

The Jihadist Social Actors in Europe

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Abstract - European Jihadists: Men and Women

With the term jihadism, I refer to a religious and political phenomenon based on a radical version of Islam that claims to be the genuine and unique embodiment of Allah's religion, all the others being fake. It is based on the primacy of jihad, that is, violence in the name of God, in order to impose on the world its religious norms, which it has reinterpreted in the light of radical Islam.

Since the emergence of Islamic State (IS or ISIS) in 2014, jihadism has brought new agents to the world stage, especially in the West. Its advent multiplied the calls for jihad among Western young people, and particularly among European young people. Among them were adolescents and post-adolescents,¹ but also young people of migrant origin, middle class converts, people with psychological problems (from depression to major psychopathologies), and women. In this article, I choose to deal only with young people of migrant origin, the middle class, and women jihadists².

German Synopsis

Mit Dschihadismus bezeichne ich ein religiöses und politisches Phänomen, dass auf einer radikalen Version des Islam basiert und behauptet, die wirkliche und einzigartige Verkörperung von Allahs Religion zu sein, da alle anderen falsch sind. Dschihadismus stützt sich auf den Vorrang des Dschihad, d.h., die Gewalt im Namen Gottes, um der Welt seine religiösen Normen, neu gedeutet im Licht des radikalen Islam, aufzuzwingen.

Seit der Entstehung des Islamischen Staates (IS oder ISIS) im Jahr 2014 hat der Dschihadismus neue Akteure auf die Weltbühne gestellt, besonders im Westen. Seine Einführung hat den Aufruf zum Dschihad vervielfältigt, vor allem unter den jungen Leuten Europas, unter ihnen Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene sowie junge Einwanderer, Bekehrte aus dem Mittelstand, Frauen, und Menschen mit psychologischen Problemen, die sich von Depression bis hin zu schwerwiegenden Psychopathologie erstrecken. In diesem Bericht werde ich mich auf junge Menschen mit Einwanderungshintergrund, den Mittelstand, und weibliche Dschihadisten konzentrieren.

¹ Of a sample of 1,200 individuals who left Western countries between 2012 and 2015 to join Syria and Iraq, 14% are under 18 years of age; 27% are between 18 and 21 years old; 26% are between 22 and 25 years old; 17% are between 26 and 29 years old; 9% are between 30 and 35 years old; and 7% are 36 years old and over. If the age group of 14- to 25-year-olds is described as "young," they comprise 67%, or just over two-thirds, of the total sample. See Arie Perliger, Daniel Milton, *From Cradle to Grave: The Lifecycle of Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, November 2016.

² For a comprehensive analysis of jihadist actors, see my book: Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le nouveau jihad en Occident*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2018.

Three Types of Jihadist Agents

We can distinguish three types of jihadist actors according to their social class:

1. Young people of immigrant origin, living in ghettoized neighborhoods or within poor districts in European cities or in their poor suburbs, where poverty prevails and which show high rates of school dropouts, delinquency, and an important underground economy based on illegal trafficking. Stigmas are strongly felt by the inhabitants of these neighborhoods, as are humiliation and a sense of being treated with contempt by the authorities and society.
2. Young people of immigrant origin who have joined the middle classes and who suffer from the stigmas against them in spite of their economic integration. For these young people, access to middle class status does not put an end to the social prejudices linked to their origin.
3. Middle-class young people of European origin who identify with Muslim suffering in the Middle East and who convert to radical Islam in order to join a "warm community," as opposed to the "cold communities," their own national communities, to which they belong.

These three types of young people are distinct in their social and ethnic origin, but they are equally beset by the fear of an uncertain future (for the middle classes, fear of proletarianization and the loss of their middle-class status; among young people of migrant origin, the feeling of hopelessness and "no future").

Rejection of Politics

Almost all over Europe, a major proportion of second- and third-generation migrant families (in Great Britain, from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, "Asians" or black Africans; in France, North Africans and those from Black Africa) suffers from non-participation in the economic and political spheres. In 2009, an official report³ focused on the lack of political commitment by these disaffected young people in the UK. They sometimes found substitutes for political citizenship in radical movements. This disengagement is in and as of itself the result of a mistrust of the political field, a sense of the nonsense of politics, a lack of motivation to

³ *Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Communities and Local Government*, www.communities.gov.uk, April 2009.

participate in politics in all its dimensions (election as well as candidacy). These young people strongly believe that no real change can occur by engaging in the political arena or by voting. This trait is found everywhere in Europe among young people of migrant origin; it is, in fact, the trait that pushes them towards radicalization.⁴ A small minority, often from within the middle classes among these immigrant offspring, become members of the political elite, but from then on they are considered traitors by the young people of the poor districts, who reject them as “lackeys of the white man.”

Disaffected Young People

Disaffected young people, i.e. those between the ages of 15 and 30, most of whom suffer from a feeling of non-participation in society and a profound sense of stigmatization, form the major part of the “reserve army” of jihadists in Europe. Their adherence to radical Islam bears witness to the crisis of European societies. We can compare Amedy Coulibaly (who killed five people between January 7 and 9, 2015, in Paris), Adel Kermiche (who murdered the catholic priest, Jacques Hamel, on July 26, 2016) and Anders Breivik from Norway (who, on July 22, 2011, killed 77 people and injured 151 in the name of fighting for the Islamization of Europe). In all three cases we find:

- the exaltation of violence, legitimized in the name of “sacred” values;
- an exacerbated narcissism, the “self” being experienced as a repository of sacred values, the realization of whose ideals justifies the recourse to extreme violence;
- the total rejection of the present situation in the name of an exalted and mythical future;
- a focus on the warrior role, which opposes the dominant non-violent values of the global society.

Inverted Multiculturalism

Jihadism cannot be solely attributed to disaffected young people of immigrant origin, whether in France, England, Germany or other Western countries; but young Muslims of immigrant origin, from the first to the third generation and living chiefly in ghettoized neighborhoods, are the majority among the jihadists in Europe.

Let’s analyze one specific case. In 2013, Karim, Adil and Rabi were the first to leave Lunel, a town with 27,000 inhabitants in southern France. Since then, more than twenty young

⁴ See *Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Communities and Local Government*, www.communities.gov.uk, April 2009.

people have followed them. Seven are already dead, including Karim. Hamza lived close to the shop kept by Karim and his brother, Saad, in Lunel. The two friends spent long hours discussing the upheavals in the Middle East, the warning signs of the end of time in Islam, and the ills of French society. "I got a BTS (technician's diploma) in accountancy, and the result was that all native French student found a job, and the only two Arabs (French citizens of North African origin) of the class, we did not find any [...]. In France, the choice is whether the employer likes the look of the customer or not. For the Arab, manual work is normal, not a higher job, even if he is qualified," said Hamza to the researchers.⁵

The feeling of being a second-class citizen, exposed to social prejudices and not having the same opportunities as other citizens, is widely shared by immigrant young people in Great Britain, Holland, Germany, Denmark, or Belgium, and empirical research by sociologists largely confirms it almost everywhere in Europe.⁶

To get Karim out of his predicament, Hamza activated the network of Johan Juncaj, an Albanian close to Mourad Farès, one of the main recruiters for the jihad in France. Before being formally identified by the intelligence services, Mourad Farès and Johan Juncaj created Facebook pages praising the holy war. For Karim, jihadism was a means to get revenge for the humiliation of having been mistreated by society; the humiliation of seeking and finding a job below his competence, which is shared by other young people with immigrant background in France (due to their North African origins) and England (due to their Bangladeshi or Pakistani origins) as well as elsewhere in Europe.

Jihadism in this sense involves reversing humiliation into a radical counter-humiliation which is inflicted on society as a whole. Humiliating those who humiliated you is the dream that many young people entertain when they feel their life destroyed by the arrogance of a society that considers them sub-human.

In Europe, the vast majority of young people who enlisted under the IS flag (the Islamic State, also called Daesh, and, more rarely, networks like Jabhat al-Nusra which represent al-Qaeda) belong to the group of "disaffected young people."⁷ Their view of society is marked by

⁵ Gilles Kepel, Antoine Jardin, *Terreur dans l'Hexagone*, Gallimard, 2015.

