

Sara GODLEWSKA<sup>1</sup>  
Paweł BERNAT<sup>2</sup>

## THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF OSAMA BIN LADEN'S WIVES

This paper's main goal was to assess, based on the analyses carried out, if Osama bin Laden's wives enjoyed a special status within Al-Qaeda as a result of their husband's rank and status. In other words, this paper examined if it is justifiable to infer the occurrence of exceptionalism or a detachment from religiously and socially predefined gender limitations, thanks to being married to the leader. The main methods used to examine this hypothesis were historical and content analysis, which provided verified premises, and the deductive method, which allowed for the construction of a sound argument that addresses the paper's research question. This paper's conclusion is not unequivocal.

**Keywords:** Al-Qaeda, Islam, Osama bin Laden, Osama bin Laden's wives, war on terror, women in Al-Qaeda.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is not a faith that promotes an internalised and individual approach to religion. On the contrary, it encompasses the whole reality of the believer, including the social and economic aspects of state organisation and the individual lives of Muslims. From that perspective, Islam is strong patriarchy. The Qur'an represents women as equal to men from the anthropological and moral point of view – "Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will surely bless them with a good life, and We will certainly reward them according to the best of their deeds" (Qur'an, 2021). However, her position in society and family is defined differently. She should seek the fulfilment of her life in being a mother and a wife and submit to her husband's will, who has disciplinary rights over her (Bani & Pate, 2015). In the marriage, a Muslim woman should be an ally or a guarding of a Muslim man – "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (...)" (Qur'an, 2021).

Although the above cannot be said about all of the six wives of the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, five of them shared life with him for a lengthy period of time, including the struggles and profits stemming from their husband position. This paper aims to examine whether the high status of bin Laden's wives translated into better treatment within the

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Godlewska, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany; e-mail: s.godlewska4169@wsosp.edu.pl. ORCID: 0000-0003-2791-0496.

<sup>2</sup> Paweł Bernat, PhD, Military University of Aviation, Dęblin, Poland; e-mail: p.bernat@law.mil.pl (corresponding author). ORCID: 0000-0002-8150-9794.

patriarchal social structure and loosening of strong social and moral constraints. The potential exceptionalism of the wives will be examined with the use of the historical method and content analysis. The critical reading of available sources reporting on the wives' lives will allow, with the application of the deductive method, to verify or falsify the central hypothesis of this study, i.e. whether bin Laden's wives enjoyed special privileges due to their husband position; whether such exceptionalism took place.

The paper is divided into five sections that provide context and premises for the main argument. The first one, very briefly, describes the inception, ideology, and structure of Al-Qaeda. The second, entitled "Women in Al-Qaeda", is dedicated to depicting the role given to women within the organisation. Next, the wives' story is presented, followed by the analysis of how the husbands rank within the organisation impacted the women's status. The paper is concluded with the answer regarding the occurrence of the exceptionalism of bin Laden's wives.

## **2. MILITANT ISLAMIST ORGANISATION AL-QAEDA**

Al-Qaida was established in 1988 and began as a logistical network to support Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union during the Afghan War. The members of the organisation were recruited from the whole Islamic world. In 1989, when the Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda dispersed but continued to oppose what its leaders believed to be corrupted Islamic regimes as well as the foreign presence in Muslim countries. Around 1996, the organisation eventually re-established its headquarters in Afghanistan under the patronage of the Taliban militia (Britannica, 2019).

The rise of Al-Qaeda coincided with the development of a new type of terrorism. Terrorist organisations were established in other countries with goals similar to those of Al-Qaeda, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. The activities of this type of fundamentalist organisations gave rise to the term "new terrorism" due to unprecedented brutal methods of operation and the scale of attacks, hitherto unknown (Zubrzycki, 2015).

