

A Neglected Genealogy of the Martyred Heroines of Islam: (Re)-writing Women's Participation in Jihad Into the History of Late Imperial Gansu

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Abstract

As agents of religiously-sanctioned violence, Muslim female fighters have only recently started to attract academic attention. Relevant scholarship has so far exclusively focused on the Middle East and the traditional centers of Islam, while almost nothing has been written with regard to Chinese Islam, whose fighting heroines have gone widely unnoticed. The present study is a first tentative attempt to bridge this gap in scholarship and put forth an alternative model of Muslim femininity which takes into account the divergent roles of women as both victims and perpetrators of violence, as well as their invaluable contribution to the transmission of religious knowledge. By comparing the stories of Arab women who fought during the early conquests and those subsumed within the anti-state narrative of Sufi sectarians from China's northwestern province of Gansu, the effort made by Jahri female practitioners in the uprisings of mid- and late-Qing times is hence (re)-written into the history of Muslim warfare.

Keywords: *Muslim femininity; female fighters; victims; perpetrators; history of warfare.*

The best *jihad* (for women) is *hajj*.¹

The woman does not have to go for prescribed war (*jihad*)
Nor spend money [for household expenses]
Nor pay blood money
Whereas these are compulsory on the man.²

The sacred war (*jihad*) of a woman
Is being a good spouse to her husband.³

1. Introduction: Towards the Feminization of Muslim Warfare?

The prevalent stereotype of Muslim womanhood is that of an ill-fated victim of violence and cultural subjugation. Such perception is reinforced by the vast majority of published research which claims that the high level of victimization to which Muslim women are

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exposed in modern Western and Muslim societies is the result of a rising incidence of verbal and physical violence against them.⁴ Yet when contrasting these data with those gathered from *hadith* literature, we obtain quite a different picture—that is one featuring strong female characters not infrequently being engaged in *jihad* operations and other acts of insurgency. From an analysis of this literature it emerges that in Muslim warfare those being accepted into the armed forces and granted permission to lay down their lives for Islam are mostly able-bodied men,⁵ while women are taught not to step into the battlefield unless their faith is seriously compromised, and even under such circumstances, they are usually encouraged to migrate.

Despite this general proscription, and contrary to what one might expect, Muslim women do not slip through the cracks of warfare history. Since the early years of Islam, when the Prophet Muhammad embarked on a series of military campaigns throughout the Arabic peninsula, some auxiliary bodies of his army had women in their ranks performing individual obligations towards the male members of their families. Most of the times, these women made their influence felt acting from behind the scene, by boosting the morale of their comrades, providing nursing services, and upholding religious values and social responsibilities. Their contribution to the war effort added a personal, non-militant dimension to the legacy of *jihad*. But it also happened that the appeal of *jihad* became often interlocked with the complaint of some independently minded women who, as this paper will bring out, expressed clear ambitions not only to be on the frontline alongside their male counterparts, but also, and more importantly, to have their voices heard in the public arena and, on certain occasions, even before the Prophet himself. Regardless of their actual role in these campaigns, the considerable number of entries related to female fighters in the *hadith* literature of this period suggests that women did play a vital role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. By virtue of their privileged access to the Prophet's messengership, they were able to capture crucial aspects of his life, including his rulings on warfare, whose purpose is generally described as self-defensive or retaliation for aggression.⁶

The picture becomes, however, more complicated as Islamic society experienced a major shift from an initial phase, where Muslims fought to protect Allah's revealed truth from the Quraysh who had them expelled from Mecca, towards the era of the great Arab conquests, following Muhammad's death (632). It is against this backdrop that the very concept of warfare underwent significant modifications which paved the way to more nuanced approaches aimed at justifying Muslim's domination over the *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book), and other non-Muslim subjects and idolaters of the newly conquered territories (i.e. Zoroastrian Persians, Manichean Turks, Shamanistic Tartars etc.).⁷ These modifications have informed the exegetical trajectories of Muslim jurists over the subsequent centuries, and, augmented with other markedly more militant and aggressive (re-)interpretations, continued to run through the pages of Islamic legal history up to this day. As to whether military *jihad*⁸ should remain a male-only occupation or could to some extent be undertaken by women, commentators have developed conflicting attitudes. In some cases, a section on the permissibility of women fighting, either as provision bearers or regular army staff, came to be appended to theological and legal treatises.⁹ Down to the present proliferation of this kind of literature, especially since the early 1990s, the second option has been strongly upheld by Muslim theorists whose fundamentalist rationale, though not being necessarily associated with jihadist globalism, is alleged to have molded the ideological structure of certain branches of radical Islam.¹⁰ Whatever the position of classical and contemporary scholars may be, a broad consensus exists on the issue of women waging war through indirect means, which not only makes it more difficult to grasp how new gender roles

have been carved out of the old scriptural narrative(s), but also greatly challenges prevailing religious and social expectations of femininity. In fact, the idea that the nurturing figure of a woman who is supposed to epitomize the highest form of maternal love and life-giving warmth could suddenly be turned into a cold-hearted agent of life destruction forces us to dismantle old-fashioned determinations of Muslim femaleness as passive victimhood. Indeed, the many facets of women fighting require a critical (re)-examination of the feminine presence in Islam, which calls further into question the discursive construction of gender in relation to misogynistic prejudices and the dynamics of cultural oppression—either emanated from an autochthonous Muslim tradition or coercively imposed by Western political engineering.

But what is even more disturbing is that, the contemporary debate over what types of action are compulsory (Ar. *fard*) or permissible (*mubah*) when it comes to women enforcing *jihad* is, in any case, abundantly corroborated by a number of apologetic arguments which have roots in classical literature.¹¹ The fact that canonical *hadith* collections contain utterances praising women for their supportive role in *jihad* operations, sometimes unequivocally highlighting their fighting skills and direct participation in hostilities, serves well the purpose of modern militant ideologues and Muslim clerics for their extra-Qur'anic, retrospectively constructed explanations of the conduct of women in war.¹² Taking these developments into account, in the pages that follow I will offer an overview of a few representative cases pertaining to the first female fighters of Islam based on the recent findings in the field of *hadith* studies. By placing the history of these medieval Arab fighters within the broader context of Muslim eastward expansion, the paper will then throw comparative insights into the *jihad* efforts undertaken by a small group of female sectarians of the Naqshbandi-Jahriyya Sufi order (Ch. *zheherenye* 哲赫忍耶) who were particularly active in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gansu.¹³ In so doing, the evolutionary narrative of women's role(s) in *jihad* will be examined through the powerful assessments of these hitherto largely ignored practitioners of a Yemeni branch of Naqshbandiyya Sufism who happened to live at the margins of both China and Islam's centers of power. Special attention will be attached to the mechanisms by which such peripheral female fighters acquired agency within the religious sphere, and their transformed subjecthood—no longer merely as wives, sisters and daughters of famed shaykhs but as saintly heroines embodying the spiritual wisdom and moral standing of the *menhuan* 門宦 (lit. Sufi pathway or faction)—set a (new) model for women's individual and collective action vis-à-vis the Confucian milieu and Manchu-dominated state. By acknowledging these transformations, I will seek to illustrate how Jahri women's partaking in the anti-Qing uprisings of Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796) and Tongzhi 同治 (1861–1875) eras,¹⁴ though many a time resulted in them achieving martyrdom, allowed a shrinkage of religious hierarchies which brought to a positive (re)-discovery of their dual positionality within the *menhuan*, as repositories of tradition as well as agent of change. Before we delve deeper into the *jihad*-related activities and martyrological narrative(s) of Gansu Muslim heroines, let familiarize ourselves first with the contents of early *hadith* literature and the deeds of a few outstanding female fighters who made the history of Islam in the Fertile Crescent.

2. Women's Role in Jihad and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in the Early Islamic World

The lives of those Arab women who struggled in the way of God constitute an important yet often-misread chapter in the formative history of Islam. Recent scholarship on

women's involvement in global *jihad* movement shows that these early martyrs of faith have become a persuasive precedent for both radical terrorist groups and Islamic feminist movements of contemporary times.¹⁵ The term most widely used in Arabic-speaking countries to define them is *mujahidaat* (lit. female fighters). Despite the strongly pejorative connotations ascribed to it by today's Western political vocabulary, *mujahidaat* originally applies to those Muslim women who served as auxiliary personnel in non-physical military operations, dispensing medications to the injured, managing fund-raising for the war effort, and encouraging their husbands, brothers and sons to wholeheartedly immerse themselves in the implementation of *jihad*.¹⁶ Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, these women have joined their male counterparts on the battlefield and fearlessly secured the *Dar al-Islam* (adobe of Islam) from the danger of tyrannical rulers and infidel enemies. Early *hadith* accounts, legal compendia, classical biographical collections and chronicles are replete with anecdotes of women who are praised for their contribution in preserving and disseminating the *sunnah* (social and legal customs),¹⁷ not lastly by partaking in fighting. David Cook points out that one of the first published works to consistently address the issue is 'Abd al-Ghani ibn 'Abd al-Wahid al-Maqdisi's (d. 1203) *Manaqib al-Sahabiyyat* (The Merits of the Women Companions [of the Holy Prophet]). In this treatise two women are particularly acknowledged for having fought shoulder to shoulder with Muhammad in his early campaigns: one of them was Nusaybah bint Ka'ab (dates unknown), who is said to have suffered serious injuries while attempting to rescue a group of wounded in the Battle of Uhud (626); the other one was Muhammad's aunt Safiyyah bint 'Abd al-Muttalib (569–640), who is reported to have been instrumental in driving the Jew forces out of Yathrib (now Medina) during the epic Battle of Khandaq (627).¹⁸

Other noteworthy female fighters related to the Prophet were his favored wife Aisha bint Abu Bakr (614–678) the "Mother of Believers", who led an army against Ali on the back of a camel at Basra (656)—hence the name of "Battle of the Camel" originated—and his granddaughter Zaynab bint 'Ali (d. 682), a die-hard fighter whose embroilment in the Battle of Karbala (680) at the side of her martyred brother Imam al-Husayn would later become the symbol of female militancy against injustice among Shi'a Muslims.¹⁹ Historical memories around the leadership and fighting skills of these two exceptional women, especially in the latter case, have been essential to (re)-crafting modern gender roles in times of social and political upheaval. The burden of responsibility assumed by sister Zaynab after the death of al-Husayn is, for instance, one of the leit-motif of Shi'a devotional literature produced in nineteenth-century colonial India by Urdu poets like Mir Babar Ali Anis (1802–1874). "Zaynab Made Islam Safe from the Flames", one of Anis's most famed *nawhas* (lit. lamentation-dirge), offers a portrayal of the woman as an everlasting symbol of assertiveness and endurance in defeat.