⁶ To view the French and English cases, among others, see: Claire Adida, David Laitin et Marie-Anne Valfort, *Mesurer la discrimination, Apports de l'économie expérimentale*, 2013; Marie-Anne Valfort, *Musulmans: la réalité des discriminations au travail* 09/04/2015, <http://www.latribune.fr/opinions/tribunes/musulmans-la-realite-des-discriminations-au-travail-467384.html>; Emily Dugan, "Britain's hidden racism: Workplace inequality has grown in the last decade," *The Independent Online*, 03/12/2014; University of Manchester, Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, *Britain's ethnic minorities are facing barriers to social mobility and job opportunities*, 2014; Roger Dobson, "British Muslims face worst job discrimination of any minority group, according to research," *The Independent Online*, 30/11/2014.

⁷ Robert Castel (2007). *La discrimination négative. Citoyens ou Indigènes*, Paris, Editions du Seuil (2007)

“hatred” related to their social and “racial” condition: they feel marginalized, excluded, rejected, mistreated, stigmatized as second-class citizens, and reduced to being inhuman, to being “insects,” as a young man told me in prison.⁸ This negative self-image, which is shared by many young men (but not women) living in the poor suburbs in France (or ghettoized neighborhoods throughout Europe), makes mutual understanding in democratic terms impossible.

The overwhelming majority of these young people does not take part in elections because, in their view, no noticeable change in their circumstances will occur regardless of the outcome of the vote. The only viable solution is to “cheat” the system and to get involved in the underground economy (traffic, drugs, theft, robbery). Violence also plays a role in bypassing the long road to economic integration: they refuse to start with underpaid menial jobs and to finish, like their parents, with an insignificant retirement pension, synonymous with indignity in their eyes. They want immediate access to middle-class status. They are in a situation of “neither/nor” that generates rancor and a feeling of double “un-belonging”: they are neither “Arab” nor “French;” in the country of their parents they are called “dirty Frenchmen,” but in France they are “dirty Arabs.” The same holds true for the young people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin in Britain: they are “Pakis” in the eyes of British citizens, and “nasty Englishmen” in Pakistan. Delinquency gives them the opportunity to obtain middle-class status symbols, thereby seeming to join the middle classes to which their parents were denied access.

It is also an act of provocation towards a society that treats them as “less than nothing” (*moins que rien*), as one of them told me in prison. The intense feeling of internalized indignity and the yearning to live in a provocative manner make them seek illegitimate recognition⁹ rather than legitimate recognition (which, in their eyes, is inaccessible). They therefore long to become, not “positive heroes” who are admired by others, but “negative heroes,” who are hated by society and yet glorified all the same by the media, who assure them notoriety based on their monstrosity and their superlative violence through jihadism and other avenues.

They *hate* society: “hatred” (*la haine*) is an anthropological category used by the very same young people to characterize their attitude towards society. Therefore, they literally accept (and some of them enjoy as a form of revenge) being hated by society in a reciprocal

⁸ The interviews in prison mentioned in this article are the result of empirical fieldwork (2011-2013) in four major prisons in France (Fresnes, Fleury-Mérogis, in the suburbs of Paris, Lille-Séquedin, in the vicinity of the city of Lille, and Saint-Maur, a high security prison in central France). The ministry of justice financed the project. For an exhaustive analysis, see Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les prisons de France*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 2016.

⁹ For the importance of recognition in modern life, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Polity Press, 1995 [first published in Germany in 1992].

relationship, this time successful in their eyes, due to the “fame” achieved through terrorist acts that push them to the forefront of the media. The recognition they seek is an inverted one: since they cannot be recognized for good, they must be acknowledged as evil in the eyes of others, inspiring fear instead of admiration, marking through deadly deeds the break with the dominant norm of non-violence.

In France, the poor suburbs (*les banlieues*) are the venue of illegality for these young boys who learn from a young age to share values of ostentatious consumerism through deviance, through a break from the legal norm: as young boys, they idolize the local “caïds” (chiefs) who “succeed” by showing off their cars, fashion sun glasses, and branded shoes.

Deviance and dropping out of school are part of the culture of these poor districts because the normal way, the route through schooling and studies, leads their young people nowhere given their social and cultural handicaps. Their parents are unable to help them because of their lack of fluency in French or English or German, or even their illiteracy. School fails them; the school environment in these poor districts is not conducive to “healthy” competition in learning, and the fact that a high concentration of pupils hails from anywhere in the world but the host country itself makes acculturation to the host country’s (French, English, German, Dutch) national norms difficult or almost impossible. In these districts, “an inverted multiculturalism” reigns, meaning that a variety of cultures is present with the exception of the most important one, namely the host country’s culture.

This type of multiculturalism creates individuals who lack an understanding of the body language and the daily habits of the larger society in which they live, and who have not learned through contact with other French, German or English individuals the basics of national behavior, in particular as regards polite manners or fluency in the normal daily language. These individuals usually create a subculture of their own, using a mixed language where inverted words (“*verlan*”)—some Arabic, English and slang—give birth to a vernacular that is almost incomprehensible to the outsider. Black African, North African, Asian, even Chinese cultures are muddled up, with some dominant features of the North African culture in France, Bangladeshi or Pakistani in Great Britain, Moroccan in Belgium.

Being based on a mix from which the major national culture is all too often absent, this subculture creates a generation that has major cultural obstacles to overcome in order to become part of the larger society in terms of cultural understanding of others. This subculture and the sentiment of being excluded generate a body language and verbal expressions that express this explicit fact of separation. This fact then becomes an aspiration, since the chasm between “them” and “us” is regarded as unbridgeable. The words made up of expressions that are

unintelligible to outsiders, and the gestures often considered as threatening and aggressive by the dominant culture, put the non-local citizen ill at ease in front of members of the subculture. While this aggressiveness is real, it is partly exaggerated by attributing an "aggressive nature" to these young men who, for their part, also live in the apprehension of others, namely the "Frenchmen" (the "Englishmen," the "German"); and who therefore go out to the city center in groups, thereby in turn increasing the levels of apprehension experienced by other citizens, who face a "horde" rather than individuals.

Between these young men and the other citizens stands a wall of misunderstanding, both sides rejecting each other and both characterizing the other in derogatory terms: the non-immigrant Frenchmen call them "Arabs," "Beurs," "Bougnoule;" while they call the non-immigrant Frenchman "Garoui" or "Blanc." This divide of mutually derogatory language exists all over Europe.

Transferring this identity from delinquency to jihadism requires some mutations, but it also preserves constant features like the revenge-seeking character of the individual: he "shines" by squandering money and roaring his car, often stolen, which is then set on fire to make disappear the traces of the theft, but also to underline the pleasure derived from destruction in a kind of modern "Potlatch."¹⁰ By becoming jihadist, these deviant young people literally stage their own narcissistic tendency to magnify themselves at the expense of the "disbelievers;" they put their pictures on the internet in order to assert their "glory" and their superiority towards a society that has denied them a fair lot. Larossi Abballa, the killer of a French policeman and his companion in Magnanville on June 13, 2016, filmed himself, streaming the video live to Facebook; Mohamed Merah filmed himself murdering the Muslim soldiers and the Jewish father and his children, sending the footage to the channel Aljazeera.

For many stigmatized young people, death becomes a means for becoming recognized for their superiority (whereas in real life they are nobody and suffer from inferiority); their exposure to deadly dangers flatters their "wounded ego" (while they consider as inferior "normal" citizens who are afraid of death and who avoid this kind of exposure). In 2013, in Fresnes, a large nineteenth-century prison close to Paris, this 25-year-old Frenchman of Moroccan descent, jailed for having been involved in drug trafficking, deeply marked by the stigmas of his origins, did not attribute his ideas to himself (for fear that I might denounce him to the prison authorities), but credited his friend for those opinions:

¹⁰ Marcel Mauss, « Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos Étude de morphologie sociale », *l'Année Sociologique*, 1904-1905.

