The *Jihādī* Movement and Rebel Governance: A Reassertion of a Patriarchal Order?

Brynjar Lia

University of Oslo

brynjar.lia@ikos.uio.no

Abstract

The rise of ISIS has drawn scholarly attention to militant Islamist movements as quasi-state actors, embracing governance as a core area of legitimation. Due to their commitment to conservative, literalist interpretations of *Sharīʿa*, *jihādī* movements have gained a reputation for being patriarchal, misogynist, and ultra-masculinist. This article seeks to qualify this perception, arguing that the social and political order established in *jihādī* proto-states is not based on norms and practices commonly associated with patriarchy. Although ISIS and other militant Islamist rebel rulers may outwardly have some of the trappings of a patriarchal order, especially in gender relations, they are first and foremost intensely religious-ideological communities, where blood ties and kinship play a minimal role. They are surprisingly bureaucratized and highly regulated, leaving little room for the traditional holders of power in patriarchal societies: the elders, traditional religious clerics, clan leaders, and heads of tribes. Instead, those who hold power are overwhelmingly young armed men whose authority rests on warfare skills and the mastery of extremist ideology. In the case of the ISIS “caliphate”, the most well-known *jihādī* proto-state, women also take part in a variety of roles outside the household, including operative and military roles, defying the image of women as passive victims.

Keywords

Patriarchy – jihadism – Islamism – al-Qaida – rebel governance

Introduction

The so-called Islamic State (ISIS),¹ an al-Qā'ida offshoot group that conquered substantial parts of northern Syria and western Iraq in 2013-14, has attracted scholarly attention to the issue of rebel governance by *jihādī* groups.² In this context, the advent of the self-proclaimed 'caliphate' is a particularly interesting case because it offers a unique window through which to view how an insurgent organization of the *jihādī* strand seeks to put its ideological vision into practice by implementing 'Islamic rulings' regarding family, kinship, authority, and gender.³

Although ISIS is clearly an unprecedented development in terms of its territorial scope as well as its geopolitical and regional significance, it is far from the first *jihādī* republic. In fact, over the past 25 years *jihādī* insurgents have repeatedly sought to form 'Islamic states' or 'emirates' in many parts of the Muslim world, including in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Caucasus, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, North Africa, and the Sahel. Very few of these proto-states, however, have survived for more than a year, and their de facto territorial control has often been severely contested.⁴ None of them has attracted such intense media attention and close scrutiny as that of ISIS.

While a range of issues can be raised with regards to *jihādī* rebel governance, this article aims to answer the following two questions: What characterizes *jihādī* proto-states in terms of patriarchal norms and practices? To what extent is it meaningful to describe and analyze *jihādī* proto-states as patriarchal sociopolitical entities? These questions may seem relatively straightforward.⁵

- 1 The abbreviation ISIS is used in this article to denote the "Islamic State" organization and its predecessor, "the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham", also dubbed "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant."
- 2 For recent studies of rebel governance, see in particular Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2011); and Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, Zachariah Mampilly (eds.), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 3 This article uses double quotation marks for literal quotations, single ones for paraphrases.
- 4 For an overview of previous *jihādī* proto-states, see Brynjar Lia, "Understanding Jihadi Proto-States", *Perspectives on Terrorism: Special Issue on the Islamic State* 9, no. 4 (2015), 31-41 <<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/441/html>>.
- 5 As outlined elsewhere in this special issue, patriarchy refers to "a dual form of dominance: male dominance over women but also the patriarch's power over the children", that is "male dominance within two hierarchal structures, defined by age and gender respectively." See Dag Tuastad's contribution in this volume: "Nationalist Patriarchy, Clan Democracy: How the Political Trajectories of Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories Have Been Reversed."

Movements such as ISIS, the Ṭālibān, and al-Shabāb are often depicted – by scholars and media commentators – as fundamentalist movements whose practices feature the worst aspects of patriarchal society. The list of violations of women's rights by these movements, from the Ṭālibān's banning of education for girls to ISIS's practice of female slavery, is very long. In short, they seem to confirm the notion that whenever *jihādī* insurgents conquer territory, they rush to establish a highly patriarchal order, making women subservient and invisible. This portrayal clearly has some merits, and there is no denying that women have suffered gruesome abuses and severe discrimination in the various *jihādī*-controlled enclaves. But, as this article will argue, the phenomenon of *jihādī* proto-states cannot be reduced simply to a manifestation of the 'entrenched patriarchal order' in Arab Muslim societies. By investigating *jihādī* proto-states with regards to their adherence to patriarchal norms, we can go beyond the taken-for-granted notions regarding jihadism and patriarchy, and improve our understanding of the underlying causes facilitating the rise and proliferation of *jihādī* groups.

Jihadism – a Patriarchal Masculinist Phenomenon?

Militant Islamist movements have often been characterized, in the works of prominent scholars on feminism and gender studies, as patriarchal masculinist groups. In the words of Valentine M. Moghadam, such movements are "comprised almost exclusively of men; they place a high premium on violence and war, and they are patriarchal in their attitudes and practices toward women."⁶ Ibtissam Bouachrine similarly argues that "[i]n the patriarchal Arab-Muslim society, jihad came to be a way through which men reaffirmed their masculinity and virility."⁷ Likewise, Tahmina Rashid conceives of radical Islamic movements "as militarized masculinities, oppressing women as well as terrorizing the non-Muslims."⁸

Several studies also link the prevalence of patriarchal values to the rise of jihadism. Maleeha Aslam's detailed study of norms among Pakistani Muslim men suggests that the way men are raised and inculcated with patriarchal norms and honour codes predisposes them to terrorist recruitment under

6 Cited in Valentine M. Moghadam, "Violence and Terrorism: Feminist Observations on Islamist Movements, State, and the International System", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 21 No.1-2 (2001), 127 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/191229>>.

7 Cited in Ibtissam Bouachrine, *Women and Islam: Myths, Apologies, and the Limits of Feminist Critique* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 7.