Al-Qaeda became an international terrorist network shortly after its inception. Until his death, the organisation was financed and led by Osama bin Laden. It consisted of various groups scattered around the Muslim world, such as the Egyptian Al-Jihad group. Initially, Al-Qaeda was an informal organisational structure of Arabs who fought in Afghanistan against the USSR, and after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, it openly turned into an organisation of fighters who were to bear the fire of the Islamic "holy war" around the world (Alexander & Swetnam, 2001). The jihadists became convinced that it was mainly they who contributed to the victory in the war in Afghanistan.

In 1996, the ideological doctrine of Al-Qaeda was proclaimed, and Osama bin Laden announced the "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, Expel the Mushrikeen from the Arabian Peninsula" (Bin Laden, 2007). In it, he claimed that the occupation (also understood as simply their presence in a Muslim country) of the land of Islam by American troops is the most severe act of aggression against Muslim countries, which forces them to start fighting. He called on all Muslims to jihad against the Americans and to overthrow the Saudi dynasty, cooperating with Israel and the United States, and made jihad a personal duty of every Muslim.

The organisation's main goal was to overthrow the "corrupt and heretical" governments of the Arab states and replace them with Sharia law. Al-Qaeda is strongly anti-Western and views the United States as the main enemy of Islam, which is particularly reflected in the

views expressed by Osama bin Laden, which urge all Muslims to take up arms and stand up against this country (Mielnik, 2019).

### 3. WOMEN IN AL-QAEDA

In the Declaration of War, bin Laden “explains that women are playing an essential role as supporters, facilitators and promoters in carrying out the international Jihad” (von Knop, 2008). Bin Laden also said: “Our women had set a tremendous example for generosity in the cause of Allah; they motivate and encourage their sons, brothers and husbands to fight for the cause of Allah in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya and in other countries. (...) May Allah strengthen the belief- Imaan- of our women in the way of generosity and sacrifice for the supremacy of the word of Allah. (...) Our women instigate their brothers to fight in the cause of Allah. (...) Our women encourage Jihad saying: Prepare yourself like a struggler; the matter is bigger than the words” (von Knop, 2008). On the other hand, however, in the fatwa (a formal ruling or interpretation of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar) entitled “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, World Islamic Front” published in 1998, which became the manifesto of the full-fledged global jihad, the role of women seems to be diminished (von Knop, 2008).

Women were also portrayed as needing protection and vulnerable: “[T]o the sister believer whose clothes the criminals have stripped off. To the sister believer whose hair the oppressors have shaved. To the sister believer whose body has been abused by the human dogs” (Al-Qaeda, 2004). Based on these statements, it can be concluded that Al-Qaeda members recognised the capture of a Muslim woman by the people considered by them as infidels as a reason to carry out the defensive jihad. In such instances, ensuring woman's freedom is a duty imposed upon the whole world Muslim community (von Knop, 2008). However, one could argue about the definition of the word “freedom”. It could not be fully justified to understand it as understood by contemporary feminism as the freedom to decide about oneself. In this case, it is about freedom in the understanding of Islamism, that is, freedom defined by Shari'a law.

A document entitled “The Role of Women in the Jihad against Enemies” encourages women to participate in jihad actively. It does not mean actual fighting but calls for women to encourage and support men in their quest to join the jihad. While explicitly stating that women should not actively engage in physical combat, the document emphasises women's power over men, reminding them that their role in jihad is a vital necessity for the entire Muslim community (von Knop, 2008). It would seem that this has an almost propaganda overtone, which aims to improve the population's morale.

Since most of the men in Al-Qaeda acted at a high risk of being injured or killed, it would seem that assigning women to tasks that are no less important, but not necessarily related to literal physical combat, made a lot of sense. Those tasks were taking care of financial transactions, bookkeeping, the establishment of bank accounts, etc. Dealing with such financial areas can also often be done from home, which also facilitates the operation (von Knop, 2008).

One of the many things that is associated with terrorism is suicide bombings. At least five fatwas discussed the possible participation of women in martyr operations, also known as suicide bombings, and finally decided that this was allowed (Lundborg Regnér, 2017). Involving women in suicide operations and using their tactical advantages (a woman attracts more media attention, she can also smuggle an explosive in her clothes more easily) could

be understood as a rational choice of a terrorist organisation. More importantly, female terrorists have a greater capacity for mobilising support than their male colleagues – they provide strong role models for other women. Female terrorism also increases male recruitment because men may feel ashamed that women are taking over their tasks. Given all of these advantages, it is not surprising that women carried out suicide attacks in the name of Al-Qaeda (von Knop, 2008).

