State Building Jihadism

Redefining Gender Hierarchies and "Empowerment"

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Since the establishment of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), there was a surge in women's incorporation into the organization. Traditionally, nationalist and leftist militant movements utilised women only during periods of mobilization and political struggle. Upon the periods of state consolidation, women were discarded and pushed out of the state institutions. Ironically and against the above established trend, this article demonstrates that this trend was reversed in the case of ISIS. By using the 'mahram' concept, the article also explains the reason why women were largely absent at the midst of ISIS's conflict and military clashes and were brought to the stage only after the triumph of the organization in establishing its state. The findings of this research are based on secondary sources and primary data personally collected from more than 150 interviews through multiple field trips to Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and the borders of ISIS-controlled territories in Syria from July 2015 to January 2017.

Keywords: women, ISIS, mahram, empowerment, gender hierarchies, state-building

Introduction

There are several diverse notions along which the world is separated into different categories, including gender, race, religion, nations, class

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or political ideologies. Gender relations and the position of women in society and the labour force has been always a topic of serious discussions among scholars in different academic fields. In both their personal and professional lives, men and women are associated in close, collaborative relationships. Simultaneously, men have traditionally greater access to societal power than women do[1]. As the most basic and predominant classification in social life throughout the world[2], gender hierarchies and the position of women also play an important role in the global labour force, which has traditionally been a patriarchal domain that many women have found unreceptive or even hostile[3].

The current trend in global labour force employment clearly demonstrates a discriminatory pattern in favour of men. In 2017, the male employment-to-population ratio was 72.2 percent, while the ratio for women was only 47.1 percent[4]. Although it is argued that a significant number of women are involved in informal employment as they often have less legal and social support, the overall employment gender gap continues to grow in favour of men. In line with the global discriminative employment trend, women's employment rate in most of the Islamic countries – especially those in the Middle East and North Africa – is even more disappointing. The repercussions of social restrictions are readily observable in the lower number of Muslim women who are employed in the labour force in comparison to other countries and regions around the world. The 2017 World Bank's World Development Indicators clearly demonstrate that the level of women's employment in the labour force across countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is 25 percent below the global average[5].

In line with social restrictions, the orthodox interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence also put restrictions on different other aspects of women's engagement in social affairs, including incorporation into militant organizations[6]. Traditional Islamic sources emphasize the importance of women's roles as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives of Muslim men at war[7]. However, against the current women's employment trends in most Islamic countries and contrary to the negative perspective of the Islamic jurisprudence on women's recruitment in militant organizations, there was an increase in the number of women incorporated into ISIS in both numbers and roles.

Since the escalation of crises in Syria and Iraq in 2013, and with the growth of new jihadi organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and, Jaish al-Fatah, there was

a new wave of women being incorporated into such jihadi groups. It is reported that more than ten percent of all Western members of ISIS were women[8]. More than 750 women from various countries in the EU have also joined jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq including 150 Germans and 200 French[9]. The same growth in women joining groups such as ISIS was evident in the case of non-European female nationals including 700 Tunisians and more than 500 Moroccans [10] [11].

Focusing on the high rate of women's incorporation into ISIS as a manifestation of women's gender hierarchy ("empowerment"), this paper therefore aims to find answers for the reasons behind high rate of women's incorporation into ISIS ("empowerment") – both in numbers and roles despite the group's conservative ideology – while putting forward an explanation as to why such inclusion runs contrary to the incorporation trend of women in nationalist and leftist militant movements (disempowerment).

Methodology

The research was executed in qualitative form by using the phenomenological approach and through conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews[12]. The questions were designed to develop a complete, accurate, clear and articulated description and understanding of the roles and positions of women in ISIS by using the respondent's own knowledge and/or feelings. The interview questions covered a range of open-ended questions depending on the respondents' backgrounds. The participants covered a wide range of individuals including ex-ISIS members, ISIS supporters, scholars, government and security officials, refugees, internally displaced people and journalists. The interview questions were used as the baseline of further discussions with the correspondents. Upon receiving ethical approval from relevant authorities, three rounds of field trips were made to conduct these interviews from July 2015 to January 2017. More than 150 interviews were conducted with the subjects in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and the borders of then ISIS-controlled territories in Syria. In addition to in-person interviews, five interviews were also conducted over the phone with three Syrian and Iraqi Arab females and two Syrian and Iraqi Arab males (age between 26 to 39) who were still living in ISIS-ruled territories in Syria and Iraq.