“Mohammad: My buddy told me, they mistreat us, they put us in a hole in these poor suburbs, separated from the rest of the population, they put us in jail, they look down on us, they think we have no pride, we are like apes. But Islam gives us pride. That frightens them. They are afraid of death—we are not. When we lean on Islam, they are afraid of us; they don't despise us anymore, they believe we are reckless and violent. We know what we want, and after death we will go directly to paradise while they will go to hell!”¹¹

Islamization in this context results in recovering the lost pride, becoming somebody that cannot be treated as inferior, pushing towards the holy war in order to overcome the humiliation of being an outsider, a “Frenchman only on paper,” a non-genuine French citizen. Radical Islam rejects citizenship (which was denied to the young people in daily life) and instead promotes violence in order to establish a new order in which those who were superior become inferior, and Muslims will gain the upper hand through the holy war.

Jihadists of the poor districts of Europe make up a tiny minority among European Muslims. Usually, male members opt for deviance if they do not succeed in getting integrated into the normal economy (however, if they do get integrated in the normal economy, they usually try to leave these poor districts to live in middle-class neighborhoods instead). Once they choose Islam as a receptacle for their identity, they might become pietistic Salafists or jihadists (the others have a more or less loose relationship with religion). As jihadists, they transpose their aspirations onto a religious plane which restores to them their lost dignity (they become the knights of the faith) and which satisfies their need for “forced recognition” by the others; since the others refused to acknowledge their dignity and mistreated them as second-class citizens, the young jihadists assert themselves in a lofty manner through sacred violence. In their eyes, they do not seek violence for “selfish” and deviant motives as might have been the case in the past, but they seek violence to dispense a religious sentence for miscreants. Jihadism introduces pride in young people who think that they can only regain dignity by transgressing the existing norms and by espousing a counter-culture of sacred violence that doubly denies legitimacy to society: through religion (whereas in a democratic society the law, not religion, should be paramount), and through violence (whereas legitimate violence should be exerted not by the individual, but by the legal system).

By espousing radical Islam, these young people adopt an attitude of provocation vis-à-vis the secularized societies that host them and of which they are often citizens (although some are residents rather than citizens). As already mentioned, jihadist Islam plays a fundamental role in turning inferiority into superiority: where they were insignificant like “insects” (remark

¹¹ For further discussion, see Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les prisons de France*, Robert Laffont, 2016.

made by a young man in prison), now they are the self-proclaimed elites of a conquering faith; where they were condemned for offenses or crimes, they now condemn the society that judged them; where they were “sub-citizens” without work, without public recognition, they become “super-believers” who seek to coerce all of humanity into an intolerant version of Islam; where they were anonymous, they become the stars of the jihadosphere and the world media.

The results of psychiatric analysis of a dozen jihadists reveal the following: most had not finished school; none of them had a professional career; their financial situation was precarious; they felt as if attacked by the void; they left for Syria to break free from an unattractive daily life.¹² These traits united the excluded young people without economic and social perspective and dedicated to a life without a future.

Among the marginalized young people in the European poor districts where the families of immigrant origin are in the majority, a tiny minority joined Daesh, but a significant proportion identified with non-violent Salafism. The latter has become a new type of socialization called pietistic or “scientific” Salafism. It fosters a sense of community that is not set *against* others but in distinction to them. Many pietistic Salafists attempt to separate themselves and their children from the larger society. One pietistic Salafist based in La Reynerie, a poor migrant district of Toulouse, told me in August 2017:

“Karim: My dream is to migrate to a Muslim country with my wife and child so that I can be in a Muslim surrounding where I can perform my daily prayers, avoid women who are without veil and sometimes half-naked, and where I am able to raise my children far from the eyes of the Kuffar (disbelievers, non-Muslims in a pejorative sense). Here in France, public schools (state-funded schools) spreads kufr (disbelief), boys and girls are mixed in a sinful way, they look at each other in an illicit way, they learn that God should not interfere with human politics, that men and women are equal, that polygamy is not allowed, that daily prayer is not tolerated in public. My wish is to go to a Muslim country where these haram (illicit) acts are forbidden. Hegira (migration in conformity to the ideal of the Prophet of Islam who went from Mecca to Medina). This society perverts my daughter, who is mixed up with male children and does not learn what is licit (halal) and what is illicit (haram); my wife has to protect herself against sin every minute when she is out in the street. Their TV, their radio, their media—they all spread sin.”

As a rule, pietistic Salafists are not jihadist, and they often reject physical violence, preferring to build up sectarian types of closed communities.

¹² Hélène Bazex, Jean-Yves Mensat, *Qui sont les jihadistes français? Analyse de 12 cas pour contribuer à l'élaboration de profils et à l'évaluation du risque de passage à l'acte*, Annales Médico-psychologiques, revue psychiatrique, 10/03/2016

Radical Islam as well as pietistic Salafism both provide a bond built against the society, the first through violence, the second through creating a closed group fostering a counter-cultural subculture that constructs a world of its own and raises a wall between the group and the others.

Radical Islam imposes a coercive sense of belonging through sacred duties and rejects freedom: "good repression" is by far superior to "bad freedom", which means freedom period and encompasses all kinds of modern freedom, from sexual to secular (for example, sexual freedom, homosexuality, gender equality in the name of licit mores that submit to the rules of God), is a unique feature of the new generation. Individual freedom has become trivial and sometimes devoid of meaning, with many young jihadists preferring repressive norms that give sense to their lives to a set of freedoms that robs them of sacred norms and limits. The major problem that distinguishes the current, new generation from that of 1960s is that the new generation *suffers* from the lack of norms, and the "unlimited" freedom to which its members are exposed makes them unhappy. They do not know where to set limits: patriarchal family is dead, nothing seems sacred, and thus the need for limits, sacred norms and transcendent principles gets the upper hand over the transgression of norms that characterized the generation of 1960s and that created the "revolution" of 1968 in France and the social protests in the US against the Vietnam War.

Freedom is more and more of a burden; individuals feel that freedom is a heavy weight on their shoulders rather than a blessing. In many cases, freedom has become synonymous with loneliness and a lack of a sense of solidarity, in particular among those people who are exposed to the new rules of "flexibility" in labor relations, among those who find meaningless the freedom to remain jobless indefinitely, and among those who suffer from being left without protection against the blind forces of the market in the name of freedom.

Family fragility and women's liberation have contributed to the loss of the sense of identity; there is no longer a bond to provide resistance to the internalized sense of loss among people who suffer from economic fragility as well as anthropological instability within the family. In this social context, freedom can appear to be more of a negative than a positive; it overburdens the individual with the risks of life without providing societal and familiar assistance and solidarity. Jihadism substitutes this cold society with a "warm" (even "hot") imaginary neo-Ummah, to be built by the new heroic agents who put their lives at stake to construct the city of God in this world, pending the advent of the end of time.

On the other hand, individuation reaches its upper limits insofar as the globalized individual has to assume many areas of his social, emotional, economic and cultural life, which

crush him under their weight. The negative dimensions of freedom push him to despair and depression whereas the positive dimensions (to choose one's work, to live in economic stability, to take advantage of one's right to the benefits of the welfare state in order to achieve a sense of freedom in culture and in leisure) are becoming scarce. Self-depreciation, a feeling of deep mental instability, and a sense of being inferior (lack of intelligence for one's failures in life) are common. Involvement in jihadism contributes to the build-up of renewed self-esteem and to overcoming the sense of instability by leaning on God and by embedding oneself in a new community, namely the Islamic Ummah reshaped by the Caliphate, the IS. Exposure to the test of sacred death in the exaltation of staging the jihad creates a new situation that overcomes the lack of self-esteem and allows access to a laudatory acceptance of oneself in the heroic fight against the infidels.

Stages of Radicalization among Disaffected Young People

Jihadism among the disaffected young people of migrant origin follows a series of stages that is different from those of the middle classes.

