

JIHADI FEMALE INTELLECTUAL: THE CASE OF IMAN AL-BUGHA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the model of Dr. al-Bugha, search beyond the reasons of her joining IS and into her intellectual, political, and ideological positions that manifest her jihadist convictions. It also looks at the influence of her social and religious milieu, represented by her father and brothers, in addition to her children.

The significance of al-Bugha's model lies not only in her advanced educational level and renowned social background, but also in her prominent position in IS' legal and jurisprudential apparatus. She is viewed as the icon of female jihadism within IS, and is exceptionally active in espousing jihadi ideology, particularly on social media, compared to many other IS members who are prohibited from using these online networks upon arriving in IS territories. She became known as the ideological and jurisprudential 'lawyer' representing IS and its political positions. She presents an idealistic depiction of life inside the territories, and engages avidly in responding to criticisms targeting IS, particularly from rival jihadi groups

To answer the question of the study in these pages the researcher traced Al- Bugha personal and family life to identify the variables which form her character and the factors that can explain why she joined Is, then how she mentioned the life under the rules of this religious organization and her argument to justify the behavior of the state of Isis.

Keywords: Al- Qaeda, Islamic State (Isis), Jihadist Woman

INTRODUCTION

Iman al-Bugha's name was not widely known before she declared her migration to Mosul in October 2014 by way of al-Raqqa. It was however known that her father, Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha, is one of the most prominent religious scholars in Damascus whose silence towards the revolution-turned-civil-war in Syria was perceived to be in support of the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Hailing from a scholarly family, Iman al-Bugha's brothers and sisters are also prominent figures in Islamic scholarship, holding doctoral degrees in Islamic Shari`ah sciences. Her brother Muhammad al-Hassan al-Bugha was the Dean of the Faculty of Shari`ah at Damascus University, and is also perceived to be in support of al-Assad's regime. Iman herself earned a PhD degree in Shari`ah Sciences from Damascus University, and was a professor of Islamic Law at the University of Dammam in Saudi Arabia.

An important aspect to be explored here in the life of Iman al-Bugha and her decision to join IS and migrate along with her children is whether her decision came as a result of swift transformations in her ideological views, or social and psychological factors, or was a decision that compounded and crystallized over time.

The significance of al-Bugha's model lies not only in her advanced educational level and renowned social background, but also in her prominent position in IS' legal and jurisprudential apparatus. She is viewed as the icon of female jihadism within IS, and is exceptionally active in espousing jihadi ideology, particularly on social media, compared to many other IS members who are prohibited from using these online networks upon arriving in IS territories. She became known as the ideological and jurisprudential 'lawyer' representing IS and its political positions. She

presents an idealistic depiction of life inside the territories, and engages avidly in responding to criticisms targeting IS, particularly from rival jihadi groups.

This study aims to analyze the model of Dr. al-Bugha, search beyond the reasons of her joining IS and into her intellectual, political, and ideological positions that manifest her jihadist convictions. It also looks at the influence of her social and religious milieu, represented by her father and brothers, in addition to her children.

It is necessary to admit (here) that dealing with the jihadist phenomenon in research is not an easy matter, especially when it mixed with media propaganda, political agendas and with the attempts of societies, especially the families of jihadi women, to hide the issue of joining, and on top of this the jihadist feminist phenomenon is still entering In the context of the security dimension in most Arab countries, what makes obtaining the accurate information or data required to carry out studies and research extremely difficult and complicated.

On the other hand, social networking sites today have a wide possibility to overcome traditional obstacles in the availability of information. Now researchers in the field of jihadist movements are able to get closer to the phenomenon through the pages available for those who join these groups, which reflect their perceptions, their intellectual, spiritual development and many important aspects in Their personalities, this allowed to better access the character of Iman Al-Bugha by following her page on Facebook, despite the blocking of the page more than once, it was re-appearing, presenting her perceptions and opinions, answering questions and entering public discussions.

In addition, this study adopted the approach of the Rolling Snow Ball, through the list of friends on her page and other social media pages for her family and her social environment, that allow the researcher to communicate with many people and succeeded in meeting some of her father's followers and students who studied with Eman in the university stage, also those who know some Details about the family and this also helped us complete the missing links in trying to get closer to this controversial figure.

This study doesn't necessarily claim to have reached everything related to Al-Bugha's biography or the reasons that prompted her to move to ISIS and her interpretation of the organization's actions. There are still some ambiguous aspects and shortcomings that I could not conclude about, but what this research found in terms of results and data gives a good and reliable idea of an important female figure in ISIS, and it fills an important deficiency in this aspect, especially since there are - until now - no previous studies or research in this field, and all that has been published is about jihadist women and some well-known models, especially European ones. Western and American, but this important female figure has remained knowledge of it linked to some often-unreliable news reports.

To answer the question of the study in these pages the researcher traced Al- Bugha personal and family life to identify the variables which form her character and the factors that can explain why she joined Is, then how she mentioned the life under the rules of this religious organization and her argument to justify the behavior of the state of Isis.

