan it would be better and it would be more functional to be able to have political seats."</p> <p>"Political participation should be also higher, we never get involved, informed or vote. We should have Muslims representing us."</p>  | Political representation  | Democracy  |
| <p>"Islam online is a sea, there is a lot of things to benefit from and a lot of things that are not good. The internet can be good to educate, to give knowledge. I use Facebook and YouTube."</p> <p>"I think it is important to get information if you find the right prayers. There can be a reasonable use of the internet and I know that some of our believers use it for that purpose."</p> | Islam online              | Technology |
| <p>"We have been saving with a lot of sacrifice (some of us even starve) to offer money to build this 'cultural space'. We would like to have a true Mosque but it is not possible in Spain."</p> <p>"In the industrial area there is a small, provisional space, until the new Mosque located 700m up in the street, will be ready."</p>   | Industrial area<br>Mosque | Urbanism   |

In another perspective, gaining the trust of the mosque leaders leads to another set of snowball sampling as they indicated me other individuals that could and would help me further my research.

While tracing my fieldwork map, I decided that it was valuable to do research in Rubi, a town located North-West from Barcelona, since it had been previously signed as a Salafist community.

The Mosque, a simple pale-green building was located in the industrial side of the town and at the time of my arrival, there were circa 30 women (with ages ranging from 20 to 60 years old) inside of the Mosque for their weekly Classic Arabic lessons. 'Being closer to the language of God', 'understanding better the Qur'an' are some of the reasons why these women at a later stage of life wish to learn the Qur'an.



**Figure 2.3** Rubi Islamic Center

I was asked if I had a preference to speak with the Imam or their *'alima'* (a Muslim woman with high theological knowledge). I opted for the *alima* who was more than willing to give me her own advice and opinions on jihad. According to her: "Jihad is not an attack, you first send a message, as they did in the times of the Prophet by sending warnings, so that the others convert. It is only acceptable a jihad through words, that is to try to educate and talk, no violence or terrorism are permitted."

I have applied the results of my offline fieldwork in Rubi to Bjørgo's theory of the 'roots of terrorism' (2005: 3, 4) to test the local female community on their potential of engaging in the jihadist narrative. Bjørgo defends that the causes of terrorism can be found in four different categories, accelerator causes (technology), trigger causes (events), structural causes (globalization) and motivational causes (grievances). Here below, I contrapose Bjørgo's root causes of terrorism with four categories that resulted from my interviews with the Muslim women, at the Mosque in Rubi.

**Table 2.3** Bjørgo's root causes of terrorism

| Accelerator causes       | Trigger causes                              | Structural causes  | Motivational causes   |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Use of technology</b> | <b>Participation in the Syrian conflict</b> | <b>Social inequality</b>   | <b>Personal grievances</b>  |
| Facebook, Youtube, Skype | "We cannot say it is a pure case of jihad." | "We would like to have a true Mosque but it is not possible in Spain." | "Our men work in commerce, stores, restaurants and some of us also need to do cleanings." |

Three overall conclusions can be distinguished from Table 2.3, the fact that the female Muslim community of Rubi is engaged in bringing together their members to educate them in Classic Arabic (direct access to the sacred Islamic texts), in offering them religious guidance (presence of the female scholar) and to debate local and global questions exemplifies their will to acquire knowledge through legitimate sources.

On the other side, the digital fluency of the community was low in terms of acquired skills and participation. Only the young women were sporadically online and their platform of choice was Skype to get in contact with relatives living in Morocco, or in other parts of Europe, followed by Facebook. They did complain about their urban exclusion, poor education levels, poor political participation yet with a shared responsibility perspective, that it was also their task to fight these problems within the community and to reach out to the non-Muslim society. As a result, the 'roots of terrorism' in Rubi cannot be targeted in the local community at a group level, at least. An individual prone to engage in the jihadist narrative would not have found support in May 2014 to his/hers process of radicalization among the female community of Rubi.

Actually, the individuals who reside in Spain and wish to encounter offline sources of jihadist narrative are obliged to follow other routes to find a space of radicalization, or to attend the non-surveilled 'garage mosque's sermons'. The police-controlled Spanish Mosques, Imams and '*khutbas*' (sermons) issue politically correct and coordinated statements that openly condemned jihadist discourses and activities.

Although it is a fact that Salafi-jihadist proponents are in higher numbers in the Catalan region (Morera & Tarres 2014: 161) than in the rest of the Spanish territory, the fact is that offline jihadist mobilization still follows the route of Morocco, due to the already referred rigorous monitoring of official Mosques, sermons and Imams in Spain. Neumann and Rogers (2007) had already reached the same conclusion in their report about European mosques and hubs of radicalization.

What is striking is that counter-terrorist forces are still following the protocol of keeping the Mosques and the Imams under deep surveillance, a strategy that instead of diminishing the jihadist mobilization is just relocating it on one hand, into the other side of the Mediterranean where jihadist organizations like IS have more freedom of movements. On the other hand, this security strategy is promoting the appearance of 'garage mosques' and 'garage Islam' (Figure 2.4).



**Figure 2.4** Garage mosque in the center of Tarragona

By these 'garage' expressions, I mean the unofficial locations of gathering, led by individuals whose views on Islam are far from mainstream or moderate.

Online, I have also interviewed moderate Muslim individuals who were not in tune with jihadist contents, to gather a varied, ample sample of population. This was



important not only to have a control group but to distance my research from 'homogenization bias' (Keeney 2011: 35), meaning receiving similar answers and observing similar attitudes towards jihadism.

### 2.5.2 The construction of a sacred space on Facebook

This dissertation discusses the female digital jihadist roles on Facebook and takes into consideration how this online platform is utilized as a space for the ritualization of violence. For that reason, the situational context involving the everyday life of Muslim women in Catalonia plays a distinctive role in the process of transforming Facebook into a sacred space.

In the first place, we shall see why, among the possible root causes to engage with online extremism, the absence of Mosques or Muslim centers has a significant impact on these women's lives. 'Social environment and widespread grievances' (Newman 2006: 750) as seen in the above section allied with close-knit social networks, proximity to Salafi-jihadist ideology, online acquaintance and regular contact with violent religious propositions (Alonso & Reinares 2006: 179, 195) frame the general setting that leads to jihadist recruitment.

Specifically for Catalonia, the lack of spaces to pray in, or their remote locations in industrial areas, have created the phenomenon of 'garage Islam', that is the reliance on unofficial, inadequate places to gather Muslim believers for Friday's services. These improvised places cannot accommodate large crowds nor incorporate the mandatory gender division by offering a separate space for women. Therefore, women are forced to perform their communal prayers in the seclusion of their homes and need to debate, pose questions or gain religious knowledge in the digital public sphere. Due to its digital affordances, Facebook becomes the preferred space for these women to pursue their religious learning processes and to perform online rituals.

As a matter of fact and as seen in the previous point, ritualization takes place within a specific and delimited stage of performance. Facebook, in the context of the Spanish-speaking jihadist women, is the central stage for violent and wrongful ritualization of jihad. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate how these women developed the process of making sense of Facebook as a sacred space, and furthermore how this sacred space has become a place of violent ideological production.

'*MashaAllah okthi*', 'now we are one' reads the comment on a photo of a female dressed as a suicide bomber carrying a baby on her left arm and a modified rifle on the right arm. The photo was posted in October 2013 and was to be found in a public Facebook profile. After that, several female users engaged in a series of comments, all praising the woman and some expressing their wish to be or to imitate her in both roles, mother and fighter: "may Allah bless you sisters. (...) *inschaAllah* [sic] the day of the jihad will arrive."

Here we enter the realm of attributing a violent nature and a compulsory status to jihad, an emic perspective that represents how these women make sense of jihad and that does not correspond to the Islamic theological perspective on the matter. In this study, jihad and violence are not considered interchangeable concepts but it is important to emphasize that for these women jihad and violence are synonyms. This communicative practice enters an echo chamber on Facebook and other social media, which intensifies this belief and the religious legitimacy.

Next, we should look at the mechanisms that enable Facebook to become a sacred space where violent contents are endorsed, shared and accepted as religious commandments.

The first phase of the user's interaction on Facebook is, paraphrasing Varis (2015: 58), a 'religious construct' molded by the perception that female users have of this platform. Being a Muslim woman online translates into bringing a 'further normative layer on communication practices' (Varis: 2015: 59) into the online space, in order to make them acceptable and in conformity with Islamic social rules of engagement. The women transfer those norms that belong to the public sphere into their own online performances. They log in to Facebook with the same veneration with which they enter the Mosque and with the exact same aim, to gain religious knowledge. There are abundant examples of the alliance between religious construct and normative layer, for example, refraining themselves from posting photos of their faces, employing religious expressions in Arabic, quoting the Qur'an or the *hadiths*, maintaining polite manners in their communications, and above all avoiding any interaction with Facebook male users. The religious conformity of their online actions promotes the perception and acceptance of Facebook as a sacred space. Indeed, both the perception that they are attending a sacred online space for religious knowledge consumption, and acceptance of this as normal provide symbolic mechanism that makes possible the introduction of religious violence as justifiable content. Once the cognitive acceptance and the emotional bonding are in motion, the second phase can start.

The second phase corresponds to the 'ideological construct' (Varis 2015: 58) when jihadist content is shaped into a militant ideology with political goals under the cover of Islamic legitimization. Violent ideology becomes the foundation that sustains and channels personal grievance into jihadist mobilization. However, drawing on Jocelyn Viterna's theory (2006) as presented in her article 'Explaining women's mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army', a dominant jihadist identity and the integration into a jihadist network do not necessarily imply its occurrence, although it increases the possibility (2006: 5).

In a third phase, Facebook, understood as a sacred space, promotes an 'identity construct', when the female user assumes an online jihadist identity. Over time, this starts to prevail over any other identity she may have. In fact, Viterna (2006: 6) mentions this singular situation where one of the personal female identities (mother, wife, believer, fighter) becomes stronger than the other personalities. However,

there are also differences between Viterna's (2006) case study and that of the Spanish-speaking jihadist women. In El Salvador, 'biographical availability' (Viterna 2006: 15), that is to say 'motherhood, family completeness, age at mobilization' constitute factors that prevent engagement with violent ideology, but in the case of Samira Yerou for example, none of these obstacles were stronger than her will to be an active member of a jihadist network. None of her other roles stopped her from trying to migrate to Syria with her infant son. Thus, the combination of various factors influence women's decisions to participate in the jihadist networks. These include the process of transforming Facebook into a sacred space, identity-molding mobilizing networks (Viterna 2006: 2), personal vulnerability (Peresin & Cervone 2015: 7), various root causes, and the attractiveness of the feeling one belongs to an online community.

### 2.5.3 Ethical reflections

When I departed to Reus, I had in mind the advices both my Supervisors, Prof. Herman Beck and Prof. Wouter van Beek had given me in terms of best practices and ethical conduct during fieldwork research. The same advices they gave to me when conducting online research, as on both sides the human interaction is the common element. I have always defined myself as a born and raised Catholic who was conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a PhD degree, not a conversion. In frequent occasions, both online and offline I would be asked to consider conversion to Islam. What I always found interesting from the online invitations for conversion was the ritualization of the '*shahada*', or the profession of faith: writing it or taping it in a video and then post it on my Facebook wall and have people commenting or liking it, was the necessary process to make the ritual valid. It is a 'ethically ambiguous situation' (Geertz 1968: 151), I try to know more about their online activities while they try to persuade me to convert, for both, achieving those goals would be a primary gain. Ethnographic research is just as a Facebook relationship status, 'it's complicated'.

On the other hand, I would also present myself, my university affiliation, the objectives of my research and to ask their permission to observe, collect and storage their online activities. I had never questioned the ethical procedure, nor seen the danger of it until the Paris attacks of 2015. However, some of the women that I had been in contact with at the initial phase of my online research were connected with individuals involved in the terrorist attacks than unfolded in Europe from 2015 to 2016. Jihadism in itself carries a threat that has had different violent feasible results. The situation implicates, of course, concerns with personal safety, and direct contact with these individuals 'retains an element of danger' (Schuurman & Eijkman 2013: 3) that has to be taken into consideration.

In 2015 and after meeting with the then recently founded Ethics Committee of Tilburg University, several steps were taken to synchronize my work with the deliberations of the Code of Ethics. My previous work was unofficially reviewed, discussed

and generally approved in the following informal discussions. Although the Ethics Committee had decided not to concede any ethics clearance to research done before their constitution, it was still an important validation of my work. On the other side, the Committee gained deep and direct insight to research, digital methods and digital storage, archive and safeguard of sensitive data related to sensitive and current subjects. Officially, it was decided that I would no longer conduct any interviews or use participant observation methods to collect more data and that I would follow an invisible observation method.

Furthermore, it was also determined that in case I would see a situation that could represent an effective danger I would have to report it. To define what represents an effective danger is highly complex when we cannot engage with the subject to clarify the intentions and meanings of online contents. Although, for example there are abundant software programs to execute content analysis (Comerda and Navanti, to quote two Dutch examples), the truth is that these programs still lack the manual and human skills to understand and contextualize language styles, cultural nuances and religious connotations. A simple example of such complexity was for example, a Dutch jihadist writing to a Dutch foreign fighter: "Finish them." No context offered, no answer, no comments or thread. Thus, for all we know it could be something important to follow up or it could just be a reference to a popular war game. Such a sense of responsibility comes more pungently when the object of research is a phenomenon that keeps on repeating itself in a short period of time. On the one side, the huge amount of data available, collected and stored that accumulates very fast, and on the other side the imperative of searching back into the archives to find relevant information that could relate to the events.

The circumstances and the timing of having to limit my research to 'invisible observation' resulted from extreme violent situations, from liability, safety and security notions. Invisible observation applied to criminal subjects resembles in several aspects to police work therefore keeping the research on the tip of his/her toes to distance him/herself from a simple monitoring activity. Even though the process has similar stages in both academic and police world, the difference lays in the results. The first aiming at scientific output, the second on defining and arresting suspects.

Nevertheless, there is an important impact resulting from doing research that involves two different legal frameworks, Spanish and Dutch that raises the complexity of the researcher's ethical considerations. While conducting digital ethnography in Spanish-speaking online and offline spaces, I needed to be aware of the Spanish Law on what constitutes an act of jihadism.

As so, the Spanish Law, Ley Orgánica 2/2015 (30 March 2015) reads as follows:

*The act of accessing in an usual manner a website that has contents directed to promote recruitment to a terrorist organization.*

On the other side of the screen, I was conducting research from a laptop with an IP address located in The Netherlands. As so, the Dutch Law on online criminal activities reports to Computer Criminality III, a., Articles 137c to 137e, of the Dutch Criminal Code that enounces the following:

*'The Netherlands comprehensive action program to combat jihadism': N) 29.b. Producers and distributors of online jihadist propaganda and the digital platforms that they abuse, are identified.*

The complexity of the jihadist phenomenon allied with the multidimensional legal framework associated with it brings up the urgency of the collaboration between well-informed and trained professionals.

At the end, invisible observation was the safest, most ethical possibility to overcome all concerns and obstacles that emerged in the late phase of data collection of this research. I chose to collect the data from public contents and public profiles and it was interesting to see the abundance of data available in this format. Keeping their profiles and contents open (instead of private) is an intentional action to reach a broader audience. The lack of direct interaction with these individuals is a methodological limitation and to overcome it, more time-consuming triangulation techniques to produce conservative confirmation of data are necessary. As Geertz (1968: 151) best said it: "This pressure springs from the inherent moral asymmetry of the fieldwork situation."

It also gives a timely opportunity to analyze the individual different stages of radicalization whereas in the past most of the primary data was about former and/or convicted terrorists, never from the phases prior to it, when the individuals were actively engaged with violence. Parallel to that, I searched equally for counselling from colleagues on the matter. The opinions were diversified according to their geographical origins and academic affiliations. All of them agreed however on the particularities and sensitivity of the subject and the difficulties to rule what would be the most ethical procedure in my case. My conclusion was that the collection and subsequent analysis of the public posts, while handled anonymously, were too valuable to ignore in a scientific approach.

Hence, social media enabled the research with the unique opportunity to acquire critical primary data furthering terrorism studies but also in the present case furthering religious studies.

A final note on the use and reproduction of jihadist-affiliated contents during this dissertation is necessary to emphasize that they are here to serve the purpose of illustrating and discussing a complex, sensitive and violent phenomenon.

## 2.6 Concluding notes

Developing a methodology to analyze online female jihadists required a multimodal approach that came with challenges. First of all, those challenges derive from a conceptual framework that has no consensus in its main terms: jihadism terrorism, religious violence. Secondly, from opposite methods of research between religious and terrorism studies, to which a curve ball was thrown by adding Digital Ethnography. Finally, the gender scope or better yet, the female scope to analyze areas that are predominantly seen as male dominant ones. Gender dimension of Islamic belonging may explain both the acceptance of violence as a purifying, mandatory individual ritual but it also justifies the extension of the jihadist identity to the roles confined to women by Islam. Moreover, gender dimension of Islam needs to be zoomed in into the ethnic dimension/diversity within the Islamic world and within the diaspora in Europe. Problem with gender studies is their inherent duality man-woman, which leads to comparisons that offer no acute image of the individual roles. Comparisons, based for example on how many foreign fighters are in fact female, will give an inferior percentage, but in a social network system the function of the role, that is the quality of the performance, is far more important to its vitality than the number.

By bridging all the areas together this research paves the way to further innovation in social sciences.



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## CHAPTER 3

# 'Okhti' online. Spanish Muslim women engaging online jihad – A Facebook case study<sup>11</sup>

### Abstract

Digital reality is becoming increasingly relevant as an online space where Muslim women gain a new religious and social role by accepting the expression of jihad through violence. Until now, the study of online radicalization in Spain has been focusing on the male perspective, therefore it is important to analyze Muslim women's online jihadist participation. Facebook, due to its easy, cheap access and interactive way of connecting with other people through a digital channel, is growing in popularity among Muslim women in Spain.

As so, it is important to examine how women understand jihad in a general manner, how they live and enact jihad on Facebook, how they embrace the jihadist recruitment online and most importantly how they transfer this role from online to offline reality.

### 3.1 Introduction

'Okhti'<sup>12</sup> online is a digital sisterhood aiming firstly at sharing and spreading jihadist contents, secondly at supporting the jihadist conflict scenarios and thirdly at achieving a jihadist role. Jihad is perceived and performed by Spanish Muslim women on Facebook under their feminine perspective, as sisters, mothers, wives and as women. Despite the feminine aspect, violence is present through photos, images and videos but also through comments and declarations. These declarations sign their intention to transfer their online jihadists' performances into real war scenarios. Furthermore, the online active role of the *okhti* associated with the changes on the Global Jihad

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from the published article: Carvalho, C. (2014) 'Okhti' Online. Spanish Muslim women engaging online Jihad. A Facebook case study. *Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 6: 24-41.

<sup>12</sup> 'Okhti' is the most used Arabic transliteration of 'my sister' by my informants on Facebook.

Front<sup>13</sup> is transforming women's independency on social and religious level. However, the most important factor in this transformation has been the interference of modern Islamic academics as well as the online sheikhs who are enhancing the role of women in the jihadist fight issuing *fatwas* (legal opinions) ruling in favor of the *okhti* right to participate in the jihad fight.

Online sites offer Muslim women knowledge, information and a space to share, to question and to debate Islamic texts and practices while at the same time being able to manage the privacy of their online activities and interactions. Fruit of these online performances and fruit of the equal right of online intervention, Muslim women are also able to reclaim an active and egalitarian role for themselves. They perceive it as being justified in the Qur'an, in selected passages such as this one,

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person [Adam], and from him (Adam) He created His wife [Hawwa (Eve)], and from them both He created many men and women and fear Allah through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is Ever an All-Watcher over you. (Surah Al-Nisa [4:1])

However, the most important change on gender jihadism was brought up by the Syrian War to the Global Jihad Front. In fact, a new perspective on women's agency is being transformed online and challenging what was once a strict male performance.

Anthropologist and author of *The Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood (2005: 8) defines agency as:

(...) the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective).

David Cook (2005a) in his article, 'Women fighting in Jihad?' addresses the legal circumstances of the feminine participation in jihad (here understood as fight) from the pre-modern times until today, underlining the conservative character of Muslim ruling. Cook also raises gender issues related with women engaging jihad, namely their sex purity and the definition of their 'martyrdom' reward. To my informants, the idea of being received with glory in the highest level of Paradise ('*Firdaws*') is the ultimate reward a Muslim woman may aspire to achieve in the afterlife: "We walk together, hold fast to the Qur'an and the Sunna and the victory will be ours. A greater reward will be given to us by our God." For these reasons, the present chapter will focus on the following research questions:

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<sup>13</sup> The jihadist recruitment to Syria is the highest ever seen in recent history and Spain has a considerable number of jihadists joining it.

- How do women understand and define jihad?
- How do they live and enact jihad on Facebook as a digital sisterhood?
- How do they transfer this jihadist role from online to offline reality?

Earlier in 2013, I opened up a Facebook account to enter in contact with the online jihadist feminine sphere in Spain. I began by browsing through public Facebook pages of Muslim Spanish women, stopping to better observe the ones that had jihadist related posts, comments, videos, Islamic music (*anasheed*), images or photos, mention to *Da'wa*<sup>14</sup> and to i-Imams<sup>15</sup> (Imams who use the internet for Islamic knowledge dissemination and argumentation, for example, issuing fatwa, giving conferences or courses). The i-Imam (as a digital Islamic authority) and the *i-Khutba* (as a digital Islamic narrative) are essential parts of the online radicalization and recruitment processes of individuals who in the ultimate phase will transfer their online knowledge and performance into an offline action in order to participate in current hot spots jihadist scenarios like Syria or Iraq.

What follows next is the result of my online fieldwork based on Facebook.

### 3.2 Method

A new Facebook account associated with the university email account was created and maintained strictly to manage the contacts that serve the purpose of this study. My name, academic affiliation, professional web link and provenience were made public on my Facebook profile. In some cases, the informants demanded more personal data to confirm my identity and the aim of the research.

The study started in February 2013 (data of the creation of the Facebook account) with me sending 'friendship requests' to Facebook accounts owners that had an open, public content.<sup>16</sup>

The open, public content facilitates the task of profile's selection as one can directly observe the contents, images, videos or comments and determine if they fulfil the jihadist criteria employed for the purpose of this study. By jihadist contents, I have taken in consideration the presence of one or more of the following elements:

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<sup>14</sup> 'Da'wa' simply understood as the preaching and proselytism of Islam, as a call towards Allah is the task of the men mentioned by the Qu'ran (Sura An-Nahl, The Bee, 16:125): "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way."

<sup>15</sup> My informants follow online Imams, sheiks and Islamic religious scholars who are considered to belong to the general Salafist current.

<sup>16</sup> My network of Facebook contacts was also enlarged when 'friends of friends' invited me to be part of their own network. The same selection criteria (language, gender, location, jihadist contents) was applied here and extended to the Facebook groups.

1. Propaganda, visual symbols and imagery (flag banners, weaponry, black horses, violence) including or promoting the female Muslim presence;
2. Al-Qaeda, Isis, Caliphate references;
3. Shahid's (martyr's) photos/videos/comments;
4. Graphic, violent photos/videos of victims (explicitly of children) of war/conflict;
5. Citations of Islamic religious sources about jihad, battles and/or of violence;
6. Salafi-jihadist ideological orientation and features (narrative, fatwa, scholars).

All contents were filtered according to their relevance to the theme, quality and relevance of threads (high number of received comments or likes).

To evaluate the jihadist contents into depth, all the collected information was crossed with semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place via private messaging on Facebook and were structured and presented equally to all the informants. As the dialogue went further in time, open questions were used in order to retrieve more data. Photos, links or comments were questioned to assess the religious knowledge, intention and perception of the jihadist message.

In the first message, as I have mentioned above, I gave a short self-presentation and I introduced them to the goals of my Facebook account. Furthermore, I requested all my informants their permission to use all contents published, shared, posted or commented by them on Facebook. All the data employed in this study is therefore legitimized by the written acceptance of the informants.

Considering the gender scope of this study, only Facebook accounts belonging to women were taken into consideration. In many cases, the informants placed in between brackets the warning that they do not accept men (*'no acepto hombres'*) and all informants were requested to confirm their gender, via private message. Although criticism may be raised concerning the easiness that one may fake their identity and gender online, it is a fact that the group of women that participate in this study are very vigilant about tracing and exposing the male presence.

I have attributed fake names (randomly chosen) to all my informants in order to protect their identities even though the informants themselves already use forged names<sup>17</sup> on their Facebook accounts. They choose war names (*'Kunyas'*) as forged names are frequently based on terminology belonging to their Salafi-jihadist belief. *Kunyas* are a common Arabic tradition, serving in the past as a parental connection to the name of the first-born child (Abu for the father, Umm for the mother, for instance Abu Karim, father of Karim). The tradition evolved when the head of the Palestinian organization Al-Fatah, Yasser Arafat (Abu Ammar) decided to attribute to himself a *kunya* as a way to symbolize his fighter status. Although the names of the informants will not be revealed, I have observed that as my informants go deeper

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<sup>17</sup> Some of the informants as the interviews progressed into a more informal talk eventually shared their true name. In the case of the converted Muslim women, they shared their pre-reversion name as well.

into their process of radicalization, they change their *kunyas* to reflect even more their full adherence to the Salafi-jihadist ideology.

The chapter takes into consideration Spanish, Arabic and English publications/comments, photos and videos on Facebook in order to represent the online jihadist women environment in Spain. Technology advances, the living in the Web 2.0 era have transformed the use of language into a more flexible and more informal linguistic structure. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Arabic does confer more status to the believer thus investing the individual with a higher social hierarchical value. As Jan Blommaert (2005: 71) writes: "Differences in the use of language are quickly, and quite systematically, translated into inequalities between speakers."

In the present study, Spanish is the dominant language of the group of informants, followed by Arabic transliteration that is employed for religious expressions ('*Assalam aleikum*', '*MaschAllah*', '*InschAllah*') and English in very few cases. Some of the informants would, during the interviews, ask me the meaning of some Arabic words and only a minority of the informants proved to know how to write them in Arabic. Given this fact, I asked my informants if knowledge of the Arabic language was a pre-condition to be a good Muslim. My informants agreed that mastering Arabic was recommended but not a determinant condition to assess the religious quality of a Muslim.

On that matter, a post about '*Tawhid*' ('doctrine of Oneness') in a Facebook group dedicated to the study of the '*Tafsir*' ('exegesis') created a long thread of discussion among the participants. A participant affirms that the *Tafsir* can only be understood and explained in Arabic while others, namely one of my informants (converted Muslim woman in the process of learning Arabic herself) defended that behaving and living as a true Muslim is even more important than mastering the Arabic language. She went even further arguing:

It is true that to increase the knowledge and to conserve the purity of the science of Allah subhana wa taala you have to make an effort to learn Arabic. However, these days the converted to Islam with different languages than the Arabic are the ones applying more the *alwalaa wal baraa*, that purify the *tawhid* in their daily day, more than the ones who were born amongst Muslims (...).

The discussion was then transferred from the classic scholars Sheykh al-Islam Taqi Al-Deen Ibn Taymiyya (d.728H/1328) and Al Bukhari to the famous converted German Muslim, Pierre Vogel as legitimate religious authorities on *Tawhid* because they were fluent in Arabic. The counter argument took an interesting twist when one informant interrogated other participants about the validity of the '*shahada*' ('the testimony'), of the '*shahid*' ('martyrdom') and of those who intervene the fight '*fisabilillah*' ('in the way of Allah') in Syria but are not fluent in Arabic. The moderator of the group ended the discussion by declaring that it was more preferable to know the *Tawhid* than the Arabic language.

It is very interesting to notice in this event that both the religious comments and scholars mentioned by the woman are an integrant part of the Salafi-jihadist doctrine.

Likewise, we can understand here the importance of Salafi-jihadist interpretation of the importance of the oneness of God to frame religious learning according to their particular vision, as observed in the next section.

### 3.3 Salafi-jihadism, the online single narrative

We have previously seen how women motivated by root causes, login to Facebook and transform this social media platform into a sacred space to learn more about Islam. However, what begins as a learning religious motivated process becomes a learning ideological process with violent objectives. Women could at this stage, when they are aware of the violent objectives surrounding their learning process, interrupt it, or question it. But, they continue it because they want to, because they believe they are following the right path and because as Muslim they wish to login to Jannah, Paradise.

As salaamu'alaykum. I'm Bird of Jannah, another random muhajirah from the blessed land of Khilafah.

Conceptually, the guidelines of this study are the terms 'Salafi-jihadist' (religious framework) and 'jihadism' (ideological framework), as developed under the scope of the Global Jihad Front.

According to Peter Nesser (2011: 174), the invasion of Iraq and the consolidation of Al-Qaeda as the transnational ideological jihadist leader marked the beginning of the Global Jihad Front, at the same time validating it as the ideological homogenization of the jihadist narrative. Jihadism in the optic of Jarret Brachman (2009: 5), is a neologism, a non-Islamic term referring to the violent nature of jihad as preached and practiced by Al-Qaeda. However, the analysis of jihadism has a religious aspect as well, which is anchored in the doctrine of Salafism.

The ideological program of Salafism entails the purification of Islam, a return to the principles of the Companions of the Prophet and the dissemination of the faith ('*da'wa*'). *Da'wa* is in fact as transnational in its goals as the Global Jihad Front ideology and thus promotes the contact and the collaboration between extremist Islamic groups wherever they might be physically located in the offline world. In what concerns the practice of *da'wa* in the West, Salafists continue to promote the idea that Muslims should refuse to integrate in the Western society and should refuse to adopt its impure lifestyle. The Islamic disagreement about the return to the path of purity and the refusal of innovations was responsible for the division ('*fitna*') that came about in the Islamic world, affirms Quintan Wiktorowicz (2001: 19). The author also points out (2006: 207-239), that in the vision of the Salafists the acceptance of

the concept of the unity of God (*'tawhid'*), the obedience to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and the common refusal of any human subjective intervention are the unique authenticators of the Islamic creed.

Another division was brought up to the Salafist ideology by the vindication of the exercise of violence. Fawaz Gerges (2009: 138) indicates that Salafi-jihadists, similar to their secular enemies, also hold contending visions on how to engage in the war against apostates. Therefore, Salafi-jihadism is a subdivision of Salafism that defends the ritualization of violence under the name of jihad. Nevertheless, it needs to be underlined that even among Salafi-jihadist thinkers the conceptualization and employment of violence differs between authors.

