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# Honour and Shame as the Fuel of Terror

An analysis of the organisation Islamic State through a gender lens

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## **Abstract**

Over the past few months, violence against women by the organisation Islamic State has been widely documented, along with the departure of western female migrants to IS-held territories. While the numbers are relatively insignificant, the media misrepresents the figures due to the nature of headline-grabbing stories about war crimes, especially against women, and for most of the population whose primary source of information about war is the media, these stories represent their closest contacts with war. This research adopts a gendered lens to understand the rationality of IS in its specific targeting of women, the highly gendered society it has implemented and in particular the different roles women can have during the conflict. While women are typically depicted as victims or monsters by the media and government agencies, this research attempts to demonstrate that women can find agency in various situations and at different degrees, from survival to extreme violence.

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# Introduction

The Jihadi movement that called itself Islamic State (IS) and its actions have gained a broad and international coverage by the Media, western governments and academics. In a world where numerous conflicts lead to a large number of casualties (murders, displaced persons, kidnapped persons but also kidnapped, enslaved and raped women), discourses, pictures, videos produced by the Islamic State have taken over the faceless numbers in media coverage and political discourses. The name that the group gave to itself will be kept as representations are as important as objective facts in a propaganda and discourse analysis. Indeed, these representations might change the facts in the near future.

## Framework

The war has always been seen as a masculine activity. Foreign affairs have ignored for a long time the fact that power lies on sustaining notions of masculinity and femininity<sup>1</sup>. War is involving men and women in different ways but any assertion that women and men are inherently different can be considered as a risk of misunderstandings about the roles that men and women can have during conflicts. Transgressions of traditional gender roles or embracement of these roles can be found in women's and men's identities. However, years of social construction and the persistence in the structures of traditional gender relations are still shaping the way in which we understand the world. According to Harder, in order to understand the roots of violent conflict's as well as their social and political contexts, there is a need to analyse power relations but also "the gendered practices of states and the construction of masculinities and

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<sup>1</sup> C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases, Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press 2001 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.4.

femininities<sup>2</sup>’.

## A “sexo-specific” approach of conflicts

History is always constructed on stories and images, but also given roles. Women and Men and their bodies are invoked in conflicts. This invocation drives first power relationships during the the conflict then its aftermaths. Armed conflicts and the practice of warfare are gendered activities: it is mainly based on male's experiences of the conflict as it is the only ones. While the focus of this thesis will be on women's experiences and narratives about their roles, the fact that “*Gender (and feminism) is as much about men and masculinity as it is about women and femininity*”<sup>3</sup> has to be stressed. It is only by understanding war as “*a patriarchal imagining*”<sup>4</sup> associated with men's honour, courage, valour and rewards -including women-, that it is possible to understand gender roles during conflicts. Women are seen as “beautiful souls”<sup>5</sup>, with moral values, but also as passive victims inclined to peace and non violence. The idea that violence is inherent to men and that women possess an aversion for the conflict reinforce the idea that femininity and masculinity are unchanging<sup>6</sup> which largely used by humanitarian organisations in order to raise support<sup>7</sup>.

Also, stating that women are the first victims of war and armed conflicts can be an issue. Men are also suffering a lot from armed violence around the world. They are

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2 C. Harders, *Gender Relations, Violence and Conflict Transformation*, Berghof Foundation, 2011, p.132.

[http://image.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/harders\\_handbook.pdf](http://image.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/harders_handbook.pdf)

3 R. Jackson and M. Breen Smyth, and J. Gunning, and L. Jarvis, “Bringing gender into the study of terrorism” in *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

4 S. Parashar, “War”, in L. Shepherd (ed.), *Gender Matters in Global Politics* New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 183-199.

5 J. Elshtain, *Women And War*, Chigago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 4.

6 B. Byrne, “Vers une compréhension du conflit selon une perspective sexospécifique” in *Gender and Peacekeeping, Cahiers de travail*, section 2, 1996, pp.33- 48.

[http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bridget\\_Byrne/publication/237597091\\_VERS\\_UNE\\_COMPRHENSION\\_DU\\_CONFLIT\\_SELON\\_UNE\\_PERSPECTIVE\\_SEXOSPCIFIQUE/links/02e7e52cdb6a72e88f000000.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bridget_Byrne/publication/237597091_VERS_UNE_COMPRHENSION_DU_CONFLIT_SELON_UNE_PERSPECTIVE_SEXOSPCIFIQUE/links/02e7e52cdb6a72e88f000000.pdf)

7 R. Carpenter, “Gender Theory in World Politics: Contributions of a Nonfeminist Standpoint?” in *International Studies Review*, 4(3), 2002, pp.153-165

the majority of combatants, and consequently, the first victims in term of direct deaths from the conflicts. This aspect of the violence under IS won't be analysed considering the short length of this research however, a hierarchy of the level of victimhood is not an idea which should be spread. Under IS rules, a large number of men from religious majority have been singled out to be killed while women were taken away for various purposes. As showed by Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, “*women on average suffer more from the indirect and long-term consequences of armed conflict*”<sup>8</sup>.

Definition by Joan Scott on power relations The term of “gender” is a social concept used to describe constructed roles, behaviours and attributes that society considers appropriate for women and men. Gender roles are socially learnt, they are not universal and can vary among cultures and change over time. Societies define feminine and masculine characteristics, feminine and masculine activities but also certain social norms about men and women relationships. Consequently, masculinity and femininity can change and women nor men can be considered as a whole. Beside, even in a same place and at the same time, women cannot be considered as a group with an uniform identity, it is first an aggregation of individuals with different identities. It is important to use an intersectional approach to understand that women nor men have the same experience nor the same goals during conflicts. Gender relations is defined as the way women and men interact. During armed conflicts, the specific disadvantages that women experience is likely to change the power dynamics in the advantage of men. The characterisation a war as masculine is dissimulating the way in which women are impacted by conflicts or engaged in it<sup>9</sup>. Without saying that women are always the victims or men the perpetrators nor the opposite, it is fundamental to state that men and women experiences of conflict are different and that it can alter future gender relations.

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8 T. Plümper and E. Neumayer, “The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy”, in *International Organization* 60, Summer 2006, pp.723–754.

9 B. Byrne, “Vers une compréhension du conflit selon une perspective sexospécifique” in *Gender and Peacekeeping, Cahiers de travail*, section 2, 1996, pp.33- 48.

## **Rethinking agency of the “weaker sex” in conflicts**

The notion of agency has to be a governing principle when gender and conflicts are studied. It can be defined as the “*ability of the subject to resist, negotiate and transform certain form of power that work on the subject internally or externally*<sup>10</sup>”. Agency should not only be considered as an action per se but also in terms of resistances to power structures. The notion of resistance should not be only seen as strong action in opposition of but also as potentiality for disruption of ascribed roles and “*contestation in the interstices of established orders*<sup>11</sup>”. However, while it will be argued that some women can have agency even in situations where they are subordinated, it is clear that some women have more agency than others. Women have traditionally formed the humanitarian front of the armed conflict stories. They are mothers grieving for the family men but also daughters, widows, and victims. In the gendered society, it is accepted that when men have to join the battlefield, women have to carry the duty to maintain the situation of the family and, by extension, the one of the country (homefront). The structure of gender roles, based on the idea that men belong to the public sphere and women to the private one, can be reinforced during conflicts. Men are not able to protect their family anymore either because they have been sent to the battle field or because they lost their life. When analysing gender and conflict, women's experiences are various and cannot be confined to one or another identity. Women are seen as the ones “*on whom injuries are made or for whose honour are fought*<sup>12</sup>”: it presents them as passive while they can be repositories of cultural identity, victims but also perpetrators of violence. It is very likely that a woman takes the lead of the family because men are absent. The roles can be multiple and it is too simplistic to imagine that one individual would only undertake one role during an armed conflict. Practices and discourses on women and gender have not analysed specifically the way in which women are “*targeted both for their assets, as ‘assets’ in themselves*<sup>13</sup>”. There

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10 A. Hinterberger, “Agency”, M. Evans and C. Williams (ed.) in *Gender: The Key Concepts*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 7-13.

11 D. Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy”, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2, n°3, p. 141

12 S. Parashar, “War”, L. Shepherd (ed.) in *Gender Matters in Global Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 183-199.

13 J. Zenn and E. Pearson, “Women, gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram”, *Journal of Terrorism Research*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 2015.



is a need for a further exploration of gender and masculinity/femininity within those groups as a path to understand the ongoing violence in Syria and Iraq. As in any other culture, the narratives about gender roles of IS are part of a certain culture and subject to manipulation and strongly linked to the subjectivation of women. Those gender role are highly politicized and this reformulation of masculinity and femininity can be found in the discourses, propaganda and “laws” of IS.

The focus will be on the Islamic State and women because of its targeting of women both in recruitment and violence but also due to the wide attention it received internationally. Even if IS is using terrorism as a tactic, its claim to be a “caliphate” is enlightening to understand the rules implemented for women: IS is trying to build a society and women will be half of its population.

In order to understand the narrative discourse of IS, the research lies on a multidisciplinary analysis, including history, international relation, gender studies and sociology, will be made. Primary and secondary sources were used to analyse the issue but also documentary data will be examined including newspaper accounts, social media accounts and YouTube videos. This research aims to be more qualitative than quantitative mainly because the timeframe and the impossibility to conduct a field research. Even if interviews of victims / survivors or direct tweets coming from western female migrant twitter accounts were analysed, this research will not pretend to encompass all the realities nor the totality of women's role under the rules of IS.

By using gender tools, including researches on femininity and masculinity and the notion of agency, this thesis seeks to argue the deliberate use of gender roles by, both, IS and its opponents in the recent events. By showing the instrumentalisation of women and the plurality of situations they experienced in this conflict, the goal of this research is to state that without using a gender lens when analysing a conflict, the aftermaths of the conflict could be “*crowded with gendered decisions*<sup>14</sup>”.

The first chapter provides a definition and gives a background to the concept of fundamentalism and how it has historically tend to the subordination of women and the control of their body and sexuality. In the second chapter, the analysis of IS reveals its

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14 C. Enloe, *The morning after, sexual politics at the end of the Cold War*, Berkeley, University of California Press 1993, p.261.

Governing by the notion of agency, the third chapter will try to evaluate myths, roles and images ascribed to women by the Islamic State. Finally, the fourth and last chapter, argues that the western media and the western governments use gender to support their strategy against the Islamic State and, by doing so, undermine the agency of women and compromising their chances of empowerment in the future.

# **Chapter 1: Narratives about women's roles in religious fundamentalisms**

Numerous actions of extremely violent groups in the world are currently framed in terms of religion. Without agreeing with the idea that violence is inherent to religion nor that religion is intrinsically peaceful, the use of religion by the IS is the one a label to support cultural and political claims. The group Islamic State, as a social actor, turns its own religious dogma into pragmatic paradigms for action. It is because IS itself described the conflict in religious terms that the religious meaning they give to the conflict needs to be studied to understand their ideology, violence and narratives. This chapter will highlight the reject of women by fundamentalisms as an historical framework to understand the use of religion by the organisation Islamic State.

## **I. Religious fundamentalism and women**

Religious fundamentalism is a new phenomenon which emerged in reaction of what has been called modernity. Women's movement of liberation derived from this modernity, and, for this very reason, it seems logical that the two clashed. Therefore fundamentalism has always been saturated with ideas and norms about women's bodies and sexuality. Islam has no monopoly on fundamentalism: fundamentalist movements have been identify in Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. In all the fundamentalist movements, a certain ideal of femininity, associated with traditional gender roles, has been creating an specific feminine identity and some rules for women's social behaviour.

## 1. Religious fundamentalism: a definition

Fundamentalism lies on the idea of returning to the essence of the faith – to the fundamentals- based on certain pillars and supports which give a special view on the society. During the fifties and sixties, a secularist spirit marginalised the religious. In response, fundamentalism arose again.

The term fundamentalism has a specific history: it appeared in the USA in the 1920's with a publication called "*The fundamentalism of the Faith*"<sup>15</sup>. This publication stated the biblical inerrancy, the Virgin birth of Jesus, his substitutionary atonement, his bodily resurrection and the authenticity of miracle. Historically, fundamentalists are a coalition of conservative Protestants that emerged in an American evangelical culture. Religious texts were seen as exempt of factual or scientific errors. That is why, when the modernisation of the world was threatening the beliefs of the Protestant community, fundamentalism arose. In the twenties, years of prosperity, a frivolous America with a relaxation of morals, a large industrialisation and a mainstreaming of Freudian theories, appeared. However, another part of the population refused to tolerate the impact of such a revolutionary culture on the mores. Powerful and conservative currents (Kluge Klan, prohibition) emerged across America and, among them, was fundamentalism. Finding support from Americans who didn't have the chance to enjoy the prosperity, fundamentalism developed in the rural areas of the Bible Belt. One of the salient events of the opposition between proponents and opponents of the modernity was the trial of John Thomas Scopes. He was accused of teaching the theory of evolution (Darwinism) to his students. The debate was not new: the term "creationism" previously emerged to support a doctrine reaffirming the veracity of the origin according to the Bible. In 1873, Charles Hodges stated "*What is Darwinism? It is atheism!*". The failure in winning the trial, and the humiliation, reaffirmed fundamentalists' beliefs but led to their withdrawal from the public sphere. They reappeared during the aftermaths of the Second World War when scientific investigations and socialism were starting to spread in the US society. Webber (1920) stated:

*"Fundamentalism came about as a self-conscious rejection of*

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15 E. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

*modernism in theology that sought to take into account the results of Biblical criticism, scientific discovery, and the general condition of the modern culture.”.*

The term “fundamentalism” has then been broadened to describe the most conservative expressions of religion. It is:

*“The construction of collective identity under the identification of individual behaviour and society's institutions to the norms derived from God's law, interpreted by a definite authority that intermediates between God and humanity<sup>16</sup>”*

Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis found some common features in all fundamentalist religious movements<sup>17</sup>. Firstly, they claim that they are the only true version of the religion. Then, they use political means to impose their version on all members of the religion and try to merge religion and the State. The trial of John Thomas Scopes is a good example of those attempts because what was at stake, in the trial, was education. If the fundamentalists had won, they would have imposed their belief in an institution ruled by the State. Finally, fundamentalist movements are patriarchal: they seek to control women and to maintain the patriarchal family.

It should be stressed that fundamentalism is not fanatic in the meaning that they are demonstrating rationality. Also, fundamentalism should not be seen as regressive but as selective in the modernity. For example, they have not rejected all values of modernity. Fundamentalist movements are among the groups that make the most savvy and efficient use of mass media and modern technologies to gather and persuade large crowds. Marsden said that fundamentalist movements have been depicted as holding to the past in “*stubborn and irrational resistance to changing culture<sup>18</sup>*”. Despite the

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16 M. Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Volume II of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*), Oxford, Blackwells, 1997, p.13.

17 G. Sahgal and N. Yuval-Davis, “Introduction: Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain” In G. Sahgal and N. Yuval-Davis (ed.), *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain*, London, Virago, 1992, p4

18 G. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: the shaping of the twentieth-century evangelicalism, 1879-1925*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 185 quoted by L. Caplan

generalisation of this idea, fundamentalist movements are actually recent and found their claims in the recent change of the society: they are a reaction to modernity. Rather than rejecting modernity, fundamentalist rework it: they choose what to reject (frivolous morals) and what to use in the modernity (new technologies). Fundamentalism is shaped by the fear of threats that would change the traditions. If the first fundamentalist movement was threatened by modernisation, current movements, and especially in the Middle East, are seeing Imperialism and Westernisation as the new threats. Fundamentalism should not only be viewed as a religious matter, but also as a disguise for invoking political, cultural or ethnic claims.

## **2. The desire to control women's bodies and sexuality: the “Othered” body**

*“Fundamentalism was born in an area of anxiety over gender roles<sup>19</sup>”*. While religion is based on male superiority, feminists were threatening gender relations. According to Shanin Gerami<sup>20</sup>, fundamentalists pay a lot of attention to family and politics. She claims that it exists three interconnected circles: the faith, the state and the family. Family is the smallest unit in society and the smallest circle of socialisation, controlling this unit could lead to control the all society or, at least, to spread fundamentalist views within the society. Religion is giving the direction to restructure the society while the State gives the tools. The family is what makes everything hold together. Women, on the grounds that they are the ones who are bearing and raising the children, are seen as the repository of the moral values of the society. However, as the scriptures revealed, women can be corrupted (the figure of Eve). Due to this perception of a corruptible woman, safeguards but also mechanisms have been created to ensure their morality. Beside the figure of Eve, others female figures exist in the scriptures. The self sacrificing mothers, seen as passive and submissive, are embodied in the figure

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(ed), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.5.

19 M. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present*, New Haven, 1993, p. 6.

20 S. Gerami, “A gendered vision of religious fundamentalism”, In *Women and Fundamentalism: Islam and Christianity*, New York, Routledge, 2012, p30.

of the Virgin Mary (an impossible ideal to reach) and the one of Fatima. Modernity could push faithful women to decadence and luxury. As the moral guardians, women, if they succumb to the temptation of frivolous mores could bring their all family into their decline. By consequence, women always fight between those two identities: the sexual predator and the nurturer.

Fundamentalism appears in the scission of the society between modernity and tradition, exactly where lies the patriarchy. In the studies about fundamentalist groups, it is possible to find common features regarding their views of gender roles: men are superior, women are inferior, the patriarchal family has to be maintain, women should remain in the domestic sphere and so on. Their assumptions are also based on preconceived ideas about femininity and masculinity. Fundamentalist movements usually emphasise women's natural role as a mother who nurtures and involves in care activities. This assumption leads to impose strict controls on women's sexuality and fertility. Women usually have to fight twice for their rights: one time for Human Rights and, then, for their own rights. Modernism is usually longer to penetrate the private sphere. Indeed, visible equality in the public sphere is faster than the deconstruction of gender roles in the private one. This explains why fundamentalism roots in the private sphere.

DeBerg argued that the fundamentalist movements coincided with the emergence of the flapper in the “roaring twenties”. Feeling threatened by their morals and their attitudes (smoking, drinking, driving, dancing, wearing short hair and heavy make-up) which were rejecting gender distinction<sup>21</sup>, fundamentalist were strongly condemning their little morals and approaches of sexuality. She quotes a radical premillennialist leader stating that drinking, homosexuality or adultery is the proof that society is going backward. Other fundamentalists have warned about the dangers of women's emancipation movements, like the “suffragist movement”, or educated women in the society. The augmentation of divorce rate as well as a “revolt against motherhood” were also named as dangerous patterns<sup>22</sup>. The fight of fundamentalists

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21 B. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, Macon, Mercer University Press, 1990.