Family and Social Upbringing

and other parts of the Arab world, yet little is known about their private lives, especially when it relates to Iman's nuclear family, where basic information about them such as her husband's name remain missing.

This does not preclude our quest to draw a closer picture with the available information and sources about her social environment and family upbringing, then about her religious and intellectual journey prior to her nafir to IS-territories. We are aided in this attempt by her avid and

direct exposition of her views and positions on her accounts on Facebook and Twitter after her migration.

Iman al-Bugha is estimated to be in her forties, according to sources close to the family. Her father, Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha, had four wives and many children. Among the well-known siblings of Iman are Dr. Muhammad al-Hassan al-Bugha (the eldest child, earned a PhD from the University of Jordan and later became the Dean of the Shari`ah Faculty at Damascus University), Dr. Anas al-Bugha (active in da`wa and religious preaching alongside his father in Syria and abroad), her sisters Dr. Hanan al-Bugha (who lives with her husband in Saudi Arabia, both are Islamic Shari`ah professors), Dr. Sumaya al-Bugha (married to Dr. Bassam al-Shaykh, both are Shari`ah professors at Damascus University), and Dr. Asma al-Bugha (who lives with her husband in Turkey). In addition to the scholarly family, Iman's circle of brothers-in-law are also well-known in Damascene circles as Shari`ah professors, most of them having been students and disciples of Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha.

Dr. Mustafa is known as a traditionalist scholar with keen interest in classical fiqh and verification of jurisprudential and doctrinal manuscripts. He is not keen on concepts of contemporary Islamic thought, religious renewal, or reconciling modernity with Islamic heritage, rather is a firm adherent of classical fiqhi sciences, according to his students.

His doctrinal and epistemological positions are closer to the Shafi`i school of thought, and the Ash`ari theology in particular. He also manifests moderate Sufi inclinations, especially the Naqshbandi Tariqa. He studied at the hands of prominent Syrian scholars, including Hasan Habanaka, Mustafa al-Khan, Mustafa al-Suba`i, `Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda, Khairo Yassin, and Shaykh Kareem Rajeh (the prominent Syrian Qur`anic reciter).

Mustafa al-Bugha became one of the most prominent preachers and scholars in Damascus, giving sermons in various mosques, and owned the publication house Dar al-Mustafa, which prints his books and publications taught to his students at Damascus University. He taught at several schools and universities in various Syrian cities.

He left in 2000 to teach in Qatar, then to teach in Jordanian universities before moving to Dagestan, at the request of its President, to contribute to da`wa and religious education in the North Caucasus republic, which in recent decades faced a growth of jihadist movements active in Central Asia. He later moved to Jordan in the wake of the Syrian revolution.

Mustafa al-Bugha did not gain political or social advantages from the Syrian regime, as did other famous Syrian religious scholars like Ahmad Kaftaru and Ahmad Hassoun (former and current Grand Mufti of the Syrian Republic), and others. He refrained from assuming official religious positions in the state. Nonetheless, he did not take an opposing position toward the regime, neither before nor after the revolution. Sources close to the family note that he renounced some of his students who engaged in confrontations between the Muslim Brotherhood movement and the Syrian regime in the early 1980s, and since then, chose to refrain from having any public stance. This made him 'accepted' by the regime, albeit without gaining any favors. His neutral positions also did not garner him antagonism from Islamist or Syrian opposition movements, since he did not engage in intellectual or political confrontations with them. Nevertheless, he delivered a sermon in the early days of the Syrian revolution expressing support for the Assad regime against the rebels, describing Assad as a "just leader," which provoked hostility from Islamists and opposition movements toward him.

He is known for his religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. His students note that he was keen to separate between male and female students during his classes. Growing up in a religiously conservative family and environment, Iman al-Bugha inherited the religious zeal of her father, and received her studies in Islamic sciences at the hands of her father and a number of other prominent scholars in Damascus.

On her upbringing, Iman expresses an absence of a playful childhood, which was replaced by a lot of reading. She states: “When I was young, entertainment was impossible, because my father refused to buy us a television so that it would not be an idol that we cling to. He put in our hands all that is useful of books and stories.” She recalls that the ‘boring’ environment led her to become an avid reader, reading the biographies of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. On reading Najib al-Kilani’s *Layali Turkestan* (Turkestan Nights), she notes feeling that she “lived in a repressed Ummah, and was pained by the glory lived by the infidels at the expense of our torn bodies.”

On her favorite subjects to read, she notes her interest in languages, history, poetry, and philosophy, but on her religious interests, she states: “I came to recognize that the real science is fiqh [religious jurisprudence], so I consumed it with an insatiable appetite.”

In examining her own narrative, we find that we are before an ideological and psychological formation that began early in her life. She grew up in a religious surrounding that renounced the products of Western modernity. Her avid reading of religious books and stories of the Prophet, his companions, and early Muslims submerged her intellectual imagination in that culture, until she “absorbed their stories into my own essence,” according to her description.

