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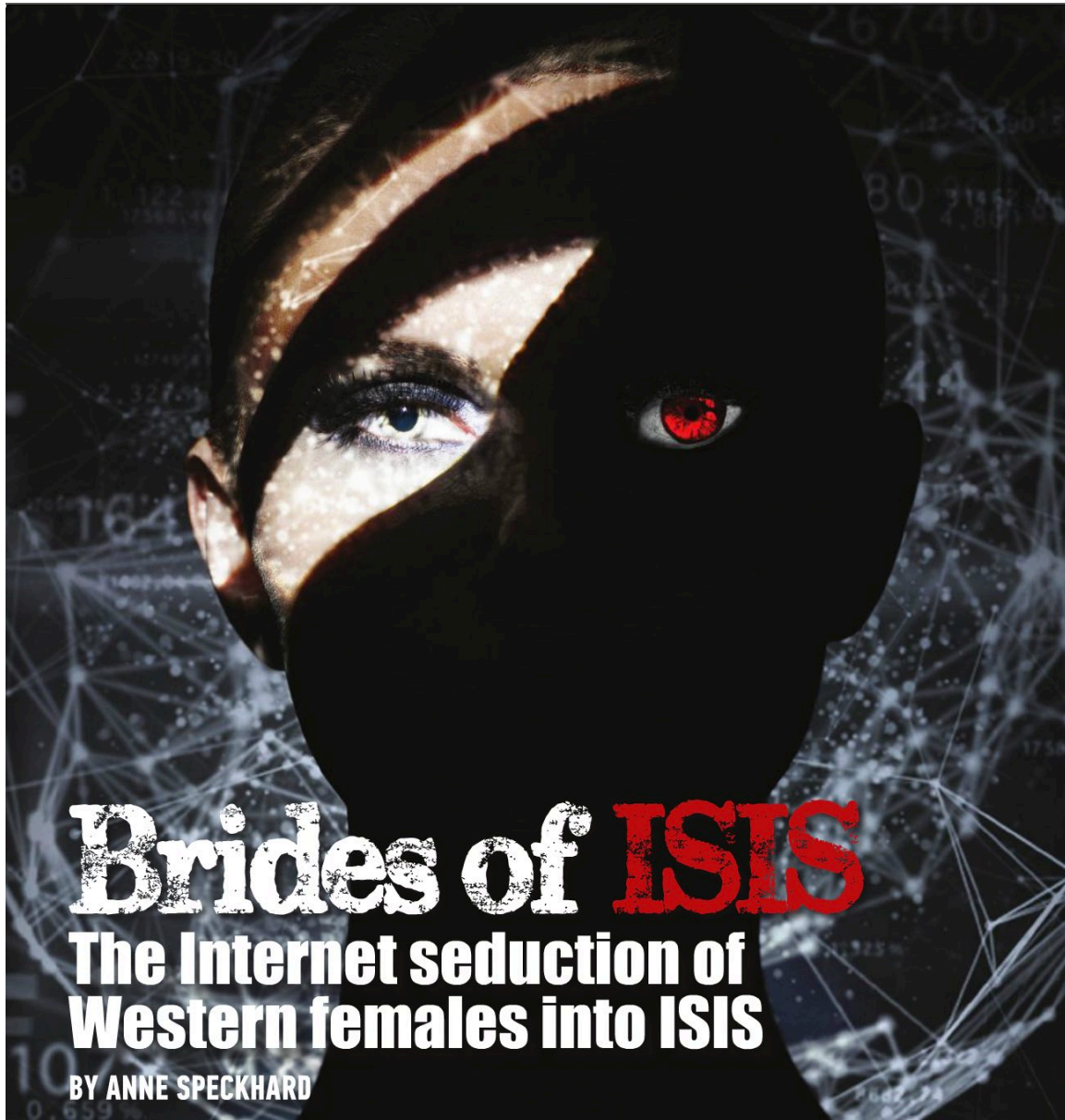


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**Brides of ISIS: The Internet
Seduction of Western Females
into ISIS**

[*Shoot the Women First*](#) is the title of a 1991 book by Eileen MacDonald based on her interviews of female terrorists and originated in advice purportedly given to Germany's GSG 9 anti-terrorist sharpshooters. MacDonald exploded the myth that female terrorists of that time period were simply pawns of their male leaders, acting without their own volition. Indeed [in my interviews](#) in more recent years of over four hundred terrorists, their family members, close associates and even their hostages, in places ranging from West Bank and Gaza, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, France, Belgium, Netherlands, UK, Canada, the United States and Russia, I too have found female terrorists to be active, rather than passive, and usually intentionally placing themselves versus being coerced or tricked into falling submissively under male influence. Whether they are more lethal or passionate than their male counter-parts, as MacDonald argued, appears to me to be individually determined by what drove them to join in the first place and what they have experienced inside the terrorist group. Certainly females may be more lethal in the sense that they can [pass security more easily, hide bombs in places many would not suspect, and that we in general do not expect violence from women and are thus more trusting to them and when they do act give them far more press coverage.](#)

