

# **MOTHERS TO BOMBERS: THE EVOLUTION OF INDONESIAN WOMEN EXTREMISTS**

**31 January 2017**  
**IPAC Report No. 35**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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The arrest of two female would-be suicide bombers in Jakarta in December 2016 shows the desire of Indonesian women for a more active role in violent extremism. It may be a reflection of the pro-ISIS movement's weakness that male leaders are more willing to oblige them than in the past, but the initiative has come from the women. Indonesian women's increasing willingness to organise social media groups, set up fund-raising charities and provide various forms of logistical support for the pro-ISIS movement shows that this is not just men exploiting vulnerable women – though that also takes place – but involves women eager to be recognised as fighters in their own right.

This evolution of women's roles increases the risk of terrorism and underscores the urgent need to improve collection and analysis of data on female networks. It also highlights the important role that civil society groups can play in working with families of detainees, women deportees from Syria, and women in conflict areas.

The past eighteen months have seen women arrested or identified in several different kinds of active roles:

- December 2016: Four women were arrested – Dian Yulia Novi and Ika Puspitasari alias Tasnima Salsabila, both former domestic workers abroad, for volunteering to become suicide bombers, the first in Jakarta, the second reportedly in Bali; Tutin Sugiarti, an herbal medicine dealer and Islamic medicine therapist, for facilitating the introduction of Dian to pro-ISIS cell leaders and for setting up a pro-ISIS charity called Dapur Uma hat Aseer (Kitchen of the Prisoners' Wives); and Arida Putri Maharani for helping her husband make a bomb.
- October and July 2016: Tini Susanti Kaduku and Jumaitun alias Ummi Delima were arrested as armed combatants with their husbands in the Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, MIT).
- September 2015: Aisyah Lina Kamelya created Baqiyah United Group (BUG), an international pro-ISIS channel on the social media application Telegram. Membership included Indians, Kenyans and Libyans.

The increase in activism is linked to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq in Syria (ISIS) and the appeal of the caliphate as a "pure" Islamic state, but also to the ability of women to benefit from the growing sophistication of social media technology. Women can take part in radical chat forums, meet men, read ISIS propaganda, express their aspirations and find like-minded friends all in the relatively safe space of encrypted messaging.

Four subsets of Indonesian women extremists have emerged, two active, one potentially active and one temporarily dismantled. The first consists of Indonesian overseas migrant workers in East Asia and the Middle East who may have more self-confidence, more of an international outlook, better English or Arabic capacity and better computer expertise than many of their stay-at-home counterparts. As uprooted foreigners in a new country, they also may have a particular interest in establishing a new community where they work. Male extremists appear to see them more cynically as sources of cash, but it makes them a particular target for recruitment and appeals for donations.

A second group consists of the Indonesian women who have joined ISIS in Syria as part of family units (very few single women have tried to leave on their own). In some cases, it was the women who pushed the family to leave, attracted by ISIS videos or determined to bring up their children under Islamic law. With more Indonesians being killed and many of the girls reaching marriageable age, the likelihood increases of more marriages between Indonesian widows and

young women with foreign fighters from outside Southeast Asia. Indonesian fighters who have gone over as bachelors have also married local women. This internationalisation of terrorist networks could become a serious headache for security forces around the world in the years to come.

A third group of potential activists are women deportees. These are women who tried to cross over the Turkish border to join husbands or other family members or who were coming in family units but were arrested and deported by Turkish authorities. They are not being monitored on a systematic basis nor are there any programs in place to assist with their reintegration, but in many cases they played active economic roles in their communities before departure; they were radicalised enough to want to leave; and they may be frustrated by not having achieved their goal.

Finally there are the women combatants from MIT in Poso. MIT, from its emergence in 2013 to its leader's death in July 2016, was the closest any organisation has come in recent years to an Islamist insurgency. The wives of three leaders were trained to use firearms and explosives, but more as a survival strategy than as a deliberate tactic to outwit the enemy (Indonesian security forces). MIT has been largely dismantled through joint police-military operations but the danger of an extremist network re-emerging in Poso is high. The involvement of the three could signal a greater willingness of extremist groups under certain circumstances to include women in training in the future.

It is important to note that Indonesia is far from alone in seeing a greater role for women in violent extremism. In 2003, one scholar wrote: "female involvement with terrorist activity is widening ideologically, logistically, and regionally" and that "contextual pressures [are creating] a mutually reinforcing process driving terrorist organisations to recruit women at the same time women's motivations to join these groups increases".<sup>1</sup>

This report examines the evolution of women in Indonesian extremist movements from Jemaah Islamiyah in the early 1990s to the pro-ISIS cells active today. It is based on direct interviews, trial testimonies, social media communications on public sites and analysis of jihadi tracts. It concludes with a series of recommendations about steps the government could take to address the increasingly prominent role of women extremists.

## II. WOMEN IN JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH

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The "new" activism of Indonesian women extremists is new only in relation to their relatively recent relegation to reproductive and nurturing roles. Indonesian Muslim women have long been more visible and vocal than their counterparts in South Asia or the Middle East. The Indonesian pantheon of nationalist heroes includes Muslim women such as Cut Nyak Dien and Cut Nyak Meutia who helped lead armed resistance against the Dutch colonial administration.<sup>2</sup> In the 1920s and 30s, women held leadership roles in Islamist nationalist groups such as Sarekat Islam and Indonesian Islamic Union (Persatuan Muslimin Indonesia, Permi), and some were jailed for their political activism.<sup>3</sup> After independence, Muslim women were active in the women's wings of the country's two largest Islamic organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammad-

1 Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.26, 2003, pp.171-195.

2 For more on Aceh's female warriors, see Elsa Clavé-Çelik, "Images of the Past and Realities of the Present: Aceh's Inong Balee," International Institute for Asian Studies, News Letter No. 48, Summer 2008, pp. 10-11.

3 The Sumatra-based Permi was singled out by the Dutch colonial government as a rebel group whose women often dominated group meetings and "express themselves more sharply and passionately than the other sex [sic]." In 1933, Hajja Rasuna Said, one of its women leaders, was imprisoned by the Dutch. Susan Blackburn, "Indonesian Women and Political Islam", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, February 2008, pp.83-105.

iyah, and though the areas thought appropriate for women's involvement were carefully circumscribed and the governing bodies of both were exclusively male, women were nevertheless fully engaged in public life, with a few NU women elected as members of parliament as early as 1955.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. *Women in Darul Islam*

Extremists from the Darul Islam (DI) movement only started to recruit women more systematically in early 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Having been crushed as an insurgency in the early 1960s, DI resurfaced in 1973 as a violent extremist movement committed to the overthrow of Soeharto and the establishment of an Islamic state. Initially, it exclusively recruited men given its preoccupation with armed struggle, but the 1979 Iranian Revolution convinced many student activists that women could play a role too – especially after the Iranian embassy in Jakarta distributed newsletters and leaflets featuring pictures of veiled women actively involved in anti-Shah protests. Some of these activists joined the new version of DI through small study circles known as *usroh*, many of them university-based, following a propagation (*dakwah*) model pioneered by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in which commitment to Islamic law (*shari'a*) began with the family, then moved to the community and finally the state.<sup>6</sup> The role of women was central because the family could not be transformed unless the women were both pious and knowledgeable. Pious women were defined as those who obeyed *shari'a*, including by wearing a headscarf (*jilbab*) – which was still rare then, especially on campuses – and raised children to be the future soldiers of God.

DI's indoctrination program for women intensified in early 1980s with two main agendas: “*jilbabisation*” or persuading more women to wear the headscarf, and the founding of women-only *dakwah* groups. *Usroh* circles in many cities introduced the veiling obligation using the book *Hijab*, written by Abu al-'Ala al-Maududi, the late leader of Pakistan's conservative Jamaat al-Islami, and translated into Indonesian in early 1980s. The most influential text pertaining to *hijab* for DI women, however, was a pamphlet entitled “Major Sins and the Verses Forgotten by the Muslim Ummah,” written by an *usroh* activist from Jakarta, Hasnul Ahmad. The pamphlet warned that women who wore miniskirts and let their hair be seen would go to hell. Many female cadres were scared and started to wear a *jilbab* after reading it.

Women's *usroh* groups, such as the one based at Masjid Sudirman, Yogyakarta in early 1980s also focused on training women on how to run a household and educate children. One of its leaders was Fatimah al-Zahra alias Lina alias Ummu Jibril, who later married Fihiruddin alias Abu Jibril, an early *usroh* activist. In 1984, the Bandung *usroh* group established its own women's wing (*lembaga keputrian*). These female activists infiltrated the Islamic study groups in many schools and universities, and some later swore allegiance (*bai'at*) to DI leaders. In addition to religious indoctrination, these women also taught their cadres skills seen as appropriate for women, such as sewing and cooking.

Until late 1980s, the main references for DI women activists were Muslim Brotherhood books, probably because the Brotherhood itself had an active women's wing called Jamaah Muslimat. They particularly relied on the diary of Zainab Al Ghazali, a Jamaah Muslimah leader who was arrested by the Egyptian government in 1965 along with Sayyid Qutb and other Brother-

4 Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics*, NUS Press and Kyoto University Press (Singapore and Kyoto, 2015), p. 60.

5 Darul Islam was a rebellion that emerged in 1948, first against the Dutch colonial army, then against the new Indonesian republic. Over time, it splintered into many different factions, some of which decided to engage in violence. One of these factions produced the regional terrorist organisation Jamaah Islamiyah, which broke away from DI in 1993.

6 These activists included Fihiruddin, later better known as Abu Jibril and his brother Irfan Awwas who later helped found Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). For more on DI and the *usroh* group, see Solahudin, *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London, 2013).

hood leaders.<sup>7</sup> The Indonesian translation of the book describes Zainab's life in jail, where she was severely tortured, and once even thrown into a cell full of wild dogs. Such books increased the militancy of the DI women, not only in their *dakwah* activities but also in supporting their husbands, many of whom were seen as subversives by the repressive Soeharto government. In 1985, for example, Abu Jibril's wife accompanied her fugitive husband as he moved from one safehouse to another, even though she was pregnant. A DI woman of Arab descent from Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, was willing to be disowned by her wealthy family and left her studies so she could stand by her husband who was sought by police for his involvement in sending DI men to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the late 1980s.

