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### **Women in Terrorism: A Journey from Sri Lanka To Syria**

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*The price of your greed  
Is your son and your daughter  
What you gon' do  
When there's blood in the water*

Grandson – Blood // Water



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## ABSTRACT

Lo studio che andrò a presentare è frutto di un'approfondita ricerca sul mondo del terrorismo al femminile. Il motivo per cui ho scelto di occuparmi di questo è, in primo luogo, il mio fortissimo interesse per il terrorismo come sfida alla sicurezza internazionale. Essendo il terrorismo un fenomeno ancora molto dibattuto, ho trovato interessante approfondire la questione incentrando però la ricerca su due gruppi in particolare: le Tigri Tamil, gruppo separatista dello Sri Lanka, e lo stato Islamico meglio conosciuto come ISIS, gruppo jihadista-salafita attivo in Iraq e Siria.

Il focus sul mondo del terrorismo femminile mi ha indirizzato verso questi due gruppi terroristici. Le Tigri Tamil perché, al suo interno, la donna ha una considerazione piuttosto alta e il suo ruolo può essere anche quello della combattente. Lo Stato Islamico invece permette alle donne di far parte dell'organizzazione interna, senza quindi esporle al combattimento aperto. Ho voluto analizzare anche ISIS perché è molto conosciuto a livello internazionale ma anche mediatico e ho ritenuto che una ricerca più approfondita mi avrebbe aiutata a comprendere quanto di ciò che televisioni e media online hanno presentato è vero.

Le problematiche che ho analizzato sono orientate verso lo studio dei ruoli che la donna ricopre all'interno dell'organizzazione analizzata e le motivazioni per cui decide di prendervi parte. Accanto a questi due aspetti, ho affiancato un'analisi generale del gruppo, la condizione della donna nella società all'interno della quale il gruppo è nato e i modelli che la donna era spinta a seguire sia dentro che fuori l'organizzazione. Fatta eccezione per l'analisi generale, volta semplicemente a presentare l'organizzazione e la sua storia, le condizioni sociali della donna e i modelli da lei seguiti saranno utili, rispettivamente, a comprendere meglio i suoi ruoli e motivazioni.

Per costruire una ricerca solida e onnicomprensiva, ho utilizzato fonti di ogni genere: dai libri alle riviste, dagli articoli scientifici a quelli di giornale, dai siti ufficiali delle organizzazioni a quelli ufficiali degli stati coinvolti. Questo mi ha permesso di costruire un confronto tra la presenza femminile nelle due organizzazioni e di concludere che esse si presentano come complementari, per quanto riguarda i ruoli, e come sovrapponibili, per quanto riguarda le motivazioni. Ad ogni modo, la ricerca presenta lacune non

indifferenti dovute agli scarsi studi sull'argomento. I risultati della ricerca sono dunque incompleti, ragione per cui, in conclusione della tesi, ho trovato opportuno inserire dei suggerimenti per migliorare la ricerca e incentivarla.

## INTRODUCTION

*Even today, statistically speaking, the Homo sapien would prefer the reassuring thought. He aims at the confirmation of what he already believes in and he would taste the uncertain just like something harmless, a lovely red herring.<sup>1</sup>*

Paolo Flores d'Arcais

The course of study I engaged in for the last two years, Comparative International Relations, never had a specific focus on terrorism. Studying international relations is not that easy, the vastness of the topic passes through historical events, economic history and theories, social history, political economy, international politics, you name it.

The complexity and, as a consequence, extreme comprehensiveness of my MA inspired me to address an equally complex phenomenon: the raising of terrorism. Outside university, I had two crucial experiences to which I owe a lot for having inspired me in the choice of the final argument for my thesis. First, I attended external courses organized by Ecole Universitaire Internationale, a research institute working on topics like terrorism and counterterrorism as well as rape drugs and intelligence. With them, I investigated the massive influence of biases on gender, culture and religion in the quest for defeating international terrorism. Second, in February, I participated to the annual edition of the HNMUN, the Harvard National Model United Nations where me and my colleague represented the country of Cuba as delegates in the Legal Committee. The choice of the debating topic was between the rights of religious minorities and sexual rights. Since the choice would have been made during the simulation, we had to be prepared on both the topics. While doing my research I realized what I would have dealt with in my final dissertation: the female participation in terrorism, precisely, in a secular group like the

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<sup>1</sup> Personal translation.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and in a religious/insurgent group like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

What I am going to present in my Master thesis is how and how much gendered stereotypes influence our way of managing real security and perceived security when dealing with women's participation in terrorism. To better explain the effects gendered biases have on our security perception, I think it is appropriate to rely on an experiment which measures how much biases manipulate our news perception.

As reported by the official website of the BBC in 2014, Marc Trussler (a PhD student in Political Science) and Stuart Soroka (Professor in Communication Studies & Political Science at the University of Michigan) ran an experiment at the McGill University in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Under the false pretension of doing “eye-tracking measures”, they studied how people choose news among good and bad ones and the results they obtained were gloomy. Participants preferred negative stories involving revenge, corruption, hypocrisy and so on over good news. At the end of the experiment, the two researchers have acknowledged the “negativity bias”: the strong human desire for hearing, reading and remembering whatever comes to be bad, news in this case.<sup>3</sup>

I presented this experiment as the umpteenth example of how biases influence our way of thinking about reality and how they are so easily spread. In this case, the influence of “negativity biases” may manifest in two different ways:

- on choosing bad news, people raise their sense of danger and believe that our level of security is not optimal; or
- on the contrary, on being certain about our sense of insecurity, we unconsciously pursue our conviction by choosing bad news (which is precisely what Paolo Flores d'Arcais told us at the beginning of my introduction when mentioning the “*confirmation of what [we] already believe[s]*”).

However, if we try to apply this theory to the female participation in terrorism, everything changes. The gendered bias has far more influence, it is stronger and more rooted in our thought patterns because it is not linked to experience alone but to a cultural lifestyle and

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<sup>2</sup> M. Trussler, S. Soroka; *Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames*.

<sup>3</sup> T. Stafford; *Psychology: Why bad news dominates the headlines*.

historical social model. The desirable result would be an increased desire for bad news related to female terrorism translated into an increased attention towards female participation in terrorism. Unfortunately, the latter does not occur. What if crime stories about women in terrorism seriously increased our security need against the threat? Security studies would become more “gendered” and so the counterterrorism approach.

The more we hear about women committing acts of terrorism, the more we ignore the phenomenon repeating ourselves it was a one-time thing, a coercion case, a sign of desperation. By so doing we pass up an opportunity to admit that cultural convictions of the past are now useless, maybe we do not even accept that countries we have always considered “backward” overcame stereotypes years in advance, maybe a masculine society like the western one is afraid to acknowledge that the two previous findings are correct.

### **Thesis questions**

The nature of my thesis is comparative: I developed a general research on women’s participation in terrorism, then I analyzed women in two terrorist groups with all their specificities and, in conclusion, I provided for a comparison between the two groups.

Considering the magnitude of the topic, this analysis could not deal with only one question. The issues I am trying to answer are:

1. Is “female terrorism” a recent phenomenon?
2. Why terrorist groups recruit women?
3. What are the roles of women in the terrorist group?
4. Why women engage in terrorism?
5. Precisely, how women’s life in terrorism change with regards to different organizations like the LTTE and ISIS?

The first and second questions are answered in the first chapter of the thesis, under their homonymous paragraphs. The third and fourth question find their answers inside the chapters dedicated to the LTTE and ISIS; as we will see, both roles and motivations are different between the two groups. The fifth question, as the third and the fourth, will be presented inside the chapters dedicated to the two cases. To answer it, I will take into

consideration temporal, cultural and social variables. The temporal variable refers to the different timing of the two organizations: the LTTE was defeated in 2009 while ISIS lasted until recent times. The cultural variable refers to traditions and cultural norms on what it means to be a woman. Finally, the social variable refers to how the society perceives the combatant woman and how this perception influences the women's reputation.

## Research

Almost all documents I read on the topic started their discussion with the assumption that women's participation in terrorism has not been adequately studied. K. Jacques and P. J. Taylor in their "Female Terrorism: A Review" start by saying:

*The sharp growth in the number of publications examining female involvement in terrorism has produced a valuable but un-integrated body of knowledge spread across many disciplines.*<sup>4</sup>

The study took a sample of 51 different publications on female terrorism and analyzed them quantitatively and qualitatively. What emerges as the main problem is the lack of continuity:

*"For example, between the years 2000 and 2001, research on female terrorism encompassed the psychology of female involvement, an overview of female involvement in suicide terrorism, and a publication detailing representation of female terrorists. None of these themes were continued in research published in 2003."*<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, data are incorrectly used. The majority of analyzed articles relied on secondary sources and, on the overall data, primary sources occurred only in the 23% of cases.<sup>6</sup> By so doing, researches may be not completely reliable because their basis is the data analysis of another source. Furthermore, problems with data are not limited to their quality but to their quantity: the lack of new data does not allow for new perspectives. As a result, there

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<sup>4</sup> K. Jacques, P. J. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*; p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 5. Original sources: D. E. Georges-Abyeie, *Women as Terrorists*. Y. Schweitzer; "Palestinian Suicide Bombers: Reality Vs. Myth", in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?*. R. Talbot; *Myths in the Representation of Female Terrorists*; pp. 165 – 186.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

is a permanent juxtaposition of disciplines like psychology, sociology and criminology but what is missing is a comparative work.<sup>7</sup>

What emerged from my research is that, even with the same old findings, there is still some material to work from a comparative point of view. Indeed, I found opposite expressions and opinions even though experts were treating the same facts.

Another aspect which stuck out like a sore thumb, was the great quantity of results on “female suicide bombing”, a new tactic of terrorist organizations already operating with suicide terrorism. Studies on the topic are several and extensive, given its recent nature.

Focusing on the two groups I analyzed, what I found about women in LTTE was not a great quantity of documents and, due to the aged nature of the group, the material I employed is pretty old. On the other side of the coin, the advantage was its almost-unknown nature, saving me from the complex filtering process of avoiding media sources to the benefit of research-based sources. With respect to ISIS, since it was a well-known group I found a great quantity of media sources like newspaper articles and videos of journalistic nature. I tried as much as possible to avoid these sources, to avoid the trap of the “negativity bias”. Compared to the research on the LTTE, on ISIS I found too much material and I found difficult to manage sources and data analysis.

## **Motivations**

I chose the argument of female terrorism because, thanks to the experiences I presented at the beginning of my introduction, it mixes two research topics I particularly care about: gender studies on women and an analysis on terrorism. Studying the female impact on terrorism has a twofold result: it helps overcoming the gendered stereotypes about women and it helps women to gain trust, respect and relevance when working in fields of security. Moreover, I would like to continue the research on this topic even after obtaining my degree.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide for what lacks: a comparative work. Since, for a comparison to be correctly developed, the parties concerned should have a common point,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

both the LTTE and ISIS wanted to create a state. They revendicate their control over a portion of territory which, through a history of wars, colonialism and occupation, has always been seized to them.

One of the reasons why I chose the LTTE as one of the two terrorist groups to be analyzed, resides in its extreme complexity. Moreover, on being the LTTE a terrorist group with local objectives, its irrelevance to western media sources fed my curiosity. However, the key factor pushing me to analyze the LTTE was a catchy essay's title I found by chance: "Women's Participation in Terrorism, Conflict and Violent Extremism: Gender Equality Or Pure Pragmatism?". The essay, written by M. Martin, took the LTTE as example of analysis and, among the terrorist groups I read about, the LTTE was the only one leaving space for such a doubt. In the text, the author declared that women's motivations for joining the LTTE could have been the product of both the aspiration to gender equality and more political reasons.<sup>8</sup>

The choice to confront the LTTE with ISIS came subsequently. ISIS is well-known all over the world as a terrorist group based on the religious concept of Jihad, although having territorial objectives. On being so well-known, media sources are countless, and this allowed me to see how media represented it and how their representation differed from objective researches. My choice of ISIS was also motivated by its bond with the Western society not only because of the location of some of their terrorist attacks but also because of the phenomenon of the foreign fighters. Temporally speaking, ISIS came after the LTTE and this proved to be useful to analyze if the role of women changed in history and how. In conclusion, ISIS acted internationally while the LTTE was a local organization.

### **Thesis structure**

The thesis structure is divided in four chapters. The first is a general presentation of women's presence in terrorism and presents the history of this phenomenon and the

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<sup>8</sup> M. Martin; *Women's Participation In Terrorism, Conflict And Violent Extremism: Gender Equality Or Pure Pragmatism?*.

reasons why women are recruited. The second and the third chapters present respectively the LTTE and ISIS cases by analyzing, in both the groups,

- their historical background;
- their administrative structure;
- the situation of women in the country/state;
- the models of women who are followed as examples of social/political behavior and, eventually, of terrorist activity;
- roles; and
- motivations.

The last chapter will confront the two groups by underlining similarities and differences about the female presence inside the two groups. In the conclusion, suggestions to enhance and encourage research on the topic will be presented.



## CHAPTER 1

### History, Is It A Recent Phenomenon?

Women's participation in terrorism is not a recent phenomenon but the female presence in military forces is even more ancient. Queen Boudica, born in the 30 AD's Ancient Britain (South East England) was destined to guide the biggest British rebellion against the Roman occupiers.<sup>9</sup> Joan of Arc, the female combatant of the 15<sup>th</sup> century French history, became a soldier at the tender age of 17 and, in just one year, she victoriously led the French victory over the English enemy.<sup>10</sup>

Shifting to more recent times, we move to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's Russia. Populism was rampant and Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will) was its outcome: more than a quarter of its members were women. Its origins trace back to August 1879 as the first revolutionary organization in the Russian Empire. What this organization was famous for were the terrorist attacks prepared to hit the Czar Alexander II, Emperor of Russia, who was finally assassinated on March 1, 1881.<sup>11</sup> The first woman among them to be tried in court for terrorism was Vera Zasulich. She was charged with the attempted assassination of Governor Trepov, in St. Petersburg. The story of Vera resembles that of an ordinary lone wolf: while the organization was preparing the attack against Trepov, Vera took the initiative on her own and, by joining a group of petitioners, managed to shoot and wound him. Her defense attorney, Pyotr Alexandrov, tried to justify her acts by underlining Trepov's cruelty by reporting his violent behavior against a political prisoner, the revolutionary Alexei Bogoliubov<sup>12</sup>:

*“Bogoliubov's tormentor required not the moans of physical pain, but those of the outraged human spirit, of trampled human dignity. Sacrilege was committed. The shameful sacrifice was carried out. Solemnly, a Russian martyrdom [of Bogoliubov] by caning was organized.”<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> R. Hingley, C. Unwin; *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen*.

<sup>10</sup> R. Pernoud; *Joan of Arc: Be Herself and Her Witnesses*.

<sup>11</sup> GlobalSecurity.org; *Narodnaya Volya [People's Will]*.

<sup>12</sup> G. Chaliand, A. Blin; *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda*; p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Charged with the accuse of being a murdered, at the moment of her trial she denied it and proudly declared: “*I am a terrorist*”<sup>14</sup>. At the end, Vera was acquitted and managed to escape from the police officers who were waiting for arresting her, under the tsar’s orders.<sup>15</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century women participation was focused on ethno-nationalist conflicts, responsible of producing terrorism and left political movements in Europe. Among them, here are a the most well-known.<sup>16</sup>

### **Germany: the Baader-Meinhoff movement and its Western female leader**

Between the 60s and the 70s the Baader-Meinhoff (also known as the Red Army Faction) gang filled the stage. Its leader was a woman called Ulrike Meinhof.<sup>17</sup>

Most of her assertions focused on the context of armed struggle. Precisely, on the participation of women:

*“The main problem for women is the gap between acting in a political role, and on the other hand, dealing with daily problems, [...] Sometimes you feel helpless as a woman in this situation. This is the main problem for women. Their private life in accordance with their political life. This is the oppression of women.”*<sup>18</sup>

The most important contribution Ulrike gave to the movement was her text about the “urban guerrilla concept”, an ideological manifesto of the communist armed struggle. After the drafting of the document, Ulrike was arrested and died in two years.<sup>19</sup>

With the exception of Ulrike’s managerial role, the role of women inside her organization was a behind-the-scenes support, for example they keep safe houses and manage logistics but also do robberies.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism*; p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> G. Chaliand, A. Blin; *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda*; p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism*; p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> S. Williams; *The Tough Legacy Of Ulrike Meinhof*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Il Post; *Storia di Ulrike Meinhof, una delle piu famose terroriste del Novecento*.

<sup>20</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism*; p. 2.

### **Spain: ETA's female activists' violence covered by tactical propaganda.**

The late 50s were the years of ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), a Basque separatist party. Women's participation inside it changed with the development of the armed struggle. When women's participation increased, between 1960s and 1970s, their roles were limited to logistics but not for long. In 1985 a sole-women group was created, "Egizan" (Act Women), enhancing the female position. By so doing, women became more involved in military actions and their heavy use of violence raised their notoriety.<sup>21</sup>

The ETA's propaganda portrayed women as victims of terrorism and not as perpetrators, reaching a twofold objective: first, they maintain a certain gendered hierarchy; second, they keep the social stereotype on women and used it as a tactical advantage in using women for terrorist attacks.<sup>22</sup>

### **Palestine: the religious sacrifice of The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine**

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine involved women in both supportive and operational role. What distinguishes this form of terrorism from the abovementioned is the religious character of the conflict: in this realm, religion was exploited as a justification for the unspeakable acts they committed.

The icon of the movement is Leila Khaled, the first woman to hijack an airplane. Twice. Her first attempt was in 1969, while on a flight from Rome to Tel Aviv; the second one came a year later, in a flight from Amsterdam to New York but she did not succeed and was arrested. Now, she is a member of the Palestinian National Council and lived in Jordan with her family. In an interview with Euronews she was asked if she was a terrorist.<sup>23</sup> Here is her answer:

*"I am afraid I am a freedom fighter, whatever that means or whatever the media that is controlled by Zionism and the imperialists say. They can give us or label*

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<sup>21</sup> L. Poloni-Staudinger, C. D. Ortals; *Terrorism and Violence Conflict: Women's Agency, Leadership, and Responses*; pp. 38 – 40.

<sup>22</sup> M. Gonzalez-Perez; *Women and Terrorism. Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*; p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Euronews; *[Interview] Meet Leila Khaled, the first woman to hijack a plane.*

*us whatever they want. I say occupation is terrorism. Zionism is terrorism. Imperialists are terrorists. They are the ones who create wars against the people of the world. I don't know what they label us but I know myself as a part of my people's struggle as a freedom fighter.*"<sup>24</sup>

## **Female Suicide Bombing**

Among the most important organizations deploying it, we find those in

- **Syria:** in 1985 the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) deployed six FSBs. Among them there was Khyadali Sana, a young 16-years-old girl who drove a vehicle into an Israeli Defense Force convoy in southern Lebanon, killing two soldiers.
- **Sri Lanka:** The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) deployed their first SB in 1987 and it was a man.<sup>25</sup> The first FSB, known as Dhanu (original name: Thenmuli Rajaratnam<sup>26</sup>), has to wait until 1991 and she will be responsible of the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>27</sup>
- **Palestine:** in 2002 Wafa Idris was the first FSB of Palestine. Her attack was not intended to be like it was: the bomb was detonated because of a mistake and, by blowing herself up, she came up becoming "a symbol of the new Muslim feminism."<sup>28</sup>
- **Chechnya:** among the most successful suicide attacks accomplished by Chechen "Black Widows" we find the 2004 attack of Satsita Dzhebirkanova and Amanta Nagayeva who blew themselves up in two separate Russian flights.<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, female protagonists in terrorism are a heterogeneous reality and there is no unique profile to identify a potential woman terrorist. However, in most of cases, having women leadership roles or not, their proportion inside the terrorist groups is never more

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> J. Rayan; *Women Suicide Bombers: Narratives of Violence*; p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> D. D. Zedalis; *Female Suicide Bomber*; p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Y. Schweizer; Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Reality vs. Myth; in *Female suicide bombers: Dying for equality*; p 25.

<sup>29</sup> E. Kleinsmith; *Sisters of Battle: Analyzing Female Terrorists*.

than the 30% of the total members. For example, L. Weinberg and B. Eubanks conducted a study on European terrorist groups and concluded that women's participation was little even in those groups where egalitarianism was seriously taken into consideration.<sup>30</sup> That 30% could seem small, but it is sadly enough to ignite a multigenerational factor: we do not have to wait very long for having children, males and females, following their mothers in the terror arena.<sup>31</sup>

### **A feminist perspective**

As an intellectual commitment and a political movement seeking justice for women and the elimination of all forms of prejudice, the feminist perspective is useful in different ways. Among the key factors included in the J. F. Matias-Martinsen's article we found:

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- Feminism gives a multi-faceted view of the issue: women have different experiences than men's; indeed, they can fill what the masculine point of view is missing.
- Women usually look at the future when analyzing a phenomenon, worrying about long term effects which, in terrorism, are important to formulate proper counter-terrorism measures not to be considered old even before being applied.
- The peace building approach of women is peaceful...
- ...respecting the worldwide trend toward a holistic approach to counter-terrorism that relies on soft measures like development and diplomacy.

As a result, women's attention to human rights is higher especially because they reserve particular attention to women's rights which are specific of every woman situation.<sup>33</sup> Rights which a man does not have because of his different physical nature.

Despite its usefulness, the feminist perspective is also unclear as well. The primary issue to be addressed is the definition of terrorism which is not clearly determined: having an

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<sup>30</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism.*; p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> J. F. Matias-Martinsen; *A Feminist Perspective in Countering Terrorism. Does it really matter?*; pp. 48 – 52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*; p. 49.

unprecise meaning of the word “terrorism” does not allow feminism to formulate a clear perspective due to the lack of basis. This is why the terrorism and counter-terrorism fields have not an articulated feminist perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding the issue, a general feminist perspective was given and could be applied to the female participation in terrorism. The traditional feminist scholars’ assertion explains the correct and appropriate behavior of women to be socially constructed: a mother who nurtures her children, takes care of them and promotes peace. There is no need for women to be combatants because men are already there, ready to defend and protect them.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, this is a reason why women’s violent acts are presented as extraordinary by media sources.

A study made on the women-perpetrated prison abuses at Abu Ghraib starts from Parker’s idea of the “myth of gender equality”.<sup>36</sup> The idea starts from feminism and accuses it of being the trigger of female barbarians: feminist ideals give hope to women who believe they can be equal to men and this encourages them to commit violent acts as a demonstration of their effective power. Under a strictly sexual point of view, pornography is believed to have a role too because by promoting violent images of sex, a process of desensitization is set in motion and women can commit acts of sexual violence too, towards men.<sup>37</sup>

Focusing on terrorism, there is a link between the increasing women’s emancipation and the rising of terrorist attacks. Concepts of masculinity and femininity enters the analysis: terrorism is perceived as a way to restore the masculine honor, a sort of revenge against the feminization of contemporary social dynamics. Men feel humiliated by women who finally fight to conquer an equal position shifting the perspective from “gendered terrorism” to the “terror of gender”. The crisis of gender order, the crisis of masculinity, the collapse of patriarchy, global movements advancing women’s emancipation are all representations of feminism challenging the male dominance in all social spheres. In more radical societies, terrorism is seen as the only path for men to achieve manhood (in the

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<sup>34</sup> F. N. Aolàin; *Feminism Assessing Terrorism (or How to Slay a New Dragon)*.

<sup>35</sup> J. P. Kaufman, K. P. Williams; *Women at War, Women Building Peace: Challenging Gender Norms*; pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>36</sup> K. Oliver; *Women: The Secret Weapon of Modern Warfare?*; p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

Hamas organization, in Palestine, men who completed a suicide attack were promised 72 virgins when reaching paradise).<sup>38</sup> However, women entered the field of terrorism too on being active combatants, even suicide bombers! By so doing, they partly undermined men's efforts to express their masculinity through violence. In brief, the gender struggle of women is a justification for their violent acts.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps it is the same for men, even if not declared.

Another point of view of the topic is given by K. Jacques and P. J. Taylor whose analysis on the feminist perspective results in two different approaches. Of all the articles they analyzed, they found articles using female terrorism to advance the feminist theory and articles using feminism to advance the female terrorist argument. In the first case, women are passive victims of their own destiny: manipulated by their male counterpart, they are forced to join terrorism which is the product of patriarchy. The result is a minimization of women's agency in terrorist acts. On the other side of the coin, there are those who affirm analyzing female terrorism through feminism is useful for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Here, women are given importance and they are seen as active agents, covering important roles.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A. L. Ferber, M. S. Kimmel; *The Gendered Face of Terrorism*; p. 874 – 876.

<sup>39</sup> K. Oliver; *Women: The Secret Weapon of Modern Warfare?*; p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> K. Jacques, P. J. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*; pp. 14 – 15.

## Why Women?

Every terrorist group has its specific reasons to recruit women, be them religious, cultural, moral or tactical. It is precisely tactical reasons the ones which are about to be presented because they are pretty common, if not equal, among all terrorist groups accepting the female participation in the achievement of their mission.

Linking women to terrorism means linking them to violence too, and this is something we are used to. Until women become agency. Why are we so worried about a woman committing violent acts, be it in a terrorism, organized crime or domestic violence? Why are we so blind to see that women are reacting to their pure, delicate figure by gripping AK-47s and machine guns? A model of violent woman is considered an “abuse of social sensibility” because it is located outside our field of vision, it is not compatible with our ideological type of woman.<sup>41</sup>

Laura Sjoberg called it “the ‘beautiful soul’ narrative: the narrative starts with a hero, a male hero, who is identified as the just warrior because the noble purpose of his struggle is that of protecting his woman and children from “the bad guy”. The message this narrative delivers is “we cannot avoid war if we want to protect our women because a world without them is unthinkable”. Women are the reasons why wars are fought, they are like a prize, a reward for men who bravely fought for them and succeeded in it. Naturally, what women are indispensable for is “bearing and rearing children on the home front”, “provid[ing] love and nurture”, “[...] support for the logistical and moral fighting of the war [...]”, or again “[...] a symbol of the good and pure that requires the evil of fighting to save it.”. This same old story repeated over again, until reaching present days.<sup>42</sup>

Giving nothing for granted, the United States investigated the women-violence ratio and, in 1975, the two sociologists Murray Straus and Richard Gelles completed the National Family Violence Survey. The results were unequivocal: they succeeded to demonstrate women and men behave the same when dealing with domestic violence. Motivations and modalities were demonstrated to be the same also by other studies and researches.

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<sup>41</sup> T. Agara; *Gendering Terrorism: Women, Gender, Terrorism And Suicide Bombers*; p. 118.

<sup>42</sup> L. Sjoberg; *Women fighters and the ‘beautiful soul’ narrative*; pp. 55 – 56.

Established that we are still far away from accepting the women's active involvement in violence, this is only one of the thousand steps towards the understanding of female terrorism.<sup>43</sup>

In brief, what is limiting our well-rounded comprehension are stereotypes. A stereotype is defined as: "a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong".<sup>44</sup> Nothing more than the social reaction in thinking about a female terrorist demonstrates that "that" wrong idea is precisely our case.

The way we define women is limited by mythical stereotypes and the gendered stereotypes. As reported from K. Jacques and P. J. Taylor, Berkowitz's mythical stereotypes represent women as beautiful, sexy, smart, tough and deadly warriors. Such a representation serves to get people used to the new female nature and to "throw the baby out with the bath water" by identifying all the women warriors in the same way. The gendered stereotype presented by Patkin is different: it appears when we identify women with a specific role or when we interpret events under a gendered lens, like when we "feminize" women's motivations for joining terrorism. Both clearly minimize the threat women can pose to international security and the minimization exacerbates when facts are presented by media sources.<sup>45</sup>

Another research by Gelfand et al. takes into consideration the cultural context when talking about adherence to terrorism. Putting men and women at the same level, the authors divide cultures between tight and loose. A tight culture is the product or consequence of an autocratic government, it has strong social norms and a low degree of tolerance towards crimes or any other form of social deviance. At the other side of the coin, a loose culture is more democratic, with a higher degree of tolerance and weak social norms; moreover, crime rates tend to be higher. In the first case, the tight culture does not allow for a great space of maneuver and its members are more prone to be a victim of terrorism. A loose culture gives more space and freedom to its members so that terrorism has not a lot of ground to play on.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> A. Speckhard; *Female Terrorists in ISIS, al Qaeda and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Terrorism*; pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>44</sup> Cambridge Dictionary; <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stereotype>.

<sup>45</sup> K. Jacques, P. J. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*; pp. 12 – 14.

<sup>46</sup> M. Martin; *Women's participation in terrorism, conflict and violent extremism: Gender equality or pure pragmatism?*; pp. 3 – 4.

The more we will accept feminine stereotypes; the more terrorist organizations will recruit and employ women. Since getting rid of stereotypes is not a brief affair, maybe understanding why terrorist groups recruit women can help us in the intent.

### **Tactical advantages**

*“Whatever the cause, allowing women into active warfare represents a huge cultural somersault for these patriarchal cultures. But above all the mobilization of women into terrorist activity demonstrates the pragmatism of patriarchy. It is based on a conscious assessment of the strategic benefits of enlisting women directly into terrorist activities that justifies abrogation of even the strongest of cultural taboos and practices.*

*By employing women, terrorist organizations have been able to exploit pervasive gender stereotypes in target societies to maximize both the success of a strike as well as its impact.”<sup>47</sup>*

### **Beauty**

Female terrorism, female suicide bombing in particular, turns around the beauty and youthfulness of their violent perpetrators.<sup>48</sup>

When women occupy more operational and managerial roles, they are fundamental to distract security forces.<sup>49</sup> In the case of ETA, presented in the previous part of the chapter, Maria Idoia López Riaño represents the best example. Even if there is no proof her sexual behavior was actually a tactic, she made it her strength: “She allegedly could not resist seducing policemen ahead of a planned attack and once even slept with a road traffic cop after he stopped to help her change a tire.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> E. Erez, K. Laster; *Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes*; p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism*; p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> F. Govan; *La Tigresa kicked out of ETA after renouncing violence*.

In the case of Al Qaeda, beauty was not only a criterion of female terrorists' selection, it was a value encouraged to be kept. A magazine called *Al Shamikha* (known as the *jihadi Cosmo*) provided women with beauty tips, among other things.<sup>51</sup>

Last but not least, if beauty does not belong to a female terrorist there is nothing wiser like offering her a possibility to obtain it. A research conducted by Dr. Anar Berko and Prof. Edna Erez provided shocking results. They interviewed 13 security prisoners with terrorism-linked experiences aged between 16 and 26 and some of them declared their belief that "[...] an ugly woman who reached the paradise after having carried out a terrorist attack, would become beautiful."<sup>52</sup>

### ***Men-pullers***

The recruitment of women can influence that of men in two different ways:

1. In the short term it can demoralize men who will feel overtook by the "weaker sex"<sup>53</sup>
2. In the long term it acts as a catalyst for men's participation.<sup>54</sup>

However, in a considerable number of cases, women are recruited only to overcome the shortage of men due to members' killings, capture or low support.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Trustworthiness (for the terrorist group and for security checks)***

Women are a good choice for terrorist groups because the trust they inspire is twofold. First, they are more reliable for the terrorist group because, differently from men, a woman's wrong choice would have terrible consequences. Second, they inspire trust during security checks simply because they are women.

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<sup>51</sup> J. Cavendish; *Al-Qa'ida glossy advices women to cover up and marry a martyr*.

<sup>52</sup> A. Berko, E. Erez; *Women in terrorism: a Palestinian feminist revolution or gender oppression?*.

<sup>53</sup> M. Bloom; *Women and Terrorism*; p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> E. Erez, K. Laster; *Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes*; p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> A. Stack-O'Connor; *Picked Last: Women in Terrorism*; p. 98.

Analyzing the first point, we take the case of a woman who actively participate in a terrorist attack. On having to manage such a high task, the stakes are high, and failure is not permitted. By quoting Dr. C. G. Yesevi, from the Istanbul Kultur University:

*“[...] if they [women] become fighters, they cannot be “good women” and if they wish to remain “pure women”, they cannot be terrorists”<sup>56</sup>*

In case of failure, women face prison and if convicted, their reputation will be convicted with them.<sup>57</sup> When in prison, they are no more terrorists, they are no more “pure”.

On having everything to lose, women are highly reliable because they can be maneuvered through instilling in them the fear of failure consequences. For example, among the Chechen female terrorists there was a distinction between the “black widows” and the “zombie”: the first were women joining terrorism after the death of their man, the second were women who were forced or tricked into the organization.<sup>58</sup>

On the other side of the coin, the high trust women inspire is the product of a gendered bias “given their second-class citizenship in many [...] countries”.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the security personnel has no suspects on them and this translates in minimal, if not completely absent, security checks.<sup>60</sup> Suffice it to say that, for a woman to bring a bomb into a plane, a building or a conference hall, is it enough to fake a pregnancy.<sup>61</sup>

Having understood the fundamental role of women in operational tactics, some extreme cases involved even men dressed like women. This was the case of an attack in a Shiite mosque, in 2006. Facts, as presented by a The Guardian article, are that:

*“The bombers were dressed in traditional Shia women's black robes when they struck. Some police sources said the attackers had been women, while others said there had been one woman and two men dressed as women.”<sup>62</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> C. G. Yesevi; *Female Terrorism*; p. 584. From A. Berko, E. Erez ; *Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression.*; pp. 493 – 519.

<sup>57</sup> E. Erez, K. Laster; *Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes*; p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> A. Stack-O'Connor; *Picked Last. Women and Terrorism*; p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> L. O'Rourke; *Behind The Woman Behind The Bomb*.

<sup>60</sup> A. Speckhard; *Female Terrorists in ISIS, al Qaeda and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Terrorism*; p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> C. Garrison; *Sirens of Death: Role of Women in Terrorism. Past, Present, and Future*; p. 338.

<sup>62</sup> The Guardian; *70 killed in Iraq mosque attack*.

### ***“Cultural protection”***

The expression “cultural protection” wants to present the cultural factor, represented by customs, social rules or theocratic limitations, as an advantage of women perpetrating terrorism. The protection of women from their home country clearly differs from state to state but here some common points will be presented.

Women exploit their “corporeality” to avoid security checks<sup>63</sup>: most of the security personnel is composed by male agents, limiting their working capacity. The fact is that soldiers are hesitant to do body searches on Middle East women because they are aware of the strict rules governing their bodies. For example, in the Muslim world searching women is considered inappropriate and offensive.<sup>64</sup> More broadly, Berko and Erez underline the general tendency to avoid security checks on heavily veiled or pregnant women.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, the cultural protection function is also that of justifying terrorist acts committed by women. When Islamic fundamentalists use terms like “daughter of Palestine” or “Palestinian bride”, they are trying to justify women’s acts of terrorism through expressions of innocence, contributing to render women as innocent perpetrators.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Devices concealing***

On having green light with security checks, terrorist groups exploit women’s traditional clothing for the transportation of explosive devices. Among the most famous example we find:

- Suicide vests or belts<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> A. Berko, E. Erez; *Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?*; note 56.

<sup>64</sup> C. Garrison; *Sirens of Death: Role of Women in Terrorism. Past, Present, and Future*; p. 337.

<sup>65</sup> E. Erez, K. Laster; *Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes*; p. 88. Original Source: A. Berko, E. Erez; *Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?*; pp. 493 – 519.

<sup>66</sup> C. Brunner; *Female Suicide Bombers – Male Suicide Bombers? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*; p. 35.

<sup>67</sup> M. L. Suttin; *The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy*; p. 9.

