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The Importance of Web 2.0 for Jihad 3.0¹

Female Jihadists Coming to Grips with Religious Violence on Facebook

Claudia Carvalho

Abstract

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

On the one side, the virtual framing of Jihad through the manipulation of the sacred Islamic texts and its transformation into an ‘authentic’ religious discourse has given the Jihadists an opportunity to justify any religious violence associated with the performance of Jihad. On the other side, the virtual performance of Jihad through a ritualization process that combines ritualistic innovation with the use of cyber tools has allured individuals to engage and participate in Jihadist acts, both online and offline. Moreover, and in the light of the Jihadist warfare in the Middle East, the article will reveal the importance of e-Ritualization of Jihad into shaping these individual representations into a community both offline and online.

Keywords

Female Jihadists, Facebook, religious violence, ritualization, web 2.0, Jihad 3.0

1 The article is a slightly revised version of a paper which has previously been published in: Paul Post & Logan Sparks (eds.): *The Study of Culture Through the Lens of Ritual*. Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy 15 (Groningen / Amsterdam: Instituut voor Christelijk Erfgoed / Instituut voor Liturgische en Rituele Studies 2015), 3-18.

1 Introduction

The Jihadist movement sets great store by the possibilities offered by present-day technology. They have at their disposal the World Wide Web 2.0 as a convenient platform for creating, distributing and exchanging content. As a result of Internet services being available almost everywhere nowadays and huge numbers of people owning smart phones, established and emerging Jihadist organizations can reach people in virtually every corner of the globe and thus expand and diversify their audience.

By manipulating sacred Islamic texts and thereby framing their interpretation of Jihad as an ‘authentic’ religious discourse, Jihadists have fabricated a divine justification for the (religious) violence perpetrated in their performance of this ‘divine war.’ It is a performance characterized by ritualized acts, including newly invented ones, making full use of the available cyber tools, and it has managed and still manages to allure individuals into engaging in and/or participating in Jihadist acts, both online and offline. In the light also of the Jihadist warfare in the Middle East and its terrible consequences, this article draws attention to the e-Ritualization of Jihad as an important cornerstone in the building of a world-wide Jihadist community, both offline and online.

2 e-Jihadism, *embedded, embodied and everyday*²

Recently, the members of the Association for Internet Researchers held an online academic discussion on the fourth age of Internet Studies, more particularly on how to update the scope of the discipline and eventually modify its name. Barry Wellman, a household name on the matter of Internet research (networks, digital communities, communication, computers, methods) advanced the idea that instead of Internet Studies we might call it Digital Media Studies in order to integrate in it the studies of the ‘Internet of Things’ and of all things connected with the ‘Mobile’ world.

The digital space we find ourselves in today has expanded tremendously, having spread from the main arteries to even the tiniest capillaries of our everyday lives. Mobile devices provide instant access, and M2M (machine-to-machine) applications are no longer a thing of the future. As a result, communication networks are no longer bound by time, space, location or accessibility.

2 Implicit reference to the book by Christine Hine: *Ethnography for the Internet, embedded, embodied and everyday* (Huntingdon 2015).

Back in 2005, O'Reilly coined the expression Web 2.0³ to explain the World Wide Web as a social platform. Later Fuchs⁴ would add an important perspective to the understanding of the Web 2.0, a perspective that hits a higher note when we look at it in the context of online Jihadism, namely that of surveillance:

One important characteristic of many contemporary web platforms is that they store, process, assess and sell large amounts of personal information and usage behavior data. It is therefore important to theorize web 2.0 surveillance and conduct empirical research about the surveillance and privacy implications of web 2.0.

Online Jihadism is a cultural, political and religious phenomenon embedded in Web 2.0. Web 2.0 could be said to be the 'new media ecology'⁵, a platform where individuals create their own content, where ownership of data is substituted by sharing data, where collaboration, cooperation and establishment of networks are vital components. While this article concentrates on female Jihadists and their response to and/or involvement in religious violence on Facebook, Web 2.0 has obviously also had harmless positive effects for women in the Muslim community, benefitting as they do from the social networking capacities involved and particularly from the physical mobility that it offers, freeing them from religious restrictions in this regard (no longer any need for a male companion, *mahram*, for instance).

I carried out my investigation of Jihadism⁶ by conducting interviews on the subject (via instant messaging) with online informants. The aim of my research was to come to understand these women's interpretation of and their views on Jihadism and Jihadism online. For the present study I have selected one of the most recent definitions of Jihadism, given by by Fawaz Gerges, who reckons that the Jihadist movement has entered its third wave with the emergence of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Gerges relates the evolution of Jihadism to the tactical approach adopted by ISIS: "ISIS's swift military expansion stems from its ability not only to terrorize enemies but also to co-opt local Sunni communities, using networks of patronage and privilege."⁷

3 T. O'Reilly: 'What is *Web 2.0*? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software' (2005), available at <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed May 2015).