The banner of 'Abbās [the Imam's personal bodyguard],
the cradle of the infant lacking milk [the Imam's infant son],
All the wealth remaining of the majesty of Islam:
Zaynab rescued these from the flaming tent;
Zaynab made Islam safe from the flames.

[...] Even today this sorrow is the responsibility entrusted to Zaynab,
She who endured every injury and outrage after the martyrdom.
Zaynab safeguarded the goal and aspirations of Husayn;
Zaynab made Islam safe from the flames.²⁰

More recently, Zaynab's noble qualities have been restored by women's solidarity groups in Iran, where the civil resistance against the Shah made them a powerful tool of political mobilization, thereby contributing to eternalize the historical memory of Karbala.²¹

Apart from the members of the Prophet's family and his descendants (*Ar. Ahl al-Bayt*), there was also a sizeable group of *sahabiyyat* (lit. female companions) and *al-tabi'un* (successors) who continued to engage in spiritual warfare after Muhammad's final departure.²² Such is the case of Al-Khansa Tumadir bint Umar (d. 646), one of the most venerable figures in the genealogy of women Arab literature whose prose style was highly applauded by Muhammad himself. Her father and two brothers, Sakhr and Mu'awiyah, were killed in a clan struggle before she was introduced to the Prophet and converted to the new faith in 629. Afterwards, during the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah (636), the widowed poetess lost also her four sons whom she is alleged to have willingly sacrificed to Allah, hence earning the title of "mother of martyrs."²³ Her grieving over the loss of her beloved is deeply eulogized in her poetry, of which an example is given below.

How have we offended you, Death,
To make you treat us so?
Every day, you claim another trophy:
One day a soldier;
The next a president!
You select the best
As well as the least different from you, Mighty Death.
I wouldn't weep and whine
If you were fair and kind,
But you take the valiant ones most deserving of life
Leaving blunderers behind.²⁴

Another case is that of Umm Haram bint Milhan (d. 650) who held an outstanding position among the women of the *ansar* (lit. the helpers of Medina) for having lodged the Prophet in her house on varied occasions during the *hijrah* (emigration). Acting upon the instructions given by the Prophet in a dream, she set out for one of the earliest Muslim naval expeditions across the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean with her husband General Obadah bin Samit (d. 656) but unfortunately died of a neck injury shortly after landing in Cyprus, thus becoming the first Muslim female martyr ever to have waged war at sea.²⁵ Like Umm Haram, also the legendary masked *mujahidit* Khawlah bint al-Azwar (dates unknown) could not restrain herself from courting martyrdom. Perfectly trained in the arts of archership, sword combat and horseback riding, she led a rescue mission in search of her captive brother Dhiraar (d. 640) who under the banner of the first caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq had taken up the arms against the Byzantines.²⁶ She daringly broke through the enemy lines first on the outskirts of Damascus, where Dhiraar was eventually freed, and shortly later in Palestine while approaching the border city of Ajnadayn (634). Here she found herself encircled and taken prisoner, but with other intrepid women by her side she soon managed to escape leaving at least thirty soldiers dead and as many others wounded.²⁷ During this bloodstained confrontation she is said to have addressed the Byzantine Commander-in-Chief thusly,

Himyar's and Tubba's daughter are we,
For us to kill you is quite easy.
For we are the flame of war,
We have for you great trouble in store.²⁸

Her comrade-in-arms ‘Afirah bint ‘Affar al-Himyariyah (dates unknown) who also fought in the Battle of Ajnadayn, was not less pugnacious. An account of her warlike temperament is offered by the great early Muslim historian and *muhaddith* al-Waqidi (747–823) in his controversial *Futūḥ al-Shām* (The Islamic Conquest of Syria).

[Referring to Khalid ibn Sa’id]: Oh commander, by Allah! We will be more pleased if you put us in front to fight the Romans and break their faces [instead of encouraging our men to do so]. We will kill them until we are all martyred and none of us remain.²⁹

Waqidi’s account does not fail to reveal also invaluable details about the close friendship between the two women and the extraordinary endurance displayed when they threw themselves valiantly into the Battle of Yarmouk (636) across the disputed territories of the then Christian Levant.

A disbeliever attacked us when Khawlah bint al-Azwar came and attacked him with a sword. He struck her forehead [...] resulting in blood flowing and Khawlah fell to the ground. ‘Afirah bint ‘Affar screamed when she saw this and [...] struck the Roman so hard with her sword that his head flew off and landed some distance away.

She took Khawlah’s head into her lap. Khawlah’s hair was soaked in blood.

‘Afirah: How are you?

Khawlah: If Allah Most High wills then I will be fine but I am sure that I will die now.³⁰

Nearly contemporary with Khawlah and ‘Afirah was Umm Salamah Asma bint Yazid (dates unknown)—not to be confused with Muhammad’s sixth wife Umm Salamah bint Abi Umayya (ca. 580–680). She was reported to have joined the Muslim army in the Battle of Khaybar (628), and to have killed nine Byzantine soldiers with just the pole of her tent not long afterwards at Yarmouk.³¹ On another occasion, serving as a sort of attorney before the Prophet, she delivered a colorful speech which brings out *sahabiyyat*’s concern over the issue of whether women should be allowed to become more actively involved in *jihad* operations.

We women [...] have had the [...] honour of swearing allegiance to Allah and to you [Muhammad the Messenger of God]. We also follow your teachings and your *sunnah* (ways). We women live within our houses and fulfill our duties. We are absorbed in looking after our husbands and [satisfying] their needs. We see to the upbringing of our children and to the daily function of the household. Men, however, have more opportunities for earning rewards from Allah because they do things which we, as women, cannot do. Men [...] have the privilege of taking part in the *jihad*. When they go for *jihad* we are left at home to protect their property and look after the family. Are we not also equally deserving the reward from Allah?³²

According to Ruth Roded’s findings, out of a total of 1200 women numbered as *sahabiyyat* who came into direct contact with the Prophet, 19 are assumed to have participated in his raids and wars, most of them as provision- and armor-bearers, reciters of martial poetries or wounded healers.³³ The highest rank was assigned to those *mujahidaat* who celebrated his first military victory at Badr (624), while some were given a share of the

spoils of war, in terms of land allotment, tax revenues from the *sawafi* (abandoned estates) or movable items (i.e. gold, silver jewelry, vessels, gems, costly dresses, curtains and other goods) soon after the conquest of Khaybar and at the Abu al-Quds Fort around today's Tripoli (northern Lebanon).³⁴ The relatively large number of women mentioned in early and classical literature suggests that women's role in the spread of Islam outside the Arabic peninsula—not just as combat facilitators but, first and foremost, as prominent *hadith* transmitters—was far from being negligible. Indeed, the evidence gained from these data challenges previous views on the subordinated status of women in traditional Muslim societies and culture.

In the next two sections, by integrating above findings with textual fragments gathered from Sufi hagiographies and ethnographic accounts circulating during the Chinese republican period (1912–1949), I will tentatively reconstruct the circumstances in which the Jahri women of late imperial Gansu fell martyrs while enacting physical violence against the Manchu rulers and other subjects of the Qing empire, such as heavy-handed county governors, rival Naqshbandi factions and non-Muslim minorities of various ethnic backgrounds.

3. Jihad in the Context of Imperial China: Making Sense of the Absence of a Womanly Paradigm

The first attested Muslim presence in China can be dated back to the Tang era (618–907), when a group of Arab and Persian emissaries, known either as *fanke* 蕃客 (lit. overseas visitors) or *hujia* 胡賈 (alien merchants), had started to settle into the major urban conglomerates along the coast, mainly Canton, Quanzhou, Hangzhou and Ningbo. Although these former Muslim “guests” were allowed to live in small communities (*fanfang* 蕃坊) with their own religious and cultural establishments, they all fell under the administration of the local imperial authority to whom they paid corvée taxes and pledged obedience.³⁵ As one scholar has noted, “‘Muslims in China’ rather than ‘Chinese Muslims’ would be the adequate way of defining the[se] [early] Muslim settlement[s] [dispersed across] China.”³⁶ But as soon as Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (d. 1398) came to power, this already sizeable cluster of predominantly Hanafi practitioners together with various other groups of *semuren* 色目人 (lit. people with special status, namely Turks and Middle Eastern Muslims) who had been brought into China proper during the Mongol conquest of the 13th and 14th centuries, became thoroughly integrated into the Ming empire (1368–1644).³⁷ It was by this time that Islamic thought and ethos came to be reformulated in Confucian terms and the once-isolated, locality-based Muslim enclaves became gradually engulfed into the Chinese moral and political system.

Prominent traces of this process of overall recalibration can be read between the lines of the so-called *Han Kitab* genre—the earliest bibliographical records on Islam composed or expounded in Chinese language, and the philosophical writings of Muslim intellectuals of the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Especially those who like Ma Zhu 馬注 (b. 1620), Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 (d. 1658), Liu Zhi 劉智 (ca. 1660–1739) and Yuan Guozuo 袁國做 (b. 1717) gravitated around the then center of Islamic learning and culture—the cosmopolitan and vibrant city of Nanjing, attempted to have Islam accepted by the Chinese upper classes of the greater Yangtze Delta region and resorted to classical Chinese to assert their religious identity, hence earning the epithet of “Hui-Confucian literati” (Ch. *huiju* 回儒).³⁸ Meanwhile, the inflow of Sufi mysticism from the Middle East, Central Asia and Chinese Turkestan (today's Xinjiang) into the traditional Islamic set-

tings of the far away province of Gansu considerably remolded Chinese Islam there. The fact that *menhuans* in this portion of the country managed to accommodate Sufi theological motifs and the notion of spiritual genealogy (Ar. *silsila*) with that of family structure as traditionally understood in Chinese society indicates that Sufism fit well with the necessity to adapt Islam to this new historical condition.³⁹ In the long run, however, the troubled condition of acknowledging Chinese rule without drifting away from the source of Islamic knowledge would prove detrimental for northwestern Muslims whose initial quietest acceptance of their minority status took a turn for the worst when, by the mid eighteenth century, the Qing government had sectarian differences increasingly institutionalized and Muslim subjects classified into self-serving political categories, like those confined within the dichotomy “Old Teaching” (Ch. *laojiao* 老教) vs. “New Teaching” (*xinjiao* 新教).⁴⁰ The embedment of such ideological nuances within the empire’s legal system not only further polarized Muslims into artificially constructed factions, but amplified the intensity of communal violence with consequences for the entire Chinese *ummah* (community of faith) which thereby soon found itself pulled into an all-out showdown with the Qing state.