In other Facebook posts, she describes her neglect for everything that was taught in school that violated that culture, noting that she preferred to sleep during these classes. This religious upbringing delineates her zealous religious and later extremist course, as she herself states. Nonetheless, her father’s political positions in appeasing the regime does not directly explain her radical opposite orientation, a gap that she herself tries to understate in highlighting her father’s role in her religious upbringing and education in Shari`ah sciences.

It is clear that she is very proud of her personality and her religious upbringing, and of her interest in the books of Islamic thought, particularly those of prominent religious scholars such as Abu al-A`la al-Maududi and Abu Hassan al-Nadwi and the poet Mustafa al-Rafi`ie, which was reflected later in her discourse and language. She studied under the tutelage of prominent religious scholars, and received Qur’anic studies and memorization at the hands of the Grand Reciter of Syria, Kareem Rajeh, who reportedly said about her (according to her own account).

In college, she was known to be distant from the students’ social atmosphere, and unlike her sisters (Hanan, Sumaya, and Asma) who also earned PhD degrees in Shari`ah and married men who hold similar Shari`ah degrees, she did not marry a disciple of her father or a Shari`ah graduate, but rather married a pharmacist. Sources close to the family note that he was known to be religiously conservative and a memorizer of the Qur’an, a student of Shaykh Kareem Rajeh as well. Not much else is known about her husband (until the writing of this study), except that he is from the Haddad family in Damascus.

After receiving a PhD degree in Islamic Shari`ah from Damascus University, with a specialization in Usul al-Fiqh, she moved to Saudi Arabia in 2001, where she worked as a professor in Islamic Culture at the University of Dammam.

Turning Point or Evolution?

Iman al-Bugha spent 15 years in Saudi Arabia, teaching at the University of Dammam. This context is significant in analyzing her ideological development and positioning, especially that the Saudi religious scene is dominated by the Wahhabi Salafi school of thought, while she herself claims to adhere to the Shafi`i Ash`arite school of thought, to which her father and most of Syria’s scholars belong, particularly the school of Shaykh Hasan Habanaka. On the other hand, the jihadist ideology that she came to espouse, particularly that of IS, is clear-cut Wahhabi Salafi, and although she does not directly speak of ‘transitioning’ from Ash`arism to Salafism, her later discussions

(after migrating to Mosul) manifest that she was influenced by the Salafi creed during her time in Saudi Arabia and her engagement in the religious, scholarly, and da`wa circles there.

Al-Bugha tries to downplay the differences between the two schools, and finds no contradiction in transitioning from one to the other. In her discussion of matters of creed, God's names and attributes, and ta`wil (esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an), matters that represent a divergence between Ash`arism and Salafism, she states: "A person asked me once: I want to perform Jihad, but IS rejects Sufism and Ash`arism. I told him: So, what is the problem? Leave your Sufism...and you become a Dawlawi [IS follower]. The issue is simple for you, al-Ash`ari himself said it, and then recanted it. Let them leave the issue. The Companions [of the Prophet] were neither Sufis nor Ash`arites, and the Imams [of schools of thought] were neither as well. So why the headache and the dispute?"

She does not consider that there was a turning point in her own transition from Ash`arism to Salafism, she merely "reconsidered" her position toward doctrinal aspects of disagreement between schools of thought (such as ta`wil of God's attributes). As for religious ahkam (rulings) and fiqh methodology, she does not find contradiction between the Saudi Salafi School and her belonging to the Syrian school of Hasan Habanaka. She affirms that she has maintained her conservative religious views, and perhaps found common space between Salafism and the school of her religious upbringing, in terms of rejecting Western modernity and disregard toward attempts of religious revival and renewal (which she calls 'polishing of religion'), adherence to the heritage of classical Islamic fiqh, and literal understanding of religious provisions, where she finds that rigidity in religion is better than laxity, and that "how beautiful is rigidity in the religious law that has great answers for every dilemma."

In an effort to bridge the gap between moderate Damascene Sufism and the Salafi School, she puts herself in confrontations with hardliners of both schools, and considers herself a representative of the universal unified view on religion. She states: "God has afflicted me with the animosity of the Sufis and the ignorant hardliners of Salafism. I did not find them to be different from each other in their ardent ignorance." She expresses receiving indignation from both sides.

In Saudi Arabia, in addition to her teaching position at the University of Dammam, al-Bugha worked as a supervisor of the Cultural Department of the International Commission on Scientific Signs in the Qur'an and Sunnah (I'jaz, or Qur'anic inimitability), where she was active in lecturing and Islamic da`wa. During this phase, manifestations of her religious extremism were beginning to reflect in her lectures and discussions with students.

In following her ideological and political positions and her social outlook on her Facebook page, it does not appear that there was a distinct intellectual shift or a specific turning point that led to her transformation from one religious orientation to another. It appears that her transition to Salafism emerged smoothly and quietly, as she appeared to be in harmony with the Saudi Salafi circles. Yet, it is evident that her experience in Saudi Arabia, since 2001, and her smooth transition to Salafism ultimately reinforced the evolution of her radicalism to the extent of taking the decision to migrate to Mosul and join IS there, a decision that reflects a psychological motivation in her, much more than an intellectual or ideological shift that she may have experienced.