In the interest of the present study, it was also important to evaluate the knowledge of my informants about Salafism. When questioned about their knowledge of specific terms and expressions linked to the Salafist vocabulary like *tawhid* ('the oneness of God'), *tarbiyya* ('religious education'), *taghut* ('those who oppose to the Prophet') or *al-wala wa'l-bara'a* ('loyalty and disownment for the sake of Allah'), my informants presented the exact same answers with the exact same sacred texts references, proving that the online theological narrative is being consequent, coherent and effective over these women. In other words, here we have the 'single narrative' as defined by Alex Schmid (2010: 46-57):

Al-Qaeda's ideology is expressed in its 'single narrative', a unifying framework of explanations that provides its followers with an emotionally satisfying portrayal of the world in which they live and their role in it, offering them a sense of identity and giving meaning to their lives.

On the other side, the present study also focuses on how my Facebook informants learn, embrace and then promote online the violent concept of jihad. Theologically the debate around the interpretation of jihad is filled with complexity and diversity even within the Salafi-jihadist group. By adding the justification to the participation of women in jihad, a new moral dilemma was posed with it.

Laiba, my informant is married and has children; her Facebook page is a display of jihadist women in real action, weaponry and advices on how to have a happy marriage. "How do you define jihad?" She answered me back with another question: "Do you know that when a woman gives birth that is jihad?" Childbirth as a category of jihad was the first definition that some women presented to me. This is an absolute feminine view of the subject that includes by nature force, fight and blood.

Personal situations also affect the choice and the manner that Muslim women decide to illustrate their online jihadist performances. For instance, the converted Muslim women are more diligent and eager to prove their Salafi-jihadist devotion: "To prove that I can be as good, or even better than a born Muslim", "to make clear that I am a ferocious believer" are some of the reasons advanced by the informants to post the most graphic photos or the most violent videos. As a matter of fact, the



participants compete among themselves to see who has the most relevant posts or the most committed comments to the jihadist cause. Actual photos of a woman dressed in a *burka* and waving a sword was what first captured my attention to one of the Facebook pages. The informant shows much devotion and spends even more time in what comes to represent jihad online, therefore, my question to her was: "What are your thoughts on online jihad?"

"I am fighting for life and liberty. I am fighting to show that women and men are the same. That is why I want to post photos of war where you can see women fighting, or of *shahidah*." The images receive comments such as '*mashallah*', '*okhti*', or '*insch'Allah okhti*', '*amin okhti*' or the saying of the '*takbir*' (*Allahu Akbar*). Even men comment these images with: "I wish you the best okhti. You are a noble wife."

What is interesting to highlight here is that right from the login moment, we are observing the Salafi-jihadist online narrative being learned and assimilated by the first time and being automatically applied into their online ritualization of jihad.

### 3.4 Online ritualization of jihad, a female perspective

A digital environment is a special structure offering a place for interconnections and interactivity between its users at all time. The more symbolism their users attribute to the space, the more ritualistic attributes they confer to it, the more they will feel emotionally bonded to it:

If you cannot start with 'Bismillah' when opening Facebook, know that this means that you should not be in fb [Facebook], since your intentions are going to be mean and that is what we are going to be judged by. our. acts and intentions [sic].

In the words of Christiane Brosius and Karin Polit (2011: 272): "As a consequence, the fabric of media spaces constituting social space and geophysical space through rituals challenges our concepts of 'digitality' and 'reality', space and place."

Jocelyne Cesari (2004: 111) makes here an important spatial distinction between Islam on the internet or the dissemination of Islamic information and Islam of the internet understood as a sphere allowing the existence of particular religious activities or narratives that otherwise would not be available. Gary Bunt (2009: 22), following the same line of thoughts, highlights the distinct features of Islamic internet spaces in the process of the online development of Islamic ritual and Islamic networks.

As Heidi Campbell (2012: 85) states: "It helps explain the ways in which networked society creates new borderlands of interactions between the online and off-line worlds, between the digital and embodied." As a matter of fact, being online is for these women a sacred experience embodied from the moment their fingers press the enter button.

As Islamic rituals, contexts and Islamic spaces change, so do the studies of Islamic rituals. In fact, ritual practices associated with 'technologically advanced societies' maybe better referred to as ritualization according to Catherine Bell (1992: 89). To the American religious study scholar, the attention should be on ritualization (1992: 7): "(...) as a strategic way of acting and then turn to explore how and why this way of acting differentiates itself from other practices."

From now on, the definition presented above will be applied to the online ritualization of jihad, which is to analyze it as a practice that is different from other Muslim practices. By doing so, the analyses will focus on performance, interaction, agents, message (textual and/or visual), all intervenient categories in the design of the social and religious online ritual strategy. Above all, it will focus on the emic perspective of jihad, which is their own constructed idea of religiously justified violence.

### 3.4.1 What is the aim of the online ritualization of jihad?

First, it is necessary to address the fact that jihad is not per se an Islamic ritual although it is treated as so by many Islamic scholars who insist in including it as one of the fundamental pillars of Islam. Indeed, it is a ritualistic innovation that allows its agents to establish, structure and control all activities that occur in cyberspace in the name of jihad. Bell describes it as a "process of formalization and ritualization" (1992: 148) that makes the invention of traditions possible.

Second, it is also necessary to address the body as an integral part of the Islamic ritual performance and the essence of the process of construction of an Islamic identity. The prayer ('*salat*') is embedded in physical acts, from the rituals of purity ('*tayammum*, *wudu*, *ghusl*') to the mandatory movements (standing, bowing, prostration, sitting).

### 3.4.2 How can this ritual be performed online in the absence of a physical presence?

Online the physical repetition of a body movement, an integral part of any ritual activity is not possible in the classic frames of ritual studies. Nevertheless, participating in online activities requires physical actions: turning on an electronic device, writing a password, or moving the mouse into the 'like' button. People do engage in this set of actions, in a repetitive, sequential way by which they enter a space (in many ways perceived as sacred) attributing to these activities a symbolic meaning.

In the interest of transferring this framework to the ritualization of jihad the attention is pointed to all online activities expressing this complex Islamic concept. And there are plenty of activities, from videos, to photos or simple mentions to the sacred Muslim texts.

In what concerns the Spanish legal framework of online jihadist activities, the Spanish Supreme Court considers them a crime of terrorism, as equal as engaging

on physical and direct terrorist acts. An example is the arrest in 2013, of a young man during the police investigation (operation Kafka), accused of inciting jihadist actions via Facebook through compliments praising Al-Qaeda's ideology and motivating other Facebook users to conduct suicide operations in the name of jihad.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, violence and ritualization of violence are categories pertaining to the analysis of online ritualization of jihad. Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 107) asserts that the "ritualization of violence in fighting is doubtless one of the most typical manifestations of the dialectic of strategy and ritual (...)." To the development of online ritualization more important than the discipline of the body is the discipline of the mind. The cognitive activities concerning online sharing and/or production of religious knowledge are the emanation of digital power. Awan, Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2011: 16-19) associate the acceptance and legitimation of the violent online jihadist message as a practice of cognitive dissonance involving mental acts like 'framing' (promote a particular moral evaluation), 'priming' (preferential selection of news stories) and 'issuing *takfiri*' (delegitimizing their opponents and sanctioning the shedding of Muslim blood).

Boyer and Lienard (2005: 3) argue that ritualization is the product of the conjugation of 'two specialized cognitive systems'. The first being the motivational system and the second the separation of action into 'meaningful units' both grounded in a 'precautionary system', that is induced by strangers and that pressures, threats, or socially offends the individual.

In the case of jihadist individuals and moreover in the case of Spanish-speaking jihadist women it is the way that the offline world pressures, threats, and socially offends them (due to their specific religious dressing code they became easily identified targets) that induces the emotional transfer into the online sphere. During my offline fieldwork in Catalonia, I collected a considerable amount of data by interviewing Muslim women and by observing their daily life. The common feeling among the Spanish Muslim women can be summed up to the answer that I received from a young woman:

People stop me on the street to tell me to take my scarf, to insult me, why don't they focus instead in the young people at the park using drugs? At the airport and at other police controlled spaces I feel the pressure of being a Muslim.

Last, when analyzing the practice of ritualization Bell claims that ritualization can promote social solidarity (1992: 216) and we can find examples being disseminated on Facebook over and over, from relationship advices to exchanging *iftar*<sup>19</sup> recipes, passing to pragmatic indications on how to arrive in Syria, the sisterhood bond is tangible even online.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/04/11/barcelona/1365680412.html>

<sup>19</sup> Ramadan dinner.

The bonding among the participants, is a feature that Bell views as the result of ritualization (1992: 193):

Such stringent ritualization has the powerful effect of tightly binding one to a small community of like-minded people. Indeed, one of the salient features of extreme ritualization appears to be a high-profile identity as a tight-knit group of true followers, a position that heightens the contrast and ill fit with other groups.

In the next section, we will see the importance of shared ritualistic online performances in the formation of a digital community.

### 3.5 From digital sisterhood to sisters in arms in Shams

Belonging, community and identity are therefore three social products resulting of the process of ritualization. In fact, and in the words of Brosius and Polit (2011: 269): "(...) ritual is the practice proving that a sense of belonging can become a social fact through practicing ritualized actions."

Belonging and its correlation to the establishment of group membership is also an operative concept for Douglas Marshall (2002: 2). Indeed, online users may be seen as social units who through their networks efforts and transition processes constitute their own digital communities. The period of transition between being a part of an offline community into becoming a part of the online sisterhood is that of a 'liminal state' as Victor Turner (2007) described it, a time of transition, a time when the emotional bond will produce the necessary acceptance of new messages and beliefs. As Hans Ulrich Sanner (2011: 116) states: "The liminal, 'betwixt and between' phase of rituals is an ideal medium for the symbolic communication of sacred truths about the composition of society and cosmos."

To Brosius and Polit (2011: 268) we have to also underline the value of the transfer of rituals, especially in periods of social crises, wars (as the one in Syria):

Further, rituals, the transfer of rituals, as well as the transformation of rituals, often play crucial roles at times of conflict, insecurity, or dramatic change in communities and societies, to the extent that even new communities and public or private spheres emerge.

In terms of affective sense of belonging, the *okhtis* are very keen on making the new users feel comfortable and above all to feel that they belong to the sisterhood. Elke Mader (2011: 473) reflects on the affective perspective of '*communitas*': "Furthermore, *communitas* (...) was emerging, and was expressed in intense communication, empathy, and cooperation in emotional, as well as organizational, matters."

The three features mentioned above about *communitas* (communication, empathy and cooperation) are visible for instance, when the digital sisters choose a similar

(sometimes even the same) profile photo on Facebook. Another evidence is that they share their contacts through WhatsApp (an internet messaging tool). Their personal level of involvement constructed online is visible on their private remarks about their personal problems, which they share with detailed information.

Identity construction is also 'an emotional commitment through which people experience their autobiographical selves', says Gabriel Marranci (2006: 7). They seek advice, opinion (frequently accompanied by quotations of the sacred texts) or just comfort from one another:

my dear beloved sister X, m [sic] I m so worried abt [sic] you all the time..dont know frm [sic] where that sort of love comes form. everytime I get yr [sic] post I get relieved that ur [sic] there safe Alhamdulillah. Plz [sic] take my love, lots of duas for u[sic].

On one side, the online connections and interactions further down the 'togetherness' of the digital sisterhood. On the other side, it produces an impact on their offline emotional structure. Don Radlauer (2007: 74), co-founder of the Institute for the Study of Asymmetric Conflict, comments about the continuity between digital community and offline existence as so:

By providing a sense of 'otherness' from ordinary society, extremist virtual communities can also deepen their members' alienation from their surroundings, reducing their normal inhibitions against violence while increasing their ability to perform as 'sleepers'.

Aisha is a young Muslim woman who enjoys her sweets with almond and honey and the sunny days in Spain. Her time is filled with her Facebook page, posting romantic photos of the ideal future husband. The prospective husband is a good-looking Muslim, strong and with loving eyes, carries a gun and on his forehead, he has the green banner of the *shahid*. Behind him, a young Muslim woman, dressed in a floating black *abaya* and *hijab* raises her hands to pray. Aisha wants to be that *okhti* in the image, better even, Aisha is willing to be another *okhti*, the one that is a true fighter and she posts a new photo. This time the *okhti* stands in front, wearing total black while waving a modified assault weapon with one arm and holding a child in the other. I asked her:

I asked her: "Would you participate in a jihadist fight?"  
"I am very much willing to, thanks and praises to God."

And she keeps on searching online for *fatwas* on jihadist women, for *hadiths* and comments on the Qur'an that justify her favorite subject: 'Jihad *fisabilillah*' ('Jihad for the cause of Allah').

I use the internet all the time to search and to share information about Tawhid,<sup>20</sup> Da'wa or to watch what is going on in Syria and Palestine. I also use it to connect myself with the other sisters. We help each other to become better Muslim women. We all seek a deeper understanding of Islam and on how to engage on jihad and it is more comfortable to do it among okhti.

A common trait to my informant's online interactions is humor, for instance one of the informants posted a photo of a 9mm weapon with the comment: "Did you always question what is inside of a woman's purse? Well, a 9mm thus..." to what the other *okhtis* reply to with comments such as: "Thought you would get one in pink", "I have to get one myself".

Exchanges similar to this one are frequent and since some of the *okhtis* started to arrive in Syria, they have evolved from posting pictures of children crying alongside their dead parents' bodies to inquiring about practical information. 'How do I get to Raqqa',<sup>21</sup> 'Do you get enough to eat there?', 'How can I book a hotel?', 'What is the best itinerary?' or 'Do you have internet connection?' are part of the questions that the *okhtis* that already performed the *hijra*<sup>22</sup> ('migration to jihadist war scenarios') are confronted online by the other *okhtis*.

In the opinion of one *okhti*, the *hijra* to Shams<sup>23</sup> "(...) was in adherence to the path of Ibrāhīm (*sallāllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) who established for them the tradition of declaring enmity and hatred towards the *mushrikīn* [polytheists] and their *tawāghīt* [disbelievers]."

Her definition is a direct application of Salafi-jihadism doctrine, as followers defend that the founding principle of '*millat Ibrahim*' ('religion of Abraham') is the concept of '*al-wala' wal bara'*' ('loyalty and renunciation') as it was defined by the Jordanian scholar (accredited as one of the most important jihadist thinkers) Al-Maqdisi<sup>24</sup> (1959-). Hence, the Salafi-jihadists justify the displacement ('*hijra*') of men and women to the region as a part of their individual duty to jihad ('*Jihad al-fard'ayn*'). Online sheiks have been dedicating their time on issuing *fatwa* about the subject. Several of them agree with the role of women in jihad being confined to motherhood, praying, domestic activities and to the moral support of their husbands. In fact, many of the women think that jihadist contents should also be enlarged to the ones reflecting their role as a mother and as a wife. The mother's support and educator role is therefore understood as a way of doing jihad and posting it online is a way of promoting and teaching other *okhti* about it.

<sup>20</sup> '*Tawhid*' means Allah is One and Unique.

<sup>21</sup> North-Centre of Syria.

<sup>22</sup> Name given in Arabic to the migration of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina.

<sup>23</sup> Historical Arabic denomination to the region of the Great Syria.

<sup>24</sup> To better understand the written work of Al-Maqdisi, I recommend the book of Joas Wagemakers (2012b), *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, Cambridge University Press.

Others expand these activities to the performance of online *da'wa*.<sup>25</sup> "How do you perform *da'wa* online?" I questioned her after seeing she had a post with the title 'The role of the Muslim women in the Da'wa'. By it, she gave instructions to her *okhtis* on how to be and to behave as a good Muslim wife, and how to support their husbands in their call for jihad *fisabilillah*. The obligation of the women is to follow the example of model Muslim women (like Khadija, Umm Salama or Umm Imarah) and online they can do it by posting photos with instructions on how to wear the *hijab* or the *niqah* but also by posting pictures of jihadist male fighters.

Sheik Yusuf al Qaradawi,<sup>26</sup> the Egyptian Islamic theologian issued a *fatwa* where he justifies women participation in jihad as part of their individual Islamic duties in order to fight the occupation of Muslim land:

(...)I believe a woman can participate in this form of jihad according to her own means and condition. Also, the organizers of these martyr operations can benefit from some, believing women as they may do, in some cases, what is impossible for men to do.

Still, during my Facebook research on the online diaries of jihadist women living in Syria (or Iraq), I did not find one narrative accounting their direct intervention in a battle, or even that they receive any weaponry training. As an example, one informant posted a photo of her 9mm gun saying: "Been six months here, still I don't know how to use kalash [sic]. I only know how to use 9mm calibre."

'The stories of Muslim women who are now fighters of Allah', or 'Feminine Fighters of Allah' are the titles of Facebook photo albums seeking online support or recruitment for the fight in Syria. Mali, Somalia and Palestine are other jihadist fight scenarios that appear in these albums. In it, diverse war/violent photos of women that are now living in Syria with the description of their story are displayed and commented by the *okhti*.

However, these albums revealed three striking features: they were created by male individuals; the male individuals are the one's inciting and praising women's participation in jihadist conflicts; and finally, and third, they justify their posts and photos with *Suras* and/or *hadiths* such as Sura Al Nisa 4:74: "Those who readily fight in the cause of God are those who forsake this world in favor of the Hereafter. Whoever fights in the cause of God, then gets killed, or attains victory, we will surely grant him a great recompense." Passages such as this one are selected out of their

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<sup>25</sup> On this matter, it is interesting to notice that the digital sisterhood is well alert of the online privacy sets and correspondent dangers: "Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullah Wabarkatuh [sic]. ... my sister in Islam, u [sic] should maintain some strategy, u [sic] r [sic] doing da'wa, good, but do not share personal matters, be careful of ur [sic] safety, may ALLAH protect u [sic] from all evil and devil ... ameen FI AMANILLAH ..."

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.meforum.org/646/the-qaradawi-fatwas>

original context and adapted to justify ultimate acts of violence in the name of religion.

### 3.6 Conclusion

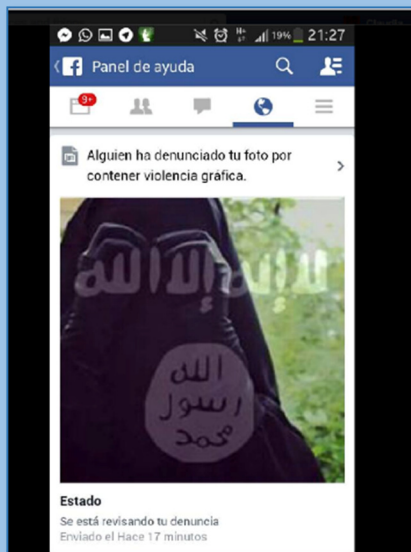
'Okhti online' is a digital sisterhood aiming first to share and spread jihadist contents, secondly to support the jihadist conflict scenarios and thirdly to become a real life jihadist fighter. Jihad is perceived and performed by Spanish-speaking jihadist women on Facebook under their gendered construction, as sisters, mothers, and wives and as women. Yet, violence is defended through photos, images and videos but also through comments and declarations. Declarations that have a clear message. These women are willing to transfer their online jihadist performances into real war scenarios. Furthermore, the online active role of the *okhti* associated with the changes on the jihadism as a social movement are transforming women's independency on social and religious level. However, the most important factor in this transformation has been the interference of modern Islamic academics as well as the online sheikhs who are giving legitimacy to the role of women in the jihadist fight issuing *fatwa* ruling in favor of the *okhti* right to participate in the jihad fight. Observing jihadist women online (in this case on Facebook) demonstrates that the way they are practicing their faith online is also changing how they practice their faith offline. Moreover, that the *okhti* online radicalization process is being successful catapulting the roles of these jihadist women: "Sister, what's the hardest thing for you there? Nothing beats the palpitation that a *Mujahid's* wife has whilst checking list names of the Martyrs." For Samira Yerou nothing made her heart beat faster than taking action into her own hands and being her own jihadist woman.





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## CHAPTER 4

# The significance of Web 2.0 to Jihad 3.0 – Female jihadists making sense of religious violence on Facebook<sup>27</sup>

### Abstract

The jihadist phenomenon has a privileged space in Web 2.0 where contents can be created, networks can be global and all exchanges of information have significance. The emergent jihadist organizations have been profiting from these digital communication features to enlarge, diversify and connect with their audience.

On the one side, the digital framing of jihad through the manipulation of the sacred Islamic texts and its transformation into an 'authentic' religious discourse has given the jihadists an opportunity to justify any religious violence associated with the performance of jihad(ism). On the other side, the digital performance of jihad through a ritualization process that combines ritualistic innovation with the use of cyber tools has allured individuals to engage and participate in jihadist acts, both online and offline. Moreover, and in the light of the jihadist warfare in the Middle East, the chapter will reveal the importance of online ritualization of jihad into shaping these individual representations into a community both offline and online.

### 4.1 Digital jihadism, embedded, embodied and everyday<sup>28</sup>

Back in 2005, O'Reilly coined the expression 'Web 2.0' to explain the World Wide Web as a social platform, later Fuchs (2005: 137) would add an important perspective to the understanding of the Web 2.0, a perspective that hits a higher note when we speak about online jihadism, namely surveillance:

One important characteristic of many contemporary web platforms is that they store, process, assess and sell large amounts of personal information and usage behavior

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<sup>27</sup> Adapted from the published article: Carvalho, C., (2015) The importance of Web 2.0 for Jihad 3.0: Female jihadists coming to grips with religious violence on Facebook. In Post, P. & Sparks, L. (eds.), *The study of culture through the lens of ritual*. (=Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy 15). Instituut voor Christelijk Erfgoed/Instituut voor Liturgische en Rituele Studies, 37-53.

<sup>28</sup> Implicit reference to the book of Christine Hine: *Ethnography for the Internet, embedded, embodied and everyday* (Huntingdon: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

data. It is therefore important to theorize Web 2.0 surveillance and conduct empirical research about the surveillance and privacy implications of Web 2.0.

During an online discussion between the members of the Association for Internet Researchers on how to better name the fourth age of internet studies, Barry Wellman, a household name on the matter of internet research (networks, digital communities, communication, computers, methods), advanced the idea of Digital Media Studies, in order to integrate in it the studies of 'Internet of Things' and of 'Mobile'.

Consequently, the digital space where we find ourselves and others being online is enlarged to include mobile operational devices, M2M (machine to machine) applications implicating that networks of communication are now endless in terms of time, space, location and participants.

Muslim women benefit from the social networking capacities of the Web 2.0, they especially benefit from free mobility without any type of religious restrictions (no need for a male companion, *mahram*, for instance).

The practical, easy, and accessible mechanisms of Web 2.0 confer the Muslim women with an egalitarian online role. Online they have the same power of creating content, of collaborating, participating and designing their own social networks. However, the embodied online experience for these women means still being Muslim, so still subjecting their online freedom, mobility and interaction to the rules of moral religious behavior. To list just some of the online religious behaviors observed by Muslim women in general, I can refer to numerous posts on the importance of not posting personal photos, more in particular photos of their own faces (unless they have the *hijab*, Islamic head cover, on), and on not accepting men in their Facebook accounts. By engaging on these moral online fundamentals, they feel that they are making a sacred sense out of the web. The other facet of making a sacred sense of the web is to use it as a means to spread Islamic knowledge, more specifically Salafi-jihadist knowledge. The task of disseminating Islamic knowledge (*da'wa*) goes together with the task of also giving advice (*nasihah*) on religious matters to other sisters. The two tasks are an everyday practice for online female jihadists to the extent that they incorporate it, in brackets, to their profile names:<sup>29</sup> *Maryam maryam* (Salafism counsellor).

Online jihadism is a cultural, political and religious phenomenon embedded in Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is the 'new media ecology' (Awan, Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2011; Sisler 2011) where individuals create their own content, where ownership of data is

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<sup>29</sup> The Spanish Muslim women use fake names as their profile names. The fake names represent religious expressions, for example, 'Muslim by the Grace of God', or their motherhood, for example, 'Umm Amin'. Although the names are fake, I still name the participants differently from their profile names to preserve their anonymity.

substituted by sharing data, where collaboration, cooperation and establishment of networks are vital components.

Jihadism (Al-Qaradawi 1998; Armstrong 1988; Cook 2005b; Lawrence 2005) is the operating concept of my research and therefore the guiding element of the interviews (via instant messaging) that I conducted with my online informants. My research aim is to understand the way in which they make meaning of jihadism and jihadism online. For the present chapter, I will select one of the most recent definitions of jihadism by Fawaz Gerges who reckons that the jihadist movement has entered its third wave with the surge of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Gerges relates the evolution of jihadism with the ISIS tactical lines: "ISIS's swift military expansion stems from its ability not only to terrorize enemies but also to co-opt local Sunni communities, using networks of patronage and privilege" (Gerges 2014: 340).

To grasp the ideological propositions of jihadism more concretely of the propositions of Salafi-jihadism (Kepel 1985), attention needs to be given to the Sunni theological school, Salafism (Meijer 2010; Wagemakers 2012: 145-164; Wiktorowicz 2001). Etymologically speaking, Salafism derives from *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious predecessors who were contemporaries of the Prophet) and defends the strict observation of the Sunna and refusal of theological innovations (*bid'a*), the proclamation of the unity of God (*tawhid*), the declaration of excommunication (*takfir*) and the purification of practices.

Facebook has been a privileged location to the promotion of jihadism among women. My female participants have this to say about how others make sense of their online performance: "Violent, us? That makes me *furiosa* ('furious' in Spanish). If by defending Islam, the Prophet (PUB) and jihad we are violent, well so be it, we are violent women!"

## 4.2 *Furiosa* – Digital research(er) on Facebook

I first started my online fieldwork on Facebook with an open profile and a direct link to my university webpage. In a couple of months, I had a network of more than 50 'friends' or informants and I was joining groups under the jihadist theme. My first methodological step to collect meaningful data was to monitor Spanish Muslim women who had open source jihadist contents, then to add them as friends or follow them, sketch their connections and finally to establish text contact with these women.

I have used the following criteria to select my participants: female<sup>30</sup> Spanish-speaking individuals who indicate to live in the area of Catalonia, who claim to be

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<sup>30</sup> To have a comparative measure, I have been also doing observation research throughout male Facebook accounts. The result of the observation was interesting. The Spanish-speaking Muslim males keep having a jihadist profile on Facebook. Some of them are even reporting directly from Syria, posting pictures of their daily lives.

Muslims (Born-Muslims and/or converted Muslims) and who produce violent contents online. I draw their connections and establish their social networks through the perspective of their shared interested in jihadism, which leads to the inclusion of:

- Female participants who are from and/or have relatives in Morocco;
- Female participants who live in Morocco, The Netherlands, Belgium and/or France;
- Female participants who communicate in Spanish, transliterated Arabic and French.

That was until February of 2015, when my Facebook account was blocked by the digital quality of my online activities reflecting 'my sympathy for jihadism'. I not have an inch of sympathy for violence of any kind. However, as an online user, I identified with the feelings my informant had shared, *furiosa*, or furious because I had invested much time and effort in constructing a relationship with these women, to line up their networks, to collect and select relevant data to my research. In the previous section, we have seen that the digital space is still being defined and explored by academia. To the novelty of the research space, we have to add a series of obstacles that come with the digital territory: authenticity of sources, irregular working times, immediacy of the data and in the case of jihadism research, the sensitivity of the subject of religious violence.

As a digital space, Facebook is a paradox in its formulation and decision making in what can be defined as violent content. The acceptance and the refusal of certain contents without a coherent pattern leads to the questioning of what Facebook administrators define as violent content. When conducting ethnography online I aim at analyzing the meaning that individuals attribute to their performances online. In fact, after the blocking episode I started to question myself how do I formulate this event: 'I was blocked', or, 'my account was blocked'? The answer is that I need to reflect on the embodied experience of being online, as I will address further in this chapter.

Even with such administrative delimitations Facebook represents still for jihadist individuals an interesting open space because here they can act as if they have religious authority, as Nico Prucha (2011: 43) acknowledges, "within these Online Territories of Terror, the jihadists assume the role of authoritative religious scholars, who define what is legal and who the 'enemies of Islam' (...) are."

Facebook is therefore the adequate platform to disseminate distorted religious Islamic values and to wave violence as an Islamic sword. Or in the words of Hans Kippenberg (2011: 175): "The change from toleration of the unbelievers to violence against them is a central theme of Islamic theology. Some Muslim scholars hold that the 'sword verse' has replaced other revelations that sound a different note."

Contemporary Muslim scholars have the digital techniques (simple, clear theological messages) that grant them 'celebrity sheikh' (Brachman & Levine 2011: 30) status. Anwar al-Awalaki (1971-2011) was and still is a celebrity Salafi-jihadist sheikh capturing the global attention of jihadists. In this chapter, I consider the significant theological model by which Awalaki presented Islamic migration (*hijra*) and violent jihad as the educative (*tarbiyah*) guidelines (Meleagrou-Hitchens 2011: 40) that could foster the identity of the Islamic community (*umma*).

In the meantime, I opened a new Facebook account and partially restored my former network of informants, only this time I was more careful and gave preference to open source jihadist contents in the form of images, photos or texts. My choice of method to collect and select the data reflects once again the sensitivity of the subject of religious violence as well as the vulnerability of the digital researcher.

The present chapter will develop around the question: How are the Spanish-speaking jihadist women making sense of both jihadism and online environments included in the Web 2.0 definition, namely, of Facebook as the preferred social networking platform (Boyd & Ellison 2007: 210-230), to create a sacred space that reinforces the ritualization of online jihad and at the same time the acceptance of religious violence as a mandatory ritual?

In Section 4.3, I will detail the definition of online ritualization of jihad, fundamental to comprehend the promotion of religious violence.

### 4.3 Online ritualization of jihad

In this study, I draw on the ritualization notion developed by Catherine Bell (1992: 91) as "(...) a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful."

Jihadist scholars do in fact aim at establishing themselves as having the most powerful extremist ideology, and one of the strategies they employ to attain their goal of domination is online ritualization of religious violence, i.e., "(...) a ritualistic innovation that allows its agents to establish, structure and control all activities that occur in cyberspace in the name of Jihad" (Carvalho 2014: 32).

I will now bring together the notion of 'ritualized body' with the notion of 'embodiment' in cyberspace. This is important to understand the online ritualization of jihad. The 'ritualized body' was defined by Catherine Bell (1992: 98) as "a body invested with the 'sense' of ritual". It is in her vision a product of the dynamic relationship between ritualization and the 'structuring environment'.