The instance of female suicide bombers operating under the banner of Al-Qaeda can be said to have increased over a relatively short time. From an analysis of the biographies of the very few women who acted under the banner of Al-Qaeda, it is obvious that in most cases, their educational level was above average compared to other female Muslims. Carrying out attacks allows women to fulfil traditional male duties and obtain the chance of being honoured by the society in which they live (von Knop, 2008).

Therefore, the community's respect (no matter whether during life or after death) and care for the honour are also important for Al-Qaeda women.

Even if classical Islamic sources are fairly negative about the role of women in jihad, it is equally clear that radical Muslims have been attempting to legitimise women's participation in it.

The necessary ideological justification to allow women to carry out suicide operations clearly exists, but it is questionable whether a revolutionary change in Jihad will be accepted by the larger radical Islamist community. It appears that women's roles of supporting male relatives and educating children in the ideology of the global Salafi Jihad play a more important role than suicide bombing in the short- and long-term survival of al-Qaeda affiliates (von Knop, 2008).

In 2003 bin Laden announced that the women are awaited to act their part.

With this statement, he emphasised the female tasks in an unprecedented way. This does not necessarily change the actual roles, but give women a new context; they are counted on in a way that hasn't been seen before (Lundborg Regnér, 2017).

However, it cannot be immediately assumed that suddenly the women grabbed their rifles and joined in building the bombs. It was a game intended to emphasise the importance of women in the organisation as such, rather than calling them to fight.

It is also worth mentioning that Al-Qaeda was an organisation with military features. After all, the main goal of its members was to wage war. Is it justified, therefore, to speak of women in Al-Qaeda as military wives understood as those who

maintain the household while their husbands are away at war, serve to calm and soothe stressed soldiers, create a sense of home at every new station or base, encourage their husbands to reenlist, and encourage their children to join the military (Sjoberg, 2012)?

The information provided so far shows that yes, the wives of Al Qaeda members were military wives. It can also be indicated that in-state military organisations, wives of Al-Qaeda members played a crucial role in psychological support for the group's male members. The ideal Al-Qaeda wife, however, provided not only psychological but also social and organisational support.

They function, much like military wives in the United States and around the world, as sources of psychological support and unconditional love, stitches in the social fabric of a sub-culture with substantial independence, and servants of the organisation as a whole (Sjoberg, 2012).

A completely different aspect is the portrayal of these women as criminals. There have been frequent arrests in the past of women whose husbands were suspected of belonging to Al-Qaeda. This had many purposes, including luring out hiding fighters who may have wanted their wives back and presenting it in the media as a success in fighting terrorism when other successes were lacking, and the public was dissatisfied. In this case, most of the arrested women testified that they did not know what their husband was doing. Perhaps some of them did not really know, or perhaps they testified in this way to protect their husbands and the community. It is also worth paying attention to the perception of the woman in this situation as a victim who sacrifices herself for the good of the cause and of her husband. It is because the husbands of the arrested did not always show a desire to release them and remained hidden, which can be interpreted as sacrificing their family happiness for the good of the mission, which is jihad (Sjoberg, 2012). Women who believed in the purpose of their actions as strongly as their husbands did, perhaps they accepted it with gratitude, knowing that they were doing a good deed.