- Bombs in the bra<sup>68</sup>

### ***Media attention***

The majority of terrorist organizations, especially when acting internationally, considers media attention and coverage as a “bigger asset than an airplane”<sup>69</sup>. Indeed, the very aim of terrorism is to create panic and push people to change their habits because they fear an attack; for this reason, the free ads media sources provide is one of the most important weapons terrorist organizations have. By so doing, the media ensure both a channel for recruitment and the terrorists-desired impact over the hit population.<sup>70</sup>

Just to give an idea of the importance of media sources for terrorism, it is enough to highlight the terrorists’ sacrifice of social norms to obtain it: the recruitment of women.<sup>71</sup>

When reporting news of terrorist attacks perpetrated by women, media are influenced by gendered stereotypes and do interpret the fact with the bias filter. Underlining personal aspects of the female actor like the characteristics of her body, her familiar connections or aspects of her education path does nothing but increase the population fear.<sup>72</sup> The message of intimidation terrorists want to deliver is loud and clear: you are safe from nobody, even from women.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, the negative consequences fall even on political decisions. As K. F. Khan wrote in her book *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman*, gendered stereotypes together with a hostile political environment:

- “[...] affects the quality of political representation [...]”<sup>74</sup>
- “[...] affects the campaigns of men and women [...]”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> A. Speckhard; *Female Terrorists in ISIS, al Qaeda and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Terrorism*; p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> M. L. Suttan; *The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy*; p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> K. Lay; ‘*Women as Terrorists’ An Insoluble Paradox. The Absurdity or The Threat?*; pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>71</sup> M. L. Suttan; *The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy*; p. 34.

<sup>72</sup> B. L. Nacos; *The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism*; pp. 438 – 440.

<sup>73</sup> E. Erez, K. Laster; *Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes*; in *Women & Criminal Justice*; p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> K. F. Khan; *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*; p.17.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p.30.

- “[...] affects people reaction to women candidates [...]”<sup>76</sup>
- “[...] affects citizens’ voting decisions.”<sup>77</sup>

An extraordinary example of how media facilitates the terrorists’ work is the case of Leila Khaled’s release. P. W. Eager reported the story in her book *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*. In brief, after the failure of her operation to hijack an aircraft, she was arrested in London. To manage for her release, the PFLP hijacked another plane and, with the aid of international media channels, negotiations were accomplished, and Leila could go back home.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Attract children***

The recruitment of women has also the power to attract children. With the exception of ISIS which, as a condition for women to enter the female brigades, accepts only single women<sup>79</sup>, generally a woman joining terrorism brings her children too. But there is more. Since women are always dependent from the male members of the family, from both an economic and safety point of view, their risk for impoverishment after the death of male members or their husbands is extremely high. For this reason, women join terrorism with their children: terrorist groups offer “opportunities” like school attendance for both children and women, medical attention or a job.<sup>80</sup>

It goes without saying that, once integrated, children are recruited for terrorist attacks, be them males or females. Actually, in some cases, like that of the LTTE, the female participation increased because girls were considered more expendable than boys.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.121.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.125

<sup>78</sup> P. W. Eager; *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*; p. 186.

<sup>79</sup> A. N Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of Women in Islamic State*; p. 83. Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC); *Umm Al-Rayan*.

<sup>80</sup> M. L. Suttan; *The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy*; p. 46.

<sup>81</sup> Not only gendered stereotypes, but also LTTE rules themselves exacerbated the phenomenon: each family was forced to cede at least one child to the organization. From M. P. Dearing; *Understanding Female Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka through a Constructivist Lens*; p. 73.

### *Enhancement of the group image*

Finally, recruiting women means also enhancing the group image under a feminist point of view. Transmitting an idea of egalitarianism shows women that now they have an opportunity to elevate their status, be that opportunity true or overstated. For example:

*“[...] the LTTE, for a variety of reasons, has a vested interest in portraying itself as more egalitarian than it might really be.”<sup>82</sup>*

It does not matter if the opportunity is true or false because if women in terrorism are recruited to give a message, women who voluntarily engage in terrorism want to give another one: I am a woman, but this does not prevent me from being everyone else I want to be.

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<sup>82</sup> J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 34.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE)

#### Introduction and structure of the chapter

This chapter will present the first terrorist group I will use for my comparison: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This has been identified as a separatist group fighting to obtain a separate state, the Tamil Eelam, for the Tamil population feeling plagued by the Sinhalese majority.<sup>83</sup>

The media defined the LTTE as “one of the most organized, effective and brutal terrorist groups in the world”<sup>84</sup>. The two aspects the LTTE empowered the most were suicide attacks (they invented the suicide vest<sup>85</sup>); the role women had in the organization, above all in the suicide commando; and how they reached it. The Sri Lankan society considers women as inferior to men, as less capable of doing violent actions and too peaceful to cover combat roles. But, when in need for combatants, the LTTE recruited women and those women made their way in the organization.<sup>86</sup> What were their roles? How they reached positions of power? How much they sacrificed or were prepared to sacrifice to gain the respect of their male counterpart?

The chapter is so structured:

1. A presentation of the **history and structure of the LTTE**: the historical events and circumstances which bring to the birth of the LTTE separatist movement will be highlighted together with the internal structure of what the Tamil Tigers call “the Tamil Eelam<sup>87</sup>”. Its military and administrative structure will be delineated together with the objectives of the group.

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<sup>83</sup> P. Bhattacharji; *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka Tamil Tigers) (Sri Lanka, separatists)*.

<sup>84</sup> K. Pickert; *The Tamil Tigers*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> P. Wang; *Women in the LTTE: Birds of Freedom or Cogs in the Wheel?*.

<sup>87</sup> The independent Tamil state.

2. **Women in the Tamil's society:** the second part of the chapter will present the situation of Tamil women through the analysis of different aspects like education, their legal status and their family role. The aim of this paragraph is to give the reader a background for a better understanding of women motivations to join the movement.
3. **Models of women** to follow: mythology, religion and past experiences offered to Tamil women female models to follow in their quest for the Tamil Eelam. Here, the history of two goddesses together with the biography of a female activist of the past will be presented as models of female sacrifice and devotion to both their men and the Tamil cause. Learning about female models' Tamil women use to follow will be useful to understand the roles of women into the LTTE.
4. **Roles:** a presentation of how women are employed into the LTTE movement and how their roles developed throughout the armed conflict.
5. **Motivations:** what pushes Tamil women to enjoy terrorism will be presented here. Motivations are divided into social, personal and idealistic.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Here I followed guidelines from K. Jacques, P. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*.

## The dawn of LTTE

The history of the Tamil and Sinhalese populations, protagonists of the birth and rising of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), started in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC with the beginning of the Indo-Aryan migration. Different clans moved from the northern India towards Sri Lanka and, among them, the Sinhalese people came up as the strongest. In two centuries, the Hindu population of Tamils' migration from southern India followed.<sup>89</sup>

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century, relationships between the two clans were plain. Then colonialism changed everything. Both the Portuguese and the Dutch forces engaged in armed conflicts for the colonial dominium of the island until 1796, when Britain prevailed. British colonial policies facilitated the rise of hatred between the Tamils and Sinhalese because of their alternating favoritisms for the two populations<sup>90</sup>

When Ceylon (the colonial name for Sri Lanka, removed from institutions in 2011<sup>91</sup>) finally reached independence from Britain in 1948, political competition between the two clans emerged. The Great Council of the Tamils (*Tamil Mahajana Sabha*), instituted even before independence, in 1921, was a reaction against the majoritarian legislative representation of the Sinhalese. Moreover, a coalition government between the United National Party (UNP)<sup>92</sup> and the Tamil Congress was formed in the year of independence.<sup>93</sup> The following year, the Federal Party (FP) was instituted as the first Tamil organization to revendicate an independent Tamil's state:

*"[...] Ceylon Tamils constituted a distinct nation with a distinct territorial homeland in the north and east."*<sup>94</sup>

The Sinhalese leader S. Bandaranaike won the elections of 1956 triggering nationalist feelings. Politics he adopted favored the Sinhalese and ignited the Tamils' reaction. It

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<sup>89</sup> Sri Lanka profile timeline; BBC news online.

<sup>90</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*.

<sup>91</sup> Il Post; *Lo Sri Lanka cancella il suo Vecchio nome, Ceylon*.

<sup>92</sup> The UNP, originally a collection of disparate and jealous factions, was organized to compete in the first general elections in 1947 against leftist parties on the platform of communal harmony, parliamentary democracy, and anticommunism. Established in 1946 by prominent nationalist leaders such as Don Stephen Senanayake, who became the country's first prime minister, and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who broke with Senanayake in 1951, establishing the SLFP [Sri Lanka Freedom Party]. From GlobalSecurity.org; original source: United National Party website.

<sup>93</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; pp. 9 – 10.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

“marked the first major increase in ethnic violence”<sup>95</sup> since independence and, from then on, tensions will develop in a series of violent events: the 1958’s anti-Tamil riots, the assassination of Bandaranaike in 1959, youth’s and student’s uprisings of 1971 to culminate with the birth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1976.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1976 the final LTTE constitution was written and approved giving the LTTE its constitutional pillar:<sup>97</sup>

*“[...] this Convention calls upon the Tamil Nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign state of Tamil Eelam is reached”<sup>98</sup>*

At the beginning of its activity, the LTTE was not the only organization fighting for the rights of Tamils but was always capable of distinguishing itself by the fact that it was the only group underlining the importance of armed struggle to reach its objectives. The other groups were the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).<sup>99</sup>

As already mentioned, India had a historical role in the conflict to the extent that it was among the ones responsible for the first flowering of the Tamil Tigers. After the 1977’s anti-Tamils riots, the Indian support intensified because the Tamil’s presence in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu was made an important part of its politics. The result was the mutual aid between the Tamil Nadu the Tamil group of Sri Lanka. The year after, the centralization of power in the hands of the Sinhalese president alone and the lack of minority protection sparked an escalation of violence between the Tamils and the legitimate government so that, in 1979, the president himself was forced to announce the state of emergency and ordered the military occupation of the city of Jaffna.<sup>100</sup>

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1982 Lieutenant Shankar, killed at the hand of Sri Lankan soldiers, will be the first loss of the LTTE and the symbol of the LTTE’s annual Heroes’

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<sup>95</sup> J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Sri Lanka profile timeline.

<sup>97</sup> A. Bandarage; *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*; p. 71.

<sup>98</sup> International Council of Eelam Tamils; *Vaddukkoddai Resolution..*

<sup>99</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

Day. The military struggle between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE officially exploded: the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1983 the LTTE broke the Sri Lankan resistance by killing 13 of their soldiers. Remembered and celebrated as the “Black July”, the revenge of LTTE demonstrated its power and boomed accession. Men and women, indiscriminately, asked to join.<sup>101</sup>

The remarkable influence, organization and effectiveness of the Tamil Tigers was one more time proved by the absorption of TELO, EROS, EPRLF and PLOTE and the capture of the city of Jaffna which will become the LTTE command center<sup>102</sup>.

From then on, the LTTE history will develop in four Eelam wars, each of which will end with a peace negotiation. During the last one, the fourth Eelam war, the LTTE will be defeated by the Sri Lankan authorities.

Table 1: Eelam Wars timeline<sup>103</sup>

PERIOD OF TIME	EELAM WAR	FACTS
1983 – 1987	1 <sup>ST</sup> EELAM WAR	1983 Anti-Tamil riots 1985 Thimpu talks (failed) between Tamils and Sri Lanka government, sponsored by India 1987 Indo-Lanka peace accord
1990 – 1994/95	2 <sup>ND</sup> EELAM WAR	1989 withdrawal IPKF 1989 – 1990 failed Premasada - LTTE peace talks 1991 assassination Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi by LTTE 1993 President Premasada killed by LTTE 1994 – 1995 Kumaratunga-LTTE peace negotiations
1995 – 2001	3 <sup>RD</sup> EELAM WAR	1995 breakdown peace negotiations December 2001 informal ceasefire agreement February 2002 formal ceasefire agreement mediated by Norway
2006 – 2009	4 <sup>TH</sup> EELAM WAR	October 2006 failed peace talks in Geneva January 2008 government breakdown from 2002 ceasefire May 2009 Tamil Tigers defeat and death of V. Prabhakaran August 2009 New Tamil Tiger leader S. Pathmanathan captured by Sri Lankan authorities

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Sources: K. Stokke; *Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka*; p. 3. Sri Lanka profile timeline.

## The LTTE Structure

The LTTE structure of early times was simple thanks to a small membership; indeed, the decision-making process was developed inside the Central Committee in a collective manner. With a rapid expansion of participants, the Tamil Tigers needed a more structured management technique, so a hierarchical scheme caught on.<sup>104</sup>

As shown in Table 2, Prabhakaran was at the top of the hierarchy, as the sole leader. At the same level we find the intelligence wing, responsible for information gathering, and the procurement wing, responsible for the supply of war material like weapons and ammunitions.<sup>105</sup> Immediately under the commander we can find the Central Committee, responsible for military and political decisions in which there were five members (Prabhakaran included)<sup>106</sup>. Finally, reaching the “wing level” of the hierarchy means entering the real complex nature of the LTTE.<sup>107</sup>

The table below represents the general hierarchical structure of the LTTE.

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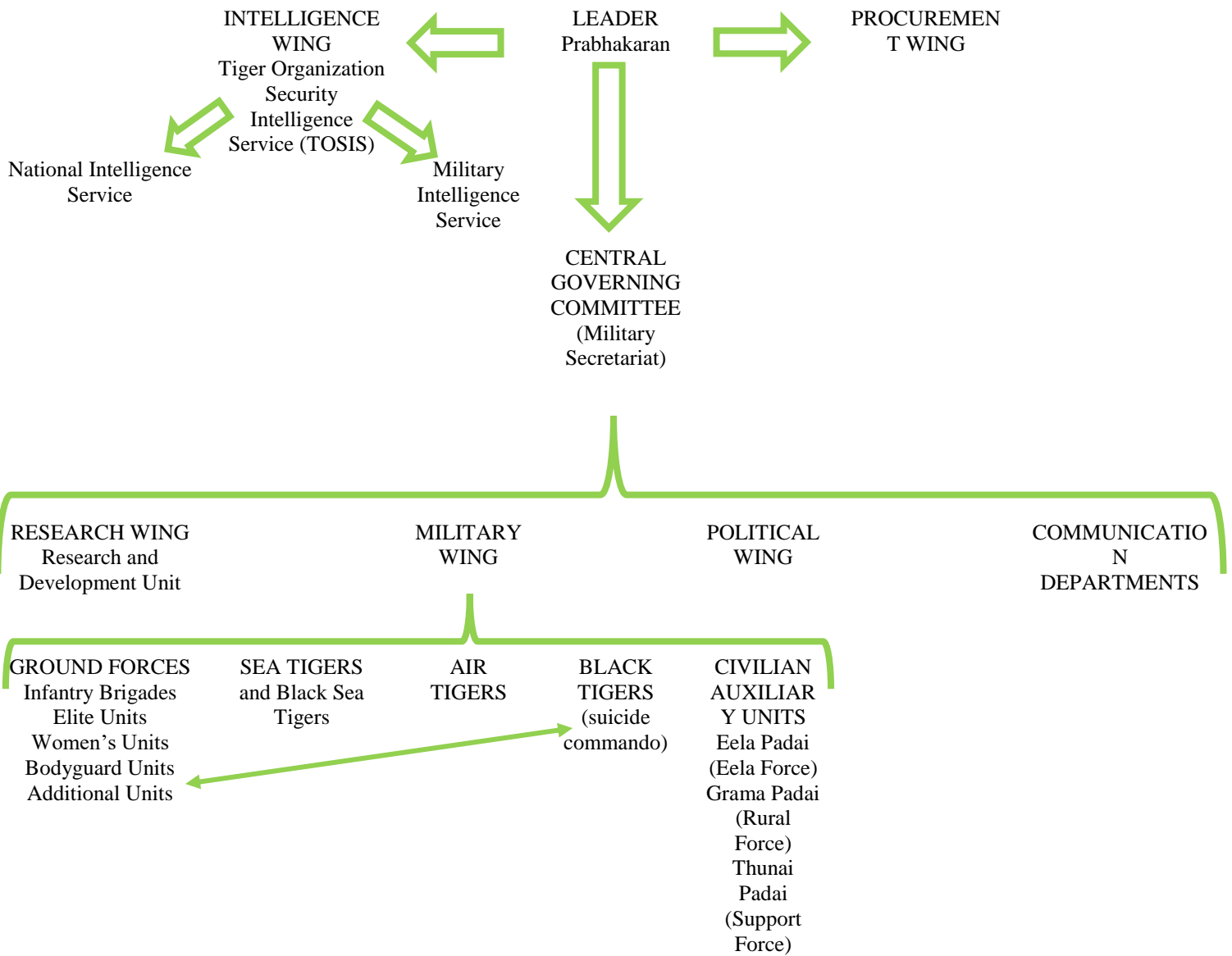
<sup>104</sup> S. Ramachandran; *Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka: a study of the evolution and growth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (1976 – 1990)*; p. 71.

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Defence; *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006 – May 2009*; p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> T. Sabaratnam; *Pirapaharan*; Volume 1; Chapter 9: TNT Matures into LTTE.

<sup>107</sup> S. Ramachandran; *Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka: a study of the evolution and growth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (1976 – 1990)*; p. 72.

Table 2: LTTE structure<sup>108</sup>



<sup>108</sup> Sources: J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 17. Ministry of Defence; *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006 – May 2009*; p. 13. K. Ariaratnam; *A Typical Terrorist Cell*; p. 9.

### ***The Ground Forces***

The LTTE ground forces were managed through the three different commands of Jaffna, Vanni and the East which were in turn divided into subareas. District commands were eight, each spearheaded by a regional commander in charge of a range of military ranks.<sup>109</sup>

Thanks to their profound knowledge of the terrain they occupied, their military tactics were extremely effective. They were able to mix guerrilla, semi-conventional and conventional tactics while combating. When engaged in an attack, they were often plainclothes, mixed into the crowd.<sup>110</sup>

Simply put, the ground forces “did most of the fighting, while the Sea Tigers and the Air Tigers filled a supporting role”<sup>111</sup>.

### ***The Intelligence Wing***

In 1983 the first draft of intelligence was instituted: the TOSIS, located in Chennai. TOSIS represented one of the intelligence wings under the LTTE in addition to “BETA-2”, located in Jaffna. In addition to the latter, other little intelligence centers were in place, but they did not last long because when the TOSIS’s center moved to Vanni it incorporated them all. Ten years after its birth, the TOSIS structure was split, replaced by the National Intelligence Service and the Military Intelligence Service. They were so structured.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> S. Ramachandran; *Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka: a study of the evolution and growth of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (1976 – 1990)*; pp. 72 – 73.

<sup>110</sup> Ministry of Defence; *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006 – May 2009*; pp. 14 – 15.

<sup>111</sup> P. Ziegler; *Learning From The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*.

<sup>112</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 21.

Table 3: The Intelligence Wing<sup>113</sup>

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE	MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE
Departments:	Departments:
Collections Department (the largest department)	Collections Department on the Sri Lankan Army: exclusively gathered intelligence.
Tasks: Agent handling Counter-espionage operations Internal security Political activities and liaison division Interrogation and detention center	Collections Department on the Sri Lankan Navy: duty to establish “sea denial” strategy <sup>114</sup> in Northern and Eastern territorial waters of Sri Lanka and support Exclusive Economic Zone Marine Logistics Support Team (EEZ-MLST) of Sea Tigers.
Research and Publications Department: makes reports.	Collections Department on the Sri Lankan Air Force
Sections: Planning and operations Data-Bank Computers Press and library Communications Dubbing movies	Administration and Records
Special Operations Division: Black Tigers are attacked.	
Operations like: Assassinations Sabotage and raids Paramilitary operations Psychological warfare projects Propaganda and deception operations	
Training and Technology Department: training and development of advanced technologies for attacks	
Administration and Records	

<sup>113</sup> K. Ariaratnam; *A Typical Terrorist Cell*; pp. 9 – 14.

<sup>114</sup> “Has the ‘aim of prevention of the use of the sea’ by another force [...]. This is ‘defined as the condition that exists when an adversary is denied the ability to use an area of sea for its own purposes for a period of time’. Sea denial implies a more passive posture where the emphasis is on defence (although this does not preclude the employment of offensive capabilities), and where the initiative is likely to remain with the attacking power”. From The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia; *Australia’s Maritime Strategy*; p. 8.

## ***The Naval Wing***

*"Geographically, the security of Tamil Eelam is interlinked with that of its seas. Its only when we are strong in the seas and break the dominance our enemy now has that we will be able to retain land areas we liberated and drive our enemies from our homeland."*<sup>115</sup>

V. Prabhakaran

The key factor for the building of the naval wing has certainly been represented by the coastal Tamils as they were experts of fishing, boat building and sailing<sup>116</sup>.

Better known as the Sea Tigers, the naval wing of the LTTE was born in 1984 with transportation aims. The drastic transformation from logistic unit to a military wing and the forthcoming expansion of the naval wing came from two critical events both occurred in 1991. The first one was the successful attack and assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi which raised controls and suspicion in India: from then on, obtaining supplies from Tamil Nadu will be more and more difficult. The second event was the withdrawal of LTTE from an organized attack to conquer a military base in Elephant Pass: this zone was the crossroad between Jaffna and the rest of Sri Lanka. The failure did not dampen Prabhakaran who responded by enlarging the Sea Tigers fleet missions and tasks: they were not simple transporters anymore, they were combatants in every respect<sup>117</sup>.

The combat tactic was, generally, engaging the Sri Lankan Navy but, more specifically, high risk operations were held by the diving unit. The diving unit had both intelligence tasks (like conducting reconnaissance) and military tasks (like infiltrate in enemy harbors to deposit mines). Inside the Sea Tigers, the Black Sea Tigers represented the most important troop: it engaged in suicide attacks using small boats filled with explosives<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> N. Manoharan; *Tigers With Fins: Naval Wing of the LTTE*.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

<sup>117</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 23.

<sup>118</sup> N. Manoharan; *Tigers with Fins: Naval Wing of the LTTE*.

The supply unit, on the other side, was engaged into keeping overseas maritime supply lines always open. The M.O.<sup>119</sup> consisted in a changeover operation, while in high seas, between large boats and small high-speed boats, which were harder to identify<sup>120</sup>.

As the others LTTE military wings, the Sea Tigers were internally divided into sections.

### ***The Black Tigers***

*“Of all the suicide-capable terrorist groups we have studied they are the most ruthless, the most disciplined”*<sup>121</sup>

Rohan Gunaratna

The very early stages of the Black Tigers are associated with the 1980s, when the LTTE was leader of the independence movement in the territory of Sri Lanka. The 1983 economic blockade imposed by the Sri Lankan government challenged the LTTE resources supply. From then on, raw material started to run out and the production of weapons fell deeply. This increased the vulnerability of the LTTE forces: 1987 was the year of a major assault by the Sri Lankan forces powered by the improvement of the latter.

Given the situation, conventional methods of battle ended up being completely inadequate and suicide attacks turned out to be a good compromise. As the journalist Lynn Neary declared during an interview with Robert Pape, professor of political science at the University of Chicago and director of the Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism, “Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels didn't invent the suicide bomb, but they pioneered it as a tactic in war”<sup>122</sup>.

The LTTE perpetrated its own first suicide attack in 1987. V. Vallipuram (Captain Miller) launched the attack by driving “a truck into a barracks of Sinhalese army troops who were sleeping”<sup>123</sup>. Immediately after the attack, Captain Miller was celebrated as a hero and a statue was dedicated to him. Representing an “edifice of martyrdom”<sup>124</sup>, it was the symbol

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<sup>119</sup> Modus Operandi.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> A. Waldman; *Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka*.

<sup>122</sup> Interview between Lynn Neary and Robert Pape; *Tamil Tigers: Suicide Bombing Innovators*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

of the LTTE's leader "real genius [...] to build a culture of sacrifice and martyrdom around his guerrilla force [...]"<sup>125</sup>.

Black Tigers were selected from within the regular cadres: the strongest, most determined and most skilled were recruited. Their task was not simply that of killing themselves and being symbols of a "not-giving-up cause", it was necessary to kill a person whose death can send civilians a powerful message or to kill as much people as they can with only one attack, just to instill fear in them.<sup>126</sup>

Volunteering was the most important form of recruitment for the Black Tigers:

*"Lt. Col. Dewarsara Banu [...] said every time there is a call for suicide mission volunteers [...] more than 50 young guerrillas applied. So many, in fact, that Prabhakaran created a martyrs' lottery. "They put everyone's name in a tombola," said Banu. "They swirl them around. Then the Leader pulls out two names, reads them out and the [ones] who aren't chosen are all crying. But the two who are chosen, they are very happy and the people around them raise them on their shoulders and are all clapping and celebrating." »*<sup>127</sup>

Once recruited, new Black Tigers addressed a challenging training through which they learned discipline and mental toughness. They went through the first six months in a place called "Red Garden", in the Mullaitivu Forest. The next step consisted on a loyalty proof: the cyanide capsule, to commit suicide in case of capture by the enemy, was put around the neck of the Black Tiger.<sup>128</sup> The day before their suicide mission, they had a last dinner with the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran.<sup>129</sup>

### ***The Women's Wing***

The LTTE distinguished itself from other terrorist groups because of their use of women and the way they were considered so important for the Tamil's cause. At the beginning

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<sup>125</sup> A. Perry; *How Sri Lanka's Rebels Build a Suicide Bomber*.

<sup>126</sup> Interview between Lynn Heary and Robert Pape; *Tamil Tigers: Suicide Bombing Innovators*.

<sup>127</sup> A. Perry; *How Sri Lanka's Rebels Build a Suicide Bomber*.

<sup>128</sup> R. Ramasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS); p. 10.

<sup>129</sup> A. Waldman; *Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka*.

of their involvement, in 1976, women were restricted to supportive roles but with the development of the conflict, they enhanced their importance within the LTTE.<sup>130</sup>

The 1980s was a time of achievements. In 1983 the Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers (*Vituthalai Pulikal Makalir Munani*) was founded, it represented the first combat unit for women only. In 1985, the first women squad was selected and trained in the same way as men but remained quiet until 1986 when in an operation against the Sri Lankan government they "had their first taste of combat"<sup>131</sup>, spearheaded by a male commander. In 1987 the LTTE leader created an only-women training camp in Jaffna and two years after women had their own leadership structure and they started to manage themselves and their attacks through the six divisions of Jaffna, Wanni, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavunia and Batticaloa.<sup>132</sup> For what concerned the role of women in leadership positions, we know that among the 12 members of the LTTE's central committee, five were women but we know that their weight in the decision-making process was minor.<sup>133</sup>

### ***The Air Force***

Established in 1995 but already planned a year before, the Air Tigers represented one of the gems within the LTTE military wing. "The Tamil Tigers have become the first guerrilla group in the world to put together an air force", declared the British author Paul French in an online article.<sup>134</sup>

In the same article we can find other important indications like planes and technologies the LTTE owned,<sup>135</sup> in addition with the Sunday Times Situation Reports discoveries.<sup>136</sup>

Not only the LTTE was extremely well equipped in terms of flying technology but also, they had well-prepared pilots. Trained at flying clubs in France and the United Kingdom,

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<sup>130</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> R. Ramasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; p. 11.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> P. French; *The Tamil Tigers*.

<sup>135</sup> It was believed the LTTE possessed a number between two and five Czech-built Zlin Z-143 light aircrafts, considered extremely easy to fly thanks to the high technology of their instruments, as explained by manufacturers working at Morovan Airplanes; Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> The Sunday Times found evidence about the presence of two US-build Robinson R44 helicopters among the Air Tigers forces. Sunday Times Situation Report 2007; *LTTE air wing: How it began and what it means*.

the LTTE Air Tigers were ready for anything. Lastly, the great support from both the Sea Tigers (logistics and smuggling of aircrafts, ammunitions and missiles<sup>137</sup>) and out-of-the-country Tamils completed a highly organized framework.<sup>138</sup>

### ***Other Forces***

Further developments of the LTTE forces are:<sup>139</sup>

- bodyguard units;
- the Victor anti-tank and armored unit; and
- civilian auxiliary units
  - The Eela Padai (Eela Force): commercial roles, personal guards, help regular military units
  - The Grama Padai (Rural Force): help regular military units
  - The Thunai Padai (Support Force): general support

### ***The LTTE Political and International Wings***

Formally separated from the military wing, the LTTE's political wing worked in harmony with its military counterpart. Members of both the wings worked together, sometimes exchanging their roles depending on potential emergencies.<sup>140</sup>

To keep a certain degree of connectedness between the two wings and the international scene, an international network was put in place. Connections with Fatah, the TLO and the TULF were firstly established and then developed through merging and cooperation especially after the Black July, when the number of Tamils abroad increased and the international activity increased along with it. Even the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSR) represented an actor of the process by its unexpected openness to negotiations.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> B. Raman; *The World's First Terrorist Air Force*.

<sup>138</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 28.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid; pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, pp. 38 – 39.

## *The Tamil Eelam*

In 1987 India and Sri Lanka signed a peace accord which drastically changed the game for the LTTE, the Indo-Lanka accord: no more support from India and a temporary ceasefire. LTTE-India bond was weaker than ever so that, after the withdrawal of IPKF, the LTTE recovered the control of Jaffna and reformed the Secretariat. A *de facto* state was taking shape: civilian administration, bureaucracy, service provision, districts are now daily bread.<sup>142</sup>

Every sector was given a functioning institution working to guarantee the achievement of the Tamils' major concerns:<sup>143</sup>

- Preserve a high degree of security both internally and externally, in a conflictual context
- Guarantee the welfare of the civilian population
- Engage in the economic development of Tamil Eelam

In this respect, J. Richards and K. Stokke provide us a detailed overview of the Tamil Eelam's systems with their major institutions.<sup>144</sup>

*People identification system:* The Department for the Registration of Persons (DRP), responsible for the identity classification system.<sup>145</sup>

*Security system:* it included a legal code (the Tamil Eelam Penal Code and the Tamil Eelam Civil Code, instituted in 1994), a legal training institution (the Mullaitivu College of Law, born in 1992), courts (District courts, two high courts in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, a court of appeal in Kilinochchi, a supreme court, specialist military courts); the Tamil Eelam Police (responsible for the creation of LTTE Criminal Procedure Code), the Tamil Eelam Magistrate's Court, a police academy, the Special Task Force (STF) (responsible for particular issues like those of the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols); and a wide range of sections each of which were specialized in a security field.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 40 – 41.

<sup>143</sup> K. Stokke; *Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka*; pp. 7 – 20.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; pp. 40 – 51.

<sup>145</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 43.

<sup>146</sup> K. Stokke; *Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka*; pp. 8 – 9. Ibid, pp. 44 – 46.

*Health system:* shared between the LTTE and the GoSL. Its institutions were the Medical Unit of Service of Tamil (MUST) responsible for Tamils' medical assistance; the Field Medical Systems for injured combatants (created in 1991); a medical college created in 1993 and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) useful to solve some deficiencies in the LTTE health care sector prior to the 2002 peace agreement.<sup>147</sup>

*Education:* it was empowered by the Rural Economic Education and Research Organization (REERO), branch of the aforementioned TRO, which build some schools after 2005; the Tamil Eelam Education Council (TEEC) which prior to the 2002 ceasefire managed the LTTE education system as it was a copy of the Sri Lankan one.<sup>148</sup>

*Economic Development:* its offices were the TEEDO, the Economic Development Department (EDD), developed after the TEEDO as its upgrade, the Economic Consultancy House (TECH), responsible for development projects (creator of the Rural Development Bank which offered financial help to agricultural enterprises and farmers) and the LTTE Planning and Development Secretariat (PDS) which monitored NGOs activities within the LTTE territories.<sup>149</sup>

*Finance and Transports Sector:* managed by the Tamil Eelam Bank (TEB) and the KP Branch, specialized in international shipping, be it legal or not (initially it was used to smuggle weapons from India).<sup>150</sup>

### ***Media Sources***

Among means the LTTE used to share information we cannot avoid mentioning <sup>151</sup>

- TV stations: Tamil 24 (Paris), TV1 (Canada), Tharisanam (Australia)
- Radio: VOT (Norway), IBC (UK), TRT (Paris)
- Printed media: Oru (UK), Ulgar Thamilar (Canada)

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<sup>147</sup> K. Stokke, pp. 10 – 14. J. Richards, pp. 46 – 48.

<sup>148</sup> J. Richards, *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> J. Richards, *ibid.* K. Stokke, pp. 14 – 20.

<sup>150</sup> J. Richards, pp. 48 – 51.

<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Defence; *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis July 2006 – May 2009*; p. 26.

## Women in The Tamil's Society

Before the English colonization, Tamil's society was divided into 18 different castes among which the most prominent was the *Vellàlar* caste<sup>152</sup>, composed prominently by landlords; immediately below we found the *Karaiyar* caste, composed by fishermen; and finally, the *Maravar* caste. Despite its middle position, the *Karaiyar* caste was considered a “good caste” because most of the LTTE activists were part of it.<sup>153</sup> The latter level of this hierarchy includes women.<sup>154</sup> A rule governing castes was the forbidden interaction between lower castes and higher castes.<sup>155</sup>

### Education

For women and girls, education starts at home with homework and crafts and continues in the temple, where religious education is provided. With the English presence education changed its way of being perceived: since it was basic in every field, rulers used it to their own purposes. Schools for girls were opened, spreading knowledge as well as values and norms which were completely different from the Tamil's traditional reality, made of childcare, needlework and home-sciences.<sup>156</sup>

The 1947 represented a watershed for girls' and women's education: the Kannagara reforms gave free access to education, representing a crucial improvement for girls. Before the reforms, in 1946, the registered data of education enrollment were 43.8% for girls, against the higher 70.1% of boys.<sup>157</sup> However, even if this breakthrough in education increased women's age of marriage, giving them the opportunity of a

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<sup>152</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 22.

<sup>153</sup> S. J. Raj, K. A. Jacobsen; *South Asian Christian Diaspora: Invisible Diaspora in Europe and North America*; p. 108.

<sup>154</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 22.

<sup>155</sup> A. Hans; *Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee Women in India*; p. 3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> Reforms' effects appeared in 2001 data: the 90% of girls and the 93% of boys were literate. From C. Wickramagamage; *A Silent Revolution? 'Free Education' And Sri Lankan Women*.

professionally-acquired social mobility, the dowry system was still there, blocking their advancement.<sup>158</sup>

The traditional treatment of Tamil's women after puberty was another factor preventing girls from receiving a high level of education. Once they have reached puberty, girls left education to learn the home management disciplines and, from then on, their life is completely submitted to their families, until they married.<sup>159</sup> Another factor opposing girls' education was the LTTE: some Tamil families participating to an UNICEF survey confessed their fear for the potential recruitment of their daughter by the Tamil Tigers and, for this reason, they used to take girls out of school to have them married at a very young age.<sup>160</sup>

Historically speaking, higher education was even more limited, not only for girls but for the entire Tamil society, when the Official Language Act (No. 33 of 1956) was established:

*“2. The Sinhala language shall be the one official language of Ceylon: Provided that where the Minister considers it impracticable to commence the use of only the Sinhala language for any official purpose immediately on the coming into force of this Act, the language or languages hitherto used for that purpose may be continued to be so used until the necessary change is effected as early as possible before the expiry of the 31st day of December, 1960, and, if such change cannot be effected by administrative order, regulations may be made under this Act to effect such change.”<sup>161</sup>*

Thanks to it, Sinhala students increased and if the admission was really hard for Tamil boys, Tamil girls addressed an even tougher challenge made of language and gender disparity.<sup>162</sup>

The advancement of women's education, seen as something innovative, was far from being an achievement free of social consequences.

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<sup>158</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 24.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>160</sup> UNICEF Sri Lanka; *Country Study. Out-Of-School Children in Sri Lanka*; p. 32.

<sup>161</sup> Sri Lanka Consolidated Acts; *Official Language Act (No. 33 of 1965) – Sect 2.*

<sup>162</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 25.