The Syrian revolution and the escalation of the conflict in Syria between opposition factions (particularly Islamist and jihadist movements) and the Iranian-backed Syrian regime constituted another catalyst in her radicalism, one that combines both intellectual and personal dimensions at once. In considering her Syrian origin on the one hand, and her extremist Salafi ideology on the other, we would find it natural that she would side with the Syrian revolution. However, the mild position of her father and brothers in support of Bashar al-Assad would soon create a rift between al-Bugha and her family. Her position toward the conflict in Syria corresponds to her espoused religious and intellectual convictions, but it is the position of her father and brothers that is quite difficult to justify, particularly in a majority Sunni society in Syria amid an Arab social and political

climate that is charged with sectarianism and factional civil wars that resulted in an overhanging “Sunni crisis.”

According to sources close to the family, al-Bugha came to visit her father in Jordan prior to her departure for Syria. The visit was reportedly a final attempt to bridge the gap between them, but it appeared that her father remained unyielding in his position. Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha’s history reflects that he always sought to steer away from clashing with the Syrian regime, both during the reign of the father Hafez al-Assad and now with his son Bashar, particularly considering that some of Mustafa al-Bugha’s sons remain in Syria today and work at Damascus University. It is difficult to generalize that the father’s position is clearly pro-Assad, considering that he remained distant from the political scene, and does not have any clear positions for or against the regime, with the exception of the sermon he gave in the early days of the revolution in April 2011.

Despite the clear contrast in political positions between Iman and her father, and although her family eventually repudiated her joining IS leading to a complete estrangement between them, yet Iman continually hints that she is still on her father’s course, and that she is an extension of his school, as if to insinuate that she is completing what he did not accomplish. Commenting on a discussion she had with an individual from what she calls “children of scholars,” who maintain a reserved position toward IS.

But why did Dr. Iman al-Bugha choose to join IS, and not another jihadi faction, such as Al-Nusra Front, for example?

The objective factor is evident in her repeated reference to her intellectual agreement with IS’ ideology and discourse. She states, “I came to the Islamic State because it is in accord with all that I believe and have learned. The Islamic State did not change any of my thoughts, and I have not learned anything new in IS that I did not know before. I repeat, I came to [IS] because it implements what I know and what I learned from Islamic law. I have discovered that I am a Daeshite before Daesh [IS] existed.”

In responding to a comment on her Facebook page on why she chose to join IS rather than any other faction, including Al-Nusra Front, she notes that she believes that IS is the “most correct”.

Her intellectual and doctrinal congruence with IS’ ideology is clear in her social, political, and religious views. She is harshly critical of Islamists who are opponents of IS’ positions and policies, declaring that she disagrees with a group of Islamic scholars and thinkers, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Abd al-Karim Bakkar, noting that she does not regard them as true jurists because they seek to merely “embellish Islam.” She strongly supports IS’ implementation of what they perceive to be obligatory Islamic laws, such as commanding prayer, Islamic penal rulings, application of the Shari’ah, and imposing the face veil (niqab) on women (a jurisprudential issue of disagreement among jurists, even in Salafi circles). She argues that these socio-religious policies have resulted in a ‘pristine’ life under IS.

Her religious position toward social and cultural issues is also in line with extremist ideology. She finds watching TV, music, Western culture, and modernity in general to be sinful. She prohibits celebration of Christian religious holidays, and considers other occasions, such as Mother’s Day, to be unlawful in religion.

Hence, it is not surprising that al-Bugha would embrace IS ideology and declare her belonging to the organization. In a famous essay entitled “I am a Daeshite before Daesh existed” (which IS published in a booklet although its size does not exceed the length of an article), she declares her loyalty and allegiance to IS, justifying her decision by saying, “Since I began reading about the plight of Muslims...and I had read the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), the companions, and Islamic conquests, I read them dozens of times, and I read history in all its revolutions, and I studied the jurisprudence of jihad at the hands of senior scholars. Since I did all that, I have been a Daeshite [IS-follower] in thought and method; I was a Daeshite before Daesh [IS] existed, and I have known since then that the only solution for Muslims is jihad.” She later adds”.

In sum, before us is a woman who is fully convinced, intellectually and religiously, of IS' thought, armed with a religious upbringing and an ideological orientation that feeds these convictions.

It remains to question whether her keenness to bridge the gap between Salafism and the Syrian school of Hasan Habanaka is merely a psychological attempt to circumvent her differences with her father, downplay her transformation toward Salafism, and to avoid manifesting the clash between her spiritual and jurisprudential heritage and her new school, to be able to say that she has not changed and has not been influenced by the Saudi Salafi environment. Or, on the other hand, is there truly 'common ground' between Wahhabi—and later jihadi—Salafism and her previous school of thought?