#### **4. OSAMA BIN LADEN'S WIVES**

Osama bin Laden's first wife was his younger cousin. Her name was Najwa. The spouses knew each other since childhood because bin Laden's mother visited her relatives in Syria, where Najwa also came from. They spent vacations together, and Najwa remembers her childhood as a wonderful period in their lives when she saw the advantages of Osama and began to consider him an ideal. From the teenage age, Najwa was sure that she would want to marry her cousin in the future. On the other hand, when they both reached the marriageable age, he could not make a firm declaration. Najwa persisted and almost harassed Osama, and finally managed to win the wedding. However, this does not mean that Osama did not reciprocate her feelings. Perhaps it was simply an awkward period of adolescence and embarrassment about such a serious declaration as a desire to marry. The wedding took place in 1974, and one of the groom's closest friends gives an entirely different explanation for the decision to marry than overcoming shyness – a desire to have sex. The young couple did not immediately live together. Najwa only moved to her husband a few months after the wedding. It should be noted that Najwa, despite her descent from a religious family, "won" the right to wear non-traditional clothes in her family home and to develop her passions, such as playing tennis and painting. After moving to Saudi Arabia, she gave up colourful dresses and started wearing abaya and niqab. Initially, the new Mrs. bin Laden did not feel comfortable in the new reality and felt awkward and embarrassed by the new outfit, but she got used to it with time. Over time, she also developed unconditional

loyalty and obedience to her husband. His word was holy in their home. In Najwa's memories, the first years of marriage are probably the best time in their life together. In 1976 their first son was born, which further raised the rank of Najwa among the bin Laden family. When Osama was working, Najwa felt lonely, and after some time, she found herself a new job- tailoring. She started designing and sewing dresses, which gave her much joy, but also exposed her to a perilous confrontation with her husband. After the birth of her fourth son, Najwa, despite enjoying motherhood, was still slightly disappointed with the lack of a female child. She has always dreamed of a daughter who could be dressed in beautiful dresses. One day, while looking at her youngest son, Omar, she noticed that the boy's hair was too long. Furthermore, instead of trimming them, she started braiding them into braids and other interesting hairstyles. The next step was to "use" her son as a dummy for new dress designs. And so, one day, Osama came home to find his son in a dress and braided hair. One might expect this event to have tragic consequences for Najwa, but surprisingly it did not. The spouses had a quiet conversation, and Najwa confided in her husband that she was sad because she did not have a daughter and had no one to transfer these specific maternal feelings to (Ducret, 2012). This happened in parallel with bin Laden's initial involvement in the war in Afghanistan.

In the course of the development of his radicalism, Osama also reflected on polygamy. Thus, turning his mind into action, in 1983, he married Khadija Sharif, a woman nine years his senior, whose family descended from Muhammad, which gave her prestige (McGirk, 2011). Najwa was unhappy about it, but her husband convinced her of his decision, giving her the illusory hope that his second wedding depends on her consent. The woman, feeling some kind of power, graciously agreed to Khadijah. Khadija was a teacher at a private girls' school in Jeddah. After some time, she became friends with Najwa, which in the long run, was of great importance to both of them because they supported each other in difficult moments that were to come (Ducret, 2012).

The family was enlarged in 1985 with another Mrs. bin Laden. Interestingly, in this case, Najwa did indeed influence the selection of the candidate. The choice fell on Khairiah Sabar, an extraordinary woman and again older than Osama, this time by seven years. The woman came from Saudi Arabia, and one thing is certain, she had higher education, a doctoral degree, according to some sources in child psychology, according to others, in Shari'a law (McGirk, 2011). It would seem that since the first two wives became friends, the third was accepted by them, the family lives in prosperity, the husband fairly divides his time between the three wives, it is a seemingly very good situation, taking into account the realities and values about which is speech.

In 1986, Osama, frustrated by the fact that his third wife has yet to give him an heir, decides to marry another woman. This seems a somewhat quick decision considering that his marriage to Khairiah back then was a year during which she might not have become pregnant for several reasons, not least because her husband was often absent because he was very involved with the mujahideen in Afghanistan. So in 1987, he married Siham Sabar, another teacher, this time of Arabic grammar. It is also interesting that Osama did treat his wives fairly and divided his time between them equally, at least back then. Nevertheless, there was an unwritten rule in the family that Najwa, although the youngest, was the "most important" wife because she was the first (Ducret, 2012).