In 1992, DI began to splinter, in part over ideology as its exiled leaders living in Malaysia, led by Abdullah Sungkar, adopted salafi jihadism and accused the head of a rival faction of deviance and Sufism.<sup>8</sup> In 1993, Sungkar and his followers broke away and established Jemaah Islamiyah.

### B. *Handbook of Womanhood*

Among other indications of its commitment to salafi jihadism, JI adopted a strict dress code. Women wore a longer headscarf and many even wore a face veiling (*niqab*).<sup>9</sup> JI also became more conservative in defining appropriate roles for women; their activities were limited to the household, even though they could still teach at the women-only *pesantren* or study group. The other reason for the curbing of public role for JI women was that JI by definition was a clandestine organisation (*tandzim sirri*), so absolute obedience to the leader, enforced through the ranks down to individual families, was a way of maintaining security within the organisation. Women could be members but only men could take the oath of allegiance (*bai'at*) – and men were responsible for the discretion of their wives. Several security handbooks translated from the Arabic warned members not to discuss jihad matters with their wives or children because they could inadvertently leak secrets<sup>10</sup>.

A key document on the role of women is the *Handbook of Womanhood* produced by the Al-Mukmin boarding school (*pesantren*) in Ngruki, Solo. Al-Mukmin was established by JI's founder, Abdullah Sungkar, and his close associate, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in 1972 and became the centre of JI activities in Indonesia two decades later. By that time, it was the centre of a network of dozens of satellite schools, most of them serving both boys and girls (taught separately), that served as recruitment centres and marriage marts.<sup>11</sup>

In the final year of high school at Ngruki, selected boys were invited to exclusive study groups for JI indoctrination, while girls had to take an extra course called "womanhood" (*kewanitaan*). According to the handbook, which became the text for this course, a woman has three main roles in life: as a daughter who has to obey her father, as a wife who has to obey her husband, and as a mother who is responsible for her children's well-being and education. The emphasis on obedience to men was stronger than in traditional Islamic schools in Java. The handbook, for

7 For more on Zainab Al-Ghazali and her autobiography, see Ibrahim Uthman, "A Re-reading of the Egyptian Zaynab al-Ghazzali, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Feminist Movement in Contemporary Society," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 3, Issue 11, pp. 407-415.

8 Salafi jihadism is a politicised form of salafism that elevates jihad against Islam's enemies to a duty equivalent to prayer and fasting. "Pure" salafis see salafi jihadists as deviant extremists; jihadists see the purists as people who sit around and do nothing as fellow Muslims are oppressed.

9 JI did not require every woman to wear *niqab* because salafi ulama had different opinions about it. Some, like Abdullah bin Baz, saw it as compulsory while others, including Nasruddin al-Albani, did not. The women – to the extent that their husband approved – could choose whether to wear it or not. The wives of Imam Samudra and Mukhlas, the Bali bombers, covered their faces, for example, while Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's wife did not.

10 for example, see "Mewujudkan Keamanan di Zaman Serba Tak Aman", [ishoomy.blogspot.com](http://ishoomy.blogspot.com), 4 January 2010.

11 For more on Ngruki and its satellite schools, see International Crisis Group, "Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The Case of the 'Ngruki Network' in Indonesia," ICG Indonesia Briefing, 8 August 2002.

instance, specifically says that women “should not ask for a divorce,” which is actually allowed in Islam (and common in Indonesia).<sup>12</sup> According to Ngruki alumni who were taught “womanhood” in early 1990s, women were to be loyal supporters and helpers who should encourage their husbands to fight, although a 2004 version of the handbook did not specifically mention jihad. There was no question of taking part in jihad themselves.<sup>13</sup> Women who did not go to JI schools but married into JI families were expected to receive similar religious training [*tarbiyah*] from their parents, brothers or husbands, emphasising obedience.

### C. *Marriage Alliances*

The primary role for women, as emphasised repeatedly through JI publications, was motherhood, and marriage became a critical institution— not only to ensure the production of little mujahidin, but to protect the organisation and expand networks. Women were critical to alliance-building.<sup>14</sup> Nasir Abas, a senior JI member from Malaysia, was a strong promoter of using marriages to gain a foothold in areas where the organisation was weak. From 1994 to 1996, when he ran a JI training camp on territory controlled by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), he told recruits that they were there to train, not to marry, but if they insisted on taking a wife, they should only choose daughters of MILF leaders. “We were just newcomers,” he said. “We needed support from the local groups.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1997, after he had returned to JI headquarters at Luqman al-Hakim *pesantren* in Johor, he decided that JI needed a new, safe route to Mindanao through Sandakan, Malaysia; the problem was that he had few secure contacts there. With the assistance of his sisters, who taught at Luqman al-Hakim, he identified a perfect fit among the female students at the *pesantren*: pretty, properly indoctrinated and from a well-to-do family. They married, moved to Sandakan, and Nasir for the next several years ran cadres in and out of Sandakan to the Mindanao camp.

In 2003, Nasir arranged for the star student of the Mindanao training camp to take over the strategic position of running the JI base in Poso that leaders hoped would be the nucleus of a future Islamic state. The problem was that Hasanuddin, the student, had no contacts in Poso. Nasir therefore arranged his marriage to the daughter of the leading extremist cleric there, Adnan Aarsal, thereby immediately establishing Hasanuddin’s leadership and influence.

In these organisationally-driven marriage arrangements and there were many, Indonesian women were not simply passive instruments. They were generally free to reject a proposed match, but within JI circles, active jihadists had high prestige and were seen as desirable partners.<sup>16</sup> There are also several accounts of women actively seeking out mujahidin to marry.<sup>17</sup>

12 Pengasuh Pondok Pesantren Islam Al-Mukmin, *Materi Kewanitaan*, (Surakarta, 2004).

13 IPAC interview with Al-Mukmin’s class of 1992 and 1994 alumni, Jakarta, 2 December 2016.

14 The principle of alliance-building *tansiq bainal jamaah* (coordination among organisations) is prescribed in JI’s strategic blueprint, the General Guidelines for the Struggle of Jemaah Islamiyah (PUPJI). But there is no specific mention of marriage as an instrument for bringing it about.

15 IPAC interview with Nasir Abbas, Jakarta, 17 January 2017.

16 Between 1985 and 1994, some 300 JI men – mostly single – went to Afghanistan for military training. When they returned, one of the first things they did was to find a bride. Many went to the *ustadz* (teachers) of Al-Mukmin for help. The *ustadz* would give them the latest alumni year book that contained short bios and pictures of all students. The men would then decide which of the female students they liked and the *ustadz* would arrange a meeting with the young woman and her parents. In theory, the women could turn the men down after the first meeting, but given the men’s prestigious status as Afghan veterans and the complete obedience of the girl to her father, the Al-Mukmin women almost never said no. IPAC interviews with the wives of Afghan alumni, Jakarta, 11 December 2016.

17 Sally White, “The wives of Noordin Top,” [www.insideindonesia.org](http://www.insideindonesia.org), 8 November 2009.

#### D. *Economic roles*

Many women also took on income-generating activities to support their families. Southeast Asian women have always had a strong economic role, but their contribution in jihadi families became particularly important as the men were frequently on the move and did not always have a stable source of income. Women generally worked as petty traders, teachers or door-to-door herbal therapists; those who worked outside the home generally did not wear a face veil so that they could more easily blend in with and attract customers.

One woman, the wife of a former JI member who fought in Afghanistan and Ambon, who herself taught at a prominent JI school, explained that women need to be economically independent. Although ideally in Islam, men should be the sole support, they were not always up to the task. She said she was also aware that her husband was doing an unusually dangerous job so she had to have an alternative source of income: “That’s the risk of being the wife of a *mujahid*.”<sup>18</sup> Some women have developed successful businesses that provide contributions to extremist causes – only in 2015 did it become clear that some Indonesian women working as overseas domestic helpers were also regular contributors to Islamic charities linked to extremist organisations.

#### E. *Prohibition on Women in Jihad*

JI forbade women to take an active role in fighting except under extreme emergency conditions. No Indonesian women went to Afghanistan unlike the many who have gone to Syria; the few JI women who accompanied their husbands to Mindanao, fleeing police after the 2002 Bali bombing, did not take part in terrorist operations (though some Filipina women did) and were not included in military training programs.

At the height of the sectarian conflicts in Ambon and Poso (1999-2001), JI prohibited women from taking part. JI fighters, mostly from Java, generally left their families behind. The few women who did follow their husbands usually stayed in a safehouse.<sup>19</sup> Their main job was looking after the children, cooking, and teaching local women about religion. In Poso, a local woman named Ina, who was married to one of the fighters, demanded to be allowed to fight. When her husband forbade her, she got angry and said, “Why don’t you stay at home with the children then, and let me go to war!” She formed her own local women’s brigade and asked a non-JI jihadi group to train it because her JI friends refused to do so. The women received physical fitness and weapons training, but not bomb making instruction (though in Ambon, some local women long used to making bombs for fishing turned their skills to making them as weapons). Ina’s brigade went along with male fighters to attack Christian villages. Most of the women were placed at the back, carrying food supplies and taking care of the injured – except for Ina who was always on the frontline with her machete.<sup>20</sup> Once the communal fighting had subsided and both areas were left with Islamist extremist organisations undertaking one-sided attacks, jihad again became an all-male preserve – until women combatants reappeared in Poso in 2015.<sup>21</sup>

JI’s primary reference on the issue was a tract written by a man who was once one of al-Qae-

18 IPAC interview with Ummu Wildan, Jakarta, 2 December 2016.

19 Saeful Anam, also known as Brekele and Mujaddid, who is currently jailed for his involvement in a series of terrorist acts in and around Poso, wrote that in 2002, he brought his Javanese wife to Pandajaya, where a JI *wakalah* (administrative unit) was based. They briefly returned to Java after the birth of their first son to escape arrest but went back to Pandajaya around 2005. His wife and child were living in the base camp [*markas*] where other jihadis and their families were based; they helped each other while some of the men were away fighting, training or getting weapon supplies. Saeful Anam, “Kisah Inspiratif Sang Mujahid Kecil Daulah Islamiyah As-Syahid In Syaa Alloh Hatf Saifur Rasul Bin Saeful Anam Bin Saefuddin Al Arkhabily -Taqobbalahulloh-,” [www.wahaimuslimin.files.wordpress.com](http://www.wahaimuslimin.files.wordpress.com), 4 October 2016.