In this context, a student of her father says: "Those who studied at the Faculty of Shari'ah at Damascus University under renowned Syrian scholars would not be really surprised that Iman al-Bugha would become a Daeshite. This also applies to a large number of students who have this intellectual predisposition. Classical fiqhi sciences are taught at the Faculty, and her father in particular is known for his keen interest in verifying classical fiqhi manuscripts, and for his rigidity in fiqhi rulings in general." This premise is supported by Dr. Muhammad Habash, a prominent Syrian Shari'ah scholar who was a member of Syria's People's Council (parliament) before switching to the ranks of the Syrian opposition abroad. He finds that Iman al-Bugha is most congruent with her religious background and with what she learned from her father and teachers.

In short, according to this premise, what happened with al-Bugha is that she moved from theory to practice, and she moved her intellectual, doctrinal, and cultural convictions to another stage; that is, to practical implementation starting by taking the decision to migrate to IS territories. Nevertheless, in terms of her hijra decision, while logical in light of the above, it remains that there are other psychological and sociological conditions that would either push towards this decision or stand against it, which brings us from the objective factor to the subjective one related to al-Bugha's own personality.

One of the most important missing links in this analysis is her husband. Despite all the efforts made by the authors to gather information about him, through contacting family members and family friends, no clear information was found, except that he is a pharmacist and an expert memorizer of the Qur'an. Neither Iman al-Bugha nor her alleged daughter Ahlam al-Nasr mentions him in any of their posts.

During her time in Saudi Arabia, she was known for deep involvement in Saudi Salafi circles and for her religious fundamentalism, according to her students. Her alleged daughter, Ahlam al-Nasr, studied at a private school in Khobar, and was known to have rejected the principles of the Syrian revolution, considering that it was launched in demand of freedom and democracy, while she herself holds the conviction of the necessity of founding the Islamic State and the caliphate system.

Furthermore, al-Bugha is a Syrian woman immersed in a Salafi environment that has blurred lines between state-sponsored Wahhabi Salafism and Jihadi Salafism. The influx of thousands of Saudis to Syria, along with dozens of Saudi women who joined IS in Syria and Iraq or Al-Qaeda in Yemen, could have created an encouraging climate and impetus for her to take the step by migrating, to finally actualize her theories into practice.

Two other important personal elements are noteworthy here. First, the influence of her children on her decision. By the time she left Saudi Arabia for Syria in 2014, al-Bugha's three children had migrated with her to al-Raqqa (IS' Poetess Ahlam al-Nasr, 15 years old, also another 14-year-old daughter, and her son Mustafa 13 years old. The three children became involved with IS despite their young age. Her son Mustafa joined IS fighters at the battlefronts before he was killed two years later. Ahlam al-Nasr married Muhammad Mahmoud, an Austrian-Egyptian IS fighter who went by the nom de guerre Abu Osama al-Gharib (who was imprisoned in Austria for

affiliation with Al-Qaeda before leaving for Syria and joining IS). Her other daughter also married an IS fighter in Syria.

Her children's activities in support of ARE indicating that they were influenced by the path and ideology of their mother. Such influence does not appear to be superficial or transient, but rather deep-rooted to reflect that they were indoctrinated in this culture and thought since childhood. Ahlam al-Nasr's poetry, articles, and online comments, particularly about the conflict in Syria, manifest strong belief and sense of belonging to IS and its ideology.

Al-Bugha's children were born in Saudi Arabia during her tenure as a professor at the University of Dammam. On her Facebook page, the mother expresses her keen interest in religious and doctrinal education of children, and it is evident that they were influenced by the prevailing Salafi climate that their mother was engaged in. In her account of the final hours before her nafir and leaving Saudi Arabia for Syria, Ahlam tweets on her Twitter account that her mother stood in front of her room crying, only to be consoled by Ahlam who reminded the mother that she raised her children on the dream of living in this 'genuinely Islamic' setting and on the love of jihad.

The second element is al-Bugha's own personality. Her discourse and views expressed on her social networking accounts, including her personal and official pages on Facebook, reflect a strong level of self-confidence, which some may interpret as arrogance and a superiority complex. Despite the differences in views and ideology with her father, she nonetheless speaks with pride that she is the daughter of Shaykh Mustafa, and a student of his school and the school of Hasan Habanaka. She asserts on various occasions that she earned an advanced degree of knowledge and Islamic Law at the hands of senior religious scholars in Damascus. In order not to lose the spiritual and intellectual legacy that garnered her important status from a young age, she astutely tries to bridge the gap between her father's school and her embrace of Saudi Salafi culture and later IS ideology, considering them to be integrative and complementary.

These personal traits, coupled with determination and ideological convictions, had an active role in reinforcing her personal decisions, such as her disagreement and estrangement from her family and later her migration to Mosul. Upon arriving in Mosul, she wrote: "I left my huge salary and joined the service of the Islamic Ummah to fight the unjust tyrants." She then addresses her female students, saying "I am absent from you because I was searching for a cave to resort to where I can speak the word of truth, that is why I left my beloved university."