Online space is the 'structuring environment' where ritualization occurs and produces the online 'ritualized body', however the task of describing the online embodiment is a theoretical challenge. A challenge that Christine Hine faced in her most recent work, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday* (2015). The author considers that 'being online' is another example of the "embodied ways of being and acting in the world" (2015: 14) and therefore "the internet user is an



embodied user" (2015: 43). David Bell in his book on cyberculture addresses the online body presence with the terms "digital meat" and "the flesh made code" (2011: 156).

Following online body representations and the communication through physical manifestations, Nanako Hayami (2004: 5) questions the significance of the ritualized body in the contemporary society. He directs the answer to applications such as the 'emotion icons', symbols that represent 'human facial expressions of feelings', because "even in the absence of the physical human face, the importance of the face remains" (Hayami 2004: 6).

The main categories of Islamic rituals are the *shahada*, or the declaration of faith by which one officially becomes a Muslim, the *salat* or prayer (performed five times a day), the *zakat*, the act of giving to the poor people of the Muslim community, *sawm*, fasting and *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic rituals can be studied on three principles: spiritual submission, body conformity and purity. According to the Islamic dogma, the performance of the rituals is anticipated by the act of voluntarily submitting them to the will of Allah, in other words, the believer engages the worship activities with the feeling of wanting to obey the divine laws. The feeling of obedience and respect for the rituals is succeeded by the physical ability to perform all the five pillars of Islam. The believer needs to have a sane body to the extent that Islamic jurisprudence dispenses people who have body disabilities or problems. At the same time, the bodily discipline required to execute the prayers is also an instrument to conform mind and spirit to the sake of the faith. The respect for and of the body is inserted in Islamic living via the Qur'an and maybe seen in themes such as funeral rites or the covering of intimate parts of the body (*awra*).

The last principle, the principle of purity (*tahara*) concerns mind, physique and environment, more specifically all Muslims should have pure intentions (*niya*), pure bodies (*ghusl*) and a pure Islamic community (*umma*). In fact, jihad and martyrdom due to their features and as commands of Allah belong to the 'ritual-purity' themes (Gauvain 2013: 169). Kippenberg concurs with the idea that in order to be considered an act of jihad, the individual needs to act in conscience when inflicting death 'against the impure' (2011: 65). The linkage between purification rituals, blood and jihad shapes the justification that Salafi-jihadist scholars needed to promote religious violence.

Women initialize the process of online ritualization of jihad by the same methods of theological purification as presented above. First, they consider the online space as a sacred space that they need to respect in the same way they respect the mosque. The online intentions (*niya*) need to be pure and oriented to the benefit of God being the guiding principle that leads to the legitimization and acceptance of violent jihadist performances.

Section 4.4 will analyze how Facebook surveillance and censorship features are carving the new phase of online jihadism.

#### 4.4 Jihad 3.0 – ‘Boiling the frog’<sup>31</sup>

The development of a jihadist global communication strategy has its roots in Al-Qaeda’s activities to disseminate their messages throughout the world. In fact, Al-Qaeda understood the strategic value of the web as a vital way to attract more adherents to its cause.

ISIS is Jihad 3.0 as the North-American newspaper *New York Times* pointed out in August 2014. The jihadist organization took Al-Qaeda’s online project further down a notch by guaranteeing a continuous stream of contents to flow in the cyber space. Moreover, jihadist ISIS contents are found in all forms of social networking, chatting, blogging, messaging available online. The contents are well thought, well elaborated, using simple texts but powerful imagery so that they reach a larger audience. Most importantly, they are translated in a variety of languages. The contents are also tailor made, according to gender, generation and geographical positioning of the audience. ISIS has been aiming specially at gaining the hearts and minds of the youth working on closing the gap that Al-Qaeda with its senior elements had not managed to do (Torres Soriano 2007: 1-3).

Finally, the online jihadist contents of ISIS are a professional production employing cutting-edge digital tools in order to grant an expanding audience. They also have enough readiness and preparation to quickly adapt, move and settle into new cyber scenarios. Indeed, the jihadist phenomenon is continuously evolving within the ‘new media ecology’ space that characterizes the Web 2.0. One of the main factors promoting online evolution and modification of the jihadist landscape is the topic of ‘trust and privacy’ (Dwyer, Hiltz & Passerini 2007). Likewise, the efficiency and diligence of Facebook’ censorship program are causing jihadist individuals to act online in a more precautionary fashion. Facebook administrators are particularly effective and fast in detecting jihadist contents. Once the Facebook administration signalizes jihadist contents (‘activation of all types of alarms’ as I was told in my case by an internal source) the correspondent accounts are cancelled. For a comparative analysis on censorship on online social networking, I can report to fieldwork I have done on Tumblr where jihadist users blog on a daily basis jihadist related contents (photos, images, texts). The violent contents on Tumblr are graphic; the names of the users and their comments clearly indicate their jihadist affiliation, yet censorship in this social platform is less effective than on Facebook or even on Twitter.

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<sup>31</sup> In the popular story, ‘Boiling the frog’, a frog that is placed in hot water jumps directly, a frog that is placed in cold water that slowly warms up does not read the alarming signs that will lead to his death. Surveillance and censorship are the hot water that made Jihad 3.0 jump to other forms of online identification. The same analogy was used to the question of computers, privacy and personal data protection in the business world by the Advise Project. I apply it here as the image of frogs was actually used in the context of representing jihadism.

Aware of the censorship measures, online jihadist users are in the process of transforming all the elements that gave away their online jihadist identity. Black horses, banners, lions and other commonly jihadist associated images are now giving place to a 'gentle Jihad' (Barber 1996: 171). The details of the profile photos enclose good indicators of how the individual wants to be perceived online, from the close-up photo, to the use of well-known jihadist pictures, or symbolic representations of their current feelings towards a certain theme, that only a trained audience will be able to read the underline meaning. For example, since Mohammed Morsi (former head of the Muslim Brotherhood and former President of Egypt) was condemned to death, many jihadists have chosen the image/photo of a frog to be their profile. The frog represents the first *fatwa* issued after Morsi assumed the government of Egypt and refers to the need to protect the frogs as they were special creatures to God, "a frog's croaking is praise [to Allah]." The profile picture in this case is a clear indication of political and religious stands, furthermore of the solidarity of the network members to the jihadist cause represented by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite all censorship online to control, filter or block jihadist contents, Jihad 3.0 has been resistant to all these obstacles and thriving to have an even stronger and ramified online presence. Section 5 will discuss the role of imagery in the new online jihadist female profile.

#### **4.5 Black butterflies and blue names – Imagery, meaning and communication**

In the case of jihadist women online, the more rigid norms of surveillance and censorship (both by Facebook administration and by police and security forces), made them be more careful with their online activities and less available for interviews. The new online control made the jihadist women change their profile pictures from classic jihad symbols to other pictures, such as compositions of flowers, birds, small texts ('I love my prophet') or generic photos representing Muslim women. They seldom post selfies, or self-portraits. In this day and age, however, selfies and social media platforms are inseparable components of the embodied online being. Muslim women are directly affected by the posting of personal photos, selfies online because it is an offense to their honor (*ird*) in the eyes of Islamic dispositions. In reality, this new form of self-representation clashes with the Islamic jurisprudence on photography (*taswir*)<sup>32</sup> but does not stop jihadist individuals from posting personal profile photos online. There is a debate around the permissibility (*mubah*) or forbiddance (*haram*) to share personal photos online among the scholars and among

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<sup>32</sup> Photography and statues as well, the legal framework on the matter is related with ISIS destruction of Human Heritage sites and with the attacks on cartoonists who depicted images about the Prophet.

Muslim believers. An informant of mine just recently posted a *fatwa* she collected online about putting personal pictures on websites, especially Facebook and Twitter:

I say that the images of souls are *haram* and *kaba'ir* ('grave sins'). The Messenger (PUB) said: Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment will be those who make images. (...) And by this we know that it is not allowed to publish photos (pictures) of people on Twitter, Facebook or other networks.<sup>33</sup>

Besides religious reasons there are also surveillance reasons to change their names from 'Umm' into for instance, 'Black butterfly', where the imagery enclosed in the name hides its deepest symbolism (death). The contents do no longer present a direct, obvious link to jihadism or to the jihadist fight in Syria. They do however continue to approach the Salafi-jihadist doctrine and the passages of the Qur'an and of the Sunna that according to the Salafi-jihadi doctrine justifies violent jihad. In this sense, the themes that are associated with Salafi-jihadi theory, eschatology, salvation, Paradise references either through imagery or texts continue to appear in a frequent way.

Jihadist videos are an equally vital source of jihadist embodied online performances, either we speak about executions or war scenes. Violent footages continue to be well accepted within the online jihadist community but they are being gradually substituted by other videos that highlight the soft jihadist lifestyle.

As we saw in the introduction, Facebook has a 'complicated' relationship with jihadist contents and videos are no exception. Knowing that the videos are the first items to be reported or blocked by Facebook administrators, part of the thrill of using this online space to publish them, is for the producers the online chase and the possibility of getting it out on the digital space. As for the consumers and analysts, the thrill is still being able to watch this content, before it is taken down by the administrators.

In a Facebook community account entitled 'Meaning and Understanding of Jihad' that I had access to via an informant, the administrator explains the goal of the page: "This Page is to Enlighten those About The Greater Jihad which is in the Battlefield for the sake of Allah and True Islam. May Allah guide us!!!" A set of elaborated compositions of images with small poignant sentences are the core of his/her productions. May 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, a new video was placed under the title: 'Mujahideen's response to the HATERS, Speech by Muhammad bin Abid.' The speech is in English, spoken by a male voice using a sermon tone and its main message is about the qualities and sacrifices the *Mujahedeen/Mujahidun* ('jihadist fighters') have and do for the protection of the *umma*. The narrator has a stronger message for the listeners living comfortably in the Western nations, eating fast food and not supporting

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<sup>33</sup> Transcriptions will be directly translated into English due to the limitation of words.

the jihadist fighters: they should be ready to embrace their near future, death without salvation. He keeps the speech on the emotional side appealing to all kinds of feelings from gratitude to sympathy for the jihadist fighters. It ends with an appeal to the change of hearts towards the jihadists so that to please God and guarantee His forgiveness.

The comments made by the followers of this page are the most interesting aspect; they just mention and notify a friend (placing the name of the friend in blue letters). The name notifications are a Facebook interactive tool that links the post to the friend's page hence spreading the content through multiple recipients. The interactive tools have a direct impact on the construction of social networks: suddenly participants without connections to each other are marked together in the same post. For instance, a woman liked and marked four other women in this post. We therefore need to multiply these four participants by the number of women that they are 'friends' with to have an estimation of how many women are now aware of the existence of the video that aims at giving meaning and value to the role of jihadist fighters. Due to these circles of communication, and notwithstanding the attempts to keep gender separation (in respect for Islamic social rules) these attempts end up being frustrated on Facebook as men and women become associated to the same content.

Here, I will just make a quick remark on gender online coexistence: the concern of respecting and keeping gender separation as an online behavioral principle only reinforces the sacred value individuals attribute to the online space. In the offline world, Muslims follow and respect the rules of gender separation and if they extend this Islamic principle of conduct to the online space it is because in their perspective, the digital space has a sacred value.

Back to the circles of communication, they broaden women's meaning of the online jihadist contents by being exposed to information that would not be accessible to them in the offline space.

In Section 4.6, I will deal with my online and offline case study of female jihadism in Spain.

## **4.6 Immigrants in digital space**

Spain and Morocco have a historical connection that dates back to centuries ago, a geographical connection that goes over the Gibraltar Strait and a shared social experience that links the population from both nations.

During the 1970s, the first Moroccan immigrants started to arrive in Spain, first as guest workers, mainly men, travelling alone and returning after a short period back to their homeland (Empez Vidal 2007). A decade later, Madrid signed the agreement to be part of the European Community (after the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 it was denominated as European Union) and the country's economy entered a

phase of exponential growth and development. Labor was in demand and workers being given the legal permission to extend their stay and bring along their families.

Catalonia pursued the same open immigration policy, encouraging North African people from across the Mediterranean to work and live in the province. Catalonia is these days home to about 226,321 Muslims (UCIDE 2015) an estimated 20 percent of whom follow the precepts of Salafism. The contour of the lines that shape the integration of Moroccan immigrants in Catalonia is determined by the contrast of ethnicity, identity and religion. Much has been said about the general struggle of the diasporic groups to adapt to the new living and working conditions and to 'gain access to the culture of their host societies' (Conversi 2012: 1371). The Maghreb population live in Catalonia their family life in a similar way they would if they were living still in Morocco. Men are in charge of the family's earnings and decisions while women are occupied with domestic chores and the raising of their children. This situation indicates 'a reinforcement of a traditional stereotype that connects women to the sphere of care and affection' (Martínez & Huertas 2014). Indeed, women are in charge of keeping the international contacts with the rest of the family, either they are in Morocco or have also immigrated elsewhere in the world. In that sense, Facebook offers these women a suitable social networking platform to reach out to family members, and to preserve frequent contact with them by sharing family photos, moments or to exchange traditional Moroccan recipes.

But above all, the common denominator that draws them into the jihadist networks is the wish to gain Islamic knowledge (*ilm*). The former administrator of a Facebook page called '*Muyahidines los guerreros de Allah*' ('*Mujahedeen/Mujahidun* the warriors of Allah') explained to a woman the purpose of his page: "Alhamdulillah sister, that is why this page was made for, to teach about what is going on in the world and that jihad is also Islam, even if some do not agree (...)."

Internet is fairly accessible to my informants, many of them having already smartphones that allow them to be connected anytime, anywhere. The older informants demonstrate a certain resistance to adapt to new social networking tools. One of the informants complained about what she thinks it is an excessive use of Facebook compared with the time devoted to praying:

And what hurts the most is that when one sees the register of Facebook, one sees that he/she has sent more than 5000 messages, and if you compare that with how many verses of the Qur'an you have read...'wallah'... I cry.

The use of WhatsApp is viewed differently by different generations. To the younger ones it is a valid tool of communication while to the older ones consider it a possible harmful tool to the community, as an older informant affirmed:

The new updated version of WhatsApp [the double check symbol] is creating *fitna* ('division') among Muslims because you know when the message was read. Fear Allah, do not let the devil whisper on your mind and do not judge your Muslim brothers/sisters.

To that, a younger informant replied: "Each one of us must know how to organize herself with the social networks, but WhatsApp is more practical, easier and simpler." As a matter of fact, the younger ones, who have access to longer and better education profit from the fact that they have access to internet services at school to create and manage different web accounts (Twitter and Instagram, for instance).

In the particular case of women's radicalization in Spain, I have come to the conclusion that there are two distinctive web layers within the same "community of practice" (Wenger 2012: 1), the digital (internet) and the mobile (smartphones).

A 'digital media community' that shifts its space from online to mobile connections is especially crucial for the Spanish Muslim women who wish to accomplish their radicalization process. In a recent Skype interview with a Muslim Spanish-Moroccan leader of an Islamic Organization in Catalonia (whom I cannot name for privacy and security reasons), he referred clearly that the process of women radicalization migrates from a digital community on Facebook to a mobile community on WhatsApp and/or Skype (online communication software product). This move according to the interviewed leader happens when the phase of radicalization enters a deeper level of commitment and the sources of communication cannot be open sources anymore. This different layer of online space that is shielded from the public eye is denominated as the 'Invisible Web' (Bergman 2000). Due to its secrecy, the mobile relationship is more individualistic, intimate and free of all features that open source internet is so feared for: control, privacy and exclusion. In that sense, here are the words of Nour Nour:

Salam aleikum sisters. I would like to communicate you that you are added to certain groups, do not accept it, and if you are already in, get out of them, because the TAGUT, make themselves pass by Muslims so that they can locate where you and all of us are, to search for us, to calumniate us, and therefore arrest us, because to them, the TAGUT, so there is more security to not accomplish jihad ... (...) I tell you this because there are many brothers in Morocco that have been arrested because of this...the location of their data.. I know of sisters that their husbands have been arrested because of this and have asked me to make this message arrive to all Muslims. Do not publish your authentic data, here we are for one cause, and that is the cause of ALLAH (...)

According to my previously mentioned male informant, the process of mobilization, radicalization and recruitment is quick (maximum eight weeks and already including logistic arrangements) and aims at very young women, more vulnerable and eager

to abandon their lives in Spain. The speed of the process is related with the need of 'sending them there, before they change their minds.' "And what if they change their minds?" I asked him.

You know, they just say to the girls that their families will be informed of their acts, bringing dishonor upon them and the families will also pay the price. Summing up, if they change their minds they are violently threatened so they have no other alternative but to go to Syria.

Samira Yerou, a Moroccan immigrant in Rubi (Catalonia) was travelling together with her three-year-old son to Syria when the Turkish authorities arrested her and sent them back to Barcelona (*El País* 2015). There the Minister of Internal Affairs accused her of having jihadist affiliations. An accusation that was formulated after the police intercepted conversations between her and a jihadist fighter, where she confirmed her adherence to the cause with sentences defending violence: "(...) he [three-year-old son] only wants the knife of the beheading" (*El Confidencial* 2015). In December 2014, Samira's husband had denounced their missing to the Spanish police. The husband suspected that Samira was keen on migrating to Syria and that she had altered her behavior since a previous visit to Morocco.

In May 2014, I was in the Islamic Center of Rubi, Catalonia, where I interviewed 20 women (including a female scholar) precisely about these subjects: jihadism, online radicalization and *hijra* to Syria. I asked them: "What would you say if your son would ask you permission to become a jihadist fighter in Syria?" The answer was unanimous: "No!" The female scholar agreed and entered a lengthy theological explanation on why all those subjects were not part of the Islamic doctrine. However, the voices of reason at the local mosque have little impact compared with the online radical networks. Samira is indeed, according to the Court deliberation, responsible for a jihadist recruiting network that was taking women from Europe and Morocco to Syria.

In the following section, I will present the concluding remarks by opening space to further studies on the new digital landscapes of female jihadism and the new challenges for digital researchers.

#### **4.7 A new digital jihadist female landscape? – Concluding remarks**

Due to the effective Spanish security and defense institutions and their active collaboration with similar European and international institutions, namely the Moroccan Counter Terrorism Institute, the number of apprehended jihadist individuals and jihadist material has increased significantly in the last years (28 individuals in 2015, 11 in 2013, *El Mundo* 2015). This increase is directly connected with the increase of the processes of online radicalization and recruitment. As we have seen, the female



jihadist individuals are aware of counter terrorist activities and of the need to therefore adopt a more discrete online profile. Their process of online ritualization of violence is changing into more subtle jihadist performances that require from the digital researcher sharper observation skills, edgier analysis and faster adaptation to new digital landscapes.

A final example to illustrate this change are the new jihadist landscapes being proposed online to attract female individuals to perform the *hijra* to Saudi Arabia and/or Morocco and Algeria. In fact, I analyzed two Facebook pages (that I had access to via an informant) announcing their services for those who wish to live in a proper Islamic land. The distinctive feature of the Facebook pages with the purpose of facilitating the *hijra* is their mention of '*Salafiya*', or as it can be read in the *Hijra Algerian* page: "Information Page for *hijra* in Algeria, according to the Qur'an, the Sunna and the understanding of the pious predecessors." Here the reference to Salafism appears in the mention to the 'pious predecessors' or *salaf*, one of the core fundamentals of the Salafist doctrine. Another very interesting fact is that when I clicked the link leading to their blog, I noticed that the cover image is a passage of the Qur'an, more exactly Sura Al-Nisa, aya 97-100, which narrates the reward of Allah to those who complete the *hijra*. At the end of the quote and in orange letters, one can read 'Reserved for women only'.

The pages are fed daily with new tips and recommendations and there is a monthly lengthy post where one of the sisters that have already performed the *hijra* narrates online her experience. One of the migrants (*muhajirun*) as they call themselves had this advice (originally written in French and Arabic) to the women thinking of performing the *hijra*:

Also to live in a country that does not insult our Beloved Prophet Allah (PUB) is more rewarding than the opposite. May Allah grant to all of those who have *niya* ['intention'] to make *hijra* and allow us *mouhajirouns* ['migrants'] to prolong ours until we die *Inscha'Allah*.

The cycle of events is similar to the female online radicalization route (exposition and acceptance of the Salafi-jihadist fundamentals), migration to Syria (transfer of the acquired cognitive skills to the offline space) and then return to the online space to report back on their *hijra* experience (exercising authority role to affect other women to embrace *hijra*). The critical difference when compared to online ritualization of jihad is the absence of the practice of ritualization of violence in the case of the *hijra* performance.

In conclusion, the complexity of this brand new phenomenon, the female Salafist (jihadist?) migration, its insertion in the new concept of Jihad 3.0 and its possible proximity with deeper routed jihadist goals are an important novelty within the online-offline jihadist space research that opens up future and further study.

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## CHAPTER 5

# i-Imams studying female Islamic authority online<sup>34</sup>

### Abstract

Using Facebook as a case study, this chapter details how self-proclaimed jihadist women construct and disseminate an online discourse to engage their audience with jihadist ideology. The empirical data provide a glimpse into the mechanisms that enable female Islamic authority online, while the theoretical framework describes the elements of jihadist propaganda used to grant legitimacy to those who assume the roles of, in this case, female i-Imams. The study shows that female online authority promotes the transformation of women into warriors.

### 5.1 Introduction

Since the advent of the internet, and with it Islamic websites, in the late 1990s, Islamic religious authority has acquired a new layer of complexity: cyber religious authority. Online spaces that are used by i-Imams to inform, lecture, and decide about Islamic subjects are very popular, particularly among Muslim youth. The online *min-bar* ('pulpit') has become a virtual platform for the i-Imams: a (usually) hardly controlled space where communications formatted as *fatwas* are often issued without any legal validation or guarantee of the professional or educational training of the issuers. The question of legitimacy and authenticity is even more pertinent because the internet is an open, free, and global communication tool. Moreover, *i-Khutbas* ('internet sermons') are attractively presented in simple English via Facebook, YouTube, or Google Plus and offer an interactive way to debate all aspects of Islamic living from rituals to sacred sources.

More recently, these sites also serve the goal of the radicalization and online recruitment of young women to engage in jihadist war scenarios, including in Syria and Iraq. In this chapter, i-Imams, understood from a female perspective and as a virtual Islamic authority, and *i-Khutba*, understood as the various shapes virtual Islamic discourse may take, are central to a state-of-the-art study of the imamate in Western Europe (Carvalho 2014: 26). The present chapter approaches the online

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<sup>34</sup> Adapted from the article: Carvalho, C., (Forthcoming) 'i-Imams, studying female Islamic authority online.' Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

construction of female authority through the analysis of the online performance of young Spanish-speaking Muslim women, specifically using Facebook as a social networking case study.

On Facebook, the female informants export similar rules of engagement to their online groups as those that prevail in their daily lives. The case study presented here concerns 50 Muslim Spanish-speaking women of Moroccan origin, as well as converted Muslim women of Spanish origin, between the ages of 18 and 40, all of whom live in Catalonia. The women from both groups use similar building blocks of discourse and narratives, based upon "a true part of Muslim tradition" (Mernissi 1991: vii-viii), in a self-constructed online participation that is not focused on gender opposition since they do not strive for a "direct struggle against men" (Sadiqi 2003: 35). Their online participation is part of an individual struggle to be *mujāhidāt* ('female participants in jihad'), and even *muqātilāt* ('women who fight with arms') – for the Quran does, they claim, call for *qitāl* ('conventional fighting') (Cooke 2002: 232). In this online space, authority is constructed through the pursuit of religious knowledge and religious education, with the highest regard awarded to the women who are proficient in both Classical Arabic and Spanish. This model of authority founded on language competence was already noted by the Moroccan anthropologist Fatima Sadiqi, who acknowledged the social importance of codeswitching among Moroccan women (2003: 39). The situation is similar on Facebook, where women who understand and write in Classical Arabic are seen as having a better understanding of the Quran, and therefore being more competent in interpreting the sacred sources.

Women who want to further their online role as i-Imams usually use a simple digital tool to achieve this goal: they make their Facebook profile public. Open access to their page implies that they are willing to give voice to their veil and claim their place among the religious authorities. The fact that the woman who wants to assume a distinctive online social status maintains a public Facebook page opens a bridge between the public sphere (polis), women (gender), and ritualization (religion). Public spaces and ritual practices in Islam are predominantly male. Hence, new cognitive schemes are being developed to format contexts and contents that will confer meaning and authority to the ritualization processes led by women. In fact, these new cognitive schemes lead women to both religious knowledge and new learned performances that, in the case of jihadism, introduce them to violent behavior patterns.

This model of Islamic online authority has two sides. On the one hand, it is a 'bridge-building discourse' framed by the faculty of *ijtihād*, defined as reasoning and interpretation; on the other hand, it is a bridge-building network process framed by the ideology of jihadism (Ahmed 2011: 7). For this reason, it is relevant to attempt to build an empirical study of the female ritualization of religious violence and female religious agency together with the notion of local cultures to unveil the identities, roles, and activities of self-proclaimed online female jihadists.

This chapter first explores online female religious authority, and then discusses how the study's informants employ their online Islamic authority to direct their audience to migrate to Syria and become part of the offline jihadist fight. Our attention then turns to the online space, or the Web 2.0, to understand how its specific features help in promoting jihadist discourse among young cyber users. All of this is discussed in the context of a case study that aims to demonstrate how Spanish-speaking Muslim women use Facebook to develop jihadist narratives and, through them, convince other women to transfer their jihadist performances from the online world to the offline world, or more concretely to the so-called Caliphate of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

## 5.2 Methodological considerations

The present chapter addresses the Facebook social media network as the specific field of research, focusing on Facebook accounts and/or pages from Spanish-speaking, Sunni Muslim women residing in Spain, specifically in Catalonia. All of them were aware of my research activities and agreed to share the contents of their pages for the purpose of my study. Follow-ups were done in the shape of interviews (via private messages and Skype) to get to know the informants and their circumstances better, assess their actual religious knowledge, and clarify the goals of their performances online. In their study on the evolution of jihadism in Catalonia, Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo (2015a) wrote that between 2004 and 2012, "Four out of every ten individuals sentenced for jihadist terrorist activities in Spain during the period were located in Catalonia." This high number of jihadist individuals highlights the importance of the Catalan region to the study of jihadism in Europe. This number should also be interpreted in relation to the high presence of Salafi imams in the area: '50 Salafi worship places, half of all those currently in existence in Spain' (Reinares & García-Calvo 2015a).

The dominant language of the informants is Spanish. They have some understanding of transliterated Arabic, although its syntax is frequently incorrect, and only a limited number have fluency in Classical Arabic – an important skill, since one's proficiency in Classic Arabic determines the individual's capacity to achieve a position of authority. The language level reflects one's hermeneutic competence in interpreting the sacred sources and indicates the possession of greater religious knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

In the offline context, language is also a crucial factor for understanding the role of imams in Spain, and more specifically in Catalonia since the autonomous region's official language is Catalan. The lack of training of the local imams can be detected directly through their communication tools, as not all of them are fluent in Spanish,

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<sup>35</sup> I translated all the quotes of the informants, in Spanish, Arabic, or other languages, in the study and in this chapter into English. Original quotes are listed in my dissertation.

let alone in Catalan. Originally from Morocco, many of the imams do not speak or understand Spanish and perform their sermons in Classical Arabic, hence creating a gap between themselves and the younger Muslim generations who prefer using Spanish. Another crucial factor is the role and the space of women in Spanish mosques. In 2014, when I conducted my fieldwork in the region, it was evident that the mosques were spaces reserved for male believers. Women are mostly only in mosques on Fridays and/or for Classical Arabic classes, which usually take place on weekday mornings. The perception of the 'invisibility' of women at the mosque was reflected in small details, such as the surprised and delighted reactions from children that were in clear contrast to the men's noticeably hostile attitude towards my presence in the mosques' courtyards.

During the period of data collection, none of the women declared that she had or was about to travel to territory controlled by the Islamic State or that she was located in the region. Moreover, during the period of data collection, no information was shared that indicated that any of the informants had in fact travelled to the region. Still, because they expressed their desire to travel and to join the Islamic State, they are regarded as potential jihadist migrants. That was for example the case of S.C. (*El País*, 7 July 2015), a mother and converted Muslim who was in charge of the recruitment of young girls to the jihadist cause.

Even though there is no information on whether any of the informants in my study did in fact migrate to Syria, there are examples of Spanish-speaking women who were not part of the study attempting to travel to territories controlled by Islamic State. One example is of course, Samira Yerou, a Moroccan-born Muslim, married and the mother of a three-year-old child. She worked as an online recruiter for the Islamic State and was captured in December 2014 in Turkey (*Audiencia Nacional* 2015). At the time of her arrest, she was waiting to enter Syria together with her child. For the specific purposes of this chapter, and considering that Spain is the location of the case study, I use the definition of a jihadist according to the law Ley Orgánica 2/2015:<sup>36</sup> individuals that are involved in "The act of accessing in a usual manner a website that has contents directed to promote recruitment to a terrorist organization or group, or to collaborate with it, or to pursue their goals. The facts will be understood as committed in Spain when the access to those contents is done from Spanish territory."

The study also considers open source jihadist publications and comments, photos, and videos on Facebook that are posted online in a consistent and frequent manner. For this analysis, the publications that generate long threads of conversations, reactions, or a significant amount of 'likes' were given preference. Data collec-

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<sup>36</sup> The text of this law is available from the website of the Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2015/03/31/pdfs/BOE-A-2015-3440.pdf>. 'Ley Orgánica 2/2015, de 30 de Marzo,' *BOE*, 77 (2015): 27177-27185.

tion was conducted between February 2013 and December 2014 through monitoring, selecting, collecting, and examining data posted on Facebook to get a representative view of the cyber jihad feminine sphere. Although this monitoring was aimed at Spanish-speaking Muslim women, I have also used information about and data from female Facebook users who expressed themselves in other languages. Even though the Spanish-speaking informants are in general not fluent in other languages, they frequently resort to the Facebook option of 'see translation', and in some cases ask other users to help with the translation. All informants use a *kunya*, or *nom de guerre*, to hide their true name. To protect the sources, I have opted here to designate them by using the Arabic word *umm*, meaning 'mother', and adding a different letter to indicate each informant. In the end, the study aims to formulate answers to the following questions:

- What are the key concepts explored by women who aspire to a role of religious authority?
- What are the elements and the events, be they of a religious, political, social, or cultural nature, that lead to framing and developing the online relationship between the female i-Imams and their female audience?
- How does an i-Imam give shape to her online authority?