While women may be both passionate and lethal as terrorists, terrorism—particularly militant jihadi strains like ISIS and al Qaeda—are male dominated enterprises and females joining their ranks do not become leaders, at least not over men. [They do however join for motivations that are not so dissimilar to men](#)—alienation, responses to discrimination and marginalization, anger or concern over geopolitics, belonging, the quest for adventure, and even romance, and certainly in the case of ISIS the belief in, and desire to take part in building a utopian state—the new Caliphate, rank as motivators to join for both males and females.

The so-called Islamic State and self proclaimed Caliphate has indeed managed to seduce thousands of young men and women from Europe, the U.S., Canada and other Western countries into its ranks. Of these, it is believed that [roughly ten percent are female](#). And they are increasingly lured into ISIS, not only by men urging them to join and even proposing marriage, but also by their female cadres who call to them over social media and instant messaging. The percentage of [French females joining ISIS](#) is believed to be one of the highest in the West—at almost twenty percent.

Once inside the terrorist ranks ISIS women, we are told by those [who blog](#) from its inner circles, are expected to marry. Indeed ISIS is in the business of state building and the mujahideen—or “holy” warriors—need wives, if not sex. That is when they are not busied with raping their Yazidi sex slaves—something the escaped Yazidis claim their ISIS “lords” see as a [spiritual duty](#) for which they pray before and after assaulting them. This abuse of females apparently is not an issue for the Western female cadres, who like their men, see this all as part of Allah's grand design.

The Western women who join ISIS, just like the Western men who also join, have by the time they reach Syria and Iraq become true believers—they've drunk deeply of the “Jim Jones” purple Kool-Aid and don't mind dying for the cause. In fact they welcome it. Women cadres in ISIS routinely [tweet and message](#) out of Syria and Iraq their fervent

desire to be “martyred” and await the glory and blessings that they believe will accrue to them if their husbands are “martyred” before they die.

They also dismiss the ruthless bloodshed and sexual violence as necessary for the revolution—much like Lenin’s and Stalin’s purges were seen as cleansing actions to get to the final goal of communism. ISIS true believers trust that with bloodshed they are carrying out the work of Allah in reestablishing the Caliphate and that when it is restored all believers will live peacefully and euphorically by Islamic ideals. Never mind who gets mowed down in the meantime.

How does ISIS manage to lure Western women into its ranks? A [New York Times expose](#) revealed the story of an isolated teenager in Washington State, who in response to James Foley’s beheading tweeted out the question of “why?” Amazingly she received polite answers from ISIS supporters and recruiters who then befriended her, and then in a swarming action carried out over months, began to address her unmet social and spiritual needs. Answering her questions they complimented her that she was a Christian and Sunday school teacher, and asked if she knew that Islam was the completion of Christianity. They sent her books and spent time communicating with her via Skype and social media. When she converted, they sent gifts of scarves and chocolates and warned her against going to her local mosque, or even revealing that she had converted—knowing full well that a moderate Muslim imam would have set her straight on ISIS—as they continued to draw her in. They convinced her that as a Muslim she should no longer live in the “land of unbelievers” and invited her to quietly slip out of the country—suggesting she bring her minor brother along with her. They also suggested a husband to her, for her marry into the movement. Luckily adult protectors of this young girl detected these recruiters and contact was cut off—before it was too late.

[Anna Erelle, the false persona of a French journalist](#) posing as young Muslim convert had a similar experience. She posted a video of a French ISIS fighter on her social media account and was immediately contacted by him and invited to chat. Quickly, her ISIS recruiter moved the conversation into seduction mode and ultimately—within a month’s time—invited her to come to Syria to marry him. He dominated the conversation, provided all the answers and brushed off her concerns about the violence of ISIS cadres, often by telling her Western news sources don’t report accurately and that revolutions necessarily spill blood. But when Erelle didn’t come to Syria as she had promised, he showed his ugly side. Abu Bilel, as he was known to her, posted a picture of Erelle alongside [a fatwa](#) commanding his brothers, plenty who live in France and Belgium, into action. It urged, “My brothers from around the world, I issue a fatwa against this impure person who has scorned the Almighty. If you see her anywhere on earth, follow Islamic law and kill her. Make sure she suffers a long and painful death. Whoever mocks Islam will pay for it in blood. She's more impure than a dog. Rape, stone and finish her. Insha'Allah [god willing].”