Notwithstanding the tragic development of the anti-Qing uprisings, Chinese Islamic scholarship has apparently failed to establish inherent mechanisms of legal reasoning which consistently address the contentious domain of *jihad* and related matters of civil governance, such as how to preserve Islamic values during hostilities, while regulating Muslims’ relationship with the larger Chinese society and other aspects of social intercourse. This is surprisingly exceptional for according to Islamic law any Muslim armed resistance or declared act of war against non-Islamic regimes has to be formally sanctioned as a *jihad* and approved by a legitimate representative of the Muslim community (i.e. an *imam* or an *imam*-appointed authority) in order to be permitted. An uprising of the scale and severity of those taking place in Manchu-ruled China during the 18th and 19th centuries would inevitably constitute a *jihad*, and as such it would have required codification—that is the circulation of legal and religious literature advocating war against the admitted enemies of Islam, discussing the reasons behind it and its complex set of meanings. Yet there is little if any indication from the primary sources produced over this turbulent period—by either mainstream Muslim scholars or the central state administration—that this kind of warfare took the form of *jihad*. It is perhaps because of the absence of jurists’ discussions and commentaries on the subject that *jihad* in imperial China has so far remained a relatively unexplored field of historiographical inquiry. Except Ho-dong Kim’s ground-breaking study on Yakub Beg’s emirate in mid-nineteenth century Kasgharia (Eastern Turkestan), the analysis of patterns of cultural confrontation authored by Raphael Israeli, some random remarks of Muslim intellectuals writing in Chinese modern periodicals, recent insights offered by Masumi Matsumoto with concern to the martyrdom operations of patriotic Chinese Muslim elites and a few other secondary sources,⁴¹ very limited information is available about the development of this practice in Chinese Islam. Published materials on the argument are far too fragmented, scarce and lacking systematicity to paint a coherent picture of the phenomenon. In addition, if we assume that “Muslims in [...] Gansu engaged in *shenzhan* [聖戰, lit. holy war] not to topple the state but to attack local officials, to take revenge on local enemies, or to defend themselves”,⁴² the military endeavor of their leaders as well as the underlying political and sectarian concerns that motivated their actions seem to differ substantially from those enshrined in the legal doctrine of *jihad* as conventionally defined. The combination of these several aspects makes the work of historical reconstruction extremely burdensome.

As for women's participation in *jihad* prior to the eighteenth century, Chinese sources are almost totally silent. The scarcity of literature covering this period suggests that local Muslim women, compared to their Arab co-religionists, were late to develop the kind of warlike consciousness required to sustain any military expedition. This does not mean, however, that they neglected to observe their religious duties, but rather that the relative degree of socio-political stability enjoyed by the overall majority of Chinese Muslim population simply did not provide a structure for this consciousness to sprout. By the beginning of the Qing era, in fact, Islamic culture had been peacefully nourishing in China for nearly 1000 years. From its initial settlement up until this time, Islam underwent strong consolidation and, at best, moderately acculturated to Chinese life.⁴³ In spite of occasional frictions with the Confucian establishment, the level of threat-perception among Muslims was quite successfully maintained below bearable thresholds, and, in any case, the assimilatory pressure pushing them to accommodate Chinese dominant culture was not high enough to enable them to launch a full-scale *jihad*. It was precisely because no head-on clash had taken place between the two cultures that there isn't any documented evidence of female enforcers of *jihad* in Chinese Islam. Needless to say, these evaluations equally apply to the Gansu Muslims as well, for at this stage they were not yet exposed to the sectarian impulses of "political Sufism",⁴⁴ which would later become one of the major triggering factors of anti-Qing Muslim violence and irregular *jihad* between opponent factions.

Another argument which further contributes to explaining the absence of this practice among female religionists in earlier dynastic periods is that before the advent of Sufism, which in Northwest China started taking roots exactly during the eighteenth century, the development of feminine activities was not sufficiently encouraged and, in some cases, even vigorously ostracized by the prevailing Hanafi *madhhab* school of thought, which with its many ramifications all over the country, had till then held an absolute leading position in matters of legal theory and enforcement of Islamic law.⁴⁵ The overwhelming hegemony of Confucianism over ritual performance, combined with the Hanafi's tacit approval of the patriarchal ordering of society, had for a long time confined the range of female action to the sphere of domestic life alone, leaving virtually no space for women's religious cultivation other than the observance of prescribed codes of behavior aimed at regulating their relationship with the husband, on the one side, and their subjugated status in society, on the other.⁴⁶ With the exception of a few independent sites of worship for women—the female-led Qur'anic schools and mosques discussed by Maria Jaschok and Jingjun Shui in their trend-setting study on the *nü ahong* 女阿訇 (lit. female clerics) of central China,⁴⁷ the possibilities for women to claim a position of reverence within traditional power structures or advance equality by questioning established norms were almost non-existent.⁴⁸ Women's simultaneous exposure to Confucian and Islamic orthodoxy helped them nurture a greater appreciation for authority at the expense of their own social mobility, which in turn translated into their own exclusion from the public sphere. Their strict adherence to ordinary ritual duties and lack of public visibility thus may explain why *jihad* awareness did not catch on among Chinese female practitioners until Sufism introduced an element of change in the existing framework of power relations, thereby allowing them to rethink warfare on women promises. At the same time, the fact that the debate on the permissibility of women enforcing *jihad* had not received the attention of Hui-Confucian scholars is all the more surprising, if we consider that Chinese Muslim women were essential assets in the process of localization and indigenization of Islamic knowledge in China.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, current research on the extant body of *Han Kitab* literature has so far fallen short of satisfactory answers. An accu-

rate (re)-exploration of available primary sources in Arabic, Persian and *xiao'erjing* 小兒經 (Arabic-based writing system used to annotate spoken Chinese), accompanied by the formulation of new approaches to the study of women's history in the period of Islamic quiescence in China, becomes thus imperative in order to fill out parts of the picture left blank by Chinese records.

4. (Re)-envisioning the Feminine Self vis-à-vis the Outbreaks of Sufi Sectarian Violence

Despite the occurrence of female fighters in Chinese history is attested in oracle-bone inscriptions from as early as the 1st millennium BCE and the idea of ritualistic self-sacrifice was surely not absent in the folk belief of certain sectarian groups of later historical periods (i.e. early medieval Buddhist and Taoist ascetics), it is hard to identify when a clear link between the two came to be established.⁵⁰ It is much harder to determine when the practice of *shahada* (lit. martyrdom)—here understood as the ultimate expression of faithful sacrifice of one's life, a God-given chance for redemption and bearing witness to the truth—was first imbued into the realm of Chinese Islam. What is certain is that no long after new Sufi-sectarian impulses penetrated overland from the Middle East into Gansu and started crystalizing there around the charismatic leadership of Muhammad Amīn 'Azīz Ma Mingxin 馬明心 (1719–1781),⁵¹ the subdued local Muslim population saw an unmissable opportunity to rise up against the oppressive Manchu regime, forsake the Chinese norm and take their fate into their own hands. As Israeli specifies,

The rebellious wave which was promoted in Central Asia [Xinjiang] about 1760 by Muslim *khojas* who raised the banner of *jihad* against the Chinese, was transmitted through the medium of the New Sect [Jahriyya] to Northwest China and thence to the Southwest [Yunnan].⁵²

[...] By the middle of the nineteenth century, when persecution of the Muslims by both the Manchu and the Chinese reached its peak, [a] junction was made between Chinese Islam in the Northwest and Southwest, and the uprising, under the unifying symbols of *mahdi* [lit. the Guided One] and *jihad*, finally took the shape of a full-blown Chinese versus Muslim struggle.⁵³

Consistent with this view, *jihad* in China came to be associated with sectarian messianism (*mahdism*)—the belief, attested in *hadith* sources and prophesied by Muhammad himself, that the “Hidden Imam” would ultimately reappear after centuries of occultation to “govern the people by the *sunna* of the Prophet and establish Islam on earth”,⁵⁴ thereby bringing about God's equity and justice.⁵⁵ The introduction of these messianic ideas that vaguely remind us some of the doctrinal aspects of Twelver Shi'a Islam (Ar. *Ithna 'Ashariyyah*), soon merged with the fervent aspirations of local Sufi shaykhs who had antagonized Qing's interests in the above regions. When war drums started throbbing, the female relatives of these shaykhs did not take long to answer the call for *jihad*, and let loose an endless cycle of violence on their oppressors.

4.1. *The Jahriyya's Archetype of Female Martyrs: The Wives and Daughters of Ma Mingxin*

A written account of the late eighteenth century, the *Qinding Shifengbao Jilüe* [Imperial Records of the Shifeng Fort Incident], determines that with the Qing's invasion of Gansu and subsequent elimination of Ma Mingxin, over a thousand women died as a

result of armed conflicts merely among the Jahri Muslims from the eastern part of the province.