*“Women's education gave rise to many jokes about women who neglected their homes while their husbands struggled with the children, and about women who could not cook without referring to were also made fun of in cartoons and jokes which expressed the anxieties and fears of a generation of people confronted by a changing world.”<sup>163</sup>*

## **Employment**

According to the IAWID report, female occupation outside the household is stereotyped to the extent that there are purely feminine jobs, such as teaching, stenography and nursing. However, at the time of the research, fields like the judiciary, engineering, surveying and arts in general have seen a rising number of women. Between the 1950s and the 1960s, due to changing reforms and the advent of the LTTE, women's occupation will suffer ups and downs but the 1970s will adjust their situation. In 1972 a constitutional provision approved the gendered discrimination justifying it as “an erosion of men's “rights” as bread-winners”. However, the frustration and agitation of women did not make it last really long.<sup>164</sup>

Dethatching from the political activism of the LTTE, women were generally discriminated from doing politics. After independence, the Sri Lankan political system changed: while the LTTE was emerging, the local government was modelled following the British system. Even if women were allowed to participate during the 1980s first Presidential election, their participation always remained limited. These factors demonstrated that:<sup>165</sup>

- Tamil women's number in politics was very low
- Tamil women politicians did not wield power proportionally to their education level
- Social mobility of Tamil women through political participation, as well as education and employment in general, has not been realized.

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<sup>163</sup> C. S. Lakshmi; “Tamil women at the crossroads”.

<sup>164</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 25.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, pp. 26 – 27.

Such a low professional consideration of women developed with all its consequences. Since women were confined into their houses, they made their houses a safe haven from which working illegally. The *Kasippu*-production was one of the most famous illegal activities involving unemployed women. *Kasippu* (or Moonshine Alcohol) was a low-quality alcohol containing a high amount of methylene and its production was particularly high during the time of armed conflicts in Jaffna. Here's a testimony of a woman who seemed pretty ashamed by what she was forced to do for her and her daughter's survival:

*"I had no other choice except for producing kasippu. My daughter has also been left out by her husband and she is my responsibility as well. What else I can do?"*<sup>166</sup>

Furthermore, the production of *beedees* was another kind of illegal manufacturing took by women. *Beedees* were a largely consumed kind of cigarette in South Asia.<sup>167</sup>

An additional illicit activity some women were involved in to raise money was prostitution and its practice was higher during the period of the ceasefire agreement. Women who had lost their husbands had no choice:

*"My husband was a carpenter. He was earlier in the movement (LTTE) and left it due to his ill health. And I got married to him only after he'd left the movement. When the army captured Jaffna, they arrested him due to his past connections with the LTTE. He was never released and I had to do prostitution for living."*<sup>168</sup>

## **Legal status**

The legal status of women is determined by both general and customary law. Under general law, woman can have their own separate property and marriage will impose no disadvantages on their property rights. However, the disadvantage is the lack of economic consideration of their house work: *The diatheddham* (or *thedathaddam*), advancing the community of property concept, is not exploitable under the general law system.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 131.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129 – 130 and note 39.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133.

<sup>169</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 29.

On the other hand, we found *Thesawalamai* (or *Thesavalami*), known also as “customs of the land” law<sup>170</sup>, which encircles both personal and territorial law, and it is applicable to all Tamils under its jurisprudence.<sup>171</sup> It is a compendium of customs created between 1706 and 1707, under the Dutch dominium when General Simons was in charge. It refers to three different types of ownership a Tamil can have: the *chidam*, the dowry given to a daughter by her parents; *the muthusam*, the property given to male members from their family; and the already mentioned *thedathaddam*, the property acquired by the married couple.<sup>172</sup>

Under this customary law, women have some advantages over properties. First, they can own a separately owned private property which could be *muthusam* (patrimonial heritage) or *urimai* (non-patrimonial heritage) properties. Unfortunately, heading and acquisition are always difficult as long as a woman is married: she is subjected to ability restrictions like her lower legal status, allowing her husband to manage his own estates without her consult. Second, under *thesawalamai* a woman can keep her own dowry and transmit it to her daughter when she will marry but when a woman receives her dowry she cannot inherit it if she has a surviving brother. Hence, even if under *thesawalamai* men and women should have equal rights on paper, women are always disadvantaged.<sup>173</sup>

Rights of the *thedathaddam* property are even more complicated. First, a women’s house work is never economically considered but under this law; furthermore, she half owns the property even if it was acquired by her husband only, which means she has a good advantage. However, if her husband died, she cannot be the only owner of the property but she will obtain the three-quarters only. Even more restrictions applied in case of conflict and property disposal.<sup>174 175</sup>

On being women’s situation not so smooth, acts signed during colonial government between 1901 and 1921 made it even worst. Half of Tamil women lost their rice paddies

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<sup>170</sup> A. Hans; *Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee Women in India*; p. 3.

<sup>171</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 27.

<sup>172</sup> A. Hans; *Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee Women in India*; p. 3.

<sup>173</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> The official document reporting matrimonial rights and inheritance is available at [http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/srilanka/statutes/Matrimonial\\_Rights\\_and\\_Inheritance\\_Ordinance\\_\(Jaffna\).pdf](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/srilanka/statutes/Matrimonial_Rights_and_Inheritance_Ordinance_(Jaffna).pdf).

because they were not wholly-owned by them and, consequently, their equality was lost too. Now, land is part of a woman's dowry and she cannot sell it without her husband consent, until his death.<sup>176</sup>

## Family

The Sri Lankan family is typically patriarchal, leaving women only a little space for decision making. As Herath explained, even the oldest adult woman's decision-making ability is lower compared to that of her younger brother.<sup>177</sup> Since the youngest age, little girls are educated differently from their brothers: they are more controlled, and their exposure to the broader society is insufficient due to their perceived vulnerability.<sup>178</sup> A reported interview by Caitrin Lynch, presents the thought of a common Sri Lankan father:

*“The reason is, she is a girl. She does not understand very much about the troublesome state of things in our country. When she goes, men talk to her for love and might even harm this child by taking her...This is a girl not a boy, right? There must be protection for girls, right?...If it is a boy it is okay.”<sup>179</sup>*

The way little girls are so obsessively protected justifies the generally unwelcomed nature of a female child. From her birth, she needs constant attention for saving her chastity, economics and reputation.<sup>180</sup>

Virginity or chastity is a symbol of purity for the Tamil woman and every sexual contact before marriage is considered a dishonor for the family of the girl/woman. When a Tamil girl has reached puberty, she left school and is kept away from the rest of the family for what the Tamils call “health considerations”, she cannot go outside without being accompanied by an older member of her family and, most important, she is always protected from pre-marital and sexual relationships.<sup>181</sup> As we will see, rape is among

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<sup>176</sup> A. Hans; *Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee Women in India*; p. 4.

<sup>177</sup> H. M. A. Herath; *Place of Women in Sri Lankan Society: Measured for Their Empowerment for Development and Good Governance*; p. 6.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. Original source: C. Lynch; *Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and cultural politics in Sri Lanka's global garment industry*.

<sup>180</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 33.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

them: even if it is not an intentional sexual relationship, rape is considered to dishonor the family in the same way as any other sexual encounter. At the moment of her marriage, the chaste woman is always represented by a visible sign called *thaali*: it is an ornament put around the women's neck by her husband when they are marrying. The *thaali* has to be kept by the women until the death of her husband.<sup>182</sup> The visibility of married women status made marriage a good tactic frequently used by families to avoid their daughters' recruitment by the LTTE.<sup>183</sup> In any case, even though women's life passes through obsessive protection and isolation, domestic violence is a phenomenon against which women cannot be protected from. Given the patriarchal nature of the system, domestic violence is socially accepted, even unconsidered. Its rates increased during the armed conflict and the post-conflict period, due to the rampant frustration.<sup>184</sup>

After marriage, women are confined to their houses and responsible for all duties linked to the household. However, they also contribute to the household income through part-time or full-time activities which salary is all or almost all devolved to children's education. Women's undertook jobs can vary from paddy cultivation; tobacco, onion and chili production; raising livestock in the backyard; fishing; handicrafts; sewing and running grocery shops or practicing the already mentioned illegal activities. Whatever the job a woman takes, her salary will always be lower compared to a male worker with the same tasks.

Back to the household management task, here women have their pivotal role recognized: "there is no want when the queen of the home is at home", these are the words of the poetess Avvaiyar.<sup>185</sup> Here's the typical Tamil woman day:

*"The Tamil woman's day starts early in the morning at about 4.30 am. She puts the kettle on the fire, preparing coffee for the family. Then she cleans the house and compound and starts preparing breakfast. In rural houses, the cows have to be milked before breakfast preparations are started. The school lunch packets have to be*

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<sup>182</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; PhD dissertation; University of Gothenburg; 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016; p. 80.

<sup>183</sup> UNICEF Sri Lanka; *Country Study. Out-Of-School Children in Sri Lanka*; p. 32.

<sup>184</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; pp. 86 – 87.

<sup>185</sup> Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID); *Women, Transition and Change. Study of the impact of conflict and displacement on women in traditional Tamil society*; p. 35 – 36.

*prepared. If the husband goes to the fields before day-break, she takes him breakfast and tea, sometimes walking more than half a mile. While he takes his breakfast, she harvests vegetables of other items, takes them to market, and with the proceeds buys some of the family's food requirements – fish, rice, coconut, etc. On returning home, she prepares the family lunch, which can take two hours. So go the morning chores. Firewood for cooking is collected in the afternoons for the next day. After the cooking is done, clothes have to be washed.*"<sup>186</sup>

### **Testimonies**

When talking about social roles, secondary sources are definitely relevant. However, even if they are the mere reflection of data collection, limited to data explanation or presentation, they can hide pitfalls like personal interpretation and cultural biases, be them gendered or not. Indeed, the direct testimony of one of the most important LTTE exponents Thamilini, the Head of the Women's Political Wing, is essential to confirm the presented situation of Tamil women. Here's a short extract of an interview with her.<sup>187</sup>

**Q:** *The role of women in society is going through considerable change, positive evolution in many respects. The Tamil National struggle must have surely impacted the traditional conservative view of Eelam woman. Can you please comment on your observations of changes, if any?*

**Thamilini:** *The Tamil community is very conservative; backward-looking in general. In this context, women are second class citizens. [...] Women were not brought up to be leaders of society. They were automatically expected to be behind the scenes. [...] They were considered to be "good" women. Don't cross the boundary – that was the core message. After puberty, we were reared and prepared for marriage. After marriage, of course, what else? Bring forth children, then look after the family. [...] Tamil women are affected by another evil: Sinhala domination and oppression. In any society when oppression is rampant the first to suffer would be the ones who are considered to be weak. Society has reared women to be weak and vulnerable. [...] Hence, Eelam women*

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Revd. C. Sinnathurai; *Eelam Encounters – 1: Women in Tamil Society*.

were forced to re-think; they began to discard traditional understanding of women. [...] In this rationalization, our leader developed the view that our women should play a pivotal role in our freedom struggle. [...] They must partake in our struggle, not only as nurses, doctors, paramedics, and cooks... our leader felt that we must take this matter a bit further. [...] So Thamil Eelam women will not be confined to their kitchens, so to speak. The traditional image of women has altered. [...] We have, in a very small way, pioneered the way for other women to follow in the path of freedom. [...]

**Q:** Has the struggle effected any long-lasting reformation of deep-rooted ills in Tamil society? [...]

**Thamilini:** A 30-year liberation struggle cannot affect change as easily as we would like to. Change is a slow process. [...] Currently, our primary focus is the liberation of our homeland. However, we are also effecting change at a grassroots level. [...]

## Women to Follow

Both religion and mythology offered examples of women following ideals of sacrifice, devotion and motherhood. Here I chose 3 examples of women, two came from the Hinduist tradition and represents the virtues of courage and devotion. Goddess Kannagi's devotion to her husband pushed her to obtain a revenge at all costs. Goddess Durga's courage allow her to defeat a powerful male demon. The last one is a true women activist, Annai Poopathy, who is still commemorated as an example of woman, mother and activist who never denied self-sacrifice, not even in her death.

### Goddess Kannagi

The myth of Goddess Kannagi spread between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., when the ancient Tamil territory of South India was divided into three different kingdoms: the Chala Nadu, the Pandiya Nadu and the Chera Nadu.<sup>188</sup>

Thanks to the effort of Ilango Adigal in his "Epic of the Ankle Bracelet"<sup>189</sup>, we know the story of Kannagi's myth and the Tamil society of the time. Tamils managed a system of social classification divided into three components: the ecological classification, the occupational classification, and class variables; and evolved between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. However, this differentiation was not adopted for ethical and moral concepts like chastity, fate, love, morality, omens and so on because they were equal for all Tamils.<sup>190</sup>

The story of Kannagi starts in Chala Kingdom. Daughter of a merchant, she is trained in all female arts until she got married with a man called Kovalan, a merchant as well. The marriage was happy until Kovalan felt in love with a dancer and betrayed Kannagi. It did

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<sup>188</sup> J. Pandian; *The Goddess Kannagi: A Dominant Symbol of South Indian Tamil Society*.

<sup>189</sup> Aka *Silappadikaram*, *Epic of The Ankle Bracelet* is the story of goddess Kannagi and her husband, Kovalan. Written around the fourth to sixth century AD, is one of the three texts among "[...] what are called the "Great-Poems" or the "[f]ive major poetical works in Tamil" which survived time. The author is supposed to be Prince Ilango Adigal, brother of King Senguttuvan, one of the characters of the story (although no other Tamil poems mentioned that the king had a brother). From Mahavidya; Scholarly Resources for the Study of Hinduism; *The Silappadikaram*.

<sup>190</sup> J. Pandian; *The Goddess Kannagi: A Dominant Symbol of South Indian Tamil Society*.

not last long: both Kovalan and the dancer suspected of each other to be unfaithful so, after they broke up, Kovalan returned to Kannagi begging for her forgiveness.<sup>191</sup>

Meanwhile, Kovalan lost all his money for the pleasures of his former partner and Kannagi decided to help him. She gave Kovalan her ankle bracelets with diamonds to allow him selling them and obtaining some money. With the ankle bracelets, Kovalan went to the Pandiya Kingdom, Kannagi followed him and found accommodation in Madurai, hosted by a herder called Mathari.<sup>192</sup>

After lunch and a brief rest, Kovalan went to the bazaar to sell one of Kannagi's bracelets. He immediately found the goldsmith of Pandiya King and asked him a price estimation on the bracelet, but he could not have known what was waiting for him. The goldsmith had stolen a similar bracelet from the queen and, by seeing the similarities with Kovalan's bracelet, he decided to have him guilty to save his own life.<sup>193</sup>

Kovalan was executed and when Kannagi heard it, after a long wait, ran to find Kovalan's corpse. When she found him, her grief reawakens Kovalan's corpse who declared the injustice he suffered. Determined to avenge her husband death, Kannagi claimed the wrong by challenging the king authority. She proved her words by showing her bracelet was made of diamonds, while that of the queen was made of pearls.<sup>194</sup>

The king plunged in shame and he died of despair, followed by the queen, who died of despair too for the loss of her beloved. From death there is no turning back, Kannagi knew it well and, not yet having obtained her revenge, she tore her right breast with her hand and cursed the city of Madurai. For the following 14 days before her death, Kannagi wandered in Chera Kingdom while every drop of her blood created fire. The Chera Kingdom king, Cheran Senguttavan, deificated Kannagi and built her a temple: Kannagi has become the Tamil Goddess of Chastity.<sup>195</sup>

The early medieval period offered us another version of the end of Kannagi's life: apparently, Kannagi transformed into a five-headed cobra to have her revenge. Indeed,

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

this is the form by which she is celebrated and worshipped in North and East provinces of Sri Lanka.<sup>196</sup>

Goddess Kannagi is one of the most important models for women engaged in the LTTE because:

*[She] represented all the ideals of Tamil womanhood but also manifested the ability to render justice in a domain outside the household. In the experiential domain on political and legal authority, Kannagi drew upon her spirituality, the source of which was chastity, declared the innocence of her husband and caused the burning of a city. Being married to Kovalan she could not escape his fate but at the same time manifested fully the essence of Tamil womanhood/motherhood: her existence was a demonstration of the operational relationship between chastity, a principle of female spirituality, and political authority*<sup>197</sup>

## **Goddess Durga**

The origins of Goddess Durga are strictly related to the buffalo demon Mahisa whose power was overwhelmed by Durga herself. While Durga is the symbol of wisdom of heart free from every cultural, religious or social contamination; the buffalo demon Mahisa is symbol of ignorance, reaction and ego attachments.<sup>198</sup>

After some victorious battles, Mahisa was granted invincibility (from Brahmā<sup>199</sup>) against every male enemy. Thanks to his power, he conquered the world but wanted the heaven too, so he gave an ultimatum to Indra, the King of the gods. Indra did not want to surrender so decided to challenge Mahisa, ending with a defeat. Indra searched for shelter to the other gods and, together with them, found a way to defeat Mahisa. Putting together the whole of their energies and weapons, the defeated gods created a beautiful creature, Goddess Durga, who was asked to defeat Mahisa.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> V. Ramaswamy, J. Nehru; *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils*.

<sup>197</sup> J. Pandian; *Caste, Nationalism and Ethnicity: An Interpretation of Tamil Cultural History and Social Order*; p. 53.

<sup>198</sup> L. Amazzone; *Goddess Durga: A Divine Female Role Model for Our Times?*.

<sup>199</sup> The Hindu Creator god. From Ancient History Encyclopedia; <https://www.ancient.eu/Brahma/>.

<sup>200</sup> G. D. Flood; *An Introduction to Hinduism*; p. 176.

She was a woman with long dark hair, represented with eight arms (“typically eight or ten, but ranging from four to twenty or more”<sup>201</sup>), each of which holds a weapon. Her arms were tattooed and decorated with bangles, she had golden earrings and orange/yellow marigolds on her breasts.<sup>202</sup>

Every male god from which she was created gave her a weapon.<sup>203</sup>

- Śiva gave her **a trident**
- Kṛṣṇa gave her **a discus**
- Varuṇa gave her **a snare and a conch**
- Agni gave her **a spear**
- The wind god gave her **a bow with arrows**
- Indra (the King of the gods) gave her **a thunderbolt and the ringing bell of his elephant**
- Yama gave her **the judicial staff of the judge of the dead**
- Kāla (the lord of time and death) gave her **a sword and a shield**
- Viśvakarman (the master artisan of the gods) gave her **a battle-axe and other weapons.**

In her fight against Mahisa, Goddess Durga was given a lion to mount by Himavat, the mountain god. Mahisa, enchanted by Durga’s beauty, asked her to marry him but Durga refused and declared she was made to defeat him. The way Durga killed Mahisa is extremely well described:

*“...[she] pursues Mahiṣa on her lion, and defeats him, kicking him with her foot, piercing his chest with her trident and decapitating him with her discus as he emerges in human form from the buffalo’s body”<sup>204</sup>*

Goddess Durga has two different forms: the peaceful forms and the wrathful forms. For example, among the peaceful forms, we can find Saraswatī (Goddess of Creativity) or Lalitā (Goddess of Abundance). Among her wrathful forms, we can find Kālī (Goddess of Death and Transformation) or Caṇḍīkā (The Angry One).<sup>205</sup> This ambivalence between

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<sup>201</sup> M. E. Shaw; *Buddhist Goddesses of India*; p. 215.

<sup>202</sup> L. Amazzone; *Goddess Durga and the Sacred Female Power*; p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> H. von Stietencron; *Hindu Myth, Hindu History, Religion, Art and Politics*; p. 117.

<sup>204</sup> G. D. Flood; *An Introduction to Hinduism*; p. 176.

<sup>205</sup> L. Amazzone; *Goddess Durga and the Sacred Female Power*; p. 3.

the benevolent and terrifying nature of Goddess Durga, made her nature extremely paradoxical and reflects in a faithful way, the complexities of every women psyche.<sup>206</sup>

What links Goddess Durga with the role of women in the LTTE is the very motive of her creation: the situation called precisely for a woman. No male actors helped Durga in her achievements and this clearly violates the model of the Hindu woman who is submissive, subordinated to her husband, confined in her household duties. On the contrary, Goddess Durga excelled in what only men were supposed to excel: war and combat.<sup>207</sup>

### **Annai Poopathy**

*"Today, we cherish the memory of a great martyr and salute her supreme sacrifice. Mother Poopathi has earned our highest esteem as one of the noble martyrs who have become legends in the history of our liberation struggle. As a woman, as a mother, as the maternal head of the family, Poopathi amma transcended her ordinary life and the bonds of existential attachment in sacrificing her life for the emancipation of her nation [...]."*

*Velupillai Pirabakaran [Vellupillai Prabhakaran]  
on Second Anniversary of Annai Poopathy's death,  
April 1990<sup>208</sup>*

Even if not a mythological one, Annai Poopathy's figure deserves to be presented as a model.

Kanapathipillai Poopathy, aka Annai<sup>209</sup> Poopathy, was born the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1932 as the only one girl of 3 children. At the age of 12 she was married and had 2 sons but soon

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> L. Amazzone; *Goddess Durga: A Divine Female Role Model for Our Times?*.

<sup>208</sup> TamilNation; *Velupillai Pirabakaran. Annai Poopathy's Fast for Freedom Second Anniversary Message March 1990.*

<sup>209</sup> Annai means "mother", it is a special title conferred by the Liberation Tigers. From The Tamil Diplomat; *Annai Poopathy – 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Commemoration in Batticaloa Today.*

became a widow. The struggle between the Tamil and the Sinhalese population was severe at the time and even deteriorated from the Sri Lankan army violence against children and the disappearance of the latter. Poopathy's participation in the struggle was already fervent but when her 2 sons were put in danger, her engagement became deeper.<sup>210</sup>

After the first of her sons died at 28 years old at the hand of the Sri Lankan army and the second one was arrested and tortured, Poopathy enhanced her engagement for the cause and entered the Mother's Front<sup>211</sup>. Her attitude towards the military atrocities of the Sri Lankan army was particularly strong during the Indian occupation of north and east: she organized protests against the Indian army ignoring the imposed prohibition for political activities.<sup>212</sup>

When the Women's Front decided fasting to be its weapon of protest, Annai Poopathy dedicated her last lifetime to it. From the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1988 to the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1988, she fasted for freedom, moving two requests:<sup>213</sup>

1. An immediate unconditional ceasefire between the LTTE and the IPKF;
2. The beginning of unconditional talks between and LTTE and the Indian government.

After the death of Annai Poopathy, annual celebrations were dedicated to her, every 19<sup>th</sup> April, while people engage in an entire day of fasting.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Annai Poopathy's Fast for Freedom*.

<sup>211</sup> "[...] the Mothers Front was formed in July 1990 by women whose children or husbands were killed or disappeared in a 1980s Sri Lankan government campaign against the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, or JVP) (8 Feb. 1991). The founders of the front were two Sri Lankan Freedom Party MPs, Mahinda Rajapakse and Managala Samaraweera (Inter Press Service 18 Feb. 1993). The objectives of the Mothers Front were twofold: first, the creation of "an independent commission to investigate the disappearance of thousands of people since 1987," and second, the initiation of "an inquiry into [the fate of the disappeared], compensation for dependents of victims and help for relatives from social services" (Reuters 19 Feb. 1991). The Mothers Front also demanded that "the government remove "all oppressive laws and disband paramilitary death squads [and] reveal the names of all political prisoners..." (Japan Economic Newswire 19 Feb. 1991)." from Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada; *Sri Lanka: Information on a group called "Mothers Front"*.

<sup>212</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Annai Poopathy's Fast for Freedom*.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> TamilNet, Sunday, 18 April 2004; *NorthEast to observe Annai Poopathi anniversary*.

Commemorations are still in place: the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Annai Poopathy's death was celebrated the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018 in Batticaloa, her birthplace, despite threats issued by the Sri Lankan military intelligence operatives.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> TamilPolity; *Annai Poopathi Remembered*.

## Roles

Among women's situation in many other terrorist groups, women in the LTTE benefitted from a pretty equal treatment and a strong attention, be it mediatic, political or military.

As J. Davis told us, Tamil militant groups welcomed women gradually and their portrayal went through three phases:<sup>216</sup>

1. Women as both mothers and fighters
2. A new women idea, contesting the traditional Tamil patriarchal society
3. The virgin warrior perceived as feminine and chaste

The way women are portrayed is not only useful to the image of the group but also

*“[...] related to the consolidation of power by the LTTE and is reflected in gender roles within that organization”<sup>217</sup>*

However crucial, women's integration in the LTTE has been slow not to offend traditional values of the Tamil society. Indeed, their inclusion was not useful for the progression of their precarious situation: once the struggle had ended, women were expected to return their social position in the household, doing housework and raising children.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 11.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

## Roles' evolution in history

The already presented historical development of the women's wing gave us a timeline of the conquests women obtained from their participation in Sri Lankan terrorism. Here's a short scheme:

- 1976: women entered the separatist movement<sup>219</sup>
- 1983: the LTTE regular militia has its Women's Wing, the Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers (or "Freedom Birds")<sup>220 221</sup>.
- 1984: selection of the first group of LTTE women<sup>222</sup>
- 1985: first batch of Women Tigers are trained in Tamil Nadu camps (India) with the Indian government assistance<sup>223</sup>
- 1986: the first combat for the Women's Wing. It was October 1986, the operation was against the Sri Lankan Army in Adampan and it was the male regional commander of Mannar, Lt. Col. Victor, who commanded the women's unit during the operation.<sup>224</sup>
- 1987: Jaffna welcomed a women's training camp where the second groups of women (and the following) has been trained. This time the commander was a woman.<sup>225</sup>
- 1989: women's army has now its own leadership structure and, in the same year, the women's recruitment in the newly Sea Tigers has started.<sup>226</sup> The first all-women's military unit with its own leadership structure was named after her female commander, Maria Vasanthi Michael ("Sothia", from which the name Sothia Brigade).<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 2.

<sup>220</sup> M. Gonzalez-Perez; *Women and Terrorism. Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*; p. 63.

<sup>221</sup> Result of the increased demand of women's participation following the 1983's Black July riots and associated violence against Tamil women. From J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 26.

<sup>222</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 26; see note 6.

<sup>223</sup> R. Rabasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; p. 11. D. A. Cahawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*.

<sup>224</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 26 – 27.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>226</sup> R. Rabasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; p. 11.

<sup>227</sup> Whose name was given to the homonymous "Sothia Brigade. From J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 27.

- 1990: from then on, the women's unit were expanded because of military needs.<sup>228</sup>
- 1991: the second brigade of women was inaugurated under the name of Malathi Brigade, named after the first female fighter killed in combat the same year.<sup>229</sup>

Throughout this timeline women have been employed in supportive, military and political roles.

## Support

The first roles women occupied into the organization was the supportive one. At the beginning of the WFLT life, women's activities were limited to propaganda, surveillance, medical care and fundraising.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, some of these supportive activities were risky, like checkpoint duty.<sup>231</sup>

Among women's supportive roles, I found documented examples of female propaganda activities. The Nitharsanam Unit ("Reality in Truth") recruits young women and men, training them to become battlefield cameramen/women.<sup>232</sup> Inside it we find the Nitharsanam Women Unit which activities are remembered by the Tamil website, TamilNet.com.

In an article dated 8<sup>th</sup> March 2003, it was declared that the Woman Unit released a film called "Uppil Uraintha Uthirangal" ("Blood stained sea") in commemoration of the International Women Day. The film told the true story of a woman cadre who participated to the freedom struggle and its producer was Ms. Kuyili.<sup>233</sup> Mr. Sanjay, head of the Thooyavan Political Science College, gave a speech which clarified how dangerous was to produce this type of propaganda:<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> R. Rabasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; p. 11..

<sup>229</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 27.

<sup>230</sup> A. Basu; *Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia*; p. 9.

<sup>231</sup> Y. Tambiah; *Sexuality and Women's Rights in Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka*; p. 80. Original source (no longer available): Daily Mirror; *Women in Action*; 4<sup>th</sup> November 2003; <http://www.dailymirror.lk/sections/supp/w@w/031104/1.asp>.

<sup>232</sup> Sri Lanka Guardian; *LTTE Propaganda: The Nitharsanam Unit*.

<sup>233</sup> TamilNet; *Film on Women's struggle released in Batticaloa*.

<sup>234</sup> TamilNet; *Film on Women's sacrifice to Tamil struggle released*.

“our cadres had filmed several battles while fighting with the enemy and more than fifteen of our cadres have died while filming the real battle. [...]”<sup>235</sup>

Another propaganda product of the Unit was the documentary “Akkini Paravaikal” (“Volcanic Birds”). It narrated the development of the women tiger movement by including their first experiences in the battlefield, their training, their first social difficulties as warrior women in the conservative Tamil society.<sup>236</sup>

## **Military**

The outbreak of women in military personnel is linked with a male cadres’ shortage.<sup>237</sup> As M. Gonzalez Perez wrote in *Women and Terrorism*, in 1992 women’s number reached 3,000 while in 2001 it raised to 5,000.<sup>238</sup>

Generally speaking, women and men started to share the same roles and the importance of women was highlighted from then on as an essential presence next to men. Assignments given to women were far more dangerous compared to the men’s and this was particularly true when talking about female cadres in the Black tigers, who conducted a great quantity of suicide operations and lead a considerable number of assassination plots against relevant public figures.<sup>239</sup>

A. A. Balasingham, in her book *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*, explained how crucial women have been in engaging Indian troops in urban and jungle guerrilla warfare. They provided major support when it came to the safety and the survival of the cadres.

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> TamilNet; *Documentary Video on Women Tigers released*.

<sup>237</sup> A. Basu; *Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia*; p. 9.

<sup>238</sup> M. Gonzalez-Perez; *Women and Terrorism. Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*; p. 62. Original sources: C. de Silvia; *A Historical Overview of Women in Sri Lankan Politics*; in S. Kirimabune, (ed.); *Women and Politics in Sri Lanka: A Comparative Perspective*; 1999; Kandi, Sri Lanka: International Center for Ethnic Studies; pp. 61 – 62. J. Goldstein; *War and Gender*; 2001; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; p. 83. K. Samuel; *Gender Difference in Conflict Resolution*; in I. Skjelsbaek and D. Smith, (eds); *Gender, Peace and Conflict*; London: Sage Publications; pp. 184 – 204: 185.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

The 1987's attack on LTTE army camp in Jaffna was incredibly well managed by women and, during Eelam War 2, they proved to be fundamental in all major battles.<sup>240</sup>

From their official admission into the heart of the Tamil cause, women worked as intelligence gatherers, suicide bombers, soldiers, commanders, policymakers and leaders. Among the highest tasks a woman could have was the participation into the Central Committee: by 2002 the head of the LTTE's political wing Thamilini, confirmed that female members of the Committee were 5 out of 12.<sup>241</sup>

### ***Ground Forces***

The WFLT was part of the regular LTTE militia. Since its achievement of military participation, the Front wrote its own manifesto, in 1991,<sup>242</sup> addressing both gendered and nationalistic objectives:<sup>243</sup>

- to secure the right to self-determination of the Tamil Eelam people;
- to establish an independent democratic state of the Tamil Eelam;
- to abolish oppressive caste discrimination and divisions;
- to abolish semi-feudal customs like dowry;
- to eliminate all other forms of discrimination, be them social, political or economic, against Tamil women, and secure gender equality in all these fields;
- to ensure the Tamil women the full control of their own lives;
- to secure legal protection for women against abuses like sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence.

Despite the women's struggle had also a hint of gender equality, speeches of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran never forgot to mention priorities:<sup>244</sup>

- “The struggle for the aim of the liberation of women is the child of fire born on the lap of our liberation movement.”;

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<sup>240</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*; Chapter “Eelam War 2 - The First Year: June 1990 - June 1991”, par. “Successful Raid on Kokkavil Army Camp”.

<sup>241</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 47.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 2. M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 45.

<sup>244</sup> P. Schalk; *Reflections of the Leader. Quotes by Vēluppiḷḷai Pirapākaran*; pp. 11 – 33.

- “The liberation of women implies the achievement of liberation from governmental suppression and societal oppression and economic exploitation as well”;
- “Only by connecting with our liberation movement the women’s group is enabled to win liberation on their road to the aim”.

Moreover, the WFLT operated a three-fold division of its structure by establishing<sup>245</sup>

1. a political wing engaged in administrative tasks and in the promotion of female emancipation and empowerment;
2. a militant wing engaged in combat operations; and
3. suicide units.

The militant wing was composed by two all-female brigades, the Sothia and Malathi Brigades. A. A. Balasingham described Sothia as

*“[...] a strong advocate of an independent women’s military structure [who] worked hard [...]. Her own personality and history was also a great impetus to the women fighters. Sothia, over years transformed herself into an independent thinker, confident and efficient, capable of leading a women’s military structure.”*<sup>246</sup>

The brigade was structured with its own hierarchy, as male brigades. After the death of Sothia in 1990, the brigade was spearheaded by Akila Akka, and Thurga (Kalaichelvi Ponnuthurai) with her deputy Mohanaa.<sup>247</sup>

The Malathi Brigade, named after the first female victim of the Tamil struggle (1991), was the second all-female brigade incorporated by the WFLT. The regiment was commanded by Brigadier Vidusha and her deputy Kamalini when it collapsed.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 2.

<sup>246</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*; Chapter “Fighting the Indian Army: October 1987 - March 1990”, par. “The Formation of An Independent Structure”.

<sup>247</sup> M. Kumar; *Thamizh Is Not Just A Language: The Valour* ; p. 37.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 37 – 38.

### *Sea Tigers*

Even if the presence of female cadres in the Sea Tigers is confirmed by M. Gonzalez-Perez as “a large female contingent”<sup>249</sup> and by M. Alison according to whom “[...] the LTTE’s naval force, the Sea Tigers, is primarily female [...]”<sup>250</sup>, official sources cannot draw the same conclusions.

One of the secondary sources we have is J. Davis’ mention of the MIPT terrorism database<sup>251</sup> which recorded 233 LTTE attacks among which only the 9% have certainly been carried by a woman.<sup>252</sup> Further researches conducted by me highlighted that the difficulty of giving numbers to women participation in the Sea Tigers is exacerbated by the incomplete database research methods. Among the databases I looked at, I found only one with a gender filter: The University of Chicago’s Suicide Attack Database, part of the Chicago Project on Security and Threats.<sup>253</sup>

These are the results I found.

*Table 4: Sea Tigers female attacks (Suicide attacks): General Statistics.*<sup>254</sup>

Total Attacks	7
Total Deaths	63
Total Wounded	6
Average Deaths per Attack	9
Average Wounded per Attack	0.9

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<sup>249</sup> M. Gonzalez-Perez; *Women and Terrorism. Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*; p. 62.

<sup>250</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 39..

<sup>251</sup> The database does not exist anymore. It has been substituted with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MIPT\\_Terrorism\\_Knowledge\\_Base](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MIPT_Terrorism_Knowledge_Base).

<sup>252</sup> J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 14.