4 C. Fuchs: 'New media, Web 2.0 and surveillance', in *Sociology Compass* 5/2 (2005) 137.

5 A. Awan, A. Hoskins & B. O'Loughlin: *Radicalisation and media: Connectivity and terrorism in the New Media Ecology* (London 2011); V. Sisler: 'Cyber counsellors: Online fatwas, arbitration tribunals and the construction of Muslim identity in the UK', in *Information, Communication & Society* 14/8 (2011), available at <http://www.digitalislam.eu/article.do?articleId=7895> (accessed May 2015).

6 Y. Al-Qaradawi: 'Extremism', in C. Kurzman (ed.): *Liberal Islam: A source book* (Oxford 1998); K. Armstrong: *Holy war/Jihad* (London 1988); D. Cook: *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley 2005); B. Lawrence: *Messages to the world: The statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London 2005).

7 F. Gerges: 'ISIS and the third wave of Jihadism', in *Current History* 113/767 (2014) 339-343, p. 340, available at http://currenthistory.com/Gerges_Current_History.pdf (accessed May 2015).

To properly grasp the ideological positions taken by Jihadism, and more particularly by Salafi-Jihadism⁸, we need to turn our attention to the Sunni theological school of Salafism.⁹ Etymologically speaking, Salafism derives from *al-salaf al-salih* ('the pious predecessors who were contemporaries of the Prophet'). It defends the strict observance of the Sunna, rejecting theological innovations (*bid'a*), standing by the proclamation of the unity of God (*tawhid*), endorsing the traditionally declared grounds for excommunication (*takfir*), and adhering to the purification of practices.

The practical, easy, and accessible mechanisms of Web 2.0 offers Muslim women an online role equal to that of men. Online they have the same power of creating content, of collaborating, participating and designing their own social networks. However, being Muslim women, their online freedom, mobility and interaction are still restricted by the rules of moral religious behavior. What the observance of these rules means for their online behavior can be read in the numerous posts on this, for instance on they are not supposed to put up personal photos, more particularly photos of their own faces (unless they are covered by the *hijab*, the Islamic head cover on), and on not accepting men in their Facebook accounts. By sticking to these moral fundamentals in their online behavior they feel they are making 'sacred' use of the web. Another way of making sacred use of the web is to use it as a means to spread Islamic knowledge, more specifically Salafi-Jihadist knowledge. The task of disseminating Islamic knowledge (*da'wa*) goes together with the task of also giving advice (*nasihah*) on religious matters to other sisters. The two tasks are part of daily practice for online female Jihadists, to the extent that they even include it, in parentheses, in their profile names¹⁰: *Maryam maryam (Salafism counsellor)*.

Facebook has become the location *par excellence* for the promotion of Jihadism among women. The female participants in this study have this to say about how others see their online performance: "Violent, us? That makes me *furiosa* ('furious' in Spanish). If by defending Islam, the Prophet (PUB) and Jihad we are violent, well so be it, then we are violent women!"

8 G. Kepel: *Muslim extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, ca 1985).

9 R. Meijer: 'Salafism: Doctrine, diversity and practice', in K. Hroub (ed.): *Political Islam: Context versus ideology* (London 2010); J. Wagemakers: "'Seceders" and "postponers"? An analysis of the *khawarij* and *murji'a* labels in polemical debates between quietist and Jihadi-salafis', in J. Deol & Z. Kazmi (eds.): *Contextualising Jihadi thought* (London 2012) 145-164; Q. Wiktorowicz: 'The new global threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad', in *Middle East Policy* VIII/4 (2001).

10 Spanish Muslim women use fake names as their profile names. The fake names represent religious expressions, for example, 'Muslim by the Grace of God', or refer to their motherhood, for example, 'Umm Amin'. Although the names are fake, I still use names for the participants that are different from their real profile names to preserve their anonymity.

3 *Furiosa* – Digital research(er) on Facebook

I first started my online fieldwork on Facebook in 2012 with an open profile and a direct link to my university webpage. A couple of months later I had a network of more than 50 ‘friends’ or informants and I was joining groups under the Jihadist theme. My first methodological step to collect meaningful data was to monitor Spanish Muslim women producing open source Jihadist content, to subsequently add them as friends or follow them, map out their connections and finally to establish contact with them in writing.