To attempt to answer these questions it is imperative to analyze both the textual and visual components of their narratives, identify the key concepts of the female jihadist narrative, relate their discourse to the construction of agency in an online environment, determine whether these reflect the objective of acquiring authority, and finally relate this process of acquiring female authority to the female jihadist recruitment networks.

Gary Bunt's *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber-Islamic Environments* (2000), *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (2003), and *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (2009) were the first scientific approaches to the online presence of Islam. Bunt introduced concepts such as 'e-Jihad' and 'cyber Islamic environments'. Since then, there has been much development in the field of Digital Media Studies in general and digital Islam in particular. As a matter of fact, Digital Media Studies evolved to integrate studies of the 'Internet of Things' with issues connected to the 'mobile' world (Carvalho 2015). Therefore, the 'i' in 'i-Imam' depicts the 'i' in interface communications that include both internet and mobile services. Similarly, I apply the notion of *i-Khutba* to the digital Islamic sermons that occur with frequency, that vary in length, and that the sisterhood community considers an authentic religious service. In the term 'i-Imam', I include the collection of women who have been invested with a role of religious authority through their Facebook connections and who guide their online performance through a jihadist narrative.



### 5.3 i-Imam: Female virtual leadership

In the Sunni Muslim tradition, an imam is defined as the “leader who constitutes the community, and without him God’s ordinances cannot be implemented” (Crone & Hinds 2003: 33). At the beginning of Islam, religious authority was in the hands of the prophet’s companions, the individuals who had been in direct contact with him and thus could narrate his life’s deeds. The companions transmitted narratives about the prophet’s conduct to the people close to them, who in turn continued the chain of transmission to the next generations (Crone & Hinds 2003: 2). For this reason, those who had learned from the sources closest to the companions could claim to have stronger religious authority. The same principle is respected and applied today by Salafis, a religious Islamic line of conservative thought that aims at imitating the deeds of the prophet Muhammad and of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (‘(his) companions’). This is also the vision shared by the Spanish-speaking Muslim women in this study, who use Facebook, have mastered Islamic studies and Classical Arabic, observe the pious Salafi doctrine, and are entitled to lead the online *minbar* and to teach their sisters the ways of salvation. Teaching, disseminating, and defending Islam are the main actions of *da’wa*, a mandatory task for all Muslims. According to Wiktorowicz (2006: 212), part of Salafism is the task of the promotion of ‘a vast educational network’ that branches into jihadism and religious violence.

The cyber environment is ideal for the endorsement of violent messages and rituals because it offers a less visible identity, fewer controls on authority and legitimacy, and a more feasible, faster way of disseminating jihadist discourse to a growing virtual audience (Lawrence & Cooke 2005: 23). However, the women’s performance of religious authority is publicly contested by other women, either about the correctness of their knowledge of Islam or about their language skills in Classical Arabic. In some of these public discussions, men also interfere to set the tone of the arguments, recommending good manners, suggest that they read other scholars’ works, or even praise the guidance of the woman who is leading the group’s conversation.

Leadership has always been a sensitive subject in the history of Islam, from the death of the prophet Muhammad. Like other forms, virtual Islamic leadership suffers from a lack of unifying religious guidance. Virtual leadership is, in the words of Philipp Holtmann (2012: 72): “a steady process of trend-setting and steering communication to influence the behavior of individuals in order to achieve a goal. This process, [which] involves the target-oriented use of forces and resources, is rendered by a computer and independent of time and space. It is based on mutual information.” Muslim women have transformed the problem of virtual Islamic leadership to their benefit by claiming a role of their own in the cyber sphere. Islamic female agency is apparently evolving online, and the products of that evolution are being transferred into the offline world. One of those evolving products is *ijtihād*: allowing individuals to self-investigate the sacred sources. This is an important faculty that in

the offline world is much more of a male domain. Cyber environments facilitate the exercise of *ijtihad* by women because they do not exert gender segregation. For that reason, the cyber gates of *ijtihad* are accessible to Muslim women who wish to employ this theological tool. At the same time, the use of it grants the possibility for Muslim women to affirm their agency online.

Another religious argument that these women use to construct online leadership is supporting their authority on legal dispositions of Saudi scholars. This is a paradoxical situation because Saudi scholars have a strict religious perspective on gender matters and contest any female religious authority. It is also a clear statement that proves that these women in particular, and sympathizers of Islamic State in general, have a basic level of religious knowledge and their interpretation method is reduced to “cherry-picking extracts from the Quran” (Duderija 2015: 8).

These arguments, together with the jihadist actions in Syria, Iraq, and Europe, shape virtual female Islamic leadership and work as motivational factors for the recruitment of female jihadists – justifying the importance of the scope of the present analysis. The next section treats how these women frame their religious views in the online space and how they adapt the jihadist narrative for a youth audience.

## 5.4 The ‘call of duty’

Although the privatization and individualization of religious knowledge (Cesari 2003: 138) are a dialectical component of living and experiencing the religious-self (Campbell 2012: 9), the reality is that the online individualization of religious knowledge is succeeded by the online networking and connection to other individuals that have similar profiles, group affiliations, language, likes, and preferences. For example, the popular computer game Call of Duty serves as an encoding use of language to reach Muslim youth and encourage them to become jihadists. In the opinion of Akil Awan, Andrew Hoskins, and Ben O’Loughlin (2011: 54), the utilization of references to youth culture is critical to attracting English-speaking ‘diasporic Muslim audiences’. The internet is the preferred means of communication between young women, who use it to socially interact, develop networks, and access information (Lövheim 2008). What is more, the online presence of Muslim youth reflects the expression of what Jon W. Anderson (2001) labels the ‘missing middle’ between the Islam of intellectual subject to textual analysis (of thought) and Islam of the masses more likely to be examined in terms of social forces. Facebook content created around the jihadist narrative is designed to be easily accessible to all types of audience.

The networks formed online by young Muslim women can be seen as “neo-communities” (Allievi & Nielsen 2003: 21), as they are the result of participation in a high-tech-oriented society by a European Muslim minority that is more attached to the virtual space than to a specific urban environment. The internet as a social, religious, and transnational space has challenged the pertinence, and even the authority, of

the offline imam (Sisler 2007). The transfer of authority and legitimacy from the context of urban space into that of the web 2.0 has induced alterations in the notions of authority and legitimacy (Bunt 2013). These changes are also felt in jihadist discourse and practice. The online reformulation of authority, legitimacy, and authenticity imposes great challenges on the offline imamate in Western Europe. Or, as one of my informants said: "To identify the genuine imam against the false one, the quality of his being endowed with the knowledge of everything, is clearly marked out in the Holy Quran, Sura Yasin, 36:12", which text reads as follows according to the English translation: "We shall surely raise the dead to life and We record what they did and the traces of their deeds that they have left behind." This *sura* has a two-fold meaning: first, the virtue of having a solid knowledge of the sacred Islamic sources; and second, the virtue of practicing the good deeds transmitted by that learning experience.

The next section treats how authenticity ('genuine Imam') and authority ('quality of knowledge') are employed to promote a sense of belonging to the Islamic sisterhood.

## 5.5 Digital *Umm*, mother, and virtual sisterhood

*Da'wa* ('issemiation') is the preferred way to spread the Islamic word, and dedication to it is one of the main female tasks online. As Umm G. says in a written Messenger conversation:

I use the internet all the time to search and to share information about *da'wa* or to watch what is going on in Syria and Palestine. I also use it to connect myself with the other sisters. We help each other to become better Muslim women. We all seek a deeper understanding of Islam and of how to engage in jihad and it is more comfortable to do it among 'sisters'.

The dissemination of jihadism online is at full speed among women as a permanent reminder of the individual duty to pursue *jihād fi sabīl-illāh* ('jihad in the path of God'). By using keywords such as *ghurabā'* ('strangers') or *kuffār* ('infidels'), they reinforce a clear separation between 'true Muslims' and the rest, whether they be 'weak' Muslims, the followers of other Islamic sects, or non-believers. By participating, a sister is immediately integrated into the process of virtual sisterhood, or becoming a digital *Umm*. The '*Umm* sisterhood' is a connection to all the 'mothers' of jihadism who aim at achieving Paradise together. "Imagine entering the gates of Jannah [paradise], hand in hand with those that you love. Yes, keep that in mind and continue to struggling [sic]" writes Umm M., after posting an image of a Muslim couple walking hand in hand.

The communications of the digital *Umm* are linked to the performance of religious rituals, the promotion of *adab* ('good Islamic manners'), and the exteriorization of affection and solidarity. Anna Piela (2012: 119) indicates that 'spiritual and emotional connection' are two key features for defining sisterhood. Even though the sisters are present online as a group, they also keep being individuals who have their own perceptions and experiences when it comes to letting these online narratives and practices structure their religious knowledge. The process called "individual rituality" (Heidbrink 2007: 177) is crucial for comprehending these religious manifestations online, and even more crucial for understanding the dynamic between offline-online-offline transfers of ritual activities (as will be seen below).

Another source of identification in the online sisterhood is the dress code. The sisters encourage each other to dress in allegedly Islamic clothing such as the *hijab*, the *niqāb*, or even the *burqa*. Indeed, to them a vital element of proper feminine religious behavior is the use of Islamic garments such as the *niqāb* and the *burqa* as the exterior symbol of pious Islamic practice. The sisters employ this in their profile picture on Facebook or as a part of the messages they convey via imagery. The imagery refers to transformations, and reflects the stages of ever-deeper radicalization of the 'sister'. For example, they might begin by choosing cute Islamic cartoons or female Disney characters dressed in Islamic clothes as their profile picture before they move on to displaying women who are brandishing weapons. The central message of the photos or cartoons is the beauty of modesty: "Sisters don't let your last day on earth be the first day you wore the *hijab*," said Umm F. to her female audience while reinforcing this principle of behavior with a set of photos of women wearing the *hijab*. The apocalypse narrative, the idea that the world is coming to an end and that therefore the Last Judgement is imminent, is an integral part of the 'Salafi-jihadi' discourse. Through the act of posting videos, images, photos, or text online, these women form a new community, a virtual sisterhood, and this includes a new shape of online agency in the domain of jihadism.

In their analysis of the work of the scholar Tariq Ramadan, Mohammad Hashas and Jan Jaap de Ruiter (2014: 159) point to the relationship between "secularism and the issue of women in Islam" to explain that cultural practices should be distinguished from Islamic practices. In the offline realm, the Islamic community has always set limits on the presence and performance of women in jihad-related conflicts, framing these limits as in accordance with the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and cultural discourses. In addition, women who have digital agency and a digital authority framed by a jihadist narrative, pay for their religious activism with real-life costs to their personal safety and security. The vulnerabilities and risks they experience online are transferred into the offline world. The i-virtue of the jihadist discourse deletes the innocence of the offline veil. Indeed, due to their typical Muslim attire they are directly identified and subject to public and official scrutiny, for instance by facing thorough airport security checks. Gaining ascendancy in the virtual

world as well as relevance in the real world has important social, religious, and cultural implications that first and foremost affect European Muslim women.

The following section discusses how female authority is performed online and how that performance turns into an effective jihadist recruitment tool.

## 5.6 Repeat after me, *ukhti*, my sister: On performing female authority

'Giving birth', and 'being a mother' are expressions that help define jihad from a feminine perspective, in the opinion of my informants. A recurrent theme on many jihadist websites is inciting women to promote the love of martyrdom in their children. Moreover, mothers are also encouraged to accept their girl's martyrdom. For example, informant Umm Z. wrote: "Mother do not be sad, Allah is with you! Prepare for my Janazah ['burial']!! I am coming to meet you as a Shaheeda ['female martyr']. Do not plan my wedding! As I chose my martyrdom day as my wedding day."

The performance of each female i-Imam follows a very personal style. According to Umm T., her most important task while using her own online *minbar*, Facebook, was persuading other women to convert to Islam: "The woman also can use the adequate opportunities to educate, guide and invite others [to the faith]." For some women, it is choosing and posting Quranic citations and/or parts of the *hadiths*. For others, it is spreading imagery and videos related to war scenes, jihadist fights, or just the visual symbols of jihadism (black banners, black horses, and swords, among others). Imagery plays a decisive role in the framing and legitimization of the jihadist narrative. Images convey messages without the need of translation, and often with a far more emotional impact than text. Arabic calligraphy and Islamic motifs are a constant presence in their online performance and narrative. The examples of Arabic calligraphy I collected during my research are usually in black and white, through the reproduction of small excerpts of the Quran. The Islamic motifs come from architectural details in symbolic mosques that have an important value in collective Muslim history. They represent ideological and political power, a strong past that is a reminder of the *umma's* glorious moments and achievements (Fighel 2007: 35). According to Jonathan Fighel (2007: 36), these visual elements are an important instrument of the indirect process of radicalization online:

The Islamic motifs, in a sophisticated manipulation, are embedded within propaganda; they can be easily recognized as legitimate Islamic historical symbols and factors that support a radicalized interpretation of Islam. The new radical motifs can easily gain legitimacy, as they appear to be authentic when they are used in proximity to widely accepted mainstream Islamic symbols and cultural references.

One interesting common denominator in the imagery of the sisters, shared through posting the same items over and over again, is that they are accompanied and justified by comments related to religious texts. Citations from the Quran are usually posted without historical or spatial context and without regard for their sequentially, i.e., without referring to the preceding or following verses. These disconnected citations are part of the strategy of framing Islamic knowledge in such a way that violent conceptions of jihad become acceptable (Awan, Hoskins, & O'Loughlin 2011: 27). Umm C., for example, wrote her name surrounded by bullets and two modified rifles, and posted the photo on her Facebook wall. Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin (2011: 28) argue that here we are in the presence of the "classical theory of cognitive dissonance which suggests that individuals seek out information confirming beliefs or behaviors while actively avoiding contrary information, in order to mitigate uncomfortable psychological tension."

The same happens with the citations of *hadiths*, narratives of the prophet Muhammad's words and deeds, which should obey the authoritative criteria of analysis determined by the *muḥaddithūn* ('scholars with great expertise in hadith') to evaluate the authenticity and the reliability of the hadiths. Umm B., who gradually acquired an online authority among the Facebook sisters, narrates for them the story of the best Muslim women in *da'wa*:

Umm Sulaim (one of the Prophet's companions) would teach her son Anas Ibn Malik about Islam, this she was doing knowing that her husband refuted Islam. [...] Her son Anas became a servant of the Prophet (*pbuh*). [...] If we speak in general terms we find women who had a very strong role in their sacrifice and service in the cause of Allah. Sumayyah was the first Muslim person to die for Islam. Khadija, the Prophet's first wife who was very rich, spent all her money supporting the *da'wa*.

This post is from 2013 and has been extensively shared and commented upon by the sisters. My informants firmly believe in the jihadist narrative, in the jihadist hero, and in the duty of doing *da'wa* for their spouses: "The work of the women in the field of *da'wa* is to give strength to the work of our men, and to expand it to areas where the efficiency of women is higher than the efficiency of men."

Likewise, *naṣā'ih* ('advice') on how to promote their husbands' ultimate sacrifice and to help others who are willing to become a *shahīd* ('martyr') are kindly spread throughout the feminine jihadist cyber sphere. Women give advice as a part of the *da'wa* process (Becker 2013), to transmit Islamic knowledge to the online sisters. The contents of the advice vary from regular daily life subjects (clothing, food, children, relationships) to the translation and interpretation of the Islamic textual sources. Translation is a vital step in the process of correctly transmitting any religious knowledge, as many of the women are not fluent in Arabic.

By translating and transliterating their comments, these women also broaden their audiences in number and diversify them in terms of both general education

and physical provenience. In the sisters who are capable of translating from Classical Arabic, the women recognize a direct religious and linguistic authority. This authority is further bestowed on them when they bring into play jihadist linguistic terminology, which is perceived as proof of their absolute adherence to the jihadist narrative and above all their command of the subject. Table 5.1 summarizes words belonging to the jihadist vocabulary, the themes to which these words refer, and examples taken from the women's posts on Facebook. The author has translated the examples from Spanish to English.

**Table 5.1** Jihadist linguistic terminology

| Categories   | Themes                             | Examples offered by informants   |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Jihād fi sabīl-illāh</i><br>(‘jihad for the sake of God’) | Legal justification of war         | “Guns are the shield of the Quran... the battles are for the sake of Allah and victory is close.”  |
| <i>Kuffār</i><br>(‘unbelievers’)                             | Enemies/Infidels                   | “Well, sure that the unbelievers are not all the same. Allah has divided them into 2 groups: the ignorant and the proud.”  |
| <i>Ghurabā’</i><br>(‘strangers’)                             | Selected Muslim role models        | “We ‘the strangers’ do not bow our heads for nothing except to Allah ... we are the soldiers of Allah, the way we travel is reserved just for us ... ‘God is great’, Allahu akbar.”                          |
| Caliphate  | Islamic State as interpreted by IS | “Allah ‘azza wa jalla’ (Mighty and Majestic He is) chooses whom He wishes to be part of this Khilafa Islamic revival...”   |
| Salafism   | Piety and Purity                   | “Whoever hates scholars of Salafiyya is innovative, misplaced and hypocritical.”   |
| Apocalyptic Discourse  | Last Judgement                     | “In that Day (Doomsday), the weight on the scale will say the truth. The ones whose actions will have weight, will be those who have succeeded.”   |
| <i>Hijra</i>   | Migration                          | “Those who believe, those who have completed the hijra and those who fight with their wealth and their lives in the cause of Allah have the highest rank with Allah ... and they are the victorious.”        |
| <i>Janna</i><br>(‘paradise’)                                 | Ultimate goal of Jihad             | “Oh martyr, what have you seen that made you smile? He sees his status in janna (paradise) before he dies.”  |
| <i>Mujāhidīn</i><br>(‘people engaging in jihad’)             | Heroism                            | “Bring up your children to be brave and courageous. Let your houses be places for lions and not for chicken farms in which your sons will be fed and then slaughtered by tyrants like if they were sheep...” |
| Female role in classic Islam                                 |                                    | “#WhoIsMuhammad pbuh? The man who stood up for women’s rights when the pagan Arabs were burying their daughters alive.”  |

Table 5.1 contains examples of jihadist narrative elements that stimulated long and pertinent threads of discussion among the informants. This illustrates the role of the leading female informants, who in the eyes of the audience have better Islamic arguments and answers. As such, the audience members trust their more educated sisters to teach them, smoothing the path to their assimilation into and understanding of the ritualization of jihad in the religious Islamic framework. Their acts and performances online respect the need for a temporal and spatial structure. For example, the online space is sacralized by the *niyya* ('right intention') that the performer should keep at all times and in all spaces if they are rightly and truly committed to act with respect and purity. The sisters constantly issue reminders of the relevance of their religious mission online, and of their need to be even more of a role model online than they are offline, since they define social media platforms as sacralized spaces. Similarly, in terms of respecting a temporal structure, the sisters follow a precise timetable. For example, every Friday before the regular sermon they remind the rest of the online community of the need to pray special *suras*.

Still, the authority established online by these women has a limited reach, as female i-authority appears valid only in the virtual world. In the offline world, female authority is graded down. Women may have a determinant role in the task of mobilization and recruitment online, but the arrangements for travelling to and settling in Syria are confided in a network of men, as notified through a public male Facebook profile: "*A salamou aleykum*, the brothers that want to do the *hijra* send me a message, and for those who are sisters, my wife will take charge of you." An additional fact that differentiates female authority and indicates that it is mostly only part of the virtual world is, for example, the question of using guns and women's physical and direct participation in the frontline of the war. Upon their arrival in Syria, women have commented on their personal Facebook pages that they receive small caliber guns, while the modified assault rifles are reserved only for men. Clearly, physical jihadist combat is, in the majority of cases, thought to be a male task.

## **5.7 Umm got married: Female authority and the jihadist recruitment**

The perfect woman, the one that can be considered a female i-Imam, is, these days, the one who performs the *hijra*, supports her husband by cooking, raising jihad-loving children (Von Knop 2007: 410), and posting all of her jihadist *i-Khutbas* daily on Facebook. Their endeavor is to perform rituals in a pure way, transmit the right knowledge, be authentic when selecting the sources, and be modest in behavior. "Good homes are built on the pious wife. Therefore, it is obligatory for a Muslim to choose pious wife" posted Umm H., quoting the *fatwa* 'Advice to Muslim Women' of the Saudi preacher Shaykh al-Fawzan (b. 1933). Al-Fawzan publishes his work on websites like <https://salaf-us-saalih.com> and [www.fatwa-online.com](http://www.fatwa-online.com), and the women focused in this case study prefer his religious guidance.



Women depart for the caliphate of Islamic State in search of a jihadist authority position in the fight for Allah, and of a role of power in concord with their newfound online voice. After arrival, they again connect to the online world so that they can share their narratives of life in Syria. The other sisters are willing to listen, learn, and ask questions about the living conditions in Syria, and they urge those who are already there to fill them in on all sort of details – from the mundane to the theological justifications of jihad. Historically, the idea of combining *hijra* ('emigration') with *da'wa* ('proselytism') and jihad is a tradition stemming from the prophetic times (Perešin & Cervone 2015: 495).

The lives of the 'sisters' in Syria are described as happy and pious, just like in the time of the prophet Muhammad, as they constantly reassure the sisters online. Umm X. – 'Got married' is the most frequent Facebook status of the sisters, and they try to illustrate how pleasant their lives are in the Sham (Syria) by posting photos that confirm this state of alleged happiness.

## 5.8 Conclusion

Female i-Imams that support the jihadist narrative in general and the ideology of the Islamic State in particular encounter an effective online space in which they can perform their religious authority and convince other women to enter jihadist recruitment networks. In that sense, the jihadist narrative has the elements and motivational factors to encourage individual participation in the jihadist fight. Islamic online female authority is anchored in online Islamic female agency, i.e., the practice of taking independent action online and the goal of being recognized as a leading religious individual, as a female i-Imam.

However, this online female authority is contested. As one Moroccan female religious scholar living in Catalonia (I have chosen not to reveal her name or location out of safety considerations) explained to me in an interview, these individuals speak for themselves and should not be trusted by their audience. In her opinion, 'wise Imams' should have the exclusive right to issue *fatwas* about what is authentic jihad, and should condemn all forms of violence. Spanish mosques are controlled by the security and police forces, so the imams issue politically correct *khutbas* and coordinate statements that openly condemn jihadist discourses and activities. However, as mentioned before, this kind of *khutba* deals with the youth audience that is 'at risk', in terms of its language and contents. These *khutbas* are not in tune with daily face-to-face communication, and more needs to be done in terms of socio-economic and political measures to prevent the grievances that ultimately degenerate into engagement with extremist Islamic narratives. It is exactly this void that is being filled by jihadist sermons.

The vulnerabilities and risks associated with female online agency represent for these women not an obstacle, but a concrete sign of their increasing power, authority, and value within the digital Islamic community. They feel they are on the right

path to Allah, *fi sabīl-illāh* ('on the path of God'), whether in the virtual world and/or on territory controlled by Islamic State. They are no longer innocent, passive religious subjects; now they are the ones endowed with religious authority, transmitting their message through an online *minbar*, or platform of communication. Through their online performance, the young Spanish-speaking Muslim women shape a form of religious authority that is framed by the jihadist narrative and results in effective jihadist recruitment.



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## CHAPTER 6

# 'Kids in the green lands of the Khilafat' – A Tumblr case study of imagery within the Jihad 3.0 narrative<sup>37</sup>

### Abstract

Caricatures of the Islamic faith are at the epicenter of the most recent case of violence associated with Muslim believers who claim to be part of the Global Jihad Front. There was never a more opportune moment to study the impact of images upon the jihadist phenomenon and how they shape new identities and new communities.

The present chapter will approach the crucial role of imagery in the framing of the jihadist discourse online. Moreover, and due to its emotional value and global language, visual material is becoming the preferred online ritualistic performance to recruit children to the Khilafat's army. The research will be conducted online having Tumblr contents representing the case study: "So apparently my blog was used as an example of 'ISIS media' for some stupid think tank presentation by some pea-brained conservative dunderheads in America. i'm not in IS but thanks for the free advertising i guess."

### 6.1 Introduction

ISIS, also denominated as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), is an association of dissidents from the jihadist fighting group Al-Nusra (both linked to Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria), they are as so a Sunni Islamic group. Its jihadist fighters are engaged into a military campaign to take over the territorial space corresponding to Iraq and Syria. In the summer of 2014, they declared to have instituted a 'Khilafat' or Caliphate.

According to Jessica Stern (2014: 1) their objective is to set a "Sharia based state throughout the region." Joas Wagemakers (2015: 33) argues that the acquisition of territory and the declaration of state's edification set ISIS apart from other jihadist

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<sup>37</sup> Adapted from the published article: Carvalho, C. (2017). 'Kids in the green lands of the Khilafat' – A Tumblr case study of imagery within the Jihad 3.0 narrative. In M. Kayıkcı & L. d'Haenens (eds.) *European Muslims and New Media*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 91-112.

groups. Furthermore, the Dutch expert adds that the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has managed to gather the religious conditions to be considered a caliph, an Islamic ruler: "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had been vetted by a group of scholars described as the *ahl al-hall wa-l-aqd*,<sup>38</sup> was found by them to be a pious Muslim ruler who fit all the criteria set for a caliph and was therefore worthy of believers' *baya*.<sup>39</sup>"

Thomas Hegghammer (2014) in his turn, considers the acts of ISIS, namely the cyber acts of ideological propaganda as deliberated, premeditated acts, he nominates it as 'Calculated Caliphate':

ISIS is not an isolated sect, but a tech-savvy bureaucracy that monitors enemy Twitter accounts and consumes academic literature (in fact, they will probably read this very article). They must have known the lay of the ideological land. We should therefore not dismiss the move as ideological excess, but rather assume it was based on a careful calculus.

The selection of themes that compose the *fatwas* issued by ISIS affiliated scholars maybe a response to the problems affecting the jihadist group (Bunzel 2015a). Indeed, the *fatwa* No. 46, dated from December 17, 2014 reads as follows below:

Q.: Is it permissible for the wives of martyrs to leave with their children for the lands of unbelief?

A.: No. It is prohibited for them, and for anyone else, to leave for and reside in the lands of unbelief. Whoso migrates from the Abode of Islam to the Abode of Unbelief has committed a great sin (*ithm 'azim*), shirking the duty to emigrate to the Abode of Islam. If a woman insists on leaving for the Abode of Unbelief with the son of a *mujahid*, she should be punished (*tu'azzar*) as a deterrent and preventive measure.

The problem is the retirement and the abandonment of many of the ISIS members or in the words of terrorism expert, J.M. Berger (2014), "(...) it's starting to look like that time ISIS threw a Caliphate party and nobody came." The lack of jihadist fighters (both local and foreign fighters) in part, due to the difficulties posed by International Security to let Western individuals to migrate to Syria, the territorial advance by the coalition forces (now trying to get back Tikrit and with plans to move to Mosul) the lack of local support, the intensification of American aerial intervention, the lack of relevant victories, or even the absence of public appearances by ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi configure the current state of the Caliphate. Furthermore, these

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<sup>38</sup> In accordance to the author's personal translation, "the people who loosen and bind" (Wagemakers 2015: 33).

<sup>39</sup> Personal oath of loyalty.

facts may present a plausible explanation to the change of hearts of the online jihadist campaign, now aiming at children.

And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference. (Qu'ran, verse (17:70) of chapter 17, surat I-isra, The Night Journey)

## 6.2 Bringing my online research toolkit to Tumblr

Christine Hine (2013), one of the first authors to construct virtual ethnography as a valid form of social science method and to develop a scientific approach to the field defends that "(...) the ethnographer's toolkit changes with every new setting."

My starting field of research to this study was Facebook (yes, Facebook not Tumblr) where I had a network of circa 60 informants (mostly women), plus participation in closed groups. Through a snowball method, I had a very interesting ensemble of individuals who were or directly engaged in online jihadist activities or directly engaged in jihadist counter-narratives. A restricted number of those individuals were in the frontline of the Syrian war and another restricted number was about to departure to Syria. Censorship on Facebook distinguishes no user and as so one afternoon I received the message that my account had been blocked because I was supporting, promoting and liking people and violent contents that were against Facebook policies. Therefore, these events diverted my research fieldwork to Tumblr. Why Tumblr? I had already been alerted to it by an Asian female informant who was also tired of constantly needing to open new accounts on Facebook after her account being cancelled due to reasons similar to mine. I welcomed the challenge of exploring a new social media space and built a new network that would allow me to do virtual ethnographic work this time around observing imagery as a manifestation of jihadism online.

Tumblr is an excellent medium for those who seek to establish an online presence through images. The media contents are here easy and fast to share and reblog, guaranteeing consequently that the online narrative is continuously being spread out in the cyberspace. These features suit well the objectives of the online jihadist strategy, keeping its discourse updated, appealing and accessible to all types of audiences.

As a short-form of blogging. Tumblr lets its users post texts, videos and even music and communicate with other users privately and publicly via messages. By consulting Tumblr's Community Guidelines the users find the same type of limitations as they would find on Facebook, namely the prohibition to incite hate-speeches, violent contents among other forbidden posts. Jihadist related contents are for this matter also considered banned online material, yet they circulate fairly at ease on Tumblr, even the graphic images of decapitations and other grueling



events. In actual fact, censorship in this medium seems to be less effective and slower than on Facebook were censors detect more, better and faster any of these non-accepted contents.

My network on Tumblr started with the same system that I had previously employed to do virtual fieldwork on Facebook, snowball method, choosing users whose profile picture indicated a relationship to jihadism (flags, black banners, weapons, lions), or lately, the choice of name (usually a '*kunya*', or name of war). From these 'start nodes' I reach to a network of users who blog in a qualitative (relevant and related jihadist contents), consistent (guiding principle and theme are jihadism) and frequent manner (daily).

In this chapter, I will analyze the jihadist images elements and visual symbols that are being employed to justify under religious Islamic terms the transformation of children into jihadist fighters. Additionally, I will also reflect on how the jihadist discourse rationalizes through images the militarized role of the kids of the Khilafat.