<sup>253</sup> University of Chicago; *Suicide Attack Database*.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

Table 5: Sea Tigers female attacks (Suicide attacks): Attack List<sup>255</sup>

LOCATION	DATE	KILLS	WOUNDED	WEAPON	ATTACKERS
Sri Lanka	1994-08-10	0	0	Boat bomb	1 female
Sri Lanka	1995-07-16	10	0	Scuba bomb	2 males 1 female
Sri Lanka	1995-09-10	0	0	Scuba bomb	1 male 1 female 1 unknown
Sri Lanka	1996-03-30	10	6	Boat bomb	1 male 1 female
Sri Lanka	1996-07-19	28	0	Boat bomb	4 males 1 female
Sri Lanka	2006-01-07	15	0	Boat bomb	1 female
Sri Lanka	2008-10-23	0	0	Boat bomb	1 male 1 female 4 unknowns

Among the highest ranks of the Sea Tigers, I found a woman called Jeyaganesh Murugesu Pakeerathy who spearheaded the group between 1997 and 2000. In 2005 she left the country, just before the beginning of Eelam War IV. Recently, her name hit the headlines because she was granted a French permanent resident status, in spite of her past. Indeed, she was arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) before leaving for France. Her husband, known as Samiraj, was a powerful LTTE operative with important connections with France and the EU.<sup>256</sup>

### ***Black Tigers***

The presence of women in the Black Tigers wing is certainly a new and distinct phenomenon. In addition to the LTTE, only the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) used women as suicide bombers.<sup>257</sup> According to Zedalis, the LTTE usage of female suicide bombers will be an example for other terrorist groups. Indeed, even if it was not to the LTTE the merit of having initiated the practice, its women were certainly the most prolific

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> S. Ferdinando; *Arrested ex-Women Sea Tiger chief has French connection.*

<sup>257</sup> S. Chandran; *Born to Die: The Black Tigers of the LTTE.*

suicide bombers of the modern era, having participated to at least the 30% of total LTTE suicide bombings.<sup>258</sup>

The very first woman to kill herself in the name of Tamil's cause was Dhanu, the female bomber who was responsible for the killing of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gadhi of India. Dhanu had an explosive belt on her waist and, by coming closer to the Minister with a flower garland, the bomb detonated killing them both<sup>259</sup> along with 19 others.<sup>260</sup> As already stated, the LTTE was a local group, recruiting local members and hitting local objectives. However, this was the only case putting together an international objective (and the only international objective at all) and a woman suicide bomber.<sup>261</sup>

Following Dhanu, many other female suicide bombers were used for high-value objectives in Sri Lanka. Other two attacks deserve attention because of the innovative tactics they employed.<sup>262</sup>

- 2006: a fake pregnant woman penetrated the Army Headquarters aiming at the assassination of the Sri Lankan Army Commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka.
- 2004 and 2007: attempted assassination of the Minister Douglas Devananda. The two women attempted his life through detonated bra bombs.<sup>263</sup>

### *Air Tigers*

There was no reported activity of female participation in the Air Tigers.

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<sup>258</sup> D. D. Zedalis; *Female Suicide Bombers*.

<sup>259</sup> M. Gonzalez-Perez; *Women and Terrorism. Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*; p. 64.

<sup>260</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 5.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> *Bra Bomber Targets Minister*; News 24.

### ***Intelligence Wing***

As for the other wings, also the Intelligence Services were divided by gender.<sup>264</sup> The Women's Intelligence Unit had the same tasks of the male one and represented a crucial organ, as stated by A. A. Balasingham:

*“The women cadres of the military intelligence unit have spent days and days in spartan conditions to meticulously study the objective of their nascent military plan. Their keen powers of observation, their eye for detail, has yielded positive results. The casualty rate of the Sri Lankan military personnel has been high as a result of the thorough ground reconnaissance work carried out by the women cadres.”*<sup>265</sup>

### **Political**

Conquering the right of being active participants in the political scene, the Women's Political Wing concentrated its activity on spreading ideals of female liberation and feminism in general. Among their responsibilities, we found:<sup>266</sup>

- the management of the Center for Women's Development and Rehabilitation, developing projects like welfare centers and employment ventures;
- the organization of campaigns against gender discrimination;
- the participation in the Sub-Committee for Gender Issues during the 2002 ceasefire, aiming at addressing gender discrimination and other areas of concern.

Thanks to M. Alison interviews, we also have some names of female leaders in the Women's Political Wing. Krishna has been the leader in the Women's Political Wing for the Trincomalee District, Banuka was leader for the Batticaloa-Amparai District, Thamiltvily was leader for the Jaffna District, and Thamilini was the overall political leader of the Women's Wing.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> J. Richards; *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 25.

<sup>265</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*; Chapter “On The Eastern Front: A Different War”, par. “True Grit”.

<sup>266</sup> S. Dissanayake; *Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?*; p. 3.

<sup>267</sup> These are not real names but movement names. M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; pp. 40 – 42.

## *Peace Talks*

Given the controversial ideas on the effective women's participation in the peace talks of 2002, the event is worth of our attention.<sup>268</sup>

The Sub-Committee for Gender Issues was the very first attempt of the GoSL and the LTTE to give a role inside peacemaking and peacebuilding activities to women. With Thamilini as the leader of the LTTE delegation, meetings were hosted in Sri Lanka, in Kilinochchi. The two parties involved, the GoSL and the LTTE, both have women inside it and their experiences were seen as perfectly complementary: the GoSL women had experience with conflict resolution practices while the LTTE women had experience of living through a conflict. Even if women's issues were widely discussed, the focus of the Committee was not so limited:<sup>269</sup>

*“Women are an indivisible part of society and are the main force behind social reconstruction and so our focus will be on women. However we will bring a gender perspective to our work, this will make the work holistic and we will also work with men”*<sup>270</sup>

During the peace talks, the LTTE delegation task was that of addressing resettlement, rehabilitation, livelihoods and trauma. Meanwhile, the GoSL delegation worked with legal and policy reforms. First problems emerged when the right for the SGI of having a seat into the formal peace process was questioned.<sup>271</sup>

A reason could be the lack of autonomous decisions: the LTTE nominees have never been independent from the LTTE influence, while taking decisions. This was particularly true for women who had to renounce to their participation in the negotiation when the LTTE decided to withdraw from formal structures. Another factor exacerbating the situation

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<sup>268</sup> J. Davis underlined the perceived and framed idea that women's participation was less important and authentic than the men's and, for this reason, she asserted, by quoting C. Ness, that they had not participated to peace talks in the same way as they did in the armed struggle. From J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 13.

<sup>269</sup> K. Samuel; *Opinion. The importance of autonomy: Women and the Sri Lankan Peace Negotiations*; p. 4.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

was the unique nature of women's presence in the SGI: prior to it no women had ever been members.<sup>272</sup>

When the two delegations considered the inclusion of women into the peace negotiations, it was challenging for Sri Lankan women to the extent that they had to change their convictions about the male nature of the military discipline. However, both the complementarity of those women's experiences and the recognition of combatant women's agency, determined that

*“[...] LTTE women combatants had as much a stake in the peace process as did non combatant women in the SGI. While identifying first and foremost as combatants, they were nevertheless equally concerned with political representation and decision making; gender sensitive legal and policy reform; equality and non discrimination.”*<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p.9.

## Motivations

Women's real motivations for joining terrorism have always been bypassed by gendered stereotypes: we can see it in the media portrait of women terrorists, always focusing on body characteristics, family portraits, educational aspects, potential psychological diseases, you name it.

An article by B. L. Nacos speaks about frames. There are six different frames in which female terrorists are portrayed and, among them, we can find media-shared motivations.<sup>274</sup>

1. **The physical appearance frame:** the source presents physical characteristics of the woman in question like the color of her hairs, eyes and skin; her makeup, her degree of beauty, the way she is dressed.
2. **The family connection frame:** an extensive description of the woman's family portrait like her mother's and father's characteristics, if she has a husband, brothers or sisters, children, friends, if a family member is died in recent times.
3. **The "terrorist for the sake of love" frame:** when a woman lose her beloved, this frame is used to explain her personal motivations for joining. As the frame explains, the motivation for joining is the willingness to continue the beloved's work. Moreover, the frame could be used also to explain the pull factor of having a male member of the family, be it the father, brother or husband, who is pulling the female member into the terrorist organization.
4. **The women's liberty/equality frame:** women join terrorism to achieve gender equality.
5. **The tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame:** women who joined terrorism are frequently described as particularly violent, sometimes even more than their male counterpart. Sometimes, women in this realm are also identified as lesbians "[...] because everyone known no 'real woman' would hijack planes or cripple middle-age men by shooting them in kneecaps".<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> B. L. Nacos; *The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism*; pp. 438 – 445.

<sup>275</sup> Original source: S. Jacoby; *Terrorism in Women's Work Too*; Washington Post; 2 October 1992; p. C8.

6. **The bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality frame:** women's engagement in terrorism is due to boredom and lack of educational and professional interests.

How many of these frames correspond to the LTTE women? And, more important, how much they are true in our context?

### **Female Motivations: a tripartite classification**

As K. Jacques and P. Taylor explained in their *Female Terrorism: A Review*, there are three macro areas of motivations:<sup>276</sup>

1. Social motivations: risk social humiliation and repression for a particular condition, gender inequalities, need for education and career.
2. Personal motivations: personal problems (being them physical, psychological or linked to the family), economic problems.
3. Idealistic motivations: desire for equal rights, for the improvement of female condition in general, change religious/nationalistic issues
4. Others: in this case we will find key events and revenge motivations like the death of a loved person and a desire for revenge for the loss incurred.

In the specific case of the LTTE we found:

#### **1. Social motivations:**

- a. the need for education and a job;<sup>277</sup>
- b. the opportunity to be important in the Tamil society;<sup>278</sup>
- c. the desire to achieve human security;<sup>279</sup>
- d. a kind of social obligation to participate in the cause.<sup>280</sup>

#### **2. Personal motivations:**

- a. family safety;<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> K. Jacques, P. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*; pp. 15 – 17.

<sup>277</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; pp. 41 – 42.

<sup>278</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 54.

<sup>279</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 41.

<sup>280</sup> A. Makshood; *The Ideal of Liberation: Women in Sri Lanka's Civil War*; pp. 30 – 31.

<sup>281</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 41.

- b. personal security, especially from rape;<sup>282</sup>
- c. attraction from “the spirit of martyrdom”;<sup>283</sup>

**3. Idealistic motivations:**

- a. emancipation;<sup>284</sup>
- b. obtaining women’s rights (framed by the independence struggle);<sup>285</sup>
- c. liberate the homeland.<sup>286</sup>

**4. Other motivations:**

- a. revenge for the loss of a loved person;<sup>287</sup>
- b. resignation.<sup>288</sup>

**Social motivations**

*The need for education and a job*

“Standardization”: this is the key issue of women’s lack for education and, consequently, for a job. This measure was implemented in 1973 by the Sri Lankan government and caused Tamil students several problems in obtaining qualifications to attend university courses. From the women’s point of view, since their access to education was far more difficult, standardization was one of the causes of their decision to join the LTTE.<sup>289</sup>

Moreover, some women explain that war destroyed their educational and professional projects also because of the suffering it caused to them. As reported by an interviewee, in a M. Alison’s study:

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<sup>282</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 53.

<sup>283</sup> P. Wang; *Women in the LTTE: Birds of Freedom or Cogs in the Wheel?*; p. 104.

<sup>284</sup> N. Gowarinathan; *Why Do Women Rebel?*; p. 40.

<sup>285</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 45.

<sup>286</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 31.

<sup>287</sup> P. Wang; *Women in the LTTE: Birds of Freedom or Cogs in the Wheel?*; p. 104..

<sup>288</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 43.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

*“I wanted to continue my studies but I was unable to [because of] the army operations. Again and again we were displaced. When I was studying [...] I was unable to take the exams, so I decided to join our movement.”*<sup>290</sup>

Thamilini, the overall Women’s Political Wing Leader, had the same experience while studying for her A Levels. Her situation was exacerbated by the fact that the period she was studying, the 1990, was the worst in terms of the Tamil Eelam’s cause struggle.<sup>291</sup>

Another interviewee, whose words were reported by D. A. Chawade in her PhD dissertation, shared her disappointment about the continual rescheduling of her examinations. She went frustrated because other students in other areas of Sri Lanka already completed their examinations and this could put her in a disadvantageous situation. She continued by saying:

*“[...] I thought that it was impossible to study under the oppression of the Sinhala chauvinism. Finally, I decided to fight for the liberation of our people.”*<sup>292</sup>

If education disruption hardly hit young women and girls by destroying both their educational and professional projects, the effect it had on female teachers was harder:

*“I was a school teacher before. But later, I realized that the job is useless. First of all we have to liberate ourselves. What is the use of learning and earning a living under suppression and oppression?”*<sup>293</sup>

The lack of education for women is strictly linked with their lack of opportunities to find a job and guarantee their own survival. Here too, one more time, the LTTE became their solution. Indeed, women joining the LTTE could find job opportunities like their engagement in the Eelam police where they received a higher salary, compared to that given by the state.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 42..

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 91.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>294</sup> M. Alison; *Armed Violence and Poverty in Sri Lanka: A Mini Case Study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative*; p. 9.

Generally, as Alison pointed out, the LTTE could raise life opportunities for women<sup>295</sup>. The combination of both the impossibility to develop education and to be engaged as public figures, be these limitations for men or women, was one of the factors creating the cause for Tamil Eelam<sup>296</sup>

### ***The opportunity to be important in the Tamil society***

A woman who participate in the LTTE is completely detached from the role the Tamil's society gave her.

*“The women feel they are making a positive contribution to their motherland which in turn instills a sense of pride and makes them feel important for the Tamil nation”<sup>297</sup>*

Their personal feeling of being important, useful and brave is not only the product of their own conviction but also of the way the movement treat them. Women are glorified, sometimes even more than men!

*“Women in the movement are glorified. My theory is that women [in the conflict] are often perceived as [victimized and] raped, but they [regain] their human dignity by entering [into] the movement...that is the perception of the public. The public glorifies these women and they are redeemed”<sup>298</sup>*

Dedicating their life to the separatist Tamil cause give them the opportunity to have a meaningful life that would otherwise continue inside their home, outside public life matters. No more women needing security, but women enabling it.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 43.

<sup>296</sup> M. P. Arena, B. A. Arrigo; *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat*; pp. 176 – 177.

<sup>297</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 54.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>299</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 52.

### *The desire to achieve human security*<sup>300</sup>

Having women able to provide security through their activities inside the LTTE provides us with another important motivation raised by the feminine public pushing towards the Tamil Tigers: the desire to achieve human security.

Beyond its official definition, the human security women were thinking about when taking their decision to join the LTTE is well defined by Alison: societal insecurities of their ethno-national community, their individual insecurity and the gender-specific risks they took (like rape) are what they were fighting for.<sup>301</sup>

Their individual security and gender-specific risks could be classified as purely individual motivations but this is a different case. Here we are taking into consideration women who have no personal experience of the facts but wanted other women to be safe from these risks. They took arms because of the pervading sense of permanent insecurity which influenced every aspect of their life. For example, linking insecurity with education, risks little girls were exposed to were also preventing them from going to school.<sup>302</sup>

Among the interviewees of Alison two women, Thamilachi and Shanthi, reported cases of violence and rape they knew about. They declared they were furious about the lack of security they were plagued by and, for this reason, they decided to be Freedom Birds.<sup>303</sup>

In an interview of the Telegraph, the young Niromi de Soyza recounted how she chose to join the LTTE:

*“[...] By 1985 [...] I [...] found myself living in constant fear. [...] We lived under indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling, day and night; our movements were restricted by long curfews. We spent many days in our home-built bunker [...]. I was dismayed by the attitude of family and friends who believed that they had no power to change the situation, but didn't support the militant groups either. [...] But at least*

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<sup>300</sup> The official definition of human security is provided from A/RES/66/290 “Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome”.

<sup>301</sup> M. Alison; *Women as Agents of Political Violence*; p. 453.

<sup>302</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 42.

<sup>303</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 43.

*they were trying, I thought. The more I listened to the militants, the more I sympathized with the idea of an armed struggle, the more it seemed like the only response.*<sup>304</sup>

Sudarvili, who joined the LTTE when she was 19 and was still a member at the time of the interview, presented the same motivation:

*“we feel this is the only way to keep fighting against the military and safeguard the people”*<sup>305</sup>

By seeing others’ suffering and insecurity, women were encouraged to take up arms, fighting terrorism with terrorism.

### ***A kind of social obligation to participate in the cause***

The LTTE propaganda perfectly exploited the social role of women to attract them, by merging their traditional role of mothers with the new role of the combatant: the mother warrior, a new figure in which women can be both mothers and warriors, without renounces. To better explain the concept, the leader of the LTTE women’s political wing used a very interesting metaphor.<sup>306</sup>

She used the way mother hen looks after her chicks to represent the way Tamil women behaved when in the LTTE. While being incredibly lovely, the mother hen would immediately attack every enemy menacing the life of her chicks, hawks in this case. Like the mother hen, the LTTE women are doing the same thing: they joined the LTTE to ensure safety to their children by attacking the enemy, the Sri Lankan Army, their “hawk”, without renouncing to their roles of mothers and nurturers<sup>307</sup>, even upgrading it.

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<sup>304</sup> Reuters; *Life as a female Tamil Tiger guerrilla relieved by one of first female soldiers.*

<sup>305</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 41.

<sup>306</sup> A. R. Murray; *Why She Did It: Battle For The Meaning Of The Female Suicide Bombing Attackers Of The Liberation Tigers Of Tamil Eelam*; p. 67.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. Original source: T. Herath; *In My Honour: Contextualising Rape in Suicide Bombing*; in Women’s Global Connection Conference Proceedings; 2006; <http://wgc.womensglobalconnection.org/Conf06proceedings/Herath.T.InMyHonour.pdf> (inactive link).

## Personal motivations

### *Family safety*

*“The State shall recognize and protect the family as the basic unit of society.”<sup>308</sup>*

The Constitution of Sri Lanka speaks clear, family must be protected. Women’s role as nurturer, mothers and houseworkers forces them to spend almost all their time with their families. For this reason, the first personal motivation I want to present is the need of protecting family, simply because women in the Tamil society are more attached to it.

Protecting their family is not only a cooking, cleaning and childbearing affair. As already mentioned, the fear of military attacks, family displacements, the anger for the suffering of the whole community made women believe there is no other choice but take up arms and combat. To see other’s suffering without helping them is not easy and the LTTE offered women a possibility to do something.<sup>309</sup>

Taking into consideration real experiences, interviews reported by D. A. Chawade contained shocking details and confessions:

*“Supersonic bombers attacked St. James Church in Jaffna. The church was completely destroyed. A nursery school nearby, two shop and ten houses in the neighborhood were also destroyed. Around ten persons were killed and many injured. Of the dead, three belonged to the same family. The bodies of the dead were torn and charred. The blown-up parts of all the bodies were collected and buried together. This was one of the most terrible events that I have witnessed and I thought the same can happen to my family and me. I was scared, but was very furious as well. This incident was an eye-opener for me to become a fighter, At the same time, I thought that if I have to protect my family, I should fight the enemy. I was right!”<sup>310</sup>*

Family protection was not only a combat affair, but also an economic one and some women decided to join because they were worried about the economic conditions of their

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<sup>308</sup> Parliament Secretariat; *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*; p. 18.

<sup>309</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; pp. 36 – 38.

<sup>310</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 92.

families, which were constantly displaced. Indeed, one of Chawade's interviewees declared:

*“In 90s, the situation was terribly bad. My family was displaced five times constantly. My parents were daily wagers and we used to get our meals on their daily earnings. We never had a penny in hand every time we got displaced. It was a great struggle to survive.”<sup>311</sup>*

Another way through which women were protecting their families was through their behavior in case of rape. Rape caused dishonor to the family of the victim, so the raped girl used to keep it secret to protect her family. Many times, dealing with the pain without help was unbearable and the girl often ended up being recruited by the Black Tigers.<sup>312</sup> The same discourse apply in case of a failed attack: this is a reason why women were more lethal, because consequences for them in case of failure were worst compared to their male counterpart.<sup>313</sup> This could be seen also as a way to protect their family: it is better to die and accomplish my duty than to survive, dishonor my family, and be tortured till death.

Finally, the concept of family of the LTTE compared to that of the Sri Lankan Constitution is wider. Family metaphors are used not only to attract women but also to incorporate LTTE cadres in the concept.<sup>314</sup>

### ***Personal security, especially from rape***

The way Tamil society view of rape never helped women to overcome the difficulty it creates: women are left alone to address psychological instability, pain, shame and fear. That's why this was one of the most considered reasons why women joined the LTTE, especially Black Tigers. As declared by A. Makshood, women who are raped underwent

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>312</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 53.

<sup>313</sup> This is linked to the concept of normal women, who remained pure 'beautiful souls'. From L. Sjoberg; *Women fighters and the 'beautiful soul' narrative*; p. 65.

<sup>314</sup> N. de Mel; "Agent or Victim? The Sri Lankan Women Militant in the Interregnum"; in *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones*; p. 65.

a double oppression. First, from her rapist; second, from the Tamil society, shaming them for what happened to their bodies.<sup>315</sup>

Practically, the problem of rapes was caused by the IPKF and the Sri Lankan Army. Despite the poor reports about rape cases, a great quantity of interviews I found contained rape as a key push factor towards the Tamil Tigers.

*Table 6: Major offenses committed by Sri Lanka Army personnel between 2005 and 2010 in the North and East.*<sup>316</sup>

CATHEGORY	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL
Murder	1	4	1	1		1	8
Rape	1		1	1		1	4
Sexual Abuse						1	1
Total							13

A. A. Balasingham explained:

- “[...] *Both the military police [Sri Lankan police personnel] had a notorious record of inhuman atrocities against the civilian population. The special commando unit based at Valvettiturai terrorized the civilians by rape, arson, looting and murder..*”<sup>317</sup>
- “[...] *for decades Tamil women have been exposed to violence, torture, murder and rape by Sinhala settlers and their military protectors.*”<sup>318</sup>

The analysis of the rape phenomenon is extremely hard to take. First, between the concepts of victim and perpetrator there is a blurred line. When the woman is raped is a victim but when it became a fighter she is the perpetrator, whether she was a past victim

<sup>315</sup> A. Makshood; *The Ideal of Liberation: Women in Sri Lanka’s Civil*; p. 27.

<sup>316</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis. July 2006 – May 2009*; p. 79.

<sup>317</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*; Chapter “Women in Combat: October 1986 - October 1987”, par. “A Commando Raid”.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid*, par. Military Training of Women Cadres in the East.

or not.<sup>319</sup> Second, a high number of rape cases were not reported due to the stigma related to it.<sup>320</sup>

The problem was all related to the concept of *karpū*.<sup>321</sup> When a girl is raped there are two cases to be taken into consideration:<sup>322</sup>

1. The girl is not married so to redeem her fault she should marry her rapist
2. The girl is already married so her *karpū* is lost forever.

For this reason, the LTTE implemented laws and punishments against those who committed the crime of rape. Moreover, the LTTE did not consider rape as women's fault: the Tamil Tigers justified the abuse by treating it as it was an accident.<sup>323</sup> What seems contradictory is exactly this consideration they had on rape: the LTTE underlined values like virginity and sexual purity but had a contradictory internal "marriage policy"<sup>324</sup> and accepted raped women either way, without pinning them any stigma.<sup>325</sup> An interviewee's explanation reported by Chawade states:

*"The punishment [...] for rape it is life imprisonment, depending on how severe the case is. But if the culprit is a serial rapist, he will get death penalty. [...] It was very important to impose severe punishment against violence against women as the patriarchal system of society always encourages men to push their 'physical and biological strength' on women"*<sup>326</sup>.

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<sup>319</sup> C. Coulter; *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*; pp. 149 – 150.

<sup>320</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 56.

<sup>321</sup> *Karpū* is defined as one of the phases of love. In this phase there is the mutual acceptance between man and women and the official ceremony, namely the marriage. They start their life together as a couple of husband and wife, promising themselves fidelity. After that there is "uta", corresponding to the body union and, finally, the birth of children. From A. Datta; *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*; p. 114.

<sup>322</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 81. Original sources: L. Carpenter; *Virginity Lost: An intimate Portrait of first Sexual Experience*; New York: UP. R. Mahalingham, J. Rodriguez; *Essentialism, Power and Cultural Ideology of Gender*; in *The Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 03(02), pp. 154 – 174.

<sup>323</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 52.

<sup>324</sup> For example, women could not marry before the age of 25 but, on the other side, there was a certain encouragement for martyrs' widows to remarry. From J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; pp. 12 – 13. D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 110.

<sup>325</sup> T. Herath; *Women Combatants and Gender Identity In Contemporary Conflicts. The Case of The LTTE*; p. 164.

<sup>326</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 111.

However, despite the underlining of counter-rape measures, I found no correspondence of words like “rape”, “sexual”, “assault” or “stigma” in Prabhakaran quotes reported and translated by P. Schalk.<sup>327</sup>

Among the most important female figures in the LTTE, Thamilini shared the fear of being raped. Her fear was not only limited to the physical pain she would have suffered or the risk of being killed by her rapist. She feared also consequences like the social stigma and blame.<sup>328</sup> Together with Thamilini, also Dhanu, the very first female suicide bomber of the LTTE, shared a history of rape.

*“[...] Dhanu, who had reportedly been gang raped by Indian soldiers as they looted her town and killed her four brothers. The acts committed against her by the Indian soldiers may have given her a strong personal motivation for an attack against the Indian Prime Minister.”<sup>329</sup>*

In spite of the LTTE protection against rape, the risk of being raped shall be taken to occur also after women joined, only that its possibility is lower. As Y. Tambiah explained, among the most dangerous places for women to be raped there were checkpoints, which they were often asked to look after, and when in custody by the police.<sup>330</sup>

In cases of Black Tigers women, the cyanide pill offered the best solution to avoid being raped when in custody. Indeed, the movement informed women that governmental forces used to rape their custody victims, encouraging them to take their pill.<sup>331</sup>

### ***Attraction from “the spirit of martyrdom”***

Focusing on motivations pushing women to join the Black Tigers, the attraction their pervasive culture of martyrdom provides cannot be underestimated.

Being the LTTE both a secular and a Hindu group, Schalk argued that it has been extremely successful in shifting the concept of martyrdom to a more secular meaning and,

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<sup>327</sup> See P. Schalk; *Reflections of the Leader*.

<sup>328</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 43.

<sup>329</sup> B. A. Howe; “What Motivates Suicide Attackers?”; p. 80.

<sup>330</sup> Y. Tambiah; *Sexuality and Women’s Rights in Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka*; p. 80.

<sup>331</sup> P. Schalk; *Resistance and Martyrdom in the Process of State Formation of Tamil Eelam*; 1997; par. “‘The art of martyrdom’ – and the cyanide capsule...”.

by so doing, it was able to exploit it for its own scopes.<sup>332</sup> Culturally, martyrdom through suicide death is the *tiyakam*, in Tamil language, which means “abandonment” or “a specific type of aggressive mourning behavior” where “mourning behavior” is defined as the negative feeling coming after the loss of a comrade who was also a good friend.<sup>333</sup>

Shifting the attention over female suicide bombing, the attraction provided to them is linked to the perceived equality surrounding men and women in the pursuit of the martyrs’ glory. As already said, the LTTE was able of merging religion and secularity in its usage of martyrdom, that is to say they inserted “the sacred” into their nationalistic objective changing the role of women too, from innocent to protector.<sup>334</sup> As we have already seen, women were also attracted from female models, some of whom were goddesses.

One of the most exploited paradigms to attract women in the LTTE, especially in the Tamil Tigers, was the metaphor linking motherhood with self-sacrifice.

*“The self-sacrifice of the female bombers is almost an extension of the idea of motherhood in the Tamil culture, [as] in this strongly patriarchal society, Tamil mothers make great sacrifices for their sons on a daily basis; feeding them before themselves of the girl children, serving them and so on. [...]”*<sup>335</sup>

A very interesting interpretation of the idea of motherhood is offered from Fuglerud. Motherhood served the Tamil cause to the extent that it defined the territory they are fighting for, the Tamil Eelam. Indeed, since they viewed the land as a Mother, every soldier, be male or female, fallen for the cause is a debt that must be repaid to ensure the fertility of the Motherland.<sup>336</sup> Who could be the best sacrifice for the repayment, if not a woman who embodies sacrifice itself?

On the other side of the coin, if it is true that martyrdom is the extension of motherhood, the contrary is always true as well. Cases of raped or sterile girls, both prevented from marriage and childbearing, could find their peace by joining the Black Tigers and dying

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<sup>332</sup> N. De Mel; *Women & the Nation’s Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century*; p. 223.

<sup>333</sup> P. Schalk; *Bird of Independence: on the participation of Tamil women in armed struggle*; Lanka Publication, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1992; *Resistance and Martyrdom in the Process of State Formation of Tamil Eelam; The Revival of Martyrs Cults Among Ilvar*.

<sup>334</sup> C. D. Ness; *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*; pp. 21 – 22.

<sup>335</sup> A. Gunawardena; *Female Black Tigers: A Different Breed of Cat?* p. 84.

<sup>336</sup> O. Fuglerud; *Aesthetics of Martyrdom: the Celebration of Violent Death among the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*.

for a useful cause.<sup>337</sup> Interlinked to this, another case presented by one of Chawade's interviewees deserves to be analyzed:

*“The LTTE promotes widows’ remarriage within the movement hoping that the society will eventually follow that too. Many of our martyrs’ wives were encouraged to remarry their fellow comrades, and they did so.”*<sup>338</sup>

Maybe this could be another reason for women to join the LTTE: they could remarry, even if they already had a husband; moreover, in an impetus of gratitude, they could be persuaded to join precisely the Black Tigers.

Males and females dying as Black Tigers were, after their death, commemorated during the “Day of the Great Heroes”<sup>339</sup> and their memory was perpetuated by *Ninaivuccinam* known also as “Tokens of Commemoration”. They were pillars, erected by the LTTE and visible from the road, to keep alive the memory of all the martyrs fallen for the Tamil Eelam.<sup>340</sup> Commemoration was another motivation for women to join the Black Tigers: not only the culture of martyrdom but the deification of the same attracted women. Furthermore, families of martyrs were honored as well and, most importantly, the LTTE looked after them through financial resources; indeed, this could provide another encouragement for women to put the cyanide pill around their neck.<sup>341</sup>

*“Death, not life, is celebrated. The greatest feat for a woman is to die a martyr. This celebration of heroic death is an aspect of most nationalist movements, but in the LTTE it is a major factor which determines and conditions the life of women who have dedicated themselves to the cause.”*<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> J. Davis; *Gendered Terrorism: Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*; p. 10.

<sup>338</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 110.

<sup>339</sup> P. Schalk; *The Revival of Martyrs Cults Among Ilvar*; part III.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, part IV.

<sup>341</sup> T. Herath; *Women Combatants and Gender Identity In Contemporary Conflicts. The Case of The LTTE*; p. 192.

<sup>342</sup> R. Ramasubramanian; *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*; p. 12.

## **Idealistic motivations**

### ***Emancipation***

Discussing about emancipation as a motivation for women to join the movement, two cases must be raised:

*“[...] many women have joined the movement at least partly because they see their participation as a means of breaking taboos, and, in particular, destroying the stultifying straitjacket of conformity and subservience traditionally imposed upon them by a rigidly and self-righteously patriarchal society.”<sup>343</sup>;*

which is represented by the testimony of Sudarvili, a female soldier expressing her gratitude to the movement for the support it gave to her and many other female combatants to liberate every Sri Lankan woman from oppression.<sup>344</sup>

However:

*“The majority of the women I interviewed said that they had not been aware of issues surrounding women’s social conditions, women’s rights or equality before they joined the movement”<sup>345</sup>;*

this is exactly Thangaci’s experience, a soldier of the Sea Tigers who declared that if it was not for the LTTE she would have never been aware about her condition.<sup>346</sup>

It is true. Not every woman who joined was aware of her inferior situation but the LTTE was and exploited this awareness for its own advantage. The ideology of the group was clear: women were essential to reach national liberation:

*“Only when women awaken and rise for their own liberation and for a national liberation of the land, that struggle will attain completion as national struggle”<sup>347</sup>*

But the opposite was true as well:

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<sup>343</sup> S. Bose; *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement*; p. 111.

<sup>344</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 30.

<sup>345</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 44.

<sup>346</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 30.

<sup>347</sup> P. Schalk; *Reflections of the Leader*; p. 50.

*“Only by connecting with our liberation movement the women’s group is enabled to win liberation on their road to the aim”<sup>348</sup>*

At this stage, a question springs to mind: was women’s emancipation a cause or an effect of the LTTE struggle? M. Martin gave us her answer. On being emancipation the cause, women are seen as victims; meanwhile, if emancipation is an effect, women are active agent. The reality is that women were “somewhere between ‘agency and victimhood’” but the slope of that “somewhere” towards one or the other direction is revealed only by victims (or combatants?) experiences.<sup>349</sup>

What is clear, by now, is that women’s inclusion in the LTTE did not produce their emancipation.<sup>350</sup>

### ***Obtaining women’s rights (framed by the independence struggle)***

Among the most urgent women’s rights to be obtained by Sri Lankan women were rights related to the sexual behavior and situation and rights related to the participation of women in the public life.

Sexual rights of women are not a reality on its own, they are intermingled with reproductive rights which, in their turn, are bound to political and economic rights.<sup>351</sup> Since the value of a woman in Tamil’s society is measure through her “pre-marital virginity, marriage, motherhood and sexual chastity” it is appropriate to protect those virtues in order to have access to all other women’s rights, even if limited.<sup>352</sup>

Regarding the participation of women in the public life, the testimony of Krishna is inspiring:

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>349</sup> M. Martin; *Women’s participation in terrorism, conflict and violent extremism: Gender equality or pure pragmatism?*; pp. 9 – 10.

<sup>350</sup> T. Gonsalves; *Gender and Peacebuilding: A Sri Lankan Case Study*; p. 19.

<sup>351</sup> Y. Tambiah; *Sexuality and Women’s Rights in Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka*; p.79.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

*“here women do not come forward for anything, they have been asked to keep quiet and do the housework. So the future generation should not be like that, women must be free, socially and economically and they must have a place, equal rights with men”*<sup>353</sup>

Protecting sexual and reproductive rights is essential for a Tamil woman to survive its society; if only her participation to public life was permitted, women’s rights in Sri Lanka would be completely respected.

Unfortunately, the A. A. Balasingham statement *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* never mentioned women rights, except “the right to self-defense and the[ir] right to exercise their patriotic sentiment”.<sup>354</sup>

### ***Liberate the homeland***

The least popular motivation, even if the most obvious, was the nationalistic feeling and willingness to liberate the homeland. As already viewed, women tended to be considered more for their gender objectives and personal motivations; however, Alison interviewees’ individual experiences tell us a different story.

Most of the interviewed women revealed nationalism to be among their motivations, if not the first one. The testimony of Barathy, who was a soldier at the time of the interview, reaffirm nationalism loud and clear:

*“the Sri Lankan Government did not respect our rights, they did not respect us, the Tamil people. We have to have a homeland for us, a separate homeland. We have rights like Sinhalese and Western countries”*<sup>355</sup>

Krishna, on the other side, underlines the necessity of acting through the movement because there is no other choice:

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<sup>353</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 50.

<sup>354</sup> A. A. Balasingham; *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*; Chapter “Historical Background”, par. Women Join the Armed Struggle.

<sup>355</sup> M. Alison; *Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 40.

“[...] you must be parallel to the Sinhalese and live together in harmony with the same status; if not, the Tamils must be separated and live happily with their own self-determination.”<sup>356</sup>

Other testimonies are offered by K. Jordan and M. Denov:

- “We are part of a group to liberate the homeland. The LTTE are fighting for the good of the people.”<sup>357</sup>
- “Because we are part of the country and the people, Tamil females tend to hold personal interest in the cause and join in an effort to support the struggle in order to improve the situation for the Tamil population.”<sup>358</sup>

Testimonies are many more, all expressing a strong nationalistic willingness, and, without a gendered prejudice, we can admit female Tigers were not only poor, raped, desperate and depressed but they strongly believed in the cause they were fighting for and they really thought a Tamil Eelam would have been reached. Oppressed by both Sinhala national chauvinism and society, women raised their heads, proving equality.

### **Other motivations:**

#### ***Revenge for the loss of a loved person***

Revenge is strictly related to the willingness to protect family members. Losing a loved one is always a shock and, if there is a little girl to suffer consequences, it can be fatal. In this respect, a woman Tiger shared her experience:

“My family donated two parcels of food to the LTTE, which almost everyone used to do in Jaffna. For that, [the Sri Lankan Army] arrested my father while my mother was crying, pleading and begging them not to. He was never released. I was just 13 and

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>357</sup> K. Jordan, M. Denov; *Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*; p. 50.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

*became an ardent supporter of the LTTE after this incident, but joined the LTTE when I was 23.*<sup>359</sup>

Though it may be tough for a little girl to endure the death of a loved one, the same happened for boys and men. The experience of the young Sabesan proved it:

*“[...] My uncle was killed by the army [...] Although we were told this we did not know definitely who killed him or how he really died. But the Tigers convinced us. I was very angry. Everyone in the family wanted revenge. I was more convinced that it was my duty by the family honor to take revenge. I was a person who was not much concerned about the war. Tigers recruiters convinced and changed my way of thinking to take revenge.”*<sup>360</sup>

### ***Resignation***

Finally, for those with nothing to lose, resignation got the better. “They were all going die one day, so better die this way”.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> D. A. Chawade; *Roles of Women During Armed Conflict. Narratives of Jaffna women in Sri Lanka*; p. 92.