1. First, life in the ghettoized neighborhoods causes the feeling of being "banned" from society. Ghettoization creates a desire to be recognized as "someone" in a subculture of deviance where "honor" is paramount and its defense is part of the domination strategy. Among jihadists, the rupture is deepened by the total rejection of "the other" as "miscreant." Deviance frequently results in prison stays and recidivism.
2. Deviant socialization begins early. It is encouraged by the resignation of the father, the supreme authority in the patriarchal family, which has become, after less than half a century, not a "blended" or an egalitarian family in the traditional style of the European middle class, but rather a decapitated patriarchal family in which the figurehead of the father is simultaneously de jure paramount and de facto absent (the father has gone back to his country, there has been a divorce, he is dethroned by his sons) and in which the children are being raised by the overworked and overburdened mother. Despite the central role of the mother, the patriarchal symbolic figure of the father remains essential and, in the absence of the father, the big brother often tries to usurp the role by exerting violence against others, in particular his brothers and sisters. This fatherless patriarchal family is the privileged venue for the crisis of authority. Many suburban jihadis have suffered from this deeply deficient family structure, in which the father figure is simultaneously

paramount and absent. Many of these young jihadists were either placed in a children's home or they lived in a single-parent family with much higher levels of violence than found in middle class neighborhoods. To give just one example, Mohamed Merah suffered through this type of fatherless family, his big brother claiming to be the highest authority, his attitude often leading to physical violence. He developed a hyper-aggressive character in the home where he was placed by the authorities, combining delinquency and violence. Similarly, Mehdi Nemouche spent time in a children's home and with foster families before being raised by his grandmother; the Kouachi brothers were orphaned very young, the mother prostituting herself occasionally to provide for the family before committing suicide, after which they were raised in a children's home. Amedy Coulibaly seems to be an exception, but many other cases highlight this crisis in the family.

3. The third major characteristic is the prison stay resulting from a deviant trajectory. From January 2012 to July 2015, 80% of those who committed terrorist acts had a criminal past, and 60% had spent time in prison.¹³ Prison also serves as a place of socialization for these young people, who include it in their life project as a "rational risk" in their deviant attitude.¹⁴ Sometimes in prison, at other times outside, young people have a "revelation" that leads them to radical Islam.
4. Next, armed with their militant faith, the young people often deepen their religion whilst they are in prison by adopting a pre-oriented inclination towards jihadism: they read the radical Suras of the Qur'an which preach an uncompromising attitude towards others, like Tawbah ("Repentance") or al-Anfal ("Treasures of War"), rather than those that preach tolerance (such as the Sura Kuffar, for instance). The deepening of their faith in prison (or sometimes outside) consists in overcoming their religious ignorance through their reading inspired by the radical version of Islam.
5. The last stage is the "journey of initiation" that these disaffected young people make to the lands where jihad is raging. The Kouachi brothers made a trip to Yemen (one of them was invited and financed by Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-Yemeni jihadist killed by US drones in 2011); Mehdi Nemouche went to Syria; Mohamed Merah made a trip to Pakistan and Turkey (and probably from there to Syria);

¹³ The WITT (Western Islamist Terrorist Threat)
<http://www.diis.dk/files/media/documents/projects/crimeplots141215.xlsx>.

¹⁴ Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Prisons de France*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2016.

Abdelhamid Abaoud, a major figure of the attacks of November 13, 2015, stayed in Syria in the service of the IS, as did Brahim Abdeslam, another member of the group. In addition, these people can be indoctrinated by charismatic figures at home, as was the case with Amedy Coulibaly who did not go to a holy war country but was indoctrinated by Djamel Beghal. The journey of initiation involves military training and encompasses the manufacture and handling of explosives. It generates a denationalization with regard to the society of origin, now considered foreign by the young people: jihadist socialization outside the country of origin creates a new identity which is detached from citizenship and polarized by religious militancy. After the stay in the Islamic country (Syria, Yemen, Pakistan) in the service of the jihadist order, the adept becomes insensitive to extreme forms of cruelty, accepting beheadings of disbelievers or heretics (e.g. Shiites). War in the service of Daesh (or other jihadist organizations, like Jabhat al-Nusra) puts an end to the empathy vis-à-vis the victims. The mujahid (the combatant of the holy war, the jihad) performs the role of the executioner as much as that of the warrior in his utter insensitivity towards the victims.

6. While not necessarily all of the above five characteristics are present among the disaffected young people of migrant origin, at least three or four of them are present when they embrace jihadism.

Middle-Class Jihadism

In recent decades, the distinction between the middle classes and the working classes has tended to fade, particularly in the lower middle classes. The fear of social downgrading and proletarianization is no longer a marginal phenomenon but is found in the economy, the employment, and the deterioration of the living conditions of many people who thought themselves to be among the entrenched middle classes. In his work on the gradual downgrading of the middle classes, Louis Chauvel¹⁵ highlights the effects of rising taxation, more expensive housing, devalued university degrees, and the increasing instability in employment and remuneration. These factors provoke a feeling of deep insecurity among middle-class young people, who are not certain that their future will hold access to the same living standard as their parents enjoyed. Their desire to leave for Syria is partly linked to their lack of hope for the future: between 2014 and 2015, Daesh seemed invincible; it conquered a territory of the size of

¹⁵ Louis Chauvel, *La spirale de déclassement*, Paris, Seuil, 2016.

Great Britain (around 300,000 square kilometers), paid a salary of \$400 to \$1,000 per month, and provided free accommodation (often the houses which had been abandoned by the Syrian middle classes were put at the disposal of the jihadist warriors) as well as a weekly shopping basket, delivered to them for free. For many of these lower middle-class young people, this meant social promotion on top of religious felicity.

One of the reasons for joining Daesh that middle-class young people cited was humanitarian. Indeed, the desperate situation of Syria, where the protest movement against the Assad regime ended in 2012 in a bloodbath by the despotic government, and the intervention of the geopolitical actors of the region (Iran and Russia on the one hand, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, the United States on the other) pushed young Muslims or converts to help victims in Syria by means of legitimate violence. In the first wave of movement of young people towards Syria from 2012 to 2013, the jihadist dimension itself was rather marginal. One can quote this middle-class young convert, who received a suspended sentence in France for his attempt to go to Syria in 2013 and who claimed:

"I was tired of injustice: Muslims were being killed in Syria and nobody cared, never mind the lofty expressions by the government. I wanted to do something, to help these people who got killed and were left alone... Humanitarian assistance in the traditional sense was powerless, these people needed more than doctors or medicines, they needed to be defended against the bloody regime of Assad."

With the advent of Daesh, the process of ideologization began in the second half of 2013 (Daesh was officially created in June 2014, but many months prior to its proclamation as the Caliphate it was already attracting young men from all over the world). From that moment on, the idea that Muslims were being attacked by miscreants became dominant, and the holy war became a pressing religious duty (*fard al-Ayn*) to be fulfilled; hell would await those who refused to engage in jihad. The aspirations of these young people were manifold. As already mentioned, many no longer had confidence in their future in European societies, where everything had been destabilized (the status of stable work, the family, the welfare state, but also the distinction between man and woman). This is the case for this young man, who was jailed for attempting to go to Syria twice in 2014:

"We live in a country where the future they promise is bullshit ("de la merde"), our future is at best a badly paid job as a petty earner, dreaming of a better life, knowing full well that it is unattainable. My parents had a rather good life with a pension that allows them to enjoy life and holidays; mine will be worse. They had job security, in my case there will be none. I have a

shabby university diploma that has not opened up the doors to any kind of bright future. I feel cheated, although I have a small job that gives me enough to live on, without high expectations."

Not only are the middle classes in an increasingly precarious situation, but nothing cements society together any longer; there are no common ideals, no utopia. This is what this middle-class professional (computer specialist) of North African origin in his early thirties, whose father fought alongside the French Communist party as a worker within the leftist trade union CGT (Confédération Générale du travail), maintained in an interview in Paris in October 2014:

"Islam makes me feel together with others who submit to Allah. What kind of common bond do I have with the others? My parents were communists, they were Muslims from Algeria, but Islam was their faith, not their tie with the other citizens. Communism was their real bond with France, but also with Algeria and the rest of the world. They believed that they could create a new society where there would be no class, no exploiter, no exploited, and that was the link that tied them together and united them with the labor movement in France. Others were socialists, others still found meaning in republicanism. Today, nothing of the sort is noteworthy, there is no link, people are living in their own exile. Islam, at least, makes sense to me. I feel that I am not alone, that something relates me to those who share this religion with me. Islam provides meaning to me, sacred meaning, something that is lacking in our society. But they hate it, people in France, but also in the West, are fighting against Muslims; Islam has become the whipping boy ("tête de turc"), and racism against it is on the rise. I feel that Palestinians are oppressed, the Arab world is oppressed by the West, and Islam is the new enemy. They push us towards radicalization with their hatred, a girl with a simple scarf is a fundamentalist, whereas the naked Femen¹⁶ who desecrates a mosque is regarded with indulgence. Muslims are being rejected, and to me that is the reason why they radicalize."