### 6.3 Exploratory data analysis: The importance of imagery

The Tumblr mechanisms available to develop a network are easy, and immediate, one truly just needs to click at the 'follow' link to be able to follow a blog. Since February 2015, I have been following 12 blogs and collecting images with the correspondent #hashtag (metadata tag, an online symbol to brand a concept, expression) of 'Jihad', 'Jihadism', 'Caliphate', 'Khilafat', 'Ak47', 'children', 'cubs'. My filter of selection has these themes as the core of the media jihadist campaign to legitimate the (ab)use of children into the Syrian jihadist conflict. In a month, I have gathered a collection of 70 images that project in a clear, effective manner the answer to my research questions.

Is jihadist imagery changing the themes of its contents in order to achieve a new online dimension of their online media strategy? Is this change going to justify the militarization of children in the Caliphate among their online audience? How do online users make sense of a kid in military clothes aiming a gun at a prisoner? Or more interesting what sense do online users make of the blessed daily life in the Khilafat?

I have conducted extensive research in all the 12 blogs to study their 'old posts', prior to 6 months ago (September 2014) there were no textual references, visual or media contents indicating the personification of children as real jihadist fighters in the terrorist frame of reference.

After the extraction of the data, I have proceeded with their codification to better identify the phenomena of both online jihadism and the militarization of children in the Caliphate. I have come to conclude that I had two sets of concepts that I can better explain by using Grounded Theory designation: 'definitive concepts' and 'sensitizing concepts'. 'Definitive concepts' are all the ones that already have an estab-

lished, transparent definition whereas 'sensitizing concepts' are yet to be clearly defined and can be better grasped through imagery, for example. I consider for that reason, concepts such as 'online jihadism', 'jihadist discourse online' as 'definitive'. While analyzing the social and religious role of the children that are draft by ISIS, I cannot attribute them theorizing concepts such as 'jihadist boy/girl', 'radical Islamic children', 'fundamentalist children', as a result they are 'sensitizing'. Hence, the reason why I am using images to study the relationship between online jihadist narrative and the function of children in the Syrian jihadist military training and operations.

## 6.4 Wiring Syria with the Jihad 3.0

At this moment, two major factors affect the quality and continuity of cyber communications in Syria: state control and the devastating physical effects of the war in the territory.

The Syrian telecommunication system is underdeveloped, insufficient and under state control. The regime has a strict surveillance as well as a strict censorship over all information channels, a task that is achieved through filtering, phishing, monitoring and social engineering (Freedomhouse 2014: 2). In the early spring of 2011, the eruption of the civil conflict caused severe setbacks and disruptions on the internet and telecommunications networks. Overcoming their telecommunications limitations has been made possible by virtue of digital devices such as VPN, Tor, BitTorrents (Chaabane et al. 2014: 1).

Nevertheless, these difficult circumstances, the number of users has grown up to 5.3% of the population (Internet World Stats 2014), a significant percentage that gains even more relevance if we measure the amount of information under the form of videos, texts, images that are sent daily from Syria. One may conclude that the internet users located in the country are efficient, effective and diligent keeping a steady stream of newsfeed flowing in the cyber space.

In a news piece of the *New York Times* (2014), ISIS is named 'online jihad 3.0' due to its fast and vast dissemination online through accounts on all major social media platforms, Twitter, JustPaste, SoundCloud, Instagram or WhatsApp. Besides the maximization of the cyber ways, ISIS has also been prolific in creating tailor-made contents alluring specific groups according to their geographical origin, language, age, gender and mainstream pop cultural references. Counter actions engaged by governments, security and defense agencies or even most recently by the Anonymous (international and informal congregation of hacktivists) have not been able to slow down the online Jihad 3.0. Their success resides in its resilience to keep on opening new accounts on the diverse social media channels every time they get blocked or cancelled, their ability to adapt to the constant transformations of the cyber space and to refresh their design and semiotic productions (making them more appealing and compelling to the targeted audiences).

ISIS has been exploiting as well the online search effectuated by Muslims (and even non-Muslims) to obtain Islamic knowledge. Salafists, radical Islamists, jihadists, moderate Muslims despite their religious doctrinal differences, they all attribute the internet with this education and cognitive function. Internet blog formats such as the one of Tumblr allow its users to post texts (although there is a limit per day on how many posts an user can blog), either in their pure written form (never too long), as GIFs (Graphic Interchange Format), or as a shared image and/or content with a written citation. These new online functions, spaces and tools are part of the 'new media ecology' and together they bring improvement to the development and acquisition of Islamic knowledge (Sisler 2011: 1136). At the same time, the new online infrastructures of communication bring more emphasis to the exchanges between the participants of the online communication process: producer of the message, transmitter, channel, receiver and destination. Online ritualization of violence through visual codes is the communication exchange that this study is focusing on, as an aesthetic manifestation of religious performance. The manifestation through online visual artifacts (videos, images, photos) expresses the emotional side of the jihadist phenomena and drawing on Benjamin Ducol theory (2012: 97) on how feelings affect the engagement in violence and terrorist activities, we need to integrate the psychological state of mind of jihadists as the critical focal point of the radicalization analysis. In the optic of Frazer Egerton (2011: 98) the emotional engagement with jihadism and terrorism "is enabled and encouraged by images."

On that matter, it is relevant to analyze the online posts placed on social media platforms by the individuals that perform the *hijra* ('migration') to Syria or Iraq. In fact, their first task after arriving at the 'Caliphate' is to enter the first available cybercafé and start posting online about their new life's status. The digital narratives are filled with pleasant emotions, the beautiful scenery, the piety and purity of the Islamic behaviors, the constant celebration of weddings (and correspondent changing of online status) or even photos of the 'brothers' leaving to the war zones. Additionally online jihadists focus their narratives on the dark side of emotions, hence exploiting fear, angst or even abhorrence as an indoctrination strategy, in the words of Fawaz Gerges (2014: 342):

Young recruits do not abhor its brutality; on the contrary, its shock-and-awe methods against the enemies of Islam are what attracts Muslims living in Western countries join ISIS and other extremist groups because they want to be part of a tight-knit community with a potent identity. ISIS's vision of resurrecting an idealized caliphate gives them the sense of serving a sacred mission.

In fact, watching, sharing or simply clicking at the 'like' button when these images/videos appear on their Tumblr dashboard brings the participants the feeling of belonging to a community, believing in the same principles and more importantly of being virtually engaged in religious violent performance.

In sum, beautiful landscapes where the tones of green are enhanced, jihadist fighters relaxing, even taking happy 'selfies' (self-portraits) are a graphic composition attempting to demonstrate that albeit the war operations, they have achieved to upgrade their level of jihadist organization into a Caliphate.

## 6.5 Jihadism is always greener in the Khilafat

Internet did not create religious violence not even jihadism but it surely gave these two entwined phenomena a steady, speedy stream to shape, share and spread their message. The features of the internet as mean of communication are what Marshall McLuhan (1964) was referring to in his renowned work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, when he affirms, "The medium is the message." In terms of communicative skills, Tumblr is a short-form of blogging oriented to the visual domain where images are the new online preferred language. And the message via the cyber channels is transmitted repeatedly, globally and immediately, especially in what comes to images. All social media platforms allow the posting of images, starting by the profile image of the user, and above all allow the dissemination of those images through their own features: like, share, comment, tweet, retweet, reblog, just to mention a few.

Back to Tumblr. While at the beginning of the jihadist enterprise in Syria most of the images posted online were self-made, amateur photos (many times blurred, not cantered, and with weak compositions) of food, fighters and flags (new territories were officially belonging to ISIS when the black jihadist banner was settled there), nowadays significant images of key events pertaining to the jihadist fight, are retouched, added filters and visual effects in order to convey its message in a more impressive style. At naked eye, they seem to be professional products accomplished by image/media/design experts. For that matter, a good example is the Tumblr account of the Dutch jihadist, Omar Yilmaz whose images are very expressive and the touches of color add a new layer of interpretation to his radical message.

Another good example of the ISIS sophisticated media campaign has its spotlight at the killing of an ISIS prisoner by the hand of a young boy. The first image to hit Tumblr (and then repeatedly posted through several users) had a young boy (considered to be by the written press a French native) standing up with a gun on his hands and pointing it to a Palestinian individual, sitting on his knees, in the presence of other jihadist fighters (one of them believed to be the brother of the French terrorist, Mohamed Merah who in March 2012 gunned down 7 people and hurt other 5 before being killed by a French police sniper).

Since then everyday new visual forms containing the young boy in his military clothes were posted and every time they had a more elaborated, enriched design, glossy techniques and color emphasis. The photo was directed to the Arabic speaking audience as Arabic was the only used written language in contrast to the norm,

since the majority of the photos/images posted online have English text and/or English translation.

The constant repetition and circulation of these images is the strength of the jihadist single narrative as proposed by Alex Schmid (2010: 46-57). Here, two concepts come across and interact with each other: ritualization and 'semiotics resources' (Van Leeuwen 2005: 3). By ritualization I mean, the integration of ritual performance with new communication technologies whereas by semiotic resources I refer to the definition presented by Van Leeuwen: "(...) as the actions and artefacts we use to communicate, (...) or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software (...)." The ritualization of a 'semiotic resource' inducing into a state of acceptance of violence as an integral, obligatory component of jihad here placed under the category of Islamic ritual. An Islamic ritual that due to its ritualistic innovations combined with its high tech affordances can be performed with equal validity both online and offline.

Online jihad activities include the promotion and dissemination of radical Islamic discourses, narratives and any other media material that legitimize and justify the offline performance of religious violence under the scope of jihad (Peters 1979, 1996) as a mandatory and individual ritual ('*fard al Ayn*') to all Muslims.

To provide a better understanding of the online jihadist narrative we can observe a photo placed on Tumblr that assembles its necessary components: extremism, jihad as an individual militarized duty, religious text and manipulation of the image. So we have a young man dressed in military clothes carrying an ammunition belt, a knife around his leg and a gun while standing next to the black flag against a green background.

Once again, the production of the photo is calculated, the camouflage suit giving a more lawful war perspective, the jihadist colors: black for fight, white for knowledge and green for paradise. It is also interesting to note that these fighters follow (with or without awareness of it) the recommendations of the Brazilian guerrilla author, Carlos Marighella<sup>40</sup> (1969: 85) when in his mini-manual on how to engage successfully on guerrilla warfare he advises the combatants to always carry light arms due to its easy transport, use, and facilitation of movements. The photo has the below quote:

The #Syria'n revolution has turned boys into men, men into lions and lions into martyrs, Oh Allah we ask of You that you grant us martyrdom like you granted the sincere Mujahideen in Syria martyrdom! Oh Allah accept from us our good deeds and multiply them and destroy for us our bad deeds and forgive us.

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<sup>40</sup> The references to guerrilla leaders are becoming more frequent among online jihadists as we may read in the following example retrieved from a Tumblr user: "Umm Kirin is, in theory, the Subcommander Marcos of modern-day jihad. What she is... easy to understand. What she stands for... a lot more complicated."

Visual material as simple as this causes a direct effect in the mind of the jihadist audience creating an online social connection between individuals who accept the jihadist principles and through these shared signs, codes and symbols they proceed with the establishment of online 'religious' communities (Bunt 2000; Campbell 2004; Anderson 2013). Stories of the jihadist fights and fighters are the other component of the edification of the online identity and furthermore of the online community. Also known as myths in the ritual theory, the stories forge an online jihadist 'collective memory', (to borrow the concept of Maurice Halbwachs 1925) based on narratives they assimilate as pure, pious and with similarities to the historical and sacred narratives of the Prophet Muhammad.

In consonance with the categorization of myths linked to online jihadism narrative developed by Philipp Holtmann (2013: 19), there are the 'community myth' (belonging), the 'conspiracy myth' (otherness) and the 'salvation myth' (redemption and recompense).

The community myth is what reinforces the sense of identity, namely group identity versus the sense of alterity, the other. In Islam the discussion between identity (Muslim) and otherness (non-Muslim) has been present since the Qur'anic times and it is even present in the semantic Qur'anic readings (Duderija 2010: 75-93), until the modern times (Daniel 1993; Said 1997; Cesari 2004; Esposito 2010; Volpi 2011). The third element defining identity in Islam is the dialectic relationship between believer (*iman*) and unbeliever (*kufir*) associated with idea of excommunication (*takfir*) from Islam (Kepel 1985: 19; Wiktorowicz 2001: 27; Wagemakers 2012a: 150).

## 6.6 'The world have [sic] only 2 religions today, jihadi and non-jihadi'

In jihadist culture, the concept of alterity encloses all enemies of their ideological principles, therefore these enemies range from Muslims who refuse them as innovation, Shias, Israelis, and Westerners. Looking deeper into the jihadist ideology (Armstrong 1988; Al-Qaradawi 1998; Cook 2005b; Lawrence 2005) and taking into account its Salafist roots (Brachman 2009; Meijer 2010; Wagemakers 2012), we can see that the internal debate on *kufir*, *iman* and *takfir* between the different Salafi branches of thought is far from being consensual.

Never argue with conspiracy theorists. They have never met Mujahideen or have become part of jihad but they spend time watching millions of documentaries and have convictions developed through such crap. Sometimes they will tell you that Mujahideen are funded by CIA and Israel and when the same people fight against Mujahideen and kill hundreds of their leaders and bomb their soldiers then they underestimate and try to confuse you like they themselves are. Our measuring device is Emaan, we will judge them by Shariah law and see them in the light of Islam, not in the manmade opinions of Kuffar and apostates who are misguided from the beginning.

The quote above leads us directly to the second myth, conspiracy myth, an important part of the motivation for the group's cohesion is of course the external common enemy. As Konrad Lorenz (1963: 183) defined it: "Discriminative aggression towards strangers and the bond between the members of a group enhance each other." The opposition of 'we' and 'they' can unite some widely contrasting unities.

On Tumblr and coinciding with the interview of the British jihadist better known by the press as Jihadi John a counter strategy was launched with the posting of memes (mimicked situations, people through images) filled with humor. Jihadi John in his black clothes brandishing his knife to cut a watermelon, to carve kebab meat, directing it to a dinosaur or a Christmas tree, all attempts of character assassination, in order to reinforce the theories of conspiracy that defend the idea that these execution videos are a mere American media campaign to undermine Islam.

Children are also employed in the imagery of the conspiracy myth, usually in the condition of fragile victims, or even more frequently in their condition of orphans whose fathers were murdered by the enemy.

In what appears to be a child's drawing, we see two representations of female Muslims dressed in pink *hijab* (one of them looking like a child) looking at a man hanged to a red rope. Under the picture, one can read the following citation: "This picture was drawn by the daughter of an Iranian Sunni Muslim who was hanged this week after an unfair trial by Shite government. Note: Iran executed 6 Sunni scholars this week."

Last, the myth of salvation that will lead to triumph (Gerges 2014: 342) and to the compensation of all the good deeds and personal sacrifices made by the individuals in order to achieve the very last degree of reward in the afterlife, Paradise. "I've been moving around a lot these days he told his mother. Stop getting tired and moving around she said, come back home and relax she said. In jihad we're like travelers he said, in Paradise we'll finally be home and relax he said."

Paradise, in Islamic thought is represented by green gardens of abundance, an image that is frequently reproduced by jihadist bloggers when posting photos of the Caliphate. They employ for that purpose all available filters and color manipulation tools to make the photos of the regional landscape look greener than it is in reality.

## 6.7 Khilafat kids

The new social media trend on accounts affiliated with ISIS and jihadism are children. Images and videos of young male individuals dressed in military uniforms and/or with black banners in their foreheads can be spotted all over Tumblr. The increase use of these images is equivalent to the increase number of children being recruited to join the jihadist fight in Syria and in Iraq. They serve both the purpose of propaganda to attract more fighters and also more families into the war effort.

Mujahideen teaching the kids in Syria, all of them were given Ak-47 to fire some shots after giving tips on how to use it in a correct manner. Now this is true empowerment.... Where are the feminists? Allahumma Barik lahum' I'm sure that these kids have the strength of lions!!

The above excerpt was posted alongside a collection of 3 photos having as common (and quite striking) feature, the presence of young girls dressed completely in black, carrying guns in the company of older men and three boys. It was striking because I had not until that point encountered a photo of young girls who are receiving weaponry training. Evaluating from the photos and correspondent comments violence associated with jihadist fight has absolute religious legitimacy and offers sense of empowerment (Nauta 2013: 137-138) to those who defend it, even if its performance is confided to little girls. 'Maybe we live and maybe we die' is the title of the report done in 2014, by the Human Rights Watch organization and it documents the life of 25 children who are/were related to the jihadist fight in Syria. The authors substantiate the participation of children as young as or even younger than 13 years old in the conflict (Human Rights Watch 2014: 21). Moreover, they corroborate that not only ISIS but also other jihadist groups combating in the region violently draft children preparing them to the war with full military training (2014: 2). They have advanced as well the possible motives (2014: 2) why these children accept to join the jihadist fight, varying from close connections (family and friends) who are already part of these jihadist group, to the inexistence of schools, participation in manifestations or personal reasons against the government. To which I also add the religious belief that ISIS represents the true Khilafat.

I"Q: Why do you believe isis [sic] is a true caliphate? There is not one scholar on this earth who supports them. Scholars are people of logic so they know if a caliphate is established correctly. IS leader doesn't meet any of the conditions for a caliph.

A: Because it's a caliphate... The prophet mohammad [sic] (PBUH) said: {Islam began as something strange and will revert to being strange as it began, so give glad tidings to the strangers.} If everyone support this caliphate so where is strange or the strangers?? Think about it..."

#Childrenatwar (label for children at war) became a hashtag that has evolved from images of physical suffering, psychological abuse, relocation to refugee camps, (where they are represented as the passive subjects, victims) into a direct, active role in the military trainings and operations. The militarization of children in the cyberspace is the result of the historical development of the media use of children during war periods (Mosse 1990; Marten 2002). ISIS virtual campaign to recruit children recurs to the virtuous ideas of hero, sacrifice, rite of emancipation into manhood. In terms of images, I have rarely encountered photos that portrait war as a game or an



adventure, children often have serious, focus facial expressions as if they are fully committed to their military duty.

"He wishes. I will be the one who slaughters you, O kuffar. I will be a mujahid, insha'allah." First photo, a beautiful young boy, somewhat with Asian traces and with medium-long straight black hair dressed in camouflage garments. Second photo, the same boy with a dark sweater and camouflage pants holds a gun at a short distance from a man who seems to be on his knees, with his back to the boy.

"ISIS made his wish come true." Last photo, the boy smiling and raising his right arm. Together the sentences and the set of three photos resemble to a marketing poster template or an almost positive advertising campaign of values of purity, honor and pride (Combating Terrorism Center 2006: 90). They represent the new set of individuals, the #cubs who will be in charge of defending Islam and carrying on with the jihad fight. If it is a child's duty to perform violent jihad than it is also at the same time evoking the Muslim father's 'sense of pride, honor, and paternal responsibility' (Combating Terrorism Center 2006: 90).

"A brother from Maghreb' fulfilling the duties of jihad with his five sons. Allahumma Barik lahum." In this photo, we see a man with beard, military clothes and weaponry surrounded by five young males also with military clothes and weapons with smiling faces and victory gestures. Green is the predominant color, from the clothes to the landscape, ending with the green hearts that appear in the citation text.

One of the last attempts in both of these directions are the photos released from a fairground named Dijla City, located north of Mosul (Iraq). "Families in #Mosul enjoy spring picnics in the Islamic State#caliphate#Nineveh. People say they feel comfortable and safe under the rule of #IS..." The first photo on the stream is of the entrance of the park, a colorful construction welcoming visitors to a safe and secure amusement space. More pictures of the site portrait a happy, safe land with children playing around, the pictures are hashtagged with the words such as: #isis, #isil, #islamic state, #caliphate, #islam, #land, #happy, #children, #jihad. I would like to give focus to the three that relate the most to this study: islam, children and jihad. So, despite the fact that we are watching what seem to be free war zones, still they are being coded under the title jihad and furthermore they pair children and jihad.

The photo stream is completed with a link to a video entitled: 'Excursions flock to the state of Nineveh.' In the video, at one point the journalist is interviewing a child calling him dear while in the back another young boy raises his finger up, the known Islamic gesture symbolizing the unicity of God (*tawhid*). However, and watching the segment more in detail, we can spot behind the children, a man wearing a color green uniform and a gun on his shoulder.

The message obtained in every single interview throughout the video is the same: In the Islamic State life is ideal and all its citizens respect the will and the law of God even if that means that the kids of the Khilafat are soldier material.

A Tumblr user posted two photos of the young Jake Bilardi, an Australian jihadist fighter, 18 years old whom she calls a 'man' and who had just been killed in a suicide operation with the text below:

May Allah accept our dear brother Abdu-Rahīm. For indeed this ummah needs true men like him who wish to sacrifice this worldly life for the hereafter. Brothers & sisters, this brother originated from an atheist family & ended up selling his soul to Allah for a cheap price, to defend this ummah & give victory to this religion, while you sit at home at the comfort of your family born into Islam & not doing anything to stop this oppression, what is the matter with you?

## 6.8 Conclusion

The leading conclusions of the present study, namely the amount of relevant imagery contents supporting the role of children as actual jihadist fighters in the territorial area corresponding to the borders of the Caliphate point out to a new dimension of the online jihadist strategy. A visual dimension that enhances the qualities of the life under the domination of the ISIS rule to the extent that this wellbeing justifies being paid off with martyrdom and the sacrifice of human beings. The novelty of this dimension is that violent contents are not at the core center of the online jihadist narrative, regular life snapshots such as eating candy, going to an attraction park are now the normal online jihadist messages. This new and differentiated online performance is even more threatening than the ritualization of religious violence as it becomes more alluring, easier to disseminate and to accept as a standardized behavior.

Albeit the online jihadist media effort to picture life in the Caliphate as peaceful, abundant and with greener grass, the truth is that the picture is wrong.

As a researcher dedicated to online jihadism, I have to keep the sharp ability of separating these two forms of radical indoctrination as two proportioned forces that concur to the online rationalization of violent performances and terrorism. Will ISIS media continue to shape not only the online reality but also the offline existence? On that note, I finish this study by quoting Jan Jaap de Ruiter (2014: 3):

It will be clear that education as advocated by ISIL will be destructive for young people and will at the same time succeed in brainwashing at least part of them into warriors that will stop at nothing to realize the (fundamentalist) ideals instilled in them at school.



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## CHAPTER 7

# The hidden women of the Caliphate – A glimpse into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network on Facebook<sup>41</sup>

### Abstract

As terrorists increasingly utilize and rely on the internet for the purpose of communication, information, propaganda, recruitment and fund-raising a new trend has emerged in terrorism studies focusing on the collective online activities of jihadist groups. While some case studies included particular webpages and Twitter, barely any research was conducted on the jihadist online activities on Facebook. That is surprising since online ties on Facebook, compared to other social networking sites, usually represent real-life relationships. Users primarily seek for social information, engage and befriend with offline friends rather than total strangers. Taking the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network (SMJN) as a case study, the paper explores the role of women as online recruiters as well as the homeland-diaspora relationship within the network. Considering the collective nature of terrorism, we hereby apply the concept of social capital as an innovative approach in terrorism studies. Although it is meanwhile well known that women have a role as online recruiters within the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network and that these women have direct online contact with leading elements of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) there is neither a sampling frame of the female jihadist recruiters nor a social network analysis of the jihadist network that they belong to. By the combined use of snowball sampling applied to Facebook and offline target sampling we have now a clear visualization, providing a glimpse into the SMJN, of its key figures and of their connections to individuals linked to the terror networks responsible for the attacks in Paris 2015 and Brussels 2016. Through a mixed methods approach including social network and content analysis the article offers an empirical base to think further about the importance of the SMJN within the Global Jihad and opens new scientific avenues to explore the explanatory potential of social capital to understand the underlying patterns of jihadist fighters' online and offline bonding. That is why we find it relevant to merge the themes, gender jihad, the Islamic interpretation of jihad and social network analysis to better grasp the 'hidden women' within the jihadist networks.

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<sup>41</sup> Adapted from the article: Carvalho, C. & Saal, J. (Forthcoming), The hidden women of the Caliphate – A glimpse into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network on Facebook.

## 7.1 Introduction

The first Spanish-speaking woman who officially migrated to Syria was Tomasa Perez in 2014, together with her youngest children (the oldest ones, 19 and 18 years old, had already travelled to Syria and she had made previous plans to give her only daughter to an ISIS fighter). Tomasa married Abdel Ahram (Abu Yasin el Andalusi), born in Tetouan (Morocco) and arrested in 2010 for being a member of a jihadist cell. Tomasa decided to become a *muhajira* ('migrant') at the end of 2014 taking her elder sons along with her from Morocco to Syria. Asia Ahmed Mohamed, followed the same itinerary as Tomasa, only she became a mother (March 2015) already after being a *muhajira* in Syria (June 2014). Born in Ceuta (Spain), she travelled to Syria with Mohamed Hamdouch (Kokito Castillejos), a Moroccan-born ISIS fighter who defended the '*takfir*' (Sageman 2004: 28) ideology. More recently, an arrested jihadist mother of Moroccan origins living in Catalonia added an interesting twist to the study of gendered jihad, by becoming both a *mujahida* ('fighter') and *muhajira*. She took upon herself the responsibility of the process of mobilization and subsequent radicalization of her remaining twin sons. In fact, the Atanji twins were the brothers of Yassin Atanji, a *mujahid* (male fighter engaged in jihad) killed in 2014 in the Syrian battlefield. The twin brothers were sent by their mother to attend a mosque in Tetouan, returning to the family's residence in Badalona (Catalonia) where they could then be seen wearing new haircuts and new Islamic attires, changes that were considered later in court as external individual signs of an ongoing process of radicalization. The judge concluded that the internet through social media platforms had been part of their online radicalization program once they had returned to Spain. In the morning that they were arrested by the authorities they were ready to perform their *hijra* ('migration') to Syria, just like their brother had done years before. We should reinforce, they did it because their mother took the individual initiative of fulfilling her sons' *hijra* and subsequent obligation of engaging in jihad. In July 2015, a woman was arrested in the island of Lanzarote (Canarian Islands) with charges of being involved in jihadist activities. S. C. Carrasco (Nabila Leci, her Facebook username), a Spanish born-again Muslim mother that passed from being a recruited jihadist to become a jihadist recruiter herself was using a bottom up process to invite other young women (preferably born-again Muslim females) to be migrants to Syria. On Facebook a woman revealed in a public discussion (2015) that Nabila had approached her some time ago: "She practically invited me to go to Syria, she defended al-Baghdadi and ISIS. I know she was doing it together with other people."

As a matter of fact, she had a straight link with at least two of the jihadist recruiters from the Tetouan network and one link to a leading ISIS fighter. Her operations were being held through digital platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp) and so far, we could trace her connections to jihadist females from South America (Brazil, Mexico)

and Africa (Morocco, Mauritania). These connections illustrate developing new jihadist networks and the evolutionary process of women's engagement in jihadist behaviors that should be subject of further studies.

Since in the last years Europe increasingly became the target of several jihadist terrorist attacks often executed by foreign fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) who returned to Europe (Hegghammer & Nesser 2015), many studies in terrorism research stressed in response that jihadist terrorists and foreign fighters are primarily but not exclusively young males. The crucial role of Western foreign fighters in the professional production and distribution of propaganda caused another research trend that deals with the online media output of ISIS. Hereby, special emphasis was placed on jihadist activities on Twitter (Carter, Maher & Neumann 2014; Berger & Morgan 2015; Klausen 2015; Vidino & Hughes 2015; Berger & Perez 2016). In the present chapter, we will address two gaps in these recent studies by applying social capital theory as relatively novel concept in terrorism studies in order to offer a new and differentiated scope of investigation that will be aiming at: 1) the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network and its local digital narrative on Facebook, and 2) the role of female jihadists within it. The lacking research on jihadist activities on Facebook is surprising. Compared to other social network sites (SNS), the interaction between Facebook users and the resulting social capital is, in one hand, not well researched and, on the other hand, more often reflects offline connections. Despite the majority of jihadists and foreign fighters being male, the foregoing representative sample of female cases who engage with Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network prior to the terrorist attacks of 2015 illustrates that women, indeed, appear as recruiter, facilitators and propagandists, offline as well as online. In order to conduct further research on that phenomenon, this chapter will firstly present a literature review on female jihadists, followed by a theory part on social capital in general and the social capital of jihadist Facebook networks particularly. In the method part of the paper, we will present methods of data collection and how we operationalized the structural aspects of the social capital concept through social network analysis. Finally, we will present the social metadata of our sample as well as the results of the social network analysis, including their discussion illustrated by several case studies.

## **7.2 Literature review: *Muhajira* and *Mujahida***

The majority of the jihadism studies rely on the theory of radicalization to approach it as a process (Sageman 2004; Bakker 2006; Neumann & Rogers 2007; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010; Ranstorp 2010; Sedgwick 2010; Borum 2011; Schmid 2013; Nesser 2016), as a religious product, Salafi-jihadism (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*) (Wiktorowicz 2005; Hegghammer 2006; Kepel & Milelli 2008; Filiu 2009; Meijer 2009; Gauvain 2013; Maher 2016), as a Sunni military global movement (Sivan & Friedman 1990; Rashid 2002; Roy 2004; Lawrence 2005; Wiktorowicz 2005; Bergen 2006; McCants



2006, 2015; Barret 2009; Gerges 2009; Al-Tamimi 2014; Hoffman & Reinares 2014; Cokburn 2015; Stern & Berger 2015); and to approach it as a social network (Arquilla & Ronfeldt 2001; Krebs 2002; Napoleoni 2003; Sageman 2004; Atran 2008; Moghadam & Fishman 2011; Asal, Nagar & Rethemeyer 2015). Parallel to these studies we also find literature that rather enhances distinct male Islamic thinkers, like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (Wagemakers 2012), Juhayman al-'Utaybi (Hegghammer & Lacroix 2011), Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri (Cruickshank & Ali 2007; Lia 2008) or Sayyid Qutb (Calvert 2010) to name a few. However, studies of jihadism and jihadist terrorism seldom take in account the debate on gender jihad (Cook 2005a; Von Knop 2007; Sjoberg 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013; Groen & Kranenberg 2010; Bloom 2011; Sjoberg & Gentry 2011; Carvalho 2014; Lahoud 2014; Perešin & Cervone 2015; Winter 2015b; Cottee 2016) and rarely mention the Islamic principles that frame jihad as a theological precept (Peters 1979, 1996; Kepel 1985; Akbar 2003; Bonner 2006; Euben & Zaman 2009). In addition to it and according to Coolsaet (2016), we are now experiencing the fourth wave of jihadist terrorism that is based on younger elements that belong to 'local networks' with a distinct subculture and to whom bonding and kinship are the main vectors of social cohesion. Continuing the literature review towards the local subculture, we need to approach the subculture contents that are held by the Moroccan jihadists, one of the highest contingents of foreign fighters in Syria (Caillet 2014; Masbah 2014). Here one may be surprised by the insignificant academic production on the subject. There are of course, honorable exceptions, Reinares and García-Calvo (2014), who have connected the Moroccan fighter's activities to the Spanish jihadist fighters, Corte (2007), Jordan and Trujillo (2006) with their relevant work on Ceuta, or Alonso and Rey (2007) who treated the evolution of jihad in Morocco.