20 IPAC interview with a former Poso jihadi, Jakarta, 11 January 2017.

21 See below, section V.



da's top ideologues: Egyptian scholar Sayyed Imam al-Sharif, better known in the West as Dr. Fadl and in Indonesia and much of the rest of the Muslim world as Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz.<sup>22</sup> The tract, titled *The Essential Guide for Preparation (Al-Umdah fi al-idad al-'uddah)* was translated into Indonesian in the early 2000s and became one of the main texts for all jihadi training courses and discussion groups.

On the subject of women and jihad, *Al-Umdah* was clear: women must not fight even in situations where jihad becomes an individual obligation (*fard 'ain*) for all Muslims, such as when a Muslim country is under attack. They could give water to fighters and help treat the wounded, but they were only obligated to fight if enemy forces entered their homes or attacked them physically. The relevant portions of *Al-Umdah* were circulated in 2004-2005 on radical websites and distributed as photocopied leaflets under the title "The Law of Jihad for Women" (*Hukum Jihad Bagi Perempuan*).

It is probably not a coincidence that around the same time that the leaflets appeared, extremist groups that were more militant than JI, inspired by the "Black Widows" of Chechnya, especially after the Moscow theatre attack in 2002; the first death of a female suicide bomber in Palestine the same year; and the growing number of women suicide bombers in Iraq, showed some interest in the possibility of using women fighters in Indonesia. There was no evidence at the time, however, that Indonesian women themselves were seeking a more active role.

The few memoirs written by wives of prominent jihadis show almost no interest in fighting. The authors instead tend to see jihad as a personal struggle to be strong against all odds, to keep the family together when the husbands were fighting or incarcerated, and, most importantly, to indoctrinate the future mujahidin. Ummu Jibril whose husband left to fight in Afghanistan and Ambon, believed that in the eyes of God, she would get the same reward as the mujahidin because of all the sufferings that she went through with her young children:

So, it is only fitting that God granted the highest heavenly rewards and honour to the mujahidin. Of course, their wives who were left behind will also be honoured.<sup>23</sup>

Another woman expressed a similar opinion:

How could it not be a jihad? I just had a caesarean when my husband left [for Poso], and I already had two small children...I had to be a single parent for years...We cannot fight because we are women. But there are many kinds of jihad.<sup>24</sup>

Both women were raised in families that had been involved in jihadi activities for decades. Such women may be more likely to accept the traditional roles as mothers and teachers than those brought into extremist organisations without long indoctrination periods – including those attracted to ISIS.

### III. WOMEN AND PRISONS

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Until 2016, very few women had been arrested for terrorism, and they were generally charged with failing to report their husbands' activities. The wave of arrests following the 2002 Bali bombing helped draw extremist women into expanded networks as they travelled to visit de-

22 *Al-Umdah* was first published in 1988 while the author was in Afghanistan. Some JI fighters training on the Afghan-Pakistan border had a chance to meet him and brought his book to Indonesia. For more on Dr Fadl, see Paul Kamolnick, "Al Qaeda's Sharia Crisis: Sayyid Imam and the Jurisprudence of Lawful Military Jihad," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2013, Vol. 36, Issue 5, pp. 394-418

23 Fatimah Az Zahra, *Perjalanan Cinta Istri Seorang Mujahid*, Ar Rahmah Media, (Jakarta, 2009), p. 67.

24 IPAC interview with the wife of an Afghan alumnus, 11 December 2016.

tained spouses and male relatives and became couriers for them. In some cases, they were forced by circumstance to become their family's main breadwinner. There is little hard evidence thus far to suggest that arrests of spouses led women to desire a more active role for themselves, although this may simply reflect the lack of in-depth research on female extremists. It also shows the difference that social media has made in recent years in allowing outsiders to assess how women are seeing themselves. Today we know that women want more action because they are discussing it in on Facebook, Twitter and Telegram. If they yearned to fight in the mid-2000s, they might have discussed it among friends, but no one else would have known.

### A. *Women in Jail*

The first woman to be formally charged with terrorism was Munfiatun, the second wife of terrorist Noordin Top. A graduate in agricultural science from Brawijaya University in Malang, East Java, she had reportedly told her former housemate and college friend that she wanted to marry a mujahid. She was then 28. The friend's husband, a JI member active in an East Java cell, had already agreed to hide Indonesia's top two fugitives, Noordin and Azhari Husin, wanted for the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003. The couple told Munfiatun that they had a candidate for her and introduced her to Noordin in early June 2004. Two weeks later, on 22 June, they were married in a ceremony in Surabaya, with Noordin using a false name.<sup>25</sup> At this point, plans for the bombing of the Australian embassy were well underway. She was with her new husband for two days before he went away; she saw him once thereafter for a few days before the bombing took place on 9 September 2004. From 20 July to 22 September 2004 when she was arrested, the bombing team arranged to have her stay and teach at Miftahul Huda pesantren in Subang, West Java, an extremist school associated with Darul Islam.<sup>26</sup> (That pesantren came back in the news as part of the network involved in the Jakarta 2016 attacks linked to a pro-ISIS group.) After her arrest, Munfiatun was charged with helping hide her husband and his accomplice, Azhari Husin, in four different locations in East Java over a period of six weeks. She was sentenced to three years, but through remissions and good behaviour, was released in December 2006. She has shown no interest in returning to extremism.

Putri Munawaroh, the second woman jailed, appears to have been more militant. The wife of Susilo, one of Noordin Top's followers in Solo, she became a jihadi heroine for hiding Top, by then the most wanted terrorist in Southeast Asia, in their house for three months, though she claimed she did not know his real identity. When police tracked him down in September 2009, Putri refused to surrender as the police surrounded the house and opened fire, killing her husband and Top. When asked why she refused to leave, especially as she was seven months pregnant at the time, she replied, "Because I also want to die as a martyr through protecting my guests."<sup>27</sup> She became the darling of extremist media, her trial covered in full and packed with supporters. Shortly before she was released in July 2012, she was married by proxy to Ridwan Lestahulu, an Ambonese jihadi then detained in Porong Prison, Surabaya whom she had never met. As the widow of a martyr, she had high social status within the movement anyway, but her prestige rose further by marrying a bachelor prisoner with several years left to serve. Her first act on being released was to visit Abu Bakar Ba'asyir who had been re-arrested in 2010 for his role in funding a terrorist training camp in Aceh. He joked with her that she should have visited her new husband first.<sup>28</sup> Putri eventually moved to East Java to be closer to Ridwan, and after he was released in 2014, they moved to Ambon where they are said to be strong ISIS supporters.<sup>29</sup>

25 Trial dossier of Achmad Hasan, South Jakarta District Court, August 2005.

26 "Lika-liku Pernikahan Munfiatun dan Noordin M. Top", [www.detik.com](http://www.detik.com), 9 October 2004.

27 Trial dossier of Putri Munawaroh, South Jakarta District Court, May 2010.

28 "Inilah Pesan Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir untuk Putri Munawaroh", [voa-islam.com](http://voa-islam.com), 28 July 2012.

29 See IPAC, "ISIS in Ambon: The Fallout from Communal Conflict," Report No.28, 13 May 2016,

Several other women were arrested for helping their husbands, including Deny Carmelita, wife of book bomber Pepi Fernando who was arrested in 2011, but there was no evidence at the time that women were pressing for military training or volunteering for bombing missions, or indeed that the fundamental ideological teachings that kept women away from active battle had changed.

Of all these women, it was Putri who achieved true *mujahidah* status in the extremist community. She had the advantage of playing the courageous wife, braving bullets to defend her husband, and thus managing to conform both to the ideological ideal of “womanhood” and to show bravery and an eagerness for martyrdom at the same time.

### B. *Impact of Police Operations and Prison Visits*

It would be logical to assume that the hundreds of arrests and deaths of terrorists suspects in police operations since 2002 would have engendered anger among some of the women left behind or spurred them to become fighters. There is anecdotal evidence of the anger, but little that has emerged to date to suggest that it pushed wives, mothers or sisters toward a desire to become terrorists themselves. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that the arrests acted as a disincentive, convincing some women that the costs to the family were too high.<sup>30</sup> Until better research among Indonesian women extremists takes place, however, it will be impossible to understand the overall impact with any certainty.

The arrest of so many men – more than 1,000 between 2002 and 2016 – did bring women into a more active role as couriers, carrying in messages, documents, hand phones or cash for imprisoned spouses or brothers and taking out messages, recorded speeches or written documents as needed. In some cases, the goods brought in served to strengthen the economic position of the convicted terrorists inside prison. A former member of the organisation KOMPAK, jailed in Jakarta’s Cipinang prison from 2006 to 2009, had his wife bring in supplies used to run a highly profitable business that ranged from selling medicine, clothes, and mobile phone credit to providing money transfer services to fellow inmates.<sup>31</sup> The wife also facilitated the installment and monthly payment of cable TV for in-prison entertainment – all items and services being sold for at least twice the normal price.<sup>32</sup>

The process of visiting also led to new cliques being formed among the wives of terrorist inmates, often mirroring their husbands’ friendship circles. Those who lived far away from the detention centre or prison would travel together on visiting days and help each other find free accommodation, usually at the homes of JI school alumni.<sup>33</sup> The process of alliance-building among extremists was facilitated by these visits.<sup>34</sup>

In some cases, women became the target of competing donors: the police, who believed the women could help draw convicted terrorists away from violence, and extremist charities, which saw aid to families of detained mujahidin as an obligation and aimed to reinforce their commitment to jihad. The Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (Mer-C) was one of the first charities to support families of detainees but others, much more extreme, followed. The Infaq Dakwah Centre (IDC), set up in 2009 and linked to the jihadi website VOA-Islam, initiated the establishment of a guesthouse (*rumah singgah*) for the families of jihadi prisoners near the detention

30 See for example Julie Chernov Hwang, Rizal Panggabean and Ihsan Ali Fauzi, “The Disengagement of Jihadis in Poso, Indonesia”, *Asian Survey*, 2013, Vol 53, No 4, p.768.