For his father, Islam was more or less a private matter in accordance with the French principle of *laïcité* (secularity); it did not mobilize him, contrary to the class struggle ideology. But to him, all those ideals are dead, the only meaning that remains is within Islam.

A second category was "tired" of the peace reigning in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War—the war exalting a "will to life" of Nietzschean nature; they were no longer satisfied with the dull status quo of the everyday life, especially in Europe. A European youth deprived of utopia looked for thrills that would shake up everyday life and introduce animation in the form of warrior exaltation and virile heroism. This young man, who dreamed of leaving France for Syria but was dissuaded by his friends, still entertained the dream of going somewhere to wage holy war in 2015:

¹⁶ A movement of young women who show their more or less naked body as a sign of protest against religion or other causes that anger them.

"I am bored to death. We have a life with flat pulse, there is no excitement, no calling, nothing noble. The only motive is to get rich, to consume, and to find attractive girls to screw ("baiser"). I need more, something more thrilling and more heroic. I also need to be in a situation out of the ordinary. The war in Syria excited me, I saw the video footage of some young men wearing Ray-Ban glasses, posing in front of their four-by-fours, proudly showing off their submachine guns, defying death and killing the nasty soldiers of the Assad Regime..."¹⁷

This category included a large proportion of middle-class young people looking for adventure in order to escape boredom and emptiness. The impression prevailed among them that the festive effervescence of the war and the sense of intensification of life would make them forget the vagaries of the future and engender a situation of generalized joviality which would blur the frontiers of life and death, the possible and the impossible, the predictable and the unpredictable. These young people exorcised the anxiety of a risky future without a guaranteed prospect of individual and collective progress.

Some of the middle-class young people engaged in the deathly game in order to join an "effervescent community" and to leave behind the "cold community" of a nation in which the individual was left to himself, insulated, and without any strong feeling of belonging. The imaginary neo-Ummah of the jihadists provided a reinvigorated sense of togetherness to these young people otherwise bereft of hope, fearful for their future, inclined to see their future as devoid of economic and social progress, squeezed between the haves and have-nots. The identity crisis among the middles classes is ever the more acute as Europe has jeopardized the political dimension of nationality by depriving the nation state of many of its former economic prerogatives. This middle class convert expressed his feelings in a rather brutal fashion:

"Robert (Abdullah, his adopted Muslim name): Islam has brought me a sense of genuine life. Before that I was a living dead and my only goal was to become rich. The more I worked, the less I could be rich. What I earned was taken away in taxes and duties and squandered on stupid consumption of alcohol and sexual parties, and I was becoming a cash cow for the government and my occasional buddies and girlfriends. There was no sense of belonging, I was left to myself, the others were indifferent. Islam has given me a sense belonging to the same Ummah; we are ready to sacrifice everything to achieve it. Before, I was a monster of selfishness; now I am ready to give away everything, including my life, to achieve the Islamic ideals. My former friends think I'm crazy, but in secret they envy me and my faith. Islam makes me feel more than a sheer

¹⁷ These interviews were made either in four major prisons (2011-2013), during my empirical research in the voluntary associations, or in the poor suburbs (2014-2017). See, among others, Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Les prisons de France*, Robert Laffont 2016, *Die Radikalisierung*, 2016.

consumer or somebody whose sole aim is to amass more wealth or to have more sex with beautiful girls. I belong to a group of people who have strong ties to God."¹⁸

Robert, aka Abdullah, does not talk about jihad, but his readiness for the ultimate sacrifice might be understood in that sense. He is part of the group of young people who were not radicalized but, due to his former life and disappointments, might still go to the extremes of the holy war.

In many cases, war allows for the positioning of oneself as a hero. Heroism contrasts with the insignificance of the self who, in the peaceful West, must wait indefinitely to find less and less stable jobs while living within families destabilized by half a century of feminism and egalitarianism. The possibility of short-circuiting this long and hopeless wait is provided by the war in which the young man can become an exceptional warrior. Confronting death opens up the prospect of a glorious future—if one survives. In case of death, according to the Islamic tenet taught to him by the Islamic radicals, the young man will be sent to paradise.

The feeling of insignificance is shared by the middle- and the lower-class young people of Muslim origin. Both groups are beset by the feeling of having no calling, no purpose; the middle-classes, because of the lack of utopia and deep anomie in the Durkheimian sense, and the disaffected young people, because of their utter sense of being the no-future underclass.

In 2013, in the largest European prison, Fleury-Mérogis, this Frenchman of Algerian origin expressed his dream of martyrdom in an unambiguous manner:

"Ahmed: You know, those who die as martyrs in the battlefield, they are heroes in this world, but also "friends of Allah" (awliya Allah): they accept to die for God's sake (in the way of God), they are heroes in this world and eternally redeemed in the other world. Look at my life here: I am in prison for theft and once out, I'll do the same again. I have no choice, there is no future, I am utterly useless, I am less than nothing, I have no respect for myself. This is what I am up to. Martyrdom, for those who dare, opens the doors of paradise, and it also gives them self-respect."

The ideas of this disaffected young man and that of the middle-class converts converge in some ways: both find in the holy death a way to leave behind the non-identity, non-dignity, insignificance and loss of purpose of life in cold and impersonal societies where no common ties cement togetherness. In the case of the middle-classes, the anomie and lack of calling is paramount, in the case of the disaffected young people, the lack of self-respect, the stigmas, and the impossible dignity that pushes towards jihad and martyrdom are paramount.

¹⁸ Interview conducted in July 2014 within a project of middle class Muslims and French society in an eastern Parisian district.

Jihadist Women and the Feminist Question

In the Islamic tradition, the women who fought the enemies are first the Sahabiyyat (companions of the Prophet), including Um 'Umara, Safiya: she cut off the head of one of the Jewish Arab attackers who climbed the wall of the fortress where women and children had taken refuge during the battle of Khandaq in 627. From the ninth to the eleventh century, the Mutarajjulāt, women dressed as men, fought and were cursed by the quotations attributed to the Prophet (the Hadith). On the whole, the classic sources of Islam are very reluctant about the role of women in jihad.¹⁹

However, a reinterpretation of tradition has been made by some scholars in order to legitimize the intervention of women in jihad.²⁰ In particular, reference is made to the classical doctrine of defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf*), stipulating that all Muslims—men, women, children, and slaves—have the obligation to fight (*fard al-Ayn*) to defend their territory and their faith in case of attack by the enemy.

Before the civil war in Syria in 2013 and the advent of Daesh in 2014, very few women were involved in jihad in Europe. There were women converts like Muriel Degauque, or women like Jihadi Jane. From 2013 to 2015, there was a significant increase in the number of women involved in jihadism: they totaled more than 500 (10%) out of the 5,000 or so people who left Western countries for Syria.²¹ They were often from the (lower) middle classes. Few of them came from the suburbs or from the poor and isolated neighborhoods from which the majority of young men hailed. Many had a proven criminal past;²² the cases of Hayat Boumedienne, the campaign of Amedy Coulibaly (one of the terrorists of the Paris attacks of January 2015) or Hasna Aït Boulahcen, Abaoud's cousin (Abaoud was one of the major terrorists in the Paris attack of November 2015 that killed more than 130 people) were in the majority. They mostly came from families in which the jihadist stance was not the dominant faith, or they were women of neo-traditional families in England who intended to obey the religious injunction of the new Caliphate, who were not from the poor strata, and most whom had no judicial record.

¹⁹ David Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 28, February 2005.