The interviews were conducted to examine how the position of women in the ideology of ISIS was framed and the main reasons for the

incorporation of women in the organization. The methods by which ISIS incorporated women were also investigated in these interviews. Due to the nature of this research, accessibility to data was in itself a challenge. Direct access to jihadi organizations and their members was both legally and practically difficult. To overcome this challenge, I interviewed people with sufficient knowledge about ISIS by using proxy respondents for collecting the needed data for this research. These proxy respondents included ISIS defectors, ISIS supporters, refugees and eyewitnesses who have experienced living in territories run by jihadi organizations in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

State building and change in gender hierarchies

The rise of ISIS has certainly changed the definition of jihadi organizations and their gender hierarchies. Initially the operative extension of Al-Qaeda in Iraq with *salafi* thoughts, ISIS stunned the world by declaring the establishment of its Caliphate in 2014 in an immense geographic area within Iraqi and Syrian terrains. Contrasting most other jihadi groups such as Al-Qaeda with a vague idea about establishing and administrating a caliphate, ISIS had clearly set its objective to establish a new society, governed by a strict interpretation of sharia law in practice[13]. Hence, a group such as ISIS should not be studied as a mere militant organization, but a group in control of a functioning caliphate. This approach of ISIS towards state building was resulted in migration and incorporation of thousands of women from around the world in its vision society[14].

The state building project of ISIS shared similarities with the process of nation and state building in several other places in the world. Armed conflicts have been always an important phenomenon of studying state building. Just like external wars, internal conflicts -such as the Syrian civil war- can, under certain circumstances, promote state building.[15] It is important to take note that there is no single pathway to state building. It is argued that several states were 'built in unremitting blood and fire, others as fractious collections of elites, and others as stable but tacit deals between political forces'.[16] ISIS's caliphate building process certainly falls into the violent path towards establishing a state.

Creating a state has been a central point of violent competition among different sectors of a society through the course of history[17]. This has been intensified in the aftermath of World War II where the most struggles in the world have been due to nation-building efforts[18].

Violence therefore has been a key component to the process of state building. In this case, militancy plays a vital role not only in 'defending the nation-state, but also in arbitrating criteria for membership (citizenship) in the nation'.[19] This is evident in the case of countries in which military (national) service is mandatory for its citizens including Singapore, Iran, Denmark or Turkey. In cases such as Israel, this mandatory military (national) service is compulsory for both men and women with no discrimination[20].

Charles Tilly's statement of war makes state and states make war is certainly the most popular notion in the current literature for explaining the relationship between military conflicts (i.e. war) and the process of state building. His argument is based on three components of centralized control over territory, development of the state apparatus, and process of civilianization[21]. Based on this argument, state building would occur when 'violent specialists and elites consolidate security and thereby provide the first and most important public good: the control over the use of force'.[22]

Based on the above argument on the link between armed conflicts and the process of state building, and specific to this article, women's active contribution to the process of state building through militant groups is evident (although less publicized) throughout modern history[23]. Women have been an important part of national revolutionary movements in conflicts in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Libya, Eritrea, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia[24].

Together with that, there exists a link between gender hierarchies and violent conflicts[25]. Societies are often in need of a major catalyst—like war or conflict—to shake up the social and political orders[26]. For instance, with the beginning of the First Indochina War against the French, the Communist-oriented Vietnamese nationalists rebelled against dominant Confucian values (favouring women's domestic roles as good mothers and wives) by recruiting a huge number of women to mobilize more fighters against the enemy[27]. The emphasis on women's participation in military affairs provided the Vietnamese national movement, with a large number of women leaving their traditional domestic roles as mothers and wives and entering the fighting force to pursue the state building cause. Between one third to half of the Viet Cong troops were made up of women including regimental commanders[28]. During the Vietnam War, a female commander, Thi Dinh, was the deputy commander of the entire Vietcong troops fighting against

South Vietnamese. The Viet Cong troops were also consisted of few all-women platoons with duties including reconnaissance, communications, commando operations and nursing.[29]

Women in these platoons were trained in using different types of weapons, hand grenades, planting landmines, and even assassinating enemy key figures. It is reported that several female Viet Cong special commandos were effectively involved in one of the most famous operations against American forces in February 1969, in which 38 US army officers were killed in Cu Chi Airbase and all their Ch-47 Chinook helicopters were destroyed by these commandos. The same pattern of women's participation in military affairs is evident in several other anti-colonial liberation movements including the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army. It is estimated that by 1979, nearly 7,500 of the 20,000 members of the Zimbabwe Liberation Army were female combatants and they were involved in several combat ranks including commanding female brigades and direct combat engagement with the enemies[30, 31].