31 He was jailed around 2006–2009 for storing weapons and joining a KOMPAK training camp in Ceram in 2004. A weapon expert, the Lampung-native inmate went back and forth to Southern Philippines to buy weapons. IPAC interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2016.

32 IPAC interview with a former inmate and his wife, Jakarta, 6 December 2016.

33 IPAC interviews with the wives of Afghan alumni, Jakarta, December 2016.

34 See International Crisis Group, “How Indonesian Extremists Regroup”, Report No. 228, 16 July 2002.

centres and prisons in Depok, near Jakarta and Nusakambangan island.<sup>35</sup> After al-Baghdadi's declaration of a caliphate in 2014, a new pro-ISIS charity group named Azzam Dakwah Centre (ADC) was formed, as will be discussed below.

#### IV. WOMEN AND INTERNET CHAT FORUMS

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The emergence of jihadi Internet forums in the early 2000s offered women a more direct and anonymous route toward involvement with extremist organisations. The Internet opened up new channels of the recruitment beyond family and *pesantren* circles. Young, educated women from families with no tradition of jihad found a new interest in religion by taking part in chat forums and reading Islamist tracts online. In some cases, they started by joining Islamist study groups on and off campus and then turned to the Internet; in some cases interest sparked through online chat rooms preceded involvement in study groups. The stories of Nurul Azmi Tibyani and Syahadah illustrate the power of the Internet and foreshadow the role that online communications had in the radicalisation of Indonesia's first female would-be suicide bombers in 2016.

##### A. Nurul Azmi Tibyani: Looking for Action

Nurul Azmi Tibyani, arrested in 2012 for aiding and abetting her husband in the commission of a terrorist act, illustrates three aspects of how the role of women extremists was changing: toward disseminating online propaganda, assisting with terrorist financing and networking, and taking part in physical and weapon training.

Nurul was a science student at the prestigious Airlangga University in Surabaya in 1998 or 1999 when she first joined a faction of Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). She said she left after one month because she thought NII deviated from Islamic law.<sup>36</sup> While studying, she often surfed the Internet and in early 2000s, she came across a relay chat room (mIRC) called Café Islam, a place where prominent jihadis such as Bali bomber Imam Samudra recruited new disciples even while they were in prison.<sup>37</sup> Nurul stood out in jihadi chat rooms because she was one of the few women who actively demonstrated her knowledge of Islam and commitment to jihad in the group discussions. It also helped that she used eye makeup in online pictures, making her look seductive even while wearing a face veil.

Her reputation grew online, and it was very easy for her to make friends with Islamist activists. Around 2004, through a listserv called Qalbun Salim, Nurul met Bambang Sukirno, the manager of a JI publishing house. Bambang volunteered to be Nurul's marriage broker, offering to make her the second wife of an *ustadz* of Arab descent. She asked her parents who immediately rejected the idea. Bambang then proposed Ustadz Munsif, one of the JI leaders in Poso, as a husband, but Nurul's mother rejected him, too. In 2006, with her mother and stepfather's consent, she met and married a man from Dubai who used the online name of "Noble Guy" and who claimed to have fought in Afghanistan and belonged to an extremist organisation in Bangladesh. The wedding took place via computer webcam and headset from Nurul's house in Surabaya. She never met her husband in person.<sup>38</sup>

35 IPAC interview with a former inmate and his wife, Jakarta, 6 December 2016.

36 The NII in question was likely linked to the faction headed by Panji Gumilang alias Abu Toto from a *pesantren* called al-Zaitun in Indramayu, West Java. If so, it was not a jihadi organisation but something more akin to a corrupt business empire that sought recruits in the name of building an Islamic state.

37 IPAC, "Online Activism and Social Media Usage among Indonesian Extremists," Report No. 24, 30 October 2015. mIRC was the most popular IRC client for Windows user, internet relay chat (IRC) is an application layer protocol that facilitates text-based communication and was popular in Indonesia in early 2000s.

38 Trial dossier of Nurul Azmi Tibyani, South Jakarta District Court, September 2012.

In 2008, through a friend of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's son, Nurul was introduced to Bahrin Naim, well-known in Solo then as an Internet expert. He told her that her husband was probably a CIA agent and that she should not continue the marriage. In 2009, she sought a divorce, also online, and her husband obliged.

Nurul then sought Bahrin Naim's advice for an inexpensive place to study archery because she said she had always wanted to learn apparently for the purposes of military preparation (*i'dad*). (Bows and arrows have become one of the most popular items for sale over Telegram channels, in part because of a hadith that says "Undergo training in archery and [horse] riding and if you have to choose, archery is preferable to riding."<sup>39</sup> He told her that he could teach her and gave her a few lessons, before proposing to marry her. She turned him down. Not long afterwards, he was arrested for illegal possession of ammunition; the last communication they had was in March 2012.<sup>40</sup>

After the divorce, Nurul moved to Jakarta in August 2009 to study Arabic at the Saudi-funded Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies (LIPIA). But as usual, her online persona as a beautiful, committed and smart *mujahidah* attracted jihadi celebrities. She touched base with her online friends in Jakarta, including Muhammad Jibril, the son of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) leader Abu Jibril and the administrator of several jihadi websites and web forums, including Arrahmah.com and At Tawbah.com. The two had met at Forum Arrahmah in 2008 and often chatted through Yahoo Messenger. Jibril tried to hire Nurul as a fashion columnist for one of his magazines as in addition to her other skills, she was a part-time make-up artist. By 2010, they became romantically involved and continued to date when Jibril was convicted for his involvement in fund-raising for the 2009 hotel bombings. She went to visit him in prison with his family members and they kept in touch via Yahoo Messenger. But in the end they broke up.

In mid-2011, Nurul learned from a recently released prisoner that an old boyfriend named Cahya, whom she had first met in 2006, was being sought by police in connection for financing extremist activities. Through hacking, Cahya and his team managed to steal some \$600,000 from an online currency trading company based in Malaysia, some of which was used to fund a terrorist training camp in Poso. Cahya asked Nurul to marry him as much for protection as love, though he had proposed to her before, and on 14 June 2011, they had a secret wedding ceremony with a former prisoner serving as *wali*, the role usually played by the father of the bride. Cahyo used Nurul's bank account to transfer some of the stolen money; police caught up with them both in March 2012. In 2013, Cahya was sentenced to eight years and Nurul to four. She was released in late 2015.

Nurul's story – of which this account is only the bare bones – shows a highly intelligent woman who seemed to get a vicarious thrill from being around mujahidin and ex-prisoners, taking part in religious discussions and learning how to use weapons. She appeared to work more on her own than through an organisation, however, and she was never treated with the same adulation as Putri Munawaroh in extremist media.

### B. *Syahadah: Disguising Female Identity Online*

Another woman who found an outlet for jihadism through the Internet from 2008 to 2011, Syahadah (not her real name), had to post her writings using a gender-neutral name, since the chat-room was supposed to be all-male.

Born in 1986, Syahadah was raised by a single mother who was not particularly religious.

39 Ahmad Ibn Hambal, *Musnad Ahmad*, hadith no. 16699, www.app.lidwa.com.

40 Bahrin Naim was first arrested in November 2010 for illegal possession of ammunitions and was sentenced for two and half years. Released in June 2012, he and his second wife left for Syria in January 2015.

She was educated in secular schools and became a troubled teenager by the time she was in high school, smoking, skipping classes and associating with undesirable friends. After graduating, she wanted to become a better person economically and spiritually. By 2005, she had found a job to support her family and began to attend religious study groups run by the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) at a mosque near her house in Jakarta.

Syahadah, however, was disappointed by the study group because it felt more like political cadre development than religious learning: “It was 20 per cent religious lesson [*dakwah*] and 80 per cent campaigning.” She kept searching for an alternative source of religious teaching and suddenly found one after the second Bali bombing in October 2005. Fascinated by the media reporting of the attack, she asked her PKS *murabbi* (spiritual leader) whether the bombing constituted a proper jihad. The teacher merely said it was wrong without explaining why. Unsatisfied, Syhadah turned to jihadi literature. It was only after a visit to Imam Samudra’s grave in Banten, however, that she embraced Salafi jihadism.<sup>41</sup> She said:

It was a long dry season but *subhanallah*, flowers were sprouting from his grave. They were real flowers, not bouquets – it must have been the miracle of jihad.<sup>42</sup>

In 2008, she joined the study group (*pengajian*) run by Abu Jibril in Pamulang, West Java and started to wear the niqab. Although men and women were separated in the group, Syhadah was able to befriend Abu Jibril’s sons and other male members of the *pengajian* on Facebook – which by this time was full of Indonesian women who posted profile photos of women and children from other jihadi struggles holding guns. His eldest son, Jibril, owned the Arrahmah publishing house and hired her to administer and write for its affiliated online forum. She was not the only woman journalist for Arrahmah. In fact, she was administering the online forum with her best friend, a Malaysian woman who was studying at an Islamic university in Jakarta. But Jibril required them to use pseudonyms that hid their identity because women were not supposed to take part in the discussion. Syhadah did not mind; she thought it was probably better to hide her real name to avoid online flirtations. Using a male pseudonym, she also wrote jihad-related and other inspirational articles on various jihadi blogs, including *millisiarebellion.blogspot.co.id*.<sup>43</sup>

By 2011, Syhadah had moved away from “jihad by the pen”, as online propagation was sometimes quaintly called, and devoted herself more to charity work. But it is telling that as late as 2008-2009, Indonesian women who wanted to be active cyber-jihadists had to pretend to be men.<sup>44</sup> This would change as social media exploded, especially with applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Twitter. The absence of any hierarchical structure on the Internet meant that no one could tell women to stop propagating jihad, especially when they used their own accounts. If anything, men eventually realised that women played an indispensable role in the development of the jihadi virtual community. Jihadi women would continue to make their voices heard by leading Facebook groups and engaging in online debates with fellow jihadis and their opponents, both in Indonesia and abroad.