While there is much debate on jihadist recruitment there is still much to be done in terms of exposing the Islamic Sunni principles that are being applied by ISIS narrative to effectively recruit women to join their movement and to expand the territory of the Caliphate. *Hijra* and *muhajira* are connected Islamic concepts. *Hijra* refers to the migration (622 CE) of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, an historic event for the consolidation of the Muslim community that symbolizes the travelling of the *muhajir* ('migrant') from a troubled to a safe space. Since then the attribution of the designation *muhajira* has been considered an honor because it is the result of "a meritis act" (Holt, Lambton & Lewis 1970: 446) in the name of God, a reason why many female Facebook users adopt the *kunya muhajira* to reinforce their wish and availability to migrate. Perešin and Cervone (2015: 495) adapt this theory to the migration into ISIS territory mentioning three factors that make Western women select the name, *muhajira*: "Western women who have joined ISIS have extensively used the term *muhajira* to identify themselves on social media, clearly indicating in this way a discontent with their previous living environment (the West), an impellent drive to move to a place of ideal perfection (the Caliphate) and the religious motivation for seeking the change."

Efforts made by ISIS to attract women into their movement are directly related to their efforts to attract men to join the fighting positions that is to say recruited women will be the reward given to these fighters and their future children will help them retaining an extra payment (Bloom 2015). On the other hand, the concept of *mujahida*, the female fighter has evolved also to include the goal of an exclusive female process of jihadist recruitment of other women that has according to Qazi (2012) a violent motivation sustaining and promoting a call for terrorist actions. That is to say, the value of migration maybe substituted by teaching other women online, on the value of affiliating jihadist principles.

ISIS religious framework to justify women's jihadist tasks takes in consideration the debate among Islamic academics on the matter. In fact, Islamic academics' debate about the role of women in the defensive function of jihad (*jihad al daf* which is also theologically considered as an individual obligation – *fard'ayn*) is complex and without a uniform perspective. In Sunni Islamic tradition, defensive jihad reports to the duty of every single Muslim to engage in warfare (*qital*) when and if their territory is being invaded by unbelievers and they have no time or conditions to required superior permission to fight (Kepel & Milelli 2008: 106). In this case, women need no prior authorization from their husbands, fathers or brothers to engage in jihadist military action (2008: 107). Despite being dead, the Islamic scholar Anwar al-Awlaqi (1971-2011) continues to be the most influential scholar among Jihadist women as he was supportive of their active engagement in jihadist activities. Confirming his ideological legacy and persisting influence, memes with his most famous quotes appear on female jihadists' Facebook newsfeed on daily basis, an interesting fact since he was the jihadist scholar who coined the expression of 'Internet *muja-hideen*'. Regarding the military role of jihadist women, al-Zarqawi (Lahoud 2014: 788) and Egyptian scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1998) are two important theological guidelines for ISIS' narrative. Al-Qaradawi – while addressing the Palestinian fight – affirmed that women have the obligation to participate in defensive jihad on their own, even if that entails travelling alone or not wearing a *hijab* as they are pursuing jihad *fisabilillah*, Jihad in the name of God. Cook (2005a: 381) adds in this sense that the choice for female jihadists fighters in Palestine was made to "skew the profile of the typical suicide attacker" and with that to deceive the Counter-Terrorist Israeli forces.

Furthermore, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars continue to discuss ISIS' acts and regulations in the optic of Sunni traditions, explicitly the recruitment of already married women with the purpose of re-marrying them with ISIS fighters. The Qur'an (24:32) is very clear on the matter: "And marry those among you who are single." Albeit, the Islamic principles on marriage, ISIS is promoting and facilitating the travelling of jihadist women to their territory even when these women are already married. In addition, these recruitment strategies are challenging another Islamic marital principle that expresses the obligation of every married woman to obey her husband in an absolute manner, as it reads in the Qur'an (4:34): "men are in charge of women

inclusive in the subject of travelling." Women play with the space offered by these different theoretical approaches to express their motivation to be an active part of the jihadist fight. In the words of Anne Speckhard (2015: 410): "A Muslim woman is a female jihad warrior always and everywhere. (...) She wages jihad when she supports jihad (and) when she calls for jihad in word, deed, belief, and prayer."

### 7.3 Social capital theory

Often people need to cooperate and invest their resources collectively to achieve a common goal. But collective action is susceptible to the dilemma of free-riding: "unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests" (Olson 1971: 2). Addressing the dilemma of collective action, social scientists emphasize the function of social capital as "social superglue" (Putnam 2000: 24). Coleman (1990: 302), therefore, defines social capital as following:

It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence.

Coleman's definition implicates that social capital constitutes a multiple-variable concept encompassing different social phenomena. In reference to Putnam's original conceptualization, social capital accounts usually for trust which arises from two related resources: norms of reciprocity and social networks (Putnam 1994: 171). Taken together, the variables of social capital function as trigger for collective action since they provide access to information and social life through social relations, increase the willingness to involve oneself trustfully into social interactions, produce support, aid and solidarity, allow social control, and raise awareness to the fate and action of others (Esser 2008: 24f.). But social capital is also accessible to other individuals when they are integrated into the same social structure (Zmerli 2008: 36). Externalities are neither restricted to in-group activities nor must be necessarily positive because "any society with cleavages of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and other lines of fracture will potentially suffer from group-specific social capital" (Warren 2008: 129). To distinguish between the different effects of social capital, Putnam introduced the typology of bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging or inclusive social capital is outside-oriented. It produces enclosing identities, generalized trust and norms of reciprocity. Bonding social capital stands for particularized trust and norms, fostering in-group solidarity, parochial identities, distinct group loyalties and

antagonism against non-members, often with negative and deliberative consequences (Zmerli 2008: 50; Putnam 2000: 22-23; Traunmuller 2012: 20).

## **7.4 Social capital of jihadist online networks**

Putnam (2000: 358) warned that recognizing “the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the need to worry about how that ‘community is defined – who is inside and thus benefits from social capital and who is outside and does not.” The radical antagonism and religious extremism of jihadist groups is a vivid example of it and also extremists often need to cooperate to achieve their goals. In this regard, many terrorism researchers stress that terrorism respectively political violence – as one possible collective action outcome of jihadist groups – foremost constitutes an “extreme form of within-group cooperation” (Ginges, Hansen & Norenzayan 2009: 225). Acts of terrorism often occur as a collective action thus without an organizational vehicle it is difficult for aggrieved individuals to perform violence effectively (Oberschall 2004; Hafez 2006; Finke & Harris 2009; Van Dongen 2014). Additionally, the free-riding dilemma is especially inherent to clandestine activities. Therefore, individuals engaging in extremist activities collectively are highly prone to defection – “the Achilles’ heel of coordinated violence” (Berman 2009: 14) – as the infiltration by traitors or informants poses a great threat (Iannaccone 2003; Oberschall 2004; Berman 2009). Social capital is for terrorist groups consequently a crucial resource determining efficient collective action outcomes such as mobilization and coordinated violence.

While trust and norms are to some degree determined by cultural, religious or political settings, networks constitute the structural aspect of social capital (Putnam 1994; Zmerli 2008: 47). According to Lin (2008), there are four explanations on how resources in a network can benefit embedded nodes: reshape of information flow, exercise of influence, social credentials and reinforcement of relationships. Especially the quantity and quality, respectively density, of the relationships (ties) within a network influence the ability of actors to mobilize resources through the connections to other actors. Granovetter (1983) established in this regard his famous typology of strong and weak ties. Strong ties occur in dense networks with intense interactions while weak ties are intermediate or less frequent relationships between actors sharing the same interests or attributes. Cliques are one extreme form of closed social networks characterized by strong ties and the interrelation of all involved actors (Esser 2000: 200; Sageman 2004: 152). Dense networks like cliques produce social cohesion, foster solidarity, trust, political inclusion, intense face-to-face interactions, commitment and conformity towards group behavior and attitudes. Thus, they function on basis of homophily and generate mainly bonding social capital. In this regard, several studies stressed the underlying family and friendship ties in jihadist networks (Sageman 2004; Bakker 2006; Gill 2007; Harris-Hogan 2014; Saal 2014). At the same time, more complex collective action is usually easier to manage for larger

and resourceful groups. The mobilization of bigger amounts of resources requires the delegation of tasks and support from a broader constituency (Asal & Rethemeyer 2008; Nesser & Stenersen 2014; Van Dongen 2014). Sageman (2004) emphasizes hereby the importance of bridging terrorist cliques and the outside world – the core and periphery of a network – through weak ties, otherwise network growth will be slow. Individuals with many direct contacts within one network are called hubs; individuals who bridge different networks or clusters (i.e. in case of their absence, a link would be missing, constituting a ‘structural hole’) are called brokers.

In the last years, terrorism researchers increasingly discussed the influence of the internet on network building and recruitment. Some experts (Taarnby 2005; Neumann & Rogers 2007; Genking & Gutfraind 2011) reject the claim that the internet serves as effective online tool to recruit European Muslims because intensive interpersonal actions are crucial for developing trust. That might be true for many radicals, and especially for clandestine networks, but other studies point to the opposite direction especially in the case of Muslim women who have online a privileged space to communicate and interact with others without being subjected to the Islamic rules of social public behavior. After the Iraq invasion (2003), radicalization leading into violence is greatly achieved by the internet (Hoffman & Reinares 2014: 40). Furthermore, Masbah (2014) infers that in reality “around 60 percent of Moroccans who joined the fighting in Syria are today recruited via social networks, whereas the rest are recruited face-to-face.”

Those social network sites (SNS) are defined by Ellison and Boyd (2013: 158) as

a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consists of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site.

While early research on online sociability was skeptical about the possibility to form relationships online, “a growing body of evidence has accumulated which shows that internet users are as sociable offline as are non-users, if not more so, and that the internet is used often as a tool to maintain and extend offline social relationships” (Gennaro & Dutton 2007: 592). Compared to other SNSs like Twitter or Instagram, especially Facebook – the most extensively used SNS – follows a more reciprocal approach in its user-to-user interaction with important implications for the generation of bonding and bridging forms of structural social capital. Friending is, indeed, one of the most central aspects of users’ activities on Facebook and serve multiple purposes of marking and displaying relationships, filtering who can access what content, and finding common friends (Joinson 2008; Smith 2011; Ellison & Boyd 2013). In a study about US Facebook users, Smith (2011), for instance, concluded that almost everybody stated as major or minor motivation to stay in touch

with friends, family and/or to reconnect with old friends. According to several other studies, users estimated that 25-30% of their Facebook friends are 'actual' friends (Ellison & Boyd 2013). Furthermore, Hampton et al. (2011) state that Facebook users friend around half of the number of their offline social ties and that they have generally larger core networks and strong ties than the average person. Therefore, connections on Facebook reflect offline relationships to a certain degree and friending practices maintain bonding social capital in form of strong ties. Ellison et al. (2014) describe relationship maintenance behavior in this regard as 'social grooming' which includes signaling attention, building trust and creating reciprocal expectations.

However, possessing more 'actual' friends on Facebook also increase bridging social capital because of more meaningful relationship with ego (Burke, Kraut & Marlow 2011; Brooks et al. 2014; Ellison et al. 2014): that makes SNSs so important when considering social capital processes, because a reshaped network, especially one with many more bridging ties, has the potential to increase one's access to various resources, such as novel information and diverse perspectives (Ellison & Vitak 2015). In Smith's study (2011), for instance, half of the respondents stated that their use of Facebook is motivated by the possible interaction with people who share the same interest. In another study by Vitak (2012), perceived bridging social capital of users increased with their network expansion by size and diversity. Usually, three SNS elements have hereby the potential to increase (bridging) social capital (Ellison & Vitak 2015). Firstly, profile information facilitates the activation of latent ties (friends of friends) because they signal shared interests and help users to find like-minded (jihadist) users. Secondly, the public display of friend lists and eventually mutual friends can serve as 'vetting process' and approve one's identity which becomes especially crucial in environments requiring high stocks of trust. At the same time, the ability to comment, reply and like common friends' content can increase the likelihood of friend-of-friend encounter. Finally, user-generated content in Facebook's newsfeed serves additionally to the profile information as 'social awareness stream'.

On Facebook, content repetition (share, retweet, repost, regram, among other means to spread a message online), the virality (constant circulation of the message) and the universal language of these images and videos make it easy and effortless to any individual to learn the jihadist narrative. Moreover, it facilitates as well the construction of the 'community of practice' as 'form of collective learning' (Taylor 2010: 125) because a "close connection is drawn between the viewer and the viewed, an understanding developed that they are both warriors in the same war" (Egerton 2011: 98). Videos have also the capacity to stimulate the feelings, emotions and social connections between the sources and the receivers. A good example of a video that impressed the female jihadists of this network and that has been circulating among other European jihadist networks (demonstrating the power of repetition, virality and fluency of the jihadist narrative through images) is the one of a young

jihadist singing the Hoor Al Ayn poem before seeing his future wife, while surrounded by his war companions. The title and the lyrics of the song refer to the 'chaste women of Paradise' who will be the reward of the righteous Muslim men and that finds its religious roots in the passages of the Qur'an ([Sura As-Sâffât (37): 40-48]; [Sura Sâd (38): 52]; [Sura Al-Wâqi'ah (56): 22-23]). The female jihadists who received the video via a Dutch contact, with Dutch subtitles (streamed on YouTube by Al Haq Media Holland) were very enthusiastic about the musical performance, praising the performer's passion with '*MaschaAllah*' comments. These types of online interactions with the help of audio-visual materials are the 'most powerful *da'wa* tool' (Fisher & Prucha 2014) and the most powerful gregarious tool among the "diaspora *mujahedeen*" (Rogan 2006: 58) who by the hyperlinks and the likes create a sense of belonging and emotional attachment, as Egerton (2011: 92) explains: "The key role played by hypermedia in the production of the global militant Salafist imaginary is its ability to allow for the construction and consolidation of the imagined community of the *ummah*, and one's place within it."

In this regard, a Tunisian foreign fighter in Syria (who connects with the Spanish-Moroccan network) posted on Facebook an image of two women, one carrying a baby and the other one waving a gun. The foreign fighter placed it without a title or any sort of explanation yet it is a remarkable use of imagery because it figures women of the Caliphate both in their mother role and in their female jihadist role. The photo may challenge the principle that women who perform the *hijra* to the Caliphate are confined to become a *mujahid* wife and a 'revolutionary womb' (Bloom 2013: 154). However, it is also true that until the moment the authors have not encounter online data supporting the idea that the women within the analyzed network aspire to be an 'exploding womb' (Bloom 2013: 154), it is nevertheless a scenario to consider as gender and violence are operative concepts for the 'imagined community'. Visual posts such as the one mentioned above grant the jihadist narrative with 'digital readiness' (Horrihan 2014) that is to say that their imagery is the first one to be seen, moreover that their imagery will install a biased judgment of reality and these circumstances will enable the audience to perform and behave according to ISIS' narrative. In other words, ISIS digital skills are being effectively directed to the purpose of "performance of goal-directed behavior" (Taylor & Currie 2012: 30).

## 7.5 Data and method: Social network analysis

After 9/11 researchers progressively utilized social network analysis (SNA) for a better perception of terrorist networks. By utilizing SNA, researchers inquire the social phenomenon of terrorism/extremism as a consequence of social structure which is characterized by actors represented as nodes, and by the ties between those connected and interacting actors.

Hence, in contrast to other quantitative methods that tend to focus on the description and aggregate analysis of the attributes of those actors who make up the research population, SNA assumes that to comprehend the social phenomenon, it is more conducive to map out and analyze the system of ties among the various actors and the ways in which these relational patterns shape actors' activity, decision making, group dynamics, and, eventually, the outcome of the group's collective action (Perliger & Pedahzur 2011: 46).

If it comes to structural social capital, there are basically two approaches to assess the bonding and bridging effects in a network: the power-as-access and the power-as-control approach (Smith et al. 2014: 163). The related centrality measures originally were developed by Linton Freeman (1978) and resembles degree, closeness and eigenvector centrality as measures for power-as-access, and betweenness centrality (brokerage) as power-as-control. These centrality measures also take different degrees of local and global network structure into account (Bonacich 1987). Degree centrality, the number of ties an actor has to other nodes, indicates an individual's potential access to resources of other actors. Covering power through indirect ties, closeness centrality describes an actor's power through the averagely low number of ties he needs to reach others in the network. As a third power-as-access measure, a high eigenvector centrality of an actor indicates that he is connected to key players with a high degree centrality and, thus, probably can benefit from their access to resources without maintaining many ties directly to other actors. By contrast, the power-as-control approach captures the circumstance that if an actor is dependent on others' resources, these nodes can have power over the actor. Therefore, an actor can become more powerful if she or he is positioned as broker in a structural hole since dependency is decreased and 'flows' between network components can be controlled (Smith et al. 2014: 163). Betweenness centrality measures hereby how often an actor lies on the shortest path (geodesic) between two other nodes in the network. In order to ease comparison between different measures of nodes and groups within the network we normalized all centrality measures.

Apart from its strengths, social network analysis surely also has its weaknesses. One major difficulty is the boundary specification problem (or 'fuzzy boundaries') which refers to the definition of rules to include nodes and ties. We countered this problem by a two-fold strategy as we followed a nominalist and empiricist approach. According to the former, actors are included based of a formal definition of group membership. The data collection process started based on Muslim women using Spanish as dominant language and with open public profiles on Facebook and whose contents, comments and posts reflected their self-proclaimed affiliation to the jihadist ideology. From the initial sampling, we went on to select and collect the connections of these women to other self-proclaimed jihadist Facebook users in order to achieve a deep and expanded data set. In this context we carefully reviewed individual profiles whether they explicitly displayed jihadist propaganda in form of profile or cover pictures, in posts or comments. In this context we carefully reviewed



individual profiles whether they explicitly displayed jihadist propaganda in form of profile or cover pictures, in posts or comments. Since Ellison and Boyd (2013: 153) state that an online identity is often linked to offline presence, we believe that this is specifically the case for jihadists. But we also relate to the empiricist approach that measures observable interactions. As Kossinets (2008: 5) suggests, this approach is especially useful since records of online communication increasingly became readily available. For this chapter, Facebook friendship simply indicates interactions between nodes within the network. Unfortunately, we were neither able to collect comprehensive data on the strength of particular connections nor on interaction patterns other than friendship. Conducting snowball sampling by reviewing friend lists of 'seeds', friend recommendations by Facebook's algorithm and applying Facebook's Graph Search we were able to compile a dataset of 352 nodes connected through 2680 ties. Additionally, we collected data on gender, origin, residency, foreign fighter status and Facebook. All data was collected between May 2015 and May 2016.

Due to research ethics, we only analyzed public information of profiles. Unsurprisingly, the publically available data of the Facebook profiles in general differed significantly, making it difficult to collect consistent data comprehensively. We hence also followed two approaches considering data validity. Whereas in most cases we had strong evidences that a person originated from a certain place or is located in Syria or Iraq in some cases we only had several indicators so that we calculated the average SNA measures for a conservative count as well as a liberal estimation. Although Facebook's design stresses the display of friend lists which is the default and typical setting of users (Ellison & Boyd 2013: 157), especially private friend lists posed a further limitation and can be compared to non-respondents in survey studies. While some possibly unobserved ties can be reciprocated through the public friend lists of others, that is not the case if both nodes' lists are hidden. In our sample, one fourth (25.5%) respectively 90 accounts had a private friend list. This means that only 6.5% of all possible ties within the network remain unobserved. While network size has no significant impact on the accuracy of SNA measures (Borgatti, Carley & Krackhardt 2006), several studies found that centrality measures are still robust if the error rate through unobserved ties is not exceeding a 10% threshold (Borgatti, Carley & Krackhard 2006; Xu & Chen 2008; Burcher & Whelan 2015). A second limitation concerns the circumstance that Facebook profiles of jihadists are occasionally suspended due to Facebook's policy to target hate speech. Yet, there are several options on how researchers can treat unobserved ties respectively missing data. For practical reasons, we opted for an available case analysis whereby we used all observed ties, but ignored missing data (Koskinen et al. 2013: 515). Contrary, a complete case analysis (excluding the nodes with missing data) would eventually exclude potentially important actors and consequently undermine the assumptions of social network models (2013: 516). Yet, opting for available case

analysis, such approach still has important implications for conclusions about network structure.

## 7.6 Social metadata

Almost half of the jihadists in the sample originate from Morocco. We could identify between 127 and 164 nodes with Moroccan origin though we assume that the actual number is higher due to the fact that data on origin is not comprehensive for the whole sample. Out of this Moroccan sample, at least 30-43 jihadists came from Tetouan, another seven from Fez, five from Tangier, three from Nador, and 2-3 from Casablanca. If we calculate the proportion of those individuals we believe to know the Moroccan city of origin (N=71), we find that 60.6% came from Tetouan, 95.8% from North Morocco, and from those 78.9% from cities on the Ceuta-Melilla axis (Tetouan, Tanger, Nador, Oujda, Fnideq, and Al Hoceima). The high proportion of jihadists from Tetouan comes not as a surprise considering that an estimated 900 out of 1500 Moroccan foreign fighters hail either from Tetouan or Tanger (Reinares & García-Calvo 2015b: 9f). Another factor that needs to be considered is the cities' proximity to the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta. Ceuta, "one of the most favorable social situations for the jihadist recruitment in Spain" (Jordán & Trujillo 2006: 2), was according to an earlier study by Reinares and García-Calvo (2014) home to many Spanish foreign fighters. Another study of the same authors (2015) found that 75% of the suspects arrested in Spain for crimes related to jihadist terrorism between 2013 and 2015 originated from Ceuta or Melilla (37.5% each). In 49 cases we believe to have data on the residency of these Moroccans, while 17 live or lived in Morocco (35%), 28-31 (62-3%) are located in EU countries. 11-12 of them reside in Spain (four in Barcelona, two in Madrid and other cities), 6 in Belgium (mainly Brussels), 3 in Italy, 2-3 in France and other countries. But these results need to be treated carefully since the sample of the residency of Moroccans is too small and the data inconsistent. Though we believe that the actual number of Moroccan jihadists in our database living in EU countries and especially in Spain is higher their proportion might be smaller. Likewise, it is hard to make statements about the origin and place of residence of the remaining nodes in our database. We additionally found that 22-35 individuals have Tunisian origin and that at least 101-122 jihadists live or lived in Western respectively beside one exception – a Canadian – in EU countries. But also here we assume that the number of EU residents in our database is in fact higher. Most of them reside surprisingly either in France (38-48, 37-9%) or less surprisingly in Spain (33-39, 32%). Eight of the French residents are from Paris and the others from a diversity of cities (including Saint-Denis, Réunion). In case of the Spaniards at least 4-6 are located in Ceuta and 5 in Barcelona. Another 15-16 individuals are living in Belgium (mostly in Brussels and Molenbeek), and 5-7 are from (Northern) Italy. Few individuals also lived in other EU countries such as Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway and the UK.

Gender is the only variable we obtained data on every person in the network. Among them are 46 women. Their proportion of 13.1% approximately concurs, for instance, with the results of Reinares and García-Calvo (2015b: 14) who found that among the Spanish arrests were 15.8% women. For Western foreign fighters, similar proportions (10-15%) of females travelling to Syria or Iraq were estimated by other researchers (Barrett 2014; Neumann 2015; Bergen et al. 2016). Yet, the majority of women in our sample lives in Western Europe (28-33, ca. 90%): 12-15 of them in Spain, 5 in France and 4 in Belgium. Compared to their male counterpart, the proportion of women with Moroccan origin seems to be significantly lower. We could only identify 8 Moroccan female jihadists. Interesting as well is that we could only verify in two cases that women in the network travelled to Syria.

Generally, we suppose that at least 85 to 115 individuals in our database are foreign fighters. The term foreign fighter might be slightly misleading. Though we could observe that most of them are taking an active part in these wars, we cannot generalize this for the whole sample. We estimate that 74% of the foreign fighters in the network have Moroccan origin while nearly everybody of them seems to come from Tetouan. At least 10-14 of the foreign fighters lived in Europe (mainly France) but as the data on the place of residence of foreign fighters is very sparse it is impossible to make further and concluding statements.

## 7.7 Results

Comparing power-as-access and power-as-control centrality measures for certain groups in the network (see Table 7.1), we find that certain attributes (Moroccan origin, Tetouan origin, residency in a Western country, residency in Spain, gender, foreign fighter) predict the degree of bonding and bridging social capital generation and maintenance within the observed Facebook network. Running analysis for a liberal and conservative count of attributes, results for power-as-access measures are in most cases akin so that we assume that they are fairly robust for both counts. The results for betweenness centrality differ for some groups, especially for jihadists from Tetouan and to a lesser degree for Spaniards and foreign fighters. Accordingly, these results and conclusions need to be treated more carefully.

**Table 7.1** Power-as-access and power-as-control centrality scores of the Spanish-Moroccan jihadist Facebook network (Average of node's normalized centrality scores)

|                        | All   | Moroccans | Tetouan | FF    | Westerners | Spaniards | Women |
|------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|-------|------------|-----------|-------|
| Liberal count (N)      |       | (164)     | (43)    | (115) | (122)      | (40)      |       |
| Conservative count (N) | (352) | (127)     | (30)    | (85)  | (101)      | (33)      | (46)  |
| FB Friends             |       | 531       | 692     | 372   | 651        | 1,000     |       |
|                        | 555   | 535       | 684     | 402   | 674        | 1,064     | 1,510 |
| Nodes                  |       | 19.4      | 25.5    | 18.8  | 11.8       | 9.8       |       |
|                        | 11.7  | 19.3      | 23.5    | 21.2  | 11.9       | 10.9      | 9.7   |
| Proportion             |       | 0.037     | 0.037   | 0.051 | 0.018      | 0.01      |       |
|                        | 0.021 | 0.036     | 0.034   | 0.047 | 0.018      | 0.01      | 0.006 |
| Degree                 |       | 0.055     | 0.073   | 0.053 | 0.034      | 0.028     |       |
|                        | 0.044 | 0.055     | 0.067   | 0.06  | 0.034      | 0.031     | 0.028 |
| Eigenvector            |       | 0.053     | 0.075   | 0.045 | 0.011      | 0.019     |       |
|                        | 0.032 | 0.052     | 0.07    | 0.052 | 0.012      | 0.022     | 0.016 |
| Closeness              |       | 0.362     | 0.386   | 0.361 | 0.312      | 0.306     |       |
|                        | 0.341 | 0.36      | 0.383   | 0.369 | 0.312      | 0.31      | 0.304 |
| Betweenness            |       | 0.659     | 0.827   | 0.687 | 0.577      | 0.7       |       |
|                        | 0.575 | 0.657     | 0.512   | 0.805 | 0.592      | 0.802     | 0.762 |

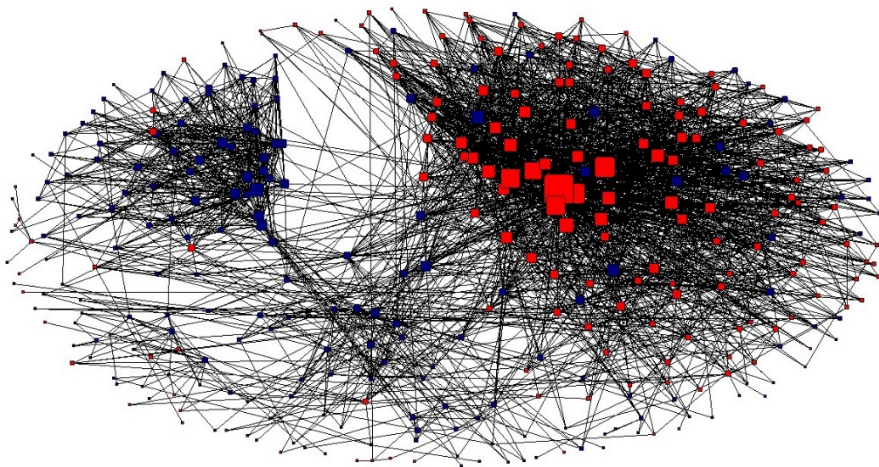
### 7.7.1 Moroccans

Though the average number of FB friends of the most represented group in the network – nodes with Moroccan origin – is slightly lower than for the whole sample (which is with an average of 555 friends still twice as much as the average US Facebook user [Hampton et al. 2011; Ellison et al. 2014]) all power-as-access centrality scores are higher. Individuals with Moroccan origin have averagely a higher number of within-network ties and consequently a higher score for degree centrality. Among the top 10% in degree centrality (see Table 7.2) are 25-30 Moroccan jihadists (63-75%), including all ten top players who are highest in degree centrality. But Moroccan jihadists do not only have more connections to other members in the network but also higher eigenvector and closeness centrality scores. Also here the vast majority of top players in eigenvector (25-33, respectively 69-92%) and closeness centrality (22-29, 63-83%) have Moroccan origin. This means that Moroccan jihadists, firstly, are better connected to key players in the network (who are mostly Moroccans as well) and, secondly, need a lower number of ties to reach everybody else in the network than the average due to their embeddedness. Such high power-as-access indicates high stocks of bonding social capital. A visualization of the entire network (Figure 7.1) as well as the Moroccan network only (Figure 7.2) supports this assumption since most of them form a dense cluster. Consequently, we can establish

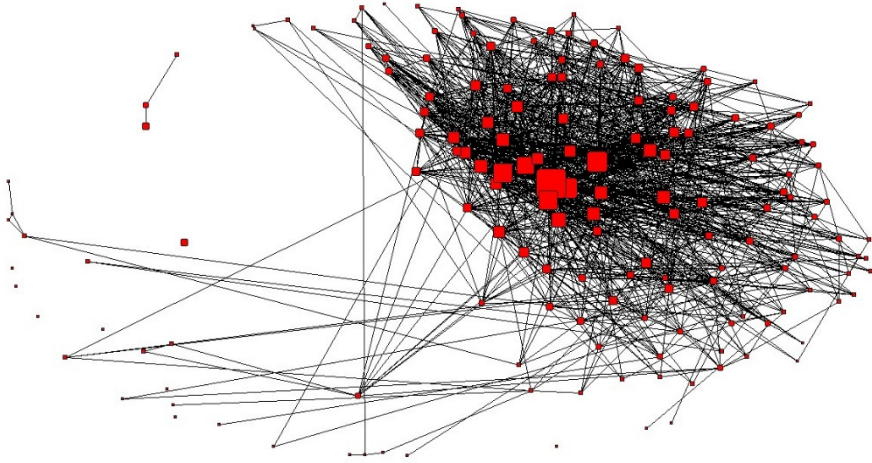
that originating from the same region (North-Morocco) plays a crucial role for jihadist network building on Facebook and the creation of bonding social capital through trust-relations. This becomes even more evident in case of nodes from Tetouan who averagely scores highest in degree, eigenvector and closeness centrality. It can be speculated that many online connections are actually also pre-existing offline connections. Also among the top players, we found a significant number of nodes from Tetouan although we believe their actual number is higher. The importance of Tetouan becomes obvious if we consider that 4-6 individuals among the top-10 key players in degree and eigenvector centrality originate from the city.