In 1990, bin Laden family's life passed between Osama's trips to Pakistan, the creation of Al-Qaeda, and his increasing radicalisation, which also translated into his family life (e.g., ever more modest home furnishings, dispensing water to his sons) and his wives

raising a group of children and spending time with each other and studying the Qur'an. At the end of 1990, a conflict broke out between Iraq and Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, fearing Iraq's expansion, asked the United States for help. Osama considered it a personal insult and a serious offence to his religious feelings (cooperation with the West) and decided to move to Sudan (Ducret, 2012).

In 1994, when the family was living in Sudan, bin Laden went into business with local officials supporting his spiritual mission. At this point, attention should be paid to what bin Laden allowed his wives to do. All of them, except Najwa, could still work professionally. Especially Khairiah, who came to Sudan almost like on vacation, spending most of the time in Saudi Arabia. She welcomed esteemed Sudanese families and talked with them about the subtleties of Quranic law. This is all the more surprising since Osama was not much of a supporter of women's education, as evidenced by the fact that he did not send his daughters to school. It is all the more surprising that he got involved with such women. Some believe that the decisions about the next weddings resulted from his religious beliefs, according to which he wanted to care for old maids who had no better chance of getting married (Ducret, 2012). This cannot be completely ruled out because what exactly guided Osama bin Laden in making these decisions, only he knew himself.

Another surprising decision in the story is the divorce requested possibly around 1994 by Khadija, unable to bear her husband's further radicalisation and constant bans. Osama agreed to this without any further discussion, but he struggled after the breakup. After the divorce, the woman returned to Saudi Arabia. After Khadija's departure, Osama married another woman, but little is known about her, even her name is unknown. It is only known that the marriage took place in Khartoum in 1994. However, it was cancelled within 48 hours, and Osama never consummated the marriage, allegedly after learning that his new wife was forced to marry him (Ducret, 2012). However, is this true, and would a man like Osama bin Laden have heeded such an argument and displayed such "nobility"?

In 1996, Osama and three wives relocated to Afghanistan, a country at the time engulfed in a war between the Taliban and the mujahideen leader Masud. The family settled in a building on the Tora Bora hill, also known as "bin Laden's mountain". The conditions in the new house were indeed Spartan. It lacked running water, electricity and windows. Osama, who was fully involved in organising jihad, did not see the influence of the environment on the health, especially mental health, of his loved ones. His children hardly saw their father, he was a stranger to them, and Najwa fell into depression, which was further aggravated by another pregnancy and fear for the life of a new child (Ducret, 2012).

In 1997, Osama went to fight alongside Masud, and the family moved to Jalalabad, where an Al-Qaeda camp and command centre was built on the city's outskirts. His wives could count on the company of other wives of other militants, but they could enjoy it for only two hours a week during their Qur'anic studies. The decision for such a limited time to socialise was made by bin Laden, and his wives submitted to it without objections. Their voluntary asceticism and submission to their husband's will may come as a surprise, given their origins and growing up in abundance and without much restriction as to their free time (Ducret, 2012).

At that time, Khairiah was not only her husband's favourite but she was also liked and respected by other women in the community because she was able to adapt to her interlocutors. She was eloquent and had a diplomatic talent. Perhaps the favouring of the third wife was due to her education and the possibility of philosophical and theological discussions between the spouses, to which Osama, of course, could not directly admit

because he did not officially consider women equal and worthy of discussion. Siham constantly compared herself to Khairiah, creating complexes that made her almost always feel down. Meanwhile, Najwa returned to her obsession with clothes, and her biggest hobbies were makeup and shopping. She was probably saddened by her husband's displacement in favour of a third wife and thus tried to make up for the gaps in education by constantly trying to be attractive to him (Ducret, 2012).

It is worth returning to the topic of Osama's children. Although he officially opposed their education, his daughters he had with Siham were taught by him mathematics and physics while he was at home, and he allowed Najwa's daughters to listen to Western music, which he, too, privately, with some exceptions, was not a great opponent. His younger sons, in turn, received permission to own a Nintendo console. Khairiah's unique position may be determined by the fact that, after long discussions and demands made by the women in the camp, the leaders finally agreed to establish a school for girls there. Khairiah was entrusted with the task of organising it and teaching girls according to the teachings of the Qur'an (Ducret, 2012).