An Interesting point added by a close person to her describing her as a "dreamer" more than realistic person, stuck with her imagination which build on her reading since early age on the history of Islam and the life of companions of prophet Mohammad.

In Dreamland

While there are numerous prominent names of women in IS, the most prominent and public face of female jihadism within the organization is that of Iman al-Bugha. Her religious and propaganda role is reinforced by her active engagement on social media, which makes her an exceptional case, considering that IS prohibits its members of engaging with media outlets or social networking sites without special permission. One of al-Bugha's most significant tasks is counter-narrative and debate in defense of IS, and disseminating on the internet religious justification of IS' jurisprudential fatwas and actions.

Another significance of al-Bugha within the organization is her status as one of IS' most prominent religious jurists. Her name tops the list of a group of IS leaders and pro-IS Shari'ah specialists who issued a statement upon the declaration of the caliphate, presenting in it arguments in defense of IS and the inauguration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as caliph of all Muslims, and calling on Muslims to pledge allegiance to him and migrate to the lands of the 'Islamic State.'

The statement came shortly after al-Bugha's arrival in Mosul. Although she is a woman, and IS rarely includes women in its senior leadership, nonetheless her name topped the list of religious leaders who signed the statement. From the outset, IS gave al-Bugha an important jurisprudential authoritative role in its religious and media apparatuses, and granted her ample discretion in her media and propaganda role on the internet.

In moving from theory to practice upon arriving in IS territories, al-Bugha conveys a rosy image of life under IS. She describes it as the "utopia" and the "promised Islamic city" that every Muslim dream of, where Islamic law rules supreme and everyone adheres to Islamic ethics and morals, where economic problems are solved and social problems alleviated because of the Islamic spirit that prevails and the application of Islamic penal codes, and where jihad, fighting, and power are the hallmarks of victory.

On her first impression upon arriving in Mosul, she writes: "The streets of Mosul are cleaner than those of Damman because of the laws applied by the Islamic State." She notes that upon her arrival, she asked State officials to issue a law regulating women's work outside the home, adding that they promised her that the law would be issued soon.

Al-Bugha defends the idea of establishing the Islamic Caliphate State, noting that Muslims have long waited for this dream, "but when it came to fruition they deemed it excessive." She believes that IS was founded to apply Islamic Shari`ah and the hudud (punishments) mandated in Islamic Law, to create the climate for a genuine Islamic life, and to declare jihad in confronting the enemies. Certainly, these key concepts and terms are used to play on the collective religious and sentimental imagination of wide segments of Muslims in general, and Islamists in particular, who see this characterization as an integral part of fulfilling Islam.

On life under IS, she says: "No matter how hard a Muslim tries to make his life as God pleases, his efforts remain confined to his home, and he will continue to suffer from the corruption of society, and the lack of a power that protects rights and punishes the unjust. Hence, Islam was in dire need of a ruler that would defend the religion and govern worldly affairs by it. I thank God for blessing me with life under a ruler that governs by God's law. Life in the caliphate is the finest life in the light of God's law, despite the infidels' attacks."

On the nature of IS' governance and services, she adds: "The system here is better than in Europe, there is no bribery or nepotism, the law is applied on everyone, taxes are almost non-existent, there are offices for employment but they are not charities, rather they take what they need for labor. Job opportunities are wide open with the condition that work is done within the limits of Shari`ah".

On the one hand, this rosy depiction of life under IS seeks to arouse in Muslims' imagination the 'selective' historical model of the Islamic state, as it is depicted in Islamic history books or in the prevailing Islamic discourse, and on the other hand, it presents a model that completely contradicts the reality that the masses of the Arab and Muslim worlds complain of: bribery, corruption, nepotism, poverty, unemployment, injustice, etc. She also plays on the imagination of non-Muslims, recent converts, or Muslim communities in the West by repeatedly comparing life under IS with that in Europe, for example.

She often defends IS' application of Shari`ah and carrying out hudud penalties – according to its interpretation, and she refutes the accusations and criticisms targeting IS by counter-criticizing the social culture in the Arab world, and comparing it to the ideal culture in the caliphate.

IS' chief female jurist dedicates important space in her discourse to addressing Muslim women and discussing women's affairs in IS territories. She speaks of the importance of early marriage and considers it a solution to the problem of 'spinsterhood.' On polygamy, she presents an ideal rosy perspective, a model that is the solution to the problems facing Arab social environments where large numbers of women remain unwed, divorce rates are high, and there are complex and burdensome conditions on marriage. She also fiercely defends imposing on women to cover their

faces by wearing the niqab (face veil showing only the eyes) or the khimar (full face veil). In this debate, she attempts to frame an Islamic culture (as she understands it) in the face of modern culture by saying that the former transcends the real problems facing the latter, and that the prevailing culture in Arab societies is the product of Western culture and media, and that it does not emanate from Islam.