**Table 7.2** Top key player and broker of the Spanish-Moroccan jihadist Facebook network (top 10%)

|             | N  | Moroccans         | Tetouan          | FF                | Westerners        | Women      |
|-------------|----|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Degree      | 40 | 24-29<br>(60-73%) | 7-10<br>(18-25%) | 16-17<br>(40-43%) | 6-9<br>(15-23%)   | 5<br>(13%) |
| Eigenvector | 36 | 25-33<br>(69-92%) | 8-11<br>(22-31%) | 18-19<br>(50-53%) | 3<br>(8%)         | 3<br>(8%)  |
| Closeness   | 35 | 22-29<br>(63-83%) | 7-10<br>(20-29%) | 16-17<br>(46-49%) | 3<br>(9%)         | 5<br>(14%) |
| Betweenness | 35 | 13-18<br>(37-51%) | 4-6<br>(11-17%)  | 11-14<br>(31-40%) | 12-15<br>(34-43%) | 7<br>(20%) |



**Figure 7.1** Jihadists with Moroccan origin  
(Node size indicates degree centrality, red nodes have Moroccan origin, liberal count)

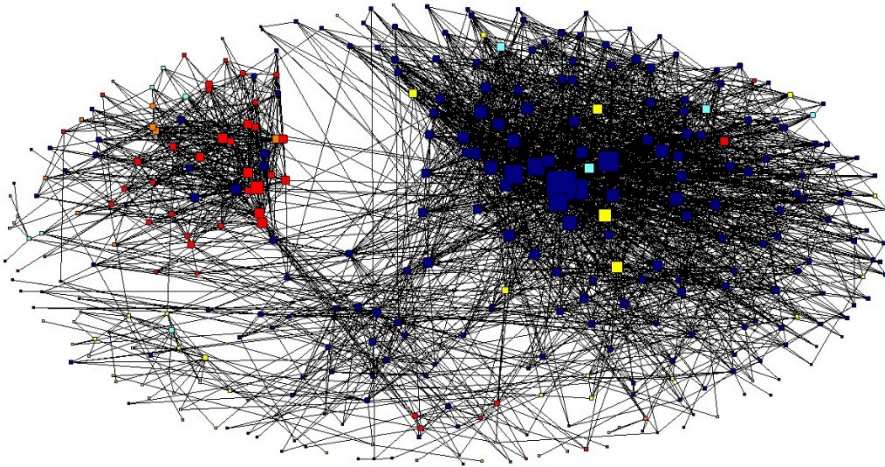


**Figure 7.2** Moroccan network

Also the stock of bridging social capital measured by betweenness centrality is slightly but less significantly higher than the overall average. However, while Moroccans are highly overrepresented among key players this is not the case for top brokers. Among them Moroccans are either slightly underrepresented or reflect the proportion of Moroccans in the whole sample. Still we can find in the visualized network a considerable amount of Moroccan brokers in or close to the two smaller clusters mainly consisting of individuals who mainly live or lived in Europe (see below Figure 7.3). To what extent nodes from Tetouan possess bridging social capital is hard to verify as the results for betweenness centrality differ significantly between the liberal and conservative count and data is therefore not robust. Yet, the mean of Facebook friends is higher than for the whole sample. Despite Tetouans are highly embedded in the network as they have the highest proportion of nodes among their Facebook friends, a high number of Facebook friends itself indicates at least that these individuals are linked to many latent weak ties.

### 7.7.2 Westerners

Apart from the Moroccan cluster, the visualized network displays two smaller clusters mainly consisting of Western jihadists. One cluster consists of Spanish, the other of French and Belgian jihadists (see Figure 7.3). Compared to nodes with Moroccan origin, the network-related bonding social capital of Westerners is considerably lower than the average of all nodes. Especially the scores of eigenvector centrality for Western jihadists lie, in one hand, under the average because of lacking ties to key players. On the other hand, we could identify some Westerners among the top players in degree centrality (three Spanish and 2-5 French jihadists).



**Figure 7.3** Western jihadists

(Yellow nodes are Spanish, red French, orange Belgian and light blue other EU residents)

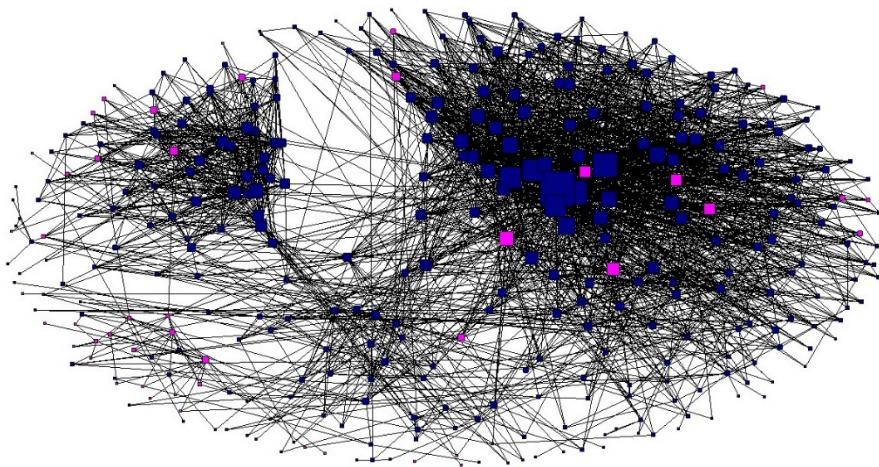
Surprisingly, degree centrality is for Spaniards even lower than for all Westerners but eigenvector centrality higher. This can be explained by the circumstance that Spanish jihadists possess more ties to Moroccan key players in the network than, for example, French or Belgian jihadists. For instance, two of the three Westerners among the key players in eigenvector centrality are living in Spain. Likewise, the network visualization shows that some Spanish jihadists are centrally embedded in the Moroccan cluster. In regard to the results on bonding social capital, it is necessary to repeat that we assume a higher proportion of nodes from Western countries than represented in the network. Likewise, the results must be contextualized in this specific Moroccan-dominated network, as we cannot make any statements about the connections to other jihadist clusters within Western ego-networks.

In opposite to possessing low stocks of bonding social capital, Western and especially Spanish jihadists are to some degree crucial in the generation of bridging social capital. Whereas betweenness centrality of Westerners is equivalent to the network average, Spaniards show scores above average. Westerners are also over-represented among the top brokers due to Spanish jihadists. The 12-15 Western top brokers (34-43%) include seven Spaniards of whom at least two come from Ceuta. Interestingly, Spanish jihadists averagely have more than 1,000 Facebook friends. This supports the assumption that they play a central role in bridging the North-Moroccan network with its diaspora and other jihadists in Spain and Europe as well as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

### 7.7.3 Women

Female jihadists are the group with the lowest centrality measures related to bonding social capital. This might be not surprising since women generally take a back seat within jihadist circles. Yet, this should not hide the fact that there exist exceptions. Female jihadists, indeed, appear as central jihadist online entrepreneurs and networkers though they are under-represented compared to their male counterpart. In our sampled network, we could identify five women (three from Morocco, one from Spain and, surprisingly, one from Germany) along with the top 10% in degree centrality. The same women can be partly found among the other key player categories. As the network visualization shows (Figure 7.4), those few female jihadists are mostly embedded in the Moroccan cluster. But many can be also found at the network's periphery. Yet, opposed to what one might expect the visualization of the network also shows that female jihadists do widely engage with male jihadists online and not only with other women.

While women might play a rather minor role in the generation of bonding social capital, they do have an importance as weak ties for bridging social capital. The betweenness centrality of female jihadists is one of the highest in the whole Facebook network. Likewise, female jihadists are overrepresented (20%) among the top brokers compared to their proportion in the sample. These seven women live in Morocco, Spain, France and Germany but are like all females evenly spread throughout the Moroccan and both the Spanish and French clusters. The brokerage function is additionally highlighted by the fact that these women have on average the most Facebook friends (1,500). Probably even more than the group of Western jihadists, women are crucial in bridging different cluster within the network as well as North-Moroccans with its diaspora and other jihadists. While the men are fighting in Syria or Iraq, many of these women obviously provide online support from home.

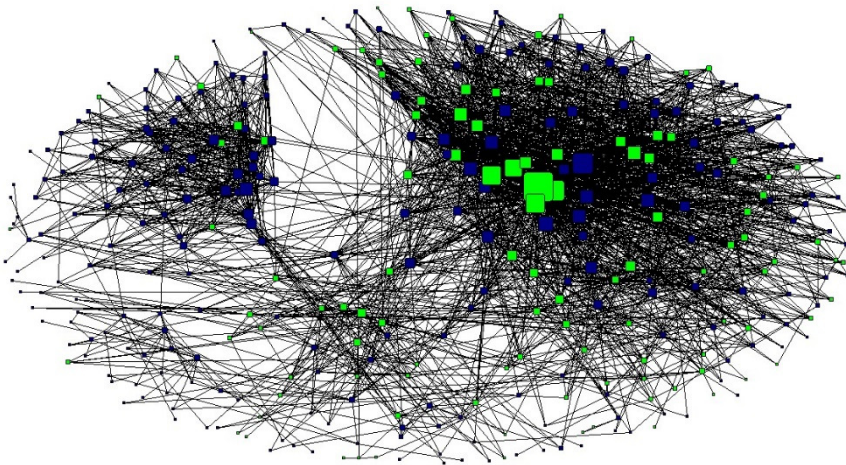


**Figure 7.4** Female jihadists (Pink nodes are female jihadists)



### 7.7.4 Foreign fighters

The power-as-access centrality measures and therefore the stock of bonding social capital of foreign fighters within the Facebook network is equivalent to the one of Moroccans and nodes from Tetouan. Foreign fighters are overrepresented in the top 10% in degree (16-17, 40-43%), eigenvector (18-19, 50-53%) and closeness centrality (16-17, 46-49%). All these foreign fighter key players are Moroccans. As stated above the circumstance that the most central foreign fighters have North-Moroccan origin is crucial for network building and the generation of bonding social capital. Especially the high-risk nature of being a foreign fighter requires trust-relations and strong ties to avoid infiltration, for example. As we can see in the visualized network (Figure 7.5), foreign fighters form a dense cluster. This dense compartmentalization of the foreign fighters Facebook network's structure based on shared origin prevents fragmentation and breakdowns in case a node is removed (through the suspension of an account or the death of a fighter). Consequently, this guarantees for these jihadist users the maintenance of a robust communication and information platform. Additionally, Sageman (2004) stresses that such small-world networks are more flexible in adapting to changing circumstances because they share a big proportion of information horizontally along several actors.



**Figure 7.5** Foreign fighters (Green nodes are foreign fighters)

Nevertheless, foreign fighters also display high betweenness centrality and are well connected throughout the different clusters. So additionally to the high stock of bonding social capital, foreign fighters are also able to generate bridging social capital and function as brokers though less obviously than in their role as key players. Here, 11-14 foreign fighters (31-40%) can be considered top brokers. Yet, compared to all other groups, foreign fighters have averagely the lowest number of Facebook

friends (around 400) which indicates that they possess less latent weak ties. At the same time, the proportion of ties to nodes in the network to all Facebook friends is the highest for the whole sample. Besides being another indicator for the high density of the foreign fighter network, one explanation can be that foreign fighters keep the size of their Facebook ego-networks restricted. Tufekci (2010) found that lack of trust and the need for face-to-face encounter were the main reason for individuals to perceive an online friendship is not possible. We assume that this motivation should be even more essential for foreign fighters and their online activities.

## 7.8 Local jihadist networks and narratives

Tetouan is a Northern Moroccan city that has a strong link to Salafist-jihadist preachers, such as Omar Hadduchi, former member of the Moroccan group Salafia Jhadia (Sakthivel 2014). And it also counts with the presence of violent jihadist cells (Echeverria 2010) connected with the bombings of Casablanca in 2013. Moreover, five of the seven individuals that participated in the 11-M attacks in Madrid in 2004 come from Jemaa Mezuak, in Tetouan a 'tumble-down neighborhood' (Atran 2008). Kinship and friendship connections are not a new dimension in the jihadist phenomenon. What is new is that the use of SNSs and the continuous and frequent use of its digital affordances contributed to the straight bonding between those who migrate to Syria and/or Iraq and those who remain in their home countries. In order to understand the virtual dynamic of these strong ties between diaspora and migrants we need to 'gain an insight into the local narratives and the networks such narratives arise from' (Archetti 2015). A recurrent theme, for example, is having images of Tetouan either as a simple post, as a profile photo or a cover photo.

Continuing to debate the home-diaspora relationships and the importance of bonding capital between Moroccan jihadist elements and connecting it to the conflict environment the foreign fighters live and fight in, death becomes part of the online content of Facebook. Indeed, the honor attributed to the suicide operations is high, and online space is frequently dedicated to the post-mortem homage rituals. Facebook posts on jihadist martyrs are frequently visited by other 'friends' expressing their bond to the deceased with likes, comments and multiple shares of the posts. Death is explored by the jihadist recruiters as *fisabilillah*, as the gateway to paradise. Hereby, the function of women is, for example, to keep the pages of their dead jihad husbands active, posting content that enhances their qualities, achievements and battle honors while they were still alive and fighting. The goal is to inspire (*tahrid*) other fighters to follow the same path (Prucha 2011) and conferring them with the celebrity status. The *muhajira* widows are keen on enhancing that their lives are now devoted to raise their orphan children in the love of the jihad, as the cubs that will turn into lions.

One empirical conclusion that can be drawn from the collected data on Facebook is that the female participants of the Tetouan network are condensed and discrete,

keeping their online profiles and activities as hidden from the public eye as possible. Except for the few ones who aspire to become influent members, most of the female users keep a private profile. In fact, the Facebook walls of these women give no indication of their jihadist connection. They are far subtler in their approach guiding it to religious education, dissemination of Islamic knowledge, both regarded as part of the *da'wa* task, one the prime jihadist task for women. As an example, one of the authors of the present chapter was included in a closed group administrated by one of the women belonging to the Tetouan network. The group entitled 'jihad al-nafs' includes more than 300 women and a few men and centered the discussion themes on religious matters in accordance to the Salafi-jihadist fundaments. Their 'soft *da'wa* and jihadist narratives online allow them to attract a larger number of women who truly wish to learn more about Islam and do not understand what type of network they are actually entered into, as we can read in the extract below taken from a thread on Facebook:

F.G.: Be careful with some accounts because they belong to ISIS.

S.E.: Sister, how can you tell it?

F.G.: They have lions in their profiles photos and they speak in the name of the Salafis, but what they really want is to do *fitna* [division] among Muslims.

S.E.: Oh, no, I think one of them added me, but she had a good method [*minhaj*].

F.G.: I alerted you about three women. One of them was arrested yesterday because she supports ISIS.

The dialogue (originally written in Spanish) that occurred in July 12, 2015 between the two women has a deeper meaning, as the woman named F.G. is in fact an element of the Tetouan jihadist network. It is a recent and recurrent strategy to denounce other women (rivalry, competition among the women could be elementary explanations for the event) for their online jihadist activities, and/or post contents condemning ISIS. It is also a recent strategy to publicly condemn ISIS as the enemy of Islam when in reality they are affiliated with the narrative. The strategy is useful to keep the same online profile (avoiding to have to open new Facebook accounts all the time), to filter possible ISIS sympathizers (and then privately contact them for indoctrination), and to dodge surveillance by police and secret services. As a matter of fact, posts such as the above that have a female jihadist as the producer are seldom on the public eye as most of them keep private profiles. However, the lack of online visibility does not implicate their inexistence, or their lack of value within the network. They may be hidden away yet their female tasks are frequently visible in photos of food and/or maternity.

They are also visible and actively participating in jihadist networks when we extend our analysis scope to the list of Facebook friends. We identified female jihadists acting as 'friends' of key leading figures and therefore as brokers of the jihadist networks who interfered with the terrorist attacks of Paris and Brussels. Furthermore,

the female individuals of the Tetouan network on their turn are expanding their connections to Australian female jihadists who have international notoriety like Asma Abdulla, Zehra Umm Abdullatif or Umm Salehaddin. A shift that we empirically attribute to the attraction of the luxury consumerism that the Australians female jihadist like to exhibit online.

In addition, by taking a closer look to the data available on the Facebook pages of the participants in the jihadist network we can assess its validity as a recruitment tool, as a distance bridging tool and a violence justification tool. First, social metadata serves as a recruitment tool within the jihadist network because the 'everyday sharing practices' as routine actions imply the normality of life even if lived in a war scenario. In fact, online identities are built upon coherence and maintenance of the same values and principles reinforcing therefore the notion of embedded, embodied and everyday online life experience (Hine 2015). The simple fact that digital connectivity is possible confirms to the audience that there are stable communication infrastructures. Moreover, the 'everyday sharing practices' together with the constant and coherent stream of the same jihadist narrative works in favor of 'micro-mobilization' as "simply to the various interactive and communicative processes that affect frame alignment" (Snow, Rochford & Worden 1986: 464). In addition, micro-mobilization reveals a great deal of the content and participants of the networks, how the initial nodes are linked, the focus of the initial messages and how the combination of both works together in the enlargement of the jihadist networks (Viterna 2006: 40).

In the case of ISIS, the initial narrative penetrates the Spanish and Moroccan cyberspace with the recurrent themes of the re-conquest of the global territory historically designated as Al-Andalus (Torres Soriano 2014) and with Morocco's internal affairs. On the first theme, we can take a closer look to Salaheddine Guitone, a foreign fighter of Moroccan origin (and known as well by the name of Abdallah Guitone and his *kunya* Abou Tamima) who was highly active on social media until his death in June of 2014. He appeared with another jihadist from North-Morocco, Nouredin Majdoub, in a video published on YouTube and Facebook in July 2014 (just days before his death on July 25) where he and Majdoub direct their speech to the Spanish people by stating: "We say it to all the world, we are living under the Islamic flag and we will die for it until we open all the occupied lands, from Jakarta to Andalusia, InshAllah [may God allow us]. And I tell you: Spain is the land of our grandparents and we are going to open [sic] it, InshAllah, with the power of God." The video went viral as well as many other videos he filmed during his migration period in Syria. Guitone, whose family originate from Oujda, was born in Grenoble and moved with 15 to Paris, but also lived for short time in Great Britain and between 2006 and 2007 in Spain (Manacor at Mallorca Island) before embarking to the Caliphate in March 2013. The experience gave him valuable language skills that was profited by ISIS media channels to issue visual and audio propaganda in different languages. In this context, Guitone was not only an integral jihadist for Moroccan and Spanish, but for

French foreign fighters too. In an earlier video published by ISIS' al-Hayat media channel in April 2014, Guitone, for instance, walked through al-Raqqa and interviewed several fellow French-speaking foreign fighters and called European Muslims to join the jihad: "Today we created an Islamic Caliphate. We are applying the law of Allah. I would also like to advise my brothers and sisters to leave the countries of the tyrants and to join the Islamic State because it became an obligation... As you see, the Islamic State is there to sacrifice its money and its soldiers" (translated from French, MEMRI 2014). A picture with Abdelhamid Abaaoud proves additionally that he had links to the Francophone foreign fighter network which was later responsible for the attacks in Paris and Brussels. That he established himself within the ranks of ISIS as an important person became also obvious as the recently leaked ISIS entry files list him eventually as bail for at least one French foreign fighter named Sen Sharly.

Guitone's high-level digital profile granted him with enough charisma and jihadist symbolism that survived even after his death. Only three days after the Paris attacks, an individual belonging to the Belgium and Moroccan network had, for example, likes on the photos of a Facebook page dedicated to Guitone. That is possible of course due to the digital affordances of the social media platforms like the digital footprints and digital archive. Guitone's 'online persona' is hence an ideal reference employed by jihadist recruiters to allure other individuals to their cause and because of his language abilities this grooming capacity is extended to a larger audience. It is in fact a reality that social metadata develops timeless reproducibility, engagement (between foreign fighters and potential recruited individuals), identity construction, mirror image (copying the example) and valorization among its digital users conferring, in this particular case that the life and jihadist heritage of Guitone's never ceases to exist on Facebook. Interestingly, two family members of Guitone from Oujda, who are also well connected to French and Moroccan jihadists and foreign fighters in the Facebook network we observed, play hereby a crucial role by sharing pictures or publish video eulogies of Guitone on a frequent basis.

On the second theme of Moroccan internal affairs, the Moroccan government is criticized on subjects that range from the treatment of religious prisoners, the treatment of Salafist religious current followers and the corruption of pious religious way of living. By borrowing the concepts of Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) and applying them to the social media platforms we have a clear ideological distinction in terms of online *gemeinschaft* (subjective, affective digital engagement) versus the offline *gesellschaft* (imposed, impersonal real separation between citizens.) On the other side, social metadata such as tags (inserting the name of a friend) have a bridging function, bringing closer the foreign fighters diaspora and their counterparts in the homeland. The individual that has not migrated to the territory of the Caliphate feels as so an active part of the actual war effort. As a matter of fact, identity and emotions, or as Della Porta (2009: 17) called it 'affective focusing' are important components of individual's micro-mobilization into the processes of jihadism recruitment.

As mentioned before it is relevant to understand the social online constructions of networks to take a closer look to their 'local narratives' and in this particular case, food is a vital part of the local narratives. Indeed, the foreign fighters recurrently post photos of plates of couscous because food plays in the Moroccan culture an important role of social cohesion and togetherness and couscous, the traditional local dish is thus an affective symbol of it, a symbol of a shared culture. Finally, it is critical to understand the cognitive opening moment (Ranstorp 2010: 6) that makes the individual receptive to extreme violent behaviors. To that matter, social metadata, in the form of comments, for example, observes also the function of justification and/or clarification of their jihadist violence. Facebook, in this case and contrary to other social platforms has the advantage of having no text limitation, therefore allowing the participants to write elaborate and long threads of discussion. On the other hand, Facebook offers the possibility of deleting comments which gives the holder of the account (as well as to the producer of the comments) the power of manipulating the discussion in the aimed direction which is frequently aiming at recruitment, or at the very least creating positive engagement with the jihadist ideology and performance.

## 7.9 Conclusion

The study conducted here deepens the existent knowledge on the jihadist social networks operating in and from Spain and Morocco. The high volume of collected data has been narrowed down to the significance of, firstly, shared origin and real-life connections for the generation of bonding social capital in jihadist Facebook networks and, secondly, the role of female jihadists in this network. The analysis of Facebook networks that have a more reciprocal nature than other SNSs emphasizes the power relationship between two interconnected categories of social capital together with 'local narratives' in the creation and maintenance of jihadist online networks. Overall, the empirical data of this study reveals the actual key player role of jihadists and foreign fighters with Moroccan origin in general and from Tetouan specifically, and how homophily facilitates highly dense clusters that would be hard to disrupt. Though less prominent and central, Western jihadists – especially from Spain and France – does not take a backseat within the jihadist Facebook network. Some of them serve as key players, but more importantly, as brokers. For female jihadists the results, in fact, indicate that they have a two-fold function within the Spanish-Moroccan network since their online activities are contributing both to the bridging social capital and to the brokerage function. These activities combined with the lower number of self-proclaimed *muhajidaat* point forward that the most effective role of female jihadists is the one they perform online.

As mentioned before, the study displays several limitations. Firstly, it is impossible to verify whether Facebook friendships are only online or derive from offline links. Secondly, in relation to the 'fuzzy boundaries' of social networks we can only

offer a glimpse into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network on Facebook. We neither claim it is complete nor can we exclude the possibility that the online ties of Moroccan jihadists represented here are far more extensive than their links to the Spanish and French clusters. Therefore, future research should be ambiguous in collecting additional data on other jihadist and foreign fighter networks on Facebook. Thirdly, as missing data is inevitable for research on more or less clandestinely acting Facebook users, future research also needs to deal with this problem. In this regard, social network analysts, for instance, proposed several statistical models and algorithms in the last years that allow to estimate exponential random graph models (ERGMs) (Kossinets 2008; Koskinen et al. 2013). Finally, despite SNA increasingly is established in terrorism studies, its methodological possibilities are not exploited so far. Also this study only focused on basic centrality measures to operationalize the social capital concept. However, since this study addressed several gaps in the literature on online extremism by connecting social capital theory, social network analysis to explore the role of female jihadists and the influence of shared origin, we believe that the results are offering interesting new insights and that more elaborated methods could be beneficial.

## CHAPTER 8

### Concluding reflections

By the end of 2017, the principal concern surrounding jihadism studies was the return of foreign fighters from the territories in Syria and Iraq, formerly ruled by IS. Among those returnees, are of course women who pose an undeniable threat to European countries. Both, men and women return with war stories and experiences that have the potential to build up their charisma and authority and allure others to engage with processes of violent extremism. In Spain, small, tight-knit, homegrown cells associated with the phenomenon of 'lone wolves' may become an inspiring terrorist model of operations for those returning to Europe.

The concerns are justified because as we have previously seen in this dissertation, women have constructed their own online jihadist role, as jihadist entrepreneurs and propaganda disseminators. Therefore, their online space of action keeps on being accessible, active and above all efficient in the achievement of their jihadist goals.

The previous situational context that conferred IS with a physical territory in Syria and Iraq and a state denomination of a Caliphate has been altered by their own military defeat. IS's flags may no longer be waving in Syria and Iraq but its violent ideology keeps on motivating mobilization, recruitment and terrorist attacks. While the lines of IS's controlled territories in Syria and Iraq are being erased, the borders of online jihadism gain more definition in the European countries. Indeed, Salafi-jihadist ideology continues to thrive online because social grievances continue to soar among Muslim migrant communities in Europe. The core concepts to mobilize their audience to 'run with wolves' and to engage with violent actions continue to be deeply anchored in the Salafi-Jihadist tenets, and in local perceived injustices.

Spanish-speaking women involvement in jihadist organizations is highly centered in their online activity of disseminating and recruiting, as we have seen in this dissertation, thus the disruption of the Caliphate does not imply a direct disruption of their roles. If much, a change of their operational strategy, instead of instilling the religious obligation of migrating to an Islamic ruled state, the propaganda is aimed at bringing the fight into European countries. Spain, due to its historical symbolism as one of the former territories of an Islamic Caliphate, Al-Andalus became a preferred target of the jihadist propaganda and of jihadist terrorism, as it was visible in the terrorist attacks of 17 August of 2017.



This conclusion bears meaningful theoretical and analytical developments to understand the evolution of jihadism in general, and of women as agents of jihadist violence in particular.

## 8.1 The road ahead

The conceptual outline advanced in the introduction has proven to be the most adequate to study the phenomenon of women involved in online jihadist networks and activities. The situational context evolved rapidly as mentioned above and the occurrence of several terrorist attacks during the period of elaboration of this dissertation have brought new elements to consider, more specifically, the resurgence of homegrown terrorist cells, vehicle-ramming attacks and the reinforcing of the principle of violent jihad as an individual and religious obligation to all Muslim believers. While these factors contribute to a broader perspective on jihadist women, new factors derived from the return of foreign fighters from Syria and/or Iraq to Europe and/or the North of Africa need to start being collected and analyzed. The number of individuals that have departed and have re-entered Spanish territory may be less relevant in terms of quantity when compared to the numbers of returnees in other European countries. However, to this analysis we have to throw another layer of complexity as this dissertation well illustrates, the Spanish jihadist network is intertwined with the Moroccan jihadist network. That is to say, their strong interconnection will facilitate the return of the Moroccan foreign fighter contingent via Spanish territory in route to their home country. New tales, new myths on how ideal life in the Caliphate was will give place to new jihadist entrepreneurs, new lone-wolves and new off beaten paths of radicalization.

The multiple terrorist attacks of the summer of 2017 in Catalonia were a terrible expression of the road ahead in terms of prevention of radicalization and counter-terrorism.

At the same time, these new developments have reinforced on one side the value of the theoretical and conceptual rationale here used in this dissertation, and on the other side, the value of the offline fieldwork conducted in Catalonia. In fact, the offline fieldwork was necessary to identify possible roots and routes of terrorism pathways in Catalonia, to study the role of Salafi-jihadist affiliated preachers, to understand the difficulties associated with social integration and to assess the view of non-Muslim population on the matter of social inclusion.

On the other side and following the classic ethnographic approach, this study has also contributed to the added-value of conducting fieldwork at the actual places where jihadist dynamics occur and to be familiar with the offline settings of jihadist environments, either to confirm their inexistence, and or transference to another location, or to confirm its presence and to identify the local and subcultures that are at play.

By doing so, this dissertation contributes equally to reinforce the significance of revisiting previous ethnographic incursions and theoretical contributions previously given to explain the jihadist phenomenon in Spain.

## 8.2 Findings

What this dissertation clearly indicates is that women fulfill online roles of propaganda, recruitment and networking. These online jihadi roles complement each other and are inextricably intertwined serving the ultimate goal of jihadist domination. That prompts the conclusion that in a global scenario, self-proclaimed jihadist women operate online in similar manners, under the same ideological umbrella and with similar objectives. They also share similar bonding network structures that rely in trusted relationships – family, friends, to build up their networks and also to allure and convince others to accept to participate in violent jihadist activities.