22 Norris, “Concrete Sin and Concrete Remedy”, *Searchlights*, 1. quoted by B. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, Macon, Mercer University Press,

against the evolution theory was also embedded in morals. Evolution, because it implies that human nature is bestial, was destroying the basis of moral responsibility which had, by consequence, led to the sexualisation of the society. Fundamentalism was also used to respond to the rapid disruption in gender roles and identity by reinforcing the gender structures and power relations. Those reactions were sometimes less theological than social.

One other interesting example of a religious fundamentalist group is the Haredi ultra-orthodox jewish sect. This community describes itself as an alternative to Western culture. This sect has strict rules to separate women and men in the society and the public spaces. Men are supposed to focus exclusively to their religious education which is putting a dual burden on women: they have to raise the children but also to be the breadwinners of the families<sup>23</sup>. In this society, women must dress modestly and not sing in public. It has been said that the religious group was trying to erase women presence from the public sphere. The ideology of modesty is very strong in this community which believes that women must stay in the private sphere. It is believed that it will provide happiness to her. This sect demonstrates how strong is the fear of sexual temptation for fundamentalist groups. Weber stated that an essential feature of religion was its hostility toward sexuality. In the case of Haredi sect, it is this fear that led to require the covering of women's bodies, their absence near the synagogues and the interdiction of physical contacts with a man. The society is highly segregated (women stay at the back of the bus). All those rules have had strong consequences regarding women's rights and, particularly, regarding their almost impossibility of being in public spaces which makes the fact to leave their homes challenging<sup>24</sup>.

In different fundamentalist movements, women are enclosed in the private sphere, covered, prohibited to initiate divorce, and denied the right of their own reproductive choices. Women are venerated when they conform to the patriarchy and their ascribed gender roles but, if she is not, they are denied most of their freedoms.

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1990, p.133.

23 U. Stadler, "The domestication of masculine piety", in *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*, New York, New York University Press, 2009, pp 117-134.

24 P. Saint-Paul, "La révolte des juives orthodoxes en Israël", *Le figaro*, 14 october 2007, [http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2007/08/20/01003-20070820ARTFIG90203-la\\_revolte\\_des\\_juives\\_orthodoxes\\_en\\_israel.php](http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2007/08/20/01003-20070820ARTFIG90203-la_revolte_des_juives_orthodoxes_en_israel.php), (accessed 28 june 2015).



Many fundamentalist leaders are seeing women less as partners than threats for morality and manners. If fundamentalist movements fight different form of change (westernisation, imperialism or modernisation), they are always seeing those changes as destructive of the families and, by extension, of their community. Historically, both judaism and christianity condemn any kind of sexual intercourses which is not aiming at procreation. Women are seen as insatiable with a stronger and insatiable sexual drive while men are only willing victims of women's enticement to which they cannot resist.

## **II. Islam, fundamentalism and narratives about women**

To begin with, Islamic fundamentalism has been widely covered by the media in regards of their rules about women. That is why while it seems obvious that fundamentalist movements in Christianity or Judaism do not represent the community of Christian and Jewish believers, when talking about Islamic fundamentalism, it is necessary to stress that Islamic fundamentalism is not Islam itself.

### **1. From Islam to an Islamist ideology**

As Winter has argued Islamist groups are not only using the fundamentals of religion but are making selective uses of the interpretations of the Qur'an<sup>25</sup>. She understands religious fundamentalism as the use of religion as the most important tool for social control. As any other fundamentalist groups, Islamic fundamentalists are creating an ideology.

*“If there is one common thread running through the multiple movements characterised as 'fundamentalist,' it is not anything to*

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25 B. Winter, “Fundamental Misunderstandings: Issues in Feminist Approaches to Islamism”, *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 13, Number 1, Spring 2001, p. 12.

*do with their interpretation of the Islamic 'foundations,' i.e. the Qur'an or hadith but rather their claim to be able to determine a politics for Muslim peoples . . . In this respect the rise of Islamist movements in the 1970s and 1980s bears comparison with that of tendencies elsewhere that deploy religious ideology in pursuit of other, nationalist and populist, political goals in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism<sup>26</sup>."*

It is possible to find some similarities among fundamentalist movements however, it is important to stress that fundamentalist groups also have different features. Among the similarities, they usually share the idea that Islamic societies have been subordinated due to their deviation of the "true Islam" and their corruption by the West. By consequence, they must weaken and overthrow the State and this goal is allowing every mean including the most violent ones. Then, they must establish a society based on the "true Islam" which is only possible by a right interpretation of the scripture. This society must be modelled according to their vision of a good society based on the earliest Islamic state under prophet Muhammad and the four pious khalifs during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The degree of application of those "rules" depends of the groups.

Islamism has been understood as a reaction to modernisation. However, as for other religious fundamentalist groups, Islamists groups do not refuse all forms of modernity. Due to the fact that they are made of ideology rather than theology, some groups have no difficulties to select what is convenient for them. As long as it is in accordance with their ideology - even if not with the religion they pretend to embrace – they will find a way to explain it. It is obviously easier to remove any kind of rationality in the development of those groups but, this marginalisation tend to make them stronger and more efficient at gathering new followers. It also has been said that Islamic fundamentalism was born as a reaction to the West. If it can be true for some fundamentalist groups, every ideology is anchored in a specific political context and, often, Islamist groups arose in reaction of a specific context. This analysis of

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26 F. Halliday, "The Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism: Iran, Tunisia and the Challenge to the Secular State." In A. Akbar and D. Hastings Donnan (ed), *Islam, Globalization and Modernity*, London, Routledge, 1994.

fundamentalist Islam aims at a better understanding of the practices and ideology of the Islamic State group. For this reason, the objective is not to give an exhaustive analysis of fundamentalist Islam but rather to present the keys to understand their specific ideology.

### **The establishment of the Islamic Caliphate**

The Iranian revolution has shown the world that secularist regimes and politics were not winning over religious politics. For example, in Egypt, the Muslim Brothers emerged in opposition to Nasser's nationalist regime while the overthrowing of the Shah in Iran was provoked by the suffering of the people created by a secularist authoritarian regime<sup>27</sup>. Regarding the Islamic State organisation, it is interesting to note that the reject of the West and of the US became stronger after the beginning of the US led coalition airstrikes<sup>28</sup>. By consequence, the political context in the apparition of fundamentalist groups should not be underestimated. In a culture where the State is seen as protective and supportive of its citizens, they have been rejected and contributed to the emergence of fundamentalist groups. If “*Islamists from al-Turabi to al-Farhan consider the state’s providential role towards its poor citizens both a civil and religious duty.*”<sup>29</sup>, it is because Islamic fundamentalism is supportive of the notion of Caliphate rooted in a pre-modern theological tradition. The caliphate had the duty to protect its citizen. It has been a point focal for many islamist groups including the Muslim Brotherhood:

*“Islam requires that the Muslim community unite around one leader or one head, the head of the Islamic State, and it forbids the Muslim community from being divided among states.”*<sup>30</sup>

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27 L. Caplan (ed), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1987, p.5.

28 J.M. Berger and J. Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper | No. 20, March 2015  
[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis\\_twitter\\_census\\_berger\\_morgan.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf)

29 L. Sadiki, *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

30 Hassan Al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, quoted by C. Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the

The establishment of a caliphate, commanded by a strong application of the Sharia (Islamic law), is supposed to show to the world the superiority but also purity of Islam<sup>31</sup>. However, fundamentalist groups were usually seeing the establishment of a caliphate as a long term goal especially because of what it requires: a complete recast of the society and the seizing of an actual territory. Without lands, a islamist group could not pretend to establish a caliphate. That's the claim of establishing a Caliphate made on June 2014 by IS reveals a great ambition. By doing so, it has claimed to be the protector and the creator of a promise land for the *umma* (the universal community of believers with no distinction of nation, race nor territory). Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of IS, was declared to be the new “caliph”. This role is, historically, to maintain order and justice on the territory according to Islamic rules and the Qur'an. For Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi it is also a way of legitimising its position by presenting himself as the successor of Prophet Muhammed and, by consequence, the rightful leader of the *umma*. If the establishment of the Caliphate found its roots in the interpretation of the scriptures, there is no such thing for legitimising the violence in which it has been established. Indeed, this hyper violence has been highly criticised and has even reached to point of being criticised by other fundamentalist movements as Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda denies the legitimacy of the “caliphate”. The call of Al-Qaeda to release Western aid workers is striking in this view<sup>32</sup>: it has affirmed that it was “*wrong under Islamic law*” and “*counter-productive*” to attack those who were helping the Muslim community. The “gentle” behaviour of Al-Qaeda is linked to its perception that muslims should adopt its views and not be forced to join them while IS is constituting a militarised “Caliphate” where expansion and oppressive policing are the rules. However, it is impossible to deny that the Islamic State is acting as a state: it governs a territory through different administrations, has its own currency, has implemented an extreme interpretation of the Islamic Law and delivers Fatwa (islamic legal decree). IS's achievements and the fact

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Islamic World Analysis Paper, No. 19, March 2015, p.8.

31 M. Guidère, “Caliphate” in *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Plymouth, Scarecrow Press, 2012, p. 67.

32 T. Harper, “Alan Henning: Al-Qaeda appealed to Isis to release British aid worker following kidnap”, *The Independent*, 15 September 2014.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/alan-henning-alqaeda-appealed-to-isis-to-release-british-aid-worker-following-kidnap-9734598.html>, (accessed on 1 March 2015)

that several other islamists groups - Boko Haram in Nigeria or Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt - have recognised it, in such a small timeframe, is creating a real threat for the stability of a already turbulent region<sup>33</sup>.

## **Jihad**

The jihad is an arabic term which refers to a religious duty consisting in resisting against unbelief. IS identifies itself as part of the movement known as Jihadi-Salafism. Salafism is embedded in the recent evolution of the Middle East societies. The current salafism is an ideology of compensation for the ones who have suffer from the recent changes in their societies. Its success has reactivated the fracture between Sunni and Shiite. The conflict between Sunni and Shiite goes back to the early history of Islam when two groups had different opinions about who should success to the prophet Muhammad. A minority of muslim decided to follow the prophet's nephew and son-in-law Ali as successor and was, then, called the Shi'a branch of Islam. On the other hand, the Sunni didn't believe that Muhammad succession should be based on its bloodline. Over the years, the Shi'a branch of Islam has been persecuted and marginalised. Even if, in some countries, shiite and sunni live peacefully, some fundamentalist groups are particularly violent with the minority. The division in Islam is still the impulse for numerous country in the Middle East region<sup>34</sup>. The doctrine of jihadism-salafism put the duty of jihad at the Center of its religious beliefs. With Al-Qaeda, the salafist doctrine has became a religious dogma but also a political method. It is a tool to undertake a fight against external threats<sup>35</sup>. In Islamist fundamentalism, it is believed that a real self-realisation is only seen possible in a true caliphate. Within its "Caliphate", IS is trying to push Jihad to a greater extend by institutionalising it as a military Jihad. Indeed, extreme jihadi groups like IS have taken the political project one step further. Salafi theological corpus lies on the conception of Jihad as defined by Ibn Taymiyya, a medieval Muslim scholar from the 13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its conception of Jihad is used by

33 D.L. Byman, *Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different goals, different targets*, April 29, 2015 <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2015/04/29-terrorism-in-africa-byman> (Accessed on 1 july 2015)

34 G. Abdo , D. Amos, R. Aslan, F. G. Gause I, B. Hoffman, E. Husain and V. R. Nasr, *The Sunni-Shia Divide*, The Council on Foreign Relations, (accessed on 3 July 2015) [http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#/#/](http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#/)

35 <http://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/En-lien-avec-les-elections-en.html#nb1>

radical islamism because he is the first to prone the fight against any kind of religious deviations including what is perceived as “heretical” Muslims. In IS's ideology, the fight against the near enemy is predominant because there is strong resentment against the Shi'a population which does not adhere to their own vision of religion<sup>36</sup>. IS's jihad is, by consequence, mainly directed to Shi'a and other religious minorities as well as rival jihadist groups in order to purify Islam<sup>37</sup>.

## **2. Islamic Fundamentalisms: the destructive character of women sexuality**

The tendency to see Islam as the only cause for women's oppression in Muslim societies is dangerous because it is forgetting that women's oppression also lies on political, social and economical contexts. When acknowledging this fact, the numerous distinctions between Muslim societies in their approaches of religion and of women's rights become coherent. The wide discussion about women, Islam and Islamism has led to numerous confusion between Islam and Islamism. For Islamic fundamentalism women and men are two completely different individuals. This religious model give to men and women the duty of adhering to strict rules on personal and family life. A woman under Islamist rules should only be define by two traditional gender roles: the one of mother and the one of wife. Being a mother is the ultimate status for a woman, the one in which she can gain the more honour. Women are always defined in relation to a man: father, brother, husband or son.

A Western imaginary created an image of Islam as a religion predisposed to oppress women<sup>38</sup>. No other religion has been targeted so passionately for its practices towards women. After encounters with the West (colonialism or wars), Islam has been

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36 C. Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper, No. 19, March 2015, p.8.

37 O. Blachez, “Qu’est-ce-que le salafisme?”, *Les clés du Moyen-Orient*, 7 december 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2015/04/29-terrorism-in-africa-byman> (accessed on 3 July 2015)

38 H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic fundamentalism: the limits of postmodern analysis*, London, Zed Books, 1999, pp. 13-20.

described as intrinsically hostile to women. The idea of liberating Muslim women from the oriental male was very strong. The condemnation of Islam for its treatment of women has been linked to the idea of a continuing enslavement of women with the harem and the veil. While orientalist writers depicted Muslim women as a sensual fantasy, they also stated that women had to be saved from their culture's cruelty. The example of the veil in the colonial time in Algeria (1830-1862), is an example of how Islamic symbols were used: uncovering women was seen as the colonial power for French soldiers while Algerian women would wear it as a sign of resistance. One could say that colonialism has reinforced patriarchal practices of Islam with the idea of "liberating Muslim women". Indeed, strict Islamic rules were applied in what seemed to be a form of resistance to westernisation and colonialism and where women's bodies became the site of struggle between the opponents and proponents of modernity (or westernisation of the societies). Attacked for their beliefs, Muslims tried to protect their women from the influence of western practices to preserve their culture. In Islam, men and women are expected to fulfil the same duties. Islam has generally improved women's rights compared to earlier Arab culture but had also shown more equality between men and women than other monotheist religion in its earliest development. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an has granted many rights to women: to be educated, to inherit and to divorce. However, if religious Islam should be separated from cultural Islam, the patriarchal roots of cultural Islam can be found before the arrival of western colonialists. Indeed, many patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an were made through the expansion of Muslim culture over former Byzantine and Sassanid territories, two territories where the social organization was already patriarchal.<sup>39</sup> Sexuality, in opposition to Christianity which prones celibacy, is recognised in Islam which tolerates it<sup>40</sup>. What is striking when analysing the Qur'an and comparing it to the beliefs of fundamentalists about women is how contradictory it is. Indeed, women had active roles in the Qur'an (business women, poets, jurists, religious leaders and even warriors) and were considered as "*the spiritual and sexual equal of men*"<sup>41</sup>. Desire from both sexes was

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39 "Muslim Journeys | Item #213: 'Women and Islam' from Oxford Islamic Studies Online", July 14, 2015,

<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/213>.

40 A. Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008 p. 103.

41 B. Stowasser, Barbara. "The Status of Women in Early Islam." in F. Hussain (ed.), *Muslim Women*,

accepted and recognised if it stays within the moral sexual ideal prescribed by God<sup>42</sup>. However, fundamentalist vision of the Qur'an is not based on this idea of sameness. Religion is used to justify oppressive practices against women's rights. First, it is important to acknowledge that some women do join fundamentalist group by choice because they can find a stricter version of it. Besides, even if fundamentalist groups do not emphasise on women's choice, they empower them in their traditional role of mothers. Women are able to find agency within the strict rules of fundamentalism. Then, the Qur'an is composed of passages which are emphasising an idea of equality between the sexes and other than prone a subjectivation of women. Women's disruptive potential is emphasised by fundamentalist groups and strict rules, coloured by the historical contexts in which they appear, are implemented in order to maintain male dominance and a “right” organisation of the public space.

The veil is a good example because it has become paradoxically a symbol of islamist extremism and of freedom of religion and agency. The debate about the veil has made this issue a boiling one. The Qur'an requires that women but also men dress modestly. Between the different interpretations of the Qur'an, it is not clear with which kind of veil, women should cover their faces or body. Indeed, the Qur'an has never explicitly stated that women should cover their body. The veil is a paradoxical concept in Islamic fundamentalism. If most of islamist groups impose the veil to women and it has become more and more opaque, it is also a way to make women the symbol of their religious fervour. Islamism expresses itself in the veil while, at the same time, it erases women's body from the public sphere. Veiling is interesting because it is intimately linked to the issue of seclusion which itself linked to the status of women. The difference in the what it believed about the veil shows how Islam is based on interpretation of scriptures and, by consequence, has been influenced by different cultures and lead to wrong assumptions but also distorted to fit the narrow-minded views of extreme religious groups.

Islam is concentrated in North Africa, the Middle East and some parts of Asia

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edited by Freda Hussain, pp. 11–43. London, 1984, p.30

42 A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002.



but significant minorities also exist in the world. Due to this variety of geographical developments of Islam - which means that Islam developed in different social and political contexts - it is critical not to generalise across all Islamic countries. While talking about Islam, disaggregation is essential. Aziz Al-Azmed has argued that the variety of conditions in which Islam can appear creates every time a new kind of Islam<sup>43</sup>. By consequence, there is as many interpretation of the Qur'an or the shari'a as societies. For this reason, Islam cannot be understood as a unique cause for women's oppression in islamist societies.

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43 Aziz Al-Azmed quoted by H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic fundamentalism: the limits of postmodern analysis*, London, Zed Books, 1999, pp. 13-20.

# **Chapter 2: A case study: the Islamic State**

The Islamic State group is a complex case study which goes beyond the two countries of which it claims territory because of its international impacts through its attacks on different countries and the recruitment of foreign fighters. The current evolutions of the conflict is not allowing us to give all the answers but an analysis of its rise and methods combine with a study of its policies and practices can help shaping the contours of the interplay between gender and the “Caliphate” it claimed to establish.

## **I. A territorial and a virtual caliphate?**

It is indispensable to have a look at the immediate context but also at the historical background of Syria and Iraq to understand the gendered ideology of IS. The savvy use of internet and social media has to be analysed because its supports, in a way never reached before within fundamentalist groups, a gendered ideology within a cultural and societal conflict

### **1. The rise of IS within patriarchal societies**

The rise of IS occurred in countries with a long tradition of patriarchal control over women. In Iraq and Syria, the societies lie on a honour culture which regards virginity as a symbol of the family honour. Women are the representative of her family's honour: if “damaged”, they are stigmatise and if “untouched”, they are meant to be married (sometimes against her will). Issues related to women's bodies and sexuality have become the sites where political contestations is played out in Iraq and Syria. It is due to the increasing militarisation of the two countries but also to the different wars

that occurred in the countries (including the US invasion of Iraq). Indeed, during wars, the state has a tendency to be more controlling and leave less spaces to liberal reforms. Even if the narratives about the Islamic State tend to show an exceptionality in its actions against women, it is important to understand that IS appeared and is operating in a context already marked by widespread violations of women's rights. Defeating IS will not undermine the deeper roots of the violence against women, IS is only one of the groups using those honour rules to rule a gendered strategy. Thus, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the gendered practices in the region.