Shannon Conley, on whose case I based my latest book, [Bride of ISIS: One Young Woman’s Path Into Homegrown Terrorism](#) was also seduced over the Internet. After converting she fell under the influence of Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni American who

was droned by the U.S. in 2011 for his instigation and involvement in various terror plots against the United States, including the failed Christmas Day [“underwear” bomber](#) who tried to take a plane down over Detroit in 2009. Al-Awlaki now dead, lives on via the Internet and inspires from beyond the grave, convincingly giving out the false message that all Muslims have a duty to go to the battlefield and carry out militant jihad until the End Times, and if they cannot do so must wage attacks at home.

Conley drank the poison and downloaded al Qaeda guerilla manuals, settling on carrying out a VIP attack inside the United States (she lived in Denver) until she realized she would likely not succeed. In the meantime she fell in love with a Tunisian ISIS fighter with whom she carried out a relationship via Skype. When he proposed marriage she agreed to join him in Syria, although she took an Army Explorer’s course beforehand in the hope of gaining skills to assist the Islamic State. Thankfully her father learned of her plans—he discovered her one-way ticket to “hell”—and alerted the FBI who arrested her on the airplane’s walkway.

The roles women take in terrorist organizations vary, but as said earlier, militant jihadi organizations are generally male dominated, and women may only take leadership roles over other women. At this point women joining ISIS may take part in all-female brigades that enforce female morality dress standards and sex segregation, operate checkpoints, and go on home raids. A Canadian woman is believed, based on the movement tracking her phone, to be working as an ISIS spy. Some of the most influential, like a woman who calls herself [Umm Layth](#), have blogged and used social media to seduce other women into joining. Such women paint a picture of life lived according to Islamic ideals, blissful marriages with ISIS fighters, as they hold the hope for “martyrdom” alongside the sacrifices necessary to bring about the hoped-for utopian state—no matter what violence that may entail.

Conservative militant jihadi groups often [do not allow females into combat roles or use them as suicide bombers until the going gets tough](#). In Chechnya, the more liberated roles of women in their society and the deep traumas occurring at the hands of ruthless Russian forces may have caused a different dynamic to play out. [Chechen women were the first](#) to carry out suicide missions once the Chechen rebels embraced the “martyrdom” ideology imported into their movement. [Chechen women](#) filled out the ranks of suicide bombers at a fifty/fifty ratio throughout their campaign. Palestinian, [Iraqi](#) and other terrorist groups with more conservative roles for women did not use them as suicide operatives until there was a clear advantage to doing so. When terrorist leaders found that their men were no longer successfully passing checkpoints that women could still breach while hiding bombs on their bodies, they began to send women.

Chillingly, it has recently been revealed that ISIS now has [a new marriage certificate](#) which both husband and wife sign, that declares the final decision over the life and death of the ISIS bride rests with the Islamic State’s leader al-Baghdadi. Under 'conditions of wife' it reads: 'If the Prince of believers [Baghdadi] consents to her carrying out a suicide mission, then her husband should not prohibit her.' This may suggest that the group is looking ahead to a similar transition in using female cadres for suicide missions.

While some have feared the Western “brides” have been subjected to group rapes, that fate appears to be reserved to Yazidi slaves primarily, and non ISIS local women whose family’s are forced to give them over to ISIS fighters, sometimes to be “married” repeatedly over a short time period by the ISIS cadres. Western women who join ISIS generally Tweet and blog positive statements about their time in ISIS, citing both the hardships and the materials “blessings” of living in the stolen quarters of others, taking over their cars and other material goods. Although it’s clear from reports of those who escape, that Westerners who join ISIS—male or female—are not allowed to leave. Reports of three London girls who joined, reported them in recent months on the run from ISIS, but no clear picture has emerged about their well-being, or lack thereof, in open sources to date.

It appears that as long as the idea of the longed-for Caliphate continues to carry its euphoric power, and ISIS continues to demonstrate some modicum of success in holding and governing territory, young girls who are angry or concerned over geopolitical events, who become convinced that militant jihad is their Islamic duty, and who feel off their track in the West, while simultaneously enticed via the Internet (often in person)—by adventure, romance and the call to live (as they imagine) by Islamic ideals while they contribute to building a longed for utopia—that they will continue to be seduced into the movement, and we will continue to see females leaving the West to become Brides of ISIS.

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