[The Governor General] Li Shiyao [d. 1788], the [Manchu Provincial-Commander-in-Chief for the county of Guyuan in Shaanxi] Gangta Ugiket Hala [1730–1789] and their troops slaughtered more than 1000 Muslim female rebels.⁵⁶

The rebels, together with those who had been lured into their evil cult, were all subjected to decapitation. Tens of thousands [of people] were sentenced. The villages were reduced to ashes, and the women and children deported.⁵⁷

By looking through another contemporary source, the *Qinding Lanzhou Jilüe* [Imperial Records of the Lanzhou Incident], we learn that in the autumn of 1781 one of the wives of Ma Mingxin, a certain Lady Zhang (d. 1782) of Caoyagou 草芽溝 (hamlet in today's Shanxi), was sent to northern Xinjiang along with her daughters and a group of other 256 women.⁵⁸

The [Manchu] Provincial-Surveillance-Commissioner Irgen Gioro Funing [1739–1814] marched towards Anding county [now prefectural city of Dingxi], where he hunted for Ma Mingxin's relatives and his closest disciples. [...] The next morning, [the Qing troops] abruptly entered Ma Mingxin's dwelling in Guanchuan [a few kilometers north of the provincial capital Lanzhou], and there they captured his younger cousin Ma Sanwa (Ma Tingmei), Ma Mingxin's concubine [second wife] and their two sons and two daughters, as well as Ma Sanwa's mother and grandsons.⁵⁹

The women were banished to somewhere around Ghulja [in today's Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture], and thereafter awarded as slaves to local soldiers from the Ewenki-Solon tribes, and to the Chahar and Oirat Mongol bannermen.⁶⁰

It is said that after being exiled there, one day the lady waited until nightfall to squeeze herself into the house of a high-ranking Qing officer. She put a kitchen knife on his throat and, out of revenge, killed him and his whole family (37 people) in cold blood while they were asleep. Not long afterwards, she was convicted of murder by the local Qing court and given a death sentence.⁶¹ Because of her warrior-like temperament, she is so far held in high esteem by the whole religious community, who sees in her the quintessential emblem of feminine loyalty, glorious martyrdom and strive for social justice. So esteemed was she that her devotees built her a *qubbah* (lit. shrine) on the banks of the Ili River, which is a practice quite unusual in Islam as women have no place into the funerary complex of patriarchs, and very rarely are made objects of veneration. As for the daughters, Jahri hagiographies maintain that they voluntarily ended their lives by drowning in a river and jumping off a cliff.⁶² Since then Zhang is remembered as the “grandmother of the lineage” (Ch. *dao zu tai tai* 道祖太太). The tombs housing her and her daughters' mortal remains are sites of pilgrimage still today.

If Lady Zhang's actions were driven more by the individual intent to right the wrongs suffered—her husband's murder and the enslavement of her relatives—rather than by a sense of religious obligation which requires *jihad* to be enforced in defense of the *Dar al-Islam*, the case of Salima (dates unknown) resonates more soundly with the rhetoric of Muslim warfare outlined above. This extraordinary Salar woman, who was also married to Ma Mingxin as first wife, made full display of her combat skills during a

bold military expedition to Gaolan 皋蘭, nearby present-day Lanzhou, where she, and hundreds of other female fighters under her lead, suffered a crushing defeat by the Qing. The following tale taken from the *Zhehelinye Daotongshi Xiaoji* [Short Collection of Anecdotes on Jahriyya's Spiritual Transmission] reveals interesting details about the great military endurance of these women.

In the 46th year [of Emperor Qianlong's reign] [1781], many respectable *awliyā'*, good-natured people and headmen sacrificed themselves here together with most of their devotees. Among them, there were [...] also the eminent *walī* Su Akhund [Su Forty-three] and Ma Mingxin's bride—our Salar [Grandmother] Salima who served as a model for all [Muslim] women. [The latter] was as brave and tenacious as the world's strongest male, [her bravery was such that] she led 500 [fighters] who ultimately succumbed to death [in battle]. The miracles these women were capable of are broadly known! [...] They would have defeated the Qing's *kafir* soldiers, if it was not for the overwhelming number of these infidels that hugely weakened their lines. They all followed the footsteps of our lineage founding father [Ma Mingxin]. No one of them retreated, all died bravely as martyrs.⁶³

4.2. *Madame of the West Mansion Safeguarding Ma Hualong's Initiatic Chain*

It was not only in warfare that these Muslim heroines reached their peak potential. An in-depth analysis of Sufi hagiographical literature uncovers that, besides siding with their husbands in battle or randomly unleashing violence in independent acts of revenge killing, women did play a decisive part in the preservation of knowledge. This was particularly true in times when the very survival of a saintly lineage came under threat or its secular power suddenly declined due to long-term exposure to machiavellian political maneuvering. Little has been written on the topic with reference to the popular centers of medieval Islam.⁶⁴ Even less is known about the intricacies of women's engagement in the politics of isolated Sufi communities of Northwest China. An illustrative example is given below as a completion to our discussion on female agency in sectarian environments.

Nearly a century after the foregoing events, Ma Hualong 馬化龍 (1810–1871), a Hui shaykh from Lingzhou 靈州 (modern Wuzhong) acclaimed as the fifth-generation descendant of Ma Mingxin, threw the whole of Northwest China into a new chain of social unrests. General Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812–1885) who brought in his own troops from Hunan, Sichuan and Anhui took a while to pacify the region. In the 10th year of Emperor Tongzhi's reign (1871), on a cold winter's day Ma Hualong ultimately surrendered and died weeks later at the hands of Liu Jintang 劉錦棠 (1844–1894), Zuo's closest aide.⁶⁵ Almost all Ma Hualong's family members were sentenced to death, gravely persecuted or castrated. It is estimated that over 300 people from his family alone died that year.⁶⁶ Those few who were able to break free from captivity dispersed throughout northeastern, southern and central China. Among the survivors, there was also Bai Feng (b. 1840), a beautiful Han woman from Guangwu 廣武 (hamlet in today's NHAR).⁶⁷ The legend goes that “Madame of the West Mansion” (Ch. *xifu taitai* 西府太太), as she is known among the Jahri adherents, was assigned by Ma Hualong before the latter's impending death to carry the lineage's *ijāzah* (lit. license or proofs of knowledge transmission)⁶⁸ and keep it safe from the Qing. Interesting details of her relationship with the Sufi shaykh are reported in the *Zheherenyue Daotong Shiliu* [Brief History of Jahriyya's Spiritual Transmission].

Before yielding himself to the enemy encampment, the Thirteenth Elder [Ma Hualong] told Bai Feng: “In order to ensure a smooth handover [of power] in the [spiritual genealogy of our] lineage, I have already stored eight boxes, four of which contain objects of extremely treasurable value for [the transmission of Jahriyya’s] legacy. The prosperity of the *menhuan* depends entirely on you. You have a vital role to play in raising the Jahriyya’s achievement: your mission is to inherit the past and usher in the future. If the enemies will succeed in seizing the city, you must tell them that you are a Han fellow. Tell the Qing soldiers I was a despotic tyrant who forced you into marriage. You must induce them to trust you, because this is the only way to safeguard the *ijāzah* [...]”⁶⁹

This is certainly one of the most illuminating passages in the whole corpus of Jahri hagiography which not only confirms the comparatively high status enjoyed by women in the *menhuan*, but rises also more general questions as to what kind of dynamics were at play in husband-wife relations within a prominent shaykh’s household, and about how Muslim women with a military elite background exerted a degree of authority in the public affairs.

While each of the stories discussed so far sheds some light on the response strategies taken by Muslim elite women to oppose state-sponsored mass violence and comply with non-Muslim rulers to keep their faith and lineage alive, they unfortunately do not give any clue to gender role attitudes in the households of more disadvantaged segments of Muslim society. How women took the initiative at the grassroots? Did they add substantial value to the elite’s *jihad* effort? How the elites mobilized public support for their anti-state military operations? What part did women from both social groups play in maintaining and furthering the Islamic revival of the following Guangxu 光緒 (r. 1875–1908) and republican eras? Given the current state of knowledge, it is hard to capture the significant disparities that feed into the overall picture. Future research is required to proceed with supplementary information which may help address more satisfactorily these questions.

5. Conclusion

By contrasting the (re)-presentations of women’s warlike qualities and roles in religious literature (*hadith* accounts and Sufi hagiographies), the paper took an evolutionary look at the feminine encroachment on the overwhelmingly masculine domain of military *jihad*. A common thread that runs through all the sources analyzed is that the burden of responsibility in times of war and spiritual crisis did not fall exclusively upon men but also on women who normally have denied access to the battlefield. To some extent, women might have seen *jihad* as an opportunity to enter the public sphere, but this should not be misconstrued as a means to buy back social prestige or make deliberate use of religiously-sanctioned violence for personal purposes. Rather than being a common practice, fighting was for them barely a last resort to protect the Prophet and his messengership, as is the case with Umm ‘Ammarah and other contemporary *sahabiyyat*, to provide military aid to a dying brother, just like Zaynab bint ‘Ali did at Karbala, or to take revenge for their husbands while attacking enemy occupied citadels, in a fashion similar to Lady Zhang and Salima. Save for Khawlah bint al-Azwar, who can be truly placed in the category of *mujahidaat*, these women were not specially trained in warfare but extemporized themselves as combatants that fought only under exceptional circumstances and, at any rate, by decision of a legitimate and recognized religious institution (the local *imam*) or, in its

absence, upon permission of the most closely related man of the family (father, husband, son etc.).

When assembling the stories discussed above into a comparative framework, it becomes evident that Muslim women of medieval Arab times and those of late imperial Gansu had both close ties to family life. The family-centered societies they respectively lived in required them to fulfill the duties of their kinship roles (wife, sister, daughter etc.) besides those incumbent on them by virtue of their Islamic faith. Their involvement in the war effort followed some general patterns of social organization which, regardless of the surrounding cultural environment, kept repeating with no relevant variations throughout the centuries. Moreover, if interpreted in light of the evidence derived from classical *hadith* traditions, the life stories of Gansu Muslim heroines as depicted in the hagiographical materials authored by Zhan Ye ‘Abd al-Hādī and Ma Xuezhi Muhammad Maṣṣūr are arguably modeled on common narrative structures, which highly praise women’s qualities of loyalty, devotion and trustworthiness to their men, as well as their spirit of sacrifice and service to the oppressed Muslim community of their times. In certain passages, even the language and literary devices employed by compilers show some striking similarities. Particularly noteworthy are the not infrequent and potentially problematic references to Shi’a Islam—like for instance the episode of Ma Hualong’s decapitation clearly resembling Imam Husayn’s unfortunate death at Karbala⁷⁰—which suggests that Jahri hagiographers were knowledgeable of this kind of literature. Consciously or not, while giving a genealogy-based account of their saintly lineage, this marginal group of sectarian writers within the Gansu-Muslim intelligentsia absorbed a number of old exegetical motifs and plot elements from non-Qur’anic texts, and have them readily (re)-adapted into an expanded narrative of spiritual descendancy which acknowledged also the achievements of their female co-religionists.