Criminal law in the Middle East societies has evolved from customary law (*'urf*) and Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). That's why when looking at the situation of women in the Middle East, it is important not only to analyse the relationship between Islam and women's rights but also the one between the social practices of Arab tribes and women. In the Middle East societies, sexual relations are have been built on the idea of reproduction. Men, families and the State have constrained women's sexuality as well as women expression in the public sphere. The confinement of women in the domestic sphere has been seen as an increase of male prestige<sup>44</sup>. In history, tribal clans have claimed their authority on men and women and their bodies: for women, it has been translated by the idea of the preservation of girl's virginity. Indeed, it was necessary to ensure that women are kept exclusively for the men of their tribe. Within Arab societies, honour is extremely important: *sharaf* (male honour), which is related to men, lies on family reputation and chivalry, and *ardh* (female honour) lies on sexual virtue, chastity and modesty<sup>45</sup>. It creates a dynamic pole between honour and shame in the society which is translated in Honour codes and women's repression. Moreover, Middle East societies, Iraq and Syria particularly, developed a cult for their leaders linked to the concept of the *za'im* (leader, chief, hero). The *za'im* embodies masculine values as domination or fighting: it is a patriarchal concept within which *shatra* (cleverness) is seen as a proof of masculinity. *Shatra* is the capacity to obtain what one wants. The

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44 E. Accad "Sexuality and Sexual Politics: Conflicts and Contradictions for Contemporary Women in the Middle East", in C. Talpande Mohanty, A. Russo and L. Torres (ed.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 237-25.

45 S. Zuhur, "Criminal law, women and sexuality in the Middle East", in P. Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008, pp. 17-40.

valuation of these two concepts explains the patriarchal basis of the Iraqi and Syrian societies.

Syria, under the regime of Hafez Asad (1970) and, then, his son Bashar Asad, and Iraq, under Saddam Husayn's regime (1968), were both ruled by Ba'ath parties and a secularist view of the society. Also, both, Syria and Iraq, are multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries. However, while Saddam Husayn's is Sunni Muslim and, by consequence, the sunnis, which are a minority in this country, were controlling Iraq, the Syria majority population was composed of Sunni muslim but ruled by a minority which was Alawi (a small branch of Shi'a Muslims). In Iraq, different minorities and communities, ethnic and religious were oppressed by the regime such as Shi'a Muslims and Kurds. In Syria, gross violations of human rights have been reported under Asad's regime. Even if some Sunnis were included in the government, the favouritism towards the Alawi community provoked resentment from the Sunni. The Christians minorities, feared the regime but were aware that a secularist regime was preferable as a Sunni one for their own safety. Both country, Iraq and Syria, have known periods where societies were more progressive and women's rights more respected but both also fell in war and conflicts which provoked a weakening of women's rights.

The earliest years of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq were seen as full of hope for women. Gender and sexuality have been the topics of public debates and the regime seemed to be supportive of sexual liberation and of feminist voices asking for the control of their own bodies. However, this promotion of gender equality was soon abandoned for the sake of the militarisation of the country which was focusing on polarised notions of masculinity and femininity<sup>46</sup>. After the Iranian Revolution, Saddam Husayn declared a war against Iran fearing the spread of the revolution to his own territory. Iraq suffered severely of the 8 years war regarding the cost in human lives but also the financial costs. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait but a US-led coalition defeated it. After the war, a shift in Saddam Husayn's regime from Arab-socialist ideas to Islamist principles occurred. Women's rights were put in danger by this embracement of conservatism. One example is the 1990 passage of Article 111 into Iraqi Penal Code.

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46 P. Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008, p 14.

Indeed, no punishment was planned for a man who would kill a woman to preserve family honour. After this, honour killings increased dramatically in Iraq. The financial and trade embargo sanction made it even worse for Iraq. Women were particularly affected by the international sanctions which reduce the job opportunities and diminish the social services. It ended up to push women out of the labour sector and, by consequence, to create a negative vision of female education. Religious leaders were some of those who emphasised the maternalist roles of women<sup>47</sup>. Women, after the war, were particularly vulnerable in Iraq, the absence of men in their family (because they were widow, displaced persons or single) made it difficult for women. They also suffered from a rise of violence and insecurity: most of the violence is believed to be unreported due to shame and fear. After the US invasion of Iraq, in 2003, violence against women and girls increased again. Even if the new Iraq's Constitution (adopted in 2005) prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, it also cites Islam as the source of legislation and Article 41 allows each religious group in Iraq to govern its own personal status matters<sup>48</sup>. Thus, the situation of women's rights is relying on Islamic law and male religious authorities. Women have been killed because of their positions in the society (politicians, translators ...) but also abducted because they were not wearing the hijab or because they were driving. Honor killings against rape survivors or women released by their kidnappers also occurred widely<sup>49</sup>. Women are now paying the highest price of the conflicts within Iraq suffering from an increasing gender-based violence. When Saddam Husayn was defeated, the Sunni rule, which he supported, was replaced by the one of the majority group of Iraq: the Shi'a Muslims. This was the beginning of a new oppressed minority which resulted in an insurgency. However, the new constitution of 2005 established quotas for women parliamentarians. It was the beginning of a new hope for women political participation. This hope soon disappeared: due to the rise of religious conservatism, few women actually joined the political parties. While between

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47 P. Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008, p 163.

48 H. Ahmed, "Iraq", in S. Kelly and J. Breslin (ed.), *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, Lahham, 2010, pp. 157-191.

49 S. Zuhur, "Criminal law, women and sexuality in the Middle East", in P. Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008, pp. 17-40.

2005 and 2007, violence between sectarian groups was raising and, in 2006, a new militia appeared and presented itself as Al-Qaeda-Iraq. After terrible violences, many of its members were jailed and met ex-Ba'athists. They gathered and created a new jihadi networks. This was the incubator of the future leader of IS<sup>50</sup>.

Before the civil war, women in Syria had one of the most educated women in the Arab world, had a high rate of political participation and freedom in general. However, culturally, society was still expecting women to fulfil their domestic work and were imposed the burden of the family's honour<sup>51</sup>. In Syria, the unemployment rate was extremely high in 2011 and, following the so-called Arab Spring of Egypt and Tunisia, young Syrians started protesting against the regimes and its violations of Human Rights. Even if women join the protests the severe repression pushed them out of the streets. While the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) had ranked Syria 59th out of 102 in 2009, it downgraded Syria to rank 75 out of 86 countries in its 2012 index which shows a clear degradation of gender inequality. In 2014<sup>52</sup>, the SIGI has give to Syria the level of discrimination: Very high (particularly because of its family code and its restriction of civil liberties). If women have participated in the Arab Spring, depending of the social context and their localisation, both Islamist and secular groups sidelined women. Indeed, none of those groups claim for equality nor participation rights for all citizens. The protestation organised itself and, from a general civil uprising, it became an opposition between two forces: Asad's regime against the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Asad's regime starts using torture and horrific forms of violence as the use of chemical weapons. Associated with a widespread campaign to mock Sunni belief, this violence against the population radicalise the opponents and attract foreign fighters. On the different groups of jihadis, one who dominated the fight was IS also known as ISIS: the Islamic state of Iraq and al-Sham (Al-Sham is the Arabic term for Syria)<sup>53</sup>. Currently, there is a widespread violence against women in Syria from all actors involved in the

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50 M. Chulov, "Isis: the inside story", *The Guardian*, 11 december 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story> (accessed on 3 march 2015)

51 S. Kelly and J. Breslin (ed.), "Syria" in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, Lahham, 2010, pp. 458-486

52 In 2014, the SIGI replaced ranks by level of discrimination.

53 J. al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2013, pp.19-44.

<http://www.meforum.org/3697/islamic-state-iraq-al-sham>

conflict. Rape is said to be a “*disturbing feature of the Syrian civil war*<sup>54</sup>”. Some examples given by THE IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, shows how honour and shame are played out in the Syrian conflict. It gives the story of a young girl gang-raped who was forced to walk naked to her home. The stigma is extremely strong and because of the association of rape with dishonour anchored in the society, numerous issues arouse. First, few rapes are reported because of the fear of being killed by their family (Honour killings) or by fear of retaliation by the perpetrators. Then, forced marriages of the victims by their family in order to protect them from rape or to allow them to safeguard their honour. A last horrific case, but revelatory of the importance of the importance of honour in the Syrian society, is the assassination of a girl by her father to prevent her of the dishonour of being raped when an armed group was approaching<sup>55</sup>.

On the basis of brief overview of women's rights and oppression within the two countries where IS appeared, it is possible to understand that IS violence against women did not appear out of the blue. The use of the gendered political and social context has been essential in the policies and practice of IS. It helped it to frame its gendered ideology which led to gross human rights violations.

## **2. Spreading the ideology: the use of online tools**

One of the characteristic of the last two decades is the irruption on the international scene of islamist and violent groups. It doesn't mean that they didn't exist before but that they started to widely mediatise their violence thanks to the new, fast and cheap ways of communication. Indeed, “*By the end of 2012, there were more internet connected mobile devices than people on earth*<sup>56</sup>” and the extremely fast growth of the internet traffic has been particularly high in the Middle East region. Non-State groups have the capacity of challenging the States and the international rules due to their capacity of expressing themselves everywhere though the internet without being

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54 THE IRC (Commission on Syrian Refugees), *Syria: A Regional Crisis*, January 2013, p. 6.  
<http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>

55 THE IRC (Commission on Syrian Refugees), p. 7.

56 N. B Weidmann, “Communication, technology and political conflict: Introduction to the special issue”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 52 , May 2015, p. 1.

controlled. In point of fact, by its global nature, it is less susceptible to suffer from government interferences but also less subject to censorship<sup>57</sup>. IS is considered as the most successful organisation in term of social media strategy. It goes from information collection (intelligence), target selection, propaganda, recruitment, fundraising to interlinked stories (words and images) that support their narrative. What is paradoxical with the use of new technologies by fundamentalist groups, is that it is a transfer of western values and supposed to represent what they are opposed to. However, IS is using online tool and social media because it understood the importance of new technologies to spread its message globally and promote its values and as a mean of force. IS is not the first armed group to use the Internet for propaganda purpose. Al-Qaeda used Internet since the beginning of its rise. In 2002, Osama bin Laden wrote in a letter: “*It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90 percent of the total preparation for the battles.*”<sup>58</sup> and, indeed, made a great use of online tools to publicise its propaganda with publication like *Inspire* (Al-Qaeda's official and multi-language magazine)<sup>59</sup>, and, in 2011, most of the jihadi groups transferred their propaganda from website 1.0 (forums and more classic websites) to platforms 2.0<sup>60</sup>.

While before social medias, terrorist groups were dependant of mainstream media to be publicised, now they have been freed from the dependance. In 2006, when it changed its name to ISI (The Islamic State of Iraq), IS established the Al-Furqan Institute for Media Production, which was producing diverse contents (CDs, DVDs, posters, pamphlets, and web-related products)<sup>61</sup>. Currently, IS doesn't wait for

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57 N. B Weidmann, p. 3.

58 Combating Terrorism Center, “Letter to Mullah Mohammed ‘Omar from Usama bin Laden,” (5 June 2002). Available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/AFGP-2002-600321-Trans.pdf> (accessed 6 October 2014). cited by J. Klausen, “Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Routledge, 9 December 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1057610X.2014.974948>

59 E. Saltman and C. Winter, “Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism”, *Quilliam*, 2014, p37. <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/islamic-state-the-changing-face-of-modern-jihadism.pdf>

60 J. Klausen, “Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Routledge, 9 December 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1057610X.2014.974948>

61 B Roggio, “US Targets al Qaeda's al-Furqan Media Wing in Iraq.”, *The Long War Journal*, 2007



mainstream media to broadcast its propaganda contents. IS is able to spread them broadly thanks to media system orchestrated by Al-Hayat Media Center which seems to have been created, in 2014, for the cyberjihad<sup>62</sup>. It addresses its messages directly to western muslims and has several publications: *IS Report*, *IS Newset* and *Dabiq* (all translated in several European languages). *Dabiq* is used as means for intimidation and dissemination of threats but also to present its utopia to eventual supporters. Videos, such as “*There is no life without Jihad*”<sup>63</sup> give evidence of an overwhelmingly positive side of the daily life of the fighters, including foreign fighters, showing brotherhood and mutual aid. For example, a video released In April 2014, shows a snowball fight between fighters and features a german fighter saying:

*“Now you see...here in Syria, we also can have fun!...That’s jihad, jihad makes fun...and we have fun here with the children...Come on, we invite you to jihad!”*<sup>64</sup>

At the same time, official platforms like Mu’assassat al-Furqan released high quality and gruesome beheading videos of hostages<sup>65</sup> showing the killing of enemies. In fact, IS propaganda, written like video or photographic content, always seem to try to find a balance between being appealing to eventual supporters and threatening the enemy.

IS uses also social media including Twitter, Instagram, Kik, Ask.fm, VK and Facebook<sup>66</sup> to release most of its propaganda. This can be understood thanks to three reasons: first, the availability of the information for both its supporters and its enemies in coverage and speed, second, the possibility to transfer any kind of multimedia content (texts, voices, photographies, videos ...), and, finally, the possibility of transferring the informations on any kind of network (websites, e-mails, but also social media websites

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[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/us\\_targets\\_al\\_qaedas.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/us_targets_al_qaedas.php) (accessed 16 june 2015)

62 R. Braquet, “Une propagande virtuelle extrêmement soignée”, *Libération*, 23 September 2014  
[http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2014/09/22/une-propagande-virtuelle-extremement-soignee\\_1106334](http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2014/09/22/une-propagande-virtuelle-extremement-soignee_1106334)  
(accessed 18 june 2015)

63 “There is no life without jihad”, Al-Hayāt Media Centre, 10 June 2014.

64 Anti-Defamation League, “Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media”, 11 July 2014  
[http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ\\_z2u1\\_Oko](http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ_z2u1_Oko) (accessed 3 July 2015)

65 E. Saltman and C. Winter, p.39.

66 E. Saltman and C. Winter, p.38.

and apps). It is interesting to note that the use of pictures broadcasted through social media accounts of fighters and female migrants is composed of what would trend or be posted on Instagram or twitter accounts by most of the users (picture of food, friends or even cats) except that among those common popular pictures, it is also possible to find weapons, dead bodies, war scenes. It is a clever balance which serves both to recruit fighters by showing them that the life in the “Caliphate” is the same that the one they would have at home but also orchestrate a day to day violence.

The use of Twitter has been particularly efficient. The total number of ISIS supporter accounts on Twitter was 46,000<sup>67</sup> from october to november 2014. It also made a savvy use of hashtags to make them trend internationally. For example, during the Football World Cup, the hijacking of trending hashtags help IS to gain visibility nigh millions of football supporters. However, since october 2014, thousands of accounts have been suspended by Twitter which can question this Twitter strategy but, actually, IS was able to inform its supporters about new accounts which allowed it to recreate its network. The most interesting social media innovation of IS is maybe its developing of complex coding and IS apps. The Twitter app named the ‘Dawn of Glad Tidings’ was a centralised body which made able anybody who installed it on a smartphone to post tweets to their account but also synchronise them with other IS supporters according to IS social media operations<sup>68</sup>. This app aimed to allow IS's supporters to keep up with its activities and progress. This permits the organisation to have trending tweets including links, hashtags and images and, last but not least, to avoid spam detecting algorithms. If the app was removed from the platform Google Play, its influence was immense before it was deleted. IS presence online is also huge because of supporters from all over the world who do not live within the “Caliphate” but support verbally the ideology of IS<sup>69</sup>. This kind of propaganda is not as professional as the one created by the official structures of IS but can almost get the same impact.

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67 J.M. Berger and J. Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper | No. 20, March 2015  
[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis\\_twitter\\_census\\_berger\\_morgan.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf)

68 E. Saltman and C. Winter, p.40.

69 E. Saltman and C. Winter, p.40

Indeed, the internet is often about the speed and the quantity of information and not always about the quality of the content.

In conclusion, social media are an incredible way to deliver IS views of events and information to a huge audience but also a dangerous double-edge sword for this organisation. Indeed, States and even the creators of social media websites have difficulties to control and regulate their websites 2.0: it is also the case for IS. The access to social media by fighters or their wives can be beneficial to the group because it allows him to publicise through a low-cost mean of dissemination to wider audience. It is a way of empowering its supporter and giving them agency by taking part in the process<sup>70</sup>. The supporters may feel valued by the possibility of spreading themselves IS's message. However, it can also lead to dangerous messages for the armed group. Indeed, like any propaganda, IS's propaganda choose carefully the messages to spread and the images or videos to broadcast. Empowered individuals on the internet sometimes broadcast extremely violent images or messages about unwanted marriages that IS cannot control. Moreover, IS's creative content is also discredited by others actors such as the US and France. Both countries created a counter narrative showing the brutality of the group but also highlighting the real daily life under the "Caliphate" through violent images and shocking slogans<sup>71</sup>. Anonymous individuals also mock IS message by diverting the message of the original content. Recently, Anonymous (an international network composed of activists and hacktivists) call anonymous citizens to help them to shut down pro-IS accounts on twitter with the hashtag #OpIsis. Nevertheless, the audience effects of the propaganda of IS is particularly problematic in the sense that if the fundamentalist groups were, in the past, the one depending of the media, it is now the media which depend on IS's stories. The professionalism of IS in communication as well as in the organisation of this communication explains why and how its ideology is spreading so fast and can attract foreign fighters and female migrants.

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70 Anti-Defamation League, "Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media", 11 July 2014 [http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ\\_z2u1\\_Oko](http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ_z2u1_Oko) (accessed 3 July 2015)

71 <http://www.stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr/comprendre2.html>

## II. Policies and Practices under IS

Through reports from NGO and institutions but also through the own publications of the Islamic State, it is possible to analyse the conservative and patriarchal society that the organisation Islamic State is building.