41 Imam Samudra was executed at the Nusa Kambangan maximum prison on 9 November 2008. His funeral was held on the same day in his hometown, Serang, Banten. Two other Bali bombers, Mukhlas and Amrozi who were also executed on the same day but were buried in Lamongan, East Java. Similarly, their funeral became a public attraction and so did their tomb, which is ironic because in salafi teaching, visiting and praying in graveyard is a form of polytheism (*shirk*).

42 IPAC interview with Syhadah, Jakarta, 8 December 2016.

43 The website is still active but has not been updated since 2011.

44 Even in 2013, some jihadi password-protected forums such as Al-Busyiro still required women to use male pseudonyms in order to avoid undesired mingling of sexes (*ikhtilat*).

## V. WOMEN COMBATANTS IN POSO (2011-2016)

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Circumstances rather than ideology forced Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), an extremist group in Poso, to take on women combatants, all wives of senior leaders, and give them military training for self-defence as Indonesian security forces closed in. It was not so much a rewriting of the rules on jihad as a necessary response to police and military operations, but it came at a time when women were expressing admiration over Telegram for women jihadis in other parts of the world.

MIT had evolved from the local military wing of a nationwide jihadi organisation – Jemaah Anshorul Tauhid (JAT) – in 2011 to become for three years (2013 to 2016) what was arguably Indonesia's only Islamist insurgency, with some 60 fighters at its height. Operating in the jungle, MIT could be said to control territory only in the sense that no one went into the hills very far to look for its fighters; it had no administrative structure and no one to govern. It functioned more like a highly mobile guerrilla unit than anything approaching the nucleus of an Islamic state that it aimed at becoming. Nevertheless, for several years it managed to provide combat training for dozens – perhaps more than 100 – Indonesian mujahidin, and sympathetic extremists with computer skills from elsewhere in Indonesia ensured that the struggle of MIT and its leader, Santoso, was put on the global jihadi map, first through al-Qaeda's Global Islamic Media Front, then through the ISIS media conglomerate. In June 2014, MIT released a video of Santoso and his followers pledging allegiance to the new "caliph" of ISIS, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and from then on until his death in July 2016, Santoso was the commander of ISIS armed forces in Indonesia.

### A. *Women as Logistic Support*

As with guerrilla movements around the world, women in the Poso area were drawn in to support MIT by acting as intelligence sources, couriers, logistics suppliers, accountants, fund-raisers, and eventually, combatants. The case of Rosmawati alias Ros, arrested for terrorism in Poso, reveals the supportive tasks that some MIT women took up. Ros and her husband, Hasan, were arrested on 10 January 2015 for aiding MIT. Beginning in 2014, they had used Ros' bank account to receive regular donations for MIT from jihadi sympathisers around Indonesia. In her defence, Ros said that she only agreed to receive the money through her bank accounts because it was going to be donated to the wives and children of terrorist detainees and "martyrs". But she did not object when finding out that it was also used to buy supplies for Santoso and his fighters. In fact, she worked with the wife of MIT member Amiruddin alias Aco to arrange the deliveries. For example in early January 2015, Ros withdrew money from the account to buy boxes of food and camping equipment. She gave the boxes to Aco's wife, and Aco then brought them up to the mountain.<sup>45</sup> MIT's male couriers had been arrested before; female couriers were used to avoid suspicion.

Using women for financial transactions was not entirely new: women's bank accounts had been used to arrange money transfers from Indonesia to the Philippines in the mid-2000s. In 2015-2016, electronic transfers from Syria to Indonesia and the Philippines also frequently went through women's accounts.<sup>46</sup>

### B. *Combat or Self-Defence?*

In mid-2014, as police pressure on MIT intensified, Santoso armed his wife and the wives of two

<sup>45</sup> Trial dossier of Rosmawati, East Jakarta District Court, August 2015.

<sup>46</sup> IPAC, "Disunity among Indonesian ISIS Supporters and The Risk of More Violence," Report No. 25, 1 February 2016.

other senior fighters. The situation was dire for them. In 2013, police had arrested twelve out of the 24 MIT members on the wanted list.<sup>47</sup> Operations also targeted MIT's affiliates in Bima, on the island of Sumbawa in West Nusa Tenggara and Makassar, in South Sulawesi. Police cut off MIT's supply chain by arresting many of its couriers. It was not only losing its existing members, it was also having a hard time attracting new ones.<sup>48</sup>

It was against this backdrop that in September 2014, Santoso asked his second wife, Jumiaturun alias Ummu Delima, and the wives of a few other members to join them in the hills. Jumiaturun was a Bima native who had only five months earlier given birth to her first child. She had married Santoso in 2012 at the age of 18 in a wedding arranged by an ustadz in Bima, an important source of MIT's fighters. She and the other women had been housed far away from Santoso's base camp. But when the order came to train, she and three other women went to a plantation for a short training session in shooting. In January 2015, Jumiaturun decided to leave her baby with her sister-in-law to join her husband in the hills more permanently. She then had to take part in two more training sessions on how to throw grenades. In July 2015, she joined the wives of other MIT terrorists to undergo a week-long training in physical fitness and weaponry.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the JI women who were kept away from operational matters, Ummu Delima was aware of all MIT's terrorist activities and took part in armed clashes with the police. She was arrested on 23 July 2016, five days after her husband was killed.

In her testimony to police, Jumiaturun gave three reasons for joining the training: to obey her husband's orders, to protect herself when attacked by the authorities, and to "help our group fight against the infidels including the government's security apparatus that prevented us from implementing Islamic law in Indonesia."<sup>50</sup> The Poso women did not initially volunteer to fight but they came to see themselves as part of the armed group. Had they not been arrested, it was possible that they would have played a more active combat role.

MIT's decision to train women fighters was primarily taken as a survival strategy. But it also served another purpose: to shame the men into action. In 2015, Santoso took pictures of the women holding firearms, which later went viral on pro-ISIS social media with the following message:

O brothers, how long will you stay sleeping while our RELIGION is increasingly attacked... Aren't you ashamed in the face of Ummu Delima's spirit? Look at the enthusiasm with which she divorced herself from worldly matters.

O brothers, how long will you just become cheerleaders in the cyber world. Don't you ever have the slightest hope to prove your love to God, and to obtain the gift of martyrdom?<sup>51</sup>

The timing of the training, just after MIT joined ISIS, might also indicate that it was partially inspired by – or at least found justification in – the number of ISIS women who appeared in propaganda as fighters and suicide bombers.

## VI. ONLINE DATING AND FUND-RAISING

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ISIS has brought about a fundamental shift in how extremists, male and female, view women. While women's roles as wives, mothers and teachers remain the most important, there is now

47 "2012, Polri Bekuk 12 Teroris Jaringan Santoso," [www.kompas.com](http://www.kompas.com), 30 December 2013.

48 In November 2015, MIT released a document entitled "MIT Yang Dilupakan", which called ISIS supporters to help out their brothers in Poso instead of going to Syria.

49 Information made available to IPAC, December 2016.

50 Ibid.

51 Telegram, 13 August 2016.



an unprecedented willingness to contemplate women as terrorists. For ISIS men, like Bahrin Naim in Syria, women are attractive as bombers because they are less likely to be suspected and stopped; for women, increased exposure through social media to news of female combatants and suicide bombers has increased their own desire for action.

The desire for a more active role has been accompanied by changes in recruitment and marriage patterns. The prevalence of encrypted chat apps such as Telegram has led a small but growing number of professional women and Indonesian workers overseas, most of them maids, to become interested in ISIS. They find and reinforce each other through social media as well as offline study groups. With their English skills, relatively higher education and/or international experience, some of these women have now become the hub for ISIS fundraising, propaganda, and international networking.

Interest in ISIS and the availability of encrypted apps have also led to an increasing trend toward online dating and marriage between women and would-be mujahidin or actual fighters in Syria, as well as intermarriage between Indonesian and non-Indonesian ISIS supporters. Some of the radical maids have shown a strong interest in joining the emigration (*hijrah*) to Syria. Well over 100 Indonesian women and children have successfully crossed into ISIS territory since 2013. Many more have been deported after being caught by Turkish authorities at the Syrian border or stopped at Indonesian airports trying to leave.

#### A. *Umm Vegas' e-dating and marriage*

The story of Umm Vegas, a 35-year-old professional who left for Syria in late 2015 illustrates the emerging trend of online dating and intermarriage among ISIS followers.<sup>52</sup> She left with the dream of marrying a *mujahid* and raising children in the wondrous new caliphate, but her experience became an object lesson for would-be jihadi brides.

Umm Vegas was born and raised in a middle-class family in Jakarta. After graduating from Interstudi School of Communication Jakarta with a degree in communications, she found a job in Bali and moved there around 2004. She dated westerners there and once went on a working holiday to Europe. In 2010, she became pregnant from her foreign boyfriend and gave birth to a son. She did not marry but instead returned to Jakarta to be with her family. Far from being desperate, she felt the baby motivated her to change for the better.<sup>53</sup> She got a good job at a multinational oil company, bought her own apartment, and enrolled in a postgraduate programme at the National Institute of Science and Technology. For a while, her Facebook postings suggested that she enjoyed being a single mother.

Beginning in 2013, however, there began to be an observable change. She started posting Qur'anic verses and videos from an English language Salafi-oriented Youtube channel, The Daily Reminder (TDR). By mid-2013, her friends noticed her transition from a liberal-minded to a conservative, *niqab*-wearing Muslim. Her religious transformation (*hijrah*) may have been motivated by the desire to repent for her past sins, as can be seen from her Facebook status:

“Become pure like a new born baby :-) then start the journey of avoiding sins. Step to Jannah!”<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting to note that almost all of her Facebook postings, including the Qur'anic verses and *dakwah* videos, were in English. Sometime in 2014, she met an Australian Muslim online

52 Some Indonesian use “Umm”, some “Ummu” for “mother of”, followed by the name of their firstborn. In this case, we have a strict Muslim who named her son Vegas, after Las Vegas.