I used the following criteria to select my participants: They were to be female¹¹ Spanish-speaking individuals, indicating that they lived in the area of Catalonia, claiming to be Muslims (born-Muslims and/or converted Muslims) and producing violent content online. I traced their connections and established their social networks through their shared interest in Jihadism, which yielded the following selection:

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

This part of my research lasted until February of 2015, when my Facebook account was blocked as a consequence of my online activities, reflecting as they did according to the administrators, ‘my sympathy for Jihadism’. This time it was my turn to be *furiosa*, because I had invested much time and effort in constructing a relationship with these women, to line up their networks, to collect and select relevant data for my research.

As we saw, academia is still in the process of exploring and defining digital space. In exploring the digital territory researchers are faced with a number of obstacles, which include the problem of the authenticity of sources, the irregular working times involved, the immediacy of the data, and in our specific case of Jihadism research, the sensitivity of the subject of religious violence.

As a digital space, Facebook is paradoxical in the way it formulates violent content and consequently also in the criteria adhered to in deciding what can be defined as violent content. The consequent acceptance or refusal of certain contents without there being an observable, explicit and coherent pattern underlying these decisions makes one question what Facebook administrators

11 To have a comparative measure I also investigated male Facebook accounts. The result was interesting. The Spanish-speaking Muslim males retain their Jihadist profile on Facebook. Some of them are even reporting directly from Syria, posting pictures of their daily lives.

define as violent content. When conducting ethnographic research online my aim is to analyze the meaning that individuals attribute to their performances online. I did not quite know how to formulate my activities on Facebook being blocked. Was I to say ‘I was blocked’, or should I rather say ‘my account was blocked’? As I will argue further on in this article, this doubt on how to phrase it really revolved around the physical element involved in being online.

While there are restrictions on content, Facebook for Jihadist individuals constitutes an interesting open space because the platform allows them to act as if they have religious authority, or as Nico Prucha¹² observes, “within these Online Territories of Terror, the jihadists assume the role of authoritative religious scholars, who define what is legal and who the ‘enemies of Islam’ (...) are.”

Facebook thus offers to Jihadists a suitable platform to disseminate their distorted religious Islamic values and to wave violence as an Islamic sword. In the words of Hans Kippenberg: “The change from toleration of the unbelievers to violence against them is a central theme of Islamic theology. Some Muslim scholars hold that the ‘sword verse’ has replaced other revelations that sound a different note.”¹³

Contemporary Muslim scholars have the digital techniques at their disposal (simple, clear theological messages) that grant them ‘celebrity sheikh’¹⁴ status. Anwar al-Awalaki (1971-2011) was and still is a celebrity Salafi-Jihadist sheikh, capturing the global attention of Jihadists. In this article I consider the significant theological model in which Awalaki presents Islamic migration (*hijra*) and violent Jihad as the educative (*tarbiya*) guidelines¹⁵ that could foster the identity of the Islamic community (*umma*).

After a while I opened up a new account on Facebook and partially restored my former network of informants, being more careful this time and giving preference to open source Jihadist contents in the form of images, photos or texts. My choice of method to collect and select the data once again reflects the sensitivity of the subject of religious violence as well as the vulnerability of the digital researcher investigating it.

The present article addresses the question: How are the Spanish-speaking Muslim women using both Jihadism and Web 2.0, more particularly Facebook as the preferred social networking platform¹⁶, to create a sacred space that reinforces the ritualization of online Jihad and at the same time the acceptance of religious violence as a mandatory ritual?

12 N. Prucha: ‘Online territories of terror – Utilizing the Internet for Jihadist endeavors’, in *Orient IV* (2011), available at http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Article_ORIENT_IV_NicoPrucha.pdf (accessed May 2015).

13 H. Kippenberg: *Violence as worship: Religious wars in the age of globalization* (Stanford 2011) 175.

14 J.M. Brachman & A.N. Levine: ‘You too can be Awlaki!’, in *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 35/1 (2011) 30.

15 A. Meleagrou-Hitchens: *As American as apple pie: How Anwar al-Awalaki became the face of Western Jihad* (London 2011) 40.

16 D. Boyd & N. Ellison: ‘Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship’, in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13/1 (2007) 210-230.

In Section 3, I will present a more detailed definition of online ritualization of Jihad, fundamental to comprehending the promotion of religious violence.