### 1. The construction of an hyper-masculinized “caliphate”

The concept of “hypermasculinity” was coined by Nandy (1998), Agathangelou extended the concept which was first, an explanation of the justification of violent acts by British colonialism in India and of the internationalisation of extreme gender identities by elites indians, to the security domain when an hypermasculine source provokes an other. In Agathangelou's analysis, she depicts the war of masculinities between the USA (“War on Terror”) against Al-Qaeda (“Jihad”)<sup>72</sup>. The global militarisation of IS proves, with its recruitment of followers all over the world but also with its global rhetoric against westernisation, its goal to spread an idea of religious, political and economical indoctrination of the mass. An analysis of *Dabiq*, the magazine of the Islamic State group, and of *Dar Al Sham*, its french version, shows how femininity and masculinity are played out on the bodies of men and women under IS rules. This magazine is an important tool for IS's propaganda and has numerous purposes. It is first a way of appeal muslims from all over the world to join the “Caliphate” and, second, a way of sharing the victory of the group. It also comprises vivid and violent pictures of casualties caused by IS but also images of “martyrs”. Through this propaganda tool and an analysis of its narratives, it is possible to have a glimpse in the gendered ideology of IS.

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72 A. M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, “Power, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, p. 519.

## **The Western culture as a corruption of the muslim world**

The West is seen as a perverted world where Muslims are humiliated. The French society is, for example, described as one full of immoral issues. The interdiction of wearing the Hidjâb and the new counterterrorism laws are perceived as public humiliation of the Muslim people. It is insinuated that any true muslim would migrate to the “Caliphate” rather than living within the French society<sup>73</sup>. The globalisation is, saw as a threat by IS, corrupting society and deviant:

*“They have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy, and uncover its deviant nature.”<sup>74</sup>*

Besides, it is stated that muslims people living under the West cannot understand the actions of IS: they have been corrupted and what they say cannot be considered as relevant because they have *“never experienc(ed) war nor tribalism, natively said to themselves”<sup>75</sup>*. According to Kimmel<sup>76</sup>, gender can be one the of the principles that organises local, regional or national resistances to the globalisation of the world in extremist movements. The resistance is framed in religious term for IS but also strongly embed in a militant misogyny and a domestic patriarchy. They are opposed to western values but also to corrupted regimes: Saudi Arabia is particularly targeted which is seen as the US puppets. Globalisation took away its manhood: it follows and it doesn't take decisions on its own. In *Dabiq*, the humiliation of which Syrian and Iraqi men suffered is emphasised as well as the solution: re-finding power over their life is recovering manhood.

*“Remember that the enemy raped your mothers and your sisters, prevented you from Jumu'ah and congregational prayers, and cut*

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73 Al-Hayat Media Center, “L'Etat Islamique étend son territoire”, *Dar-al-Islam*, Issue 2, January 2015 p. 10.

74 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The return of the Khilafah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 1, july 2014, p. 9.

75 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.12.

76 M.S. Kimmel, *Globalization and its Mal(e)contents The Gendered Moral and Political Economy of Terrorism, International Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 3, September 2003, pp. 603-620.

*you off from trade and agriculture. In short, he didn't leave you with anything of the religious and worldly affairs<sup>77</sup>."*

Here the shame and the humiliation is explained in several points. First, the enemy emasculated men by rapping their female relatives. Second, they removed from them their status of breadwinner. A man who is not capable of providing for its family or protecting it, is seen as less as a man without nothing left to express his masculinity. IS translates social frustrations into narratives and, by doing so, allows a fusion of economic and political inequality and cultural discourses about the lost glory of their culture. *Brown suggests that:*

*"Fundamentalism ... is the religion of those at once seduced and betrayed by the promise that we human beings can comprehend and control our world.<sup>78</sup>"*

Religion is seen as the basis of the identity of the group but culture and politics are also part of the ideology. Taking the role which is considered as the most manly one, the fighter / the martyr, is the only solution to recover from the emasculation:

*"This month, the soldiers of the Islamic State launched a swift and brutal offensive in the northern Halab countryside. The campaign, entitled "Taking Revenge for the Chaste Sisters," targeted the treacherous sahwāt murtaddīn who prostituted themselves to America and its regional puppets, stabbing the mujāhidīn in the back and sub-sequently imprisoning and even raping many of the muhājirāt<sup>79</sup>."*

There is the need of hating the enemy which are considered as deviantly feminine

77 Al-Hayat Media Center, "al-Qa'idah of Waziristan, A Testimony From Within", *Dabiq*, Issue 6, December 2014, p.11.

78 B. K. McCarthy, "Fundamentalism and the Control of Women." In J.S. Hawley (ed) *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp.175-176.

79 Al-Hayat Media Center, "The return of the Khilafah", *Dabiq*, Issue 1, July 2014, p.7

because they “prostituted” themselves but, also, of remasculating men by taking revenge for the dishonour of seeing their female relatives raped. Violence is a way for finding political agency and by proving the agency, men can also refund their lost honour.

***“Two camps with no third in between”<sup>80</sup>***

The second idea is the clear distinction that IS is operating between the good and the evil, the believers (mu’minin) against the non-believers (kufir), and “us” versus “them”. The world has to choose:

*“The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the jews<sup>81</sup>.”*

It also denounces, several times, the dual discourse produced of the West:

*“So while genocide is committed by the Maliki, Asadi, and Israeli forces against the Muslims via systematic massacres, chemical warfare, rape, and starvation by siege, Obama watches with euphoria. However, when his brothers in Yazidi Satanism and Peshmergan Zionism are killed, he panics<sup>82</sup>.”*

The fact that IS victimised muslims and particularly vulnerable parts of the population with an emphasis on women gives a strong justification for the call of Jihad. It also

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80 Al-Hayat Media Center, “From hypocrisy to apostasy: the extinction of the grayzone”, *Dabiq*, Issue 7, January 2014, p.6

81 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The return of the Khilafah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 1, July 2014, p.6.

82 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.35

denounces an hypocrisy without bounds from the West which gives credit to its discourses. IS is in a process of identity protection and use a cultural strategy to justify its ideology. It frames its culture as if it was the only authentic one. This culture is lived as a community of feelings and narratives. People within the community believes to the imaginary because the narratives make sense. The discourse justifies and arguments in favour of the beliefs of the group. They represent themselves as the exclusive depositories of an exclusive culture: the “true faith” / the “true Islam”. They highlight the fact that their culture is mistreated and that its original purity has been lost, and are the only one that can find it back.

### **The protective “Caliphate”**

IS presents it self as a protective “Caliphate” whose idea is to create a haven for muslims from all over the world. IS does control territory which means it has lands and cities to implement its religio-political project. It has shown that it could create a combination of municipal administration (police, Islamic outreach, tribal affairs, recruitment and training, education, sharia courts) but also aid-based services (humanitarian assistance and facility management)<sup>83</sup>. Institutionalisation is a factor of IS's expansion. By being active in, for example, education of the judicial domain, it shows its capacity to create governance but also to “protect” its population even if, it is under an extremely oppressive regime. The declaration of the creation of a “Caliphate” shows its success in seizing territories. It has to be noted that IS found its power more by giving importance to its territory than to suicide attacks which shows that IS is more than a terrorist group. Their claim of creating a Caliphate and a new society should be regard with attention. In *Dar Al Islam*, the last few pages of the fourth issue look almost like a touristic brochure showing amusement parks for children and beautiful landscapes. Numerous pictures<sup>84</sup>, in *Dabiq*, shows that IS “takes care” of its people:

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83 C. Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State*, Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper Number 13, November 2014,  
[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en\\_web\\_lister.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf) (accessed 2 July 2015)

84 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The Failed Crusade”, *Dabiq*, Issue 4, july 2014, pp.28-29



there is electricity installations, cancer treatments, the streets are being cleaned, there is care homes for elderly and the orphans, food aid (rationing system in Aleppo<sup>85</sup>) and so on. In June 2014, IS posted short videos picturing IS as a “*charitable organization, beloved by civilians and establishing a better society.*”<sup>86</sup>. Muslims, from all over the world, were marginalised but not they have a place where they can be empowered again. Also, it is clear that IS has understood that to expand its control and create the “Caliphate” it will have to present itself not only as a violent machine but also as a protector. Those magazines call people from all over the world showing a world where solidarity is taking over the capitalist individualism: “*Do not worry about money or accommodations for yourself and your family. There are plenty of homes and resources to cover you and your family.*”<sup>87</sup>. When IS states: “*Foley’s Blood is on Obama’s Hands*”<sup>88</sup>, it clearly displays the will to differentiate the group, which does everything it can to protect its people, from the U.S. presented as non-protective for its own people. It is also a way to show that the members of IS have access to a distinct manhood following religious lines to which the Americans cannot access. They are deviant men incapable of protecting their own and, consequently, are dishonoured.

### **Men's bodies: finding honour in fighting and dying**

Men can only achieve self-realisation by killing this enemy threatening the community or dying for the community: by doing so, they give a meaning to his life. Besides, the vocabulary linked to the conquests of IS is enlightening, men “*liberate*” cities and are casted in hyper violent but glorified combat roles: they are “*heroes*” and “*lions*”. The violence and death are socially accepted but also glorified. Manhood is strongly linked to violence and is valued but also aggressive militarism. The severe and

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85 A. Al-Tamimi, The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Fall 2013)

<http://www.rubincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Jawad-YA-au1-PDF.pdf> (accessed on 7 June 2014)

86 Anti-Defamation League, “Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media”, 11 July 2014 [http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ\\_z2u1\\_Oko](http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html#.VZ_z2u1_Oko) (accessed 3 July 2015)

87 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.33.

88 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.37.

brutal killings of homosexual individuals shows a strongly rooted homophobia but also the hate of those who do not embrace IS's vision of masculinity. Homosexuality is seen as a western practice which is corrupting Islamic societies. For example, in march 2015, a man has been thrown off a building in Raqqa (Syria) for homosexual acts. This is one example on at least half a dozen cases in which IS has killed a man for being homosexual. In *Dar Al Islam*, it is stated that homosexuality has to be sanctioned by death. France is said to allow gay marriage and the only solution to save humanity is described as the application of the Sharia<sup>89</sup>. The enemy blood is versed to clean the honour: “*The hands of the mujāhidīn soaked in the blood of the filthy nusayriyyah*”<sup>90</sup>. It allows to find back the lost masculinity. That is why violence and death are celebrated by all the society by men as by women. It is an honour that is reflected on the all family but also on the community. The community is constructed within the blood of its martyrs:

*“And indeed the Islamic State will remain. It will remain because it was built upon the corpses of martyrs and it quenched its thirst with their blood, and by such the market for Jannah was convened.”<sup>91</sup>”*

It also states the responsibility the muslims from all over the world has to migrate to IS-established territory and join the fight: “*if there were any good in you, you would have worn clothes of war and come to guard the outskirts of Mosul to thereby protect your “sisters,”*”<sup>92</sup>. IS has created an organised violence and a trivialisation of the death. Grief is private but also public as shown in the pictures and postmortem testimonies of fighters. The goal is to emasculate the enemies by erasing their beliefs and taking away their masculinity: “*We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women*”<sup>93</sup>.

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89 Al-Hayat Media Center, “Le combat contre les apostats”, *Dar-al-Islam*, Issue 4, June 2015 p. 12.

90 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.42.

91 Al-Hayat Media Center, “Remaining and expanding”, *Dabiq*, Issue 5, November 2014, p.32.

92 Al-Hayat Media Center, “Shari’ah alone will rule Africa”, *Dabiq*, Issue 8, February 2014, p.37.

93 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The Failed Crusade”, *Dabiq*, Issue 4, July 2014, p.5.

## **Fragile but supportive women**

Women also have their role to play within IS ideology. They need protection and support: “*They are as fragile as glass bottles but their souls are those of men with ambitions almost hugging the heavens..<sup>94</sup>*”. There protection is actually essential in IS ideology: when women are evoked, it is mostly to depict them as victims of the war on Islam. The fourth number of *Dabiq* shocked internationally for its justification of the right to enslave non-muslim women. Women should not fight and those who do as the PKK female fighters are seen as deviant because masculine: “*May Allah disfigure the turbans of the PKK’s women, yet they have more manhood than your likes!<sup>95</sup>*”. Number 7 and 8 depict women as support for fighters and claim that it is their duty to migrate to the “Caliphate. In *Dabiq*, women are mostly associated with men's honour or children are the helpless victims of the enemy. Also, what is striking when reading those magazines is the complete absence of women in the pictures as if IS was trying to remove them completely from the public sphere.

This analysis of *Dabiq* shows how Is has created an hypermasculine and paternalist “Caliphate”. IS is using a soft (protection of the population) but tough ideology (hyperviolent society where honour is found in death). The propaganda shows comprehension of the group for the doubts that can arouse, the love of the family, the difficulties of taking care of the family but, by accusing the enemy and providing itself for its population, it also states that there is no excuse for refusing to clean the honour of the community. The method goes beyond propaganda in the sense that it tries to convince and encourages the consent of the people targeted by the message. IS wants its future fighters to embrace its institutionalised Jihad.

## **2. Sexual politics**

As we analysed previously, there is a need of protecting women who are seen as easily influenceable by the West. If they were influenced by western idea such as

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94 Al-Hayat Media Center, “Shari’ah alone will rule Africa”, *Dabiq*, Issue 8, February 2014, p.34

95 Al-Hayat Media Center, “Shari’ah alone will rule Africa”, *Dabiq*, Issue 8, February 2014, p.37.

gender equality or the liberalisation of women, they could corrupted the all society from within. For this reason, IS has implemented gendered policies and practices. It has promoted extremely narrow gender roles, enforcing strict rules on women's dress and sexual conduct and instituting other discriminatory and abusive practices against women. The first appearance of guidelines about IS's sexual politics was in the fourth issue of *Dabiq*, in October 2014 and, then in a pamphlet named "*Questions and Answers on captive women*", in December 2014, released by The nonprofit Middle East Media Research Institute. An analysis of the manifesto published by the all-female brigade al-Khans'aa will not be provided as IS's policies because it is not clear if it has been approved by IS. However, it will be analysed in the next chapter.

### **The public and private space divide**

According to a report from the OHCHR, entitled "Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria", in the ISIS-controlled areas of Syria, women and girls have been confined excluded from private life<sup>96</sup>. As stated previously, IS believes in traditional role which enclosed women in the private sphere where she has to carry out housework and caring activities. Also, under IS, it is prohibited for a woman from appearing in public without a male guardian (*mahram*). This *mahram* must be a member of her family or someone appointed by the "Caliphate". If they don't have a male guardian, the only fact of adventuring outside to purchase food can be dangerous<sup>97</sup>. The participation to public life by occupying certain position like doctor or lawyer but also the will to participate to election are highly dangerous for women. Indeed, some attacks or murders were reported. They also have to follow strict rules while exercising their job and any complaints can be severely punished. The irruption of women in the public sphere (by undertaking a public position or organising strikes) is usually punished by death<sup>98</sup>.

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96 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria*, A/HRC/27/CRP.3, 14 November 2014, p.9

97 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.10.

98 UNAMI/OHCHR, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July – 10 September 2014*, p. 10

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI\\_OHCHR\\_POC\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_6July\\_10September2014.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf)

## Appearance

Appearance of men and women are severely controlled by IS. Men are required to grow their beards<sup>99</sup> while women have to cover their body with a double-layered veils, loose abayas and gloves<sup>100</sup>. The extreme differentiation between men and women appearances aims to reinforce the biological difference. In a “Caliphate” dominated by traditional views on women and men, women as sexually tempting and men as incapable to resist it, women and girls over the age of ten years have to be fully covered and hide any part of their bodies<sup>101</sup> while men have to wear ostensibly was is usually seen as one of the most manly attribute of their body. It shows that women are seen as guilty: they are removed from the public sphere but even when they appear in it they have to hide themselves and become invisible; and men have to expose their masculinity in the public sphere. A testimony from a woman who has fled from Aleppo, said that the way she dressed was checked at several checkpoints but also the difficulty to wear the only clothes allowed for women:

*“You can hardly see your way...I fell many times. It is hard to breathe. You are walking in the street but it feels like a prison cell.”*<sup>102</sup>

Other interesting facts on the appearance of women was join when IS stated that married women should wear black, while unmarried females other colours, so as to be easily distinguishable in the hospital<sup>103</sup>. This can probably be explained in the way that the only acceptable status for a woman is the one of the wives of the man. Indeed,

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99 AFP, “Irak : barbe obligatoire à Mossoul sous contrôle des djihadistes”, Le Point, 1 June 2015.  
[http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/irak-barbe-obligatoire-a-mossoul-sous-controle-des-djihadistes-01-06-2015-1932619\\_24.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/irak-barbe-obligatoire-a-mossoul-sous-controle-des-djihadistes-01-06-2015-1932619_24.php)

100 M. Mahmood, “Double-layered veils and despair ... women describe life under Isis”, *The Guardian*, 17 February 2015,  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/isis-orders-women-iraq-syria-veils-gloves> (accessed on 15 June 2015)

101 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.9.

102 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.9.

103 UNAMI/OHCHR, p.10.

unmarried women are considered as a threat for social order<sup>104</sup>.

## Slavery

According to IS's doctrine<sup>105</sup>, taking women as slaves is allowed. A pamphlet on female slaves, found on a twitter account supporting the Islamic State group, states:

*“It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of [as long as] that doesn't cause [the Muslim ummah] any harm or damage.”*

Slavery is actually regulated with very specific rules. First, it applies to those on who the status of “*dhimmi*” is non applicable like the Yezidi population. Then, it is forbidden to separate a young child from its mother. The child a muslim and a slave will be a free child. Also young child because they will be raised according to their rules will grow up free. Also, it is important to state that IS forced women from minorities in slavery because it is the only way to have sexual intercourse with them. Sexual intercourse out of marriage is forbidden. Their justification of the sexual slavery is also including in their implementation of what they see as a moral society. Indeed, the organisation believes that the desertion from slavery caused the spreading of adultery, forbidden for men and women, and of the sin of fornication (sexual intercourse outside marriage). These rules are reinforcing the idea of special and vigorous sexual urge of men. Their needs have to be satisfied. Moreover, according to Guidere, the idea that capturing a non-muslim women and converting her to Islam would allow men to gain an easy way to Paradise. This belief provoked under IS an high number of forced conversion and rapes under forced marriages<sup>106</sup>.

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104 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.10.

105 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The Failed Crusade”, *Dabiq*, Issue 4, july 2014, p.15-17

106M. Guidère, ISIS’ Politics of Sex, 30 janvier 2015

<http://www.sicherheitspolitik-blog.de/2015/01/30/isis-politics-of-sex/> (accessed 11 June 2015)

### **Temporary marriage (*nikah*)**

IS has revived the institution of temporary marriage. Several women have been executed for refusing to have sexual intercourses with IS fighters under this rule<sup>107</sup>. In IS's views, marriage is the only way possible to have sexual intercourse for muslim men and women. It is supposed to be a intra-muslim engagement. The violence in forced marriage can be understood as symbolic as well as political in the sense that it implies reciprocal obligations.

### **Virginity**

As previously explained, virginity is a important sign of the honour of a woman.

*"If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]...<sup>108</sup>".*

A 'quest of virginity' has been developed among the IS fighters. Their quest has led them to have sexual intercourse girls more and more young. Girls are considered as women as soon as they have their menstruation<sup>109</sup>.