8 Cited in Tahmina Rashid, "Radical Islamic Movements: Gender Construction in Jamaat-i-Islami and Tabligh-i-Jamaat in Pakistan", *Strategic Analysis* 30, no. 2 (2006), 354 <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2043393>>.

conditions of political and socio-economic marginalization.⁹ The nature of ‘outraged masculinity’ and the conditions nurturing its proliferation are not precisely defined. Overall the existing literature lends credence to the assumption that Islamist violence is somehow associated with patriarchy and a certain set of social norms and political culture found in ‘patriarchal’ Muslim-majority societies in general and in the MENA region in particular. In this conceptualization of an Islamist militancy-patriarchy nexus, a political culture of male dominance is seen as being an inherent part of radical Islamist movements, with tribalism or ‘tribal culture’ serving as an archetype of patriarchal society.¹⁰ This notion is explicitly spelled out by Jacobsen and Deckard, who argue that “the level of tribalism” is a good predictor of religiously motivated violence. Their study is based on a new data set measuring “tribalism”, supplemented by empirical cases of ISIS in Syria/Iraq, al-Shabāb in Somalia, and the Ṭālibān in Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹¹ They find that “it is within tribal environments that Islamist movements are best nurtured.”¹² Jacobsen and Deckard do concede that *jihādīs* are not simply replicas of patriarchal tribalism, suggesting instead that “tribal-patriarchal concepts – such as honor, gender and grievance – [are turned] into ideological rather than kinship-based concerns.”¹³ Such a transformation of ‘tribalism’ at the hands of militant Islamists, although highly relevant, is not analyzed in the study. Nor do Jacobsen and Deckard attempt to hypothesize why *jihādī* groups apparently thrive in the context of ‘tribal-patriarchal’ societies.¹⁴

9 See e.g. Maleeha Aslam, *Gender-based Explosions: The Nexus between Muslim Masculinities, Jihadist Islamism and Terrorism* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2012), 222–52.

10 Since patriarchy refers to male dominance not only over women but also over younger men, societies with strong tribal, clannish, or otherwise kinship-based organizations are likely to be patriarchal. However, patriarchy does exist outside kinship-based organizations, so should not be equated with, or reduced to, tribalism.

11 David Jacobson and Natalie Deckard, “The Tribalism Index: Unlocking the Relationship between Tribal Patriarchy and Islamist Militants”, *New Global Studies* 6, no. 1 (2012), chapter 6 (unpaginated), doi:10.1515/1940-0004.1149.

12 Jacobson and Deckard, “The Tribalism Index”, 2.

13 Ibid.

14 Another study linking jihadism and tribalism is that of Akbar Ahmed, who argues that the U.S.-led campaign against *jihādī* movements, especially its campaign of assassinations (‘targeting killings’) using drones, has drawn unwilling tribes inhabiting ‘ungoverned spaces’ of the Muslim world into the battle thereby transforming the conflict into “a global war on tribal Islam.” See Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Washington D. C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2013).

On a theoretical level, there are several possible causal connections between prevalent patriarchal social structures and norms, on the one hand, and the existence of *jihādī* organizations, on the other. As suggested above, Islamist militants may simply adapt to the local context by adopting existing cultural codes and social norms in order to avoid alienating conservative constituencies. Although possible, this is improbable, for several reasons. For one, *jihādīs* are revolutionaries and an anti-systemic sociopolitical force; their political radicalism would alienate almost any conservative constituency even if they pretended to accommodate to existing social norms. Another possible interpretation is that the *jihādīs* carry with them, possibly without much reflection, patriarchal values that they take for granted and which become apparent in their sociopolitical and organizational activities, especially in the context of territorial control and governance of civilian populations.¹⁵ A third hypothesis, which finds support in this article, is that *jihādī* movements recruit more easily in highly patriarchal or tribal societies because jihadism represents an alternative to, and a revolt against, an existing order in which young men and women are expected to obey, revere, and remain subservient to elder men, often their own kin.

This article argues that the social and political order established in *jihādī* proto-states contrasts sharply with common patriarchal norms and practices. *Jihādī* proto-states are intensely ideological projects, in which blood ties and kinship play a minimal role. This aspect is perhaps most visible in the participation of foreign fighters or foreign volunteers. They are mostly young men and women with no kinship ties with the population in the *jihādī* proto-state to which they travel. These foreign Muslim volunteers often sever their kinship ties *in defiance of their fathers* (i.e. their nominal patriarchs) to join their 'brothers and sisters' in faith. ISIS, which is the primary case study for this article, seeks to create an intensely religious-ideological community in which all relations are tightly measured against ideological dictates. As will be argued, *jihādī* proto-states are run by young armed men whose authority derives from the ideological movement, not from kinship ties. The traditional holders of power in patriarchal societies – elderly men and tribal shaykhs – are relegated

15 For example, in the case of Boko Haram, it has been argued that the organization's mass abduction and rape of women occurs against "the backdrop of the patriarchal ideational infrastructure of the Nigerian society [... and] is an extension of the 'repertoire of violence' ingrained in the sociopolitical and cultural milieu of Boko Haram's primary area of operation." See Temitope B. Oriola, "Unwilling Cocoons: Boko Haram's War Against Women", *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 2 (2017), 100, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2016.1177998.

to the role of bystanders, subjects, or propaganda mascots. Women are active participants in a variety of roles in the ISIS 'caliphate' (or what is also dubbed the 'Islamic Revival' project). Their roles, duties, and rights are all prescribed in detail by the *jihādī* movement's ideologues. Although women are encouraged to find their main role in the private sphere, as housewives and mothers, the enforcement of gender segregation nevertheless creates a limited public sphere for women in areas of education, health, policing, and so forth. Far from being helpless victims in a patriarchal world, the female *jihādīs* actively shape the movement. Despite keeping a low profile, they seem to demonstrate a degree of agency, participating in various spheres of activity, as the exigencies of war have induced *jihādī* groups to allow for an expanded role for women in recruitment, in propaganda activities, and even in the military domain.

In the following, four specific empirical themes (women, youth, children, and tribal leaders) will be examined with a view to assessing *jihādī* proto-states' social practices and adherence to patriarchal norms.

ISIS and Women

The role of women 'in jihād' and in the struggle for an Islamic society is an important theme in *jihādī* ideology.¹⁶ The influential *Minbar al-Tawhīd wa-l-Jihād* web portal contains several dozen treatises on the topic, many of them heavily focusing on women's contributions to the *jihādī* struggle with titles such as "The Role of Women in Jihād", "Woman in the Battlefield of Jihād", "The Caravan of Female Martyrs in the Land of Qandahar", "Eulogy for a Muslim Female Knight", and "Woman's Departure for Jihād".¹⁷ Similarly, ISIS's female al-Khansā' Media Brigade has also published ideological tracts outlining women's role in "the Islamic State."¹⁸ Furthermore, documents retrieved from areas under the organization's control in Syria, Iraq, and Libya also reveal a

16 David Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad?", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005), 375-84, doi:10.1080/10576100500180212; Katharina Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30, no. 5 (2007), 397-414, doi:10.1080/10576100701258585; Nelly Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women From Jihad", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014), 780-802, doi:10.1080/09546553.2013.772511.

17 See the section "Shaqa'iḳ al-Mujāhidāt", *Minbar al-Tawhīd wa-l-Jihād* <<http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=46>> (accessed 2 September 2015).