4 Online ritualization of Jihad

In this study I draw on the ritualization notion developed by Catherine Bell as “(...) a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful.”¹⁷

Jihadist scholars aim at establishing themselves as having the most powerful extremist ideology and one of the strategies they employ to attain their goal of domination is online ritualization of religious violence, i.e., “(...) a ritualistic innovation that allows its agents to establish, structure and control all activities that occur in cyberspace in the name of Jihad.”¹⁸

To understand the online ritualization of Jihad, it is important to grasp the notion of the ‘ritualized body’ and of ‘embodiment’ in cyberspace. The ‘ritualized body’ was defined by Catherine Bell as “a body invested with the ‘sense’ of ritual.”¹⁹ In her vision, it is a product of the dynamic relationship between ritualization and the ‘structuring environment.’²⁰

Online space is the ‘structuring environment’ where ritualization occurs and it produces the online ‘ritualized body’. The task of describing online embodiment, however, is quite a theoretical challenge. It was a challenge that Christine Hine faced in her most recent work, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*.²¹ The author considers that ‘being online’ is another example of the ‘embodied ways of being and acting in the world’²² and therefore ‘the Internet user is an embodied user.’²³ David Bell in his book on cyber culture addresses the online body presence using the terms ‘digital meat’ and ‘the flesh made code.’²⁴

Following online body representations and the communication through physical manifestations, Nanako Hayami addresses the question of “the significance of the ritualized body in the contemporary society.”²⁵ In this he points to applications such as the “emotion icons”

17 C. Bell: *Ritual theory, ritual practice* (New York 1992).

18 C. Carvalho: ‘Okhti Online. Spanish Muslim women engaging online Jihad: A Facebook case study’, in *Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* (2014) 32.

19 Bell: *Ritual theory* 98.

20 Ibid.

21 Hine: *Ethnography for the Internet*.

22 Hine: *Ethnography for the Internet* 14.

23 Idem 43.

24 D. Bell: *An introduction to cybercultures* (London 2001) 156.

25 N. Hayami: ‘Ritualized body: Goffman’s theory derived from Durkheim and Bateson’, *CDAMS Discussion Paper* 04/16E (2004) 5.

(‘emoticons’) that represent “human facial expressions of feelings”²⁶ because: “Even in the absence of the physical human face, the importance of the face remains.”

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

The Islamic rituals can be studied on three principles: spiritual submission, body conformity, and purity. According to Islamic dogma the performance of the rituals is anticipated by the act of voluntarily submitting them to the will of Allah, in other words, the believer engages in the worshiping activities with the feeling of wanting to obey the divine laws. The feeling of obedience and respect for the rituals is succeeded by the physical ability to perform all the five pillars of Islam. The believer needs to be of sound body, Islamic jurisprudence granting dispensation to people with physical disabilities or problems. The bodily discipline required to execute the prayers is at the same time an instrument to concentrate one’s mind and spirit fully on the faith. The respect for and of the body is injected and incorporated in Islamic living through the Qur’an and can be seen in themes such as funeral rites or the covering of intimate parts of the body (*awra*).

The last principle, that of purity (*tahara*), concerns mind, body and environment, more specifically it involves that all Muslims should have pure intentions (*niya*), pure bodies (*ghusl*) and be members of a pure Islamic community (*umma*). In fact, Jihad and martyrdom, due to their features and as commands of Allah, belong to the ‘ritual-purity’ themes²⁷. Kippenberg concurs with the idea that in order for an act to be considered an act of jihad, the individual needs to act in (good) conscience when inflicting death ‘against the impure’.²⁸ The linkage between purification rituals, blood, and Jihad shapes the justification that Salafi-Jihadist scholars needed to promote religious violence.

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

In Section 4 we see how Facebook surveillance and censorship features are carving the new phase of online Jihadism.

26 Hayami: ‘Ritualized body’ 6.

27 R. Gauvain: *Salafi ritual purity: In the presence of God* (Abingdon/New York 2013) 169.

28 Kippenberg: *Violence as worship* 65.

5 Jihad 3.0 – ‘Boiling the frog’²⁹

The development of a Jihadist Global Communication strategy has its roots in the activities undertaken by Al-Qaeda to disseminate their messages throughout the world. In fact, Al-Qaeda understood very well the strategic value of the web as a vital way to attract more adherents to its cause.

ISIS is Jihad 3.0, as the North-American newspaper *The New York Times* pointed out in August 2014.³⁰ The Jihadist organization took Al-Qaeda’s online project further down a notch by guaranteeing a continuous stream of contents to flow in cyber space. Moreover, Jihadist ISIS contents are found in all forms of social networking, chatting, blogging, messaging available online. The contents are well thought-out, and well worked-out, using simple texts combined with powerful imagery to appeal to the largest possible audience. Most importantly, they are translated into a variety of languages. The contents are also tailor-made, according to gender, generation and geographical location of the audience. ISIS has been aiming especially at winning the hearts and minds of the youth, working on closing the gap that Al-Qaeda failed to bridge, not paying any attention to it, power being in the hands of its senior elements.³¹