In the spring of 1997, the bin Laden family moved to Kandahar, where Osama decided to marry for the sixth time two years later, instructing Yemeni Sheikh Rashad Ismael to find him another wife. This one pointed to a teenage Amal. The girl accepted the offer of marriage without hesitation, believing that it was "God's plan". Thus Amal became the youngest wife of Bin Laden in July 2000. From an early age, she was pious and obligatory. She was also determined to die a martyr's death alongside her husband. The other wives were not thrilled with the expansion of the family but used to not discussing their husband's decisions, so they accepted Amal. Bin Laden's sixth wife seemed to enjoy life in the camp, as evidenced by her father's visit nine months after the wedding, who was shocked by the conditions in which his daughter lived. He urged her to return home to Yemen, but she refused, insisting that her place was with her husband, where her dream would come true, and she would live for a short time (Ducret, 2012).

In August 2001, she gave birth to a daughter. It was a time when nothing other than war was talked about in the camp. The atmosphere was also warlike. Mentally and physically exhausted, Najwa asked Osama for permission to return to Syria. They had a serious conversation, after which Osama agreed. It was a difficult decision for him because Najwa was with him from the beginning, for better and for worse, and the consent to her departure could be explained with love and respect for her. He likely did not want bad luck for his wife, and it motivated his decision even more. Before leaving, at the beginning of September, she gave him her wedding ring, symbolically ending their relationship. However, they did not get an official divorce (Ducret, 2012).

As for Khairiah, she was the first to flee to Saudi Arabia via Iran after the 9/11 attacks. In Iran, she was temporarily detained under house arrest, but the authorities allowed her to return home. She later crept from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan to meet her husband in Abbottabad. In the case of Siham, military sources say she may have sneaked into Pakistan and hiding after 9/11 until she felt it was safe for her to see her husband (McGirk, 2011).

Around 2005, bin Laden sneaked into Pakistan and settled in a fortress house in Abbottabad. After some time, he called his wives to him. Apart from two Saudis and a young Amal, 17 children lived with him. Each wife and her offspring lived on a separate floor of the house, and bin Laden tried to devote the same amount of time to each group. During the 2011 commando attack, bin Laden was in a bedroom with Amal and their daughter Safiyah. The woman pounced on the Americans to protect her husband and was



shot in the leg. The Americans left the women and children tied up at the scene, and soon they were captured by Pakistani special forces (McGirk, 2011).

## 5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HUSBANDS' RANK FOR AL-QAEDA'S WIVES

Spencer discusses an example where a husband's position in ISIS significantly increased his wife's opportunities. As ISIS arose from the Iraqi part of Al-Qaeda, it can be assumed that a similar situation could also be possible in the original organisation. It is also an excellent example of the exceptionalism of women in a terrorist organisation.

As clever and ambitious as Sayyaf was, her success within the organisation likely would not have happened without her husband's sanction. Women living under ISIS' stronghold are not able to occupy senior commanding roles; specific women are privy to top-secret discussion and undertake operations dependent on their husband's seniority. The odyssey of Umm Sayyaf confirms this (Spencer, 2016).

It is about Umm Sayyaf, who married the chief financial leader of ISIS. Thanks to her marriage to a high-ranking ISIS member, Umm had direct insight into the organisation's activities. "Notwithstanding her husband's assistance, Sayyaf held a prominent position in her own right. According to an anonymous senior defence official, Sayyaf was a principal advisor to the caliphate leadership on all critical women's matters" (Spencer, 2016). It is worth emphasising, however, that she did not become an adviser on tactical or political matters, but on women's matters, which may indicate, despite the exceptional situation, that she will remain in the iron pattern of "women deal with women's matters, men with men".