The processes of jihadist mobilization share similarities in its mechanisms, activities, performances, communication, socialization, but the profiles of the female jihadist agents actually differ among them, in terms of demographics, social-economic status and life experiences. This is exactly the line of inquiry pursued in this dissertation, that processes (and not profiles) convey observable patterns that combined as indicators may serve as the base to construct prediction models. That is to say, there is no archetype of women ‘who run with wolves’ but there are indeed as this dissertation illustrates it, archetypes of female processes of engaging with jihadist networks.

The results obtained through this dissertation exceed the initial anticipation. Indeed, a robust sample of data concerning the online female jihadist environment was gathered and studied providing a complete overview of the Spanish and Moroccan jihadist networks operating in Europe and in North Africa and their connections with the European terrorist attacks of the last years. Furthermore, it allowed to map Facebook as a specific ‘online territory of terror’ where production and/or consumption of jihadist propaganda found a digital space that would accommodate these activities.

On the other hand, this dissertation displays a unique database analysis on the online social structures of Spanish-Moroccan jihadist network that it is as complete as possible. As a matter of fact, demographic details of the individuals (age, education, occupation, location, place of birth, social affiliations and family members) involved in these networks were collected whenever it was possible to retrieve and treat them in a conservative manner. Hence, the database analysis allowed to classify their social organization (sisterhood, Digital Umm), social roles (sister, mother, wife), social dynamics (processes, interactions, norms), social exchange (social capital), social skills (communication, personal relationships) and social status (influence, legitimacy, authority). This dissertation was an incursion into the online processes of construction of female jihadist roles. The roles were assessed and categorized as

jihadist online entrepreneurs and networkers, a dual function involving violence, digital skills and authority.

Indeed, we have now a broad perspective on women's online roles, their activities, and the key leading elements in the network structures.

### **8.3 Facebook as a digital field**

The study was guided by the question how to identify and understand the roles jihadist women may play online. Facebook was selected as the most promising digital environment, and the utility was explored of analyzing social meta-data for inferring vital aspects of online social dynamics and online exchanges between individuals involved in jihadist networks.

The online ethnographic method was in its own right, key to illustrate the evolution of these women's jihadist roles and the framing of their activities according to the development of the social-political contexts. Addressing the online performances of these women was determinant to reveal their online jihadist roles and to attribute them their due importance among their own jihadist networks. While the digital methods did fulfill their function of data collection, they have also fulfilled the task of selecting the most adequate theories. In fact, in this dissertation the theories were informed by the data and were key to explain the processes of engagement with violent online contents and to explain the ability of the jihadist discourse to mobilize and recruit new jihadist members.

The database was manually curated in order to make it representative of the study and to keep the focus limited on the designated sample hence avoiding dispersion and excess of collected data. 'All samples represent something. The trick is to make them representative of what you want them to be' (Bernard 2011: 147).

Additionally, empirical evidence strengthened by solid theoretical pillars has highlighted the importance of understanding the impact that local cultures and subcultures have in the formation of jihadist networks. This understanding of both local and subcultures was achieved through means of thick descriptions (ethnographic approach), selection of digital environments (digital humanities approach) and employment of social network analysis (social movements approach). The multimodal approach, that is an approach that contains different methods, different sciences aligned by the same research question has provided an inside perspective of the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist network.

The limitations of this study, as well as the limitations of Facebook as a digital field, are at the same time its unique strength, it is an online research conducted on a specific group of women that move around Spain and Morocco, that act upon local cultural references and that accept and justify violent behavior through the injunction of religious arguments. Although the study mirrors a particular sample with defined characteristics it has the potential to explain similar processes of violent extremism that are linked to other jihadist networks. True to the matter, alongside

the ideological motivation, the data here presented illustrates how kinship and social ties are other vital sources promoting jihadist networks. Indeed, family members, close friends create their own social structures upon belonging and emotional bonding and that is why tight social support is linked to the terrorist attacks that took place in Europe. These jihadist social networks share similar relationship patterns and construction dynamics, categories that validate the importance of social network analysis. Furthermore, these common categories are an informed manner to advance possible future social jihadist network models, that is to visualize and determine how they will evolve as an organization. Moreover, the input brought up by empirical data such as the one presented in this dissertation contributes to a comprehensive, deepen topographic analysis of the jihadist social networks. There are of course limitations to the use social network analysis and to the social capital perspective. However, the benefits delivered by this methodological approach are recognizable, quantifiable and translatable into social network models and network visualizations.

Jihadist women gain their audience through the construction of online legitimacy and religious authority and their knowledge of the Salafi-jihadist principles. Their initial nodes are individuals from their close range of connections, family and friends and through trust mechanisms they move forward to more distant ties. This was demonstrated in this dissertation. Women depart from their own Spanish-Moroccan social ties and bridge and expand their networks to other women located in different parts of the globe.

Daily, embedded and embodied exposure to violent arguments, contents, performances and activities framed by religious justifications are central elements to the jihadist engagement capacity. Coherence, consistency and frequency are the other elements that contribute to the fast pace of radicalization as it was with Samira Yerou, for example. Normalization of violent behaviors through trusted, tight-knit relationships between online producers and consumers results in quick and firm adhesion to processes of extremism. That is to say, through trusted channels of communication, that are guided by recognized online jihadist female leaders who have and procure social closeness to their audience, have higher possibilities to succeed in their goals of jihadist recruitment.

This study spotlight are jihadist women acting online to pursue their violent goals. However, it includes observations and analysis of the male performance, roles and identity and their gender engagement online transactions and relationships within the jihadist digital environment. I argue that female insights are essential, but male representations are vital to achieve a full-circle, an all-inclusive analysis, that gives a comprehensive perspective of 'phenomena adjacent to violence' (Kirby & Marsha 2012: 4). That is, to understand, for example, the social life built during the conflict, or the 'jihadi culture' (Hegghammer 2017: 4) which was part of the online discourses justifying the migration to the Caliphate. Moreover, it was through the observation of posts related to male ludic activities such as eating, or playing with

newborn babies and the subsequent analysis of the social meta-data that it was possible to define the role of women living in the Caliphate.

These online methodological approaches provided important indications and opportunities when it came to the moment of selecting and collecting data. Empirical data that in offline fields of research would be difficult if not absolutely impossible to obtain. In other words, this dissertation has exposed the interest of furthering the possibilities offered by digital methods, namely Facebook to gather primary data on individuals directly engaged with jihadism. This interest has grown higher in the aftermath of the loss of territories by ISIS, in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, the lack of physical territory has enhanced the necessity of acquiring a stronger hold of all that communication technologies have to offer, whether it is in the form of propaganda, recruitment or formation of cells.

Ultimately, studying Facebook as an online environment for jihadist activity has provided critical insight into local stories and had made it possible to contextually link jihadist individuals and to map their local networks.

## 8.4 Al-Andalus – Impact significance

The jihadist assaults of August 2017 in Catalonia highlighted several factors that are critical if we want to assess the magnitude of their impact upon Western society in general and Spanish society in particular. Partial fruits of online processes of radicalization and online engagement with violent contents, and exposure to Salafi-jihadist ideology, these terrorist attacks offer the opportunity to compare and contrast the theoretical applicability and empirical validity of this this research.

The **first factor** is that the Catalan region is undoubtedly a '**radicalization** hotbed'. According to the 2017 census of Muslims in Spain prepared by the Andalusian Observatory, the autonomous body of the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE 2018: 7), the community with the highest number of Muslim citizens is Catalonia with 522,113 Muslims, of which 190,869 are Spanish and 331,284 are foreigners. Within Catalonia, Barcelona is the province with the highest number of Muslims, 328,840 in total. The total number of Muslims in Spain in 2016 was 1.9 million (1,946,300) of which 834,058 were Spanish and 1,112,242 foreign.

Interconnected to this, the **second factor** concerns the connection between Salafism, the set of beliefs most strongly affiliated with **jihadism**, and the high number of praying centers that advocate this ideology in Catalonia (Reinares, García-Calvo & Vicente 2017: 33). Particularly important is their online appeal to re-conquer the historical territory of Al-Andalus.

The **third factor, digital jihadism on Facebook** connects the previous points with the impact of abundant online exposure to violent material and engagement with jihadist networks.

The account of radicalization continues to be divided between the same three concerns we saw in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.1: how online violent radicalization happens, how jihadist recruitment takes place, and how these actions end up to inflate terror attacks. However, in the concrete case of this research we observed that Salafi-jihadist principles constitute the mainstream discourse that is shared on Facebook among Spanish-speaking female jihadists. Those beliefs are introduced as the religious frames that regulate daily life until they become the core of an ideological system that justifies religious violence.

The final step of the process of radicalization, the actual joining of jihadist networks, results from the emotional attachment, the generated feeling of belonging to individuals who share similar mind-sets, similar paths and similar backgrounds. Furthermore, the fact that these women combine their online ties with their 'real offline' ties, i.e. family members, close neighbors and friends, encourages cooperation with and integration into jihadist networks.

We can conclude that radicalization processes like the ones observed in this study benefit from access to online extremist constructions. It is now known that Samira Yerou was in possession of Salafi-jihadist materials that she consumed and shared on Facebook as a recruitment mechanism to capture circa 40 other women in the space of one year. In spite of this crucial knowledge, to actually and feasibly 'determine the role of internet in violent extremism' (Conway 2016) more and more differentiated quantitative studies on social impact are needed.

The **fourth factor** concerns the evolution of **terrorism** in general and the development of an important subgenre denominated as the 'new crime-terror nexus' (Basra, Neumann & Brunner 2016: 3): the coming together of criminal and terrorist networks, backgrounds and contexts, increasing their potential to recruit and to fulfil their illegal activities. The jihadist terror attacks of 17 of August 2017 shed light on the alignment between crime activities and processes of radicalization. The leader of the jihadist cell, Ripoll's Imam Es Satty, had been detained prior to the attacks for drug smuggling and had been in contact with one of the arrested elements of the 11 March attacks of 2004. The new line of study that amplifies the role of 'jail wing jihadism' in the dissemination of violent beliefs among convicted individuals needs to be expanded with a gendered lens. From the 158 people arrested in Spain for the crime of jihadist activities, 14.6% were women (García-Calvo 2017), among them Samira Yerou. Although she claimed her disenchantment with IS's violent terms, there are other arrested women who will most likely maintain their engagement with Salafi-jihadism and who may still act as disseminators. Processes of disengagement with violent beliefs, or the beliefs that are 'part of an all-encompassing religious triangle' (Nanninga 2017: 181), need to be the subject of future research.

Finally, the **fifth factor** is the use of **violence** to generate social capital, i.e. making use of the social connections and managing them to attain the network's violent goals. However, the benefits generated by the close-knit jihadist network also has a negative social impact. The level of group cohesion and trust is high enough for

members to accept taking high risks and to 'create spectacular acts of symbolic violence' (Nanninga 2017: 173). In contrast, their level of social integration outside the network is low, thus they are disconnected from state-sponsored institutions, police forces or social services.

In conclusion, the jihadist strikes in Catalonia point out, first of all, the urgency of focusing research on local processes and online mechanisms of radicalization. Secondly, they have also accentuated the importance of clearly identifying the different online roles that female jihadist elements assume in jihadist networks. Third, the violent acts have emphasized the significance of paying attention to both the online and 'real world' environments for understanding jihadist phenomena in Spain.

Last, the jihadist strikes in the heart of Al-Andalus enable future impact evaluation of research design, methods and overall analysis of Terrorism.

## **8.5 'Women who run with wolves'**

In the mid of November 2016, Samira Yerou was the first woman in Spain to be officially condemned and sentenced for her role as a jihadist recruiter. The court sentence was determined by her direct involvement with ISIS jihadist networks, her high-ranking direct connections as well as her violent behavior. Samira's radicalization process represents the model of applicability of the present study, a Spanish-speaking female of Moroccan origins living in Catalonia who assumed an active online role as a jihadist recruiter.

The maturation of her radicalization process went through different stages, as reflected in the structure of the thesis and at the beginning of each chapter. Departing from a woman belonging to a specific subculture with patriarch standards, inserted in 'radical milieus', where she developed an affective engagement to leading male figures and to their extremist ideology, factors that contributed to her initial jihadist click (similar to ETA's female processes of radicalization as shown in Chapter 1). To the moment she took the migrant route to Spain and was confronted by the local situational context that in her particular case included the root causes and personal grievances that were her motivation to establish contact with Salafi-jihadist Imams in Morocco (Chapter 2).

Moving along in the radicalization process, Samira went on to become a sister who had an online role as a recruiter and who took advantage of the digital affordances to complete her recruitment goals (a parallel process to what we have seen in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4), a jihadist female whose role and authority were unquestionable to the male counterparts she related to and who are known for their position in ISIS hierarchy (Chapter 5), a mother who travelled to Turkey with her 3-year-old son and to whom she taught violent principles through imagery (Chapter 6), a jihadist entrepreneur that recruited and added social capital value to the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network (Chapter 7).

The case study of Samira Yerou illustrates the path of a convicted jihadist female who lived in Catalonia, who had migrated from Morocco to Spain with a college degree but felt forced to work in a factory and as a housekeeper. Radicalization was the result of a combination of 'personal discrimination and inadequate coping mechanisms' that enhance grievances and catalyze processes of radicalization (Pearson & Winterbotham 2017: 63). Her life course trajectory, the grievances she felt in adulthood, and her process of radicalization as documented in this thesis, evidence her agency, her own will 'to knife off the past from the present' (Sampson & Laub 2005: 17).

Samira Yerou has a unique female jihadist profile, one that reflects her life experience, her social-economic background and her own grievances and motivations to engage with violent jihadist ideas and activities. It also reinforces the fact that profiling potential individual jihadists might have scarce utility to the Studies of Terrorism. As a matter of fact, the process of radicalization of Samira is remarkable also for her geographical mobility, her fast behavioral transformation (accepting and educating her son with violent patterns), the quick passage from recruited jihadist to jihadist recruiter (police sources advance she had already a female jihadist network of her own with ramifications to other European countries). That is why her case is so paradigmatic to the future analysis of how the process of violent radicalization works among women.

In 2012, when I first started this study, the main question was to find online female profiles with pro-jihadist contents and to make sense of their online jihadist roles. Five years later, we have a clear perception where the self-proclaimed jihadist women are, but also what are they at, that is what are their roles and positions in the Global Jihadist Front.

With that in mind, and with the gained knowledge on Spanish-speaking jihadist women, we should promote new studies focusing on the impact of the return of jihadists into Spain and their possible effect on successful engagement and recruitment with online processes of violent extremism.

What we still do not know is what happens when these roles are forced to an end. In the case of Samira, she was arrested and convicted for her online jihadist activities but has she disengaged from her Salafi-jihadist beliefs? Or is she just waiting for the opportune moment to run again with the wolves?

How will Spanish jihadist women continue to forge their online roles and activities within the new situational context, is a question for further studies.



## 8.6 Suggestions for future interventions

### 8.6.1 Local stories – Local networks – Good practices

#### *Local networks*

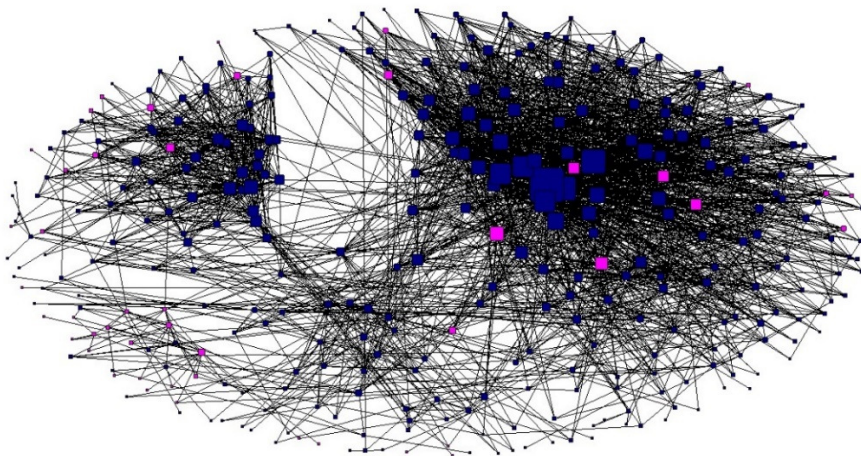
If 'all radicalization is local' (Coolsaet 2016), then all attempts to disrupt radicalization processes have to be **local** as well. The seeds of the process of radicalization in Spain are intertwined with the roots of the Moroccan migration, therefore any strategy to prevent and fight back against extremism has to take this relationship into consideration.

#### *Local narratives*

We will need deeper knowledge of the storylines that have impact on the members of these networks. Together with local cultural references they constitute the cornerstone of how trusted communication flows among jihadist individuals. Therefore, the local narrative has to be the anchor of a successful, tailor-made counter-message.

#### *Local roadmap*

Critical visualization of the specific configuration of the online Spanish jihadist network allows better identification of the key figures and the location of their weaker ties and/or their distant trusted ties. Since this is a close-knit network (Figure 8.1, women are represented in pink) the only way to have access to it is to build an online 'crucial bridge' (Granovetter 1983: 202) with their weak ties. This may be achieved through the online participation of recognized Muslim female scholars (*mujtahid*).



**Figure 8.1** Female jihadists

*Local female mujtahid*

Once online access to the network is achieved, the female bridge-builder has to quickly establish her role as a religious authority figure. Her message is only effective the moment it achieves access to the network’s dense core center.

The key to accomplish that goal is to *calibrate* the jihadist message and not to *counter* the jihadist message.

*Local gendered initiatives*

Initiatives that could lead to results include providing offline structures of belonging, targeting affective and meaningful relationships, valuing social assessments of best prevention practices, and offering education, employment and empowerment as seen below on Table 8.1. These may work as positive alternatives to radicalization. All these initiatives can only realize their maximal potential, however, if gendered, that is if they are adjusted to fit the different types of female audience. Thus, initiatives have to have small target groups of individuals that share similar experiences.

**Table 8.1** The three E’s strategy

| Education     | Employment    | Empowerment |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Valorization  | Qualification | Integration |
| Participation | Remuneration  | Action      |
| Inclusion     | Commitment    | Resilience  |
| Knowledge     | Skills        | Experience  |
| Prevention    | Promotion     | Partnership |

*Recruiters vs recruitees*

One of the findings of this thesis is that the main female roles within the jihadist networks are propaganda and recruitment, therefore the CVE strategies should be directed to prevent these women from *being recruited* (targets) but first and foremost it should be directed to prevent these women from *doing online recruitment*.

*Gender jihad strategic studies*

Attributing full-fledge agency to women for engaging, pursuing and promoting negative and violent acts will modify the male-focused nature of radicalization research and ultimately will produce more fine-grained results and recommendations on how to prevent and combat this violent phenomenon.

**8.6.2 Policy recommendations**

1. Ensure that legal, judicial, and social services are prepared for the return to Catalonia of foreign fighters of Moroccan and/or Spanish origin. Considering the high number of Moroccan and Spanish-Moroccan inhabitants of the area

and the close family connections within the community there is a high probability that these individuals will either travel to or pass through Catalonia. The return or even so much as the passage of these radicalized individuals will also bring stories of war, heroes and martyrs, which may invigorate the jihadist narrative.

2. To calibrate the post-caliphate narrative, groundwork has to be set in motion to combat the grievances that emerge from the absence of social integration, education opportunities and corresponding low employment options. To develop effective and successful strategies of integration practitioners need to have specific cultural and situational awareness and religious training.
3. Consider involving leading female individuals that have valid life experience, recognized religious authority, and the professional status to work as local role models, in establishing a bridge between the local community and practitioners. This can help promote the figure of a local female entrepreneur with the ability to organize new mind-frames, to build alternative networks, and to highlight the potential of online tools in the prevention of female processes of radicalization.
4. It is important to take into consideration the capacity of female agency to engage with violent contents, environments and activities. Standard actions of CVE that misread these women's own will as naïveté or deception are failing for that exact reason. Online intervention procedures should be considered that attribute ownership of violent conduct to women and distinguish female jihadist roles (recruiting, propaganda) to better tackle them. Two general distinctions should be taken heed of: while recruiters tend to have a closed, private, 'friends only' online account so that their contents are only visible to the audience they have selected, disseminators tend to have an open, public online account, which allows their message to reach a maximum audience range.
5. It is advisable to ensure tailored training to the online practitioners who deal with female jihadists with an active online profile. Tailored training has to involve specific gendered cultural and religious notions about the particular audience, thorough scripts of what constitutes jihadist online activity (thus avoiding false negative profiles), and well-defined protocols of intervention (strict observation, participant observation, monitoring). More importantly, it should recognize the sensitivity and the perils of the practitioner's tasks by on the one hand establishing high recruitment standards (personal and professional), and on the other hand supporting them with legal and mental health counselling.

6. Taking into account the number of women radicalized in Spain through online media platforms it is imperative to identify, select and empower local Muslim centers and associations to craft their own online prevention activities and help them direct these to their communities. Increased social participation, inclusion and debate can be stimulated through the development of user-generated content that can feed specific messages into specific social media platforms.
7. It is necessary to execute diagnostic actions in the local communities, especially those affected by a high concentration of radicalization spots, to evaluate which social measures will have more positive impact on integration, and consequently help to prevent and combat extremism. Local government digital initiatives are needed that bridge and bond their citizens, and co-develop small-scale projects, mobile software tools, and a disposition to find solutions.
8. Online communication systems can be built that reflect a transversal female audience (age, education, digital literacy, occupation, background) and that are able to reflect back the envisioned goals in the fight against radicalization processes. Once the results are visible and measurable (reduction of the number of radicalized women, reduction of active online pro-jihadist female accounts, increase of social well-being and social satisfaction) a new corpus of knowledge can be assembled, guaranteeing the continuous improvement of good practices.
9. An important initiative is the creation of the **Digital UMM** (*Union de Mujeres Musulmanas* – Union of Muslim Women), which appeals to the female youth population by devising digital content that features self-empowered Muslim women, that is: women who thrive in their own multi-layered identities (Muslim, born-again Muslim, Moroccan, Spanish, Spanish-Moroccan) and roles (personal, professionally), and who are able to overcome negative stereotypes by leading through example.
10. Investment in science will further knowledge acquisition on processes of radicalization, especially if the learning processes will be based on further collection of primary data. Radicalization as a social process is transformative in its risks, liabilities, challenges and mechanisms. Knowledge valorization could be the direct outcome of this strategy, which would allow for the formulation of good practices that will increase safety and security.



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**Internet**

<http://quran.com>

## SUMMARY

# **Women Who Run With The Wolves – Online stories and roles of Spanish-speaking jihadist women**

*'Women Who Run With The Wolves – Online stories and roles of Spanish-speaking jihadist women'* explores how jihadist women construct and spread online violent stories to recruit other women into their networks. Using Facebook as a case study, this dissertation demonstrates on one side, the potential of this social media platform to serve as a successful site of digital research. On the other side, the primary data collected on Facebook provides a one of the kind glimpse into the entrepreneurial female jihadist profiles and their roles within the Spanish Jihadist Network.

As a matter of fact, it is illustrated here the crucial female function in the management, connectivity and expansion of jihadist cells.

From the mechanisms that enable online gender jihadism to succeed, to the description of the elements, which compose jihadist propaganda aiming at engaging women into processes of violent extremism, the results are clearly presented in this dissertation. In this context, the interests of the Salafi-jihadist propaganda are paramount to understand the online development of female jihadism authority and consequent assimilation of violent ideology.

Following the ideological lead, evidence was also given to sate the relationship between the Moroccan migration in Spain and its impact to the growth of Salafi-jihadist networks in the country. Indeed, blood (family), bonding (friendship) foster through social capital the construction of local stories and reinforcement of local ties. Together, they are the gregarious agents that explain violent mobilization and that have the power to galvanize these individuals to take part in terrorist acts.

As so, it was proven that the Spanish-jihadist network has a decisive and extended presence in the phenomena of jihadism in general. However, in particular, it is a jihadist group with particular features, determined preferences dictated by local settings that distinguish them and that constitute their cultural identity markers. These distinctions mediate trust, collaboration and competition among several jihadist groups active around the world. But, once exposed as they were here, these features represent a crucial opportunity to identify their recruitment processes and to develop efficient counter-terrorism strategies of prevention and combat.

Currently, Western countries as well as North-African states are at arms with the jihadist threat increased by foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq. The new



and first person account of war stories brought by these returnees may have what it takes to persuade other individuals to join jihadist networks. The knowledge acquired by research such as the one presented here, highlights how online stories produce online performances and roles that generate terrorism. And, furthermore it contributes to a better formulation of public and private policies, in order to anticipate, curve and delete online radicalization.

# Tilburg Dissertations in Culture Studies

This list includes the doctoral dissertations that through their authors and/or supervisors are related to the Department of Culture Studies at the Tilburg University School of Humanities. The dissertations cover the broad field of contemporary sociocultural change in domains such as language and communication, performing arts, social and spiritual ritualization, media and politics.

- 1 Sander Bax. *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëtische debat in de Nederlandse literatuur (1968-1985)*. Supervisors: Jaap Goedegebuure and Odile Heynders, 23 May 2007.
- 2 Tamara van Schilt-Mol. *Differential item functioning en itembias in de cito-eindtoets basisonderwijs. Oorzaken van onbedoelde moeilijkheden in toetsopgaven voor leerlingen van Turkse en Marokkaanse afkomst*. Supervisors: Ton Vallen and Henny Uiterwijk, 20 June 2007.
- 3 Mustafa Güleç. *Differences in Similarities: A Comparative Study on Turkish Language Achievement and Proficiency in a Dutch Migration Context*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 25 June 2007.
- 4 Massimiliano Spotti. *Developing Identities: Identity Construction in Multicultural Primary Classrooms in The Netherlands and Flanders*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Guus Extra, 23 November 2007.
- 5 A. Seza Doğruöz. *Synchronic Variation and Diachronic Change in Dutch Turkish: A Corpus Based Analysis*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 12 December 2007.
- 6 Daan van Bel. *Het verklaren van leesgedrag met een impliciete attitudemeting*. Supervisors: Hugo Verdaasdonk, Helma van Lierop and Mia Stokmans, 28 March 2008.
- 7 Sharda Roelsma-Somer. *De kwaliteit van Hindoescholen*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Braster, 17 September 2008.
- 8 Yonas Mesfun Asfaha. *Literacy Acquisition in Multilingual Eritrea: A Comparative Study of Reading across Languages and Scripts*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 4 November 2009.
- 9 Dong Jie. *The Making of Migrant Identities in Beijing: Scale, Discourse, and Diversity*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 4 November 2009.
- 10 Elma Nap-Kolhoff. *Second Language Acquisition in Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Multiple Case Study of Turkish-Dutch Children*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 12 May 2010.
- 11 Maria Mos. *Complex Lexical Items*. Supervisors: Antal van den Bosch, Ad Backus and Anne Vermeer, 12 May 2010.

- 12 António da Graça. *Etnische zelforganisaties in het integratieproces. Een case study in de Kaapverdische gemeenschap in Rotterdam*. Supervisor: Ruben Gowricharn, 8 October 2010.
- 13 Kasper Juffermans. *Local Linguaging: Literacy Products and Practices in Gambian Society*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 13 October 2010.
- 14 Marja van Knippenberg. *Nederlands in het Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs. Een case-study in de opleiding Helpende Zorg*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen and Jeanne Kurvers, 14 December 2010.
- 15 Coosje van der Pol. *Prentenboeken lezen als literatuur. Een structuralistische benadering van het concept 'literaire competentie' voor kleuters*. Supervisor: Helma van Lierop, 17 December 2010.
- 16 Nadia Eversteijn-Kluijtmans. *"All at Once" – Language Choice and Codeswitching by Turkish-Dutch Teenagers*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 14 January 2011.
- 17 Mohammadi Laghzaoui. *Emergent Academic Language at Home and at School. A Longitudinal Study of 3- to 6-Year-Old Moroccan Berber Children in the Netherlands*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen, Abderrahman El Aissati and Jeanne Kurvers, 9 September 2011.
- 18 Sinan Çankaya. *Buiten veiliger dan binnen: in- en uitsluiting van etnische minderheden binnen de politieorganisatie*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Frank Bovenkerk, 24 October 2011.
- 19 Femke Nijland. *Mirroring Interaction. An Exploratory Study into Student Interaction in Independent Working*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Sanneke Bolhuis, Piet-Hein van de Ven and Olav Severijnen, 20 December 2011.
- 20 Youssef Boutachekourt. *Exploring Cultural Diversity. Concurrentieoordelen uit multiculturele strategieën*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Slawek Magala, 14 March 2012.
- 21 Jef Van der Aa. *Ethnographic Monitoring. Language, Narrative and Voice in a Caribbean Classroom*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 8 June 2012.
- 22 Özel Bağcı. *Acculturation Orientations of Turkish Immigrants in Germany*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 3 October 2012.
- 23 Arnold Pannenburg. *Big Men Playing Football. Money, Politics and Foul Play in the African Game*. Supervisor: Wouter van Beek, 12 October 2012.
- 24 Ico Maly, N-VA. *Analyse van een politieke ideologie*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 23 October 2012.
- 25 Daniela Stoica. *Dutch and Romanian Muslim Women Converts: Inward and Outward Transformations, New Knowledge Perspectives and Community Rooted Narratives*. Supervisors: Enikö Vincze and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 30 October 2012.
- 26 Mary Scott. *A Chronicle of Learning: Voicing the Text*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon and Jef Van der Aa, 27 May 2013.
- 27 Stasja Koot. *Dwelling in Tourism. Power and Myth Amongst Bushmen in Southern Africa*. Supervisor: Wouter van Beek, 23 October 2013.

- 28 Miranda Vroon-van Vugt. *Dead Man Walking in Endor. Narrative Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending in 1 Samuel 28*. Supervisor: Ellen van Wolde, 19 December 2013.
- 29 Sarali Gintsburg. *Formulaicity in Jbala Poetry*. Supervisors: Ad Backus, Sjaak Kroon and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 11 February 2014.
- 30 Pascal Touoyem. *Dynamiques de l'ethnicité en Afrique. Éléments pour une théorie de l'État multinational*. Supervisors: Wouter van Beek and Wim van Binsbergen, 18 February 2014.
- 31 Behrooz Moradi Kakesh. *Het islamitisch fundamentalisme als tegenbeweging. Iran als case study*. Supervisors: Herman Beck and Wouter van Beek, 6 June 2014.
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