<sup>360</sup> R. Brett, I. Specht; *Young Soldiers. Why They Choose to Fight*; p. 56.

<sup>361</sup> S. Shoker; *Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined*; p. 43. Original source: M. Trawick; *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood and Play in Batticaloa*; Berkley: University of California Press, 2007; pp. 1 – 165.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS)

#### Introduction and structure of the chapter

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is the second terrorist group I chose to analyze and to compare with the LTTE. ISIS is born as a theocracy, a proto-state based on an extremist interpretation of Islam. The promotion of violence through the revendication and remembrance of the Prophet Muhammad's battle, ISIS fights for the restoration of the Caliphate, in place during the early years of Islam. Ideologically speaking, ISIS predecessor is the 1920s Ottoman Islamist group called Muslim Brotherhood: born in Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood followed Al-Qaeda's ideology and the Jihad, some sources say even Wahhabism. Eschatology<sup>362</sup> is what makes ISIS different from other Islamist group: the strong belief in a judgment day and in the arrival of the messiah (Imam Mahdi).<sup>363</sup>

The chapter is so structured:

1. A brief overview over the **origins of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria**.
2. The second part of the chapter will delineate the position of **women in the Muslim society** in the education and employment fields; in politics, family the legal framework. Presenting the general social situation of Muslim women will be useful to introduce potential motivations for joining terrorism.
3. The "**Women to follow**" paragraph presents the "four pure ladies" from the Holy Qur'an: Lady Maryam (Mary), Lady Khadijah, Lady Fatimah and Lady Asiyah. Encouraged to follow these religious models, women are pushed to sacrifice

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<sup>362</sup> The part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind. From Oxford Dictionaries; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/eschatology>; consulted on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>363</sup> I. S. Osaherumwen, A. K. Mutunrayo; *International Terrorism in the Middle East: ISIS as a Case Study*; par. "Ideology and Beliefs".

themselves for the Islamic State's cause, tirelessly. Those female models' stories represent the values and roles women have to respect while fighting for ISIS' cause.

4. The **roles** of women in the Islamic State which are divided in three macro groups: women as wives and mothers, women as supporters (in the military field) and women as active participants of the fight.
5. The **motivations** of women for joining the Islamic State will be divided like those of the LTTE: social, personal and idealistic motivations.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Here I followed guidelines from K. Jacques, P. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review*.

## **The origins of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)**

The outbreak of Eastern resentment and terrorism is older than we think. Historically speaking, the World War I represented a watershed in the emergence of radicalization and terrorism: the global modernization brought by the Western world made Middle East believe that development will soon benefit its territory. However, triggered by the reaction of the Western World to Eastern requests of self-determination, Arab societies soon understood it was a “one-way” project putting them in a subordinate position.<sup>365</sup>

After the WWI, self-determination was already a distant memory. As a consequence, Arab leaders felt betrayed by Western states and understood the only viable solution to regain honor was to affirm the true nature of Arab societies: the respect of Islamic norms. Trust between East and West was broken, and subsequent steps will be devastating.<sup>366</sup>

When investigating the origins of ISIS, Al Qaeda surely represented its launching pad. In 1979, as a response to the soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the future al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden recruited his first members. The 1980 will see the accession in the movement of Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah whose battle name will resonate for years: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.<sup>367</sup>

Woodward M.’s “Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives” gives us a detailed story of al Zarqawi’s life and project. Al-Zarqawi’s early adolescence was marked by the loss of his father, when he was only 17. After the tragic event, he left school and become involved in criminal activities and drinking. Close to desperation, his mother enrolled him in Islamist courses. She could not have known that those courses would have made his son the mind of one of the richest and most powerful terrorist organizations ever.<sup>368</sup>

The increased interest in Salafism, pushed al-Zarqawi to join the Mujahideen cause in Afghanistan, in 1989. Having arrived too late to participate to their fight against the red army, he remained there as a reporter and started to form his own social network. Thanks

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<sup>365</sup> Willem T. Oosterveld, Willem Bloem et al.; *The Rise and Fall of ISIS. From Evitability to Inevitability.*; pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> I. S. Osaherumwen, A. K. Mutunrayo; *International Terrorism in the Middle East: ISIS as a Case Study*; par. “Historical Background”.

<sup>368</sup> Katarzyna Jasko; Arie W. Kruglanski et al.; *ISIS: Its History, Ideology, and Psychology*; pp. 4 – 6.

to his spiritual teacher, al-Zarqawi's commitment increased but the ultimate push factor was the detention period he and his spiritual leader passed between 1994 and 1999 for the illegal possession of weapons and explosives. Once out of jail, al-Zarqawi convinced Osama bin Laden to provide him financial resources and he opened his first training camp in Western Afghanistan. After that, in 2001, the terrorist cell developed but the American intervention forced al-Zarqawi to move between Iran, Iraq and Jordan in search of the support he found with Ansar al Islam, a jihadist group of the Iraqi territory.<sup>369</sup>

The 2003 represented a watershed: the US invasion of Iraq. The chaos it created, together with the intensification of the conflict between the Sunni and Shia populations, paved the way for Al Qaeda in Iraq, formed in 2004 by al-Zarqawi with the promise of being faithful to Al Qaeda's cause.<sup>370</sup>

*“Still, there is general consensus that without the Iraq invasion in 2003 and what followed after, ISIS would not have existed today”<sup>371</sup>*

In 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed by American forces and was replaced by Abu Hamza al Muhajir. With him the ISI (Islamic State of Iraq), the forefather of ISIS, was formed but its first years were not easy.<sup>372</sup>

Several factors played in favor of an ISI recovery. First, the USA provided the terrorists with a fundamental source (and resource) of leadership formation: Camp Bucca. After the assassination of the two top leaders of ISI, Camp Bucca provided ISI with its new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who revived ISI from the lethargy. First of all, he used the former staff of Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence forces to fill high-rank positions in the ISI hierarchy. Second, the ISI organized “Destroying the Walls”<sup>373</sup> a breakout campaign towards prisons. With the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq,

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Isahosa Stephen O. & Adebayo K. Mutunrayo; *International Terrorism in the Middle East: ISIS as a Case Study*; par. “Historical Background”.

<sup>371</sup> Willem T. Oosterveld, Willem Bloem et al.; *The Rise and Fall of ISIS. From Evitability to Inevitability*; p. 7.

<sup>372</sup> Katarzyna Jasko; Arie W. Kruglanski et al.; *ISIS: Its History, Ideology, and Psychology.*; p. 9.

<sup>373</sup> “In recent statements, ISI outlined two main priorities for the new campaign: first, to secure “releasing of muslim captives everywhere” and second, to “dominate the territory” that was previously controlled by ISI in 2006.” From S. Weyer; *The Islamic State of Iraq and the “Destroying The Walls” Campaign*; p. 1.

in 2011, violence exploded, and the Syrian civil war followed. Exploiting the vulnerability of Syria, al-Baghdadi went for the establishment of a Syrian branch of ISI.<sup>374</sup>

In 2013, al-Baghdadi merged with Jabhat al-Nusra<sup>375</sup>: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was the final outcome. A year after, with the conquest of Raqqa province (Syria), ISIS proclaimed itself “caliphate”, headed by its self-appointed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Katarzyna Jasko; Arie W. Kruglanski et al.; *ISIS: Its History, Ideology, and Psychology.*; pp. 9 – 11.

<sup>375</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra means “front for the support of al-Sham people” (al-Sham is a Syrian region), an extremist Islamic group fighting especially in Syria. From Il Post; *Cos’è il “Fronte al Nusra.*

<sup>376</sup> Katarzyna Jasko; Arie W. Kruglanski et al.; *ISIS: Its History, Ideology, and Psychology.*; p. 12.

## The Structure

*“The Islamic State was a terrorist state, but it was also a modern state. [...] They dressed like they lived in early Islam, but administratively they were excellent and ran the state efficiently.”<sup>377</sup>*

Azzam, a department of electricity’s worker

The most important discovery, fundamental to determine the true structure of the Islamic State, comes from the killing of Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi<sup>378</sup> (known under the pseudonym of Haji Bakr) by rebel forces from northern Syria. Without even knowing it, rebels have killed the “architect” of the Islamic State. 31 pages with schemes, directives and schedules came to light, offering a complete framework of ISIS administrative and Secret Services organization.<sup>379</sup>

Spiegel Online provides us with some original photos<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> G. Abdul-Ahad; *The bureaucracy of evil: how Islamic State ran a city.*

<sup>378</sup> He was the former colonel of the air defence force intelligence service during Saddam Hussein’s reign. From C. Reuter; *Secret Files Revealed the Structure of Islamic State.*

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1: The original Haji Bakr's sketch for the possible structure of the Islamic State administration

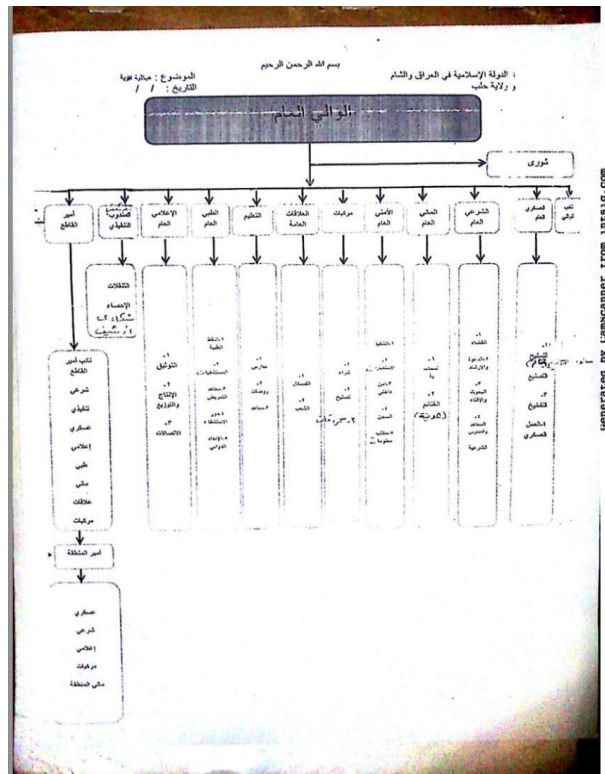


Figure 2: A sketch of Bakr's plan for the establishment of the Islamic State



(Source: Spiegel Online)

To briefly present it, the founded plan contains information and management projects of typically state-owned activities like finance, education institutions, daycare, media and logistics. However, the manic attention for public administration was relative and military priorities were definitely highlighted: surveillance techniques, espionage plans, murder and kidnapping tactics. Moreover, every piece of ISIS administration had its leaders and employees.<sup>381</sup> The Islamic State structure will be analyzed through two separate structures: the governance structure and the municipal administration.

### ***Governance structure***

Thanks to a detailed research from TRAC<sup>382</sup>, the Islamic state's general governance structure can be divided into 3 tiers:

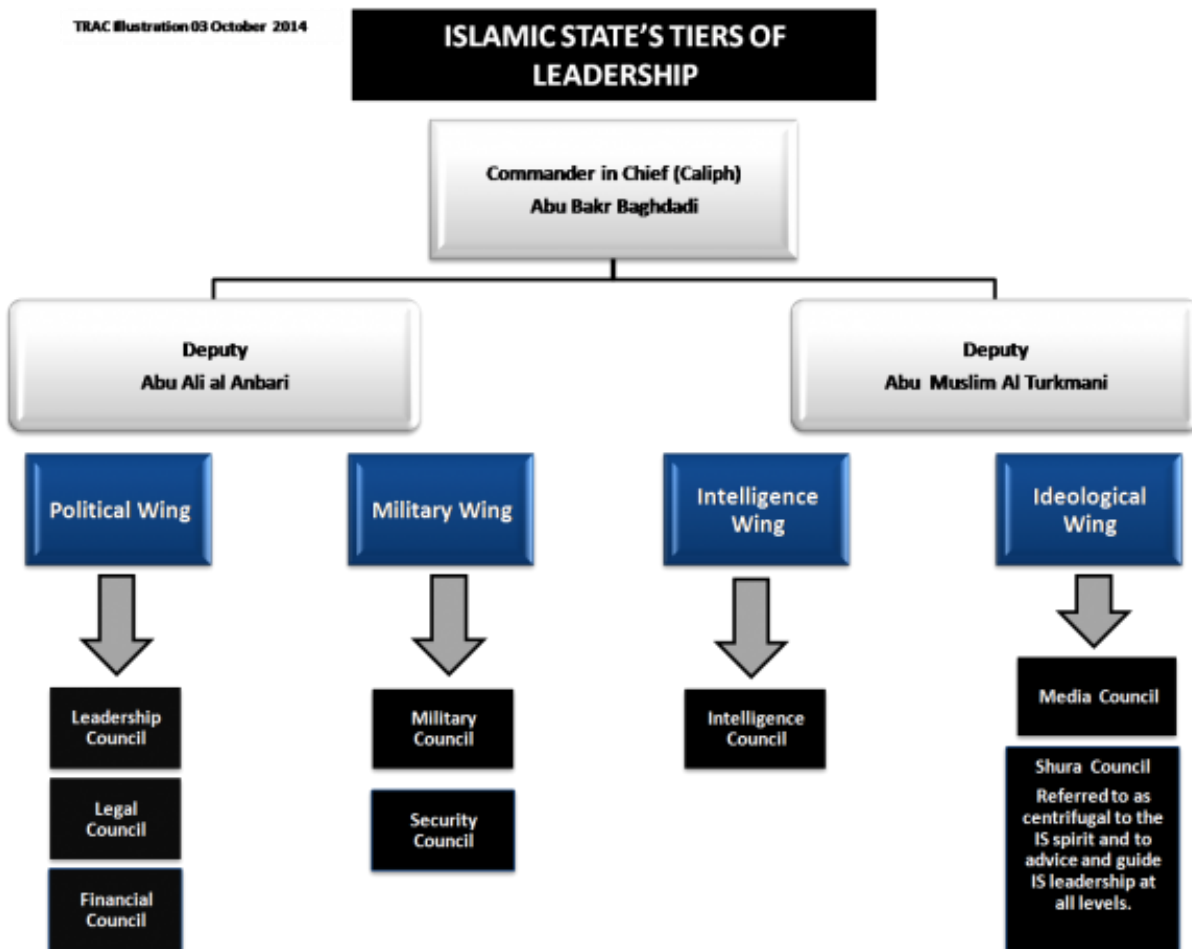
1. First Tier: the top leadership positions which provided an extremist vision, controlled decisions and implemented the group vision within all tiers;
2. Second Tier: the four wings (political, military, intelligence and ideological wings);
3. Third Tier: reinforcement of the control in ISIS controlled areas (**Municipal administration**)

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

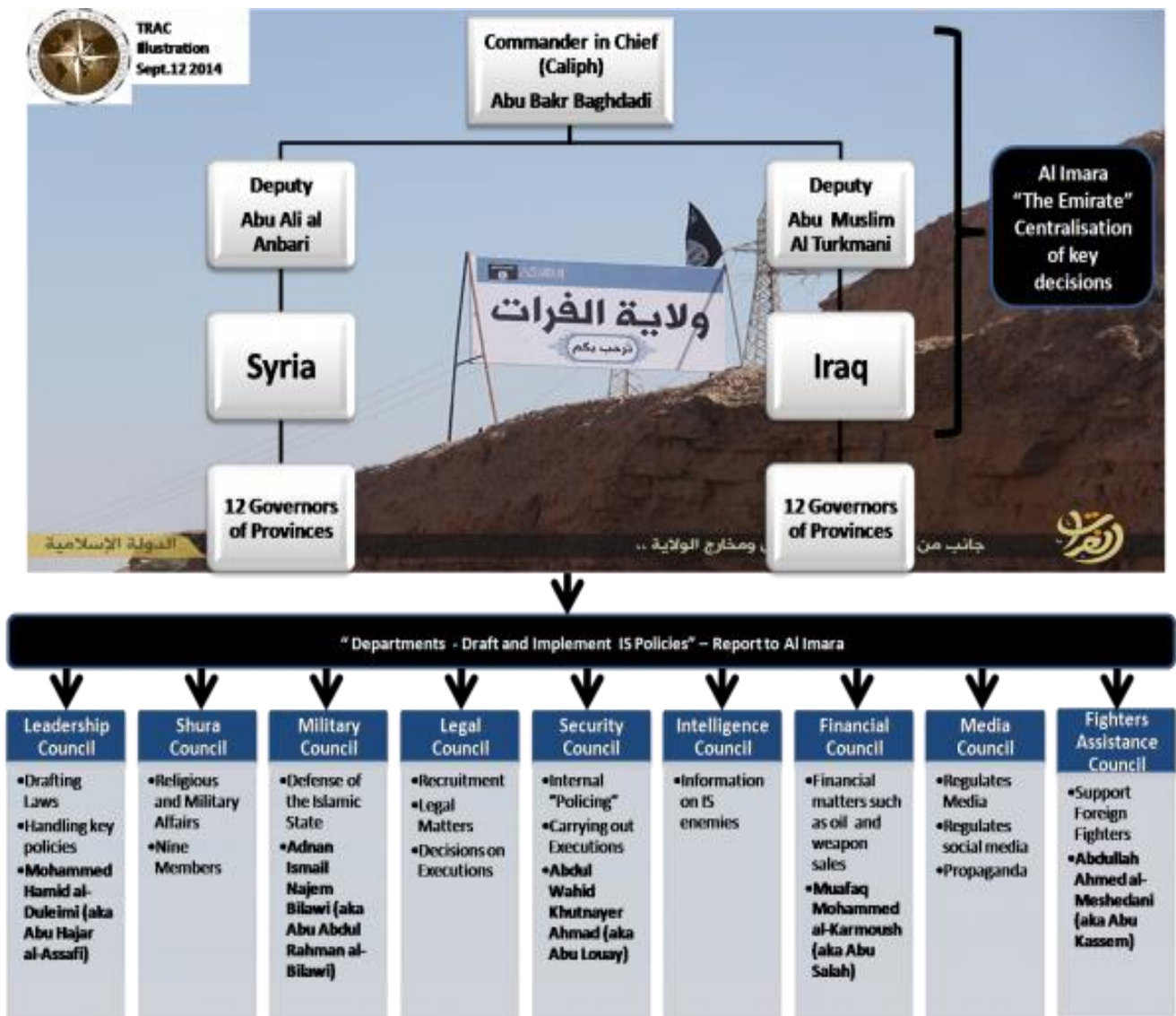
<sup>382</sup> TRAC; *Islamic State (IS / Islamic State of Iraq and ash Sham (ISIS) / Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS or ISIL, IS)*.

Figure 3: ISIS general structure



(Source: TRAC)

Figure 4: ISIS general structure 2



(Source: TRAC)

### First Tier

At the top of the hierarchic structure we found the Caliph, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who is the sole decision-maker whose decision are implemented with no avenue for recourse. He

represented the Prophet Mohammed and shared authority with nobody<sup>383</sup> (even if he took his decisions with the support of his Cabinet.<sup>384</sup>) Although the high centralization of the Islamic State, it covered a large territory; indeed, The Caliph needed deputies: he had one controlling the Iraqi territory, and one controlling the Syrian territory<sup>385</sup> and each territory held 12 governors.<sup>386</sup>

### *Second Tier*

Under the deputies' and governors' authority, four different wings were deployed, each of which grouped different Councils. Here's a brief presentation of the wings and the principal Councils inside them.

- The **political wing** was tasked with communication of instructions and the monitoring of their implementation; and the formulation of policies. It worked in cooperation with the military wing and the support of the **Leadership Council**. It comprehended also the **Legal** and **Financial Councils**.
- The **military wing** managed offensive and defensive projects of the Islamic State as well as deployments and execution. It received support from the both the **Military Council** that drove the campaign to win more territory and defend what was already held (**the Provincial Council** helped it in its scope by acting in each of the ISIS' 18 provinces.<sup>387</sup>) and the **Security Council** that implemented policies and decisions.
- The **intelligence wing** (or **Intelligence Council**) handled the activities of the political and military wings and informed the leader about potential threats and suspect behaviors. Furthermore, the Intelligence Council was also sharing another task with the **Security Council**: the elimination of Caliph's rivals and the rooting

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<sup>383</sup> Col. (ret.) Dr. J. Neriah; *The Structure of the Islamic State (ISIS)*.

<sup>384</sup> N. Thompson, A. Shubert; *The anatomy of ISIS: How the 'Islamic State' is run, from oil to beheadings*.

<sup>385</sup> R. Barrett; *The Islamic State*; p. 28.

<sup>386</sup> N. Thompson, A. Shubert; *The anatomy of ISIS: How the 'Islamic State' is run, from oil to beheadings*.

<sup>387</sup> R. Barrett; *The Islamic State*; p. 31.

of every plot against him; moreover, they were also responsible of his physical security.<sup>388</sup>

- The **ideological wing** had more to do with propaganda: it was central to all the activities of the group, it cooperated with the Media Council in attracting fighters and those who were engaged in its activities were considered to be “at the apex of the chain of leaders”. **The Shura Council** was also inside this wing. Also known as the Consultative Council, it was formed by members appointed directly by the Caliph<sup>389</sup> and it was tasked with conveying directives from him towards the executive branch of the government; after that, it monitored the effective implementation of measures.<sup>390</sup> It was the Caliphate religious monitor that reported directly to the executive branch of Al Imara. It is also said that the Shura Council had the power to depose the leader if he was not acting in compliance with the Shari’a law: this is the utmost demonstration of the prominence of this body.<sup>391</sup>

Even if not illustrated into the TRAC schemes, **the Sharia Council** was another body which deserves to be clarified. It was directly overseen by the Caliph and was the most powerful body of the Islamic State. It was composed by six members and among its most important duties we found the selection of the Caliph and monitoring the compliance of the entire administrative structure with Sharia law. Under the Sharia Council we can find the **Sharia Commission**, which helped the Council with the monitoring of discipline, respect of rules and implementation of penalties. The Commission supervised two sub-bodies: the sharia police force and the sharia courts. The sharia police force supervised the Islamic conduct of the region and it was detached from the civilian police force. The sharia courts were tasked with the management of both religious and civilian disputes and acted like true judicial bodies.<sup>392</sup> Every time ISIS conquered a new territory; the Sharia Council was responsible for the creation of sharia police and courts.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Col. (ret.) Dr. J. Neriah; *The Structure of the Islamic State (ISIS)*.

<sup>390</sup> R. Barrett; *The Islamic State*; p. 29.

<sup>391</sup> N. Thompson, A. Shubert; *The anatomy of ISIS: How the ‘Islamic State’ is run, from oil to beheadings*.

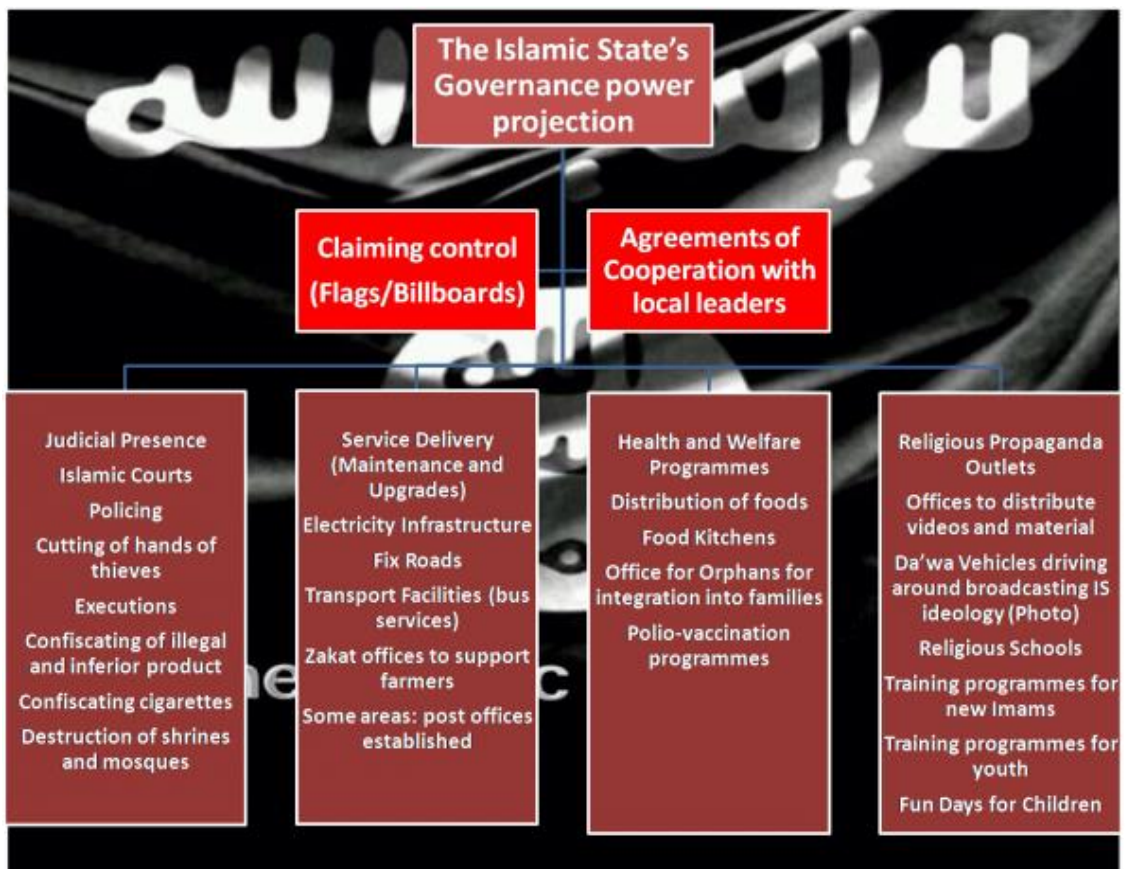
<sup>392</sup> R. Barrett; *The Islamic State*; p. 31.

<sup>393</sup> Counter Extremist Project; *ISIS*; p. 4.

### Third Tier

The last tier of ISIS' structure is a sort of introduction to the municipal administration which will soon be presented. TRAC represented its structure like this.<sup>394</sup>

Figure 5: ISIS general structure 3



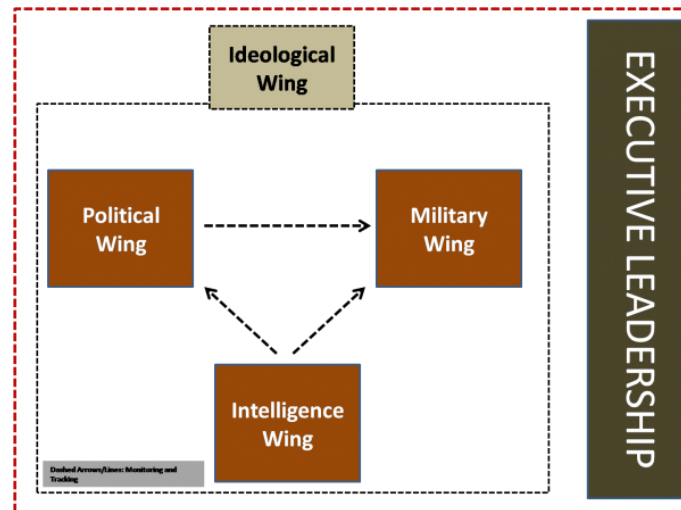
(Source: TRAC)

<sup>394</sup> TRAC; *Islamic State (IS / Islamic State of Iraq and ash Sham (ISIS) / Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS or ISIL, IS).*

Putting things together, the Islamic State’s structure

“shows a relationship of continuous monitoring of the activities of each “Wing” indicated by dashed lines, with reporting and accountability always referred back to the Executive Leadership of the IS.”<sup>395</sup>

Figure 6: ISIS general structure 4



(Source: TRAC)

### ***Municipal Administration***

The Islamic State’s municipal administration is an example of utopian state governed by authoritarianism. Its ideology was founded on myths and its first step was to “purge” the society from infidels and undesirables. At the beginning of its activity, the Islamic State implemented controlling measures, namely an extensive census under which every person and activity was registered. With the establishment of authority, a municipal administration could now be developed.<sup>396</sup>

Every province was provided with a governor, a deputy and a Sharia official to run each province’s administration through offices called *diwan* in Arabic:<sup>397</sup>

<sup>395</sup> TRAC; *Islamic State (IS) / Islamic State of Iraq and ash Sham (ISIS) / Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS or ISIL, IS)*.

<sup>396</sup> G. Abdul-Ahad; *The bureaucracy of evil: how Islamic State ran a city*.

<sup>397</sup> Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently; *The Truth of the Islamic State’s Governance*.

- **The Diwan of Education:** it was responsible for schools, institutes and colleges created by ISIS. All the school subjects charged with polytheism advocacy were eliminated: history, philosophy, art and sociology.
- **The Diwan of Hisba:** this was one of the largest bureaus, tasked with population surveillance, enactment of laws and punishment of offenders. Here many women were employed to enforce laws on the feminine population who could not be touched by male agents. This *diwan* had its own internal structure, presented by official documents. The Hisba of Wilayas, the Hisba of the centers and the Hisba offices were its branches.<sup>398</sup>
- **The Diwan of Soldiery:** it managed the recruitment of children and young men/women, it arranged their salaries and services. Inside it, we found a branch of the Islamic police responsible for the transportation and monitoring of fighters.
- **The Diwan of Health:** it managed hospitals and health centers. Here, women were demanded because male doctors and nurses could not visit female patients.
- **The Diwan of Treasury:** responsible for money collection; and buying and selling of real estate properties.
- **The Diwan of Zakat and Agriculture:** it collected the Zakat tax on shops and crop yields and it distributed the crop cultivations.
- **The Diwan of Proselytizing and Mosques:** this religious office organized mosques' affairs by ensuring every mosque had a uniform for the Friday sermon, that prayers rimes were updated, and it organized religious festivals to recruit children. Furthermore, it hired preachers.
- **The Diwan of Services:** tasked with the management of public services like electricity and water supply, sewage, roads and bridges maintenance. Azzam, the worker whose words appeared at the beginning of the ISIS' structure presentation, clarified The Guardian how the Islamic State ran the distribution of resources:

*“ ”The process of issuing an electricity bill used to take us almost two months,” Azzam said, “When [Isis] came, they simplified the system”. All commercial activities, factories and shops now paid a fixed fee. In residential areas, Azzam said, Isis installed smart meters to provide a set amount of electricity throughout the month. “No one*

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<sup>398</sup> A. J. Al-Tamimi; *The Internal Structure of the Islamic State's Hisba Apparatus*.

*dared not to pay their electricity bill, fearing the horrible punishments of the hisbah [religious police],” he said. Stealing electricity was theft: you could lose your hand.”*

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- **The Diwan of Resources:** responsible for the selling of oil, minerals and antiquities.
- **The Diwan of Fay’ and Ghana’im (War Spoils):** responsible for counting and safekeeping of wealth captured from military operations.

Even though the Islamic State organization could already seem complex, Spiegel, an online magazine, declares that ISIS organization was still not completed after its father’s death. In 2014 ISIS was forced to rapidly abandon its operative center in Aleppo but the exaggerate quantity of files in their hands was impossible to get rid of; as a consequence, a rebel group of Aleppo, the al-Tawhid Brigade, took them over. Spiegel online was given exclusive publication rights by the brigade, all except a list of IS spies inside of the same brigade.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> G. Abdul-Ahad; *The bureaucracy of evil: how Islamic State ran a city.*

<sup>400</sup> C. Reuter; *Secret Files Revealed the Structure of Islamic State.*

## Women in The Muslim Society

For a better understanding of how women are employed in ISIS it is necessary to explore how women are perceived in the Muslim society and what are the roles they use to cover. As we will see, analyzing the living conditions of women will be useful to understand their main motivations for joining ISIS.

### Education and employment

Education, as a duty and as a right, is clearly stated by Imam Khomeini<sup>401</sup> to be universal, without gendered limitations:

*“today’s women, like the men, must be properly educated and concern themselves with the issues (of the day) [...]”*<sup>402</sup>

Indeed, this indicates that the right of education is among women’s rights. To them, access is guaranteed to all types of education and all levels, women and girls receive the same education as their male counterpart and undertake the same examinations. However, there is a divergence among scholars concerning the separation between men and women.<sup>403</sup>

Women in the Muslim society are not only allowed to pursue knowledge and learn but they are also encouraged to do so. In this respect, female models like Aisha (The Mother of the Faithful), Lady Fatimah bint al-Hussein Ibn Ali and many others were employed in religious and mythological stories to push women towards the best of their learning possibilities.<sup>404</sup>

Under the Shari’a Law, the primary duty of every women is to stay at home providing care for children and managing the household. Women’s role in traditional nomadic societies is even more specialized and, for this reason, it has an important consideration. In this respect, the woman is responsible for the production of construction materials and items to be used at home. She manages the displacement and procures supplies of water

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<sup>401</sup> An Iranian religious political leader who made Iran the world’s first Islamic republic, in 1979. From BBC Online; [www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/khomeini\\_ayatollah.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khomeini_ayatollah.shtml); consulted on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>402</sup> Shaw, B. Arezoo (trans.); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 42.

<sup>403</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 20.

<sup>404</sup> A. O. Altwajri; *Women in Islam and their Standing in the Muslim Society*; p. 20.

and firewood. However, she has also the right to work out of her home, even though with some limitations. First, she always needs the permission of her husband or guardian to start an activity outside her household. Second, despite no official text or law ever excluded women from leadership positions, women are often excluded from the latter under the motivation of their “moral vulnerability” and tendency to be source of conflict.<sup>405</sup> On this last observation, the “beautiful soul” narrative is, one more time, extremely influential.<sup>406</sup>

Eventually, the access to education grants women a certain degree of socio-economic opportunities albeit with some limitations. For example, in the religious community the figures of marja’-I taqlid and mujtahid are two important authorities. The marja’-I taqlid is “a scholar of proven learning and piety whose authoritative rulings one follows in matters of religious practice”<sup>407</sup> while the mujtahid is “an authority on divine law who is entitled to give an independent judgment on a point of theology or law”.<sup>408</sup> As Khomeini himself confirmed, a woman can be a mujtahid but not a marja’-I taqlid<sup>409</sup>

*“[to] alleviate the woman from the heavy responsibility of becoming a marja u-t-taqlid”<sup>410</sup>*

The female participation in the public life is also considered. Women generally take part in religious services during feast days but, at higher levels, there is also evidence of women participating in public issues and consultation procedures, occupying administrative positions and even working on the battlefield. Guidelines of modesty and virtue must always be respected so that the gender perspective is kept alive. However, the contemporary Muslim society is now pushing towards a revision of the women’s role inside the community.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; pp. 20 – 21.

<sup>406</sup> L. Sjoberg; *Women fighters and the ‘beautiful soul’ narrative*; pp. 55 – 56.

<sup>407</sup> The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 4, footnote 2.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, footnote 3.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>410</sup> Personal translation. Islamshia (website of the Islamic association Imam Mahdi); <http://islamshia.org/alcune-nozioni-sul-taqlid-hujjatulislam-fallahzadeh/>; consulted on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>411</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 19.