### **Contraception**

On december 2014, the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry reported that IS closed family-planning departments in public hospitals Mossul to prevent women to have access to

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107 H. Saul, "ISIS executes 150 women for refusing to marry militants', buries them in mass graves", *The Independent*, 17 December 2014

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/ISIS-executes-150-women-for-refusing-to-marry-militants-buries-them-in-mass-graves/articleshow/45550919.cms> (accessed on 17 June 2015)

108 The Middle East Media Research Institute, "Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet On Female Slaves", 4 December 2014

<http://www.memrijttm.org/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-on-female-slaves.html> (accessed 13 June 2015)

109 M. Guidère, ISIS' Politics of Sex.

contraceptive pills<sup>110</sup>. It is believed that this measure was taken to boost the birth rate which means, first that they strengthen the control over women's bodies and second, it emphasise women's role as mother under IS rules.

### **Adultery**

The *hadd* of stoning is carried out on a woman for committing adultery<sup>111</sup>. ISIS has executed women and men charging them with the crime of adultery. For example, during the months of June and July 2014, eight women were executed on that crime basis in Raqqa<sup>112</sup>.

### **Modern policies**

Guidere explains that ISIS has created some innovation in his islamist rules. In order to recruit young fighters. For example, the authorisation of “distance marriage” is interesting in its innovative character. Indeed, IS is using numerous new technologies to spread its message but also use audiovisual internet to allow a woman and a man to get married religiously and remotely is unique<sup>113</sup>.

In conclusion, the organisation is constructing identities but also sexualities within an extremely violent ideology. It has raised the pressure on women and their bodies in a dramatic way. Muslim women have become bearer of the culture of IS and must be preserved from dishonour while non-muslim women must be dishonour and non-muslim women drive back in the “good” society. The symbol of veiling and of the brutal rejection of homosexuality, but also the numerous sexual crimes, show a need of controlling sexual autonomy. This control of sexuality highlights IS's project of state-

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110 J. Hattab, “Baby boom? ISIS bans contraceptive pills in Mosul”, *Al Arabiya News*, 1 December 2014 <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2014/12/01/Baby-boom-ISIS-bans-contraceptive-pills-in-Mosul-.html> (accessed 11 June 2015)

111 Al-Hayat Media Center, “A Call to Hijrah”, *Dabiq*, Issue 3, September 2014, p.36.

112 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.10

113M. Guidère, *ISIS' Politics of Sex*,



making. Indeed, the control of sexual autonomy but also of sexual identity is of primary importance in all states power and in all societies. IS has referred to a glory and very ancient past to justify its practices which lie on a tradition of violence against women in the Middle East, but also on Iraq and Syria failures and popular ignorance. With the rise of IS, the control over women's bodies has been reinforced to tremendous chunk.

# Chapter 3: Where is agency? Plurality of women's experiences under IS laws

In the extensive literature about political violence and terrorism, women are often forgotten. Their “gentle trait” is supposed to prevent them to engage in such violent actions. Even when gender is addressed by academics, it is usually showing only one side of women's experiences: women as perpetrators of violence or as victims but not as actors. Numerous roles are available for women in relation to terrorism and violence. Gender and the masculinity/femininity dichotomy should not be analysed without the notion of agency. During wars and armed conflicts, women are denied their agency whether they are staying in the boundaries in the private realm or they are taking active roles. Women are targeted by the IS organisation as repositories of cultural identity and spoils of war but also for their values in reproduction (mothers of the next generation) or production (cooking, caring, cleaning, blogging, tweeting, punishing). The chapter will try to analyse and conceptualise the roles of women under IS laws from women considered as “good muslims” to women suffering from the most violent forms of domination but also to understand in what extent they can use their roles to find agency and find agency by resisting the roles they have been given.

## I. The “Other” women

According to a report from Amnesty International<sup>114</sup>, IS has systematically targeted religious minorities and committed gross human rights violations. As a fundamentalist group, it is not surprising that IS is targeting religious minorities to

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<sup>114</sup> Amnesty International, *Escape from hell: torture and sexual slavery in islamic state captivity in Iraq*, Peter Benenson House, London, 2014, p.4.

impose its beliefs. Rape and sexual assaults were one of the fundamental theme of the second-wave of feminism. The objective was to gain an international recognition of the specificity of assault endured by women during armed conflicts and wars. The atrocities committed, during the nighties, in Bosnia or East Africa were widely publicised and since then, numerous actions have been taken to raise awareness about the specific vulnerability of women during conflicts. However, current researches try to focus on the different circumstances and causes of rape and gender-based violence offering a more nuanced approach. While the systematic targeting of women and gender-based violence is explained by an irrational violence from IS, the stories that are available, in the United Nations and the NGO reports but also some media articles, are actually showing: first, a rational in the target of women by IS and second, a small, by its outcomes, but strong, by its meanings, resistance from the women from minorities to the fate reserved for them by the armed group.

### **1. Women of minorities as repositories of cultural identities**

A widespread false assumption is that women are passive in front of the islamisation and of their society. However, while they are suffering from pressures on their bodies because they are considered as the repositories of their cultural identity. Some women can resist. For example, a number of women who had refused to wear the veil were beaten by ISIL in Mosul. It has been reported that they reacted: throwing stones at their attackers. It is believed that those women were killed later on<sup>115</sup>. This example reveals that seeing women as only victims is a false assumption. Women can be victims but this victimhood does not define their all identity.

The war that the IS group is engaged in is a war against Western culture but also one to apply its power on a territory. Its will to impose a specific form of Islam, with fundamentalist rules, is linked to culture and politics. The destruction of ancient cities - notably Hatra, Nineveh, Nimrud, Khorsabad but also ancient artefacts at the Mosul museum, the Mosque of the Prophet Yunusbesides and Imam Dur Mausoleum in Iraq

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<sup>115</sup> UNAMI/OHCHR, p.7.

and Apamea, Dura-Europos, Mari in Syria – beside the loss of world cultural heritage shows a will of cultural cleansing. In a video (February 25, 2015), the armed group claims that the Mosul Museum destruction was motivated by religion:

*“We were ordered by our prophet to take down idols and destroy them,”; “These ruins that are behind me, they are idols and statues that people in the past used to worship instead of Allah.”*<sup>116</sup>

The will to destroy Syria and Iraq's cultures is important for our analysis. Indeed, while some women are suffering of being the Other body, other women also suffer of being the Other is a more classic sense of not belonging to a community. Women, as the mothers or future mothers of individuals from a certain ethnic or religious group, are seen as the guardians of social and cultural values. When the United Nations Security Council labeled rape as a weapon of war in conflicts worldwide, it emphasised the use of rape to “*humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group.*<sup>117</sup>” in Resolution 1820. Small religious communities have been targeted by IS on its war against the infidels. Among those communities can be found: the Yazidis, the Christians, the Shi’a Turkmen, the Shi’a Shabak and the Kurds. The Final Report from the OCHR<sup>118</sup> give us a detailed understanding of how these minorities were attacked by IS. The Christian community and the other communities have been targeted since the takeover of Mosul on 10 June 2014. First, the repression has started with the confiscation of the belongings, lands and houses of the minorities. Then, IS ordered them to convert or to pay *jizyah* (protection tax) or to leave the city, the refusal of this ultimatum would result in their deaths. IS started marking the houses of Christians individuals and abducted some families which were not respecting their rules. It has result on a massive departure of Christians. Members of the Shi’a Turkmen, the Kurds, the Shi’a Shabak communities have also been similarly suffering from expulsion, confiscation of belongings and lands, adduction and killings. The Yazidi community has been particularly singled out. They

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116 A. Curry, “On ISIS's Path of Ruin, Many Sites of Global Importance”, *National Geographic*, 12 March 2015, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/150312-isis-destruction-looting-ancient-sites-iraq-syria-archaeology/> (accessed on 3 June 2015)

117 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Rape: Weapon of War*, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/rapeweaponwar.aspx>

118 UNAMI/OHCHR, pp. 11-17.

are seen as *Kufara* (non-believer) and, by consequence, the only option offered was conversion or death. The community, whose population is comprised between 100'000 et 600'000 in Iraq, belongs to one of the most ancient populations of the Mesopotamia, their belief system appeared 4000 years ago. Thousands of Yazidis live in Syria. The Yazidism is a monotheist religion whose rituals are transmitted orally. Also, to be Yazidi, it is necessary to have been born Yazidi. They have been persecuted for over a thousand years because misunderstandings of their religion by Muslims and Christians:

*“In Iraq and Syria, they have been taken for Satan's lovers because they mixed up the two main religion of the book (Islam and Christianity)<sup>119</sup>” « Yazidi are fire worshipers, which make them look like pagan to Syrians eyes. While Christianity and Judaism are tolerated, this religions isn't considered.”*

Sébastien de Courtois, journalist for France Culture adds: *“IS forces take it out on them. They want to murder them all”*. It's a will of regeneration of Islam and purification of religion. It has been reported that Yazidi males were systematically killed while women were abducted<sup>120</sup>. IS's goal has been the destruction of the culture of the Yazidis. Since virginity is part of the family honour in the Yazidi culture, IS fighters have been horrifically pragmatic: *“It's simple, they almost raped every woman. Their goal was that no girl remain a virgin, they also took the married women that they liked”*<sup>121</sup>. Their bodies are, by consequence, *“used as the territory on which wars are fought and ideologies played out<sup>122</sup>”*. The idea of emasculating enemies by rapping their women is an old war strategy. For example, during the conflict between Pakistan and India, rape

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119 Frédéric Pichon quoted by S. Gillig, “Qui sont les yézidis, cible des djihadistes en Irak ?”, *Le Monde*, 12 August 2014,

[http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/08/12/la-communaute-kurdophone-yezidie-cible-des-djihadistes-de-l-etat-islamique\\_4470471\\_3218.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/08/12/la-communaute-kurdophone-yezidie-cible-des-djihadistes-de-l-etat-islamique_4470471_3218.html)

120 UNAMI/OHCHR, pp. 5-8.

121 C. Mercier, “Le but de Daech était de ne laisser aucune fille vierge”, *Libération*, 3 December 2014  
[http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2014/12/03/le-but-de-daech-etait-de-ne-laisser-aucune-fille-vierge\\_1156103](http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2014/12/03/le-but-de-daech-etait-de-ne-laisser-aucune-fille-vierge_1156103)

122 C. Parashar, “War”, in L. Shepherd, *Gender matters in global politics: A feminist Introduction to International Relations*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 102.

became a common tactic as a means of degrading the enemy<sup>123</sup> but this use can even be found in mythological myths like the taking of Troy. Honour is a collective concept enhanced during wars and armed conflicts but also heavily gendered. Femininity and masculinity are used during those times but also staged. Honour is a concept that is often expressed through the physical body. A man would find honour because he was wounded or even killed while fighting against the enemy. A woman would find honour by staying pure or, in other words, by keeping her hymen intact which will prove that her men succeeded in 'protecting' her honour. A woman would, in this conception of war, find her honour through the one of the men. The example of a brother committing suicide because he could not bear the fact that he was unable to protect his sister reveals how much women's honour is important for the family.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, even if it is men's honour which is attacked, it is the women who will carry the shame. The fear of losing this honour is, by consequence, often stronger than the one of actual violence.

*“ I was not afraid of the beatings, but could not bear the thought that they could attack my honour. We were constantly told that we would be forced to marry or sold to some men<sup>125</sup>. ”*

The whole sexual division of war is probably the most well represented in this idea. Indeed, it is because women are seen as passive and non-threatening and men as future enemies that men are killed while women suffer from diverse forms of sexual violence. According to the report rule of terror: the capture and enslavement of Yazidi women shows the will of IS to impregnate against their will these women. Their impregnation will affect the ethnic and religious composition of their minority where virginity is essential to get married and where inter-faith marriage are forbidden<sup>126</sup>. The report states

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123 R. Yunus and S. Mushtaq and A. Sadaf, “Female Sexuality as Carrier of Masculinity: A Feminist Critique of History of Sub Continent Partition (1947)”, *European Academic Research*, Vol. I, Issue 8, November 2013.

124 L. Wolfe, “The advent of ‘jihadi brides,’ ‘caliph-ettes’: A timeline of how media are getting it wrong and right”, *Women Under Siege*, 27 March 2015, <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/pages/Advent-of-jihadi-brides-timeline-of-how-media-wrong-and-right>

125 Amnesty International, p.6.

126 M. Tawfeeq and B. Todd, “Four arrested in Iraq 'honor killing'”, *CNN*, 21 May 2007, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/05/18/iraq.honorkilling/index.html>

that the nature of the attacks, associated with IS statements in the media, can lead to the idea that there is a denial of this religious group's right to exist. By abducting women and forcing them to carry "IS's babies" but also by raping them, IS is preventing another generation of Yazidis from being born. The strategy of rape to terrorise seems viable for IS. Indeed, the IRC reported that Syrian refugees cited rape as one of the main reasons to flee the conflict<sup>127</sup>. Here, the sexual and gender-based violence against women has a political and social meaning. By pushing the Yazidis, but also other minorities, out of their territory and making it impossible for them to perpetuate their community, IS is clearly showing a political motivation of domination over its "Caliphate".

## **2. Women as *khums* (spoils of war)**

After the large-scale rapes in Bosnia and the horrific gender-based violence in Rwanda, the specificity of sexual attacks on women has started to be recognised. The thesis of the rape as a weapon of war has been publicised widely. Defining rape as a weapon of war should be used carefully in the sense that the fact of raping can be undertaken for several means and perceived differently among the perpetrators. Indeed, if rape is used to terrorise minorities but also to attack their culture and values, it can also be used in a more pragmatic way by the perpetrators. Under IS's rules, it has been common to abduct women in order to sell them as slaves. It is more than a gendered story or a sexualised story, it is the organised crime of human trafficking. This has nothing to do with dominating the region or a sexed story of men's specific urge, the fighters select carefully their victims to sell or buy them. Sexual violence has always existed during war: the advantage of the gendered story is the one that there is hope for a change by changing social construction of masculinity. However the fact that women are used as sexual slaves is more problematic.

*"After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters... who participated*

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<sup>127</sup> Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p.13.

*in the Sinjar operations, after one-fifth of the slaves were transferred to the IS's authority to be divided as khums [spoils of war]<sup>128</sup>. ”*

The Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reveals that during the attack on Sinjar (Iraq), some of the abducted women have been taken into Syria. Kept captives, they have been used as ‘war booty’ to reward soldiers (sexual amusement) but also sold in markets and held in sexual slavery. IS is apparently selling Yazidi women to young fighters to induce them to join the fighters. There are several reports showing that these women have suffered of multiple rapes by multiples perpetrators (from the men who abducted them to their “owners”). Women are seen as pawns and as *khums*. Thousands of Yazidi women and girls are captured and sold into slavery. IS has been abducting women for economical reasons. Women are targeted for their assets but also as assets. They have been targeted for their capacity of reproduction and of production: as wombs and workers. It is important to understand that during conflicts, there is the development of an economy of war. Abducted women can be seen as useful to support this economy of war by cooking, doing laundry from the home-front. Iraqi-news revealed a list produced by IS with a fix price for the selling of Yazidi or Christian women as slaves (*malak yamiin*): for a child of less than 10 years, 200.000 dinars (138 euros), for a young woman of less than 20 years, 100.000 dinars (104 euros), for a woman of 30 years, 75.000 dinars (52 euros) and for a woman of 40 years 50.000 dinars (35 euros). According to video filmed in Mossoul<sup>129</sup> and translated in english, the prices have been fixed because: “*The market to sell women and spoils of war has been experiencing a significant decrease, which has adversely affected ISIS revenue and financing of the Mujahideen.*<sup>130</sup>” Sexual slavery has become an important

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128 Al-Hayat Media Center, “The Failed Crusade”, *Dabiq*, Issue 4, July 2014, p.15.

129 “Saudi ISIL Militants Filmed Laughing at How They Will Share Yazidi Female Sex Slaves”, Eretz Zen YouTube account, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJGK1ivJyhw> (Accessed 5 July 2015)

130 S. Webb and K. Rahman, “The price of a slave... as determined by official ISIS price list”, *DailyMail*, 4 November 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2820603/The-price-slave-determined-official-ISIS-price-list-Islamist-group-sets-prices-Yazidi-Christian-women-girls-nine-fetching-highest-price.html#ixzz3epFvqgvp>



source of income for IS and is regulated by an office opened for that purpose in Mosul<sup>131</sup>. The women abducted have been taught the tenets of Islam, put under the “protection” of IS and they received food/water. Married women who converted were given / sold to IS fighters as wives as the other women who were abducted because their marriage is not recognised by Islam.

Those horrific stories have been widely presented by western officials and the western medias discussing women as powerless victims with emphasising on the most shocking details. Despite this popular narrative, some others stories show that Yazidi women tried and succeed in resisting to the fate that was given to them. Indeed, stories of girls and women who escaped are numerous:

*“He said that if I did not consent to marrying him he would sell me on to another man who would take me to Syria. I let him believe that I would marry him and managed to run away before he could carry out his threats.”<sup>132</sup>*

Considering the danger of such actions, these escapes should be understood through the concept of agency and a remarkable capacity of adaptation and survival to violence. These actions are contradicting the persistent portrayal of women through the lens of victimhood and as powerless, it allows us to understand that victims are not always helpless but sometimes agent. The two experiences do not always contradict each other. Long, following Giddens (1984) theory of structurations affirmed:

*“The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, social actors are “knowledgeable” and “capable”<sup>133</sup>”.*

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131 THE IRC, p.7

132 Amnesty International, p.7.

133 N. Long, “From paradigm lost to paradigm regained”, in N. Long and A. Long, *Battlefields of knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*, New-York, Routledge, 1992, p. 23 quoted by C. O.N. Moser and F. C. Clark (ed.), *Victims, Perpetrators or*

Within the most extreme forms of coercion, Yazidi women reduced in slavery have been negotiating their fate and made choices. It would be inaccurate to state that those choices were entirely constraints even if the range of options and choices available were very restraint. Indeed agency or at least the capacity to resistance appears as soon as two choices or more are available. Even with a low degree of agency and sometimes collectively, these women tried to resist by escaping their horrific fate from a classic escape to the most extreme form of escape: death. The constraints which lead to make those choices are evident: beating, sexual violence and psychological violence while the resistance is found in the desire to preserve their honour, find back their family but also a form of survival. In numerous testimony, it is stated that what they would endure under IS was worse than death. Weighting the cost of each choice available, they make lethal choices:

*“Jilan killed herself in the bathroom. She cut her wrists and hanged herself. She was very beautiful. I think she knew that she was going to be taken away by a man and that is why she killed herself.”<sup>134</sup>”*

As a Yazidi man said *“The fear of the crimes Da’esh could commit against the women and children of my family is much greater than the fear of being killed by Da’esh”<sup>135</sup>”*. These choices are rational and not driven by impulsivity as shown in this testimony:

*“At night we tried to strangle ourselves with our scarves. We tied the scarves around our necks and pulled away from each other as hard as we could, until I fainted. Two girls who were held with us woke up and stopped us and then stayed awake to watch over us. When they fell asleep at 5am we tried again, and again they woke up and stopped us.”<sup>136</sup>”*

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*Actors. Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, p.4.