18 "Women of the Islamic State: A manifesto on women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade", translated by Quilliam Foundation, January 2015 <<https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>>.

preoccupation with defining women's role in written rules and regulations.¹⁹ Although ISIS has contested al-Qā'ida on several ideological issues, they do not seem to diverge significantly on the role of women. In practical terms, the actual deployment of female combatants and the use of women as suicide bombers have varied significantly among al-Qā'ida, ISIS, and their various regional branches. Boko Haram, ISIS's branch in West Africa, and al-Qā'ida in Iraq, ISIS's predecessor, have both been very prolific users of women in military attacks. At the opposite end of this spectrum, al-Qā'ida's core organization has hardly deployed women in operative roles. Practical considerations of access, utility, and local context, not ideology, explain this variation.²⁰ For all *jihādī* organizations, gender segregation is a defining theme, from which the strict social regulations are derived. If proper precautions are put in place to prevent the 'unlawful mixing of sexes' (*inkhilāt*), female participation in the public sphere is both possible and to some degree encouraged due to the necessity of having female staff in the education system, health services, the police, the commercial sector, and so forth.

For the most part, ISIS did not employ women as fighters, but tended to confine them to the private sphere, where their role as mothers and wives was cherished.²¹ This was not because war fighting was absolutely forbidden for women, according to the *jihādī* interpretation of Islamic teachings. In fact, it is considered permissible to allow women to fight on the front line under special circumstances (e.g. when the male fighting force is overstretched and faces defeat). Although rare, several cases of "an actual military role for women" in ISIS have been documented over the past few years, not only as suicide bombers but also as cooks and kitchen staff close to the front lines.²² Furthermore, in late 2016, as ISIS faced setbacks on several fronts, the organization reportedly increased its reliance on women "in missions related to leadership, logistics, carrying arms, [and the] production of explosives", as well as in deploying suicide bombers.²³

19 See the collection of some 300 documents published by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi at <<http://www.aymennjawad.org/>>.

20 Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 4.

21 In particular, mothers of fallen martyrs were celebrated in ISIS's eulogies and martyrdom stories.

22 Aymenn al-Tamimi, "The Archivist: Stories of the Mujahideen: Women of the Islamic State", *jihadology.net*, 17 October 2016 <<http://jihadology.net/2016/10/17/the-archivist-stories-of-the-mujahideen-women-of-the-islamic-state/>>.

23 "Tanjīd Dā'ish yatafāwat bayn al-'Arabiyyāt wa-l-Gharbiyyāt: Naqla naw'iyya fi mahāmm al-nisā' qimn al-tanzīm al-mutaṭarriṭ", *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 10 October 2016 <<http://aawsat.net>>.

During its caliphate era, ISIS employed female personnel in many different roles related to 'jihād', in various supporting roles such as policing the (female) civilian population, and in various guard duties where female crew were needed for searching women.²⁴ ISIS reportedly established several female police units, such as the al-Khansā' Brigade and the Umm Rayān brigades set up in early 2014, reportedly in response to the unpopularity of male police "enforcing morality on women outside their families."²⁵ These policewomen received some four weeks of weapons training and a fixed salary. They were required to wear the *niqāb* and were to be accompanied by a man, as dictated by the ISIS rulings on male guardianship.²⁶ The presence of male guardians should not be taken as evidence of a traditionalist patriarchal order, however. Indeed, elite units of the al-Khansā' Brigade consisting of wives of foreign fighters were reportedly exempted from the obligation of having a male chaperone, following an ISIS fatwa endorsing this practice.²⁷ Furthermore, women in the ISIS administration enforced law and order in ways that contrasted sharply with norms about respect and deference for age and seniority. The account of a former ISIS Women's Police member who had taken part in meting out corporal punishments on women in Raqqa is particularly revealing: "What upset me most was lashing old women when they weren't wearing the proper clothes. These women were like my mother."²⁸

ISIS has released video footage of members of its female fighting force defying the housewife stereotype. In one such video, some 30 women, each wearing black *'abāyah* and *niqāb* and all armed with Kalashnikovs, demonstrate their skills in handling automatic weapons and shooting from different positions. The women brandish their weapons while cheering *takbīr* – a common battle

com/print/756861>; and "Isis sends female supporters to serve as frontline suicide bombers", *The Guardian*, 12 November 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/12/isis-women-frontline-suicide-bombers>>.

24 See e.g. the footage in "Why are women joining ISIS?", *TestTubeNews*, 30 October 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfjqkX5giuc>>.

25 Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate* (McLean, VA: Advances Press, LLC, 2016), 84.

26 See e.g. "Isis: British women led by Aqsa Mahmood 'running sharia police unit for Islamic State in Syria'", *The Independent*, 8 September 2014 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-british-women-running-sharia-police-unit-for-islamic-state-in-syria-9717510.html>>.

27 Speckhard and Yayla, *ISIS Defectors*, 166–7.

28 According to TV interview with two former members of Islamic State's al-Khansā' Brigade. See "What It's Like To Be A Woman In Islamic State", *Sky News*, 20 April 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zel6FSGSw8>>.

cry for Muslim extremists whose literal meaning is “God is [the] greatest” – much like male fighters do in *jihādī* videos.²⁹ Several of them deliver short speeches, suggesting that ISIS does not adhere to the strictest Salafist interpretation – that women’s voices are *ʿawra* and should not be heard by men outside their immediate family.³⁰

Women also play a role in the field of ISIS propaganda, media outreach, proselytization, education, and recruitment. In this and many other fields, they were being trained to fill the specific roles ISIS has designated for them. Online ISIS recruitment videos such as “The preparation of the Muslim women for jihād” were just one of many examples of how ISIS portrayed itself as an ideological state in which women would have specialized roles in society for which they needed training and education. As opposed to the Ṭālībān regime in the 1990s, which banned female education (under the justification that proper gender segregation was practically impossible in war-torn Afghanistan), ISIS encouraged education for women but insisted that it be confined to what women needed in order to fulfil their roles in society. In practice, this covered a wide range of areas. In fact, both male and female teachers were equally mentioned in ISIS announcements regarding its efforts to remake the school system. One document announced an obligatory one-week Islamic law training course for “all directors and teachers – male and female”, without which they would not be allowed to teach.³¹ Another document instructed both male and female teachers to undertake “their required repentance” within a specific time and a specified location in order to avoid exposure to “inquiry” or “judicial proceedings.”³² A third document on internet restrictions in Mosul, specifying the need to employ an all-female staff administration for an “Internet hall designated for women”, implicitly endorsed female visitors spending time in internet cafés and women working in these enterprises.³³

29 “Nisā’ al-Tamkīn”, *YouTube*, 22 December 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10vJYPsm4rU>>.

30 For a discussion of the concept of *ʿawra* among female Islamists, see Laila Makboul’s article in this volume.

31 See “Specimen L: Shari’a Session for Teachers, Raqqa Province, Islamic State, Caliphate on the Program of the Prophets/Prophethood, Diwan alTa’aleem: Wilayat alRaqqa”, *aymennjawad.org* <<http://www.aymennjawad.org/> and <https://justpaste.it/isteachertraining>>.