53 IPAC interview with a friend of Umm Vegas, 7 November 2016.

54 Umm Vegas Facebook status, 14 September 2014.

and was preparing to apply for a spouse visa to Australia, but the relationship did not work out.<sup>55</sup>

In 2014, Umm Vegas began attending some Salafi and jihadi discussion groups in the South Jakarta and Bekasi areas. In early 2015, she wrote a long note on why she supported Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi – the first sign of her conversion from Salafism to a pro-ISIS stance. Her list of Facebook friends expanded to include several ISIS sympathisers, Indonesian and foreign. In April, she started e-dating an Irish-English ISIS fighter in Aleppo whom she met on Facebook. The two exchanged a few messages on their Facebook wall, one of which suggested that Umm Vegas was planning to go to Syria and get married to him. But in mid-2015, she fell victim to a jihadi con artist, Susan Ermia, who robbed a number of ISIS followers in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi, promising to arrange their passport applications and itineraries to Syria only to steal their money. Despite the loss, Umm Vegas appears to have left for Syria in November or December 2015. It is unclear whether she brought her son along. By late 2016, Umm Vegas was reportedly abused by her husband and was in her post-divorce waiting period (*'iddah*) while heavily pregnant.<sup>56</sup>

Her case further sheds light on ISIS' treatment of widows, including arranged marriages for them. A two-page document issued by ISIS's Office of Martyrs and Prisoners in its Armed Forces Council (*Diwan al Junud*) entitled "General Rules for Households" outlines two phases of guidelines for widows and divorcees. During the *'iddah* period, they are required to live in ISIS safehouses or stay at their own homes if accompanied by a male guardian. They are not to leave the house and have to rely on the local amir or other person responsible (*mas'ul*) for food and other supplies. When the *'iddah* period is over, "we [ISIS] advise them to get married. The wife of the amir or *mas'ul* would then "contact the sisters who wish to get married and put forth suitable brothers to them."<sup>57</sup> It is the local amir and his wife who are in charge of arranging these marriages, meaning there is a higher chance for the Indonesian women to be wed to foreign fighters.

Intermarriage to foreign terrorist fighters can thus start from e-dating or online marriage before leaving for Syria or after arrival. There is also some evidence of marriages aimed at forging alliances. Some Indonesian fighters who arrived in Syria in mid-2015 apparently trained and fought with a French unit in ISIS rather than the Indonesian one. The daughter of Abu Jandal, the late leader of the Indonesian military unit Katibah Masyariq, was reportedly married to a French fighter. The actual date of the wedding is unknown, but some photos were circulated in April 2016. In this context, the marriage was probably a symbolic gesture to cement the brotherhood between Indonesian and French fighters, just as the companions of Prophet Muhammad married the women of Medina following their *hijrah* from Mecca. In the same spirit, Najma, a former Indonesian migrant worker in Hong Kong who left for Syria in early 2015 and whose husband died in a battle, was remarried in late 2016 to a North African fighter.

The women of ISIS, however, are more than just jihadi brides; some have become important players in their own right.

## B. Women's Online Activism

Women's online activism has changed considerably in the age of social media and ISIS. Just as their counterparts in Europe and America, Indonesian women can now create and lead groups on Facebook and Telegram – both women-only and mixed-gender groups – without the need

55 IPAC interview with a friend of Umm Vegas, 7 November 2016.

56 *'Iddah* is a prescribed waiting period that a woman must observe after the death of her husband or after a divorce, in which she must not marry another man.

57 Diwan al-Jund Office of Shuhada and Prisoners, "General Rules for the Households", an undated ISIS document that was circulated among Indonesian ISIS supporters on social media since at least October 2015.

for male permission. Some have also joined ISIS' international media groups on Kik and Telegram, where they become acquainted with international jihadi luminaries such as Jihadi John and Abu Saeed Al-Britany.<sup>58</sup> A woman with the initial of NJ administers one of the largest Indonesian Telegram groups, Grup Pembela Tauhid (GPT) that has 850 members. She was also one of the founding administrators of GPT Facebook group created in 2012. The other founders left for Syria, so when the ISIS loyalists started to migrate from Facebook and Twitter to Telegram in 2014, seeing it as more secure and independent, she proudly took charge of GPT's group there.

NJ is an important domestic hub as she singlehandedly runs an ISIS matchmaking group called Channel Ta'aruf. The channel serves an increasing demand of ISIS supporters – particularly those who do not have access to ISIS study groups in their area – to find like-minded partners. As of December 2016, the channel had 941 members and 158 listings of pro-ISIS men and women who are looking for spouses. The channel is a one-way communication platform. Participants submit a short bio and contact details to the administrator, who then posts the bios to the channel. Contact details are not published so as to avoid direct contact between unmarried men and women. Interested parties have to message the administrator to organise an introduction; she then makes sure that there is a third party who can keep an eye on the single men and women throughout their courting.

NJ has also boasted of her achievement in bringing in Salafis into the ISIS camp through a series of online debates and through facilitating their introduction (*ta'aruf*) to ISIS supporters. Her leadership did not go unchallenged. She was widely criticised by fellow ISIS supporters for promoting the mingling of sexes (*ikhtilat*). The quarrel between NJ and her (mostly male) critics peaked in October 2016, when a member of a men-only group likened her involvement in the mixed-gender group to “eating pork by reciting God's name [*bismallah*]” i.e. legitimating what has been forbidden by God.<sup>59</sup> In response, she wrote a series of rebuttals citing Qur'anic verses, *hadith*, and opinions of Islamic scholars that support her definition of *ikhtilat* as direct physical interaction between a man and a woman without the presence of other parties. She further challenged her critics to present a scriptural argument proving that a mere virtual discussion on religious topics involving hundreds of men and women counts as *ikhtilat*. She managed to silence her detractors.

Resistance to female activists in a mixed-gender setting is less common in international groups. A few Indonesian women have facilitated the *hijrah* of fellow Indonesians as well as pro-ISIS men elsewhere by connecting them to contacts in the war zone. One example is a female ISIS supporter, Aisyah Lina Kamelya (ALK), who in September 2015 created the Official Baqiyah United Group (Official BUG), whose members came from around the world including Indonesia, India, Kenya, Philippines and Egypt. Some of the most active BUG members were two Indian men: the Jaipur-based marketing manager Sirajudin and the Dubai-based computer engineer Mohammed Naser.<sup>60</sup> ALK and the two Indian men were previously part of an international WhatsApp group called Ummah Affairs that hosted a regular question-and-answer session with radical British cleric Anjem Choudary – that was how they managed to recruit the non-Indonesian ISIS supporters to BUG. A few ISIS fighters in Libya were also active in BUG;

58 Mohammed Emwazi alias Jihadi John was a British jihadi who was first seen in the beheading video of US journalist James Foley that was uploaded on YouTube in August 2014. He went to Syria in 2012 and was reportedly killed in a drone strike in November 2015, but ISIS only confirmed his death in January 2016. Omar Hussein alias Abu Saeed Al-Britany is a British-born ISIS propagandist and fighter who is believed to have joined ISIS since 2014 and has been on the United Nations sanction list since September 2015. He has used various social media platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Telegram to encourage *hijrah* to Syria and Libya and call for attack in his home country. See “Omar Hussein”, [www.counterextremism.com](http://www.counterextremism.com), undated and Dana Ford, “ISIS Confirms Death of ‘Jihadi John,’” [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), 20 January 2016.

59 Telegram, 28 October 2016.

60 National Investigation Agency of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, “Final Report: State vs. Mohammed Sirajuddin,” 29 February 2016.

other members were keen to get *tazkiyah* (recommendations) and information on how to join ISIS in Libya and asked to speak with them in private chats. In October 2015, Naser was arrested in Sudan, en route to Libya to fight with ISIS. Sirajudin was later arrested in December 2015 for planning to travel to Syria.<sup>61</sup> ALK might have tried to get to Syria via South Asia but as of December 2016, she remained in Indonesia because her husband was in custody for his involvement in a terrorist plot uncovered in December 2015.<sup>62</sup>

Some Indonesian female migrant workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan have also facilitated the *hijrah* to Syria of fellow nationals through raising money, organising itineraries and helping obtain a *tazkiyah* or recommendation needed as part of the screening process for potential members. Most of the migrant workers were radicalised overseas – some through intensive interaction with ISIS sympathisers on social media and others through a combination of offline study groups and social media contacts. For some, their first exposure to ISIS ideology was through the videos and writings of international jihadi clerics such as Anwar Al-Awlaki and Anjem Choudary rather than local ideologues. It was only after some Indonesian jihadis – such as Mahfudz Dachlan, a former KOMPAK jihadi – visited them in their host countries that they became better connected to the Indonesian groups. Many have also married Indonesian jihadis.

These women became intermediaries for individuals who tried to go to Syria on their own, rather than through formal ISIS channels. Some radical Indonesian maids working in East Asia were able to raise money from fellow ISIS sympathisers in the region to pay for the trips of some individuals from Indonesia in 2015.<sup>63</sup> Some also booked tickets for would-be emigrants with itineraries that made the journey seem like normal tourism (e.g. Jakarta-Singapore-Moscow-Istanbul or Jakarta-Macau-Dubai-Istanbul). In some cases, jihadis married the migrant workers so that their new wives would finance honeymoon trips to meet them; this way, when they actually left for Syria, they would have a record of international trips and arouse less suspicion of immigration officials when they left for or arrived in Turkey.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, many women believed that their financial contributions constituted “money jihad” (*jihad al-mal*) and that this was compensation for their inability to participate in armed jihad (*jihad al-qital*).<sup>65</sup>

### C. Supporting Mujahidin Families

Women in ISIS have been regular donors to families of imprisoned and “martyred” terrorists, initially through charities set up by extremist organisations, and later, after unhappy experiences with dubious transactions and corruption, through charities they ran themselves.

The stricture to help families left behind by detained or killed mujahidin is found in numerous hadith. One of the most widely cited by extremist charities is:

Whosoever takes care of families of fighters in the path of Allah, they truly are also fighting.<sup>66</sup>

61 “ATS: Sirajuddin To Be Confronted with Man Having IS Links,” [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 22 December 2015.