Last but not least, the online jihadist contents put up by ISIS are produced professionally, employing cutting-edge cyber tools to reach an ever-expanding audience. They also have enough readiness and preparation to quickly adapt, to move and settle into new cyber scenarios. Indeed, the Jihadist phenomenon is continuously evolving within the ‘new media ecology’ space that characterizes the Web 2.0. One of the main factors promoting online evolution and modification of the Jihadist landscape is the topic of ‘trust and privacy’.³² The efficiency and efficacy of the Facebook censorship program are causing Jihadist individuals to act online in a more precautionary fashion. Facebook administrators are particularly effective and fast in detecting Jihadist contents. Once the Facebook administration signals Jihadist contents (‘activation of all types of alarms’ as I was told in my case by an internal source) the corresponding accounts are cancelled. For a comparative analysis of censorship exercised on online social networking, I refer to fieldwork I did on Tumblr, where Jihadist users, on a daily basis, blog Jihadist-related contents (photos, images,

29 In the popular story of ‘Boiling the frog’, a frog that is placed in hot water jumps out immediately, while a frog that is placed in cold water that is slowly heated fails to register the alarming signs that will lead to his death. Surveillance and censorship are the hot water that made Jihad 3.0 jump to other forms of online identification. The same analogy was used in regard to the question of computers, privacy and personal data protection in the business world by the Advice Project. I apply it here as the image of frogs was actually used in the context of representing Jihadism.

30 *New York Times*: ‘ISIS displaying a deft command of varied media’, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/world/middleeast/isis-displaying-a-deft-command-of-varied-media.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimes&_r=0 (accessed May 2015).

31 M.R. Torres Soriano: ‘Jihadist propaganda and its audiences: A change of course?’, in *Perspectives on Terrorism* 1/2 (2007) 1-3.

32 C. Dwyer, S. Hiltz & K. Passerini: ‘Trust and privacy concern within social networking sites: A comparison of Facebook and MySpace’, in *Proceedings of the thirteenth American conference on information systems* (Keystone, co 2007) 339.

texts). The violent contents on Tumblr are graphic; the names of the users and their comments clearly indicate their Jihadist affiliations, yet censorship in this social platform is less effective than on Facebook or even on Twitter.

Aware of the censorship measures, online Jihadist users are in the process of transforming all the elements that gave away their online Jihadist identity. Black horses, banners, lions and other images commonly associated with Jihadist content are now being replaced by a ‘gentle Jihad’.³³ The details of the profile photos show good indicators of how the individual wants to be perceived online, from the close-up photo, to the use of well-known Jihadist pictures, or symbolic representations of their current feelings on a certain theme, which only a trained audience will be able to recognize. For example, since Mohammed Morsi (former head of the Muslim Brotherhood and former President of Egypt) was condemned to death many Jihadists have chosen the image/photo of a frog as their profile. The frog represents the first fatwa issued after Morsi was installed as president of Egypt and refers to the need to protect the frogs as they were special creatures to God, ‘a frog’s croaking is praise [to Allah].’ The profile picture in this case is a clear indication of where one stands politically and religiously, and expresses the person’s solidarity with the members of the network members and their allegiance to the Jihadist cause represented by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite all censorship online to control, filter or block Jihadist contents, Jihad 3.0 has been resistant to all these obstacles. Instead it is thriving with an ever-stronger and ramified online presence. Section 5 takes a closer look at the role of imagery in the new online Jihadist female profile.

6 Black butterflies: Imagery, meaning and communication

The increasingly rigid norms for surveillance and censorship (employed both by Facebook administration and by police and security forces) has made Jihadist women more careful in their online activities and less available for interviews. They have changed their profile pictures from photos with classic Jihad symbols to (seemingly) ‘harmless’ pictures such as those of flower compositions, birds, or short texts (‘I love my prophet’), or to generic photos representing Muslim women. They seldom post selfies, or self-portraits. In this day and age, however, selfies and social media platforms are inseparable components of the embodied online being. Muslim women are directly affected by the posting online of personal photos/selfies because it is an offense to their honor (*ird*) in the strictest sense of Islamic precepts. While this new form of self-

33 B. Barber: *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism’s challenge to democracy* (New York 1996) 171.

representation clashes with the Islamic jurisprudence on photography (*taswir*)³⁴, it does not stop Jihadist individuals from posting personal profile photos online. There is debate among Muslim scholars and Muslim believers whether sharing personal photos online should be permissible (*mubah*) or prohibited (*haram*). An informant of mine just recently posted a fatwa that she found online on putting up personal pictures on websites, especially on Facebook and Twitter:

Abdillah Ubayd Sheikh bin al-Jabiri: I say that the images of souls are *haram* and *kaba'ir* (grave sins). The Messenger (PUB) said: Those who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment will be those who make images. (...) And by this we know that it is not allowed to publish photos (pictures) of people on Twitter, Facebook or other networks.³⁵

As we saw, apart from religious reasons, self-censorship also take place for security reasons (so as not to attract attention in surveillance activities). This may be a reason for Jihadist women to change their names from 'Umm' into 'Black butterfly', for instance, where the imagery enclosed in the name hides its deepest symbolism (death). The contents they produce no longer present a direct, obvious link to Jihadism or to the Jihadist fight in Syria. They do however continue to disseminate the Salafi-Jihadist doctrine and the passages from the Qur'an and from the Sunna that according to the Salafi-Jihadi doctrine justify violent Jihad. The themes associated with Salafi-Jihadi theory and eschatology, references to salvation and Paradise, either through images or through texts, are as frequent as ever.

Jihadist videos are an equally vital source of Jihadist embodied online performances, be it those of executions or those showing war scenes. Violent footage continues to be widely accepted within the online Jihadist community, al-though it is gradually being replaced by other types of videos that highlight the soft Jihadist lifestyle.

As we saw in the introduction, Facebook has a 'complicated' relationship with Jihadist content, and videos are no exception in this regard. Knowing that the videos are the first items to be reported or blocked by Facebook administrators, part of the thrill for the producers of using this online space to publish videos lies in the online chase, in whether or not they will be able to get it out in digital space long enough for it to be viewed, while for the consumers and analysts the thrill is whether or not they will be able to watch the content before it is taken down by the administrators.

In a Facebook community account entitled 'Meaning and Understanding of Jihad' that I had access to via an informant, the administrator explains the goal of the page: "This Page is to

34 Photography and statues as well, the legal framework on the matter is related with ISIS destruction of Human Heritage sites and with the attacks on cartoonists who depicted images of the Prophet.

35 Transcriptions will be directly translated into English due to the limitations on the number of words.

Enlighten those About The Greater Jihad which is in the Battlefield for the sake of Allah and True Islam. May Allah guide us!!!” The core of his or her productions is a set of elaborated compositions of images with small poignant sentences. On May 17th, 2015, a new video was put up under the title: ‘Mujahideen’s response to the HATERS, Speech by Muhammad bin Abid.’ The speech is in English and is uttered by a male voice adopting a sermon-like tone. Its main message concerns the qualities it takes and the sacrifices it requires for *Mujahedeen/Mujahidun* (Jihadist fighters) to protect the *umma*. The narrator also has a rather unpleasant message for those Muslim listeners living comfortably in the Western nations, eating fast food and not supporting the Jihadist fighters: ‘they should get ready to embrace their near future, which is death without salvation.’ His speech is emotionally charged, with nothing but positive feelings for the Jihadist fighters, who deserve nothing but admiration, sympathy and gratitude from his listeners. It ends with an appeal for a change of heart among those who so far have not supported the Jihadist fighters, to please God and guarantee His forgiveness. The most interesting aspect of this video is the comments made by the followers of this page, who merely mention it and notify a friend (placing the name of the friend in blue letters). The name notifications are a Facebook interactive tool linking the post to the friend’s page and thus spreading the content to and subsequently through multiple recipients. The interactive tools have a direct impact on the construction of social networks: suddenly participants without any previous connections to each other are marked together in the same post. Thus, if a person likes a post and marks, let us say, four other persons (as a woman in the example actually did), we therefore need to multiply these four participants by the number of women that they are ‘friends’ with to get an estimate of how many women are now aware of the existence of the video aimed at giving meaning and value to the role of Jihadist fighters. In these circles of communication on Facebook, in spite of efforts to keep genders separated (and thereby respect Islamic rules), these attempts are sometimes frustrated, causing men and women to become associated to the same content. Suffice it here to make just a quick remark on gender online coexistence: the concern of respecting and keeping gender separation as an online behavioral principle only reinforces the sacred value individuals attribute to the online space. In the offline world, Muslims follow and respect the rules of gender separation and if they extend this Islamic principle of conduct to the online space it is because in their perspective, the digital space has a sacred value.

Back to the circles of communication; they broaden women’s understanding of online Jihadist contents, being exposed as they are to information that would not normally be accessible to them in the offline space.

In Section 7.I will deal with my online and offline case study of female Jihadism in Spain.

7 Immigrants in digital space

Spain and Morocco have a historical connection that goes back many centuries. Geographically located on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, the two countries share important experiences linking the populations of both nations.