32 See “Specimen iV: Call for repentance of teachers in IS controlled parts of Syria: February 2015, Islamic State, Caliphate on the Program of the Prophets/Prophethood, Diwan alTa’aleem, Statement for distribution: 11 for the wilayat [provinces] of al-Sham only. Date: 25 Rabi’ alThani 1436 AH”, *aymennjawad.org* <<http://www.aymennjawad.org/> and <https://justpaste.it/repentancesyriateachers>>.

33 “Specimen i8V: Further Internet restrictions in Mosul, Islamic State, Diwan al-Amn

Women have also figured as authors of theological and ideological productions, although the number of these productions has been minuscule compared to those produced by male ideologues and propagandists. One example is a Syrian female scholar who served in ISIS's Fatwa Issuing and Research Department and also in the organization of ISIS's *hisba* teams (i.e. teams for Islamic morality enforcement). Her standing was such that she was profiled in ISIS's commemoration literature on its fallen martyrs.³⁴ Another example is the female author of the article "The Twin Halves of the muhājirīn", published in the English-language ISIS magazine *Dābiq*.³⁵ Interestingly, the article was not dedicated to the typical female *jihādī* sphere, such as how to be a good *mujāhida*. Instead, it addressed issues of strategic importance for ISIS, namely its ideological rivalry with al-Qā'ida. The author launched a venomous attack against the pro-al-Qā'ida Jordanian ideologue Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdī and his supporters. After recounting the heroic steadfastness and patience of the ISIS *muhājirāt*, the writer turned her anger on the al-Maḥdī disciples, who run the important *Minbar at-Tawḥīd wa-l-Jihād* web portal for *jihādī* literature:

This is the path for the patient believing women, not the half-men whose attempts at dissuasion we see on what they refer to as "Minbar (Podium) at-Tawḥīd wal-Jihād," where they call the people to remove the women from the blessed Wilāyat Ninawā! And for he who wears the cloak of advice upon that podium of dissuasion, I say: You falsely claim to fear for the muwahhidāt who do not fear anything but Allah; if there were any good in you, you would have worn clothes of war and come to guard the outskirts of Mosul to thereby protect your "sisters," but not in the least ... May Allah disfigure the turbans of the PKK's women, yet they have more manhood than your likes!³⁶

In other words, the towering *jihādī* figure al-Maḥdī, who is in his late fifties and has figured for years as the most cited *jihādī* ideologue, was being dressed

al-Aam, Wilayat Ninawa centre, No. 791, Date: 14 Shawwal 1437 AH", *aymennjawad.org* <<http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1>>.

34 Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Thea Archivist: Stories of the Mujahideen: Women of the Islamic State", *jihadology.net*, 17 October 2016 <<http://jihadology.net/2016/10/17/the-archivist-stories-of-the-mujahideen-women-of-the-islamic-state/>>.

35 Umm Sumayah al-Muhājirah, "The Twin Halves of the muhājirīn", *Dābiq* no.8 (Jumada Al-Akhira 1436), 32-37.

36 Cited in Umm Sumayah al-Muhājirah, "The Twin Halves of the muhājirīn", *Dābiq* no. 8 (Jumada Al-Akhira 1436), 37. (Transliteration as in the original document.)

down by this female ISIS writer for being a coward, for being more feminine and weak than Kurdish female fighters and, most importantly, for attempting to restrict the role of women in jihād.

Another example of female writers cited by ISIS supporters is “Umm Muḥammad”, the widow of the legendary and brutal *jihādī* commander Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī, who commanded al-Qā‘ida in Iraq, ISIS’s precursor, until his death in mid-2006. In a message entitled “Message to those who stay behind and have neglected jihad feessaabeelilah”, Umm Muḥammad specifically addressed the youth: “Oh young people and sons of the clans, attach importance to your religion and pay attention to it.” She urged them to remember the hereafter, abandon mundane concerns, and join “the caravans and processions of martyrs.”³⁷ The theme raised by Umm Muḥammad in this quote, namely the special role of youth, will be explored later in this article.

Women are also active in foreign-based recruitment rings, funnelling male and female volunteers to ISIS-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq.³⁸ For example, female ISIS defectors have reported their involvement in the recruitment of “hundreds of foreign women to Syria.”³⁹ Over the past few years, female *jihādīs* have emerged as prominent and active cell members in ISIS-inspired terrorist plots targeting European countries, in particular France, a trend that diverges from earlier patterns where women played a relatively minor auxiliary role in *jihādī* networks in Europe.⁴⁰ *Jihādī* propagandists have seized on this to prod male sympathizers into action in order not to ‘lag behind their sisters in jihad.’⁴¹

37 Umm Muhammad, “Message to those who stay behind and have neglected jihad feesaa-beelilah”, *Umm Layth Blog*, 12 March 2014 <<http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com/post/79373439614/message-to-those-who-stay-behind-and-have>>.

38 For example, female activists have been arrested on suspicion of being part of ISIS recruitment networks in Spain and Morocco. See “Tafkik shabaka fi-Isbāniya wa-l-Maghrib taqūm bi-ilḥāq nisā’ bi-tanzīm al-dawla al-islāmiyya”, *Euronews*, 16 December 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15er8RIK05s>>.

39 For a similar case in the United Kingdom, see “Video: Secret cell of British Muslim women encouraging others to join Islamic State exposed”, *The Telegraph*, 24 November 2015 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12012683/Secret-cell-of-British-Muslim-women-encouraging-other-to-join-Isil-exposed.html>>; “Munshaqqa ‘an Dā’ish li-Akhbār al-Ān: tamakkantu min idkhāl mi’āt ajnabiyyāt ilā Sūriyā”, *AlAan Arabic Television*, 25 June 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQK5sXoaSQ>>.

40 Jason Burke, “St-Denis female suicide bomber is not the first, and will not be the last”, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/18/st-denis-female-suicide-bomber-is-not-the-first-and-will-not-be-the-last>>.