## Politics

*“Women have the right to participate in politics; indeed it is their duty to do so. [...] The Islamic religion is a political religion; everything in it has a political dimension, even its acts of worship.”*<sup>412</sup>

Women in politics have, as their male counterpart, rights and duties. The most important and highlighted right of the Muslim woman is her right to vote and to be voted for; however, the latter has some limitations and it is considered differently depending on the scholars. In particular, contemporary Muslim scholars have called into question the very mechanism of elections: according to them, selecting a leader is not a matter of accepting individual who seek nomination, but it is more appropriate to have the community choosing who to select or nominate for the elections. In this respect, the position of women is not equal to that of men because some scholars stated it is appropriate to give men the opportunity to run for election on the basis of a Qur’an verse:

*“(Joseph) set me over the storehouse of the land: I am a good keeper, knowledgeable”*  
*(Qur’an: 12:55).*<sup>413</sup>

Another important limitation for women’s political career is a ban imposed on them to obtain the role of head of state. This is based on the Hadith<sup>414</sup>:

*“No people will ever succeed if they hand their affairs to a woman”*<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 38.

<sup>413</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 18.

<sup>414</sup> A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Koran. From Oxford Dictionaries; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hadith>; consulted on the 24th July 2018.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

## Family and marriage

### *Family*

Concerning the place of women in their families, M. Chaudhry gives us a schematic framework of the roles a woman has in the Islamic society:<sup>416</sup>

1. Daughter: a good one if she is grown up without distinction from her brothers, this treatment will also grant paradise to her mother and father.
2. Wife: she is the image of her men's character which is established by looking on how he treats his wife. In the Muslim community it is usual to say, "the best from among you is one who behaves best towards his wife".
3. Mother: women who are also mothers have a higher status than men.

As you can see, these roles are all linked to the family environment and they are an effective timeline. The male counterpart has the responsibility of his wife and children maintenance.

*"Men and women are equal in the sight of God, but in view of the differences in their nature, they have been assigned different roles for the smooth functioning of the human society. Women have the unique ability to bear children and to nurture them. Men are physically stronger."*<sup>417</sup>

Therefore, the diversity of function between men and women is determined by biological differences. As M. Z. Khan explained, women are life-givers and have the natural capacity for child bearing while men cannot. Women have the entire responsibility of children, especially in their early stages, while men are only a support.<sup>418</sup> Mothers are considered to have a higher status compared to men because of the noble nature of their responsibility which is not only a matter of infinite love but also a fundamental task for raising a good Islamic society, a holy duty.

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<sup>416</sup> M. Chaudhry; *The Role of Women in an Islamic Society*.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; p. 7.

“[...] *If you raise a good child, that child alone may secure the well-being of a nation, just as, God forbid, if you raise a bad child, he may be the cause of corruption in society. [...]*”<sup>419</sup>

On the other hand, when taking into consideration heavy jobs like military tasks, a woman does not fit with it. Khan also stressed that there is no “superiority” or “inferiority” reference in his discourse but only “natural capacity and proper functioning”. Moreover, he mentioned the women’s vulnerability to manipulation and their need for a male protector who certainly cannot be handled the same. For this precise reason, women are better to stay at home.<sup>420</sup>

### ***Marriage***

Marriage in the Muslim society is among the most important celebrations because it is celebrated twofold: first, it celebrates the elevation of the moral and spiritual consciousnesses of the man and the woman, far from carnal indulgence<sup>421</sup>; second, celebrations are extended to the special function of procreation and the consequent holy duty of motherhood.<sup>422</sup> Hereby, every attitude negatively affecting women’s capacity of childbearing is disapproved. A marriage needs righteousness and the respect of mutual obligations.<sup>423</sup>

A woman can exercise her rights even before the institution of marriage. For example, while writing her marriage contract she can indicate “not to be married with” and she is free to accept/reject a marriage proposal. Scholars have different opinions on whether the marriage has to be invalidated in case of violation of a woman’s rights.<sup>424</sup>

To validate a marriage there are different procedures to be done: first, a public announcement has to be made to ensure the free consent of the two parties and of the guardian of the bride; second, the future husband has to provide for a settlement

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>422</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 23.

<sup>423</sup> M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; p. 10.

<sup>424</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 22.

proportionate to his means, the dower.<sup>425</sup> After the marriage, a series of mutual obligations are put in place: the woman looks after the household on which his man has the last word, the man looks after her woman and children in terms of protection and wealth.<sup>426</sup>

A married woman has also access to a wide range of **property rights**. M. Chaudhry expressed pride for the way the Islamic society granted property rights to women, especially property rights related to marriage:

*“In the United Kingdom, it was only in late 1882 that the first Married Women’s Property Act was passed by Parliament, and before that, a woman could not hold property on her own, independently of her husband, and in Italy as late as 1919. [...] But Islam had proclaimed and enforced the rights of women since approximately the year 600 only through revelation from God, not as a result of women having to fight for their rights.”<sup>427</sup>*

Specifically, a married woman under the Shari’a Law has property rights during, before and after her marriage allowing her to be supported in all stages of her life. For example, a husband is obliged to give her wife a marital gift when they get married and in case of divorce too.<sup>428</sup> In case of death of her husband, a widow is entitled to obtain a share of her husband’s estate which is determined by law.<sup>429</sup>

Concerning a property privately owned by a wife, she is allowed to have whatever property she wants and manage it independently. If she decides to allow her husband to help her with the management of her properties, he can take decisions on them; if not, the wife remains the sole decision maker. The question of inheritance is slightly more complicated: a woman’s share is always a half compared to a man’s, even if they have the same degree of relationship<sup>430</sup>. Except for this, there are no discriminations between

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<sup>425</sup> The dower is different from the dowry which is given to the bride by her parents and guardian. From M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; p. 10.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>427</sup> M. Chaudhry; *The Role of Women in an Islamic Society*.

<sup>428</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 16.

<sup>429</sup> M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; p. 23.

<sup>430</sup> Technically there is no discrimination because men are the sole breadwinner at home and have the entire responsibility of their family’s wealth; hence, giving them more inheritance is considered equal. From Ibid, p. 25. Indeed, no married woman is required to spend money coming from her property or income on the household. From UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 16.

the heirs under the Islamic system of inheritance: for example, there are no rules concerning primogeniture or the exclusion of females.<sup>431</sup>

Back to marriage, the Islamic system also accepts **polygamy**, even if with some limitations. Rules and guidelines were put in place and the number of wives is now limited to 4. The Qur'an clearly states the conditions to be respected.:

*“If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans marry women of your choice – two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one ...” (Qur'an 4:3)*<sup>432</sup>

This means that the fundamental condition for polygamy is to treat wives equally under the emotional, economic and temporal point of view. Moreover, in conditions of war and armed conflict, men die more compared to women so that the number of women disproportionately increases relatively to the men. Indeed, polygamy is not a desire anymore but becomes a necessity for the economic subsistence of women. Morally speaking, polygamy is not stigmatized; actually, it discourages bad moral practices.<sup>433</sup>

**Divorce** is also possible through the respect of a precise procedure. The right to divorce is different for men and women, while men has the right to divorce, women has the right to ask for it.<sup>434</sup> Specifically, a woman stipulates her right to divorce while writing her marriage contract but if she is already married she need to turn to the Faqih.<sup>435</sup> The Faqih will act following a rigid procedure.<sup>436</sup>

1. He evaluates if the complaint is valid;
2. if it is valid, he punishes the man for his behavior and compels him to behave properly;
3. if this measure fails, he grants the divorce.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid, pp. 23 – 25.

<sup>432</sup> UNICEF; *Women's Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 26.

<sup>433</sup> M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; pp. 18 – 21.

<sup>434</sup> UNICEF; *Women's Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 25.

<sup>435</sup> The Faqih is someone who deals with the study of *fiqh*, which is the Muslim Law, composed by law (in the European sense) but also by norms concerning worship. Personal translation, definition from Enciclopedia Treccani; [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/faqih\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/faqih_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/); consulted on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>436</sup> The procedure is judicial “so that the rights of the wife may be fully safeguarded.”. From The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 13 and 34.

It is important to state that the Islamic society never looked upon divorce with favor, be it initiated by a man or a woman.<sup>437</sup> Such a long procedure is a way to give the couple enough time to reflect about their decision, before the divorce becomes irrevocable.

*“Revocable divorce can only be pronounced twice; where after there should be reconciliation in approved form, or final separation with beneficence. [...]”*<sup>438</sup>

The condition for a couple to be back together even after having obtained an irrevocable divorce is hard to manifest.

*“[...] in case she should marry another husband and he too should happen to divorce her, or should die. In such contingency, it would be no sin for them to return to each other, provided they are sure that they would now be able to observe the limits prescribed by Allah. [...]”*<sup>439</sup>

## **Legal rights**

*“In the Islamic system, women have the same rights as men [...]. However, there are some things unlawful for men, because of the corruption they create in men, and others unlawful for women because of their tendency to corrupt women.”*<sup>440</sup>

Generally, a woman’s legal rights are:<sup>441</sup>

- the right to manage her own finances;
- the right of handling her legal matter on her own;
- the right to bring a suit against her husband or any other person before the court;
- the right to be a witness;
- the right of having her legal opinion, judgement and consultation accepted.

A question opens when treating her testimony and opportunity to be a judge. The Shari’a law allows the testimonies of both men and women, in different cases, and as there are

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<sup>437</sup> M. Z. Khan; *Woman in Islam*; p. 12.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>440</sup> The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 35.

<sup>441</sup> A. O. Altwajri; *Women in Islam and their Standing in the Muslim Society*; p. 18.

restrictions for women’s testimony, so there are for men.<sup>442</sup> The majority of Muslim scholars does not allow women to testify in cases of adultery, capital and corporal punishment, marriage, divorce and guardianship but allows them to be witnesses of business and wealth affairs. In this respect, the School of Hanfiya is more specific: it allows two females and one male in all matters with the exception of corporal and capital punishment while birth, breastfeeding and physical issues related to the woman nature are topics in which women have the power to testimony. In case only male witnesses are available it is always possible to have his testimony because “whatever shows clear and credible evidence is valid”.<sup>443</sup> All those limitations concerning the women’s opportunity to be a witness are in place not because of a perceived inferiority of women compared to men but it is a matter of sensibility:

“[...] *considering the fineness of their [the women’s] feelings which prevent them from verifying the details of the event and its circumstances [...]*”<sup>444</sup>

When considering judgeship, the Islamic legal system put some requirements:

- to be conversant with Qur’an and Sunnah
- having the ability of ijtihad<sup>445</sup>

The inclusion of women in the judgeship activity divides Muslim scholars: most of them stated only men can be judges; Hanifi, one of the leading Islamic jurists, stated that women can judge only in matters which are not related to capital punishment and contracts. Other scholars think women can judge every case, basing their assumption on the following Qur’an verse which they establish to be addressed to both men and women:

*“Behold Allah bids you to deliver all that you have been entrusted with unto those who are entitled thereto, and whenever you judge between people, to judge justice. Verily the most excellent is what Allah exhorts you to do: verily, Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing.”*<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Actually, there was no evidence of limitations on men’s testimony.

<sup>443</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 14.

<sup>444</sup> A. O. Altwajri; *Women in Islam and their Standing in the Muslim Society*; p. 18.

<sup>445</sup> Literally it means “to make an effort, to work hard” and it indicates the deduction process of Shari’a laws from their sources. Personal translation. From <https://www.al-islam.org/it/introduzione-alla-shariah-islamica-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi/il-metodo-dell%E2%80%99ijtihad>; consulted on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>446</sup> UNICEF; *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 13.

## Freedom

To conclude the overview of women's condition in the Muslim society I will present a general overview about their liberties and limitations.

What immediately comes to the mind of a Western woman when thinking about Muslim women is the way they dress. Shari'a Law prevents women from being immoral by inviting them to properly cover their body, especially private parts and all those parts which can attract sexual attention. In this respect, the Muslim hijab serves its purpose by covering the hairs and the neck and must be worn every time outside the household, especially when in institutional buildings like the Islamic Ministries.<sup>447</sup>

*Figure 7: Hijab*



(Source: Independent Online; *Police Scotland approve hijab*)

When a woman is in need or wants to move from her house she has to obtain the permission of her husband or male guardian; if she travels she needs the permission of a muhram.<sup>448 449</sup>

In the marriage procedure, a woman cannot marry without her male guardian consent and, if there is no consent, the marriage is automatically invalid. Moreover, a woman cannot

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<sup>447</sup> For examples of cases and exceptions: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 52 – 56.

<sup>448</sup> Someone of the same sex or sharing a degree of consanguinity with the person being made up; if of the opposite sex, thus precluding marriage. From The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 55, footnote 73.

<sup>449</sup> UNICEF; *Women's Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*; p. 26.

be the guardian of another woman or represent her in marriage.<sup>450</sup> However, the School of Hanfiya objected: it is possible to marry without the male guardian consent and a woman can represent another one in marriage because

*“There is no blame on you for what they do with themselves, provided it is reasonable”*  
*(Qur’an 2:240)*<sup>451</sup>

For what it concerns **abortion**, it is not permitted in the Muslim society.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division); *The Position of Women from The Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*; p. 36.

## Women To Follow

The female models women are pushed to follow always present the same characteristics: an endless faith in Allah, altruism, wealth, intellectual brilliance, devotion and perseverance. Since ISIS is known to be a theocratic state, each of the women I will present come from the Qur'an. Given the overlapping of the Islamic and Christian faiths, some of the women presented here coincide with Christianity models.

*“It suffices to say that the best of the women of the world are Maryam bint Imran, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, Fatimah bint Mohammad, and Asiyah wife of Fir'awn (Pharaoh)”<sup>453</sup>*

### Lady Maryam

*“And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed into it of Our spirit. She confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books and she was one of the obedient.” (66:12)<sup>454</sup>*

Lady Maryam, the Arabic name to designate Mary, the mother of Jesus, means “exalted”, “pious worshipper” and in the Islamic culture it represents virtue and piety. The importance of Mary in the Holy Qur'an is given by the appearance of her name. Her mother, Hannah, transmitted to her daughter her same pious and devoted character.<sup>455</sup>

*“[Hannah:] My Lord, I have vowed thee what is in my womb to be dedicated to Thy service. So do accept it of me; verily, Thou alone art All-Hearing, All Knowing...and I have named her Mary, and I commit her and her offspring to Thy protection from Satan, the rejected” (3: 36 - 37)<sup>456</sup>*

The daughter Hannah was given was a blessing from God, since her and her husband Joachim could not have children. Even before knowing the child to be a boy or a girl, Hannah was

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<sup>453</sup> K. Ahmad (translation by M. Qutub); *The First Issue. Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid. The Best Woman of Mankind*; p. 13.

<sup>454</sup> From the Quran. Translation found in The Quranic Arabic Corpus; <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=66&verse=12>.

<sup>455</sup> S. Khan; *Mary, the mother of Jesus, from an Islamic perspective*; from Ayesha magazine, p. 29.

<sup>456</sup> M. J. Luqman; *Hannah, Mother of Mary*; from Ayesha magazine; p. 23.

already sure about his or her destiny. At her third year of age, Mary was brought to the temple and she stepped inside alone, without looking back.<sup>457</sup>

During the first days of her life, Mary lived under the care of the priest Zakariyya and soon proved to be devout and righteous as a God's servant. Indeed, she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus: she was untouched, devout, pure and the sole womb who deserved the hard task. An angel appeared in front of Mary while she was praying, to state what God had designed for her.<sup>458</sup>

Mary is presented in the Holy Qur'an as a model for both men and women. She is an example of advanced spirituality and, with her son Jesus, they are the true example of devotion. Mary is the representation of a soul which have committed no sin and for this reason she is the example to follow in the quest for God. Together with Lady Asiya, who I will present further, she is perfection.<sup>459</sup>

*“Many men reached the level of perfection, but no woman reached such a level except Mary, the daughter of Imran, and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh” (Bukhari)<sup>460</sup>*

To be an example of faith, the Holy Qur'an imposes to follow one of the two as an example; even if not attaining their level of perfection.<sup>461</sup>

The most important feature of Mary as a model is the way she sacrificed everything. She was well-known as a chaste woman who dedicates her life in the name of God; however, she had a son. The sacrifice she made to accomplish what God asked her was her reputation as a chaste woman. Mary was chosen for her fortitude and inner peace which proved to be fundamental in tackling the consequences of Mary's Holy duty. Mary is the example of perfect motherhood:<sup>462</sup>

*“Those mothers and future mothers, who uphold the noble role of the mother, can realize the power of motherhood that Mary actualized. [...]”<sup>463</sup>*

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid, pp. 24 – 25.

<sup>458</sup> S. Khan; *Mary, the mother of Jesus, from an Islamic perspective*; from Ayesha magazine, pp. 30 – 31.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, pp. 31 – 33.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>461</sup> S. B. Ahmad; *Asiya Bint Muzahim*; from Ayesha magazine; p. 34.

<sup>462</sup> T. Rodney; *Mother of the Righteous*; from Ayesha magazine; pp. 56 – 57.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

## Lady Khadijah

Lady Khadijah is born in the 555 CE from a noble family: her father, Khuwaylid bin Asad and her mother Fatimah bint Zayd. Her father was popular for his wealth and leadership in the tribe of Quraysh.<sup>464</sup> Khadijah lost her family soon: her mother passed away in the 575 AD and her father in the 585 AD<sup>465</sup>, while fighting the battle of “Fujjar”<sup>466 467</sup>.

After the death of Khadijah’s father, his inheritance was shared among Khadijah, her brothers and her sisters. Khadijah soon understood the evil nature of wealth and its corrupting feature; furthermore, she believed she could create her own fortune. And so, it was: she soon expanded her family businesses, but she never lost her generosity and goodness; indeed, the profits she made were used to help poor people. Her determination allowed her never to be influenced by other people while taking decisions. She soon became the richest merchant in Makkah gaining the title of “princess of Quraysh” or “princess of Makkah”.<sup>468</sup> Moreover, her infinite purity made her to be called “tahira” which means “the pure one”. Khadijah’s achievements were extremely remarkable in the Islamic society which was patriarchal and “anti-woman” oriented.<sup>469</sup> This was the demonstration of her ability to exploit all her good qualities, namely her extraordinary intelligence, firmness and prudence, her devotion, generosity and virtue, together with her chastity and honorability.<sup>470</sup>

Accounts about her marriage are different: I found evidence of three total marriages from which Khadijah had a total of three children<sup>471</sup>, other sources stated she married only once, with the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>472</sup> The story of their relationship started when Khadijah was in need of an agent for her commercial activity. Khadijah came to know

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<sup>464</sup> K. Ahmad (translation by M. Qutub); *The First Issue. Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid*; pp. 5 – 6.

<sup>465</sup> S. A. A. Razwy; *Khadijatul Kubra, A Short Story of Her Life*; p. 8.

<sup>466</sup> Also known as Sacrilegious War (Harb-ul-Fijar), it started during an annual fair in ‘Ukaz held during the month of Dhul-Qa’dah during which both war and bloodshed were forbidden. The shows of the fair presented scenes of blood and sexual arrangements, even if forbidden. A war exploded between the Quraish and the Banu Kinanah, on the one side, and the Qais ‘Aylan, on the other. From A. S. S. A. Rizvi; *The Life of Muhammad The Prophet*; chapter “Early Years”; par. “Sacrilegious War (Harb-ul-Fijar) and League of Virtuous (Hilful-Fudhul)”.

<sup>467</sup> K. Ahmad (translation by M. Qutub); *The First Issue. Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid*; p. 6.

<sup>468</sup> S. A. A. Razwy; *Khadijatul Kubra, A Short Story of Her Life*; pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 12 – 13.

<sup>470</sup> K. Ahmad (translation by M. Qutub); *The First Issue. Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid*; p. 5.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>472</sup> S. A. A. Razwy; *Khadijatul Kubra, A Short Story of Her Life*; p. 28.

about Muhammad's integrity and ability; indeed, she decided to give him an opportunity. Together with her trusted slave, Maysarah, she sent Muhammad on a business trip in Syria and, once back, Nestora, a Jewish monk, noticed something extraordinary: Muhammad found rest under a tree, well-known for having been a place of rest for all future Prophets only. Maysarah discovered all and immediately informed Khadijah.<sup>473</sup>

The wide range of marriage proposals refused from Khadijah were immediately wiped out by Muhammad. In a moment of reflection, Khadijah told one of her friends, Nafisah, her thoughts about Muhammad: she was sure he was precisely what she was looking for in a man. Thanks to her friend Nafisah who courageously informed Muhammad about Khadijah's intentions and convinced him to accomplish the big leap, Khadijah and Muhammad finally marry. At the time of their marriage, Khadijah was 40 and Muhammad was 25, they had six beautiful children among which another pure and righteous woman was born: Fatimah.<sup>474</sup>

During her lifetime, Khadijah always dedicated her life to the others and her immense generosity completely detached her from wealth and richness which were only secondary to her. Indeed, she too is an important example of self-sacrifice, not only in her duty of mother, but also in her role of woman.

### **Lady Fatimah**

The birth of Lady Fatimah has a story of altruism behind it. When Khadijah had to deliver her, nobody wanted to help her with the labor. However, after sometimes, four women heard the God's call and came to her rescue:

*“O Khadijah! I am Sarah, the mother of Ishaq, and the other three are, Mary the mother of Christ, Asiyah the daughter of Muzahim, and Umm Kulthum, the sister of Moses. We have all been commanded by God to put our nursing knowledge at your disposal.”*<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> K. Ahmad (translation by M. Qutub); *The First Issue. Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid*; p. 7.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>475</sup> WOFIS; *Brief History of Fourteen Infallibles*; chapter: “The Second Infallible, The Daughter of the Holy Prophet Fatimah Az- Zahra’ (Peace be on her)”.

Considered the second of the fourteen Infallibles, Fatimah was born in Makkah, on the 615 AD, as the sole daughter of Khadijah and Muhammad. Five years after, Fatimah lost her mother and, from then on, Prophet Muhammad took care of her.<sup>476</sup> Actually, it was Fatimah who really looked after her father and her devotion to him was so strong that she was soon called “Umm Abeeha” (the mother of her father)<sup>477</sup>. Hard times were coming for Fatimah: the same year of Khadijah’s death also her father’s protector Abu Talib passed away; therefore, Fatimah was the sole who could protect her father. She always sustained him against the daily humiliation he endured by giving support and looking after the wounds non-believers caused him.<sup>478</sup>

*“There was so much respect in the heart of the Holy Prophet for Fatima that whenever Fatima arrived in the mosque of the Prophet, the Holy Prophet stood up to respect her. This gesture was also to show the companions respect for women generally which was lacking in the Arabian society of the day.”<sup>479</sup>*

When Fatimah reached an age making her suitable for marriage, she received many proposals. Her father waited for the Divine order to come and it came with Imam ‘Ali. Fatimah’s joy and acceptance were in her silence, so the marriage was decided. The union gave Fatimah four children.<sup>480</sup>

At the time of her marriage, Fatimah inherited a great territory from her father, the Fadak, which was her absolute property. When the Holy Prophet died, Fatimah was left with difficulties: the loss of her father was a strong hit on her and her grief was inconsolable, her Fadak was usurped;<sup>481</sup> moreover, her husband Imam ‘Ali refused to ally with Abubakr<sup>482</sup> so the door of their house was burnt down and Fatima was wounded, losing

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> B. S. al-Qurashi; *The Life of Fatimah Az-Zahra’, The Principal of all Women: Study and Analysis*; p. 37.

<sup>478</sup> S.M. R. Shabbar; *Story of the Holy Ka’aba And its People*; chapter: “The Story of Hazrat Fatima, daughter of the Holy Prophet”.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, par. “Children”.

<sup>480</sup> WOFIS; *Brief History of Fourteen Infallibles*; chapter: “The Second Infallible, The Daughter of the Holy Prophet Fatimah Az- Zahra’ (Peace be on her)”, par. “Marriage”.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, par. “The Property of Fadak”.

<sup>482</sup> Muhammad’s Caliph (successor). From Treccani Encyclopedia;

<http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/abu-bakr/>.

her fifth unborn child.<sup>483</sup> The grief was too much to endure and, after only 75 days, Fatimah died too when she was only 18.<sup>484</sup>

Fatimah's name is remembered in its infinite forms: the Islamic culture named Fatimah using eight different epithets and four different surnames. Among the most heard epithets we found Az-Zahra' (shining) and As-Siddaqaah (truthful woman). Umm Abeeha, which I mentioned before, was among her surnames.<sup>485</sup>

The fourteen Infallibles often referred to her as an exemplary woman in Islam. The words of her own father Muhammad proved it when he referred to her as "the bright star of guidance".

*The prophet was with one of his companions and he said.*

*PROPHET: "Look for the sun; when the sun is hidden in the night, look for the moon. When the moon is hidden, search for Venus, the evening star; and when that, too, is hidden, look for the two bright stars in the Ursa Minor"*

*COMPANIONS: "O' Prophet of God. Who is the sun?"*

*PROPHET: "I am the sun"*

*COMPANIONS: "Who is the moon?"*

*PROPHET: "Ali"*

*COMPANIONS: "Who is Venus?"*

*PROPHET: "Fatima"*

*COMPANIONS: "Who are the two stars in the Ursa Minor?"*

*PROPHET: "Hasan and Husayn"<sup>486</sup>,<sup>487</sup>*

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<sup>483</sup> S.M. R. Shabbar; *Story of the Holy Ka'aba And its People*; chapter: "The Story of Hazrat Fatima, daughter of the Holy Prophet", par. "Children".

<sup>484</sup> WOFIS; *Brief History of Fourteen Infallibles*; chapter: "The Second Infallible, The Daughter of the Holy Prophet Fatimah Az- Zahra' (Peace be on her)", par. "Death".

<sup>485</sup> B. S. al-Qurashi; *The Life of Fatimah Az-Zahra', The Principal of all Women: Study and Analysis*; p. 37.

<sup>486</sup> Two of Fatimah's children.

<sup>487</sup> Z. I. Sarraf, S. M. H. S. Turab; *Fatima Zahra in the words of the Infallibles*; par. "Fatima al-Zahra in the words of Prophet Muhammad", subpar. "Fatima – the bright star of guidance".

## Lady Asiya

*“And Allah has set forth an example for those who believe, the wife of Fir'aun (Pharaoh), when she said: "My Lord! Build for me a home with You in Paradise, and save me from Fir'aun (Pharaoh) and his work, and save me from the people who are Zalimun (polytheists, wrong-doers and disbelievers in Allah).” (66:11)<sup>488</sup>*

The story of Lady Asiya begins in Egypt: she is the wife of the Pharaoh, a man corrupted by his power. Once he heard the prophecy about Moses, a man who will destroy his kingdom, he immediately ordered the death of all male children and give to mid-wives the task to examine all pregnant women in order to be sure about the sex of each child. Moses' mother did not trust the mid-wife coming to her so, hearing Allah's advice, she put her baby in a wooden basket and entrusted him to the Nile's waters. Asiya was the one who saved him: when she found him, she was so enchanted by what happened that she decided to bring the baby to the Pharaoh, to ask his approval for adopting him. Asiya's courage was well rewarded and the baby was accepted. Having heard the news, many wives came to the Pharaoh to feed the little child, without results. Moses mother came to know it so, after her sister proposed her as the child's wet-nurse, she came up be the wet-nurse of her own son.<sup>489</sup>

In this respect, the stories of Asiya and Moses' mother, whose name is Eucabid, are strictly connected. Both of them are brave, have faith and are just. Eucabid is the model for piety and reliance on God; on the other hand, Asiya represents compassion, righteousness and strength. Both of them are reminding the power of women not only in their own generation but also in the future ones, especially the power they have in their relationship with God.<sup>490</sup> Asiya sacrificed everything for Moses: she was the Queen of Egypt but instead of enjoying wealth, richness and materialistic pleasures she chose to be closer to God. She soon developed monotheistic beliefs and when Pharaoh discovered it, he punished her so severely that she died because of his tortures.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> From the Holy Quran. Translation found in The Quranic Arabic Corpus; <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=66&verse=11>.

<sup>489</sup> A. M. B. Majlisi; *Hayatul Qulub - Vol. I Stories of the Prophets*; pp. 359 – 361.

<sup>490</sup> N. J. Bashir; *Eucabid and Asiya – Demonstration of Courage and Love*; in Ayesha magazine; pp. 58 – 63.

<sup>491</sup> S. B. Ahmad; *Asiya Bin Muzahim*; in Ayesha magazine; p. 36.

In the respect of her life, the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Islamic tradition are different. The Bible told us it was Bithiah, the daughter of the Pharaoh, to rescue Moses, while the Qur'an declared it was Asiya.<sup>492</sup> Nevertheless, what is clear is what Asiya represents:

*“[...] the wife of Pharaoh represents those believers who fervently pray to get rid of sin but cannot fully remove themselves from strong evil influences, represented by the Pharaoh, and having arrived at the spiritual stage of the self-accusing soul, still stumble.”<sup>493</sup>*

Together with Lady Maryam, she is the other woman whose name is mentioned in the Qur'an, twice.<sup>494</sup> The notable point she is well-known for are:<sup>495</sup>

- her righteous rebellion: she rebelled against her tyrannical husband and never submitted to him. Contrarily, she submitted to God and resisted in her monotheistic faith;
- her independence: she was spiritually independent from her husband;
- her rejection of material wealth;
- her asking for a home: she asked God for a home where she could find peace and shelter, in paradise, next to Him;
- her status as martyr: in their path to God only two women became martyrs: Lady Asiya and Lady Fatima. This status has a high value in the Islamic culture.

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<sup>492</sup> N. J. Bashir; *Eucabid and Asiya – Demonstration of Courage and Love*; in Ayesha magazine; p. 60.

<sup>493</sup> S. B. Ahmad; *Asiya Bin Muzahim*; in Ayesha magazine; p. 34.

<sup>494</sup> F. Meghji; *A Woman of Paradise: The Rebellious Queen of Pharaoh Part 1*; p. 92.

<sup>495</sup> F. Meghji; *A Woman of Paradise: The Rebellious Queen of Pharaoh Part 2*; pp. 58 – 67.

## Roles

Due to the old public-private dichotomy, women have hardly been allowed to combat or participate in military activities. However, the kind of terrorism ISIS perpetrates has its negative side: suicide attacks and suicide missions made casualties but the only sure loss it incurs in is the death of the attacker. Indeed, the shortage of men increased women participation a lot, especially in Islamic terrorism.<sup>496</sup>

Despite their significant presence, the role of women in ISIS is not so detached from women's classical role in the Islamic society. The general principle is the "behind the scene" rule: being good wives and perfect mothers resumes female responsibilities pretty well;<sup>497</sup> moreover, roles of wives and mothers are also perfectly intermingled with women's participation in morally-based activities.<sup>498</sup>

Every woman, once arrived in the Caliphate, is hosted into a *maqar*, an all-female safehouse. Inside it, women are "distributed" among the male combatants to be married with and they are prepared for their *mujahidin* role.<sup>499</sup> Their role will be delineated not only by cultural and religious norms but also by the type of Jihad. As explained by K. Kneip, Jihad can be considered as *fard kifaya* (with the participation of part of the Muslim community) or as *fard'ayn* (with the participation of the entire Muslim community). In the latter case, women are allowed to join the Jihad respecting the rules of their own *female jihad*.<sup>500</sup> The word *Jihad* is translated in English as "to struggle"; however, its meaning is not limited to the armed struggle. In ISIS's acts there is a direct link between the religious and political character. Indeed, women are doing *Jihad* to the extent that, as mothers, they are acting politically because they aim at raising and educating children through the ISIS' creed.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; p. 22.

<sup>497</sup> R. de Bont, D. Weggemans, et al.; *Life at ISIS: The Roles of Western Men, Women and Children*; p. 12.

<sup>498</sup> A. Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State*; p. 78.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid; p. 79.

<sup>500</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 91.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

As will be presented, roles' assignment for both men and women starts at a tender age and with the beginning of their scholastic formation they are also prepared for their jihadists' roles.<sup>502</sup>

Since ISIS is an international terrorist group, it is crucial to present where these women come from, how they are recruited, what is their social group and how much they are involved in terrorist attacks. We can divide the women's nationality between local and Western; the latter group is the very focus of ISIS women's literature that is why Western women are always overrepresented in researches. For example, Syrian and Iraqi women represented only 7% of the total which is dominated by foreign citizens (82.2%). The rest is unknown.<sup>503</sup>

Table 7: Western women presence in ISIS

Country	Percentage of women who have travelled abroad to join a terrorist group	Number of female foreign fighters (best estimate or most available data) Note: the percentage is from separate data, and may not represent the proportions in the previous column)	Total number of foreign fighters
Australia	15%		
Austria	6.5-19%	59	300
Belgium	12%		478
Azerbaijan		200	
Canada	20%		

<sup>502</sup> R. de Bont, D. Weggemans, et al.; *Life at ISIS: The Roles of Western Men, Women and Children*; p. 13.

<sup>503</sup> A. Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State*; pp. 92 - 93.

Country	Percentage of women who have travelled abroad to join a terrorist group	Number of female foreign fighters (best estimate or most available data) Note: the percentage is from separate data, and may not represent the proportions in the previous column)	Total number of foreign fighters
Denmark	10%		
Finland	20%		
France	38%		1910
Germany	20%		915
Jordan			3000
Morocco	17%		1623
Netherlands	40%		
Russia		512	3417
Saudi Arabia			3244
Spain	10%		
Sweden	24%		300
Switzerland	10%		
Tunisia	12.5%	700	2926-5500
United Kingdom	7.5%		850
United States			129

(Source: J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between.*)

To recruit them, ISIS pushes on their need of economic and personal security. The story of a woman from the Spanish city of Ceuta, reported from the Carter Center, proves it.<sup>504</sup> The strategy of recruitment is a unique social media campaign, tailored precisely for Western women: through an in-depth listening process of those women's frustrations, dissatisfactions and bad living conditions, ISIS recruited huge numbers of women especially from the Western world. Their digital campaign ranged from Facebook to Instagram, from KIK to WhatsApp, through YouTube and Ask.FM too.<sup>505</sup>

<sup>504</sup> The Carter Center; *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda*; p. 4.

<sup>505</sup> A. Perešin; *Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS*; pp. 25 – 26.

Women's age varies from the preteen (11 – 13) till adult (25+) and their level of technical expertise is different, but the majority stands at a low level (91.6%). When married with a jihadist, women's rank immediately fits their men's one; moreover, women's roles often depended on their husband rank.<sup>506</sup>

To introduce the argument, women's roles are classified into:<sup>507</sup>

- being good wives and “ideologically devote mothers that are ideologizing the next generation of jihadists”;
- supporting roles; and
- active roles.

### **Being good wives and “ideologically devote mothers that are ideologizing the next generation of jihadists”**

This is considered one of the dominant active roles of women but, since it is different from active roles to the extent that it does not include active participation in military activities, it deserves a separate analysis.

Being mothers means, first of all, being wives. The first responsibility for every Muslim woman is to take care of her husband through supporting him and maintaining the household.<sup>508</sup> Women are extremely important for men, especially because they can make sure that they are always motivated and focused<sup>509</sup> becoming “mothers” for their husbands. In case of their husbands' death, women are encouraged to view the event not as a painful experience but as an honor and a privilege which has to be hoped for.<sup>510</sup>

This natural function of women is underlined by ISIS through a strong criticism towards the Western idea of women: by criticizing the West, ISIS presents itself as a model to follow and, by so doing, propagandizes itself as the savior of corrupted women with the ultimate function to attract women from Western countries. Female members of ISIS

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<sup>506</sup> A. Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State*; pp. 93 – 96.

<sup>507</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>508</sup> A. Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State*; p. 79.

<sup>509</sup> S. De Leede, R. Haupfleisch, et al.; *Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalized, and how to empower them to prevent radicalization*; p. 26.