During the 1970s, the first Moroccan immigrants began to arrive in Spain, initially as guest workers, mainly men, travelling alone and returning to their homeland after a short period of time.³⁶ A decade later, Madrid signed the agreement to become a member of the European Community (a name that was changed to the European Union after the Maastricht Treaty in 1993), after which the country's economy entered a phase of exponential growth and development. Labor was in great demand and workers were given legal permission to extend their stay and bring along their families.

Catalonia likewise pursued this open-immigration policy, encouraging North African people from across the Mediterranean to work and live in this province of Spain. Catalonia these days is home to about 226,321 Muslims,³⁷ an estimated 20 percent of whom follow the precepts of Salafism. The contours of the lines shaping the integration of Moroccan immigrants in Catalonia is determined by the contrasts involved in ethnicity, identity and religion. Much has been said about the general struggle of the diasporic groups to adapt to the new living and working conditions and to 'gain access to the culture of their host societies'.³⁸ Family life among the Maghreb population in Catalonia is pretty much what it would be like if they were still living in Morocco. Men are in charge of the family's earnings and take the decisions, while women occupy themselves with domestic chores and the raising of their children. This situation implies "a reinforcement of a traditional stereotype that connects women to the sphere of care and affection."³⁹ The women are also in charge of maintaining international contacts with the rest of the family, keeping in touch, either with relatives in Morocco or with those who have emigrated to other places in the world. Next to any Jihadist-oriented use, Facebook offers these women a suitable social networking platform to reach family members, and to keep in frequent contact with them by sharing family photos, special moments or to exchange traditional Moroccan recipes.

36 N. Empez Vidal: 'Social construction of neglect: the case of unaccompanied minors from Morocco to Spain', *Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research Working Paper 7* (2007) 9-10, available at <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2007-007.pdf> (accessed May 2015).

37 UCIDE: 'Estudio demografico de la poblacion musulmana', (2015) 9, available at <http://observatorio.hispanomuslim.es/estademograf.pdf> (accessed May 2015).

38 D. Conversi: 'Irresponsible radicalisation: Diasporas, globalisation and long-distance nationalism in the digital age', in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38/9 (2012) 1357-1379, p. 1371.

39 Y. Martínez & A. Huertas: 'Las adolescentes migrantes ante las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TICs): Prácticas mediáticas y relaciones socio-afectivas', in A. Huertas & M. Figueras (eds.): *Audiencias juveniles y cultura digital* (Barcelona 2014) 175-189.

While Facebook offers them an easily accessible opportunity to stay in contact with relatives, the common denominator that draws them into the Jihadist networks is the wish to gain Islamic knowledge (*ilm*). The former administrator of a Facebook page called *Muyahidines los guerreros de Allah* ('*Mujahedeen/Mujahidun* the warriors of Allah') explained to a woman the purpose of his page: "Alhamdulillah sister, that is what this page was made for, to teach about what is going on in the world and that Jihad is also Islam, even if some do not agree (...)."

The Internet is fairly accessible to my informants, many of whom already own smartphones, allowing them to be connected anytime, anywhere. The older informants demonstrate a certain resistance to adapting to new social networking tools. One of the informants complained about what she feels is an excessive use of Facebook compared to the time devoted to praying:

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

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

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

To that a younger informant replied: "Each one of us must know how to organize herself with the social networks, but Whatsapp is more practical, easier and simpler."

As a matter of fact, the younger ones, who have access to longer and better education, profit from the fact that they have access to Internet services at school to create and manage different web accounts (Twitter and Instagram, for instance).

With regard to women's radicalization in Spain, I have come to the conclusion that there are two distinctive web layers within the same 'community of practice'⁴⁰ that play a significant role: the digital (Internet) and the mobile (smart) phones.

A 'digital media community' shifting its space from what we might call 'stationary' connections to mobile ones is especially crucial for the Spanish Muslim women who wish to accomplish their radicalization process. In a recent Skype interview with a Muslim Spanish-

40 E. Wenger: 'Communities of practice a brief introduction' (2006) 1, available at <http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/06-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice> (accessed May 2015).

Moroccan leader of an Islamic Organization in Catalonia (whom I cannot name for privacy and security reasons), the man pointed out that the process of women's radicalization is migrating from a virtual community on Facebook to a mobile community on Whatsapp and/or Skype (online communication software product). This move, so he explained, takes place when the phase of radicalization enters a deeper level of commitment and the sources of communication can no longer be open ones. This different layer of online space, which is shielded from the public eye, has been referred to as the 'Invisible Web'.⁴¹ As a result of it being secret the mobile relationship is more individualistic and intimate and most importantly free of all features that make operating on the open source internet so dangerous: control, lack of privacy and exclusion. This is what Nour Nour has to say about this:

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

According to the male informant mentioned earlier, the process of mobilization, radicalization and recruitment is quick (eight weeks maximum, including logistic arrangements) and aims at very young women, more vulnerable and eager to abandon their lives in Spain. The speed of the process is related to the need of 'sending them there, before they change their minds.' "And what if they change their minds?" I asked him.