41 One of the suspects behind terrorist incidents in France was reported to have stated on jihadist media that “Women, sisters have moved to attack. Where are the brothers? [...] She brandished a knife and she hit a policeman.... Where are the men?” Cited in “The

ISIS's strict policies on gender segregation and Islamic dress code, and its rules of male guardianship, have not deterred foreign women, both Western and Arab, from joining the organization. In fact, young female foreign volunteers have arrived in numbers not seen in earlier waves of foreign fighter recruitment.⁴² By early 2015, a common estimate of the number of ISIS *muhājirāt* (or immigrants) from Europe was between 500 and 600. In this context, it is interesting to observe the agency of female ISIS recruits. Many of these female volunteers had defied their own parents' wishes and, in a sense, violated their duty to oblige the wishes of their male guardian. In ISIS's ideology, the duty to participate in *jihād* trumps all other Islamic obligations. Furthermore, when they arrived in ISIS territory, the *muhājirāt* were given a new male guardian (in Arabic: *walī*) or 'patriarch.' He was often the local military commander and he remained the guardian as long as the woman in question was unmarried. He would become her guardian again if she was widowed. What is interesting about this procedure is that the kinship patriarch was replaced by a bureaucratic appointment. The patriarchal role was reduced to an issue of bureaucratic organization, divested from kinship and blood ties, and set apart from patriarchal authority in its literary meaning as "the rule of the father."⁴³

One of the most notorious ISIS practices was slavery. The organization permitted its members to take female prisoners as concubines, and spent considerable time and space in their online journals justifying this, citing Islamic sources.⁴⁴ However, ISIS also justified the enslavement of male prisoners, which ironically created a sort of 'gender equality' in ISIS's repression of 'non-believers.'⁴⁵ Similarly, one finds that rules and regulations specifying strict dress codes were not directed only at women. In fact, an ISIS document listing

young women behind France's 'terrorist commando' network", *France24.com*, 15 September 2016 <<http://www.france24.com/en/20160914-france-terrorism-women-jihad-paris-gas-cylinder-islamic-state-terrorist-commando>>.

- 42 Although the female foreign fighter topic is still understudied, there is ample evidence to suggest that "the involvement of female foreign fighters on this scale is a new phenomenon." See Edwin Bakker and Seran de Leede, "European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic", ICCT Background Note, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague (ICCT), April 2015 <[https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-de-Leede-European-Female-Jihadists-In-Syria-Exploring-An-Under-Researched-Topic-April2015\(1\).pdf](https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-de-Leede-European-Female-Jihadists-In-Syria-Exploring-An-Under-Researched-Topic-April2015(1).pdf)>.
- 43 Kathy E. Ferguson, "Patriarchy", in *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Helen Tierney (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1999), 1048.
- 44 See e.g. "The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour", *Dābiq* no. 4 (Dhū-l-Hijja 1435), 14-17.
- 45 Women have clearly suffered more than men by the enslavement practice, but men are overwhelmingly the victims of ISIS's mass executions.

“reprimand penalties” to be meted out against offenders in Mosul stated that in case of women not abiding by the Islamic dress code, their male guardian would be “taken into custody in Hisba Center, male custodian forced to buy her abaya, custodian flogged 20 times in front of her.” Furthermore, men who wore “clothes which resemble those worn by infidels or women” would be punished as follows: “Be held custody in Hisba center for a day. [...] Change his clothes in the presence of his custodian. Flogging 15-30 times.”⁴⁶ While ISIS laws were harsh, the ISIS governance was bureaucratized and ideological in nature and relatively predictable, which in turn enabled women to take legal action against their husbands and guardians. One such case was recounted by ISIS defectors: a Tunisian ISIS fighter was taken to court by his two wives, prosecuted, and punished after having asked them “to be in bed with him together.”⁴⁷ Such practices would probably not have become an issue for public legal action in a traditional patriarchal society, and it is illustrative of how the ISIS ‘state’ trespassed into the private sphere, reducing the patriarchal authority of the extended family over its members.

There is no doubt that women’s agency in ISIS-controlled areas was circumscribed, but their ability to shape their own lives and their own futures was probably limited more by their presence in a country in the midst of a civil war rather than by ISIS-imposed gender restrictions. True, local women in ISIS-controlled areas, unaffiliated with ISIS and lacking ideological dedication to the caliphate project, for the most part strongly opposed ISIS rule and celebrated the territorial setbacks of ISIS in 2016-17.⁴⁸ At the same time, women in armed conflicts have commonly been portrayed “as intrinsically weak or vulnerable” and as “the weaker sex who, like children, need protection and mentoring.”⁴⁹ Similarly, reports of massive abuses against women in ISIS-con-

46 “Specimen 13S: Reprimand penalties for various offences, Mosul (2014), Islamic State, Diwan al-Hisba, Statement for distribution no. 2, List of reprimand penalties (1)”, *aymennjawad.org* <<http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1>>.

47 According to eyewitness accounts, the Tunisian was reportedly imprisoned for 20 days, lashed, and “paraded [on a pickup truck] around the town with a sign telling what he did.” Speckhard and Yayla, *ISIS Defectors*, 83, 122.

48 In this regard, it is interesting to note the *nomenclatura*-style society created by ISIS, described by former inhabitants as “a brutal, two-tiered society, where daily life is starkly different for the occupiers and the occupied.” See “Spoils for the Rulers, Terror for the Ruled: Life in the ‘Islamic State’”, *Washington Post*, 1 October 2015 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/life-in-the-islamic-state/2015/10/01/overview/>>.

49 Rehana Wagha, “Armed Conflict and Women’s Agency: The Case of Swat, Pakistan”, *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014), 125, doi:10.1080/12259276.2014.11666193.

trolled areas have also reinforced the impression of ISIS women as passive victims, a representation which fails to recognize women's autonomy and agency. By contrast, available sources suggest that many female ISIS activists felt a genuine ownership of ISIS's utopian state project and, as outlined above, women have played a role in key areas in ISIS governance. The organization recruited a large number of very dedicated female volunteers, many of whom arrived from abroad. While some became disillusioned, returned, or fled, others were wholeheartedly committed and strenuously refused their mothers' or fathers' plea to come home.⁵⁰

The rise of social media as a virtual public space expanded female agency in the ISIS state project in the sense that it permitted female ISIS supporters to have "an unedited voice about their involvement in the conflict."⁵¹ In numerous interviews and blog postings, and on social media platforms, female ISIS activists in Syria have offered detailed accounts not only of their material hardship and suffering but also of their joy and jubilation at participating in building this allegedly 'virtuous society.' Taken together, this material suggests that female recruitment to ISIS was based on ideological and religious commitment, while factors such as sexual attraction, adventurism, and grooming were less decisive.⁵² While some of these accounts are clearly the product of ISIS propaganda, the massive social media material produced by ISIS's foreign volunteers and their European-based supporters, in addition to testimonies given in interviews and interrogations, provides a relatively solid basis for drawing tentative conclusions about the motivations of female volunteers. In one such assessment – a study of more than a hundred Western females who have joined ISIS – the authors refute the assumption that most women join ISIS to become 'jihādī brides.'⁵³ Furthermore, among the large amount of ISIS documents retrieved and published by Aymenn al-Tamimi's Archivist project, there is scant

50 See e.g. "Life under ISIS control: French Women in Raqqa-Syria", *France24.com*, 24 September 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iecM8MxPTQw>>. See also the excellent biography of two Norwegian-Somali teenage sisters who left for Syria in 2013 in Åsne Sejersted, *To søstre*. Oslo: Kagge forlag, 2016.