134 Amnesty International, p.8.

135 Amnesty International, p.11.

136 Amnesty International, p.8.

Women are usually not seen as capable to be agents or, if so, only if they are perpetrators of violence but these collective action of escapes or resistances show that these women possess a degree of agency. It is necessary to understand that victims of those traumatic events must be helped but that “saving them” from IS is not enough. They are not helpless, they are traumatised: medical care and psychological care is at least as important. While some women showed resistance to their victimisation, it is necessary to welcome them back in a community that is none for its honour killings and where the loss of virginity/honour out of marriage is considered sometimes as worse than death. It seems that the question of escaping violence and committing suicide deserves a better understanding, an in-depth research and more appropriate answers from the international community.

## **II. The “good muslim”**

From the social media and the literature produced by IS organisation, it is possible to have a glimpse of what is the life of women under the rules of IS. Unfortunately those sources are not always reliable but they are the only one we can access. Our only sources for understanding the roles of women as wives, widows and mothers are by consequence the ones of a really well orchestrated propaganda through western female migrants social accounts. Those roles can be, at the same time, empowering and subordinating for women.

### **1. From passive roles to active roles**

First, it is essential to state that the women owning twitter and Instagram accounts but also tumblr blogs belong to western women. They are using the term: *muhajirah* or *muhajirat* (plural) to describe themselves. This word means: “one who

avoids or abandons bad things,” and later encompassed “migrant.”<sup>137</sup>. By consequence, it seems difficult to have informations about women from the region living under IS. The Iraqi and Syrian women (natives or *ansar*) are rarely mentioned and when they are it is always in relation to their relationships with western women which are mostly positive but sometimes difficult. For example, while Umm Esa writes “*My heart swells with hapiness when I see the Ansar Mujahideen in Dawla, may ALLAH increase the love between Mahajir and Ansar of Dwala*”, other refers to the difficulty to live with other women with a complete different culture or mistreatment and discrimination. Also, there is no possibility to know if IS is controlling those accounts and the individuals behind them. By applying the frame of the “beautiful soul<sup>138</sup>” and “spartan mother<sup>139</sup>”, it will be shown that traditional feminine notions and images such as grieving mother/wives or the sacrificing mothers are still relevant but also that it is fundamental to see those women as real agent in engaging with IS.

### The “beautiful soul”

*“I came here alone and broken, you raised my status as a woman, from a girl I become a mother, and with that I have become stronger<sup>140</sup>”.*

The idea of women as “beautiful souls” is the one of women as better human beings and not involved in the brutality of the war. IS female bloggers show a certain vision of the life under the rules of IS:

*“They establish the shariah wherever they go, they set up Islamic court houses, and also set up houses for families, the apartment I’m living in is provided by ISIS. They provide electricity alhamdulillah, and also they give food and clothes (mostly*

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137 A. Peresin and A. Cervone, “The Western Muhajirat of ISIS”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38:7, 2015, pp. 495-509.

138 J. Elshtain, *Women And War*, Chigago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 4.

139 Elshtain, p. 4.

140 Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>, [last accessed 1 july 2015] (Tumblr deleted)

*Ghanima) to families, today for example we received fresh bread. It's almost like a normal town but the shops all close for salah and you see mujahideen everywhere.<sup>141</sup>*

Numerous women tweeting or blogging emphasise the idea a “good life” under IS. They usually post, on social medias, pictures of their life from landscapes to food. Umm Abdullatif, an active blogger supportive of IS, claimed via her Ask.fm page that the “*lifestyle for women in IS controlled lands is “amazing”, the food is “yummy”, women supplies are available as well as “internet connection”*. Blogs, mostly created via the Tumblr platform are written as diaries with picture of the day to day life under the “Caliphate”. They show daily activities and aim at presenting a peaceful life filled with the love for their husbands and sisterhood. Umm Abdullatif says she has english speakers friends: “*Thats [sic] all I know over here... Sham [Syria] is filled with english speakers!*” while Umm Ubaydah (@al\_Khansaa<sup>142</sup>) post pictures of her and her friends wearing the niqab. The image of their life is highly romanticised as in any other lifestyle blogs. For example, @\_BirdsofJannah tweeted “*After a few minutes, I flip my niqab. He looked at me. Our eyes catch each others*”: her blog is written as a romantic fiction with pictures. The bloggers also emphasise the feeling of protection compared to western countries: they say that they have no fear of being attacked or street harassed. Umm Hamza tweeted on March 17, January and March 8:

*“They ask why we leave? We women are harrassed [sic] and some beaten in the street in the west. Here under the law of Allah we are protected,”*, “*I cover myself. I don't hide. I am free and not oppressed,<sup>143</sup>*” or also “*free for the first time in my life as a woman*”

The need of protection of the “beautiful soul” is described in those terms as well as a financial protection: a broad list of benefits given to women joining IS (money mainly). The unmarried women coming to lands controlled by the organisation stay in a hotel

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141 <http://al-khanssa.tumblr.com/> (accessed 6 June 2015)

142 Twitter account suspended.

143 Syrian observatory for Human Rights, “Why Young Western Women Go To Syria”, 18 March 2015 <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/03/why-young-western-women-go-to-syria/>

called a *maqkar* for which they don't pay anything. They also receive monthly food supplies. If they get married, they will be given a house, sometimes a monetary gift and spoils of war<sup>144</sup>. The domestic role is glorified in several tweets. Being a “normal housewife” seems the goal of most of those women, pictures of food are all over their accounts as well as studying religion or learning Arabic<sup>145</sup>. They need men to do everything so getting married is shown as what should be the first goal of any aspirant *muhajirah*. Women need a male guardian to leave the house or do also anything else. @\_BirdofJannah explained in her blog that women coming to the West are not forced to marry but can't walk alone without a male guardian. However, IS created in Al-Bab (Syria) an office to welcome single women or widows who want to marry IS male fighters. If the woman comes alone, IS will give her a place to stay with a group of other women. “*But it gets hard there,*” Umm Abdullatif warns. Umm Abdullatif says that she came to Syria alone, and was appointed a *wali*: a person with authority or guardianship over her. At the same time paradoxically, the image of strong women and of a “jihadi girl power” does not fit the frame of the “beautiful soul”. From unempowered in the West, they advertise the idea of more security under IS but also more agency. They claim to have gain better value and a better respect as women under IS rules.

### **The “spartan mother”**

*“Do not let your heart get attached to your husband to the extent that you try to stop him from approaching the front lines, rather push him, show him that you are pleased with him when he is away fighting the enemies of Allah.”<sup>146</sup>*

The bloggers and tweeters also explained how to get to Syria, how to act, what to expect

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144 C. Hoyle and A. Bradford and R. Frenett, “Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS”, *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, p.22.

145 Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>, [last accessed 1 july 2015] (Tumblr deleted)

146Umm Layth, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>, 28 june 2015 [last accessed 1 july 2015]

from the life under the Caliphate. The bloggers have their own role: the one of propagandist or recruiters. Most of the recruitment of western fighters and women is currently made through the internet. The recruiters show their joy when other western women come to their lands:

*“Three friends of mine who I made friend (sic) over social network has (sic) made their ways to Islamic State, and two of them made Hijrah this month. Met one of them, it was like a dream<sup>147</sup>”.*

It is not the first time that an organisation targets women for Jihad but the proportion of IS internet propaganda is bigger than other fundamentalist organisations. In the past, Al-Qaeda had talked about jihad and women: *“The jihadi woman is the woman who raises her children to join the jihad, to fight and dies for jihad. This is the honorable thing to do<sup>148</sup>.”* In IS propaganda, the idea of raising children exists but is not the most predominant. However, it is possible to find pictures or some mentions of it:

*“She helped me educate myself about the rewards I was able to get through marriage, by preparing a fighter for the sake of Allah, about how bearing more children to kill and be killed for Allah’s sake held an even greater reward, that the Prophet (sAaw) will boast about the number of his Ummah and we will have contributed to it. What an honor that would all be.”*

*“Our mothers raising the next. #GenerationKhilafah<sup>149</sup>”*

As shown in the manifesto of the all-female brigade *“The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood”*. It seems almost natural, in such a patriarchal society, that women are supposed to raise children and nurture

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147 Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>, [last accessed 1 July 2015] (Tumblr deleted)

148 “A Speech by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Emir of al-Qaeda in Iraq: “Does the Religion Wane While I Am Still Alive””, 2005.

[https://archive.org/stream/SistersRoleInJihad/78644461-Sister-s-Role-in-Jihad\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/SistersRoleInJihad/78644461-Sister-s-Role-in-Jihad_djvu.txt)

149 @UmmYaqqin, February 19, 2015 (account suspended).

especially when the purpose is to create a state. A state needs a future and the future is the next generation. Peetman said:

*“Some mothers understood their attachments and responsibilities as requiring either the sacrifice of their sons for the state or nation, or the use of violence against other women's sons – or daughters<sup>150</sup>”*

Nevertheless, the “spartan mother” should be seen as more complex than a woman engaged in motherhood. The tradition in implicating women in Jihad is the one of enclosing them in the private sphere. However, with the use the most public way of express ourselves in the modern world, it is questionable that they are only active in the private sphere. It is highly paradoxical when analysing the rules on women under IS which are removing them from the street. The idea spread in the blogs is emphasising women roles in supporting their male relatives and by educating the new generations with the most public tools. Most of the women still stay in the private sphere and act in secondary duties as logistic, medical support, housework and children education.

The loss of their husband is also well reflected in the social accounts of these western female migrants. This death is celebrated as a joyful event or at least a proof of the heroic behaviour of the husband. Indeed, martyrdom is the way to ensure the men a place in heaven according to IS ideology.

*“Oh weak hearted one do not misinterpret this to mean that we want to rid ourselves of our husbands, that we want them dead, rather we want them to truly live, in the everlasting Heavens under the throne of Allah. There is nothing more beloved to us than Shahada, so we wish for our loved ones to attain what is most loved by us, so we encourage them to kill and be killed for the sake of Allah<sup>151</sup>.”*

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150 J.J. Peetman, *Working Women: A Feminist International Politics*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 12. quoted in S. Jacobs and R. Jacobson and J. Marchbank, *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistances*, London and New York, Zed Book, 2000. p. 13.

151 Umm Layth, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>, 28 june 2015, [accessed 1 july 2015]



In this post, Umm Layth argues that she wants her husband to find honour in combat and encourages his heroic behaviour. She admires the fact that he will achieve the greatest honour by killing and being a martyr. *“Nothing beats the palpitation that a Mujahid’s wife has whilst checking list names of the Martyrs<sup>152</sup>”*: by agreeing to the notion of “just” or “holy war” the women take part of the propaganda and the ideology of IS. It is possible to find many similarities with previous conflict and women's roles in these in what is written and emphasised by the bloggers and tweeters. The only difference is that what was before private is not public and encourage recruitment. Grievance is publicly shown but also celebrated. Indeed, it seems to be as rewarding for them than for their husbands. On april 22 2015, it was reported that 15 young western women who joined IS and married IS fighters became widows. The fact that they are widows is usually strongly attached with honour: *“It’s not hard because it’s for the sake of Allah and we are happy to observe it . . . When one husband gets martyred, it’s like a celebration<sup>153</sup>.”* A major topic covered by Umm Abdullatif is the concept of becoming a martyr (a person who is killed in battle): *“I was married to him for 5 weeks. We got married in December and he got Shahada (martyrdom) in January. Alhamdulillah (praise God),”*. Every blogger becoming a widow is usually reporting it to her followers, they mention their love for their husbands: *“My love.. Fi Dunya wa Akhirah insha’Allah □ ”* (Umm Abdullatif (@yallahAlJannah) March 25, 2015) ; but also the fact that they miss their husbands: *“Every day, there’s not a minute i [sic] don’t think of him. He was the perfect husband, alhamdulillah (praise God)”*. Sometimes, the way of the reporting associate the want of joining the dead husband: *“He was a blessing from Allah swt (heart) please make dua (prayers) Allah accepts him and I will join him very soooooon:’)<sup>154</sup>”*. The quote show the will to access to martyrdom and to join their husband in death. Sometimes, the loss of the husband can also be described as

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152 Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/>, [accessed 1 july 2015] (Tumblr deleted)

153 R. Spencer, “Wives of the Islamic State: “When one husband gets martyred, it’s like a celebration”, *JihadWatch*, 28 March 2014, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2015/03/wives-of-the-islamic-state-when-one-husband-gets-martyred-its-like-a-celebration>

154K. Rockett and S. Adamas, British terror twins widowed after 'BOTH husbands killed fighting for Islamic State' in Iraq, *Mirror*, 6 December 2014, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/british-terror-twins-widowed-after-4761655>

something difficult. Umm Jihad said on twitter: he *“died the best of deaths so it's nothing to be upset about, it's just that we're still here, that's the hardest part,”* even if she latter said that women were the happiest when their husbands died in battle. Indeed, beside the fact to miss their loved one, there is also the acknowledgement of the difficulties of being a widow under IS. For example, Umm Ibrahim tweeted on 19 november 2014 *“#nobodycaresaboutthewidow<sup>155</sup>”*. After the death of the husband, the widows *“have to wait four months and 10 days before they're allowed to leave the house, remarry, go shopping etc.,<sup>156</sup>”*. The difficulty of widowhood, which seems to be seen as something logical and expected, has been shown by the return to their country of origin by female migrants. Due to this regularity in widowhood, IS adopted several measures. To avoid to deterring women who would like to join their organisation, IS has shown comfort to the new widows:

*“every (foreign) sister who has been afflicted with the loss of her husband on the battlefield”* should not become disheartened according to Dabiq. *“Be firm, my dear sister, be patient, and await your reward.”*

Women going to Syria for love exist but marriage is most of all a pragmatic issue. The “jihadi bride” is an expression created by western medias: it usually only encompasses the foreign women who left their country to join IS in order to become the wives of IS fighters. In reality, it is more complicated than this: being a wife is part of the process but, even if it can be, is not the final goal of those women. They also use male fighters in a certain way to achieve certain purposes. Indeed, the only way to reach the “Caliphate” is usually marriage. It is necessary for them to travel with a male guardian and, they are strongly encouraged to come promise of marriage by a male fighter and strongly discouraged to come alone and single. As stated before, even if the IS organisation is highly patriarchal, they still need women to reach their goal of the

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155 C. Hoyle and A. Bradford and R. Frenett., p. 27

156 R. Spencer, “Wives of the Islamic State: “When one husband gets martyred, it’s like a celebration”, *JihadWatch*, 28 March 2014, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2015/03/wives-of-the-islamic-state-when-one-husband-gets-martyred-its-like-a-celebration>

creation of a state and a society. Women are indispensable to create a state. Thanks to the blogs and tweets, it seems that the migrants come on their free will. Through their social accounts, those women celebrate their marriage in a romanticised way however love is not superior to anything. Following Jihad comes first: marriage is not always depicted as an easy process but because being a wife is the only role available for women under IS, women still embrace it as a way of finding honour. However, this does not mean that those women do not feel empowered by their duties. Like in the western societies where some women find fulfilment in traditional roles, women under IS do too. What's interesting is that in the image of the beautiful souls: need of protection while here they encourage their husband to fight which is still within this frame but at the same time, by celebrating widowhood and martyrdom, they also, in a way, show that they can live without them.

Nurturer, wives, mothers, widows, those roles can empower women because they are becoming the symbols and the custodians of honour and cultural social religious values. They are the ones who will transmit the ideology to the next generation. They have an important role in IS propaganda and recruitment abroad. IS is an imagined political community: they have conceived their “state” with an image of communion where the notion of brotherhood but also sisterhood are emphasised. Within a state or when there is the will to construct a state there are different demands for men and women. Both are asked for sacrifice for the greater good of the community. For women, this sacrifice is the one of their sons and husbands and their duty is to support their husband and raise their child in the ideology of the group. The way they dress and what they believe is essential in the perpetuation of IS culture. Women can find agency in motherhood, and by being a wife, and because agency usually leads to the claim of more agency, some of these women actually achieved to obtain more important role and to find more agency in those roles.

## **2. IS Female brigades: women embracing patriarchy?**

It is commonly understood and to a certain extent “accepted” that in wars men commit violence against other men but also against civilians, women and children

included. However, women who act in a violent way or who oppress other women still leads to incomprehension. While western female migrants to IS's occupied lands are chocking but acceptable because framed in the terms of actions driven by feeling and, consequently, within the bounds of a patriarchal understanding of femininity, there is little understanding of the female militia of IS.

According to Elshtein, the “spartan mother” is supportive of violence. In *The Warriors*<sup>157</sup>, J.Glenn Gray was reporting that some warriors of the WWII were receiving letters with demands from their wives to kill more enemies as a personal favour for them. Nowadays, IS female blogger are publicly cheering the victories of IS and encouraging them on social media often using emoticon and internet slang. The female IS blogger encourages men to fight but also expresses the wish to fight herself. She is a supporter of the fight and believes in the war engaged which is in complete opposition with the image of the woman peace activist. In the case of female IS bloggers, this idea is strong. Some women are asking for more agency within IS. After the loss of their husband, other women can also make to violent declarations or call to Jihad and violence. Indeed, more and more women claim a stronger right to Jihad. Aqsa Mahmoud known as Umm Layth said to her parents : “*I want to become a martyr*<sup>158</sup>” and in her blog explained that women cannot fight or carry suicide operations but she wishes they could: “*The day will maybe come soon that we could*”. Honour for women can be found in three ways with a growing additional way of expressing the aspiration of being a martyr herself: marry a “just warrior”, becoming the widow of a martyr, and raising future fighters. However, they are well aware that being a warrior is not what is expected from them and few of them made it quite clear in their answers on their Tumblr blogs: “*I will be straight up and blunt with you all, there is absolutely nothing for sisters to participate in Qitall (Fighting)*<sup>159</sup>”. Despite the fact that they are not allowed to participate in Jihad, women have found other ways to express their violence.

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157 J.G. Gray, *The warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, New York, Harcourt, 1959 quoted by Elshtein, p 200.