By gathering cross-national data from 1900 to 2015, Webster et al. established a link between armed conflict and gender power imbalances within society. They concluded that 'warfare can disrupt social institutions and lead to an increase in women's empowerment via mechanisms related to role shifts across society and political shifts catalysed by war'.[32] However, even though warfare changes gender hierarchies and increases women's empowerment, in all the above mentioned cases, it is evident that the nationalist or leftist movements have utilized women only during periods of mobilization and political struggle. Upon the periods of state consolidation, women were discarded and pushed out of the state institutions[33]. In other words, women were "disempowered" in the aftermath of establishing new states. In her study of national symbolism in constructing gender, Karima Omar has also identified the same trend of changes in gender hierarchies through women's empowerment (during the struggle) and disempowerment (after the triumph of the struggle) in cases of the Vietnamese and Nicaraguan nationalist struggles. The main reason for women to be pushed aside upon the triumph of the military campaign is argued to be due to the fact that their elevated status during times of conflict does not comply with the conventional and traditional gender roles that consistently re-emerge after nationalist wars[34].

Ironically and against the above established trend, the following section of this article demonstrates that this trend is opposite in the

case of ISIS. Women were largely absent (disempowered) at the midst of conflict and military clashes and were "empowered" and brought to the stage only after the triumph of ISIS in establishing its state.

Women, ISIS and the state building project

While women are integrated by few jihadi organizations such as Al-Qaeda and several other smaller groups in Pakistan, Palestine and Iraq, their number remains low compared to those of their male counterparts. Women are mostly integrated in these organizations as suicide bombers which is pre-eminently, a tactical tool than an expression of a long-term strategy. The female dress code in many Muslim societies provides a tactical advantage for jihadi organizations to conceal explosive and weapons they may need for their operations. Several female suicide bombers could pass security checkpoints and successfully conduct their operations due to this tactical advantage – especially as security forces in many Muslim countries are largely male dominant and thus unable to perform proper body search on women due to religious and cultural restrictions[35]. However, due to strong religious and cultural negative sentiments against the use of women in violent operations, even this tactical advantage has not resulted in extensive use of women in combat roles.

Apart from suicide bombing, women also perform other duties in jihadi organizations. These non-combat roles involve supporting duties and are believed, by jihadi organizations, to be a closer match to the peaceful and non-violent nature of women while helping the groups attain their objectives. Some of these roles include distributing messages, recruiting new members, fundraising, translating, etc. However, the common characteristics among these roles is that they do not require them to mix with the opposite sex in the public sphere.

The reason for women's lower integration into jihadi groups (disempowerment) is rooted in the principles of *mahram* and sexual purity. Based on these conservative principles of gender hierarchies, a Muslim woman should always be accompanied by a male *mahram* (either her husband or a relative in the prohibited degree of marriage) in public[36]. Due to the nature of war zones, women would unavoidably find themselves in the illicit company of non-*mahram* males, therefore, to avoid such seemingly sinful circumstances, jihadi groups initially barred women's involvement in jihadi activities. This is the main factor which makes jihadi organizations different from other non-jihadi militant organizations in incorporating women for militant activities.

Emphasizing women's sexual purity through the concept of *mahram*, shapes the ideological view of these organizations towards women and causes these groups to find themselves in a constant clash against 'a world characterized by sexual disorder, one in which females are seen as encroaching on the male domain'.[37] As a response, jihadi organizations stress the domestic roles of women in jihad, which included being virtuous wives to male jihadists and good mothers to the next generation of jihadists.