51 Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 45.

52 See e.g. "Inside the Chilling Online World of the Women of ISIS", *Buzzfeed.com*, 12 September 2014 <https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-the-women-of-isis?utm_term=.uk8mqVMD5#.cfKrWgO2n>.

53 Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, "'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part': Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon" (Report, Institute for Strategic Dialogue / International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2015) <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf>.

evidence of the notion of “an institutionalized ‘sex jihad.’”⁵⁴ Instead, women appear to be recruited for many of the same reasons as men.⁵⁵ As for female ISIS recruits from the Middle East, family bonds to male ISIS members appear to have been very important.⁵⁶ In addition, much like female recruits to other rebel groups in the Middle East, patriarchal norms in their home communities have probably been a factor; female recruits saw in ISIS’s ideological utopia a way of escaping traditional restrictions imposed by their male kin.⁵⁷

ISIS, the Elderly, and the Youth

If ISIS were a movement dedicated to upholding patriarchal norms about the sanctity of male dominance over women and of the elderly over the youth, one would perhaps expect the organization to show extraordinary respect and reverence to older people, to valorize age seniority, and to be ruled like a gerontocracy. This is not the case. In fact, the very opposite is a characteristic feature. As Olivier Roy and others have pointed out in the context of France, jihadism can

54 See Aymenn al-Tamimi, “The Archivist: Stories of the Mujahideen: Women of the Islamic State”, *jihadology.net*, 17 October 2016 <<http://jihadology.net/2016/10/17/the-archivist-stories-of-the-mujahideen-women-of-the-islamic-state/>>.

55 According to the report, they felt “socially and culturally isolated [in the West], believed Muslims were being persecuted and were angry that nothing was being done about it. They were also attracted by an idealistic view of religious duty, a sense of sisterhood, and the romance of the adventure.” See the summary in “Western women who join Islamic State defy ‘jihadi bride’ stereotype: report”, *Reuters*, 28 May 2015 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/28/us-mideast-crisis-women-idUSKBN0D16J20150528>>.

56 “Tanjīd Dā’ish yatafāwat bayn al-‘Arabiyyāt wa-l-Gharbiyyāt: Naqla naw’iyya fi mahāmm al-nisā’ ḍimn al-tanzīm al-mutaṭarrif”, *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 10 October 2016 <<http://aawsat.com/print/756861>>.

57 It may seem ironic that female volunteers have flocked to ISIS given its reputation for brutality and oppression of women. Rehana Wagha’s study of women’s support for the Ṭālibān in Swat, Pakistan, is helpful in explaining the attraction of militant Islamism to women. Wagha notes that “[g]iven the strong desire of women to desist men’s domination, religious rhetoric on women’s rights and status espoused by Mullah Fazalullah [a key Ṭālibān preacher] cannot be underestimated. They perceived Mullah Fazalullah as the messianic figure who would help them in restoring and raising their status and autonomy [...] Thus, it would not be inappropriate to identify and interpret women’s support to Talibanization as a desperate attempt to realize their status and rights within the prevailing sexual division of labor and the hegemonic ideology of Islam.” Cited in Wagha, “Armed Conflict and Women’s Agency.”

be understood as a “révolte générationnelle” among radicalized youth.⁵⁸ Elderly men are not only conspicuously absent in ISIS’s ranks of recruits; they are also surprisingly rare in the higher echelons of the organization. Age is hailed as a virtue only when it equals seniority in the *jihādī* struggle. Furthermore, elderly men are mostly invisible in ISIS propaganda. This contrasts sharply with state-controlled media in the MENA region, where aging state leaders are the omnipresent stars, and where the youth’s anger at patronizing state leaders was one of the most important leitmotifs during the Arab popular revolts.⁵⁹

When elderly men do appear in ISIS propaganda pieces, they are often being used as a propaganda mascot for recruitment purposes. One such case was an ISIS fighter walking with a stick and portrayed as “the oldest mujahid in Iraq” by an ISIS media outlet.⁶⁰ Another example was a 70-year-old Albanian fighter whose picture figured on many pro-ISIS websites.⁶¹ The message in both cases was not that old men deserve special respect and unreserved obedience, however. Instead, the intention was to prod young men to join ISIS, since even ‘these old men can fight.’ The subtitle to the picture of the Albanian veteran was telling: “A 70-year old Albanian fighter for the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham: Now, what’s your excuse?”⁶² Age is also an issue in ISIS’s ideological dispute with al-Qā’ida. ISIS’s spokesman has accused al-Qā’ida’s leader, Shaykh al-Zawāhirī, of being senile.⁶³

ISIS propaganda material is filled with pictures of young people. It clearly reflects a reality of social revolution in which extreme upward social mobility became possible for young men in Raqqa, Mosul, and other ISIS-controlled areas. One of the many young men interviewed by the German journalist Jürgen Todenhöfer, who himself spent 10 days in Mosul and Raqqa in 2014, was in fact “the local police chief in Mosul.”⁶⁴ In the interview, the young police com-

58 See e.g. Olivier Roy, “Le djihadisme est une révolte générationnelle et nihiliste”, *Le Monde*, 24 November 2015 <http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/24/le-djihadisme-une-revolte-generationnelle-et-nihiliste_4815992_3232.html>.

59 See e.g. ‘Umar al-Hādī, “al-Shabāb muwāṭinūn wa-laysū abnā’ak”, *almasryalyoum*, 27 October 2016 <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1031314>>.

60 “The oldest mujahid in Iraq! Where are you, O ye Youth!! *The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham* [in Arabic]”, *YouTube.com*, 8 September 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSblJWXSa2I>>.

61 *Umm Layth Blog*, 19 October 2013 <<http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com/post/64492271332/a-70-year-old-albanian-fighter-for-the-islamic>>.

62 *Umm Layth Blog*, 19 October 2013 <<http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com/post/64492271332/a-70-year-old-albanian-fighter-for-the-islamic>>.