In the case of bin Laden's wives, the husband's position simultaneously granted them certain privileges and, on the other hand, deprived them of them. Being the wives of the leader, they could enjoy extra protection and respect, and at the same time could make them a target of a potential attack for the same reason. One cannot speak of privileges in the form of travel or material goods in their lives before leaving for Afghanistan because they resulted from their husband's wealth as the heir of a multi-billionaire, not a terrorist leader. For example, Maha el-Samah, the wife of a Canadian fighter who also lived in the camp, who regularly travelled to Canada and was able to enjoy visiting shopping malls there, enjoyed greater privileges of this type (Ducret, 2012).

Due to bin Laden's radical beliefs, their privileges were limited, as evidenced by life in very modest conditions and limited time for social interactions. There are also no reports that either of the bin Laden wives wished to become her husband's official adviser like Umm Sayyaf was.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There is no simple answer to the main hypothesis of the paper. Based on the source information and carried out analyses, it has to be stated that the phenomenon of exceptionalism among wives of Osama bin Laden occurred and did not occur at the same time.

If we focus on the part of the definition of being different from the rest in terms of living conditions and material well-being, this did not apply to Osama bin Laden's wives because the leader's wives shared the hardships of life in the camp with him and the other women. It also points to the lack of superiority of his wives over other women in Al-Qaeda. Of

course, as in the unwritten rule of the hierarchy of wives, it was possible that, due to the rank of their husband, they were logically treated with greater respect or prioritised on certain issues, not wanting to offend the leader, but the cited sources do not mention it. However, what was unique was that they followed their husband and stayed by his side almost to the end, which was not always done by other women married to important figures in this organisation.

Exceptionalism, however, took place in a different sphere, related to the strict adherence to the values proclaimed by members of Al-Qaeda. First, divorce. By design, marriages are concluded until the death of one or both spouses. Divorcing the second wife, in addition, at her request and resolving the matter “peacefully”, may prove Osama bin Laden's genuine respect for the opinion and wishes of his wives and the potential PR disaster that could have happened if the divorce had not occurred and the tormented woman decided to flee from her husband. It could damage the image of the rising leader, so choosing the “lesser evil”, it was better to opt for a divorce, which is allowed by Islam.

Another point is the equality of wives. Most sources agree that Osama bin Laden treated his wives equally and did not favour any of them for most of his married life. However, the time that Khairiah was active during the time in the Afghanistan camp and the aspect of her education clearly show that at that time, she was her husband's favourite and enjoyed his greater attention. This indicates a selective approach to treating wives equally because when circumstances changed and other wives began to show dissatisfaction, bin Laden began to pay more attention to the one who shared his beliefs, did not complain, and at the same time was a worthy partner to discuss religious matters, the most crucial issue in his life. This thread could also point to Khairiah's exceptionalism in comparison to his other wives.

The story of little Omar dressed in a dress deserves special attention. From the perspective of Islamic fundamentalism, it was a clear slander and denial of the son's masculinity. Cultural settlement of the case may also be evidence of the exceptional treatment of wives by bin Laden in the privacy of his home. This is also evidenced by other events, such as allowing Najwa to leave and giving the other wives the opportunity to leave him when the situation was about to worsen and become very dangerous.

It is also worth paying special attention to the repeated departures from bin Laden's proclaimed hatred and contempt for the Western world and life principles. Using Western machines, Western Internet portals, and driving Western cars constitute the selectivity of treating his assumptions, which proves hypocrisy. Also, in the private sphere, the example of home teaching daughters and allowing their sons to play on the Nintendo console prove this.

The issue of wives and women in terrorist organisations, in general, is a vast topic that can be studied from many perspectives. It is also a difficult topic to explore because it is not easy to access reliable information in this area. This may be due not only to the fear for the lives of those who have come into contact with this environment, but it may also result, as in the case of bin Laden's last wife, from a deep faith in the rightness of one's actions. This topic is still relevant today, especially in the era of the development of new technologies and the threat of the emergence of new types of terrorism. Therefore, it is worth exploring it despite the difficulties and show various facets of the world of terrorism.

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