Apart from these remarkable and uncoincidental similarities, there are also significant differences which deserve to be briefly summarized. Chinese preference for female qualities like inscrutability, emotional restraint and quietness of spirit, as they are often portrayed in mainstream literary discourse(s) of both fictional or historical nature, evidently clashes with the boldness, action-minded and even nihilistic character of Gansu Muslim heroines herewith examined. Far from being cultural victims or exclusive products of an all-encompassing Confucian tradition, these women behaved according to some specific Islamic template which, nevertheless, should not lead us to assume that their actions were not affected by the surrounding Chinese environment on any measure. As emphasized at various points in the paper, Islam underwent substantial alteration in the process of being transferred to the Middle Kingdom. During this thousand-year-long process of localization and indigenization, Chinese Muslims have shown a sustained tendency to social unrest whenever assimilatory pressure grew unbearable. But it was not until the coming to power of the Manchus that a more generalized eruption of dissent forced the ruling establishment to launch a crackdown on Islam. Starting from the Qianlong era, a series of inglorious proscriptions were being infringed upon the northwestern Muslims⁷¹ with the aim to incorporate Xinjiang—and indirectly also Chinese Islamdom—into the Qing Empire through the medium of Confucian ideology.⁷² Manchu rulers were, none the less, unable to develop a consistent policy towards the ethnically diverse and factionally divided Muslims of Gansu, where multiple strategies were preferably employed. This eventually resulted in Jahri adherents being kept in segregation and badly punished, rebellious leaders beheaded and their family members (including wives, sisters and daughters) banished in frontier and malaria-prone regions for penal servitude. Not solely the neo-Sufi Jahriyya *menhuan* was charged with “heresy” (Ch. *xiejiao* 邪教)—

a serious accusation in the Confucian-oriented legal system of Qing China, but the activities of all the other *menhuans* and non-Sufi schools were also strongly restricted with profound aftereffects on the general Muslim population.⁷³ Women's participation in *jihad* must be seen as the sequel of this shift in Qing policy.

It was precisely the impossibility of accommodating heterodoxy within the paternalistic vision of both Confucian and Islamic normative orders that turned Jahri female practitioners into fearless enforcers of *jihad* and guardians of the lineage, whose embedded destructive and, at the same time, transformational power wholly manifested itself in the stories of Lady Zhang, Salima and Bai Feng. While shedding new light on the alternative femininities of Islam in contexts where the social construction of orthodoxy is severely challenged and conformity to state-defined norms is no longer achievable by normal means, these few cases best exemplify the mechanisms through which peripheral Muslim women among sectarian military elites temporarily step up to leadership for the sake of Islam and a deeper belief in social justice.

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NOTES

1. *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*, 2: 346.
2. M. Muhammadi Rayshahri, *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shi'a Hadîth*, London: ICAS Press, 2009, p. 1138, No. 6458.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 490, No. 2800.
4. In a newly released report, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) has described the violence experienced by Muslim women in Western countries as the result of compound factors, which besides gender, include perceived religion, ethnicity, social class and migration status. The report reveals that in 2014, 81.5% of Islamophobic acts taking place in France targeted women, while out of the complaints gathered between January and June 2015 in the Netherlands, 90% concerned Muslim women. See ENAR, *Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women*, Brussels: ENAR Foundation, 2016, pp. 4, 26. A critical reading of female oppression in modern Arab nations and the ambivalences of Muslim women's victimization vis-à-vis secular Western-style politics and the new trajectories of global Islam is given in Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 5–8; and Miriam Cooke, "Women, Religion, and the Postcolonial Arab World", *Cultural Critique*, No. 45, 2000, pp. 160–163.
5. In his analysis of the Abbasid-era Muslim habit of paying military substitutes to serve in *jihad*, Bonner (2010) lists what conditions an ideal *mujahid* (lit. struggler in the path of Allah) is to fulfill when ordered forth onto the frontlines:

[he] must be a free [not a slave] adult Muslim male, sound of body; and he must bring his own provisions, weapons, equipment and mount, all out of his own wealth. Only one who can provide these things enters the category of those upon whom the performance of *jihad* is incumbent.

- Additionally, he specifies that not all those who wish to go to war are allowed, or encouraged, to do so. Among these are the old, sick and poor, who comprehensively fall under the category of *mukhallafim* (lagers). See Michael Bonner, “Ja‘ā’il and Holy War in Early Islam”, (repr.) in *Jihad and Martyrdom*, ed. David Cook, Vol. 1, Milton Park-New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 147, 150.
6. For an overview of the evolution of Islamic principles of warfare and its conduct refer to Bernard K. Freamon, “Martyrdom, Suicide, and the Islamic Law of War: A Short Legal History”, *Fordham International Law Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Article 11, 2003, pp. 313–317. Further insights with specific reference to Qur’anic verses in Ella Landau-Tasserion, “Jihad”, (repr.) in *Jihad and Martyrdom*, ed. D. Cook, Vol. 1, Milton Park-New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 8–11.
 7. M. Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 84–91, 143–144, 147–148.
 8. The word *jihad* is used here in its narrower sense as synonym with “lesser *jihad*” (Ar. *jihad al-asgar*) which, by endorsing Freamon’s (2003) interpretation, applies to the Muslims’ effort to “use military methods, including war and violence, to advance or defend their religious values, goals, and objectives.” See Freamon, “A Short Legal History”, *op. cit.*, pp. 301–302 (note 8).
 9. The most authoritative example comes from Muhammed al-Bukhari’s *The Book of Jihad*, which devotes more than one section (Ch. LXII–LXVIII) to the *jihad* of women, see *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4: 89–93. This source however tends to portray women as non-combatants in charge of carrying water-skins for the thirsty, treating the wounded and bringing the killed back to Medina. Except for a few rare cases, such as that of Umm ‘Ammarah the “Prophet’s Shield” (dates unknown) who almost died while attacking a Quraysh with a sword or others who stroke hard a bunch of Byzantine soldiers with improvised weapons (i.e. stones, tent pegs and pillars used as lances), al-Bukhari and his contemporary al-Waqidi (*Futūḥ al-Shām*, 1: 88–89, 3: 341–342) do not raise the issue of women armed forces explicitly. On the contrary, as we approach the modern era, when the emancipation of women began to be discussed and the emerging feminist movement readily instrumentalized, legal literature becomes much more explicit and controversial. Cfr. Farhana Ali, “Why Women Kill: A Look at the Evolutionary Role of Muslim Female Fighters”, in *Know Thy Enemy II: A Look at the World’s Most Threatening Terrorist Networks and Criminal Gangs*, eds. Michael T. Kindt et al., Maxwell AFB: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2007, pp. 146–149; Youssef H. Aboul-Enein and Sherifa Zuhur, *Islamic Rulings on Warfare*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, pp. 12, 23, 26–27.
 10. A recent discussion of the subject is offered by Muhammad Khayr Haykal in his impressive three-volume work *al-Jihad wa’l-qital fi al-siyasa al-shara‘iyya* (Jihad and Fighting according to the Shari‘a Law), as expounded in D. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, pp. 124–126.
 11. An interesting development of this overall approach is embedded in the polemic against Muslims who deliberately make use of marriage issues to avoid *jihad*. Further distinctions between *fard kifaya* (lit. obligatory, but not for every member of the *ummah*) and *fard ‘ayn* (incumbent upon all Muslims, men and women alike) should therefore be seen as an attempt made by both classic and modern jurists to call men forth to battle, thereby pushing them to part from their wives and break all those earthly ties that would otherwise divert the *mujahidin*’s attention away from their holy mission. See *Ibid.*, pp. 55–57, 126; D. Cook, “Women Fighting in Jihad?”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2005, p. 379.
 12. A good example is that of female emancipation within jihadism which, by either providing an egalitarian exegesis of the Qur’an or historicizing it, attempts to set a precedent that challenges traditional gender roles in the service of militancy. As the contentious case of the American-educated Pakistani neuroscientist Aafia Siddiqui (b. 1972) reportedly suspected of ties to Bin Laden’s networks clearly indicates, this assumption, when pushed to the extreme, can lead Muslim scholarship to shift from a gender-specific interpretation of *jihad*—with women complementary to male fighters—towards one where the former are expressly ruled by *fatwa* (lit. authoritative yet non-binding opinion on a point of Islamic law) to fight against and with unrelated men. Refer to Rafia Zakaria, “Women and Islamic Militancy”, *Dissent*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2015, pp. 121–122; Charlie Winter, *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade*, London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015, pp. 8, 22; Declan Walsh, “Guantánamo Files Paint Aafia Siddiqui as Top Al-Qaeda Operative”,