63 Fawaz Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 248.

64 “Islamic State: Inside ‘brutal’ heartland in Mosul”, *BBC News*, 23 December 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNZ7De-4clM>>.

mander bragged that “Mosul was now the safest place on earth.” Judging by the YouTube footage of the interview, the man was in his early- or mid-twenties, which is very young for a top police commander in an Arab city of more than a million people. These are clearly not random examples. Nearly all *jihādīs* pictured in *Dābiq* are very young, including those who are celebrated as martyrs. The caliph himself, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, is in his forties (b. 1971), as are several of the former Iraqi officers manning key ISIS military positions, but the movement as a whole appears to be very young. While it is not surprising that ISIS recruits young men to front-line service and combat duties, it is remarkable that their civilian offices are staffed with bureaucrats in their early twenties. In numerous ISIS videos covering ISIS rule in Syria, Iraq, and its Libyan province in Sirte, young men nearly always man positions of authority, whether as spokesmen, government office bureaucrats, court officials, or police officers.⁶⁵ Perhaps to further underscore the non-patriarchal character of the movement, ISIS videos devote much attention to the clients – many of them middle-aged and elderly men – seeking help and assistance from ISIS youth manning the various government offices. These men are often interviewed by ISIS media outlets as they heap praise on the alleged justice and welfare provided by the ISIS government. Underneath, the message is unmistakable: the youth are now in charge, and the traditional patriarchy has been turned upside down.⁶⁶

ISIS and Children

Yet another avenue for exploring ISIS and its assumed patriarchal character is to examine how the movement relates to youngsters and children. In a tribal, patriarchal family, fathers and heads of the local clans would have the ultimate

65 See e.g. the following videos released by ISIS Libya province: “To Establish the Religion – Wilāyat Ṭarābulus”, *jihadology.net*, 30 March 2016 <<http://jihadology.net/2016/03/30/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-to-establish-the-religion-wilayat-%E1%B9%ADarabulus/>>; and “And What Is To Come Will Be More Devastating and Bitter – Wilāyat Ṭarābulus”, *jihadology.net*, 26 March 2016 <<http://jihadology.net/2016/03/26/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-and-what-is-to-come-will-be-more-devastating-and-bitter-wilayat-%E1%B9%ADarabulus>>.

66 At the same time, it is noteworthy that former ISIS fighters have highlighted absent fathers as one of several reasons why they left their home to join the organization, again underscoring the complexity of the generational struggle in which ISIS plays a role. See Lydia Wilson, “What I discovered from interviewing imprisoned ISIS Fighters”, *The Nation*, 21 October 2015 <<https://www.thenation.com/article/what-i-discovered-from-interviewing-isis-prisoners/>>.

say over their progeny in all important matters. Again, ISIS does not seem to abide by these traditional norms, which ensure the extended family's authority over its offspring. The organization's extensive recruitment of child soldiers is just one example of how ISIS violates patriarchal authority.⁶⁷ ISIS has expended considerable effort in socializing the new generation into its utopian project and creating a new generation of *jihādīs*. Children spend much time away from their families at special camps for religious and military training, where they are reportedly trained in the use of firearms, in martial arts, and in various ways of killing enemies, including actual participation in the execution of prisoners.⁶⁸ Children are encouraged to contribute to the ISIS caliphate in any way possible, including spying and informing on family, relatives, and friends.⁶⁹ ISIS has also exploited children for suicide missions. In early 2017, perhaps as many as a third of ISIS's suicide missions were carried out by children, according to reporting based on ISIS propaganda material.⁷⁰

ISIS's *Ashbāl al- Khilāfah*, or Cubs of Lions of the Caliphate, where "boys as young as six are recruited", has been compared to Hitler's youth programme.⁷¹

- 67 For studies of ISIS's recruitment of children, see e.g. "The Cubs of the Caliphate: How the Islamic State Attracts, Coerces and Indoctrinates Children to its Cause", Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, Baghdad, 2016 <<http://www.bayancenter.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/pdf02566.pdf>>; Kara Anderson, "Cubs of the Caliphate: The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State", Paper, Drake University, Des Moines, USA, 2016 <<http://www.drake.edu/media/departments/offices/international/nelson/2016%20paper,%20Children%20in%20ISIS,%20K.%20Anderson.pdf>>; and John G. Horgan, PhD, Max Taylor, Mia Bloom and Charlie Winter, "From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 7 (2017), 645–64, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1221252.
- 68 "In an IS training camp, children told: Behead the doll", *Associated Press*, 20 July 2015 <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/f852b2d021254f06b9a002dfe25c7538/training-camp-children-told-behead-doll>>.
- 69 "Life under Islamic State in Raqqa", *Sky News on YouTube.com*, 24 September 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUYQsfm5p5U>>.
- 70 See e.g. Charlie Winter @charliewinter, 3 March 2017, pic.twitter.com/1e1sBkixQs. See also "Isis deploys child suicide bombers as Iraqi army advances", *The Guardian*, 11 November 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/11/paranoid-isis-executes-scores-of-spies-in-face-of-iraqi-army-advance>>.
- 71 Kathleen Kuehnast, "Women Under ISIS Rule: From Brutality to Recruitment" (Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C., 28 July 2015) <<http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/07/28/women-under-isis-rule-brutality-recruitment>>. The Hitler Youth organization was founded in 1933 and became the Nazi regime's main tool for indoctrinating German youth. Nearly all German youth between 10 and 18 were inducted into the organization. The stated aim was to shift their

Adolescents have joined ISIS after having run foul of their fathers and families. Often, however, child recruits have been forcibly taken away from their families. This was the case with a number of Yazidi boys, aged between 8 and 15, in the Farouq Institute for Cubs in Raqqa.⁷² Such exploitation of children is not typical of patriarchal societies, but is indicative of the breakdown of traditional social structures as a result of armed conflict, creating a context in which children are easy prey for rebel groups seeking cheap labour, recruits, and cannon fodder.⁷³ ISIS discourse regarding training camps for their 'Cubs' also bears much resemblance to the indoctrination practices of totalitarian states and movements, which often separate individuals from their kin in order to atomize them and use ideological inculcation from childhood to grave to create new bonds of loyalty and allegiance.

ISIS and the Tribal Shaykhs

A final aspect worth investigating in order to assess the alleged patriarchal character of ISIS is the organization's relationship with tribes and tribal councils. While patriarchy cannot be reduced to tribalism, it remains true that a society in which tribes fill important socio-economic and political roles is more likely to embrace patriarchal norms than a society in which tribes and clans are absent.

If ISIS were patriarchal, one would perhaps expect the organization to permanently incorporate tribes into its governing structure or at least cherish and valorize tribal institutions. There is, however, little empirical evidence to suggest that this is the case. True, early analysis tended to expand upon ISIS's successful co-optation of Sunni tribes, suggesting that "the relationship between ISIS and the tribes is no longer a mere marriage of convenience", but based on a strategic decision to cooperate, highlighting the fact that ISIS had set up a 'ministry' for tribal affairs. Relying on measures such as fuel subsidies and cash bribes, ISIS was seen as pursuing a successful "carrot-and-stick" approach that

loyalty and obedience away from home and towards the Nazi Party. See Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004).

72 "In an IS training camp, children told: Behead the doll", *Associated Press*, 20 July 2015 <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/f852b2d021254f06b9a002dfe25c7538/training-camp-children-told-behead-doll>>.