²⁰ Nelly Lahoud, "The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis' Exclusion of Women From Jihad," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 26, May 2014

²¹ See *Le Nouveau Jihad en Occident*, op.cit. for the statistics.

²² See Rajan Basra, Peter R. Neumann, and Claudia Brunner, *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, ICSR, 2016, "Criminalité et terrorisme: ces poreuses frontières entre grands bandits et jihadistes," site d'Atlantico, 18/10/2016.

When women participate in jihad in Muslim countries, it is specifically to avenge a family member such as a husband, a cousin, a brother or father, murdered by the police, as was the case for the “black widows” in Chechnya. Or they accompany their husband, as with Sajida al-Rishwai in November 9, 2005, who tried unsuccessfully to detonate her belt in Jordan. In Europe, feminine jihadism occurred in a new fashion, and vengeance was not the major motive for their actions. Rather, it was a new identity based on more than half a century of feminism that paradoxically pushed them towards female jihadism.

Some post-adolescent young people found a way of becoming “adults” through the war that assumed the role of a rite of passage. The sister of a young teenager (15 years of age) who left for Syria told me in an interview in an association in Ile-de-France in 2015:

“Nicole (my sister) was impatient. She had become a woman and engaged in real life. She yearned for children. My mother told her: ‘You are too young, I carried you when I was in my thirties. You have to study, to find a job, to build a future rather than to get married and become pregnant so young.’ But Nicole insisted that she would be a real woman, to be recognized as such. She was ill at ease with her adolescence, she thought that our mother did not understand her urge to be a woman and a mother. She went to Syria, not because she was radicalized, but to achieve her goal of becoming a mother.”

To begin with, some young women intended to restore their image as genuine “women” as opposed to their mothers, who had become “quasi-men” by adopting attitudes that seemed to deny their female identity. These young women opposed the dominant feminist tendency to become pregnant in their thirties by giving birth to “lion cubs” at a much younger age in the service of their new faith. Some had military training in Syria (within the Al-Khansaa Brigade). Those who were not able to join the ranks of jihad nourished a hatred of society and tried to constitute autonomous women cells. This was particularly the case for three young jihadist women in Paris who intended to blow up a car filled with gas cylinders in a tourist district in Paris in September 2016, one of them stabbing a police officer.

The self-assertion of jihadist women poses the question of a new style of feminism that is partially at odds with the leitmotif of traditional feminism based on the rejection of violence. The new logic of action exalts violence in an attitude that derives simultaneously from feminism, post-feminism and anti-feminism. The feminist dimension lies in women’s self-assertion and their ability to act without a man to lead them and provide them with the guarantee of legitimacy. Although Rachid Kassim suggested action through the encrypted messaging application, Telegram, the “patriarchal” vision of Islam could not convince young women to act alone, not unlike Ulrike Meinhoff, a member of the German Baader-Meinhoff group in the

1970s and 1980s, who combined feminism and far-left ideology. In France (not in Syria where this would be impossible), women now assert themselves as autonomous agents of violent jihadist, whereas until now this was the exclusive prerogative and the inalienable privilege of men. The feminist dimension here, so at odds with Western feminism, is to contest the exclusivity of the violent action by men.

Convergence and Divergence with Men: Feminism and its Avatars

The factors that attracted girls and women to Syria from 2013 to 2016 bear similarities to the factors that drew men there.

First, women have constituted a significant proportion of workers and employees in Europe for at least two generations, following the gains of feminism, the shaking up of the patriarchal family, and the benefits arising from the legal equality between men and women. As a result, they feel the same job insecurity and fear of the future as men do (if not more, due to their disadvantaged position in the job market). In a society deprived of utopia where the sense of belonging has been weakened in many ways (the fragile family structure, the weakening of the nation state, the loss of job security due to the globalization, and the new "flexibility" in recruitment policies), women lean towards the utopia of radical Islam, attracted by its promise of an effervescent community (in contrast to the "cold" national European communities) and a restored family structure (a reassuring neo-patriarchal family rather than the destabilizing modern family).

Another common point is the sluggishness of everyday life and the boredom experienced in the peaceful European societies since the end of the Second World War. The instability and fragility of the family, even if it is experienced differently by men and women, has the same root: the primary anthropological cell of collective existence is no longer perceived as solid in the face of the uncertainties of life and the multiplication of family models (man and woman, woman and woman, man and man, live-in partnership, the blended family). The "à la carte family" puts the burden on the couple, who must negotiate with each other the forms of their coexistence, the stepfamily being a further place of the dilution of authority, with children bequeathed by stepfathers or mothers. The shared authority between the biological father and the new husband of the biological mother or the mother and the new wife of the father contribute to this growing sense of fragility of authority, which is now subject to endless negotiations between the husband and wife (or the two members of the couple). The dream of marriage with a "knight in shining armor" who might die after a few months was easily internalized by many of these young women who ventured into Syria because in their minds,

the marriage had already been affected in its immutability within their own family and put to the test of a destabilizing modernity.

The pride of being part of the new effervescent Muslim community, even though this was proved to be an illusion upon arrival in Syria, was a strong motivation for young women to depart for Syria. The knight of faith was the counter-model of the “de-idealized” man to whose trivialization both feminism and the loss of his role of an exclusive financial provider for the family had contributed. For a large proportion of these young women, it was the romanticism of love which re-idealized men rather than adherence to the political ideal of an anti-imperialist Islam or the desire to protect Muslims against secularization, both of which prevailed in the motivation of young men to join Syria.

Finally, there was a quest for norms and even discipline among women and men, a need for guidance that would give meaning and direction to their lives. For men, this was particularly the case among those who sought to engage in the police or the army and who, as unsuccessful candidates, turned to jihadism (this was the case for Mohamed Merah, who tried to join the *Légion étrangère* in France in 2010 before committing the deadly attacks against Muslim military men and Jews in 2012). There were many male examples, but there were also proven instances of similar female examples, like Hasna Aït Boulahcen, who dreamed of joining the French army.²³

However, while women and men shared some aspirations for their relationship with the new Islamic State, other characteristics separate their motivations.

To begin with, their relationship with death is different in the overwhelming majority of the cases, even though some jihadi women would like to die as martyrs in the same way as some men do. Many girls died in bombings in Syria, but overall the female death rate was much lower than that of men. They were not affected in the same way, and what often awaited women was the death of a husband, a period of mourning (lasting around four months) and then a possible marriage with a second husband.

The Need for Norms and a Strong and Inclusive Community

Jihadist women (like their male counterparts) strongly aspired to belong to a community that would give meaning to their lives. The dystopia of Daesh, repressive and regressive but promising strong integration into a close-knit Islamic community (the neo-Ummah), was highly

²³ Isabelle Rey-Lefebvre, Simon Piel, Nicolas Bastuck et Florence Aubenat, “Hasna Boulahcen, entre vodka et niqab,” *Le Monde*, 22/11/2015.

attractive to young men and women living in European societies, where togetherness had become almost meaningless due to the lack of shared utopia (up to the 1980s, the utopia of socialism, communism, and republicanism had been a warrant for a better future and the cement of social togetherness in France). The more restrictive the norms were, the more reassuring they became, at least before jihadist women experienced real life under the aegis of Daesh in Syria. The rigid norms played a reassuring role for the anomic individuals in search of belonging to a "hot" community, as compared to the "cold" societies they lived in.