Contrary to the abovementioned classical approach of jihadi groups towards women's position in jihad ISIS practically incorporated a large number of women in its organizational structure upon establishing its state in Syria and Iraq. The success of ISIS in being the jihadi organization with the highest number of women should be viewed in two closely related levels; firstly, the success of the organization in solving the *mahram* obstacle, and secondly; transformation of ISIS from a mere militant jihadi establishment into a group in charge of administrating a functioning state.

Overcoming the *mahram* obstacle

By establishing 'gender-segregated parallel institution,' ISIS managed to minimize interactions between opposite sexes within its organization and therefore bypassed the *mahram* hurdle which was the main reason for women's absence (disempowerment) during the group's militant struggle. This means a unit within virtually every existing ISIS institution was allocated to women only to address related women's affairs. These units were fully administrated by women, and their level of interaction with their male counterparts was minimized. This system comprised all ISIS state institutions, such as education, healthcare, administration, police, finance, and service provision. Unlike jihadi organizations, such as the Taliban and Al-Shabaab of Somalia with ultra-rigid orthodox ideological tenets, ISIS repeatedly showed interest in adopting pragmatic approaches learned from others.

Implementing gender-segregated parallel institutions, with the idea borrowed from the practices of Iran and Saudi Arabia was an example of such pragmatic approaches. ISIS might not have been the first entity to use gender segregation as a tool for social engineering[38], but it was the first jihadi organization to implement this policy effectively throughout its ruling territory[39]. Through this mechanism and against the conventional trend of women's disempowerment in non-jihadi

organizations, ISIS successfully "empowered" a group of ideologically dedicated women to be a part of its state apparatus.

While recognizing the brutality of ISIS toward women and that the orthodox interpretation of sharia laws is in contrast with conventional definition of women's empowerment, the primary data collected for this paper clearly expounds the existence of a systematic structure of women's incorporation into ISIS for achieving organizational success. The "empowerment" brought about by ISIS was exclusively for Muslim women who were marginalized for their orthodox religious and ideological beliefs in secular Western or Arab societies. ISIS "empowered" this exclusive group of women by providing them a platform to perform their social duties (including working in different civil and military sectors), while adhering to their strict interpretation of religion. This means women of religious minorities and those Muslim women with different interpretations of Islam who were living within ISIS territories were severely discriminated and marginalized by the organization.

Primary data collected through fieldwork in Iraq, the ISIS-controlled Syrian borders in southern regions of Turkey, and Lebanon reflect the effectiveness of ISIS in reconciling its ultra-conservative Islamic narrative of women, with the organization's incorporation of the same through establishing gender-segregated parallel institutions. ISIS defectors, and Iraqi and Syrian refugees interviewed for this research as well as conversations with Iraqi and Turkish security and military officials, confirmed the existence and functioning of these institutions across ISIS's territories.

Women of the ISIS state

In studying ISIS, it is important to note that unlike Al-Qaeda, the organization should not be treated as only a militant organization. ISIS has morphed into a state builder which made its structure and ultimately its view over women's incorporation different from other jihadi groups. ISIS claimed to have a stark vision for founding a state (caliphate), tracking the classical structure of the caliphates during the golden age of Islam (8th century to 13th century). ISIS envisaged a state as a unified, transnational government ruling over the entire Muslim community by imposing its strict interpretation of sharia law[40].

Within its controlling territory, ISIS implemented a detailed hierarchical structure of governance by using gender segregated parallel

institutions, which encompassed several councils including military, healthcare, education, defence, intelligence, and judiciary. ISIS's incorporation of women was operationalized through this framework. Some of the main roles assigned to women by ISIS through its gender-segregated parallel institutions were as follows:

Military forces

There are confirmed reports that ISIS had established a battalion consisting of female suicide bombers in Syria by mid-2015 (RBSS, 2015). Maha, a 25-year-old former resident of Raqqa who fled to the Turkish city of Gaziantep in early 2016, explained;

> I was approached by an unknown woman in a female gathering in Raqqa and was asked if I would like to sacrifice my life in the path of Allah. I was told by the woman that I can join a group of martyrdom seeking women who would like to defend the caliphate against the crusaders and the infidels. The woman told me that I will be trained to fire rifles and even how to use explosive jackets[41].