- The Guardian*, 26 April 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/26/guantanamo-files-aafia-siddiqui-alqaida> (accessed 6 July, 2018). By extra-Qur'anic explanations here I mean a wide array of post-prophetic sources which encompasses exegetical commentaries (Ar. *tafsir*), early and later hadith traditions, eschatological texts, as well as juridical, historical, edifying and hortatory literary works used to supplement the Qur'an. Although there are scholars like Fatoohi (2013) who have warned against overtly relying on these materials on the grounds that Qur'anic legal framework is eternal, it is generally agreed that, if properly balanced, they can help explicate and amplify the Holy Book's original message without necessarily adulterating it or diluting its scriptural authority (see Louay Fatoohi, *Abrogation in the Qur'an and Islamic Law: A Critical Study of the Concept of 'Naskh' and Its Impact*, New York-London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 92–93; Gerhard Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur'an”, in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel S. Reynolds, London-New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 71–71, 82; William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Hadith Qudsi*, The Hague-Paris: Mouton & Co., 1977, pp. 32–39). On the importance of extra-Qur'anic references—especially of the genres of *maghazi* (accounts of military campaigns) and *sira* (biography of the Prophet)—in examining the variegated meanings of Muslim warfare, refer to Bonner, *Jihad and Islamic History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23ff; cfr. Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 95–115.
13. The administrative borders of Gansu were totally redrawn in republican times. Prior to 1928, the province comprised most of present-day Qinghai (Tibetan Amdo). When Ningxia was made an autonomous region (henceforth NHAR) in the late 1950s, its borders shrunk further attaining today's territorial morphology. Unless otherwise specified, any reference made to Gansu in the text below applies extensively also to Qinghai and Ningxia. As for the etymology of Jahriyya (lit. vocal school, from the Arabic *jahr*, meaning reading or speaking aloud in public), historian of China Joseph F. Fletcher specifies that the term has at least three important connotations: (1) it is applicable to all Sufi orders that perform the meditative remembrance of God loudly (Ar. *dhikr-i jahrī*); (2) it designates the *tariqah* (esoteric path) founded by Central Asian Khwaja Ahmad Yassawi (d. 1166)—known also by the name of Yassawiyya—which during the sixteenth century came to be closely associated with Naqshbandiyya Sufism; (3) it stands for a sub-group within the Naqshbandiyya proper that traces its origins back to another influential Khwaja (Fa. Master of Wisdom)—Mahmud Anjir Fagh-nawi (d. 1317)—whose peculiarity was that of practicing the vocal remembrance as a supplement to the Naqshbandiyya's customary silent one (*dhikr-i khufī*). See J. F. Fletcher, “Central Asian Sufism and Ma Ming-hsin's New Teaching”, in *Proceedings of the Fourth East Asian Altaistic Conference*, ed. Chieh-hsien Ch'en, Taipei: National Taiwan University, 1975, pp. 79–80. In addition, it is important here to stress that the Yassawi tradition, prior to its ultimate absorption into the Naqshbandiyya during the 16th and 17th centuries, welcomed women's participation in séances and had special female circles, a custom that apparently has managed to survive in the late-nineteenth century Laachi- and Chachtuu-Eshander-offshoots of Yassawiya where collective loud *dhikrs* and dances accompanied with women are largely attested (refer to Alexandre Benningsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 34–35, 67–69). More on Jahriyya Sufism in relation to the broader national context, and the other sectarian affiliations and non-Sufi schools of Northwest China in Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998, pp. 86–89, 103–107, 177–186; Michael Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999, pp. 121–126. The salient features of Jahriyya Sufism at the various stages of its historical development are most comprehensively summarized by Chinese Muslim scholars like Mian (1981), Ma (1983) and Bai (2007). See respectively Weilin Mian 勉维霖, *Ningxia Yisilanjiao Gaiyao* 宁夏伊斯兰教派概要 [Brief Outline of Islamic Schools in Ningxia], Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe 宁夏人民出版社 [Ningxia People's Publishing House], 1981, pp. 58–100; Tong Ma 马通, *Zhongguo Yisilan Jiaopai yu Menhuan Zhidu Shilüe* 中国伊斯兰教派与门宦制度史略 [Brief History of the Chinese Menhuan System and Islamic Schools], Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1983, pp. 362–451; Shouyi Bai 白寿彝, *Zhongguo Huihui Minzushi* 中国回回民族史 [History of the Chinese Hui People], Vol. I, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局 [Zhonghua Book Company], 2007, pp. 439–445.
 14. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a detailed record of the uprisings, for which there already exists a rich body of scholarly literature in both Chinese and Western languages. The monumental four-volume work HMQY is the most widely recognized and referenced collection of relevant

- primary sources, comprising those on the Du Wenxiu-led Panthay rebellion (1856–1873) in Yunnan, not discussed here. One of the best documentary accounts in English is that produced by Chu (1966) who covers the origins and development of the Tongzhi revolts at all stages—the administrative materials (official communications to the throne, imperial edicts, law and regulations) as well as supplementary data (charts, maps, tables and general statistics) contained into this work help gain a more comprehensive understanding of Qing’s standpoint and methods of intervention. Secondary sources include in-depth essays and book chapters like those authored by Liu and Smith (1980), Yang (1981), and Bai (2007) which are mostly focused on the Jahariyya’s involvement in the fights. See Wen-Djang Chu, *The Moslem Rebellion in Northwest China 1862–1878: A Study of Government Minority Policy*, The Hague-Paris: Mouton & Co, 1966; Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard J. Smith, “The Military Challenge: The North-west and the Coast”, in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 11, Late Ch’ing, 1800–1911, Part II*, eds. John K. Fairbank et al., London-New York-New Rochelle: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 214–243; Huaizhong Yang 杨怀中, “Lun Shiba Shiji Zhehelinye Musilin de Qiyi” 论十八世纪哲赫林耶穆斯林的起义 [Study of the the Jahri Muslim Uprising of the 18th Century], in *Qingdai Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Lunji* 清代中国伊斯兰教论集 [Collection of Papers on Chinese Islam during the Qing Dynasty], ed. Ningxia Zhexue Shehui Kexue Yanjiusuo 宁夏哲学社会科学研究所, Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, pp. 47–107; S. Bai, *Zhongguo Huihui Minzushi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 130–136, 144–151.
15. See Zakaria, “Women and Islamic Militancy”, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–122; Katharina von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Women”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 5, 2007, pp. 406–407; cfr. F. Ali, “Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Article 2, 2006, pp. 25–26. Based on this precedent, various Islamic terrorist organizations have also attempted to justify the brutality of their actions and began (re)-producing their own narratives, such as the one contained in the Islamic State handbook for female suicide bombers *A Sister’s Role in Jihad* which is enjoying a growing worldwide readership since a draft copy was first released on the net in January 2001 (available at “Internet Archive” website, last retrieved March 12, 2017, https://archive.org/stream/SistersRoleInJihad/78644461-Sister-s-Role-in-Jihad_djvu.txt). In like manner, on 23 January 2015 a cluster of ISIS on-line supporters which goes by the name of all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigade’s media arm, drew up and posted a semi-official document titled “Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study” on an Arabic jihadist forum with the aim to elucidate how women should behave in ISIS-controlled territories, and enumerate the circumstances under which they are appointed to aid *jihad*. Refer to Lisa De Bode, “ISIL Publishes Treatise on Womanhood in Apparent Bid to Recruit Saudis”, *Al Jazeera*, 5 February 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/2/5/female-warrior-guide-lays-out-rules-of-life-under-islamic-state.html> (accessed 7 June 2018); Winter, *Women of the Islamic State*, *op. cit.*, 2015, p. 5.
 16. Assad Nimer Busool, *Nisa Muslimaat Mujahimadaat* [Muslim Women Warriors], Chicago: Al Huda, 1995, pp. 34–35, 64 (as quoted in Ali, “The Role of Muslim Female Fighters”, *op. cit.*, p. 21, note 3).
 17. Ahmed (1992) and Siddiqi (1993) agree that Islam, unlike other religions, had no difficulty in acknowledging women as a source of authority before modern times. Especially in the earliest days when oral transmission was the only vehicle for passing on religious knowledge, women who had enjoyed the Prophet’s company were deemed to be invaluable custodians of the *sunnah*, and as such they were often approached by co-religionists eager to learn about the Prophet’s achievements during his battles. Among them, the Prophet’s wives are acclaimed as the most accurate and authoritative of all the times, and therefore are granted great recognition as *hadith* collectors and interpreters. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 47, 73; Zubayr Muhammad Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origin, Development and Special Features*, Oxford: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p. 117. While Western scholars like Smith (1985) have raised serious doubts about the historical authenticity of these accounts on the grounds that the compilation of orally-transmitted texts (*Ar. matn*) by 7th- and 8th-century male *muhaddithin* (lit. traditionists) tended to favor androcentric readings of early Islamic historiography, there exists a growing body of literature which highlights women’s contribution to religious scholarship and knowledge production (Jane I. Smith, “Women, Religion and Social Change in Early Islam”, in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, pp. 20–21, 24). The best recent study on the topic is Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013 (esp. Ch. I and II).
 18. Cook, “Women Fighting in Jihad?”, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

19. Max Seligsohn, “Ā’isha bint Abī Bekr” [lemma search], (repr.) in *E. J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913–1936*, eds. M. Th. Houtsma et al., Vol. 1, Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1993, p. 217; A. Sayeed, “Zaynab” [lemma search], in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith, Vol. 1, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 460.
20. Mir Babur Ali Anis, *Anis Ke Salaam*, ed. Ali Jawad Zaidi, Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Biyuru, 1981, p. 281 (as quoted in David Pinault, “Zaynab bint ‘Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imams in Shi‘ite Devotional Literature”, in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998, p. 91).
21. Pinault, “Zaynab bint ‘Ali”, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–95.
22. For a definition of the two terms and further historical insights on how this group came to be the primal authority from whom the traditions of Islam were passed down to subsequent generations, see Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature*, *op. cit.*, Ch. II and III (esp. pp. 14–15, 28–29). Based on the assumption that in order to be qualified as a companion (sing. *al-sahabi*) a Muslim had to have meet, seen or heard the Prophet at least once in his/her life, Siddiqi (1993) posits that the number of companions might have risen exponentially from 1,525 in 628 (at the time that the first known census of Muslim population was taken at Hudaibiyah and a famous treaty of peace signed between Muhammad and the Quraysh clan of Mecca) to above 100,000 in 632 (when Muhammad’s farewell pilgrimage to Mecca took place). As for the successors, that is those early disciples who did not learn directly from the Prophet but from the *hadith* of his companions, estimates are much more difficult to obtain.
23. Nabia Abbott, “Women and the State on the Eve of Islam”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 1941(b), pp. 260, 273.
24. Daniela Gioseffi, *Women on War: An International Anthology of Women’s Writings from Antiquity to the Present*, New York: The Feminist Press at City University of New York, 2003, p. 104.
25. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4: 47–48, 90. The same version of the story is transcribed with minor variations also in Margaret Smith, *Rabi‘a The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (repr.) 1984, pp. 137–140; and Mahmood Ahmad Ghadanfar, *Great Women of Islam: Who Were Given the Good News of Paradise*, Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publishers, 2001(a), pp. 187–188.
26. *Futuh al-Sham*, 1: 77–82; M. A. Ghadanfar, *Commanders of the Muslim Army: Among the Companions of the Prophet*, Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publishers, 2001(b), pp. 320–321, 324–326.
27. *Futuh al-Sham*, 1: 88–89; Ghadanfar, *Commanders of the Muslim Army*, *op. cit.*, pp. 326–327.
28. *Futuh al-Sham*, 1: 90. Himyar (*homeritae* in early Greek sources) and Tubba’ (plural Tabābi‘ah) refer respectively to the most numerous tribe in the ancient Sabaean Kingdom of pre-Islamic southern Arabia (today’s Yemen), and to the Sabaean feudal rulers. The latter may also be a corruption of the name of an influential family among the Hamdān, another tribe who inhabited the region. See Johannes Heinrich Mordtmann, “Himyar” [lemma search], (repr.) in *E. J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913–1936*, eds. M. Th. Houtsma et al., Vol. 1, Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1993, pp. 310–311.
29. *Futuh al-Sham*, 1: 96.
30. *Ibid.*, 3: 353.
31. Ghadanfar, *Great Women of Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 237–238.
33. R. Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa‘d to Who’s Who*, Boulder-London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, pp. 15, 35. Roded argues that what caused a drop in the number of women in the biographical dictionaries compiled after the time of the Prophet, and ergo the dramatic weakening of women’s status in Islamic society, was a combination of the following: (1) ecological factors (the gradual transition from a nomadic society based on matrilineal kinship to an urban-agrarian one where patriarchal authority became increasingly dominant); (2) economic changes (the rising importance of landed property); and (3) external cultural influences (Byzantine, Persian and Turkish). Roded’s quantitative analysis of biographical entries speaks in favor of the thesis that Muslim male literati, in particular legists of the Abbasid era (750–1258), played a significant part in downgrading the position of Arab women in Islam and reinforcing misogynist ideas while (re-)interpreting early sources. Similarly, Abbott’s (1941a, 1941b) seminal works on the warring queens of pre-Islamic Arabia have shown that the “[c]hanging social conditions, due in part to contacts with neighboring peoples and kingdoms, may have been deprived the Arab woman [...] of some of the public prestige and privileges enjoyed by her earlier sisters” (quoted from Abbott, “Women and the State”, *op. cit.*, p. 259). Refer also to N. Abbott, “Pre-Islamic Arab Queens”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1941(a), pp. 1–22.