<sup>510</sup> CODEXTER; *The Roles of Women in Daesh*; p. 6.

marry at the tender age of 16 or 17 and, from then on, they will perform a wide range of activities among which being a good wife for her husband and birthing the next generation of jihadists through educating them with ISIS precepts are taken for granted. It seems ISIS wanted women to be “jars” filled with traditions and social norms to be transmitted to future generations.<sup>511</sup>

The extreme attention given to motherhood is demonstrated by an education structure specifically tailored to prepare future mothers: the Al-Zawra female finishing school. As the first school with this approach, Al-Zawra aims at raising ideologically motivated mothers with a combination of schooling and military training. E. Kulze presents it in detail:

“[Al-Zawra school] *isn't for just any women, but for those who are “interested in explosive belt and suicide bombing more than a white dress or a castle or clothing or furniture”*”<sup>512</sup>

In preparation for their roles as *mujahidin*, women are offered classes in five areas:<sup>513</sup>

1. domestic work: sewing, cooking;
2. medical first aid;
3. Islam and Sharia law;
4. weaponry;
5. social media and computer programming for editing and design.

Moreover, the institute’s website provides for exercises and tips for women who want to train alone.<sup>514</sup>

The importance of education in the fulfilment of women’s role of mother and wife is underlined by the *Women of the Islamic State* manifesto. Written by women engaged in the Al-Khanssaa Brigade, this document stated:

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid, pp. 80 - 81.

<sup>512</sup> E. Kulze; *ISIS Opens A Jihadi Finishing School for Women*.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

*“She cannot fulfil this role if she is illiterate and ignorant, though. Hence, Islam does not ordain the forbidding of education or the blocking of culture from women.”*<sup>515</sup>

On the contrary, ISIS is highly interested in the education of its women and already projected how they should be educated. The Al-Khanssaa brigade’s manifesto presented a schematic structure of education through which every girl must learn, a sort of curriculum:<sup>516</sup>

- age 7 – 9: girl must be educated in three subjects, namely *fiqh* and religion, written and read Quranic Arabic and science such as accounting and natural sciences
- age 10 – 12: religious studies will be amplified, especially *fiqh*, and will be more focused on women regarding rules for marriage and divorce. Furthermore, girls will be taught cooking, sewing and knitting.
- Age 13 – 15: there will be a focus on Sharia law and manual skills, useful for raising children, the study of science will be reduced to leave space for Islamic history, the life of the Prophet and his followers.

## **Supporting roles**

### *Support in families*

The first supporting role a woman can have is the already mentioned “familiar support”: the support a woman provides to her own husband to keep him concentrated on the *jihad*. In this respect, an analysis by K. Von Knopp explains that women are not interested in pursuing *sharaf* (the male’s honor) but they are bound to their own *ird* (female honor): the concept of power for men and women is different and related to the social role assigned to them. For example, women who have always been far from having a public relevance perceive their role as “husbands’ supporters” as a way of having public influence on the struggle.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; p. 18.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>517</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 91,

Different issues of *Dabiq* magazines resume the “five ways to please your jihadi husband”.<sup>518</sup>

1. “Have loads of children”: “*As for you, O mother of lion cubs...And what will make you know what the mother of lion cubs is? She is the teacher of generations and the producer of men. [...] So have you understood, my Muslim sister, the enormity of the responsibility that you carry?*”<sup>519</sup>
2. “Be positive of polygamy”: “*And every sister should know that when her husband wants to marry another woman, it’s not obligatory for him to consult her, not to seek her permission, nor to try and appease her. If he does that, it is an act of generosity on his part and a means of preserving the companionship between the two of them.*”<sup>520</sup>
3. “Mourn his death appropriately”: “*Ihdād – according to the Sharī’ah – is for the widow to stop adorning herself with jewelry, perfume, decorative clothing, and anything else meant to beautify oneself. This is an obligation during the ‘iddah for all women whose husbands have passed away.*”<sup>521</sup>
4. “Encourage him to fight”; and
5. “Be supportive”.

### **Propaganda**

Women have demonstrated to be highly performative also in the realm of propaganda. As already stated, ISIS used its strong criticism towards Western countries to attract women into their territory. The distribution of this online propaganda is often a task of women who play a fundamental role despite their limitations in the use of Internet.<sup>522</sup> Female members are responsible for the distribution of jihadi ideology, the glorification of their struggle, for encouraging violent acts against the Western enemies, and for helping future members to travel in Syria through giving them advice and tips to avoid being discovered

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<sup>518</sup> T. Silverman, C. J. Stewart; *Women in Islamist Extremist Magazines: ‘Five Ways to Please Your Jihadi Husband’*.

<sup>519</sup> Umm S. al-Muhājirah; *A Jihād Without Fighting*; in *Dabiq* magazine, iss. 11; p. 44.

<sup>520</sup> Umm S. al-Muhājirah; *Two Three Or Four*; in *Dabiq* magazine, iss. 12; p. 22.

<sup>521</sup> Unknown author; *Advice on Ihdād*; in *Dabiq* magazine, iss. 13; p. 24.

<sup>522</sup> R. de Bont, D. Weggemans, et al.; *Life at ISIS: The Roles of Western Men, Women and Children*; pp. 12 – 13.

by authorities. In this respect, once recruited as propagandists, Western women are extremely powerful in their task because they declare their preference for Sharia law over the Western customs. Moreover, women organize all-female study groups.<sup>523</sup>

An example of what ISIS propaganda produced is the *Dabiq* magazine. It was published regularly and translated into English, French and German to reach a wide audience. The esthetics of the magazine seem equal to any other magazine: professional photos and well written articles. The magazine was a report of ISIS victories as well as of religious teachings and an information source for social activities.<sup>524</sup>

Another online magazine to be written from women was *Rumiyah* (an Arabic name for Rome<sup>525</sup>).<sup>526</sup> Compared to *Dabiq*, it was slimmer in the number of pages, more or less 40 vs. the 80 pages of *Dabiq*, but it maintained the same graphic structure. The chosen title is linked to the Italian city of Rome: *Rumiyah* is the term indicating a prophetic motto about Rome and its conquest.<sup>527</sup>

*“Oh muwahhidin, for Allah, we will not stop in our jihad if not under the Rumiyah’s (Rome’s) olive trees”*<sup>528</sup>

Online activities passed also through social media. ISIS allowed its female members to be active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Umm Laith is the best-known women to be engaged in this kind of activity, for example she gave women advice on how to abandon their Western life in Britain and embrace the philosophical creed of ISIS. The measure seemed working: a high number of pro-ISIS tweets published every day came from Western women.<sup>529</sup> Dr. E. Saltman, a researcher from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue commented:

*“Previously jihad was laced in mystery, but now Isis allows for its male fighters and women to tweet about what they are eating for dinner, as well as to talk about life in the*

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<sup>523</sup> S. De Leede, R. Haupfleisch, et al.,; *Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalized, and how to empower them to prevent radicalization*; pp. 26 – 27.

<sup>524</sup> A. Mah-Rukh; *ISIS And Propaganda: How ISIS Exploits Women*; pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>525</sup> T. Ghosh, P. Basnett; *Analysis of Rumiyah Magazine*; p. 16.

<sup>526</sup> Some articles written from women are cited in L. Dearden; *Isis calls on women to fight and launch terrori attacks for first time*; and in Z. O’Brien; ‘You’re SPOILING MY JIHAD’ Euro ISIS terrorists slams Muslims who ‘do not understand Islam’.

<sup>527</sup> V. Colombo; *Rumiyah, La Rivista dell’ISIS Per La Conquista Di Roma*.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> F. Gardner; *The crucial role of women within Islamic State*.

*field, to glorify martyrdom online, this is really a gamechanger compared to other jihadist groups of old*<sup>530</sup>

Furthermore, ISIS had also developed its own app “The Dawn of Glad Tidings” (or “The Dawn”) that was downloadable from Google Play Store. After the user’s registration and the payment of a small money amount, the app provided for uploads on ISIS’ activities through tweets, links, hashtags and photos.<sup>531 532</sup>

### ***Facilitators***

Women in the role of facilitators are engaged in secondary tasks, not directly linked with fighting. According to a study by the Committee on Women’s Right & Gender Equality of the European Parliament, the activities of facilitators include:<sup>533</sup>

- raising funds;
- purchasing and shipping of military equipment; and
- the management of information.

The activity of raising funds is documented by the already mentioned *Rumiyah* magazine that inform readers about limitations in the role of women when directly linked to the military activity; hence, it declares women are engaged in the collection of funds.<sup>534</sup> In a recent case, in January 2018, a 40-year-old female ex-federal worker, was accused of having transferred between 24,000 to 30,000 Australian dollars to the Islamic State, in 2015.<sup>535</sup> Advanced financial technology is also used for the intent: in the United States a woman transferred funds to ISIS through Bitcoin, donating over \$85,000.<sup>536</sup>

Women who funded ISIS were motivated also by their sons’ participation in the movement: this was the case of Nathalie Haddadi, a Frenchwoman whose son was killed while fighting for ISIS in 2016; and of a British family composed by Sally Lane and John

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<sup>530</sup> L. Smith; *ISIS: The ‘central’ role of women in forming the next jihadist generation*.

<sup>531</sup> The app has now been shut down. Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> F. Paci; *App e social media aiutano i jihadisti nella marcia verso Baghdad*.

<sup>533</sup> S. De Leede, R. Haupfleisch, et al.; *Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalized, and how to empower them to prevent radicalization*; p. 28.

<sup>534</sup> F. Gaud, J. Lisiecka; *Women in Daesh: Jihadist ‘cheerleaders’, active operatives?*; p. 2.

<sup>535</sup> A. Baidawi; *Ex-Federal Worker in Australia Accused of Financing ISIS*; The New York Times.

<sup>536</sup> K. Hannam; *An American Woman Used Bitcoin to Sent Money to Islamic State*; fortune.com.

Letts who sent money to their jihadi son, Jack Letts. Nathalie Haddadi was charged with financing terrorism and sent in prison for two years. In an interview for the CNN she declared “[...] I sent altogether 2,800 euros in several transfers”.<sup>537</sup> The case of the British family was different because their son suffered from severe obsessive-compulsive disorder as a teenager; indeed, his family sent him money to ensure him a healthy living. His father declared:<sup>538</sup>

*“I think it’s crazy that we can’t send a penny to our ill son to help him get out or to help him in any way because we’ll be seen as supporting terrorism.”*

Women engaged in the procurement of military equipment have been found in the United States. Discovered in February 2015, their names are Jasminka Ramic, Mediha (Medy) Salkicevic and Sedina Unkic Hodzic and they were arrested for giving both funds and military equipment to ISIS. From the United States they were able to send uniforms, surplus gear, combat boots, rifle scopes and other weapons. The three women were engaged in different roles and had a different relevance in the process.<sup>539</sup>

The management of information function included intelligence gathering and the sharing and delivery of messages, especially between local and foreign operatives.<sup>540</sup> One more time we found a case in the United States. Safya Roe Yassin started her activity transmitting threats to the federal government then enlarged her effort by creating multiple social media accounts and promulgating her sustain for ISIS. Finally, she was recorded by the FBI while revealing the identities of three federal employees.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> B. Jones, M. Bell; *The mothers caught between the law and their jihadi children*.

<sup>538</sup> C. Johnston; *British parents arrested and bailed after trying to send money to son in Syria*.

<sup>539</sup> A. Alexander; *Cruel Intentions. Female Jihadists in America*; p. 12.

<sup>540</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; p. 22. F. Gaud, J. Lisiecka; *Women in Daesh: Jihadist ‘cheerleaders’, active operatives?*; p. 2.

<sup>541</sup> A. Alexander; *Cruel Intentions. Female Jihadists in America*; p. 13.

### *Professional roles / State-building roles*

Since the Islamic State is administered through a complex and highly organized structure, skilled workers are needed to work together with combatants. Women engaged in professional roles can choose from:<sup>542</sup>

1. teacher;
2. doctor;
3. nurse (e.g. in convalescent homes<sup>543</sup>);
4. law enforcement;
5. administration; and
6. welfare activities (like orphanages).

Every professional role a woman decided to be engaged in presented a series of limitation. Some were specific to only certain jobs, while others were applicable to all of them. For example, women working as healthcare providers ergo nurses and doctors, worked on a separate zone of the hospital, a “gender segregated unit”, and must respect restrictions imposed by the Sharia law like the standard dress code, limitations on the night turn and the treatment of male patients.<sup>544</sup> In this respect, the call for female nurses and doctors have been incredibly high while ISIS was battling in Mosul because of the losses they were suffering.<sup>545</sup>

More general restrictions are provided by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade’s manifesto.<sup>546</sup>

*“If a woman is forced to work outside the house, we must reward her for this service and look after her household and children in her long absence. As for the proposals:*

1. *The work must be appropriate for her and her abilities and not involve more than what she is able to endure, or what is difficult for her to achieve.*
2. *It should not exceed more than three days a week or should not last long in the day so she does not have to leave her house for a long time.*

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<sup>542</sup> S. De Leede, R. Haupfleisch, et al.; *Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalized, and how to empower them to prevent radicalization*; p. 26.

<sup>543</sup> L. Smith; *Isis: The ‘central’ role of women in forming the next jihadist generation*.

<sup>544</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; p. 24.

<sup>545</sup> G. Pellegrini-Bettoli; *Intrepid Sisters Reveal How ISIS Depends on Role of Women*.

<sup>546</sup> C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; p. 25.

3. *It must take into account necessities – for the illness of a child, travel of her husband. She must have holidays.*
4. *She must be given two years maternity leave, at least, to rear and feed the child, and only resume if the child has started to be able to rely on himself for the most important things.*
5. *There must be a place to put children at work until they reach school age, where they can be checked upon from time to time to stop the problems that arise from small children being themselves in the house or someone to care for them.”*

### **Active roles**

The position of the Islamic State towards the female participation in combating has always been controversial as demonstrated by its official magazines, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*.<sup>547</sup>

The first article to be examined is “Our Journey to Allah”, in the 11<sup>th</sup> Issue of *Rumiyah*. Here the writer underlined the message through many religious references and quotes coming from the Holy Qur’an. First, the article highlighted the role of women as “increased and [...] of greater importance” but, actually, there is no declared change in the role of women. On the contrary, the writer wanted to reinforce the women’s traditional stance:

*“We Muslim women are required to fulfill our duties attentively, and being negligent of them will only lead to our destruction. [...] Allah has honored us by choosing us to be wives, sisters, and mothers of the mujahidin [...]”*<sup>548</sup>

Moving on with the article, the already mentioned supportive roles of women are frequently quoted: be supportive with your husband, make your house a source of rest for him, prioritize his needs, be patient on him and appreciate his presence, hide your weaknesses and be strong for him and serve him, always, because you will be rewarded by Allah.<sup>549</sup> However, towards the end of the article, the controversial position of ISIS

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<sup>547</sup> C. Winter, D. Margolin; *The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State*; in CTC Sentinel, August 2017, vol. 10, iss. 7; p. 23.

<sup>548</sup> Rumiyah magazine; *Our Journey to Allah*; p.13.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

emerged when referring to the history of Umm ‘Amarah Nasibah Bint Ka’b al-Ansatiyyah, a female companion of prophet Muhammad. Together with four other women, one of which is said to have been pregnant, she defended him during the battle of Uhud.<sup>550</sup>:

*“Rise with courage and sacrifice in this war as the righteous woman did at the time of the Messenger of Allah, not because of the small number of men but rather, due to their love for jihad, their desire to sacrifice for the sake of Allah, and their desire for Jannah<sup>551</sup>.”<sup>552</sup>*

The writer is not only inviting women to participate in the armed combat but also to participate in it with nationalistic feelings. Generally, women were allowed to combat only under specific circumstances, namely<sup>553</sup>

- if the enemy is attacking the country (for self-defense);
- if the men are not enough to defeat the enemy; and
- if the imams gave the women a *fatwa*<sup>554</sup>.

Despite these limitations the article speaks clear: “not because of the small number of men”. This would suggest a change in the women’s engagement strategy from ISIS.<sup>555</sup>

Just two years before the strategic change, the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of *Dabiq* proved itself to be still backward with regard to combat women. An interview with Umm Basīr al-Muhājirah, wife of one of the Paris attackers<sup>556</sup> revealed the rigid attitude towards women’s role in *jihad*:

*“My sisters, be bases of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Be advisors to them. They should find comfort and peace with you. Do not make things difficult for them. Facilitate all matters for them. Be strong and brave. [...] Learn*

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<sup>550</sup> C. Winter, D. Margolin; *The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State*; in CTC Sentinel, August 2017, vol. 10, iss. 7; p. 24.

<sup>551</sup> Heaven. From Oxford Dictionaries; <https://ms.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/malay-english/jannah>.

<sup>552</sup> Rumiyah magazine; *Our Journey to Allah*; p.15.

<sup>553</sup> C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; p. 22.

<sup>554</sup> Official permission.

<sup>555</sup> C. Winter, D. Margolin; *The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State*; in CTC Sentinel, August 2017, vol. 10, iss. 7; p. 24.

<sup>556</sup> He launched an attack in Paris on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, two days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Source: M. Shelbourne; *New issue of ‘Dabiq’ features interview with widow of Paris gunman*; FDD’s Long War Journal. Consulted on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

*your religion! Read the Qur'ān, reflect upon it, and practice it. [...] Follow the example of Āsiyah [...] Follow the example of Maryam [...] There were many righteous women in history, so follow their example. Be patient. Patience is a great virtue.*"<sup>557</sup>

There is no mentioning of women in combat and no encouragement for women to take arms and fight *jihad*.

In another issue of *Dabiq*, the 11<sup>th</sup>, another article is directed to women and, similarly to issue 7, presented a model of righteous woman; “the wife of the Prophet of Allah, Ayyūb”.<sup>558</sup> In addition, the article underlined the “absence of obligation of jihād and war upon the Muslim woman – except in defense against someone attacking her” and, one more time, what female *jihad* truly is:

*“You are in jihad when you uphold your loyalty to him [your husband] in his absence.*

*You are in jihad when you teach his children the difference between the truth and falsehood, between right and wrong. Indeed, you, my precious sister, are today the wife of a mujāhid [...]*”<sup>559</sup>

Moreover, also sources like media and reports suggested that a change has really occurred in the female engagement. In a report of February 2018, UN WOMEN declared that among their “countless activities” they also acted as operation leaders and militants. The same report quotes the Al-Khanssaa brigade, an all-female brigade instituted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2014.<sup>560</sup> The Al- Khanssaa brigade was instituted to enforce the Islamic morality and Sharia law, it performed stop and search activities at the Islamic State checkpoints; moreover, it was engaged in other activities like intelligence gathering, overseeing slaves and recruiting. The brigade’s tasks were expanded in 2015: the function of policing public morality of women was added, together with their function of spies (in the realm of intelligence gathering). Consequently, women were trained in the use of firearms for a period of 15 days; after that, women started patrolling the assigned area. These women too were obliged to respect an appropriate dress code.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Dabiq magazine; *A Brief Interview with Umm Basīr al- Muhājirah*; iss, 7; p. 51.

<sup>558</sup> Dabiq magazine; *A Jihād Without Fighting*; iss. 11; p. 42.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid; p. 41.

<sup>560</sup> UNWOMEN; *The Role of Women in Terrorist Organizations: the Case of ISIS*; par. III.

<sup>561</sup> A. Spencer; *The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State*; p. 83 – 84.

Figure 8: Female Members of Al-Khanssaa Brigade



(Source: Middle East Institute)

During the fulfillment of their law enforcement role, women operated through an excessive use of violence, even for the smallest offences.<sup>562</sup>

Another example of all-female unit is offered by the Umm Al-Rayan brigade. Instituted the same day as the Al-Khanssaa brigade, it was tasked with

*“[...] exposing male activists who disguise in women’s clothing to avoid detention when stopping at the ISIL checkpoint”<sup>563</sup>*

The conditions for joining were an age between 18 and 25 and a single status, applying for both the Al-Khanssaa and Umm Al-Rayan brigades.<sup>564</sup> The salary amount is available only for the Umm Al-Rayan brigade: 25,000 Syrian liras, corresponding to less than \$200.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 9.

<sup>563</sup> TRAC summary; *Umm Al-Rayan*.

<sup>564</sup> CODEXTER; *The Roles of Women in Daesh*; p. 7.

<sup>565</sup> TRAC summary; *Umm Al-Rayan*.

Aside from these two units, where women are considered to be mere enforcers<sup>566</sup>, women were also present in the frontlines, alongside men. Following J. Davis research, 28 ISIS' plots were conducted with the presence of women.<sup>567</sup> An example is the case of Libya, in March 2016: many women appeared to have been killed while fighting in the Libyan city of Sabratha. Other newspapers estimated the presence of combatant women in Libya to be more or less a hundred.<sup>568</sup> Other cases involved the use of female suicide bombers, but data are not enough to demonstrate a recurrent presence of women. The use of women in suicide operations from ISIS dates back to 2015, in Turkey, while in 2016 the organization managed 6 different suicide attacks, all using women. Despite these examples, there is no report which can demonstrate the widespread use of female suicide bombers:<sup>569</sup> furthermore, towards the end of the Caliphate, in 2017, no woman attacker has been identified.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> C. Winter, M. Bloom; *The women of ISIL*.

<sup>567</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 14.

<sup>568</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; p. 24.

<sup>569</sup> As shown by the University of Chicago Suicide Attack Database, there is only one suicide attack directly involving a woman. For details see [http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search\\_results\\_new.php](http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_results_new.php).

<sup>570</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 13.

## Motivations

Despite the gender discourse and the focus on ISIS, women's motivation to join are very similar to the reasons of other women who join other terrorist groups; moreover, evidence of a similarity between men's and women's motivations have been highlighted.<sup>571</sup> Stereotypical conclusions on women who are trapped or tricked by men to join surely needs a further assessment, especially when talking about foreign fighters: European women attracted by ISIS were well educated and they open another scenario to be investigated.<sup>572</sup>

Even though, as demonstrated by J. Davis research on the topic, there is affinity between men's and women's motivations, we can find differences between people in conflict zones and outside conflict zones. Conflict zones generally push people towards revenge acts or cause them traumas; out-of-conflict zones can be hostile as well, even without weapons and armed struggles, for example people may feel discriminated and marginalized, this can create frustration for an unsatisfying and unsuccessful life, and the desire to escape to find a scope. Moreover, a secondary traumatization caused by a traumas' transmission from conflict zones to non-conflict zones is also possible.<sup>573</sup>

In the specific case of women, given the insufficient research on their motivations, there is nothing but media sources to assess the phenomenon but, as we already said, media can be biased and often concentrate their news about female terrorists on their private life.<sup>574</sup>

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By so doing, media sources represent ISIS women as having no agency or ability to make coherent and informed decisions.<sup>576</sup> Among the most gendered interpretations we found

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<sup>571</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 5.

<sup>572</sup> L. Smith; *Isis: The 'central' role of women in forming the next jihadist generation*.

<sup>573</sup> A. Speckhard; *Female Terrorists in ISIS, al Qaeda and 21rst Century Terrorism*; p. 2.

<sup>574</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 5.

<sup>575</sup> K. Jacques and P. Taylor in *Female Terrorism: A Review* explain the main difference between the Western and Arab media. While the Western media filtered news through gender stereotypes, the Arab media does not (pp. 13 – 14.)

<sup>576</sup> H. Khelghat-Doost; *Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad*; p. 22.

the masculine woman.<sup>577</sup> She lost her inherent femininity, developing violence and aggression; irrational actors with romantic and sexual urges; and dormant victims in desperate need of saving. ISIS exploited these interpretations and the effect they had on women in their own propaganda: narratives and tactics to recruit women are gendered to the extent that ISIS knew exactly how to get to them; indeed, through narratives of empowerment, freedom and sisterhood women were attracted towards the Islamic State.<sup>578</sup> In addition, ISIS strived for vulnerable people: psychological and social issues like PTSD<sup>579</sup> could be exploited not only to recruit but also to push members committing suicide attacks.<sup>580</sup> A biased interpretation of women's motivations does not take into consideration their dependency on the context.<sup>581</sup> For example, it is too simplistic to assess women joined ISIS to become "jihadists brides": there is a wide range of push and pull factors influencing Eastern and Western women and these factors are different depending on the context but also on the age of the woman, her social status, her economic situation, and so on.<sup>582</sup>

Introducing women's motivation, the classification of K. Jacques and P. J. Taylor will be already employed: social, personal and idealistic motivations will be presented and, at the end of the paragraph, other motivations outside these three realms will be presented as well.

### **1. Social motivations:**

- c. the opportunity to be important and gain respect;<sup>583</sup>
- d. poverty;<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> The Carter Center; *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda*; p. 2. The original source is K. Jacques, P. Taylor; *Female Terrorism: A Review* where the authors took into consideration newspapers' articles too.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Posttraumatic stress disorder.

<sup>580</sup> A. Speckhard, A. Shajkovi; *Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men*.

<sup>581</sup> S. K. Smith; *Kittens and Nutella: Why Women Join ISIS*; p. 12.

<sup>582</sup> L. Smith; *ISIS: The 'central' role of women in forming the next jihadist generation*.

<sup>583</sup> S. K. Smith; *Kittens and Nutella: Why Women Join ISIS*; p. 12. A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>584</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 6.

- e. identity and belonging;<sup>585</sup>
- f. faith and religious duty.<sup>586</sup>

**2. Personal motivations:**

- a. personal and family security;<sup>587</sup>
- b. romance.<sup>588</sup>

**3. Idealistic motivations:**

- a. freedom.<sup>589</sup>

**4. Other motivations:**

- a. curiosity;<sup>590</sup>
- b. sisterhood;<sup>591</sup>
- c. adventure;<sup>592</sup>
- d. indoctrination.<sup>593</sup>

**Social motivations**

*The opportunity to be important and gain respect*

Women who join ISIS are not only joining a terrorist organization, they are raising their social status. When ISIS propaganda focuses on women's empowerment it gave those women an opportunity to raise their social status and have a significant social role, a role which would have been denied by their countries of origin.<sup>594</sup> As we have seen, the fundamental role of women in ISIS is that of being wife and mother. Western countries see these two women's roles as normal: a wife housework is a "labor of love"<sup>595</sup> while being mother is purely biological. Recruiters of ISIS knew it well and they appeal on women's desire to feel important, to be important; phrases like "you are the hope of the

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<sup>585</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*. J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*.

<sup>588</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>589</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*. K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; pp. 94 – 95.

<sup>590</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

<sup>591</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> R. Islam; *Gender and Terrorism: The ISIS Phenomenon*; p. 71.

<sup>594</sup> S. K. Smith; *Kittens and Nutella: Why Women Join ISIS*; p. 12.

<sup>595</sup> S. Federici; *Wages Against Housework*; p. 2.

*Ummah*” or “the *Ummah* will not rise without your help” create a sense of empowerment a woman want to achieve. This is particularly effective when recruiting young women from countries where Islamophobia and discrimination are the order of the day. Exploiting social expectations and dynamics is an efficient technique: the Islamic ideals inspire the female agency in ISIS giving women roles which are not competitive with men’s but complementary, not precluding them the same *jihadis* status of men whatever their role.<sup>596</sup>

State-building become a universal justification: every woman, be it wife, mother, nurse, doctor or teacher is helping to build the Islamic State. Since family is the core of the Muslim community, the role of women as wives and mothers is the most important. However, there is space for other roles too, maybe professional roles. As highlighted by A. Speckhard, one of Al-Baghdadi’s speeches, in 2014, called for different professional figures without a gender specification:<sup>597</sup>

*“We make a special call to the scholars, fuqahā [experts in Islamic jurisprudence], and callers, especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields. We call them and remind them to fear Allah, for their emigration is wājib ‘aynī [an individual obligation], so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them.”*<sup>598</sup>

Education to reach these professional levels is free and ask no fee so that women can receive what they need and really make the difference. By giving a high value to women, whatever their role can be, the Islamic State ensure itself a high number of female participants: they give women a professional role which otherwise she could never receive, and, by giving great value to women’s domestic work, they also give dignity to mothers and wives living at home.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> The Carter Center; *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda*; pp. 5 – 6.

<sup>597</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>598</sup> Al-Hayat Media Center; *A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadam*. [<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/14241/ABB20140701.pdf>]

<sup>599</sup> The Carter Center; *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda*; p. 6.

## **Poverty**

Despite the problem of poverty is considered to be exclusive of Syrian women, it is worth of examination.<sup>600</sup> The Al-Khansaa brigade's manifesto speaks clear on the amplified effects of poverty on women:

*“In the Gulf, social security is an artificial arm that is not sufficient, with many instances of poverty, misery and sadness for families, especially harming vulnerable women. The conditions for a monthly stipend are impossible to reach and always the problems remain.”*<sup>601</sup>

In the same manifesto, the writers present a way in which the Islamic State was eradicating poverty in Nineveh, an old Iraqi city. Women were given the possibility to sell stocks in markets, thanks to the Zakat Chamber they received their daily livelihood for both them and their children in addition to free healthcare.<sup>602</sup>

By so doing, ISIS showed women it understood their difficulties and challenges and offered them the possibility to live a modest life. The issue of poverty can somehow be linked to the sense of empowerment too: when taking into consideration Western female members, poverty is certainly not a problem. However, as Speckhard stated:

*“Recruiters who are promising female empowerment and emancipation, both political and economic, can be very persuasive to women who are feeling disillusioned and distressed by living in the West”*<sup>603</sup>

Not only ISIS is exploiting the economic poverty of women, but the institutional too: women are granted a house, a husband and, in the best of cases, a state-builder job; the Islamic State granted women holidays and aids so that taking care of children and of the house while working is not the burden it could be in the Western society.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>600</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 6.

<sup>601</sup> C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; pp. 39 - 40.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>603</sup> A. Speckhard, A. Shajkovci; *Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men*.

<sup>604</sup> See C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; p. 25.

### *Identity and belonging*

The inclusive community under which ISIS represented itself was another key pull factor in attracting female members. Women who faced discrimination and Islamophobia were searching for a place in society and ISIS offered them one: a safe haven for both men and women where no discrimination was in place; the skin color, ethnicity and nationality were not a motive for marginalization. Indeed, a utopian sense of belonging and unity was what the Islamic State transmitted to its potential members while recruiting them, giving an opportunity to live without hiding and fearing social repercussions, to finally belong to a true community.<sup>605</sup>

To recruited women, finding a community to belong to means also finding their own identity. The Islamic State was not only religion and Islamic culture: what it portrayed transcended culture, we can call it a “Muslim identity” which is more intellectual and while urging everyone to become “better Muslim” it is silently trying to say: “we are your vehicle to be so”.<sup>606</sup> The process of identity formation is far more evident and hard-hitting on women: ISIS often used to criticize Western feminism to portray itself as the best alternative. Critics included its elitist character which allow it to expand only among elite societies at the expense of minorities; by so doing, the Islamic State was offering its specific type of emancipation. Indeed, it is not unusual that ISIS often spoke to people who were highly disillusioned with their national government such as people from the Middle East and North African countries who were subjected to countless challenges and difficulties.<sup>607</sup>

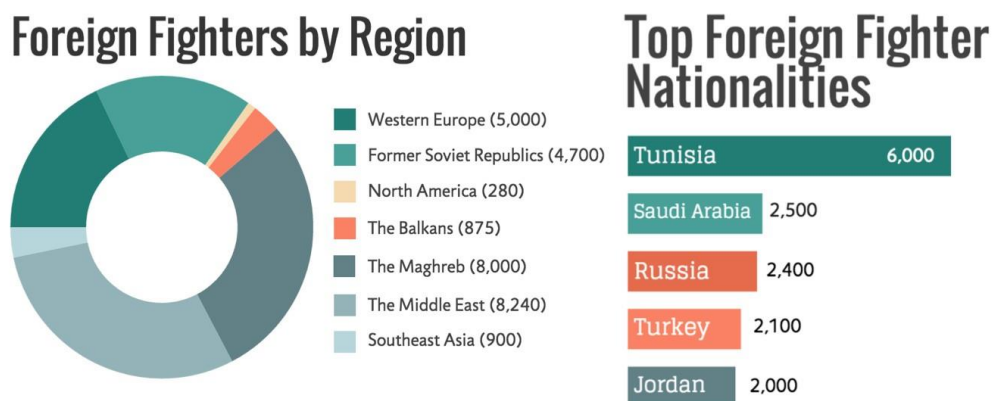
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<sup>605</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>606</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

<sup>607</sup> The Carter Center; *The Women in Daesh: Deconstructing Complex Gender Dynamics in Daesh Recruitment Propaganda*; pp. 3 and 5.

Figure 9: ISIS' Foreign Fighters



(TSG Report, December 2015)

However utopian and idyllic may it be, the “Muslim identity” hid pitfalls: Dr. R. Islam called it “wrapped feminism”. This new dimension misguided the role of women in this utopian society promising their empowerment which, consequently, will bring them their reward in the afterlife.<sup>608</sup> This is the propaganda version of what life in ISIS is, reality is totally different. Even if women were given importance in their role of propagandists, being a female in the Islamic State is a “tale of torture and gang rape and [had] nothing to do with the romanticized propaganda that espoused these girls to join them”.<sup>609</sup> Moreover, it is clear that empowerment and emancipation came only if women are given certain roles, like operatives in the female brigades or suicide bombers.

### ***Faith and religious duty***

Women joining ISIS for religious motivations are often guided by their country attitude towards a different religion. This is not only a matter of belonging and identity as a human being, but also of religious liberty to the extent that Muslim women feel unaccepted by

<sup>608</sup> R. Islam; *Gender and Terrorism: The ISIS Phenomenon*; p. 73.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

the Western country which hosted them. For example, France, the Western nation from where the majority of Western female recruits joined ISIS, imposed a ban on specific aspects of the Islamic dress in public.<sup>610</sup> On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2011, France became the first European country to ban the full-face Islamic veil in public places. Whoever is found with his/her face covered in a public place will be subjected to a fine of 150 euros and instruction in citizenship.<sup>611</sup> Under the pretense of being a measure to avoid “the affirmation of political Islam in the public space”<sup>612</sup>, this has the smell of a security measure coming from fear not to be able to identify a potential terrorist in case of attack. Keeping the eyes on France, R. Zakaria told us some anecdotes:

*“[...] French Muslim schoolgirls who are excluded from school for wearing headscarves live and learn in relative isolation from the mainstream of French society. In October, the Paris Opera refused to perform because the audience included a veiled woman who, despite possessing a valid ticket, was asked to leave and then refused to do so. The choices of Muslim women – especially as they relate to veiling – are perceived and confronted as a defiance of French culture.”<sup>613</sup>*

Following the stream of religion, the different attitude of men and women relatively to religion is worth to be underlined:

*“A lot of the guys are idiots – they’re attracted to the macho side of it - whereas women tend to have given it much more sober thought and made a very conscious choice.”<sup>614</sup>*

The words of S. Maher speak clear: women are clearly more affected by religion compared to men not only because of their higher visibility (a Muslim woman is immediately recognizable thanks to her veils) but also because women who do not respect the holy Qur’an edit

*“And stay in your houses with dignity, and do not show off yourselves like the showing off of the former days of ignorance, and observe Prayer, and pay the Zakāt, and obey*

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<sup>610</sup> S. K. Smith; *Kittens and Nutella: Why Women Join ISIS*; pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>611</sup> BBC; *The Islamic veil across Europe*.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> R. Zakaria; *Women and Islamic Militancy*.

<sup>614</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

*Allāh and His Messenger. Surely Allāh desires to remove from you all uncleanness, O Members of the Household, and purify you completely*<sup>615</sup>

are escaping their natural role in the pursuit of more masculine activities. It is not possible to be a righteous Muslim and living in the West because religion will always be corrupted by Western values and this is true for women as well as for men.<sup>616</sup> A “pure Islamic lifestyle” filled with “pure Islamic ideals” are to be reached only if living inside the ISIS “Caliphate”<sup>617</sup>; for this reason, ISIS pushed both men and women alike to accomplish their *hijrah* once for all, not waiting for others to be an example but being an example themselves:

*“And do not wait for other women from amongst the wives of Sahwah<sup>618</sup> soldiers to make hijrah before you. Rather, be a model and an example for them all, and that a great honor it would be to be the first.”*<sup>619</sup>

## **Personal motivations**

### ***Personal and family security***

With a focus on historical conflicts, the Al-Khansaa brigade’s manifesto presented risks Sunni women faced since the Crusader-Shiite war, “before God’s soldiers were sent to save it [Iraq]”. The soldiers of mujahidin finally triumphed over the Shiite army and released all the women and men prisoners from al-Mattar prison. The manifesto continued by presenting the high sense of security ISIS provided inside its land, in all corners and pretended this security to be “the fruit of Shariah law” thanks to which “Now, women can wander in souqs<sup>620</sup> and go on pilgrimage without falling foul of criminals”.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> M. Sher ‘Alī (transl.); *The Holy Qur’ān*; no. 24, p. 491

<sup>616</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>617</sup> A. Speckhard, A. Shajkovci; *Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men*.