On 7 July 2016, ISIS officially claimed its first suicide attack conducted by one of its female members. Three ISIS members (including a woman) conducted a series of suicide attacks against Sayyid Mohammed mosque (a Shi'a holy shrine) in the city of Balad, 80 kilometres north of Baghdad, Iraq. The attacks killed 35 civilians and left 60 others seriously injured. In an official announcement by ISIS which was published in its news agency Al-Amaq, the group accepted the responsibility for the attacks and identified the female suicide bomber as Um Ja'ada[42].

It was also confirmed that ISIS was increasingly using its female members for fighting enemies in Libya, Kenya and European countries. In February 2016, seven ISIS female operatives were arrested by the Libyan officials in the western city of Sabratha in the Zawiya District of Libya. In the same attack, three more ISIS female fighters were killed. Some of these women were fighting alongside their male jihadist counterparts in the battle field[43].

Police force

Soon after declaring its caliphate in 2014, ISIS affirmed the establishment of *hisbah* (sharia police force)[44], a female-only police squad that

supervised ISIS territory for proper implementation of the organization's strict interpretation of sharia law for women, especially their dress code[45]. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of women in this force due to the secretive structure of it and also limitations in accessing their members. However, General Mahdi Younis of Iraqi Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq told the author in an interview that about a thousand women were recruited by ISIS sharia police force throughout its territories[46].

The ISIS defectors and the Syrian and Iraqi refugees I interviewed during my field work in Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon explained that *hisbah* forces functioned in all major towns throughout ISIS territories in Syria and Iraq. The interviewees told the author that they witnessed women armed with AK-47s, covered in black robes patrolling the streets of Raqqa, Mosul, Fallujah, Manbij, Tell Abyed, Tell Afar and Jarablus either in cars or on feet. ISIS female police force operated under the Security Council of ISIS, which was in command of the internal policing.

Mohammad a 58-year-old Syrian refugee who was living in the southern city of Gaziantep in Turkey shared his personal encounter with ISIS *hisbah* in the Syrian city of Tell Abyed.

> I was walking with my wife on the street for shopping groceries. Along the way, we have come across a group of 10 to 15 people who were gathered around a couple. We heard that a female *hisbah* force who was carrying a gun was speaking loud to the couple. She was shouting that the woman has not observed the dress code and that she has to come with her to the police station. The woman's husband was begging the woman to let her wife go. The ISIS woman had a clear North African accent of Arabic. As the population around the couple was mounting, a group of ISIS male police force showed up in a car to help their female colleagues. I told my wife to hurry up and stay away from the crowd. I do not know what happened to the couple[47].

Mahmoud a 46-years-old ex-ISIS member and former resident of Raqqa and currently a refugee in Gaziantep in south of Turkey also noted that

> Female *hisbah* members have a separate facility for their own in the city. This is to prevent them from mixing with us [their

> male jihadi counterparts]. *Hisbah* members take the women who have broken the sharia law to this facility in Raqqa. Women who wear tight *abaya* [long black dress], not being accompanied by a male family member in public, smoke cigarettes, drink and eat publicly during the fasting month, commit adultery, commit acts of homosexual nature or wearing bright nail polish will be arrested by the force and will be taken to its facilities[48].

For ISIS to expand its ideological control over all its society members, the group incorporated a large number of women as police force through its mechanism of gender-segregated parallel institutions. This allowed ISIS to increase its degree of control over its entire population.

Teachers and educators

The education system and its affiliated institutes, including schools and universities, were crucial to ISIS as they were the perfect means for shaping the hearts and minds of the next generation of devoted jihadists[49]. Hence, ISIS set its educational goal to 'decrease ignorance, spread religious sciences, resist corrupt sciences and curricula and replace them with righteous Islamic curricula'.[50]

Despite reports on the closure of girls' schools in ISIS territories, a number of them were still operational under strict restrictions put upon them by ISIS *Diwan al-Ta'aleem* (council of education). Schools were entirely gender segregated and only female teachers were allowed to work in girls' schools. It was compulsory for both female teachers and students to observe the dress code of black robe and full-face veil.

In city of Sanliurfa in southern Turkey, I also met Ayisha (30 years old), a former teacher and a mother of two children who fled Deir ez-Zor in Syria in 2015. She explained to me that

> After the gender segregating of schools, only female teachers, principal and, cleaners were administrating the elementary school I was working in. A thick curtain was set up behind the main gate of the school and only women could enter the school. I have personally seen a number of ISIS female police forces checking the school regularly to assure the school pupils' and staff's adherence to sharia laws especially in terms of dressing. This made many citizens of the city to refuse sending their kids to schools[51].