This is particularly the case for Saïda, born in the early 1980s in a non-practicing North African family to a French mother of Algerian origin and an Algerian father who had seven children.²⁴ Her parents divorced when she was 13 years old. She blamed her father for not raising her as well as her brothers and sisters. She was more tender towards her mother, and she worried about her because her mother did not perform the daily prayers and therefore risked hell in Saïda's eyes. In high school, Saïda had difficulty attending classes and turned to Islam, influenced by her friends. She tried to pass the police officer exam in order to fight against pedophiles, drug dealers, and the others law breakers. She did not succeed, despite receiving good grades, because she did not receive a medical certificate of good health. She attributed to Allah the fact that she did not succeed in the exam. Afterwards, she also noted that working in a male environment such as the police would have been illicit from an Islamic viewpoint (*haram*). She married a Tunisian Salafist against the opposition of his parents, learning about Salafism (the "Salafiyya") on Google. She found answers to her questions on Islamic forums. She had fits of depression that she attributed to the sins she felt she had committed prior to joining the Salafist faith. Not only did she yearn for rigid norms, but she also felt guilty for not having applied them previously. This type of aspiration is as prevalent among the peaceful Salafists (the so-called pietists who aspire to Hegira, leaving Europe for a Muslim country) as it is among a significant proportion of Salafist jihadists (who consider violent jihad the only way to assure their redemption). Both are in search of restrictive norms, absolute certainties, a faith that will frame and give meaning to their existence. Wearing the full veil, Saïda was stopped by the police and, after an altercation, spent a night in prison. For her, the will to build another life with a set of self-imposed restrictive norms was a paramount existential question. The Salafist neo- Ummah filled this void, but stripped the individual of much of his or her free will.

²⁴ Agnès de Feo, a French journalist doing her doctoral research on the topic of women turning to radical Islam, communicated this case to me.

Women Facing Violence: "Total Muslims" versus "Negative Heroines"

For a new generation in the West, women's relationships with violence have been progressively evolving at an anthropological level. Violence still remains largely the preserve of men: the female prison population is 4% in France and 6% in Great Britain, and domestic violence has its roots mainly among men (90%), women occupying a marginal place (around 10%). However, women's imagination, especially of very young women, regarding the subject of violence has been evolving. 10% of jihadists today are women. If we compare this figure with most extremist movements, this proportion is one of the highest, except in far-left movements like the Baader-Meinhoff gang (the proportion of women in this group exceeded 50% and at times reached 60%²⁵) or the Red Brigades in Italy. In the IRA in Northern Ireland, there were 5% women;²⁶ 6.4% of the members of the Basques of ETA were women.²⁷ The distribution of Western women who went to Syria is as follows: 70 Germans (including 9 minors); 63 to 70 French; 60 English (20 minors), 30 Dutch, 14 Australian.²⁸ Given how women are treated by Daesh, this proportion reflects their fascination with jihadism as well as that of adolescent girls and post-adolescents.

To begin with, violence is no longer being perceived as the exclusive preserve of men. It must be emphasized that this was already the case in the past; examples include the Algerian women who played a major role in the Algerian war of independence, the Chechen "black widows," but also the socialist and communist leftist women in Lebanon who took part in the movement against Israeli occupation through kamikaze attacks in the 1980s.

Some of the women who joined Daesh presented particular traits, especially their quest for "de-Westernization" in order to embrace Islam more thoroughly, but also in order to become new women. These young women felt that "occidentality" (Westernness) had stuck to their skin like a straitjacket, preventing them from identifying fully, absolutely, totally with the neo-Ummah that, in their eyes, embodied happiness in this world and bliss in the afterlife. For them, the West was first and foremost a reign of total secularization, the profanation of the sacred in the name of the supremacy of the secular, the annexation of the public sphere being by a non-religious (or anti-religious, in the jihadists' view) system of reference; becoming a real Muslim

²⁵ Peter R. Neumann, *Der Terror ist unter uns*, Chapter 10, "Frauen," Ullstein Verlag, Berlin, 2016.

²⁶ Paul Gill, John Horgan et Paige Deckert, "Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists," *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 59 (2), 2014.

²⁷ Fernano Reinares, "Who are the terrorists? Analyzing changes in sociological profiles among members of ETA," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27, 2004

²⁸ Edwin Bakker and Seran de Leede, *European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic*, ICCT Background Note, April 2015.

being impossible in this situation. Leaving Europe was also finding a way of escaping the all-secular public sphere where “naked bodies” (women without veil, sometimes exposing their legs, their forearms) are permitted. Shedding all occidental traits and habits becomes a prerequisite for recovering a “full” Muslim identity.

The brother of this young woman, like herself hailing from a secular French family who converted to Islam, became radicalized under the influence of a local preacher; he sought to become a “total Muslim” and left France for Syria. He was explicit in his opinion:

“She said that everything in France was sinful: in the street, her veil was disturbing to other people, who looked at her askance, which made her furious. But since other women did not wear the hijab and some men had their arms and sometimes their legs exposed, she felt that the entire society was corrupt and perverse. At the family table, wine and even non-halal meat was unacceptable to her. She sometimes told me: I feel ashamed to be a French woman. Not only am I not free to be a proud Muslim, but other people dress and behave in such a way that I am ill at ease all the time. My dream is to migrate to a Muslim country, to forget about France and the entire country, and to embrace my new Muslim identity. I am sincerely ashamed of being French, and even more so of belonging to the Western world. You will all go to hell for this widespread sinful behavior.”²⁹

Women and men of this category, whom I qualify as “total Muslims,”³⁰ want a world in the image of the uniqueness of Allah that would result in the unification of all spheres of existence under the protective wing of God. The secular world seems monstrous to them because it has broken off its ties with God, is bound only by the soft consensus of the citizens who have banished God from their existence and have taken his place. The loss of the old utopias (socialism, communism, republican ideas) and the lack of meaning resulting from the absence of a cement for living together creates a climate of anxiety for some, who strongly feel the need for an encompassing principle in the sense of Karl Jaspers (“*das Umgreifende*”, the encompassing, which gives sense to the existence and ties the community together); or who long for mystery in the sense of Gabriel Marcel (who opposed the “mystery of being” to the “problem,” understandable and susceptible of finding a solution in this world). For a few years now, Daesh has brought this kind of meaning to the young men and women who entered the fold of Islam and broke with the West, the world of domination, desecration, and opposition to Islam and all that is sacred and transcendent. They excommunicated a desacralizing and profane

²⁹ The words of a 28-year-old man of a secular middle-class family, whose 23-year-old sister left France in 2015.

³⁰ Fethi Benslam, in French, speaks of the “surmusulman” (Over-Muslim) to characterize those Muslims who look for more and more restrictions in the name of religion in order to prove to themselves worthy of their genuine Islamic identity. Over-Muslims are different in the sense that it is their quest for “de-Westernization” that characterizes them. See Fethi Benslama, *Un furieux désir de sacrifice, le surmusulman*, Seuil, 2016.

Western world by opposing it with an Islam that reintroduces the sacred into life and restores a unified meaning to the world by guaranteeing individuals a happy life after death if they fight the forces of evil incarnated by the agents of secularization in a diabolic West.

While living in the West, some women, like Umm Raeesa, tried to break away from the Western identity which had "infected" them by identifying themselves with the cohesive Islamist identity, and the more restrictive it was, the more it seemed to them to be genuine. This new identity gave them certainty beyond doubt and anxiety. But then suspicion was cast on the authenticity of their religious beliefs: if they were true fervent followers of the new faith, why would they stay in the West instead of migrating to Syria? Umm Raeesa responded: "We are neither adapted to this side (the West), nor to the other (Daesh)." She was skeptical about the ability of the jihadist movements to ensure the conditions of a truly Islamic life while rejecting the irreligious Western world where they lived.

The West, the venue of feminism that has managed to desecrate the patriarchal family, to bring man and woman dangerously close in their respective social roles, and to make inaudible the desire to be a woman and to feel the body during precious childbirth, was experienced as alienating, as making impossible the self-assertion as a genuine mother-woman. Admittedly, the desire for early motherhood among young women or adolescent girls could not reproduce the model of the past, being the product of the imagination of young people. It was the reaction to many generations of feminists and the yearning for recovering a sense of womanhood rather than the desire to become a woman in the historic, traditional sense. This romanticized world of theirs would become totally destroyed after few months in Syria, the inferiority of men to women and the destiny of women under the Islamic State being unbearable to many of these young women. But in Europe, prior their journeys to Syria, many of these young girls and women looked for an exotic life, romanticized and estranged from the daily life.