34. *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 3: 522–523; *Futūḥ al-Shām*, 2: 177. Roded suggests that women present at battles only occasionally received a part of the movable booty, despite there are cases of daughters being specifically mentioned for having inherited their father's share. See Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
35. Ma Qicheng 马启成, "Zhongguo Yisilanjiao" 中国伊斯兰教 [Chinese Islam], in *Zhongguo Yisilan Baike Quanshu* 中国伊斯兰百科全书 [Chinese Encyclopaedia of Islam], ed. Zhongguo Yisilan Baike Quanshu Bianji Weiyuanhui 中国伊斯兰百科全书编辑委员会, Chengdu: Sichuan Cishu Chubanshe 四川辞书出版社 [Sichuan Lexicographical Press], 2007, p. 754.
36. Raphael Israeli, "Established Islam and Marginal Islam in China from Eclecticism to Syncretism", (repr.) in *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002 (a), p. 99 (emphasis in the original, with minor changes).
37. Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.
38. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2005, pp. 21–29, 134–160.
39. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
40. Distinctions of this sort—comprising those more deliberately aimed at atomizing rival congregations through the inflamed rhetoric of "Good Muslims" (Ch. *lianghui* 良回) vs. "Bad Muslims" (*huifei* 回匪) and other bureaucratic tools—were devised for nothing but practical administrative reasons which poorly describe the way northwestern Muslims understood themselves (see R. Israeli, "Islam in China", in *Politics and Religion in Contemporary China*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2012, pp. 264–266; more details on the historical context in J. Lipman, "'A Fierce and Brutal People': On Islam and Muslims in Qing Law", in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, eds. Pamela Kyle Crossley et al., Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 98–103). Regardless of the strongly ideological stances advocated by the Qing imperial administration, today it is broadly agreed that, with the only exception of the Mountain Tajiks and a few ethnic Uyghurs who identify themselves as Ismailis or Imamiyyahs (Shi'ia branches of Islam), all other Muslim minorities of China are Sunnis who belong to one of these two categories: Sinophone Muslims (also comprehensively known as Huis) or Turkophone ones, namely Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Salars, Uzbeks, and Tatars besides aforementioned Tajiks and Uyghurs (refer to Bai, *Zhongguo Huīhuī Minzushi*, *op. cit.*, p. 411; cfr. Ma Qicheng, "Zhongguo Yisilanjiao", *op. cit.*, p. 753). Apart from these two major clusters there are also small groups of Mongolian-speakers, like the Dongxiang (Sartha), Bonan, and Alashan Mongols, or in the case of Kaligang and Khache Muslims (found respectively in present-day northeastern Qinghai and Ü-Tsang-central Tibet) even Amdo and Lhasa Tibetan-speakers—none of the last three is nevertheless officially recognized as one of the 56 ethnic groups that make up contemporary "Chinese nation" (Ch. *zhonghua minzu* 中華民族). See Hao Sumin 郝苏敏 & Wen Hua 文化, *Ganqing Teyou Minzu Wenhua Xingtai Yanjiu* 甘青特有民族文化形态研究 [Research on the Cultural Morphology of Gansu-Qinghai's Ethnic Minorities], Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe 民族出版社 [The Ethnic Publishing House], 1999, pp. 14–16, 181–312; Ding Mingjun 丁明俊, *Alashan Caoyuan Xinyang Yisilanjiao de Mengguzu Musilin* 阿拉善草原信仰伊斯兰教的蒙古族穆斯林 [The Muslims of Mongol Ethnicity from the Alashan Grasslands], *Xibei Minzu Yanjiu* 西北民族研究 [Northwestern Journal of Ethnology], No. 4, 2005, pp. 79–91; David G. Atwill, "A Tibetan by Any Other Name: The Case of Muslim Tibetans and Ambiguous Ethno-religious Identities", *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, Vol. 23, 2014, pp. 33–61.
41. H. Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004; R. Israeli, *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002, and Id., *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation*, London-Malmö: Curzon Press, 1980; M. Matsumoto, "Rationalizing Patriotism among Muslim Chinese: The Impact of the Middle East on the Yuehua Journal", in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, eds. Stephane A. Dudoignon et al., London-New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 117–142. With regard to the periodicals where some passing references are made to *jihad* and "noble death" in defense of the country's interests, the *Yuehua* 月華 (Crescent China) and *Huijiao Dazhong* 回教大眾 (The Hui People) are just a couple of most fitting examples which stem from a more widely spread phenomenon of print publishing led by Muslim intellectuals from Republican China and abroad.
42. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, *op. cit.*, p. 132. In another note, by elaborating further on these considerations on the peculiarities of *jihad* in China, Lipman convincingly maintains that "[*jihad*] seems [more] to be part of a complex of images of Islam—partially Middle Eastern and Orientalist—transported to China" (see *ibid.*, note 65). This stance may explain why *jihad* as a concept of Islamic jur-

- isprudence has not been so far systematically treated, to the best of my knowledge, by any primary source written, compiled or translated into Chinese during the whole of the Ming-Qing period when the indigenization of Islam took place.
43. This point is extensively acknowledged by both Chinese and Western scholars. Bai (2001), for example, has referred to this millennium-long presence of Muslim settlers in China as the Islamic age of “cultural transplantation” (Ch. *yizhi shidai* 移植時代), which roughly coincides with what Israeli (2002c), in his three-phased model of cultural change, identifies as the phase of “material acculturation”—the timeframe when “Muslim society [is believed to] ha[ve] [acquired aspects of Chinese material culture and] adequate mechanisms [were developed] to keep chronic stress at a tolerable level [on the ideological front].” See respectively S. Bai, “Zhongguo Yisilan zhi Fazhan” 中国伊斯兰之发展 [The Development of Chinese Islam], (repr.) in *Minzu Zongjiao Lunji* 民族宗教论集 [Collection of Essays on Religion and Ethnicity], Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe 河北教育出版社 [Hebei Education Press], pp. 376–378; R. Israeli, “Islam in the Chinese Environment”, (repr.) in *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002(c), p. 297 (text rephrased).
 44. The coining of such a term is due to Zarcone (1998), who first used it to describe the unparalleled power of Central Asia’s Sufi brotherhoods and their transnational networks, especially with regard to the sophistication of their hagiolatry which in modern times became instrumental in shaping dynasties, fomenting uprisings, and supporting governments while simultaneously plotting against them. This is, according to the French historian, what makes “Sufism offer more than Islam, despite the former being integrated into the latter” (quoted from Thierry Zarcone, “Political Sufism and the Emirate of Kasgharia (End of the 19th Century): The Role of the Ambassador Ya’qūb Xān Tūra”, in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the 20th Centuries*, eds. A. von Kükkelgen and A. J. Frank, Vol. 2, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1998, p. 153, with minor changes).
 45. On the favorable attitude of Sufi brotherhoods towards the fair sex, refer, among others, to Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975, Appendix II, pp. 426–436; Smith, *Rabi’a The Mystic*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–175, 190–205; J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, pp. 18, 232. These findings offer important insights on how certain ascetic traditions in the history of Sufism, by granting women more opportunities for deepening their religious commitment, were capable to undermine those classical formalist views of Islamic orthodoxy that had long ignored the needs of feminine audiences. The anti-formalist proclivities of Sufism are hence deemed responsible for reconfiguring the social duties traditionally assigned to women, who thereafter came to be known also as *faqirani* and *hafiza* (resp. female equivalent of *faqir* and *hafiz*), or, in some special cases, found themselves empowered to the rank of *muqaddamat* (lit. female circle-leaders), *shaykha* regent and even *abdal* substitute. Some evidence of such development in Northwest China can be drawn from the life stories of female saints whose shrines became object of intense veneration. For a few examples of this folk-cults in the Qadiriyya order refer to Weijian Li 李维建 & Jing Ma 马景, *Gansu Linxia Menhuan Diaocha* 甘肃临夏门宦调查 [Survey on Linxia’s Sainly Lineages], Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe 中国社会科学出版社 [China Social Science Press], 2011, pp. 299–300; QHBQ, p. 137.
 46. Tontini’s (2016) recently published study on the *Muslim Sanzijing* equips us with conceptual lenses through which we can gain a better understanding of gender asymmetries at the intersection of Islamic and Chinese traditions. While stressing out Hanafi’s flexible interpretation of Islamic source(s) of law, the work simultaneously denounces the school’s ability to rework Chinese local customs—such as those pertaining to matters of family, marriage and patriarchal distribution of social roles between men and women—and reconcile them with the normative character of Islamic jurisprudence. Refer to Roberta Tontini, *Muslim Sanzijing: Shifts and Continuities in the Definition of Islam in China*, Boston: Brill, 2016, pp. 13–19, 29–34.
 47. M. Jaschok and J. Shui, *The History of Women’s Mosques in Chinese Islam*, Milton Park-Oxford: Curzon Press, 2000.
 48. Mahmood (2005, 2014) is one of the first scholars who helped identify Muslim women’s agency “not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms” (S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, *op. cit.*, p. 15). Although her framework of analysis is contemporary Middle Eastern culture, the theoretical reach of her innovative approach to Islamic piety suits well the case of Chinese Muslims, as it equally reveals “how suffering and survival—two modalities of existence that are often considered to be the antithesis of agency—can be articulated within the lives of women who lived under the pressures of a[ny] patriarchal system [...]”. See Mahmood, “Feminist