While conducting fieldwork in Erbil in northern Iraq, I also had the opportunity of meeting Sharifah (originally from Mosul) whom her relatives and friends were still living in Mosul under the ISIS rule. Through Sharifah, I was connected by phone to one of her friends, Jamilah (32 years old), in then ISIS-controlled city of Mosul. Jamilah explained her experience of dealing with ISIS education system.

> At the early stages of ISIS taking control of Mosul, many female teachers who were working at schools left their jobs as they were not satisfied with the Islamic State's ideological approach towards education. However, the caliphate forcefully called all female teachers to return to their schools under the new rules and regulations. Female teachers receive some minimal salaries directly from ISIS and they are threatened that upon leaving their jobs, their properties will be confiscated[52].

Apart from the elementary and secondary schools, ISIS established its first female finishing school, Al-Zawra for adult women. According to the mission statement of the school, it provided training for women 'interested in explosive belt and suicide bombing more than a white dress or a castle or clothing or furniture'.[53] The institute provided a wide range of courses including 'domestic work such as sewing and cooking, medical first aid, Islam and Sharia law, weaponry, training in social media and computer programs for editing and design'.[54] Knowing the importance of women as the mothers of future jihadists, ISIS established a functioning system of ideological education for its female population based on gender segregation.

Doctors and nurses

As ISIS has morphed beyond a plain militant organization towards founding its caliphate, providing public goods for its inhabitants while observing its strict interpretation of sharia law has become more important. The healthcare sector was one of those vital services which ISIS paid exceptional attention to. In early 2015, ISIS announced its Islamic State Healthcare System (ISHS) which was replicated from the UK National Healthcare System (NHS). In a YouTube video published by ISIS, an Indian doctor named Abu Muqatil al-Hindi, explains that 'there are doctors from Russia, Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Australia, and that women are treated by female physicians'.[55] The same pattern of

gender segregation in other ISIS institutions was applied to the organization's healthcare system (ISHS) as well. Female patients were only permitted to be visited and treated by female doctors and nursed in 'Women Only' sections of hospitals within ISIS territory.

During my visit to Debaga refugee camp close to the city of Makhmur in Iraq, I met Kolthum, a 42-year-old female general physician who has fled the ISIS controlled city of Mosul with her husband and four children. She told me

> A section within Mosul general hospital is allocated to female patients to visit female doctors and nurses. ISIS threatened us [those female doctors who refused to return to their works in the hospital] with confiscation of our properties. The range of services offered by us [female doctors and nurses] was also more limited than those offered to men as the number of us [female doctors and nurses] were fewer than those of men[56].

Adilah a 30-year-old female nurse from Raqqa whom I met in Istanbul in April 2016, also emphasized

> Despite female doctors being able to continue working in Raqqa general hospital, ISIS officials were extremely strict about implementing sharia law at medical centres. While I was a nurse at hospital, I was really afraid of even touching 5 or 6-year-old sick boys for medical check-up as I was not allowed to treat men[57].

As an organization in charge of governing a society, ISIS quickly realized the importance of providing services for the entire population they rule. This included women as half of the populace as well. By segregating health centres, ISIS managed to provide the basic health services for women without jeopardizing its strict *salafi* ideological commitments.

Housing and sheltering officers

ISIS offered free accommodation, utilities, and services for its members. In terms of their female recruits, there were women in charge of these arrangements. According to Sana a 39-year-old Syrian ex-ISIS female member whom I met in the Turkish city of Kilis,

> Women who arrive in Syria or Iraq from abroad were being sent to ISIS owned houses called *maqars*. It is important to note that *maqars* were only for single women. Married women with their families would have been accommodated in proper houses by ISIS housing and sheltering officers. In this case since the male member of the family was in charge, they were attended by ISIS male housing and sheltering officers[58].
>
> *Hamoon Khelghat-Doost*

A 46-year-old female former resident of Mosul who wanted her identity to be protected as she was serving ISIS for a short period of time in 2015 and currently lives in the Debaga refugee camp in northern Iraq explained

> The female housing and sheltering officers were also acting as translators to the newly arrived foreign females and help them overcome the language barrier at their initial weeks in ISIS territories. As translators, they were helping women familiarize themselves with the neighbourhood and assisting them understand caliphate's official documents and announcements[59].