<sup>618</sup> Arabic for “Awakening”. From M. Benraad; *Iraq’s Tribal “Sahwa”; Its Rise and Fall*.

<sup>619</sup> U. S. al-Muhājirah; *They Are Not Lawful Spouses for One Another*; in Dabiq magazine iss. 10; p. 48.

<sup>620</sup> A market in an Arab country. From Cambridge Dictionary;  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/souk>.

<sup>621</sup> C. Winter (trans. and analysis); *Women of the Islamic State*; pp. 29 – 30.

The manifesto clearly stated ISIS to be the best solution for local women if their first aim is to provide safety for themselves and their families. Shifting towards the international community, the problem of security is equally felt. Women in UK feel (??) it particularly: the zone of Bradford, where criminality, drug dealers and worklessness were the order of the day, was certainly not a safe place to raise children; indeed, travelling towards the Islamic State could represent progress and empowerment, together with safety and employment opportunities.<sup>622</sup>

“[...] *jihad* is a means to peace, safety and security, and not an end in itself [...]”<sup>623</sup>

In the realm of security, women also fear worse alternatives like the risk of being raped: some ISIS practices concerning women were comforting in this respect.<sup>624</sup> For example, once arrived in ISIS territory, women are immediately married, and, after that, they are kept secluded and in case of their husband’s death, they are quickly remarried after the ‘*iddah* period.’<sup>625</sup>

### ***Romance***

Among the “Seven promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits” we found romance too. It is not seen very often but it is worth to mention it among women’s motivations to join. Unmarried women are always guaranteed a husband once arrived in the Islamic State and are far easier to attract compared to married women with a stable family. The latter case comprehended a more complex process of recruitment, through which women were encouraged to abandon their husbands who do not follow Sharia law.<sup>626</sup> The fable of romance could start even earlier, during the process of recruitment: one of the most used weapons for recruitment is a love chatting with the potential female *jihadi*: a love story starts through the internet and being in love with a male *jihadi* would push the woman to join ISIS. Some examples are the case of the American Shannon Conley, who felt in love with an ISIS fighter online and tried to join ISIS; the case of, a French journalist, already

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<sup>622</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

<sup>623</sup> M. Sa’ad Ababakar et al.; *Open Letter*; p. 10.

<sup>624</sup> A. Speckhard, A. S. Yayla; *Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined*; p. 103.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 112 – 113.

<sup>626</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

posing as an ISIS supporter, contacted by an ISIS fighter and seduced into marrying him and coming to Syria; and cases of many other women and girls coming from Canada, UK, Belgium and many other Western countries were often attracted in the same way.<sup>627</sup>

## **Idealistic motivations**

### ***Freedom and emancipation***

The concept of “female jihad” not only implied a godly reward but also give power to women, over their own families, husbands and society in general. A woman who desperately wants to take control of her own life is more vulnerable to ISIS recruiters’ eyes, even more if her emancipation started from a Western country where there is a very different concept of “emancipation”.<sup>628</sup>

The article by K. Kneip presents important details on the difference between Eastern and Western emancipation. She starts by presenting a general definition of Western emancipation, found in the Merriam Webster:<sup>629</sup>

Emancipation: *the act or process of emancipating; emancipating being: to free (someone) from someone’s else control or power.* Full definition:

- *to free from restraint, control, or the power of another; especially: to free from bondage*
- *to release from paternal care<sup>630</sup> and responsibility and make sui juris*
- *to free from any controlling influence (as traditional mores or beliefs).*

(Merriam-Webster, 2015)

From a Western perspective, conditions of female members of ISIS are seen like:<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> A. Speckhard; *Female Terrorists in ISIS, al-Qaeda and 21rst Century Terrorism*; pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>628</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 92.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> The author wants to refer to both parental care and the women’s dependency on their “male guardian”.

<sup>631</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 97.

- *to free from restraint, control, or the power of another; especially: to free from bondage:* to the extent that they can exercise power if commanders of an all-female brigade. They can hope to be selected for the job but, if not, they exercise no controlling power.
- *to release from paternal care and responsibility and make sui juris:* if they obtain a job they can act without a male guardian controlling them.<sup>632</sup> If not, their male guardian will control them every time.
- *to free from any controlling influence (as traditional mores or beliefs):* this is not true from our perspective because we, as Westerns, perceive Islamic values and beliefs as a controlling influence.

Compared to Eastern emancipation, the meaning of the three defining points presented by Merriam Webster change perspective.<sup>633</sup>

- *to free from restraint, control, or the power of another; especially: to free from bondage:* Eastern women who joined ISIS are not taking our same models; the “four pure ladies” I presented are their models, their lives and experiences represent what the East perceives as emancipation, an *islamicipation*. Indeed, concepts like “restraints” and “control” are only applicable to negative influences like that of the Western society.
- *to release from paternal care and responsibility and make sui juris:* from an Eastern perspective, this means be free from the control of Western families (for example, in case of adopted children). Moreover, liberty translates also in the free choice to join ISIS. In spite of this, a male guardian will soon take control of their own life even though in the respect of Islamic values and norms.
- *to free from any controlling influence (as traditional mores or beliefs):* The Eastern perspective demonstrates that “controlling influence” has not a universal definition but is relative to the practiced culture. A woman who wants to join ISIS to emancipate herself considers that of the West as a “controlling influence” both

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<sup>632</sup> Women were often put in a separate wing in every working environment so that they were far from men’s eyes.

<sup>633</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 98.

legally (for example the case of veiling ban in France) and socially (in cases of discrimination and margination).

Recently, scholars have contested the two perspectives under which the concept of “Islamic feminism” was perceived to hide a culture of gendered oppression. The Western perspective sees Islamic traditions and norms as patriarchal, but patriarchy is its inherent characteristic insofar as it is based on a theological interpretation. In the words of O. Abou-Bakr:

*“[...] seeking to ‘un-read’ patriarchy in the Qur’an, is uncomfortable with the term ‘Islamic feminism’ because she rejects ‘feminism’ as an intellectual tradition that is inescapably entangled with the history of Western colonialism and the othering of non-western Muslim women.”*<sup>634</sup>

Attracting women with promises of freedom and emancipation is particularly effective with younger women, better if in scholarly age. Many young Muslim girls believe they can be freer in the Islamic State compared to Western countries: this is the case of UK, already presented when analyzing *security* motivations, where young Muslims experiences problems with Western education and general discrimination. A female witness declared:

*“With the convictions I had I felt I couldn’t live in this country [UK] any more [...] I remember writing: ‘I feel jealous that I can’t take my children to the local school because it[’]s not Islamic’. I felt suffocated”*<sup>635</sup>

If those children reflected their mother’s anguish, they will be an easy prey for ISIS recruiters, especially if they are little girls facing both their Muslim and gender identity.

### ***Nationalism***

Among researches and interviews I personally read, nationalism never appeared as a motivation for joining ISIS and J. Davis explains us why:

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<sup>634</sup> M. Al-Sharmani; *Islamic Feminism*; p. 84.

<sup>635</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

*“Missing from these stories, however, are explanations involving desired to join a terrorist group or to fight. This is not to say that those stories do not exist; instead, it may simply be rare that women express them. This may be due to several reasons, ranging from societal expectations (both in the Islamic State and without), as well as legal consequences from fully articulating their terrorist intent.”<sup>636</sup>*

## **Other motivations**

### ***Curiosity***

Since media have become fool with ISIS news, we cannot blame some curiosity from the female population. A well-educated girl, even if young, understands media sources cannot be 100% credible so she uses to surf the Internet in search for information. A witness declared that media sources are among the reasons why youth’s curiosity is raised:

*“The media are going on about Isis all the time, but they don’t know what’s going on. That feeds the curiosity: so people look on social media and Isis are waiting, fishing for curious girls”<sup>637</sup>*

### ***Sisterhood***

The sisterhood represents a “new family” for the newly female member and is “nothing like the “fake relationships” they had at home”.<sup>638</sup>

*“Beyond romantic attachment, and in common with their male counterparts, the women within our dataset speak of the sense of camaraderie and sisterhood they experience in ISIS-controlled territory, in contrast to the fake and surface-level relationships they have in the west. This search for meaning, sisterhood, and identity is a key driving factor for women to travel.”<sup>639</sup>*

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<sup>636</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 8.

<sup>637</sup> J. Witt; *Guardian Live: Why do young women want to join Islamic State?*

<sup>638</sup> K. Kneip; *Female Jihad – Women in the ISIS*; p. 94.

<sup>639</sup> C. Hoyle, A. Bradford, R. Frenett; *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*; p. 13.

Promising a sisterhood was not a largely used tactic of recruitment but it is clear it bore fruits. Not only is used by recruiters to attract potential female members but is to be found in ISIS propaganda magazines too like *Dabiq*, which discussed “polygyny”<sup>640</sup>:

*“They [the infidels] prohibited what He [Allah] permitted, and permitted what He prohibited, and one of the most manifest things that they ruined and defamed in defense of women and their rights – as they claimed – was polygyny.”*<sup>641</sup>

Following ISIS discourse, the institution of sisterhoods depends especially on polygyny. There are categories of women who are more in danger like widows, infertile women and divorcees because, due to their non-pure and sinner nature<sup>642</sup> it is harder for them to find a husband.<sup>643</sup>

*“In the end it ensures that no “sister” is left outside of the community or without sustenance and protection”*<sup>644</sup>

### ***Adventure***

To “break from the boredom of their lives”<sup>645</sup> and have “a life changing experience”<sup>646</sup> women are often pushed towards the Islamic State by their thirst of adventure.

ISIS propaganda got its job done in promoting *hijrah* as an adventure:

*“If speaking about the muhājirīn is amazing, then speaking about their twin halves the muhājirāt”*<sup>647</sup> *is even more amazing! How many stories have I heard which I would not*

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<sup>640</sup> For a better understanding: polygyny is “the practice of having more than one wife or permanent female sexual partner at the same time” while polygamy is “the fact or custom of being married to more than one person at the same time”. From Cambridge Dictionary; <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/polygyny>; <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/polygamy>.

<sup>641</sup> U. S. Al-Muhājirah; *Two Three or Four*; in *Dabiq* magazine; p. 19.

<sup>642</sup> Even if divorce is permitted, Islam never looked at it positively.

<sup>643</sup> U. S. Al-Muhājirah; *Two Three or Four*; in *Dabiq* magazine; p. 19.

<sup>644</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>645</sup> J. Davis; *Women and the ISIL phenomenon: from recruiters to suicide bombers and everything in between*; p. 7.

<sup>646</sup> A. Speckhard; *Seven Promises of ISIS to its Female Recruits*.

<sup>647</sup> Female migrants.

*have believed if not for hearing them directly from the mouths of those sisters involved or seeing these sisters with my own eyes [...]*<sup>648</sup>

Moreover, in the same magazine we can find true women's experiences:

*"I met a sister who was six months pregnant accompanied by her husband coming from Britain. I was surprised by this adventurer, so I said, "Why didn't you wait a bit until you gave birth to the baby you are carrying and then perform hijrah!" She answered, "We could not handle waiting any longer. We melted yearning for the Islamic State!"*<sup>649</sup>

The courage demonstrated by this woman was source of attraction and inspiration for many other girls and women who wanted to join ISIS. As many other ISIS propaganda techniques, romanticizing the adventure of joining ISIS is more efficient on young women because it gives the possibility to travel and find new places, new people and a "meaningful romance as a prize for making the journey".<sup>650</sup>

### ***Indoctrination***

*"The process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically."*<sup>651</sup>

The term "uncritically" deserves attention. The process of indoctrination is the true essence of pull factors encouraging women to join the Islamic State; however, to uncritically accept an idea or means having an attitude

*"with lack of criticism or consideration of whether something is right or wrong"*<sup>652</sup>;

implies ignorance. We can call it a "zero indoctrination", since the victim is unaware of what he or she is learning from the process because his/her basic culture is completely different from the indoctrination subject. In brief, the indoctrination starts at zero.

The new dimension of ISIS terrorism is right there: where extremist ideologies are in place, women are generally more vulnerable to indoctrination; however, ISIS

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<sup>648</sup> U. S. Al-Muhājirah; *The Twin Halves of The Muhājirīn*; in Dabiq magazine; p. 33.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>650</sup> E. M. Saltman, M. Smith; *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*; p. 16.

<sup>651</sup> Oxford Dictionaries; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/indoctrination>.

<sup>652</sup> Oxford Dictionaries; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/uncritically>.

indoctrinated women living in Western countries too, where extremist ideologies are not in place.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> R. Islam; *Gender and Terrorism: The ISIS Phenomenon*; p. 71.

## CHAPTER 4

### A COMPARISON

As I stated in the beginning of my dissertation, studies on the female presence in terrorism are controversial. Experts wrote everything and its opposite, always analyzing the same data. The complexity of studying the phenomenon is even exacerbated by the gender question. Terrorism is a matter of history, sociology, psychology, law and policies but when treating the female presence these disciplines are no longer enough to produce satisfying results: a gender perspective emerges as a new filter.

The female presence in terrorism is not a new phenomenon. If not immediately inside terrorist groups, women participated in military activities on being soldiers, propagandists and torturers. The first female self-declared terrorist of our time is represented by the case of Vera Zasulich, a militant of Narodnaya Volya (the People's Will), a populist group with Russian origins. She declared herself a terrorist after she tried to kill Governor Trepov, in St. Petersburg. At the time, the terrorist was not defined as it is today.<sup>654</sup> Here are two modern-day definitions:

- *A person who uses unlawful violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.*<sup>655</sup>
- *an advocate or practitioner of terrorism as a mean of coercion*<sup>656</sup>

On the opposite side a soldier is

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<sup>654</sup> “The words *terrorism* and *terrorist* came to English as translations of words used in French during the period known as the Reign of Terror (1793-94), when the new government punished—usually by death—those people thought to be against the ongoing French Revolution. It was a gruesome and protracted period of official state-sponsored violence that set the political tone for much of the use of these words ever since. [...] In brief, the first definition of terrorism and terrorist was nowadays “state-sponsored terrorism”. From Merriam Webster; *The History of the Word ‘Terrorism’*; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/history-of-the-word-terrorism>.

<sup>655</sup> Oxford Dictionaries; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/terrorist>.

<sup>656</sup> Merriam Webster; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terrorist>.

*a person who is in an army and wears its uniform, especially someone who fights when there is a war.*<sup>657</sup>

The two groups I analyzed here are overlapping soldiers and terrorists. Both the LTTE and ISIS had a uniform, an army and a political cause, the redefinition of state boundaries; despite that, they are using terrorism to achieve their objectives.

The employment of women was plenty of advantages: historical biases and stereotypes against women as weak and corruptible souls worked in favor of terrorist groups both on the side of the victim and on the side of the terrorist. Recognizing those stereotypes to be part of their culture too, terrorists employed women in a “safe” way, keeping them behind the scene in most of cases. The LTTE and ISIS demonstrated us their ability to pull the strings from the bottom, women inside them are complementary to the male presence.

Both the organizations have a well-studied structure made of wings and hierarchical positions. The strategic usage of communication is typical of both, although towards a different public: the LTTE employed films and documentaries of the Tamil Tigers victories while ISIS’ communication strategy was broader due to its modern-times collocation. Social media, dedicated websites, high quality videos and a TV channel are only a few of ISIS’ communication vehicles. In this respect, ISIS was more “terrorist” compared to the LTTE: ISIS’ attacks aimed precisely at worrying people, at changing their lifestyle, at teaching them to be afraid of particular circumstances which made easier for terrorists to achieve their territorial objectives. On the other side of the coin, the LTTE was more political and aimed at obtaining a Tamil State, using terrorism. We can conclude both ISIS and the LTTE aimed at obtaining their own state, but they are not perpetrating state terrorism.<sup>658</sup>

A different tactic means a different employment of terrorists; of women, in this particular case. From my research, I expected to find a more modern role of women in ISIS,

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<sup>657</sup> Cambridge Dictionary; <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/soldier>.

<sup>658</sup> According to R. Blakeley, state terrorism involves for key elements: 1) *There must be a deliberate act of violence against individuals that the state has a duty to protect, or a threat of such an act if a climate of fear has already been established through preceding acts of state violence;* 2) *the act must be perpetrated by actors on behalf of or in conjunction with the state, including paramilitaries and private security agents;* 3) *the act of threat of violence is intended to induce extreme fear in some target observers who identify with that victim;* and 4) *the target audience is forced to consider changing their behavior in some way.* From R. Blakeley; *State Violence as State Terrorism*.

compared to the LTTE. ISIS, as an international organization, recruited women from all over the world. Many ISIS female members came from Western countries where women are fully emancipated and able to stand up in front of discrimination and difficulties, making them more independent compared to Middle East women. Well-known by ISIS male terrorists, I expected them to offer Western women more active roles as the case of Laura Passoni, the 19-years-old woman who converted to Islam and, once arrived in the Islamic State, was offered jobs as an internet seductress and a member of the morality police (*hisba*), which she both declined.<sup>659</sup>

The case of LTTE was that of a local organization, recruiting local women: women were largely used as combatants, especially as suicide bombers. They engaged in almost all the military wings and have dedicated women units with a parallel hierarchical structure to those of men. The controversial nature of these two organizations is represented by their gender approach in their temporal collocation: ISIS is a modern-time organization with a conservative ideology both on their state management, based on the Shar'ia law, and their attention towards women; the LTTE dates back to the 1970s but, even if defined as backward by one of its leaders, Thamilini, was more innovative in its employment of women.

Even if my expectations proved to be wrong for the female role in terrorism, they came up being well-founded when taking a look to women's social background. Tamil women's life was extremely risky: to achieve a high level of education was impossible, due to puberty forcing girls to abandon school. A young maiden girl lives at home because she is likely to be raped; indeed, she marries at a young age. Working life as a nurse, a teacher or a stenographer was the maximum aspiration for Tamil women who were so lucky to be well-educated; if not, illegal activities to be managed at home were a good alternative for a woman to be economically independent.

The Muslim society, on the contrary, encourages both boys and girls to be well-educated. Even if women's career is limited, they participate in public activities by managing feast days' religious activities. In both their education and working environment, women are separated from men. Gender separation in the educational environment is crucial for

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<sup>659</sup> A. Speckhard; *Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men.*

gender segregation to flourish also in the working, political, social and terrorist environment. While in the LTTE women joined to break their traditional roles, in the Muslim society the separation of men and women exacerbate the problem of conservatism when women join ISIS. As discovered by the Penn State University:

*Students who attend sex-segregated schools are not necessarily better educated than students who attend coeducational schools, but they are more likely to accept gender stereotypes [...]*<sup>660</sup>

This could explain why women who experienced a separated education are more likely to accept ISIS' treatment and more eager to reach *islamicipation*. On the contrary, Sri Lankan women who have not completed their education, be them separated by men or not, are more prone to deny their social role and join the LTTE to break the rules.

In comparing roles and motivations of women in the LTTE and ISIS we will find complementary in roles and a deep contrast in motivations.

## **Roles**

The only element linking the two organizations is the women's roles as mothers and wives. Both the organizations underline the importance of women as supporters of their men and mothers of their children who must be raised through the organization's creed. The majority of women keep their engagement like this. Discrepancies emerged when analyzing women in the military apparatus.

ISIS differentiated roles of men and women under "honor" pretenses: male and female honor is different and must be achieved differently. Women are often propagandists, teachers, doctors, nurses; simply broadening their role of mothers. As propagandists they spread the group's creed to recruit new members, as teachers they educate children through presenting and justifying the group's cause, as doctors and nurses they take care of combatants and ill people: in brief, they are "societal mothers". They marry at a tender age, receive specific education which is different from their male colleagues. Due to the high attention to education, women in ISIS are allowed to engage in professional roles,

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<sup>660</sup> Penn State news; *Sex segregation in schools detrimental to equality*.

almost “substituting” the military activity. Indeed, when it comes to military roles, women are discriminated: strict limitations, which are difficult to overcome, and the perceived weakness of the female body and soul are alienating women from the active military role.

On the other side of the coin, the LTTE has women in almost all its wings. Further to their roles of mothers, wives, propagandists and doctors, women worked in the ground forces which have their own women’s apparatus and so it is for the sea and black tigers. The female presence was largely found in the suicide squads, the black tigers and the black sea tigers, and their effectiveness was positively assessed, if not better than men’s. What attracted them was the pervasive spirit of martyrdom the LTTE spread repeatedly which is a plus compared to ISIS: for the Tamil Tigers, the suicide bombing was not simply a tactic but a holy duty. Raped women were particularly attracted by it because it was seen as a pure way to die, after the contamination of rape crossed their bodies.

I already mentioned education as a crucial element in the women’s social roles, in both societies, and I see it as equally important when placed in the two terrorist organizations: the LTTE did not encourage women to be educated, but to fight; while ISIS deals with women’s education but preferred them to stay behind the scenes, raising children and healing combatants.

Here is the complementarity. ISIS is, in the same time, conservative, in the way it forces women to stay home, and modern, in the way it promotes education); LTTE shows up the same but inverts the elements on being modern in the way it encourages women to fight but conservative in the way it pulls away women from education. Moreover, the ISIS and the LTTE present all the potential roles a woman can have in a terrorist organization so that, through the analysis of both of them, counter-terrorist forces can have a complete framework of past, present and potential tactics of female terrorists’ exploitation.

## **Motivations**

Women’s motivations to join terrorism have differences and similarities which deserve a one-by-one analysis. Both the organizations exploited the gender difficulties associated with being a woman: the need for emancipation, to feel important and to protect

themselves and their families. These three are the only common points to be found between women's participation in the LTTE and ISIS.

The Tamil Tigers were certainly not a vehicle for education, but they were for finding a job. Sri Lankan women hardly completed their education and attending university was almost impossible during the civil war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The LTTE offered these women a job, especially in their own police.

The most underlined motivations for women's engagement was the consequence of a rape or the risk of being a victim of it. Rape in the Sri Lankan society was a damning and every effort was made to protect women from it. The LTTE represented one more time a solution for both cases:

- to prevent rape through marrying women with combatants, giving women military roles, or both of them or;
- to solve the impurity caused by rape through the deployment of women in suicide squads.

Moreover, raped women in the LTTE could remarry.

The desire for human security and for the respect of women rights were others LTTE-typical factors: both of them are linked with nationalism because, in the first case, the local nature of this group made patriotism easier to emerge while, in the second case, the conquest of women's rights was framed by the independence struggle to the extent that the LTTE movement was presented as the only way women could obtain their rights.

The societal obligation a woman felt when joining the LTTE is opposite to the religious duty felt by a woman joining ISIS: in the first case, women are attracted by a political struggle; in the second case, women are attracted by a religious pretense.

ISIS was a particular case because, on being an international organization, motivations were different between Western and Eastern female members. The need to feel important, the need for emancipation were common elements of both national and international recruits. Discrepancies emerged when taking a religious perspective where we find the same difference observed between the two groups, except that this time is internal. Among the motivations of western women for joining ISIS, indoctrination was the most radical because it started from zero and captured women with no links with the Islamic

society or religion. Emancipation, even if common between the two organizations, can be placed halfway between religion and society: we talk about *islamicipation* which is the Islamic way of being emancipated, that is to say following religious models like Lady Asiya and Lady Mary; and about social emancipation, linked to the ability of women to be free from controlling influence and economic dependency and the opportunity to be equal to men. Confusion began when Western women juxtapose their way to be emancipated with the Islamic one. Furthermore, on being ISIS everywhere on the internet, it is easy to search information on it, activating factors like curiosity, the need for adventure and romance (triggered by love chats with recruiters).

With regards to nationalism, even though already mentioned, it deserves a separate analysis. In the LTTE, women motivated by nationalism have no problems with declaring it: women claiming nationalism as a motivation for their joining were justified by the behavior of the Sri Lankan government towards the Tamil population. As written by A. Bandarage:

*The Sri Lankan state is not immune from charged of “state terrorism” against the Tamil minority and against the Sinhala majority [...]. Sri Lankan armed forces have been charged with indiscipline, disappearance, torture and indiscriminate killings of Tamil and Sinhala youth suspected to be members of the Tamil LTTE and the Sinhala JVP insurgent group [...].*<sup>661</sup>

The book continues by finding evidence of international reports made by organizations like Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch stating the Sri Lankan government's violent behavior. While in ISIS women are afraid of declaring their nationalistic feeling because of social and legal consequences, the LTTE female member is free of expressing it because there are data supporting and “justifying” their cause. Moreover, combating ISIS was complex because it involved international actors, international law and different cultures. At an international level, ISIS' terrorism is negatively perceived so that combating their fire with fire is “justified” but, even if there is evidence of human rights violations perpetrated by the Iraqi army against the ISIS

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<sup>661</sup> A. Bandarage; *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*; p. 17.

combatants or suspected combatants<sup>662</sup>, it seems an insufficient justification to push women declaring their nationalistic plea.

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<sup>662</sup> See Rai News; *Giustizia sommaria, il lato oscuro della liberazione di Mosul*.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the comparison of these two terrorist groups, the role of women completely changed through times and places. Be women military active or not, they represent a fundamental resource for terrorist groups because they manage hidden activities like recruitment, logistics, children bearing, they even organize terrorist attacks. Their “behind the scene” role could be the cause of so few data and researches on their presence.

What I understood from my research is that some organizations are not disposed to enlarge women roles for a purely tactical reason. If the hidden role of women in the organization does not allow us to study women’s position, it is easier for terrorist groups to make them appear the “isolated case”. By so doing, they have the “element of surprise” advantage. Meanwhile, men continue to die on the battlefields, forcing women to take up arms for an organization in desperate need of combatants. Told like this, it sounds counter-terrorism should wait for men to die just to see women showing their real role in the fight. However, this cannot happen, and preventive countermeasures should be developed through the usage of both the LTTE and ISIS as models. Following their path, we have a well-rounded representation of potential developments in the female terrorism.

From my research, it emerges LTTE has women in almost all its military wings. The role of women as combatants has been underlined plenty of times by propaganda and Prabhakaran the same. Female terrorists acted as ground soldiers, as suicide bombers and as expert seamen, for the Sea Tigers. Their active presence in the combat wing made the LTTE a model for women on-the-ground engagement; indeed, through the analysis of women’s military presence and behavior we can create a model for a future female engagement in terrorist activities, as combatants. Even if the LTTE is a local group, its model is essential for further studies on both local and international organizations because it perfectly embodies a “feminist” approach on combating.

*“[...] women, especially LTTE women, were able to think and act independently, within the broad parameters set by LTTE policy, without the oppressive pressures from their families and husbands. They never had to be concerned about getting permission from their husbands when making decisions in their line of duty. How did the men, especially the LTTE men, adopt to this evolving female culture. It is natural to expect such*

*changes in the female culture to have a corresponding effect on the male culture too.*

*Indeed substantial changes did take place within the male culture in Vanni and especially within the LTTE male culture. This topic has not been studied sufficiently. An obvious aspect of this change is the degree of respect long standing LTTE men afforded to women. This was visible both in the private as well as the public spheres. Many women from Vanni who are now living in the “normal” patriarchal societies, both in the island and elsewhere, are presently experiencing stark existential differences between their life in Vanni and their present life.”<sup>663</sup>*

On the other side of the coin, ISIS was far from being feminist but, on being a well-developed and modern international organization, women filled roles like the propagandist, the recruiter, the facilitator, the professional/state-builder. This makes ISIS the perfect puzzle piece to complete the LTTE. ISIS propaganda was largely based on websites and social media, allowing women to be far from being discovered and, most importantly, allowing them to work from their country of residence. This was particularly true for Western women who were crucial for their ability to influence their same culture, and act as recruiters, and for the opportunity they had to create external units in their home countries.<sup>664</sup> Many women also acted as facilitators: they raised funds for ISIS, they purchased and shipped military equipment and managed the information. Last but not least, women were also crucial when it came to state-building roles: on being ISIS a terrorist organization encouraging education and enhancing it, women were employed as doctors, nurses, teachers, to name a few.

Now, to sum up the whole thing:

- The LTTE is a **local** organization, with a large female presence in the **military** field. It is perceived as **feminist** and the military tasks of women are highlighted over their supporting role. It is more **nationalist** compared to ISIS.
- ISIS is an **international** organization with a large female presence **behind the scenes**. It is a **conservative** organization and the role of women as mothers and supporters are highlighted over their military role. It is nationalist but its double

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<sup>663</sup> N. Malathy; *Women under LTTE: ‘Cannon fodder’ or women’s liberation?*.

<sup>664</sup> A case in the UK is presented by Il Giornale. G. Micalessin; *Gli 007 e la nuova minaccia in casa: le “madri Isis” che allevano killer*.

character as a **separatist-religious group** melt their objectives: to obtain a Caliphate and to eliminate infidels.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the research process has not been easy for several reasons among which the lack of data and its incorrect usage are the most important. Thus, the final question I pose is: how to enhance the research capacity on the phenomenon of the female terrorism?

### **The inclusion of women in counter-terrorism efforts as a form of prevention**

Starting from a rational approach to the phenomenon may not be sufficient to reach a comprehensive understanding, especially if there are men working at it. Indeed, using women to study female terrorists means taking advantage of the irrational approach they can have towards other women and of their empathic capacity. They catch and encompass female motivations before men simply because, as women, they experience the same difficulties. Social and personal motivations like the need for emancipation, the desire to be relevant and taken into account, the need to protect their family and themselves are the common motivations between ISIS and the LTTE and we should start from it. Women to be included are better to be former combatants, whether they were in terrorism, local army or secret services, to be closer to terrorist women situation. By doing an “intercultural dialogue” can be implemented.

*“Intercultural dialogue is, essentially, the exchange of views and opinions between different cultures.”<sup>665</sup>*

If the discussed terrorist organization is local, the presence of local women and former combatants in the counter-terrorist efforts is enough to trigger a negotiation. However, if the organization is international, other cultures’ points of view are essential. In the case of ISIS, creating a cultural dialogue between East and West is a strength point as long as there is no pressure or willingness to “correct” the other. Moreover, the dialogue should be focused on the cultural aspects and not on the terrorist organization because to

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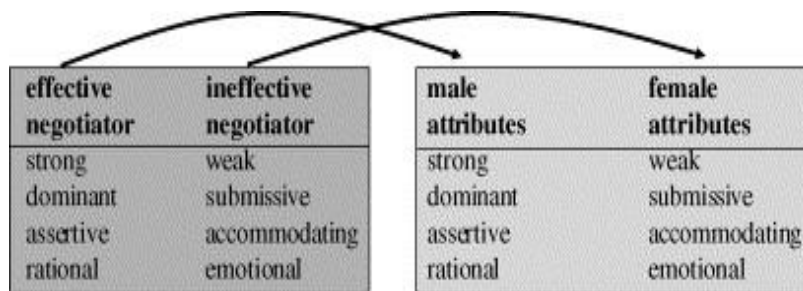
<sup>665</sup> European Commission; *Intercultural Dialogue*.

understand the reasons why a woman joins terrorism we need to know the social and cultural aspects dissatisfying her.

Women’s agency can prevent other women to join terrorist organizations by talking with them from their own perspective, negotiating a half-way between their reasons to join and their safety. Allowing an all-women dialogue may have positive consequences on the reliability of interviewees’ answers because a mutual trust has been created.

I should imagine the current lack of negotiating women is linked to their perceived inability to do the job. Even though few data confirmed this claim, women are assessed to be ineffective negotiators compared to men because of their “gendered” characteristics.<sup>666</sup>

Figure 10: The Gender Stereotype-Negotiation Link



(Source: Research in Organizational Behavior)

Another interesting inspiration is given by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) which drafted a non-binding good practices document focused on women and gender aspects in countering violent extremism (CVE).<sup>667</sup> Before being weapons against female terrorism, women are essential to study the phenomenon. Among measures encouraging a female study we find:

- identifying gender dynamics in radicalization leading to terrorism and preventing it among women and girls;<sup>668</sup>

<sup>666</sup> L. J. Kray, L. Thompson; *Gender Stereotypes And Negotiation Performance: An Examination Of Theory And Research*; in *Research in Organizational Behaviour*; p. 104.

<sup>667</sup> GCTF; *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*; p. 1.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid*; p. 3.

- involve men and boys (together with women) in gender dynamics CVE,<sup>669</sup>
- develop gender-sensitive disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women and girls;<sup>670</sup>

### **Creation of an International Database of Female Terrorism**

As a post-attack measure, the creation of an International Database of Female Terrorism could be useful to help researchers and military strategists to better study the phenomenon. K. J. Cunningham fosters it to contain both classified and unclassified information, information on female participation in violent organizations, women with the potential for violence, interviews, statistics, surveillance data in comparison with data coming from media sources, scholarly research and terrorist propaganda to provide for a comprehensive, cross-national database on the female participation in terrorism.<sup>671</sup>

Furthermore, as I have seen during my research, a gender filter is essential in existing databases to facilitate the researchers work.

### **Use new disciplines to explain the phenomenon**

Female terrorism studies are generally conducted inside the human and women's rights field, under a gender perspective, following sociological interpretations, under a feminist approach, to name a few. However, what found in my research was a not well developed criminological and anthropological approach. Why is it important to include these two disciplines?

*“Criminology [is] the whole of studies concerning the description, the etiology, and the therapeutic and preventive treatment of delinquency and other deviant behaviors, considered as an individual and social phenomenon, to be addressed through a multi- and interdisciplinary method.”<sup>672</sup>*

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<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid; p. 6

<sup>671</sup> Ibid; p. 124.

<sup>672</sup> Personal translation of M. M. Corraera, P. Martucci; *Elementi di Criminologia*; p. 3.

In the realm of terrorism, criminology is essential when taking into consideration the formation of identity. As we have seen, many women decided to join terrorism because they lost their identity, being them involved in the LTTE or ISIS. Criminologically speaking, social interactions are essential in the formation of identity and, during recruitment, interactions aim at influencing the point of view of the victim. Here is another revealing quote, about women in particular, which can be applied to female terrorism too:

*“The real oppression emerging from a repudiation can explain, for example, why women, even after having the eradication of objective obstacles, cannot exploit new opportunities for a long time yet. The suffered projection of a reductive image let them interiorize an inferiority sentiment which they could not be free from, condemning them to a systematic renounce.”<sup>673</sup>*

Presented like this, women who can finally join their “equality” by combating close to men are not the commonplace but the exception because society is not yet ready to see women like this. As women renounced because of their inferiority feeling, society renounces to see women as combatants. This kind of reflection, to be treated under a criminological point of view, can be a good opening for new perspectives about female terrorism. Furthermore, on being criminology based on psychological and sociological data collection methods, its implementation could also be useful to collect data and organize them, through the already presented International Database of Female Terrorism.

On the other side of the coin, anthropology can help to formulate and present reliable female motivations because it is a ground-based study.

*“[...] it is imperative that academics ‘undertake “othercentric” research which sheds light on the experience of “suspect” communities, with a focus on the subjectivity and lived experience of the “other”’. This is, of course, precisely the greatest strength and contribution of cultural anthropology in general.”<sup>674</sup>*

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid, p. 247.

<sup>674</sup> J. A. Sluka; *The contribution of anthropology to critical terrorism studies*; p. 141. From R. Jackson, M. Smith, J. Gunning; *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*; pp. 138 – 155.

To have anthropology being applied correctly in the study of female terrorism it is necessary that women become anthropologists so that they can build a feminine dialogue. Indeed, it is essential to encourage the study of terrorism from women and girls who want to work in the counter-terrorism field.



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