73 For an overview of the extent of the problem of child soldiers, see the "Children and armed conflict": Report of the Secretary-General to United Nations General Assembly, No. A/70/836-S/2016/360, 20 April 2016 <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/836&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC>.

won them tribal support.⁷⁴ By early 2017, ISIS's relations with the tribes looked far less rosy. The emerging picture is one not of strategic cooperation but of ISIS exploiting tribal cleavages to win new adherents and crush opposition. As an ideological, utopian project, ISIS has been unwilling to tolerate competing sub-state entities controlling its subjects.⁷⁵ When facing tribal resistance to its caliphate project, ISIS has been cruel in its repression. Hence, although there has been evidence of ISIS having temporarily friendly relations with local tribes, there are many examples of ISIS brutally slaughtering tribes. The best-known examples of the latter are the massacre of hundreds of al-Shu'aytāt and al-Bu Nimr tribesmen in Syria in the latter half of 2014.⁷⁶ In the case of the al-Shu'aytāt tribe, the executions took place after its tribal elders refused to submit to ISIS demands for loyalty and an oath of obedience.⁷⁷

One illustrative example of ISIS's relations with the tribes is a widely reported story from May and June 2015, when much ado was made of the Sunni Arab tribes of the Iraqi Anbar province, who had reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIS. Video footage of tribal gatherings and statements were taken as evidence.⁷⁸ Arab mainstream media portrayed this as if the Sunni tribes were genuinely turning to ISIS against the Iraqi government. Upon closer inspection, however, these videos suggest a different story.⁷⁹ Given its reputation of

74 James Fromson and Steven Simon, "ISIS: The Dubious Paradise of Apocalypse Now", *Survival* 57, no. 3 (2015), 22-23, 40, doi:10.1080/00396338.2015.1046222. For a similar argument emphasizing "shared economic and political interests" and a common enemy as the key factors enabling ISIS to cement its relationship with Syrian tribes, see Haian Dukhan and Sinan Hawat, "The Islamic State and the Arab Tribes in Eastern Syria", *E-International Relations*, 31 December 2014 <<http://www.e-ir.info/2014/12/31/the-islamic-state-and-the-arab-tribes-in-eastern-syria/>>.

75 This has also been an observation made by U.S. military officials tasked with combating ISIS. A U.S. general noted in October 2014 that "there will come the time when ISIS cannot tolerate the tribal structure within ISIS territory, because that tribal structure is in direct opposition to the full exertion of ISIS influence over the population." Cited in Fromson and Simon, "ISIS", 22.

76 "Islamic State group 'executes 700' in Syria", *Aljazeera.com*, 17 August 2014 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/islamic-state-group-executes-700-syria-2014816123945662121.html>>; "Anbar Volunteers Amass, As Is Accused Of 'Genocide' Against Albu Nimr Tribe", *Radio Free Europe*, 6 November 2014 <<http://www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-iraq-anbar-genocide-albu-nimr-tribe/26677344.html>>.

77 "Islamic State group 'executes 700' in Syria."

78 "al-'Ashā'ir al-sunniyya fi-l-Fallūja wa-l-Anbār tubāyī' za'im "al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya" – ta-fāṣil", *YouTube.com/Orient News*, 4 June 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRkaRHK6y4Q>>.

79 See in particular the analysis in Kirk H. Sowell, "The Islamic State's Eastern Frontier:

terror and brutality, ISIS has been able to intimidate and humiliate tribal leaders. In one of the videos, a “Conference of the Shaykhs and Head of Tribes in Ramadi”, where the pledge of allegiance was given, one sees a mostly unknown tribal figure reading out a statement in support of ISIS followed by the usual *takbīr* salutations, but there is clearly no enthusiasm in the crowd. In fact, it was perhaps the meekest and least convincing shouts of *takbīr* in the history of jihadism. Hardly any of the tribal leaders lift their hands in the air. At the end of one of the videos, as the ceremony winds down, young armed men start appearing on the screen, strongly suggesting that ISIS gunmen had basically coerced the tribal leaders at gunpoint.⁸⁰ In other videos, the pretense of a genuine tribal embrace of ISIS is even less convincing. The tribal leaders pose in front of the local population and read out statements of loyalty with young ISIS gunmen standing next to them.⁸¹ These images are basically a show of public humiliation for the elders and a demonstration of the supremacy of the young men of ISIS over the tribal elders. In yet another video, a youth reads the statement that the tribal leaders are repeating after him. A man who is hardly more than an adolescent is basically telling the tribal shaykhs what to say in public. Hence, these displays cement the image of ISIS as the youth’s revolt against the patriarchs.

Concluding Remarks

Over recent years, hundreds of young European women have voluntarily travelled to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq – despite, as a British newspaper reported, “almost daily reports of slavery, rape, and enforced domestication.”⁸² The puzzle of ISIS’s attraction to women should encourage us to revisit the common conflation of *jihādī* movements and patriarchy in the Muslim world. As shown in this article, the ISIS caliphate is first and foremost a radical ideological project rather than a return to a patriarchal order. A number of practices

Ramadi and Fallujah as Theaters of Sectarian Conflict”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no 4 (2015), 130–141 <<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/449/html>>.

80 “Mu’tamar mashā’ikh al-qabā’il wa-zu’amā’ihā fi-l-Ramādī”, *YouTube.com/Al-ArabiTV*, 3 June 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLTNoosISIo>> (accessed June 2015).

81 “‘Ashā’ir al-Ḥawījāh yubāyi’ū Dā’ish [...]”, *YouTube/IraqPower*, 24 March 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdzZnRNWMI>> (accessed June 2015).

82 Cited in “What is luring Western women to Syria to join Isis?”, *The Telegraph*, 23 February 2015 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11429118/What-is-luring-Western-women-to-Syria-to-join-Isil.html>>.

associated with the *jihādī* movement are undeniably misogynist and repressive, but explaining those with reference to entrenched patriarchal norms reduces jihadism to a culturally specific phenomenon rather than a socio-economic or political one. Returning to the causal links discussed in the introduction, explaining why *jihādī* groups thrive in “a tribalist environment” – for example, the fact that *jihādīs* harness specific “tribal-patriarchal concepts” into ideological tenets – this article instead argues that the causality is different. Militant Islamist movements thrive in societies where tribal patriarchal cultures are strong not because they reaffirm patriarchy but precisely because they represent a revolt against the supremacy of such kinship-based structures. In the case of ISIS, its utopian ideological model, as practised and preached in Mosul and Raqqa, is very different from tribal societies in many key areas. Most convincing, perhaps, is the dominant role of youth at all levels in *jihādī* movements, in ways which dethrone patriarchal leaders and displace the elders as authority figures. The new social media platforms and the exigencies of war in ISIS-controlled areas have also given women a more prominent place. Would the role of women be further restricted and the role of youth be reversed if ISIS were allowed to consolidate its governance structures over the long-term? Perhaps, but we might never know, because the ongoing recapture of ISIS-held territories will probably not allow us to observe how *jihādī* rebel rule would look under more peaceful conditions.