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

Samir Yerou, a Moroccan immigrant in Rubi (Catalonia) was travelling together with her three-year old son to Syria when the Turkish authorities arrested her and sent them back to Barcelona.⁴² There the Minister of Internal Affairs accused her of having Jihadist affiliations, an accusation that was formulated after the police intercepted conversations between her and a Jihadist fighter in which she

41 M.K. Bergman: 'The deep web: Surfacing hidden value' (2000), available at <http://brightplanet.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/12550176481-deepwebwhitepaper1.pdf> (accessed May 2015).

42 *El Pais*: 'El viaje radical de Samir Yerou y su hijo' (2015), available at http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2015/03/10/actualidad/1425998844_927245.html (accessed 2015).

confirmed her adherence to the cause with sentences defending violence: “(...) he [three-year old son] only wants the knife of the beheading.”⁴³ Samir’s husband in December of 2014 had reported them as missing to the Spanish police. The husband suspected that Samir was keen on migrating to Syria, having noticed a marked change in her behavior since her last visit to Morocco.

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

In the following section, I will present my concluding remarks, inviting further studies on the new digital landscapes of female Jihadism and the new challenges for digital researchers.

8 A new digital Jihadist female landscape? – Concluding remarks

Due to the effectiveness of Spanish Security and Defense institutions and their active collaboration with similar European and International institutions, particularly the Moroccan Counter Terrorism Institute, the number of apprehended Jihadist individuals and the amount of Jihadist material confiscated or removed has increased significantly over the last few years (28 individuals in 2015, compared to 11 in 2013).⁴⁴ This increase is directly connected with the increase in online radicalization and recruitment. As we have seen, female Jihadist individuals are aware of counter terrorist activities and of the need to adopt a more discrete online profile as a result. The process of online ritualization of violence that they are involved in is changing into more subtle Jihadist performances that require from the digital researcher sharper observation skills, edgier analysis and faster adaptation to new digital landscapes.

A final example to illustrate this change are the new Jihadist landscapes being proposed online to attract female individuals to perform the *hijra* to Saudi Arabia and/or Morocco and Algeria. In fact, I analyzed two Facebook pages (which I had access to via an informant) offering

43 *El Confidencial*: ‘Una yihadista a su hijo de tres años dile deguello al policia y voy’ (2015), available at http://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2015-03-10/una-yihadista-a-su-hijo-de-tres-anos-dile-deguello-al-policia-y-voy_725520/ (accessed May 2015).

44 *El Mundo*: ‘Los presos preventivos por yihadismo en España superan ya a los de ETA’ (2015), available at <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2015/04/26/553ccd61ca47414e0d8b4571.html> (accessed May 2015).

their services for those who wish to live in a proper Islamic land. The distinctive feature of the Facebook pages whose purpose is to facilitate the *hijra* is their mentioning ‘Salafiya’, or as can be read on the Hijra Algerian page: “Information Page for *hijra* in Algeria, according to the Qur’an, the Sunna and the understanding of the pious predecessors.” Here the reference to Salafism is implicit in the reference to the ‘pious predecessors’ or ‘salaf’, one of the core foundations of the Salafist doctrine. Another very interesting fact is that when I clicked on the link leading to their blog, I noticed that the cover image is a passage of the Qur’an, more exactly Sura Al-Nisa, aya 97-100, which narrates the reward of Allah to those who complete the *hijra*. At the end of the quote and in orange letters, one can read: “reserved for women only.”

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

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

The cycle of events is similar to that in the female online radicalization route (exposition and acceptance of the Salafi-Jihadist fundamentals), migration to Syria (transfer of the acquired cognitive skills to the offline space) and then return to the online space to report back on their *hijra* experiences (making use of one’s authority gained from first-hand experience to get other women to embrace *hijra*). The critical difference when compared to the online ritualization of Jihad is the absence of the practice of ritualization of violence in the *hijra* performance.

In conclusion, the complexity of this brand new phenomenon, the female Salafist (Jihadist?) migration, its insertion in the new concept of Jihad 3.0 and its possible proximity with more deeply rooted Jihadist goals constitute an important novelty within the online-offline Jihadist space research, which, also because of its profoundly disquieting aspects for the world at large, deserves future and further study.

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Biography

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