158A. Shubert, “The women of ISIS: Who are they?”, *CNN*, 29 May 2015

[http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/29/middleeast/who-are-the-women-of-isis/index.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fedition\\_europe+%28RSS%3A+CNNi+-+Europe%29](http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/29/middleeast/who-are-the-women-of-isis/index.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rss%2Fedition_europe+%28RSS%3A+CNNi+-+Europe%29) (accessed 1 June 2015)

159 C. Hoyle and A. Bradford and R. Frenett, p. 32

First, they are exalting the victories of their fighters in a military language. Living in a war territory, they have documenting their lives which is also the attacks from the International Coalition. That is why, if their posting express grief and love, numerous calls to murder western leaders or expression of violence can be found. This is not surprising because, in the past, there is numerous examples of women who, while acting non accordingly to traditional gender roles, have used gender constructions to express their views and pursue their goals<sup>160</sup>. Here, women emphasise their roles as wives, mothers and widows which allow them to make claims of violence. For example, Umm Jihad's posts on Twitter after her husband's death started asking for attacks on the West, or against the U.S. President Barack Obama. It is very interesting that her political claims appeared after the death of her husband, as if her pain was allowing her to claim for revenge and a "non-feminine violence". Umm Layth has encouraged young muslims still in their countries to commit terrorist attacks. Others have said that if joining IS's territory is not possible, women could commit attacks where they are.<sup>161</sup> During the last months, there was an evolution on the view's of women within the Caliphate. Besides, the will of becoming a martyr or the encouragement to fight and to involve in terrorist actions, there has been a change with the creation of all-female brigades within IS.

In February 2014, two female brigade - al-Khans'aa and Umm al-Rayan – were created within IS territory. Their role is not to join men in their violent actions but to perform tasks such as implementing moral policing duties or "*searching those who pass through checkpoints in order to expose men disguised as women to avoid recruitment*"<sup>162</sup>". Based at Raqqa and partly composed by foreign women, its goal is the strict application of the Sharia. The implementing of strict laws and rules has already took place. On december 2014, the Syrian Observatory For Human Rights reveals that a

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160 M. Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security", *Security Dialogue*, vol. 35, no. 4, December 2004, pp.447-463.

161 M. Piggott, "Isis: Jihadi Janes in Syria incite UK Muslim women to violence says ICSR study", *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, 20 January 2015  
<http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/01/isis-jihadi-janes-in-syria-incite-uk-muslim-women-to-violence-says-icsr-study/>

162 E. Veatch, "Women of ISIS: The Role of the Oppressed in Oppressing", *Foreign Policy*, 12 December 2014,  
<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/12/12/women-of-isis-the-role-of-the-oppressed-in-oppressing/>

female members of Al-Hisbah morality police had arrested 15 women in the city on charge of “*not wearing veils*” while it is reported that the responsibility of the all-female brigade<sup>163</sup>, Al-Khans’aa, is getting stronger. It now monitors adherence to dress code and punishes women not respecting the rules reinforcing the patriarchal domination (punishable by lashing). The engagement of women in violence and violent organisations is not a new phenomenon. It seems surprising that women undertake roles in political and religious struggle in the Middle East but, actually, there is examples of previous involvement of women in Jihad. First, Carol Gentry and Laura Sjoberg<sup>164</sup>, shows that women were mandated to make the Jihad in an early islamic sect called the Khariji but also that many women have been involved in fights before Muhammad's death. It is only when veiling and the seclusion of women became the norm that it was less likely to see women join the fight. For ISIS, as for many other jihadist groups, Aafia Siddiqui is a heroine. Also, it is necessary to focus on what happened in other islamist movements. The example of Al- Qaeda reveals that if it used to exclude women from all level of the organisation; After 9/11, they decide use women as jihadi but also as support from the home-front. Women in Al-Qaeda, step by step, began to play a more important role in the organisation. They were al least two female martyr in Al-Qaeda since 2005. A Al-Qaeda leader explained that women could escape from security checks, hide weapons more easily because they attract less suspicion. The use of women by the Islamist group Boko Haram shows that women have been also used because of their assets for terrorist attacks. It is not excluded that IS will follow that example. During the year 2013, there were several examples of the use of women and of their veil to hide weapons by Boko Haram but also the use of men disguised as women to be less suspicious and carry on attacks. There is no evidence of the use of women for that purpose yet in IS, but it is likely to happen as the change of IS about women lead to their active participation. Women have been spotted in new roles far away from the home-front. They were apparently undertaking roles in logistics, intelligence and as medics, according to military and expert sources<sup>165</sup>.

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163 THE IRC, p. 7.

164 C. Gentry and L. Sjoberg, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, New York, Zed Book, 2007, p.114.

165B. Argentieri, “FEATURE-From brides to battlefield, women taking up new roles with Islamic State”, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 2 April 2015,

The raise in the number of women directly involved within the organisation of IS caliphate lead to questioning the motivations and aspirations of those women. It is only possible to make hypothesis on why these women are joining the IS brigades.

The first hypothesis is the one of the survival strategy. The goal in engaging is to earn money. Indeed, in the bloggers and tweeters texts, money is an important reasons of why life under IS is a good one. The hashtag “#OnlyInTheIslamicState” shows some interesting review of the money women can be given when they get married or when they arrive in the IS controlled lands. For the members of the brigade, the salary is apparently of 200 dollars per month which is an important amount for Syria and Iraq<sup>166</sup>. Besides, many women, in Syria and Iraq, are now widows and they found themselves in a situation of financial destitution:

*“Muhaajirat families in Raqqa live in peace and are untouched by hunger, the cold winds or frost. The Caliphate fairly divides money among all the people, migrant and none migrant, so that there is no difference between Arabs and Persians, blacks or whites.”<sup>167</sup>”*

They have to earn women in order to fulfil their duty as mothers. Their possibilities are extremely limited due to IS constraints about women's work.

The second hypothesis is highly connected to the first one. Indeed, the financial situation of women in Iraq and Syria added to the loss of their husbands or male relatives because of the conflicts has lead to an extreme vulnerability. Joining the brigade could be a way of empowering themselves but also to find a safe place. Women

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<http://www.trust.org/item/20150402000135-xwe2l/>

166 E. Veatch, “Women of ISIS: The Role of the Oppressed in Oppressing”, *Foreign Policy*, 12 December 2014,

<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/12/12/women-of-isis-the-role-of-the-oppressed-in-oppressing/>

D. Ghanem-Yazbeck, “Djihadisme : les femmes prennent les armes”, *Les Echos*, 1( September 2014), <http://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/cercle/cercle-108839-djihadisme-les-femmes-prennent-les-armes-1042519.php>

167 al-Khans’aa Brigade ,Women of the Islamic State A manifesto on women, Translation and analysis by Charlie Winter, February 2015, p.37.

<http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>

are at risks because of IS's rise in the Syrian conflict but the attacks against women from the government and other actors is still relevant<sup>168</sup>. It is extremely unsafe for a woman to live in Syria or Iraq. For these women, life is not always easy under IS. The existence of a all female brigade reveals the wish of social safety and absence of contact between the two sex. They have their own installations and are women from all backgrounds and ethnicities. They are trained to carry and use weapons and do not hesitate to punish strongly other women for their misconducts. Usually targeted or oppressed, the only way to survive and live safely in a patriarchal society could be to find agency in the condition of their own subordination and by subordinating themselves other women.

The third hypothesis is a form of empowerment in an anti-feminist view which is possible to find in the manifesto of the brigade. Usually in the position of having to fight for their survival, the idea of being in control and subjugate other women, as it is preferable to hope for the death of other women's sons than to loose your own, could be an alternative of enduring the patriarchal oppression. The Manifesto was released by the all-female al-Khans'aa Brigade's media on 23 January 2015. However, it is important to stay careful while analysing this manifesto which was not written by the IS group and which is sometimes contradictory to its ideology. It is composed of guidelines for jihadi wives directly produced by the militia and divided in four parts: the first one is focusing on women in the Islamic State and what is wrong about the Western civilisation; the second one focus on the life under the Islamic State and the last one is a comparison between life for women living in the Arabian Peninsula and the one for women under the IS group. Presenting the Western model of gender equality, they say: "*The model preferred by infidels in the West failed the minute that women were "liberated" from their cell in the house<sup>169</sup>*". It is a strong claim for the persistence of traditional gender roles but those roles are understood as empowering. There is even a representation of IS rules as rules making women's life easier because it allows women to have a job but because of their other duties it should "*not exceed more than three days a week or should not last long in the day so she does not have to leave her*

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168 M. Shalaby and A. Marnicio, "Report by the Women and Human Rights in the Middle East Program", *Journal of Women and Human Rights in the Middle East*, (Women in Conflict), Issue 3, Winter 2015,

<http://bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/d69eb3d2/WHR-pub-Journal-Issue3-010715.pdf>

169 al-Khans'aa Brigade, p.19.



house for a long time<sup>170</sup>”; But also allow her to be able to perform her mother duties: “She must be given two years maternity leave, at least, to rear and feed the child, and only resume if the child has started to be able to rely on himself for the most important things.<sup>171</sup>” Those proposition underline a form of respect of women's fragility: “not involve more than what she is able to endure, or what is difficult for her to achieve”. The Caliphate is seen as producer of protection but also as producer of freedom. Indeed, the way in which the rule of veiling was re-established by IS is the one of the return of women's honour.

*“Respect for their bodies has returned and has been taken from the eyes of onlookers, with their corrupted hearts. Causes of their humiliation are prevented, revealing dresses were confiscated from shops and scandalous photos were banned from walls and shelves. Muslims, with the permission of God, were cleansed.<sup>172</sup>”*

It also state that a woman can leave her private sphere for Jihad:

*“ Jihad (by appointment) – if the enemy is attacking her country and the men are not enough to protect it and the imams give a fatwa for it, as the blessed women of Iraq and Chechnya did, with great sadness, if the men are absent even they are present<sup>173</sup>. ”*

This is particularly interesting because it, carefully, states that the act of Jihad is accessible to women and, by doing so, reflects their will to have violent role. Indeed, women are forbidden of taking part in Jihad but this reveals that, at least, women from the brigade would be ready to fight if IS's view on the topic would shift. If they are actors of the patriarchal oppression and help to implement it, they are also the masters of their own fate and can gain the perception of being in charge of their daily life. It is probably the only way for them to have power in the IS society. In a segregated society, this position in the brigade offers a form of relief and empowerment. It is possible that the fact to gain some power and responsibilities is appealing for these women.

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170 al-Khans'aa Brigade, p. 27.

171 al-Khans'aa Brigade, p. 27

172 al-Khans'aa Brigade, p.28

173 al-Khans'aa Brigade, p27.



# **Chapter 4: The virtual war on women's image: Western media presentation of women under IS**

The Islamic State almost theatrical performance in denouncing orientalist western troops and exposing their success in the battlefield have lead to a form of paranoia from the West. The Influence of IS extend to more than Syria and Iraq, it has a disproportionately focus toward “foreign fighters” and “foreign women fighters” leaving their own countries in its content but also its target audience. In consequence, western media have obsessively covered IS's actions in a sensationalistic way which is serving well IS's main goal: getting attention and spreading its ideology. Indeed, particularly since June 2014, international media have focused on the Islamic State phenomenon by showing its shocking brutality and its barbaric crimes<sup>174</sup>.

## **I. Joining IS: The “runaway teens” or the “bad mothers”**

After the analysis of the language of IS's propaganda, it seems necessary to analyse the language of the counter-propaganda whose political narratives are selective and sensationalist but also made of false assumptions. The counter-propaganda toward IS's ideology and recruiting of western women has been filled with gender bias even before the group declare the establishment of a Caliphate. Indeed, the idea of an irrational departure has been widely advanced: irrationality which usually strongly

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<sup>174</sup> E. Saltman and C. Winter, “Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism”, Quilliam, November 2014, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/islamic-state-the-changing-face-of-modern-jihadism.pdf>

linked to a feminine behaviour. While, it is not possible to assert that the comportment of all women joining IS were completely rationale, it is surely possible to call for a transversal analysis of the reasons of this departure.

## 1. The teens

In March 29, 2014, a report begin to appear claiming that the Islamic State was recruiting “brides”. The Telegraph reports on ISIS recruiting "brides."<sup>175</sup>The paper says women are being culled from local schools or colleges in occupied towns like Raqqa. In July 2014, NBC used this term in the context of IS recruitment of Western Women<sup>176</sup>. The word has enter the media narrative about IS. If it is true that IS is kidnapping women from minorities to force them into marriage with fighters, soon, the media focused on Western female women. The western “brides” were mentioned using the sobriquet of “Caliphettes<sup>177</sup>”, “pin-ups<sup>178</sup>” or “Teen Poster Babes.<sup>179</sup>”. All these appellations contain a message deeply embedded in gender oppressive structures. They present women as defined by their physical appearance but also tend to delegitimise their actions. For example, “caliphette” is clearly trying to mock at the same time the Islamic State and what is considered, by the media, as a “silly teenage dream” from the Western female migrants. If it is impossible to know all the reasons of why women are living for IS's territory, it is possible to try to give a better explanation than, in the best

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175 R. Spencer, “Syria: the jihadi town where 'brides' are snatched from schools”, *The Telegraph*, 29 March 2014,  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10731665/Syria-the-jihadi-town-where-brides-are-snatched-from-schools.html>

176 C. Vinograd, “Jihadi Brides Swap Lives in West for Front Line With Syria Militants”, NBC News, 25 March 2014  
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iraq-turmoil/jihadi-brides-swap-lives-west-front-line-syria-militants-n150491>

177 J. Dettmer, “The ISIS Online Campaign Luring Western Girls to Jihad”, *The DailyBeast*, 8 June 2014,  
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/06/the-isis-online-campaign-luring-western-girls-to-jihad.html>

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[http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/01/28/comment-nos-filles-deviennent-des-califettes\\_4565061\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/01/28/comment-nos-filles-deviennent-des-califettes_4565061_3232.html)

178 C. Dicker, “Teenage Girls Seduced by the Syrian Jihad?”, *The DailyBeast*, 21 April 2014  
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/21/teenage-girls-seduced-by-the-syrian-jihad.html>

179 R. Luxton, “Meet IS's Tenn Poster Babes”, *Ryot*,  
<http://www.ryot.org/photos-samra-kesinovic-sabina-selimovic-isis-poster-girls-runaways/807773>

case, that they are lured by “*photos of bearded Prince Charmings on Facebook*<sup>180</sup>” or, in the worst case, by kittens and Nutella<sup>181</sup> pictures. The problem with the narrative of the media is its beliefs but also its choice of words. Associating those women with teenage crisis and with easily influenceable individuals does not help to understand what is at stake in the decisions of certain women living for IS's controlled lands. Also, it is fundamental to state considering the frenzy about the stories and narratives about those women that it is not an attempt to justify what IS is trying to present as a model of empowerment for muslim women. It is certain that a in-between can be found amidst presenting an image of female emancipation or an image of a victim and helpless teenager.

## 2. The deviant woman

If they cannot be described as teenagers, women who left for IS's controlled territory are usually associated under a male related status (daughters, sisters, wannabe brides) or with their role as mothers. The medias, by doing so, have provide a really restrictive identity for women. For example, the “*Woman Dumps Her Children*<sup>182</sup>” to join IS or “*Woman abandons children*<sup>183</sup>” were titles chosen to tell the story of women joining IS. However, few of those kind of article are trying to explain why those women would join IS. There is still an assumption that terrorists are men and that women cannot engage or support political or religious violence. As shown by Sjoberg and Gentry, a woman who engages in political violence is doing it outside the boundaries of femininity which is seen as beyond of any understanding. What is presented as shocking

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180 S. Erlanger, “In West, ISIS Finds Women Eager to Enlist”, *New York Times*, 23 October 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/24/world/europe/as-islamists-seek-to-fill-ranks-more-western-women-answer-their-call.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/24/world/europe/as-islamists-seek-to-fill-ranks-more-western-women-answer-their-call.html?_r=0)

181 P. Mosendz, “No, ISIS Doesn’t Use Nutella, Kittens to Lure Female Recruits”, *Newsweek*, 19 February 2015  
<http://www.newsweek.com/no-isis-doesnt-use-nutella-kittens-lure-female-recruits-308080>

182 L. Fogarty, “British Mom Reportedly Dumped Her Children, Joined ISIS”, *Opposing Views*, 1 September 2014 <http://www.opposingviews.com/i/society/british-mom-and-former-rocker-suspected-joining-islamic-state-and-threatening-christians>

183 S. Dredge, “Sydney woman Jasmina Milovanov, who calls herself Assma Abdullah, leaves children to join Islamic State”, *News*, 26 May 2015  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-26/sydney-woman-abandons-children-to-join-islamic-state/6498370>

by the medias is the fact that a woman is supposed to care for her children, a daughter or a sister to be pure and a “beautiful soul”: the women leaving are seen as having flaws in their femininity. They are presented without agency or as distanced from femininity. Those narratives emphasises the fact that their actions are beyond rationality and driven by feelings. Women in terrorism are typically described by media as deviant or women to be rescued. They either have been forced or influenced by males or are portrayed as mothers, monsters or whores. In the case of the teenage girls, they have been said to desire the perfect husband with high level of masculinity (protective and strong). Some of the women joining IS have been depicted as women with a strong desire to nurture the community and care for the community. What is interesting in the narrative of the media is that while one kind of violence is criticised while an other one was made glamour. Indeed, the members and fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have female fighters among them. Before fighting against IS, they have and are still involved in armed conflict with the Turkish troops. They are listed as a terrorist group by the US as well as NATO. However, since they are involved in the fight against IS, diverse stories about them (mostly false) have emerged such as the one of a woman who is said to have kill 100 IS fighters. Usually, the media portray those women as beautiful, brave and describe them as “badass”, “angels” and so on with little attention to their political message. This shows a striking dual discourse about women participation in political conflicts and armed conflicts.

### **3. Deconstructing the myths**

While the common understanding of women is the one of a peaceful individual, the fact that women decide to support IS regimes by taking roles against their “interests” has been questioned in a feminist perspective<sup>184</sup>. It is necessary, to understand the fact that women are joining IS, to acknowledge the political grievances of the sympathisers but also in which way it is political. Our goal is not to valorise the

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184 E. Veatch, “Women of ISIS: The Role of the Oppressed in Oppressing”, *Foreign Policy*, 12 December 2014  
<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/12/12/women-of-isis-the-role-of-the-oppressed-in-oppressing/>

IS empowerment model advertise but to understand what are the motivation of some of those women. Indeed, a common interest cannot be made on the simple basis of the same sex, there is not such thing as “women” as a whole with the same beliefs and goals.