These female officers were also in charge of controlling the mobility of women during their stay in *maqars*. Based on ISIS strict regulations, women's mobility in towns was limited and the officers were those ensuring these regulations to be observed by the newcomers. Contacts with local Syrian or Iraqi residents of the cities should have been arranged by the officers and it was very minimal at this stage. However, after leaving *maqars*, these women had more freedom to interact with locals in the cities they were assigned to live in. Several female housing and sheltering officers were also closely cooperating with ISIS authorities as matchmakers. Naqibah, a 34-year-old ex-ISIS female member from Raqqa noted that female housing and shelter officers were very much involved in introducing single women to male jihadists and vice-versa. They introduced the women to male jihadi candidates under the surveillance of the ISIS Marriage Affairs Department[60].

The job description of female ISIS housing and sheltering officers went beyond mere accommodating the newcomer women in their new houses. They have been used as agents of social engineering by ISIS to allocate the newcomer women in their new social positions within the ISIS-run society.

Tax collectors

Generating income was key to survival for groups such as ISIS. At its peak in 2014 and early 2015, ISIS was crowned as the richest terrorist group with the annual net income of 2 billion US dollars[61]. The Syrian and Iraqi oil fields were the main sources of income for the group in those years generating millions of dollars per month. Losing its territories and therefore some of its most important oil fields, the group started to diversify its sources of revenue to counter its financial crisis. Taxation has been one of the important sources of income for ISIS since its establishment in 2014 , however, upon losing its oil and gas revenues, the group intensified the use of tax money to overcome the crisis. By the end of 2016, taxation was making up to 50 percent of ISIS total revenue[62].

While news and reports coming out of ISIS territories were clearly verifying the existence of the tax authority, no mentioning of women's duty in the authority has been reported so far. However, upon the process of data collection along Syrian borders in southern Turkey, I have come across a couple of Syrian refugees who admitted the existence of a small group of female tax collectors within ISIS authority. Rashid, a 29-year-old who was a shopkeeper in Raqqa and now living in Kilis in south Turkey indicated that

> As a result of the international pressure on ISIS and as the aftermath of losing its oil revenue, jihadists have intensified their efforts in generating tax revenues. This would make women of no exception. Upon visiting the ISIS tax authority in Raqqa to pay my business tax, I noticed a room with closed door which was assigned by the group for women to pay their taxes. The process of tax collection was run by ISIS female tax collectors[63].

Although ISIS was crowned as the richest terrorist organization of its time, near the end of its caliphate the organization was facing severe financial crisis. For this reason, and through its gender-segregated parallel institution, the organization started to exploit all the financial resources possible including those of women. For this reason, female tax collectors were recruited to maximize the organization's access to the scarce financial resources.

Hijrah

Women also contributed positively to the legitimacy of ISIS by making *hijrah* (migration) to its territory. Establishing a global caliphate for all Muslims (men and women) around the world regardless of their race, nationality and colour is on its own a form of what is called *Da'wa* (global invitation for all Muslims) in Islamic jurisprudence. This invitation encouraged Muslim men and women around the world to make *hijrah* (migration) to the "true" land of Islam and to form the "real" Islamic *ummah* (global community). Within this framework, thousands of women from all around the world migrated to the ISIS controlled territories in Syria and Iraq. In absence of conventional tools of providing legitimacy such as suffrage, women's participation in *Hijrah* in general was playing a vital role in providing ISIS with the legitimacy it needed to rule and run its caliphate.

ISIS claimed that by making *hijrah* to its newly established Islamic state, women who were socially and culturally alienated for their strong Islamist views and practices in western or secular Muslim countries could have found a conducive environment in which they could become active members of society (through gender-segregated parallel institutions) while adhering to their radical interpretation of religion. Noor, a 31-year-old former resident of Raqqa who was an English instructor and currently lives with her family in Gaziantep, southern Turkey, shares her story of encountering a migrant female ISIS member in Raqqa in late 2014,

A French woman who was married to a Moroccan ISIS jihadist moved to our neighbourhood. In one of the rare encounters I had with her, I asked her how come she left a country like France to came and live here? She replied with broken English that as a *Muslimah* [Muslim woman], she feels freer and more respected here. She is free to wear her *niqab* [face veil] with no shame and fear of being harassed by *kuffar* [infidels] like in France[64].