62 ALK married Arif Hidayatullah around October 2015. Arif was arrested in December 2015 for a series of bomb plots directed from Syria by Bahrun Naim.

63 One of them was Ivan Armadi Hasugian alias Madi, the 17-year-old teenager who tried to bomb a church in Medan in August 2016. Madi was very active on social media, he used to run a Telegram channel and online blog called Al-Madi File wa Video and Al-Madi Media. In August 2015, Madi spread a message on a pro-ISIS, male-only semi-public Telegram group, accusing some migrant workers of corrupting the money that was donated to him for travelling to Syria.

64 IPAC, “Online Activism and Social Media Usage among Indonesian Extremists,” Report No. 24, 30 October 2015.

65 See for example, Ummu Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, “A Jihad without Fighting,” *Dabiq*, Issue 11, September 2015.

66 Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Jihad, Hadith no. 2631. See also “Kepada Yang Belum Berangkat Jihad,” [annajhsolo.wordpress.com](http://annajhsolo.wordpress.com), 4 January 2013.

The first two charities to actively support ISIS were already active before ISIS emerged: Infaq Dakwah Centre, established in 2009, and Gerakan Sehari Seribu (Gashibu), set up around 2010 by Agung Setyadi, a former detainee involved in the 2005 Bali Bombings, and Izzy Imani who later joined ISIS in Syria and killed there in 2015. These organisations became pro-ISIS around 2013 but it was also true that most of the terrorist suspects arrested since late 2013 have been pro-ISIS. In 2014, three more pro-ISIS charities emerged that were noticeably more militant: Azzam Dakwah Centre, Baitul Mal Ummah, and Baitul Mal Al-Izzah. ADC initially relied on radical websites for fund-raising but as several of these closed down, it all came to rely on Telegram channels and groups to seek donations. The other two were started on Telegram in 2016. They post touching stories, most commonly testimonies of inmates' wives who cannot afford to pay hospital bills for giving birth or taking care of their sick children. The story that managed to attract the most enthusiastic donors was a love letter from a seven-year-old girl named Nisa to her father in jail. The hand-written letter was circulated on hundreds of ISIS Telegram groups and channels, in which the little girl said that she missed her father very much and asked him to buy her some clothes and school equipment; she also hoped that he would die as a martyr and looked forward to seeing him in heaven<sup>67</sup>.

Women are seen as being more susceptible to such emotional stories and many are eager to make donations. But some found themselves cheated. In 2014, a group of radical migrant workers in East Asia collected monthly donations for the families. They were not sure how to select the most deserving recipients, so they planned to channel it through Gashibu, which had a good reputation in the extremist community. Before they were able to find a Gashibu contact, a religious teacher (ustadz) linked to Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) in Jakarta approached them and offered religious counselling and sermons through WhatsApp.<sup>68</sup> When he found out about the donation plan, he volunteered to deliver the money directly to the needy families – except that he took every single cent and disappeared.<sup>69</sup> In 2015, one of the administrators of Baitul Mal Ummah called on the channel's followers to help a brother in need. It later turned out that he used the donation for his own wedding party.

Besides the unprofessionalism of charity staff, the other factor that led many to distrust these ISIS charity groups was their biased selection of recipients. Inmates' wives have complained, for example, that ADC failed to reach out to the neediest because the latter lack access to mobile phones. Some organisations have been accused of having too many programs with too little funding. For example, Baitul Mal Al-Izzah stretched its already limited resources into four different projects: foster parents; start-up business loans; mujahidin family aid and *dakwah*. The money available for widows and wives was thus tiny.

Dissatisfaction with the existing charities motivated some women to establish their own. In 2014, a married woman from Tasikmalaya, Tutin Sugiarti (alias Ummu Absa alias Nenek Genit), established the Dapur Ummahat Aseer (Kitchen of Prisoners' Wives). Tutin was later arrested as an accessory to terrorism but not for the charity work per se. Another charity called One Mind emerged in 2016, with staff that included (staff that included former migrant workers) former migrant workers. Unlike the better-known charities like Gashibu, the charities founded by women are specifically dedicated to helping other women. Other pro-ISIS women's groups have formed a kind of rotating savings club (traditionally called *arisan* on Java), but instead of distributing the collective savings to members, they transfer the sum each month to a pool of recipients that they have known and selected personally, particularly those they see as having

67 The picture of Nisa's letter went viral on pro-ISIS Telegram channels and groups in November 2016.

68 JAT was founded in 2008 by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the former leader of JI and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MII). More on JAT, see International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid", Asia Briefing No. 107, 6 July 2010.

69 This story was circulated on Facebook and Telegram in August 2015 as ISIS online activists were discussing Susan Ermia, the jihadi con artist.

been neglected by other agencies.<sup>70</sup>

#### D. *Financing Terrorist Plots*

Pro-ISIS women have become involved not only in helping mujahidin families but in financing terrorist plots. One example dates from November 2016, when police uncovered a terrorist cell led by Rio Priatna Wibawa, an agricultural expert from Majalengka. Rio was working with an Acehese man, Bahraini Agam whom he had met via Facebook six months earlier. In late May 2016, Bahraini raised money for his and Rio's terror plots through Facebook and he later gave Rp 7 million (\$520) to help Rio set up what was supposed to be a bomb laboratory at Rio's house. However, a message circulated on the pro-ISIS Telegram network on 1 December 2016 revealing that in fact, Bahraini had received Rp 30 million (\$2,300) from fourteen people – mostly women – as a result of his Facebook fundraising.<sup>71</sup> The amount he gave to Rio was thus far below the total donation, and the suspicion was that he pocketed the rest.

Police investigations further revealed that Rio himself also received contributions from Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, including from some women whom he had e-dated via mobile phone.<sup>72</sup>

While there are many examples of jihadi men apparently exploiting women, especially women migrant workers, it would be wrong to assume that the women are simply victims.<sup>73</sup> Most women involved in ISIS consciously decide to join and are at least as committed to the cause as the men, in some cases more so.<sup>74</sup>

## VII THE FIRST (WOULD-BE) FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

Indonesian women have been increasingly open since 2015 about expressing admiration for women suicide bombers and their own wish for a more active role in jihad. As it turned out, the first woman arrested for planning to detonate a suicide backpack bomb – at Indonesia's presidential palace – had a rather more complicated motive for wanting to do so.

It was the November 2015 Paris attacks that sparked a particularly heated round of debates in ISIS chat groups about the permissible role of women in armed jihad. On 18 November, a French woman named Hasna Aitboulahcen was wrongfully reported to have blown herself up during a police raid on a terrorist safehouse in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis. Later investigations revealed that while she was a key player who, among other things, rented the safehouse, she did not actually detonate a suicide belt as first reported.<sup>75</sup> Still, the sensational news reports that dubbed her as "Europe's first female suicide bomber" was enough to make Indonesian ISIS women excited about their own prospects as future fighters and bombers.<sup>76</sup> Many single women expressed a desire on social media to follow in Aitboulahcen's footsteps; a few married women with children did as well.

70 It is worth mentioning that this kind of activism in fundraising is also found among the younger JI and Jamaah Ansharu Syariah (JAS) women who started to get involved in HilalAhmar Society Indonesia (HASI), a JI-linked charity group that has deployed several aid missions to Syria since 2012. JAS was established in 2014 by JAT members who disagree with Ba'asyir's decision to pledge loyalty to Al-Baghdadi. IPAC interview with a female activist of HASI, December 2016.

71 Telegram, 30 November 2016.

72 "Rio Pratna Tersangka Pembuat Bom Diduga Didanai TKI," [www.tempo.co](http://www.tempo.co), 25 November 2016.

73 Sally White, "The wives of Noordin Top," op. cit.

74 IPAC, "The Failed Solo Suicide Bombing and Bahrnun Naim's Network," Report No. 30, 29 July 2016.

75 "Family of Woman Killed in Paris Attacks Raid File Murder Complaint," [www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com), 21 January 2016.

76 See for instance, "Who Was Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber?," [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), 20 November 2015.

Some women had explicitly stated their wish to conduct a suicide mission. In August 2016, two women exchanged the following messages in a semi-public Telegram group:

A: I wish someone would give me a bomb and show me the way so that I can blow up their offices [government oppressors]

B: Me too, Umm.<sup>77</sup>

ISIS ideologues and leaders, however, did not share their enthusiasm. In January 2015, online supporters of ISIS circulated a document entitled “Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study”, which was apparently written by the media wing of ISIS’ women brigade, Al-Khansaa. The Al-Khansaa Manifesto basically put forth motherhood and serving one’s husband as the main duties of women, but it also stipulated that women may be called into violent jihad under certain circumstances.

We have already clarified what the fundamental function for women is - it is in the house with her husband and children. However, there are other causes for which it is permissible for certain women to leave her home in order to serve society that we will recount below, God permitting (besides things that she customarily needs to do like traveling, on visits or hospitalised and so on). This is only in exceptional circumstances, not continually, as is the case with men. Women may go out to serve the community in a number of situations, the most important being: 1) Jihad (by appointment) – if the enemy is attacking her country and the men are not enough to protect it and the imams give a fatwa for it, as the blessed women of Iraq and Chechnya did, with great sadness, if the men are absent even they are present. 2) The most common reason is for studying the sciences of religion. 3) Female doctors or teachers may leave, but they must keep strictly to Shariah guidelines. It is always preferable for a woman to remain hidden and veiled, to maintain society from behind this veil. This, which is always the most difficult role, is akin to that of a director, the most important person in a media production, who is behind the scenes organising.<sup>78</sup>

This stance is shared by many female supporters of ISIS in Indonesia and elsewhere. But some Indonesian women in a pro-ISIS chat group cited a different document released in October 2015 by the ISIS-linked Al-Zura Foundation as a justification for women’s martyrdom.<sup>79</sup> The Al-Zura document reiterated Al-Khansaa’s glorification of women role as mothers and caretakers, saying that “women must offer what she can for the jihad [...] by treating the ill, sewing cooking, or washing”. But it also contained a clearer ruling on female martyrs by noting that women can carry out martyrdom operations “after the Amir has permitted it and if it is for the public good”.<sup>80</sup> This was taken as proof by some women that ISIS allows female martyrs.