On another occasion, she says, “In the Caliphate, marriage takes place within hours, the problems of marriage have ended, spinsterhood ceased. One woman was married when she was 46 years old. Another was approached by her son who told her: Mother, I have married you to someone, if you do not like it, tell me to annul it. She accepted, and I attended her wedding party, a party for two celebrations, one for her and one for her son who got married three days before that. They were lovely, the two brides, the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law.”

In the context of propagating IS ideology, strategies, and positions toward other Sunni armed factions, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the West, among others, she presents jurisprudential, intellectual, and political justifications. On IS’ position on fighting other factions, such as the Free Syrian Army or the Sahawat (Awakening forces in Iraq), she considers fighting them justified because they are ‘apostates and traitors, there is no other punishment for them except death.” She also justified the burning alive of Jordanian pilot Mu`az al-Kasasbah because he was part of the coalition against IS. She accuses other factions of submission to the US and Turkey’s orders and of receiving funds from abroad to fight IS, and for this, she declares their kufr equally with their allies, where “for us, there is no difference between the atheists, the Crusaders, the Nusayriyya [Alawites], the apostates, and the traitors from among those cowardly Sahawat.”

Based on the above texts and her extensive activities on social media, we find that we are before constant arguments in defense of IS’ thought and its political, ideological, and religious positions on the one hand, and an effective rosy depiction of the ideal life under the caliphate on the other hand. Her approach is that of political and media propaganda in service of IS’ agenda and narrative, and in countering rival and opposing narratives that expose IS’ extremism and brutality, and also in confronting the positions of Islamic currents that, in general, consider IS’ ideology and actions to be deviation from Islam. Al-Bugha stands at the forefront of the intellectual, doctrinal, and media battles against the majority of Islamic trends in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and against the spectrum of Syrian opposition factions, and against the stereotypical depiction of IS that has prevailed in world media and public opinion.

Remarks: Iman al-Bugha’s Ideological and Self-Positioning

This study relied heavily on Iman al-Bugha’s own writings and discourse for many reasons. Her texts reflect her deep belief in the project of the ‘Islamic State’ and her identifying with it ideologically and religiously. They also expose the propaganda role that she plays in defending IS in the cyber world, and her marked ability to infiltrate the religious imagination of Muslim populace on the one hand, and her attempts to undermine the stereotypical image that the media portrays about IS on the other hand.

This ideological and self-identification with IS and its political project, coupled with her estrangement from her family, the death of her son while fighting alongside IS, and the marriage of her two daughters to IS fighters, reinforce the conclusion that she has tied her fate—definitively and wholeheartedly—to the organization. She found in IS the final resort for her strong personality, religious orientation, and personal, intellectual, and ideological identity. We find this in her answer to those who are worried about her and her fate in the event that IS is defeated and the ‘caliphate’ ceases to exist; she responds: “Believe it or not, this question has not come to my mind, because I am here in the Islamic State, I have taken its identity and became one of its citizens, all thanks be to God, and that’s it! [IS] shall remain, God willing, and if God forbids, it ceases, then I shall not go to

you or to the likes of you because I do not like humiliation and disgrace, I love eminence much more.”

After the collapse of the “khilafa”, with the military defeat of Isis wish lost its lands, thousands of people have killed during the war, thousands have arrested and others maybe have escaped, but until this study (March 2021) no news about the destiny of Eman and her family according to close resources to her, several people asked on the social media about her absence without answers!

REFERENCES

IS issued a memo on June 26, 2014 prohibiting its members from communicating with media outlets or social networking sites without obtaining prior permission from the leadership, with the exception of a few officials tasked with media and propaganda roles.

The authors attempted repeatedly to communicate with the family through social networking sites to obtain basic information. The family evaded the attempts, and refused to answer simple questions about her husband’s name and whereabouts, particularly after al-Bugha’s migration to Mosul.

Her Facebook page says that she was born in 1967, but al-Bugha herself shies away from stating her exact age, considering that to be unbecoming.

Syrian sources close to the family and the circles of the Shari’ah Faculty at Damascus University refused to give further details on the sons-in-law of the family.

See his official page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/sh.prof.moustafaalbougha/about/>

For details on his work in Dagestan, see the page of his publication house, Dar al-Mustafa, run by his son Dr. Anas al-Bugha on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100003327396129&fref=ts>

Based on statements made to the authors by students of Dr. Mustafa al-Bugha and his children, who did not want their names disclosed.

See segments of his sermon on April 17, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhARfOgQusU>

- Also see: Ibrahim al-Jabin, “Iman al-Bugha Umm Da’ish al-Fiqhiyya fi al-Mosul wa Waliduha Yad`u li Bashar al-Assad fi Dimashq,” [Iman al-Bugha: The Jurisprudential Mother of IS in Mosul, while Her Father Prays for Bashar al-Assad in Damascus], Al-Arab, November 29, 2015, <http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=67407>

From her posts on her personal Facebook account, which was subsequently deleted, <https://www.facebook.com/dremanelbogha?fref=ts>

Ibid.