Another step was taken in jihadism with the figurehead of "the negative heroine" who went beyond the "total Muslim woman" in terms of her radicalization. She was the feminine counterpart of the male "negative hero." Her mindset was an explosive mix of feminism, anti-feminism and post-feminism: her will to act hid her tormented character. The jihadist heroine sought to embody the counter-values of society, beginning with violence, acting for ISIS, mostly in the West. The more violent she became, the more she legitimized herself in her own eyes, inversely proportional to her de-legitimization in Western societies. She sought to punish the West through violent action. She also intended to attract new female adepts to strengthen IS. The number of these negative heroines was rather marginal. In contrast to the majority of

the young female jihadists who intended to marry a knight of faith, their yearning was to take arms and to fight against the miscreants (the entire West) in order to defend radical Islam.

In Syria, except in rare exceptional cases, the “mujahideen” could not intervene in the battlefield during the reign of the IS. In Europe, some of the women who were prevented from going to Syria turned their anger against their society and became negative heroines. This was the case for the young women who tried to blow up a car in the tourist district of Notre-Dame de Paris in September 2016. One of them, Ines Madani, attacked a police officer with a knife and wounded him. She planned to play the role of a combatant *sensu stricto*. She had pledged allegiance to IS on the internet.

Women thus oscillated between the dream of love, the desire to break with a morose daily life, the yearning for building up a family beyond the fragility of the modern one, and the aspiration to recover their female identity by reinforcing their identity as being different from men. A tiny minority intended to act as combatants in the battlefield or to attack their own country through terrorist action.

Jihadist Converts and the Mythical Restoration of a Lost Unity

Among the 10% of women among jihadists, a significant minority is made up of converts (in January 2016, roughly a third of jihadist women³¹). European female converts have a number of characteristics that distinguish them from the Muslim women or girls who left or were about to leave for Syria.

To begin with, a principle of active individuation underpinned their motivations: they felt called to an “individual duty” (*fard al-Ayn*) that encompassed men and women.³² The distress of Muslim societies morally compelled some women to go to Syria to defend the dignity and the territory of Islam. Some English women took the initiative to go to Syria. To the overwhelming majority of them, being a woman no longer meant escaping this obligation which, in the past, applied only to men, if not *de jure*, then at least *de facto*. During the period from 2013 to 2017, when Islamic State claimed the status of the Caliphate, individual awareness created a sense of obligation and responsibility towards the Muslim community that pushed individuals towards action. Sitting by idly promoted feelings of guilt for men and women alike. Engaging on the side of Daesh meant fulfilling their religious duty as Muslims.

³¹ 220 French women were present in Syria within Daesh in January 2016, one third of them converts. See Elodie Guéguen, “Les femmes dans le jihad,” *France Inter* 08/01/2016.

³² C. Hoyle, A. Bradford, R. Frenett, “Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, 10-14.

The notions of the afterlife, divine justice, the last judgment, hell and its pangs, as well as paradise and its delights, preoccupied women as much as men. Secularization had apparently rendered obsolete those religious notions, which were thought to be strictly reserved for the private life of the citizens.

Their behavior called into question the separation between public and private life: they questioned the relegation of religion to the private sphere; moreover, they wanted to annex the public life and put an end to the separation of politics and religion. In the perspective of these young people, the belief in the hereafter was rooted in an eternal reality that extended to the entirety of the individual's life (and in particular his or her life in the public sphere) and brought an ethical-religious sense encompassing the private and the public spheres that, in European societies, belonged solely to the private sphere. This demand for "religion" by converted women and girls who questioned the dichotomy of private vs public spheres could be explained by the exhaustion of secular utopias throughout Europe and the emergence of new "dystopias" that attempted to coalesce the fragmented lives of individuals by insisting on the totality of their existence, private and public spheres at the same time.

The late modernity diversifies the sectors of life and tends to compartmentalize social relations without a link between them. The new regressive utopias such as jihadism attempted to unify all spheres of existence by denying the principle of differentiation and diversification in the name of a transparency based on the mythical unity of Islam. In an opaque and fragmented complexity devoid of unity, Daesh opposed a transparent simplicity in which violence against the disbelievers gave a monolithic unity to the life of the believer. Women were particularly exposed to the seductive powers of this notion because they no longer knew how to draw a boundary between "womanhood" and "manhood," feminism having transformed women into "quasi-men," the dialectic of gender equality having created an anguishing indistinctness with regard to their femininity. Radical Islamism reassured these women by re-inscribing the difference of the sexes into a sacred register where to be man or to be woman had an absolute meaning, reintroducing a mythical transparency which appeased the modern anguish of gender indistinctiveness. One can mention an afterlife in paradise that would soothe the anguish caused by the uncertainties of the present time through the assurance of eternal bliss.

Before their departure to Syria, the fascination among young European teenage girls with the "Daesh-type family" was rooted in the quest for a counter-model to the stepfamily (blended family) in which they lived, which was often marked by instability, a lack of unified authority (the difficult sharing of authority between the father, the mother, the stepfather, the stepmother), the disappearance of patriarchy without a new substitutive frame of reference, and

the agonizing dilution of the distinction between man and woman. The converted girls wanted to find a spouse who was the antithesis of the clichés of men in their present daily lives, marked by the loss of the former superiority (and the Islamic hero would re-idealize the man's role), an equalization that "de-idealized" men, and an egalitarian culture that rendered men "effeminate" or robbed them of their manhood (and the Islamic warrior image would restore the man's virility). What they were looking for was an exceptional man who could be trusted, who would not be intimidated by danger, who would adorn himself with the insignia of the knight of faith: the machine gun, the SUV, the Ray-Ban sunglasses, and the proud air of the one who would kill or get killed without flinching. His heroic nature would reassure the young woman, anxious to idealize her future husband.

Identifying herself with an effervescent neo-Ummah in which she would assume the eminent role of the mother (Ummah and Umm (mother) stem from the same linguistic root in Arabic), she would no longer feel insecure. She would find someone whom she could totally trust: someone who accepts the need to die for his ideals would also back her in the vicissitudes of married life. The "extraordinary" man would guarantee the couple an intensified marital life which would also be protected from the monotony and boredom which assail many modern couples after the first few months of marriage. Of course, the couple could be shaken by the death of the husband as a martyr, but *boredom* would not besiege them.

For hours, girls looked on the internet to find a suitable young man who would become their husband and who would often come from Europe, while men used social networks to go in search of women once they had arrived in Syria and subsequently tried to seduce them by courting them according to "Islamic norms." Women journalists contacted young European jihadists in Syria, pretending to be a young woman ready to migrate in order to see how young jihadists tried to seduce young girls.³³

In addition, young women also want to become a celebrity to raise themselves above their insignificance and give meaning to their lives: they build a new ego by making a new skin. The jihadi star-system needs feminine figures who stand out for the quality of their propaganda on the internet and for their striking, even cruel, character. This is the case for Samantha Louise Lewthwaite, Maria Giulia Sergio, and Emilie König, who all have made a name for themselves on the global jihadist network and attracted young girls in whose eyes they were stars.

Finally, the spectacle of a Syrian society plagued by death and destruction has induced an attitude of compassion that can create a humanitarian goal of a new kind: to help the Muslims

³³ See, for instance, Anna Erelle, *Dans la peau d'une jihadiste*, Robert Laffont, 2015.

of Syria against the heretical regime of Assad, legitimizing the use of violence which is perceived as legitimate and bypassing non-violent options in the name of the higher values of Islam. This argument is confirmed by the stories of a dozen American women, who might easily have been Europeans, arrested before they left for Syria, exemplified by Shannon Conley, a 19-year-old woman from Colorado who was sentenced to four years in prison for trying to help Daesh.³⁴

Conclusion

Under the reign of Daesh, many men and women, mostly from Europe, went to Syria, driven by a fascination with the perspective of the new Caliphate. Their imaginary view of Islam and their grievances towards society as well as their sense of exoticism and romanticism played a major part in their readiness to identify with the new Islamic State. The latter acted swiftly through social media to heighten young men's perceptions of the exceptional knights of Islam that would await them in Syria, and to increase young women's desire to become adult women, willing and able to build up new family ties through marriage and motherhood in an exotic setting, all in the name of an imaginary Islam. The twists and turns of their subjectivity have to be understood in order to grasp their fascination for Daesh.

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³⁴ Trevor Hughes, "Teenage jihad suspect sentenced to 4 years", *USA TODAY*, January 23, 2015.

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