While women are associated with highly sexualised images as “pin-up”, men are not forgotten, they are “Holy warriors” and attracted by a “sexy jihad<sup>185</sup>”. When the “pull” factors are emphasised: be part of the building a “caliphate” or being lured by the social propaganda, it is rare to see analysis of the “push” factors from women's life<sup>186</sup>. Sometimes feeling disempowered in their own country, IS offers a model of agency but also a model of identity and belonging. While it is usually argued that young girls are joining IS because of a teenage crisis and to live a romantic wedding with an IS fighter, it is dangerous to focus on those reasons. IS is a modern phenomenon and it definitely lies on fundamentalist Islam. If it may be true that young men may be lured by the masculine comradeship depicted by IS and women by a housewife life with a warrior, it would be a mistake to remove any political or religious identity from those individuals. IS uses radical interpretation of Islam to justify its action. It could explain why Western female migrants “*tend to be extremely pious and have been ISIS ‘fangirls’ for the duration of the Syrian conflict, active on social media*<sup>187</sup>”. Sometimes, for those women, it does not matter if they would find or not a husband because they believe that leaving their country for IS's territory is a religious duty. Individuals who left for joining IS are not uneducated and some of them actually present a rejection of the media narratives:

*“It really doesn’t affect me when people call me - extremist, fundamentalist, too religious, radical, khawarij, brainwashed etc*

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185 V. Khan and J. Opperman, “Isis: Islamic State's vision of 'sexy jihad' draws foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria”, *International Business Time*, 18 June 2015  
<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-islamic-states-vision-sexy-jihad-draws-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria-1506890>

186 N. Gowrinathan and Z. Mampilly/, “Pushed and pulled: What is the lure for Western women to join ISIS?” *Women Under Siege*, 5 March 2015,  
<http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/pushed-and-pulled-what-is-the-lure-for-western-women-to-join-isis>

187M. Smith, quoted by C. Vinograd, “Jihadi Brides Swap Lives in West for Front Line With Syria Militants”, *NBC News*, 25 March 2014,  
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iraq-turmoil/jihadi-brides-swap-lives-west-front-line-syria-militants-n150491>

In the stories of young girls joining IS, it has been shown that their radicalisation on the Internet was linked to a form of politisation<sup>189</sup> seen as a push factors. For example, a feeling of an international oppression of the muslim community, and the absence of international responses to it, has been noted as a clear push factors for women to join IS. It seems that the media usually associate young individuals with an absence or an incapacity of having political opinions. If this individual is a woman, the absence of political rationality is even worse. It is important to understand that beyond the savvy use of social media by IS and its propaganda, it also created a counter culture which can be very appealing for the youth including young girls. Young muslims can suffer of a sense of alienation on the West characterised by violent debates about their religion as well as a threat to their identity in the society in which they live. Women calling for other women to join IS relies mostly on the identity: the one of sunni muslim women.

*“Sunni women suffered throughout the Crusader-Shiite war when they were abducted and kidnapped, tortured, violated and murdered in many situations. Sunni women were regularly kidnapped from the arms of their parents by militias and were lost for many years (...) women were forced to bear the babies of murderers, all the time being subjected to the worst forms of tortured, mental and physical, at the hands of Shiite militias<sup>190</sup>”.*

Emphasising the persecution of the West on muslim women, their participation in IS is relying on their political, ethnic and religious identities<sup>191</sup>. Sometimes, muslim women can feel rejected for their religious practices when some states stigmatised them by

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188Uumm Layth, 8 MAY 2013, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com/>

189 E. Saltman and M. Smith, “‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’ Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon”, *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2015, p. 21.

190 al-Khans’aa Brigade ,Women of the Islamic State A manifesto on women, Translation and analysis by Charlie Winter, February 2015 <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf> p.29.

191 N. Gowrinathan, The Women of ISIS: Understanding and Combating Female Extremism, *Foreign Affairs*, 21 August 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-08-21/women-isis>



authoritarian policies (ban of the veil or burqa, restriction on religious practices) : *“every other stage of injustice and oppression inflicted upon Muslim women in the name of freedom, humanity and equality.”*<sup>192</sup>. Usually, acts of violence and terrors have been associated to masculinity under IS, it is however interesting to see that the group asked for the liberation of a woman: Aafia Siddiqui. She was captured in 2008 and convicted in 2011. She offers what can be called an alternative to feminism for muslim women. A highly educated woman who decided to refuse the “western feminist” freedoms. She is broadly celebrated by jihadi all over the world. Even if this woman has an unique story, it shows, first, that it is possible for rational and educated women to refuse the Western liberalisation of women, and, second that IS shows a great acceptance for them under its Caliphate. Women can also adhere to the violent ideology of IS. They can enroll by conviction: they sanction other women because they have anti-muslim behaviours according to the ideology to which they adhere. Their presence in IS, which is emphasising an ultra patriarchal ideology, can be questioned. IS is not only a violent armed group, it is also not a religious group only composed of irrational individuals which only aims to target and oppress women. The narrative about its barbaric behaviour leads to ignore and misunderstand women's wishes to participate in its development. Indeed, by the very fact that this brigade exists, women's roles are more than the one of victims under IS. IS is a political group glorifying a certain societal view and this view is shared by many individuals and, among them, there are also women. Women join IS for various reasons: a mix which can include personal reasons driven sometimes by emotions but removing the political is dangerous because they are looking for agency and belonging. To fight the narratives of IS about gender, it is fundamental to go beyond simplistic assumptions about their goals and aspirations.

Since medias have acknowledged the rise of IS, it has been possible to have access to a large amount of gruesome material on the violence in Syria and Iraq provided by IS or by the medias. The pictures and videos provided and publicised by IS have been going quickly viral even to the point where a french website made one of the stories about a young Yezidi girl the first one in the “buzz” section. Pictures and videos

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<sup>192</sup> al-Khans'aa Brigade, Women of the Islamic State A manifesto on women, Translation and analysis by Charlie Winter, February 2015 <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf> p.27.

of violence but also vivid stories can go quickly viral. The non-understanding of Women's violence or wish to join a extremely violent group prevent us to understand women's violence. The pervasiveness of sexual violence and gender-based violence but also the presentation of western female migrants as victims or deviant in the media is worrying because it could contribute to shape a future foreign policy response<sup>193</sup> without understanding the context in which those patterns are spreading.

## **II. Fighting on women's bodies: “Saving muslim women”**

There nothing good or bad about the fact to have access to a constant flow of real time news. It is important to know what is happening in Syria and Iraq and to understand how IS is shaping a gender oppressive “Caliphate” but, the issue is how those information are used. The dichotomy between the “good guys” and “the bad guys” is dangerous for several reasons. First, it disempowers muslim women but also some of the muslim men who are seen as “not “good enough” to protect “their” women. Then, it raise the strength of the Islamic State and introduce false assumptions about its views.

### **1. Disempowering Muslim women**

Sexual violence against women is often fetishized in media. For example, to present the UN Report on sexual violence in conflict, the story of a woman burned alive by IS for not engaging in an “extreme” sex act<sup>194</sup> has been widely used. IS is known for using shocking stories (beheading, crucifixion, torture, rape and mass killings) to get

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193 P. Robinson, “The CNN effect: can the news media drive foreign policy?”, *Review of International Studies*, 25, January 1999, pp. 301–309

194 I. Tharoor, “Islamic State burned a woman alive for not engaging in an ‘extreme’ sex act, U.N. official says”, *The Washington Post*, 22 May 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2015/05/22/islamic-state-burned-a-woman-alive-for-not-engaging-in-an-extreme-sex-act-u-n-official-says/>

recognition but the media, by creating this non-rational and savage identity, fail to understand their violence. Each camp, here the international coalition against IS, tries to present itself as the “good” versus the “evil”, the “good guys” or “diabolised West” (International coalition) versus “the barbaric Islamic State” or “the true muslims” (the IS group). Both groups tend to internationalise the conflict between a “global Jihad” and the “International coalition”. The US State Department has listed 62 countries as part of the “global coalition to degrade and defeat ISIL”<sup>195</sup>.

A large part of the problem of the mediatisation of the violence of IS against women is that by focusing on this violence against women, Western government and medias create a narrative opposing Islam and Muslim men against women and a second narrative showing “us”, the West, as their only protector. On one hand, as showed previously, by removing any political or rational motives in the participation of women in IS's violence, the West is creating an idea of helpless, passive and vulnerable women. On an other hand, the West is presented as the only defender possible because either muslim men are shown as incapable of defending their women either as perpetrators of violence against them. The perception of women as individuals distanced from violence has created the “myth of protection” which posits men as the militarised protectors of women (Tickner 2001). Here, the western governments are taking over this protective role.

While women have a tremendous place in IS discourses and ideology and are often depicted as the victims of imperialists nations, the West has a tendency to give them the same role. In recent comments and discourses from western government officials, the saving of women has been part of the rhetoric. Obama stated: “*They enslave, rape and force women into marriage.*” Obama claimed also that “*In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality*”<sup>196</sup> while Laurent fabius (French Foreign minister) argued “*It is what Arabs call Daech and what I would call the cutthroats of Daech*”<sup>197</sup>. *Daech* is the acronym of IS is arabic but it

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195 J. Drennan, “Who Has Contributed What in the Coalition Against the Islamic State?”, *Foreign Policy*, 12 November 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/12/who-has-contributed-what-in-the-coalition-against-the-islamic-state/>

196 B. Obama, “‘Transcript: President Obama’s Speech on Combating ISIS and Terrorism’, 10 September 2014”, *CNN*, 11 September 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/10/politics/>

is perceived as pejorative because it removes the word “State” from the name. The use of *Daech* is clearly used as a counter propaganda by the opponents of the IS groups. When talking about the propaganda of the group and its narratives, it seems essential to use the name it gave to itself. This does not mean to approve the fact that it is a state or that it is Islam but to avoid falling in an other kind of ideology. Western discourses about Islam, Fundamentalism and Muslim women has created a tool for justifying intervention under the banner of “Saving Muslim women” considered as oppressed. The myth of “saving Muslim women” is dangerous for two reason. First, it associate systematically fundamentalist Islam with the Muslim woman victim while the reasons of the violence against women in that region extent to social and tradition roots. Second, it fails to understand that women cannot be taken as an homogeneous group. Some women do adhere to fundamentalism some are oppressed by it, some women rush into violence, other suffer from it. Now, that IS has gained attention internationally, Muslim women are once again put on the front stage along with the vision of a “barbaric” and “savage” group. A new moral crusade has been created led by the US and followed by many. It is obvious that a widespread violation of women's rights has occurred in Iraq and in Syria however, it has to be noted the rise of IS didn't create but lean on existing degradation of women's rights and freedoms. A lot have been said on the US intervention in Iraq and its use of the banner “saving Muslim women” to justify it. The invasion of Iraq was catastrophic for women, and led to the rise of IS, by its repercussion in the region while the help provided by several countries (US, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) to the Syrian rebels to overthrow Asad's regimes was provided without any distinction between the groups. This contributed to destabilise the region but also ignored the terrible pressure that was put on women by numerous jihadi groups and the regional chaos. The issue with the rhetoric of salvation is that it removes any agency of women and contributes to marginalise them. The politic of the veil is the most visible example. Women are thorn apart between the ones who want to cover them and the other one who want to uncover them. There is no balance and no choice. While when they choose to veil for religious and other reasons and claim autonomy, they are accused to help to oppress their sisters and deny their agency. In the media, it is almost

impossible to defend a muslim identity and beliefs and, at the same time, promote peace<sup>197</sup>. The moral crusade is trying to rescue Muslim women from their own culture without even trying to understand it but is also and always defining women uniquely by their biological sex. This issue with the dichotomy “good” versus “bad”, is that there is no grey area. If IS is oppressing women, the West is obviously freeing them. This idea is highly dangerous because it disempowers women and stigmatise Muslim men while raising the hysteria about IS and its strength.

## 2. Raising the strength of the Islamic State

Numerous stories about the Islamic State have been spread. Many horrific stories were true and moved citizens all over the world. However, it seems that a race to the most horrific and sensational story has begun. While, aid workers during numerous conflicts have been warning about journalist interviewing rape victims without a proper training and photographing them without their consent, myths and misinformation about IS have spread. For example, it has been said that IS fighters are afraid of the female fighters of the PKK and run away when they see them, which is at least exaggerated. However, it gives an image of the IS fighters afraid of what is seen as “strong” women in a desperate attempt to explain their violence against women.

The first widely spread hoax about IS is the one of the existence of a sexual Jihad<sup>198</sup>. In 2013, a tunisian woman was said to have “relived” Islamic fighters and returned pregnant while taking part of a so called sexual jihad. It was said that girls could be “[sexually] swapped between 20, 30, and 100 rebels” but also that they ““were fooled” into traveling to Syria to offer their sexual services to rebels fighters”<sup>199</sup>. The language here is very important. Those women were depicted as

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197 J. Rich, ““Saving” Muslim Women: Feminism, U.S Policy and the War on Terror”, *International Affairs Review*, Fall 2014

[http://www.usfca.edu/International\\_Studies/international\\_affairs\\_review/fall2014/articles/Saving\\_Muslim\\_Women/](http://www.usfca.edu/International_Studies/international_affairs_review/fall2014/articles/Saving_Muslim_Women/)

198 ““Sexual jihad”: Tunisian women go to Syria to “relieve” holy warriors, return pregnant”, *RT*, 20 September 2013, <http://rt.com/news/sexual-jihad-tunisia-syria-133/>

199 ““Sexual jihad’: Tunisian women go to Syria to ‘relieve’ holy warriors, return pregnant”, *RT*, 20

influenceable but also, by using, the word “fool” that it was sexual abuses from IS fighters. The idea was the delegitimate Islamic groups to avoid any popular support toward them by showing that they were dishonouring Tunisian women. This term of “sexual jihad” was used again, in 2014, by the BBC<sup>200</sup> but, this time, about IS. The problem with the accusation of “sexual Jihad” is that it can exist a misunderstanding in the terms. For example, a woman who migrates to IS's territory will marry a fighter but this cannot be considered as a sexual Jihad but as a simple marriage. Besides, numerous confusions occurred while talking about rapes and sexual Jihad. The term is only encompassing women who choose to have sexual intercourse with IS fighters. At the time of writing, there is no proves of any “sexual jihad” within IS's territory. The second hoax is about the excision of women spread greatly to and was even mentioned by the UN representative for Humanitarian question in Iraq, Jacqueline Badcock<sup>201</sup>. The allege IS fatwa made the headlines before the truth was revealed.

These hoax aim at reinforcing the bad image of IS by its opponents but also which shows the issue with the diffusion real time news. It seems that the Media and even UN official are sometimes to prompt to denounce or to have a vivid story about the “barbaric” violence of IS. This should not won over the verification of the sources and should not make to media succumb to their own representation of IS. Moreover, this reinforce the strength of the organisation IS by giving them reason in their denunciation of a campaign to discredit their “caliphate”. IS is already using discourse in *Dabiq* to underline dual discourses from the West and everything that it judges as untrue. Spreading rumours to support a “shaming” strategy will only support IS narratives. Another concern is the fact that it could create doubts on proved crimes committed against women. Finally, it contributes to IS’s reputation which is first, already well-know and, second, a reality which is already pushing women and refugees outside of their countries.

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September 2013, <http://rt.com/news/sexual-jihad-tunisia-syria-133/>  
200 “Tunisia's 'sexual jihad' - extremist fatwa or propaganda?”, *BBC News*, 27 October 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24448933>  
201 L. Bushak, “Female Genital Mutilation Still Exists, And It Might Be Happening In Iraq, UN Says”, *Medical Daily*, 24 July 2014, <http://www.medicaldaily.com/female-genital-mutilation-still-exists-and-it-might-be-happening-iraq-un-says-294810>

To conclude, the frenzy broadcasting about women's suffering under IS's rules has a lot of downsides. Even if, it is important to talk about it, it should be more important to be careful with the way it is talked about. While it is true that the crimes committed by this fundamentalist group are horrific, the “barbaric” label put on those crimes, and specifically on crimes against women, by western governments is undermining the various causes of violence and more specifically preventing us to understand the deep roots of a systematic targeting of women. Aphorisms about terrorists groups violence or why women engage in violence are appealing but by spreading false rumours or false assumptions about their thinking and the reasons of their engagement, the West is failing to understand their violence which is definitely not missing of rationality.

# Conclusion

*“We are passive consumers of the pornography of violence”<sup>202</sup>”*

As the violence against women by the organisation Islamic State doesn't seem to have any kind of limits, the purpose of this thesis was to find an understanding in what is always presented as incomprehensible and “savage”. Stating that the widespread violence against women is irrational or the acts of disturbed people is the first step to future failed policy towards the countries.

The first chapter aims to present an historical background to fundamentalism and to demonstrate that IS is not exceptional. In fundamentalism, women's rights have been undermined by the recent, but powerful, groups. The obsession with women's bodies and sexuality has always been a major feature of fundamentalist groups. Islamist groups did not depart from the rule and have applied strict application of the Shari'a but also, spread false interpretation of the Qur'an. This analysis of the way in which islamist use the Qur'an as a tool to defend their ideology intends to prove that islamist group are not only the sons of religion but also arose from specific cultural and political contexts.

Chapter 2 focused on giving the tool to understand the specific targeting of women by IS. Lying on patriarchal societies and making a savvy use of mass communication and social media, IS has implemented an hyper-masculinised caliphate with strict gender oppressive rules. IS reposed on traditional and rigorous ideas of masculinity and femininity. By analysing *Dabiq* and *Dar Al Sham*, under the term of “hypermasculinity” coined by Nandy, it has been determined that IS reposes its religious and cultural views on women's and men's bodies following a severe patriarchal line. The short but necessary description of IS policies in Iraq and Syria which follows allows to understand its determination to control every aspects of women's life from appearance to their presence in the society.

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202 W. Self, “We are passive consumers of the pornography of violence”, *The Guardian*, 23 december 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/23/-sp-passive-consumers-pornography-violence>



The third chapter focussed on analysing the different roles that women can pretend to have under IS rules from the lowest level to the highest. The chapter is governing by the notion of agency and demonstrates the possibility for women to find agency or to resist IS's patriarchal society. It states that agency can be found in survival even if at the lowest degree and, by doing so, shows that agency is not a manichean concept but is filled with gray areas.

Chapter 4 criticises the narratives and false assumptions publicised by the media but also, sometimes, by Western governments. It tends to deconstruct ascribed roles for women joining the armed group by offering them the agency and rationality they are often denied. Moreover, it tries to explain the danger of such narratives for the creation of Foreign Policy responses but also, the danger of stigmatising the group making it more appealing for some followers.

In armed conflicts, both masculinity and femininity are instrumentalised. Beyond the idea of the powerlessness of victimhood, women have suffered but also fight for survival, encourage violence and support their family. Applying a gender lens on the analysis of a conflict is not only talking about women. Men can also feel vulnerable through the vulnerability of women but also, feel threatened by women. Understanding the cause of the violence in a conflict is fundamental to reach comprehensive solutions. Indeed, without knowing the patriarchal societies in which it occurs, there is a risk of failing to understand the needs of the victims and the reasons of the perpetrators. The answer is not to impose norms on the societies but to find the solution within the cultures. Indeed, the way we understand things shapes the solutions, we will have to offer. In the recent discourses and newspapers articles, few have five other presentations than IS as illegitimate, horrifically violent and irrational actor. This imposed vision is often part of the counter-propaganda. The frenzy in the media, that began with the apparition of foreign fighters or western female migrants, has hidden the deeper causes of the apparition of IS but also, enclosed all women involved in a narrative made of the dichotomy victim / monster.

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