Ibid., dated January 24, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Ibid., dated November 7, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Reliable sources that are close to the family met with the authors on December 10, 2016 at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan.

Post on her Facebook page, op. cit., dated February 1, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Ibid., in response to a comment on her Facebook page, dated November 6, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 31, 2016.

Ibid., dated February 7, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 25, 2016.

Iman Mustafa, A.B. (2014). *I am a Daeshite (IS-follower) before Daesh (IS) existed*. Dar al-Ghurabaa Publication of the Islamic State Organization.

The source preferred to remain anonymous, interviewed by the authors at the University of Jordan on December 10, 2016. Compare with: Mohammad Abu Rumman, "Hakatha Tashakalat Ideolojiyat al-Tawahhush" [This is How the Ideology of Savagery Formed], Al-Arabi al-Jadid, October 6, 2014, <https://goo.gl/qKEta>

Muhammad H. (2015). *Frankness in the necessity of reforming religious curricula: Iman al-Bugha as a model*. Shahedon.

A source very close to the family, the researcher answered (via Messenger technology) that her personality overwhelmed the personality of her husband, and it is known that she is the one who greatly affects her children, however we could not know from any independent source any additional information about him. Confidential resource (interview by Messenger social media on 10-3-2021).

Rahma D. (2014). Female students of university of Dammam launch initiative to report extremist faculty members. <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/5219853>

Although there is discrepancy on whether Ahlam al-Nasr is al-Bugha's daughter, nonetheless, al-Bugha herself notes that her children had followed her path in joining IS.

Muhammad Mahmoud grew up in Vienna and attended an Islamic school there. Austrian newspapers dubbed him the "boy terrorist." He was imprisoned for four years convicted of being a member of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. After his release, he moved to Germany where he founded the Salafi organization Millatu Ibrahim. He was expelled from Germany and later left for Egypt. In 2013, he appeared in a video while burning his Austrian passport and threatening terror attacks. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and detained in Turkey for almost 6 months before he was released. He later disappeared and joined IS in Syria. He married Ahlam al-Nasr in October 2014. Mahmoud published a video online with his new name, Abu Osama al-Gharib, while in the Syrian city of Al-Raqqa, showing bodies with severed heads. See: "Muhammad Mahmoud Yanshur Video ma' Juthath Tamm Qat' Ru'usiha," [Muhammad Mahmoud Publishes Video with Bodies with Severed Heads], Euro Arab Press, November 7, 2014, <http://www.eapress.eu/eap/?p=852>.

See: "Sha'irat Da'ish al-Sa'udiyya Ahlam Tatazawaj min Abu Osama al-Gharib fi al-Raqqa al-Suriyya," [The Saudi IS Poetess Ahlam Marries Abu Osama al-Gharib in al-Raqqa, Syria], Al-Quds al-Arabi, October 14, 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=234717>.

On Ahlam al-Nasr's migration to Syria and her life there, her tours of al-Raqqa, and the first time she fired weapons, see: "The Saudi IS Poetess Reaches Syria and Marries Al-Gharib," Arabi21, op. cit.

Compare with: "The Saudi IS Poetess Reaches Syria and Marries Al-Gharib," Arabi21, op. cit. The report mentions that the marriage ceremony took place on Saturday, October 11, 2014, and that guests tweeted about it.

- Also compare with: "The Professor of the University of Dammam Confirms Her IS-Belonging and Her Family Renounces Her Position," Al-Hayat, op. cit., reporting that her resignation came on October 21, 2014.

But on the other hand confidential very close to the family told the researcher by messenger that Eman emigrated to Syria with her family to gather.

Iman al-Bugha had two accounts on Facebook, a personal one which we have used as the main source in this study, and an official page that contains Islamic fatwas and rulings.

Ibrahim A.J. (N.D). *Iman al-Bugha: The jurisprudential mother of IS in Mosul, while her father prays for Bashar al-Assad in Damascus*. op. cit.

Ibid.

Interview by Messenger on 5-2-2021.(the source refused mentioning the name).

Munira A.H. (2014). *IS prepares Iman al-Bugha for an important position in the 'Islamic State*. Al-Hayat.

See: "Ustatha Sabiqah fi Jami'a Sa'udiyyah: Shawar' Da'ish Anzaf min Shawar' al-Dammam bisabab Tawliyat al-Kafa'at," [Ex-Professor at a Saudi University: The Streets of IS are Cleaner than the Streets of Dammam Because of the Appointment of Qualified People], Watan, January 31, 2015, <http://www.watan.com/archive5/2015/01/31/%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9/>

Her personal Facebook page, op. cit., dated November 2, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 22, 2016.

Ibid.

Ibid., dated October 18, 2016.

Ibid., dated December 13, 2016.

Ibid., dated October 18, 2016.

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Ibid., dated October 13, 2016 (made in a comment to a post on her page).

Ibid., dated April 8, 2016.

Ibid., dated November 5, 2016.