For these women, Islamic states founded by jihadi groups provide an escape from a society where to be equal citizens; one should abandon her religious duties[65]. The society established by ISIS claimed to provide the opportunity for these women to escape from a society in which being an equal citizen required abandoning the duties of one's religion.

Conclusion

The gender hierarchy and position of women within militant organizations throughout their course of armed struggle and after the triumph of these movements has been a topic of intense debates among scholars. Several researchers argue that 'in the midst of conflict and with nationalism at its height, women are empowered as a means of furthering the cause, yet once liberation is achieved, the importance of women and women's issues diminishes'.[66] However, empirical evidence discussed in this article reveals a reverse process among jihadi organizations. Groups such as ISIS were extremely exclusive of women throughout their campaigns and military operations prior to establishing states, however, upon their triumph, these organizations intensified engaging women in various roles and capacities.

ISIS might not be the first jihadi organization to try establishing its full-fledged state, however; it was the most effective and practical in terms of amount of territory and size of population controlled. Despite its brutal approach towards women of both religious and racial minorities, ISIS has challenged the conventional gender hierarchies among jihadi organizations by provided a platform to incorporate a large number of women in various social roles from all around the world. Such mobilization of women was unique in the history of jihadi organizations. The reason for ISIS's success in "empowering" a substantial number of like-minded women (through incorporating them in various social roles) against the restrictive interpretations of the Islamic jurisprudence was rooted in the organization's structure. Unlike groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS had a clear vision of governing a society based upon the principles of sharia law in practice.

As a result, ISIS morphed from a mere militant organization like other jihadi groups to a state builder. Along this metamorphosis, ISIS's objectives and therefore organizational structure was transformed as well. While other jihadi organizations seek to dismiss western troops from Muslim lands, and to topple down western supported local governments with vague plans for the morning after, ISIS had set its objective to revitalize its own interpretation of the Islamic tradition of caliphate. For that reason, ISIS's strategy for "empowering" women through incorporating them in large amounts was geared towards addressing the challenges facing a functioning state. These challenges included providing public goods and services, maintaining order and security, and obtaining legitimacy. This is where the differ-

ences between groups such as ISIS and nationalist and leftist organizations appear.

To address challenges facing a functioning state, women were incorporated through gender-segregated parallel institutions in a variety of social roles, some of which were discussed in this article. By using these institutions, ISIS has successfully managed to solve the *mahram* issue unlike other jihadi organizations. The *mahram* concept burdens all jihadi organizations for incorporating more women in their ranks. It is almost impossible for jihadi organizations to ensure their female members are accompanied by a male *mahram* in all occasions especially during militant operations. For that reason, most jihadi groups are reluctant about the widespread use of women. This accounts for the lower number of women in these groups in comparison to the nationalist and secular militant groups throughout their course of struggle against enemies.

However, upon triumph and establishing the state, while nationalist or secular movements dismiss or marginalize their female members, a jihadi group like ISIS challenged the conventional gender hierarchies of jihadi organizations and intensified its utilization of women to address the challenges of administrating a state. In studying the gender hierarchy within jihadi organizations such as ISIS, it is important to note that the "empowerment" brought about by ISIS was exclusive to a very special population of women. Groups such as ISIS target Muslim women who feel socially and culturally marginalized in their societies because of their ultra-conservative lifestyles. Islamic states founded by jihadi groups such as ISIS claimed to provide an escape from societies where to be equal citizens, one should have abandoned her religious duties.

ISIS's triumph in incorporating large numbers of women was due to the ability of ISIS in providing a conducive environment for women's integration by solving the *mahram* burden through gender-segregated parallel institutions. By this mechanism, ISIS claimed to provide the platform needed for "repressed" Muslim women around the world to be "empowered" and to play a more active role in the creation of a new generation of believers, and a state in which practicing their extremist ideological commitments are recognized and protected unlike their countries of origin where they migrated to the ISIS territories from. Gender segregation provided the ideological justification for many faithful women to ISIS' ideology to participate more actively in

social affairs against the established gender hierarchies among other jihadi organizations.

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