- Theory, Agency and the Liberatory Subject”, (repr.) in *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, ed. Fereshteh Nourai-Simone, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2014, p. 210.
49. The first Muslim converts were women who had been married off to Arab and Persian merchants and, by virtue of accepting their husbands’ religion, became themselves assimilated into Islamic culture. “Their husbands were foreigners living in China, the children were ‘native *fanke*’ [nationalized foreigners], and the[se] wives and mothers were the only Chinese citizens in the family” (Jaschok and Shui, *The History of Women’s Mosques*, *op. cit.*, p. 75).
 50. China has a long history of women versed in the arts of war who occasionally served as military commanders, the earliest known case of a woman of this kind is Fuzi 婦子 (d. 1200 BCE). Posthumously revered as Queen Mother Xin 母辛, she is alleged to have ranked second-in-command only to the first Shang King Wu Ding 武丁 (ca. 1250–1192 BCE) and to have led many successful campaigns against neighboring rival states. At the zenith of her military career she raised 13,000 soldiers who were intended to attack the Western Qiang tribes, indeed a record number of troops under the authority of any military leader at that time. A detailed account of her life achievements is offered in Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A. D. Stefanowska, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity Through Sui, 1600 B.C.E – 618 C.E.*, Armonk-London: M.E. Sharpe, 2007, pp. 19–25. As for the early development of ascetic self-sacrifice with particular reference to the methods of auto-cremation deployed by Chinese monks and nuns in medieval times, see James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007, pp. 8–12, 42–45, 95–97. On Buddhist- or Daoist-inspired practices of extreme monasticism and other forms of ritual offerings resulting in the death of the practitioner, refer respectively to Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 99–101, 191–192 (note 11); and Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500–1700*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2012 (esp. Ch. IV). I am grateful to Oliver Weingarten at Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, for his brief but insightful excursus on warfare in ancient China which has been of much help to better contextualize the history of Chinese female warriors and frame my own argument.
 51. Fletcher (1977, 1995) provides solid evidence that demonstrates the spread of a Jahriyya’s chain of spiritual succession from the Yemeni Sufis of Zabid to the Muslims of Northwest China through Ma Mingxin who is reported to have received his initiation in Zabid sometime between 1725 and 1740 when vocalized *dhikr* litanies had already become widely practiced in addition or in preference to the silent ones. See Fletcher, “The Naqshbandiyya and the Dhikr-i Arra”, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 1, 1977, pp. 114–115, and Id., “The Naqshbandiyya in Northwest China”, in *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia*, ed. Beatrice F. Manz, London: Ashgate Variorum (posthumously published article, Ch. XI), 1995, pp. 27–33. The introduction of this and other doctrinal innovations into China proper (i.e. veneration of saints, abstaining from paying fees for religious services, and meditation around shrines and burial sites) provoked a furious reaction from the most conservative Qadim Hanafite (*gedimu* 格迪目) and Khufiyya Sufi (*hufuye* 虎夫耶) majority which had the Jahriyya earn the blameworthy appellation of “New Teaching.” Cfr. Lipman, “A Fierce and Brutal People”, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100; Dillon, *China’s Muslim Hui Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122ff.
 52. R. Israeli, “Islamization and Sinicization in Chinese Islam”, (repr.) in *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002(b), p. 126.
 53. *Ibidem*.
 54. *Sunan Abu-Dawud* (Book 36, No. 4273). Cfr. *Bihār al-Anwār* (2: 501–502), where the prophecies anticipating the beginning of a new era of faith restoration are more deeply permeated with the philosophy of *jihad*:

Due to his [the Imam Mahdi’s] just rule, the fire of disbelief should be extinguished [...]. O Allah, we beseech You [...] that he may slay Your enemies till there does not remain any caller to oppression. [...] Demolish their pillars and blunt their sword. Make their weapons useless. Lower their flags and eliminate their fighters. Put discord into their forces. O Lord, send down hard stones upon them and hit them with Your sharp sword. Do not turn away the severity of Your chastisement from the criminals. Send down chastisement on the enemies of Your Wali [lit. friends of God] and the enemies of Your Messenger through the hands of Your Wali and the hands of Your servants.

Though most certainly this absolute vision is not shared by all Muslims, some Qur’anic provisions—such as those contained in verse 8: 39–40 “[and] fight against them until there is no more oppression

- and all worship is devoted to God alone”—do not seem to oppose it in principle (see M. Asad trans., *The Holy Qur'an*, p. 303).
55. The idea that the advent of a rightly guided savior will end tyranny and fill the earth with justice is a leitmotif of both Sunni- and Shi'a-inspired *hadith* literature, see for example *Sunan Abu-Dawud* (Book 36, No. 4269 and 4270). For a synopsis on mahdism in Twelver Shi'ism, refer to Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism" [lemma search], in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 14, Fasc. 2, 2007, pp. 136–143. On-line source (last retrieved April 30, 2017) <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-in-iran-vii-the-concept-of-mahdi-in-twelver-shiism>. On the possibility that *jihad* could have been designed to bring salvation to the society in a hypothetical eschatological future, D. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihad", (repr.) in *Jihad and Martyrdom*, Vol. 1, Milton Park-New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 88–122.
 56. *Qinding Shifengbao Jilüe*, in SQSW (Vol. 49), 17: 5a. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Chinese are my own.
 57. *Ibid.*, 17: 21b.
 58. *Qinding Lanzhou Jilüe*, in SQSW (Vol. 49), 13: 19a-19b, 23b-24a.
 59. *Ibid.*, 13: 19a-19b. As reported by the Jahri hagiographer Ma Xuezhi (1850-1923), when Zhang left Guanchuan for Xinjiang, the daughters at her following were actually three and not two. See *Al-Kitāb al-Jahri*, p. 212, and *Zheherenye Daotong Shilüe*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), p. 610 for cross-reference.
 60. *Qinding Lanzhou Jilüe*, in SQSW (Vol. 49), 13: 23b–24a.
 61. *Al-Kitāb al-Jahri*, p. 212. Other sources reduce the number of deaths to 20, cfr. *Zheherenye Daotong Shilüe*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), p. 610.
 62. *Ibidem*. Cfr. *Manāqib*, pp. 82, 84–85; *Huijiao Lanshan Daopai*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), p. 688. It is difficult to build a more detailed picture of these women and of their actions through the materials here referenced as they contradict each other on several points.
 63. *Zhehelinye Daotongshi Xiaoji*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), pp. 564–565.
 64. Among others, Chamberlain (1994) has brought attention to the mechanisms of elite maneuvering in thirteenth century Damascus. Although he is not primarily concerned with women's presence in saintly lineages, his work elucidates how local political power was vested in military households whose authority was, to a great extent, exercised by the wives of professional warriors of pastoral or Mamluk origins. While indirectly supporting their husbands in the military recruitment, these women worked as a fundamental driving force of knowledge transmission. They founded madrasas, centers of Qur'anic learning and various charitable associations with the intent to bring in new men into their husband's personal army, not lastly scholars of recognized religious prestige who could therefore enjoy protection from the elites. See Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 38, 52–54; other rare evidences from the Ottoman empire and the Turko-Mongol dynasties of Central Asia, in Gavin R. G. Hambly, "Becoming Visible: Medieval Islamic Women in Historiography and History", in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, pp. 10–19.
 65. S. Bai, *Huizu Renwu Jindai Juan* 回族人物志·近代卷 [Biographies of Notable Hui Personages: The Modern Period], Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1997, p. 38; Ma, *Zhongguo Yisilan Jiaopai*, *op. cit.*, p. 411.
 66. Ma, *Zhongguo Yisilan Jiaopai*, *op. cit.*, p. 491 (table in Appendix). Gladney (1991), instead, accounts for only 130. Refer to Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 51.
 67. *Manāqib*, p. 145.
 68. Word meaning in historical context in Ibrahim Kalin (comp.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, Vol. 1, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 191–192, 232; John L. Esposito (comp.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 133. For an exhaustive study of the *ijazah* system in Islam see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, Vol. 2, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971, pp. 175–180.
 69. *Zheherenye Daotong Shilüe*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), p. 644.
 70. More details about this story in *Manāqib*, pp. 138–143; and *Zhehelinye Daotongshi Xiaoji*, in QZDD (Vol. 19), p. 558.
 71. The culmination of this policy of proscription came about in the 49th year of the Qianlong reign (1784), when local Muslims were forbidden from building new mosques, leaving their villages for the communal prayer or preaching services, and all non-Muslims from converting to Islam. See

- Fletcher, “The Naqshbandiyya in Northwest China”, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
72. James Millward and Laura Newby, “The Qing and Islam on the Western Frontier”, in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 123–125; Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 17, 199. These findings either speak in favor of Qing’s varied yet unsuccessful attempts to patronize Muslim mosques, or recognize the intermediary role of Gansu Muslims in Xinjiang for bridging the gap between the Qing imperial realm and Central Asian communities. In an earlier published work, Newby (2005) has also suggested that the Manchu rulers made no substantial effort to exploit Islam for political purposes, they instead preferred to keep addressing Muslim subjects through Confucian orthodoxy, especially after they acknowledged that Islam could become a threat to the stability of the Empire. See L. Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: A Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand c. 1760–1860*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, pp. 18, 42, 251–252.
73. Lipman (2006) points out that despite such treatment was given to factions judged as heterodox, Qing emperors continued, at least for a good while, to ascribe Islam the status of a legitimate religious doctrine but did not expect that by charging the Jahriyya of heresy they would have caused larger and more corrosively destabilizing effects. Lipman, “A Fierce and Brutal People”, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 93–94.

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