A counter argument emerged in October 2015 from Usdul Wagha, a disciple of Indonesia’s most prominent jihadi ideologue, Aman Abdurrahman. He translated and circulated “To Our Sisters: A Jihad Without Fighting,” an essay written by Ummu Summayah Al-Muhajirah that was published in Volume 11 of the ISIS magazine *Dabiq*. Sumayyah’s idea of women’s role in jihad was even more conservative than that of Al-Khansaa. She wrote:

Still, the absence of an obligation of jihād and war upon the Muslim woman – except in

77 Telegram, 5 August 2016.

78 Charlie Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansaa Brigade,” Quilliam Foundation, February 2015, p. 22.

79 The women cited a summary of the document that was published by an Indonesian jihadi news site, VOA-Islam. “Daulah Islam (IS) Keluarkan Peraturan Baru Bagi Para Wanita yang Ingin Berjihad,” [www.voa-islam.com](http://www.voa-islam.com), 24 November 2015.

80 Haras Rafiq and Nikita Malik, “Caliphettes: Women and the Appeal of Islamic State,” Quilliam Foundation, 2015.

defense against someone attacking her – does not overturn her role in building the Um-mah, producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle.<sup>81</sup>

But it did not totally crush the hope of women who wished to play a more active role because Bahrūn Naim, Indonesia's leading ISIS recruiter and propagandist, seemed to support the idea of female martyrdom. In May 2016, when a follower of his blog asked whether it was permissible for single women to do *amaliyah* (jihad operations), Bahrūn Naim answered:

In the Islamic State, there are still many men to fight. It becomes an obligation for women when men no longer want to fight, as in Indonesia.<sup>82</sup>

Following this encouragement, in August 2016, some women online activists translated an English article called “10 Brave Palestinian Women Martyrs” which was widely shared across the Telegram groups. The arrest of two would-be female suicide bombers in December 2016 revealed that Bahrūn Naim not only gave them verbal encouragement but also direct instructions by telephone as well as financial support.

The first woman arrested was Dian Yulia Novi. Dian, aged 27, was devout but not radical when she left Indonesia to work as a domestic, first in Singapore from 2011 to 2013 when she took care of young children, then as a caretaker for an elderly person in Taiwan from 2013 to March 2016. Her radicalisation began in Taiwan, where a lighter workload meant that she had more leisure time to spend with her smart phone. She spent most of her time surfing Islamic websites and social media, and developed a friendship with a particular ISIS sympathiser on Facebook, Ulama binti Ghulam. As a largely self-taught Muslim, Dian found Binti Ghulam's simple explanations on jihad appealing. She said in an interview with *Tempo* magazine after her arrest:

At first I felt I curious, why kill, why cut off hands? It seemed very hard-line. I strongly objected and debated with jihadis on Facebook. For months I was against them. Their response: “Sister, if you were raped or your family was raped, what would you do? Wouldn't you be angry?” Yes, I'd be angry.<sup>83</sup>

She was led from this to a belief that she should avenge for the Muslim deaths in Syria and other conflict areas. But she had another motive: to save her father from hellfire. When she returned to Indonesia in 2016, she found out that her father was seriously ill and sought help from a witch doctor in the village. At the time, she had already embraced the salafi position that all forms of superstition were idolatry. She thought that the only way to save him from divine punishment was to sacrifice herself as a martyr, because she had read that a martyr could save herself and her extended family from the wrath of God.<sup>84</sup>

She became determined to find the contacts who could help her undertake a suicide mission. Shortly before returning home from Taiwan, she chatted online with Tutin the founder of the Dapur Ummahat charity whom she met on Facebook, and told her of her intention. Tutin was already in touch with Nur Sholihin, an ISIS supporter who led the extremist charity ADC from his home in Solo. Nur Sholihin had been a long-time admirer of Bahrūn Naim and after many attempts at communication, he finally reached Bahrūn Naim in Syria through Telegram in early

81 Ummu Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, “A Jihad without Fighting”, op. cit.

82 Telegram, 25 May 2016.

83 “Dian Novi: Perintah Meledakkan Bom dari Bahrūn Naim,” *Tempo*, 19 December 2016.

84 This belief was based on a hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad and Thabrani, saying that a martyred mujahid could give a *shafaat* (recommendation, help) to 70 of his family members in the hereafter. See A. Z. Muttaqin, “Jihad Amal Ibadah Tertinggi,” [www.arammah.com](http://www.arammah.com), 10 May 2014.



2016. He told Bahrun Naim that he wanted to volunteer himself for an *amaliyah* (terrorist act), but Bahrun Naim told him that he wanted to try a new strategy of using a female suicide bomber. He already had a target, the presidential palace in Jakarta, and thought using a woman would be an advantage because she would not arouse suspicion.<sup>85</sup>

Nur Sholihin agreed to look for a possible candidate. His first choice suddenly decided to join a different cell in Bahrun Naim's network, so he turned to his friend, Tutin for help. Tutin introduced him to Dian online. As soon as Dian returned from Taiwan, Tutin met her in person to make sure that she was really up for the job. Tutin was satisfied with Dian's performance during what amounted to an informal job interview and recommended that Nur Sholihin take her on. Nur Sholihin and Dian got married three months before the mission was due although by then he was already married with a child.

According to an ISIS fatwa, women need the permission of and to be accompanied by their father (if single) or husband (if married) to carry out any activities outside their home – even for worshipping, including by becoming a martyr – and they knew her father would never grant a permission let alone accompany her.<sup>86</sup> Dian thus had to find a husband; Nur Sholihin and his first wife decided that he should take Dian as a second wife because if she married anyone outside the group, their plot might be leaked.<sup>87</sup> On the night before the attack, police captured the couple and their accomplices with a pressure-cooker bomb made with TATP (acetone peroxide, sometimes called the “Mother of Satan”), the explosive of choice for ISIS bombers. It had never before been used in Indonesia, although Bahrun Naim in September 2015 had tried to get another of his Indonesian followers to use it.<sup>88</sup>

Dian and Nur Sholihin's testimonies led to the arrest of several other terrorist suspects, including a woman named Ika Puspitasari alias Tasnima Salsabila, who was allegedly preparing to carry out a separate operation in Bali. Ika was also part of Nur Sholihin's network; they were introduced by a friend that Ika met on Facebook in 2015. Ika's husband (whom she had married via mobile phone while in Hong Kong) had been arrested in December 2015 for planning a terrorist attack in Indonesia; at the time, Ika, who was still working as a maid in Hong Kong, contributed Rp 8 million [US\$ 600] to fund the planned attack. She returned to Indonesia in November 2016.<sup>89</sup>

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

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Indonesian women in extremist organisations are now catching up with the lethal practices of their sisters in other parts of the world. While leaders of most violent jihadi organisations continue to see the ideal role of women as “lionesses” staying home and producing “cubs”, women have been brought into combat, including suicide operations, when pressure on the group from counter-terrorism operations has drastically reduced the number of recruits; when there is a perception of increased threat; and when women can provide a tactical element of surprise especially when they are seen less likely to come under suspicion than men.<sup>90</sup> The last was clearly

85 “Teror Jaringan Kulak Tahu,” *Tempo*, 19 December 2016.

86 “32 Islamic State Fatwas,” [www.jihadica.com](http://www.jihadica.com). Some jihadi scholars suggest that women need a permission from their husband or guardian to conduct offensive jihad, but not defensive one. See for example, Yusuf al-'Uyairi et. Al, *Muslimah Berjihad: Peran Wanita di Medan Jihad*, Media Islamika (Solo, 2007), pp. 87-88

87 “Teror Jaringan Kulak Tahu,” *Tempo*, 19 December 2016.

88 Trial Dossier of Arif Hidayatulloh bin Soeharno, East Jakarta District Court, October 2016. According to Arif, Bahrun Naim in September 2015 had sent him instructions on how to make different kinds of bombs, including with TATP.

89 “Terungkap Ika Puspitasari Calon Pengantin yang Akan Ledakkan Bom Bali,” [www.news.okezone.com](http://www.news.okezone.com), 22 December 2016.

90 Jessica David, “Evolution of the Global Jihad: Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.36, pp.283-284.

Bahrn Naim's reasoning in telling his followers to look for women suicide bombers.

The use of women can thus sometimes be seen as a sign of strain in the organisation or as a dramatic way of establishing superiority of the group's leader where there is competition among factions or rivals.<sup>91</sup> Given the history of attempts at one-upmanship among Indonesian ISIS leaders, this could be a factor in Bahrn Naim's thinking as well.

But these considerations are all from the leaders' point of view. Chatter on social media and especially over the Telegram application, as well as evidence from the small number of women arrested, has shown that the Indonesian women themselves are looking for a more active role. This means that pressure for more women suicide bombers may be coming both from above, in Syria, and below, from women who want their own chance at martyrdom.

The question is what to do. Research on pro-ISIS women is more urgent than ever before, to understand their motivations and aspirations and how they might be channeled more productively. Far and away the best subjects for such research are the women, now in the high dozens, who have been deported from Turkey after trying to cross into Syria to join ISIS. The Indonesian government should urgently put together a top-flight research team to design a questionnaire that could be used and systematically try to interview every woman who has returned, since their names, passport numbers and addresses are known. It would be particularly important to elicit information on the circles of friends these women moved in so that a target population for disengagement programs could be identified. These programs might involve social, educational and economic activities designed to draw them into new networks; there are a number of small local initiatives that could be replicated.

It is also critical to understand more about the *dakwah* and fund-raising activities taking place in Indonesian migrant worker communities abroad. Some of the most effective NGOs within Indonesia and across the region are concerned with improving the conditions of migrant workers abroad. It might be possible to design a program that would alert fellow migrants to the danger of recruitments – and of losing their hard-earned cash to dubious jihadi charities.

Finally, Indonesian police should be trying to gather as much data as they can from returnees and deportees about marriages that Indonesians have made with non-Indonesians, because of the implications for wider organisational alliances.

The need to know more about Indonesian extremist women suddenly has become urgent.

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91 Ibid. p.285.

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