

## Muslim Women in the Digital Magazines of Daesh and Al Qaeda: Gender Narrative and Educational Implications

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**Abstract:** Insofar as terrorism is usually associated with men, the phenomenon of Muslim women joining groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda and that the fact they are usually recruited on the Internet have aroused much interest. Accordingly, a qualitative content analysis was performed on articles written for Muslim women appearing in the official magazines of both groups, with a view to examining the gender narrative employed by them as a decisive factor in fostering female radicalisation. Both groups clearly advocate for gender inequality, giving Muslim women the traditional and by no means passive, roles of mothers and wives. Daesh, above all, promotes very strict social gender stereotypes and rules, justifying them on the basis of its interpretation of the Islamic sacred texts. In the content published in the magazines of both groups there are three factors that may go a long way to engaging Muslim women: a feeling of sisterhood and belonging; their religious duty to construct an Islamic 'state' and a sense of empowerment that makes them feel that their role is essential to the survival of such groups.

## INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism is currently a universal challenge that is not restricted to a specific religion, race or ideology<sup>[1]</sup>. In the case of Islam, its use for violent purposes has become one of the chief concerns and threats to global peace<sup>[2]</sup>.

Daesh and Al Qaeda are the two groups that have had the greatest repercussions in the West<sup>[3]</sup>. The latter, led by Osama Bin Laden and whose origins date back to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, became a benchmark for global terrorism following the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001<sup>[4]</sup>. Subsequently, the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the most acerbic critic of Bin

Laden, established a branch of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which would subsequently become the group Daesh<sup>[5]</sup>.

Both groups share ideological aspects but differ in the strategies that they have implemented. For Daesh, the creation of a state governed by Sharia law (the law of Allah) is one of its primary objectives while for Al Qaeda it is secondary, the priority being to attack the United States and its allies<sup>[6]</sup>.

Notwithstanding, the fact that the number of terrorist attacks carried out in the West has dropped in the past few years, coinciding with the fall of Daesh's self-proclaimed 'Caliphate', there are some who assert that the group and its ideology still pose a serious threat<sup>[7]</sup>.

Moreover, Europe is currently facing a new complex challenge: the returnees<sup>[8]</sup>. Of particular concern are the children born in the 'Caliphate' and their mothers<sup>[9]</sup>. To this should be added Al Qaeda's predicted return as a 'moderate' alternative to Daesh<sup>[10]</sup>.

The Internet, a tool used by both Daesh, to compensate for the loss of the physical 'Caliphate'<sup>[11]</sup> and Al Qaeda, in its so-called 'electronic jihad'<sup>[12]</sup> has gained unprecedented educational importance. Considering that the radicalisation process does not obligatorily require physical contact<sup>[13]</sup>, digital propaganda plays a fundamental educational role<sup>[14]</sup>, contributing especially to the recruitment of women<sup>[15]</sup>.

Studies of Islamic-inspired terrorism have traditionally focused on men, owing to the wrong belief that women have always assumed passive roles<sup>[16]</sup>. Indeed, the participation of women in terrorist groups is not new, although, it continues to generate great confusion<sup>[17]</sup>. Concern about the online radicalisation of women rose after the Roshonara Choudhry case, the first British woman to be condemned for a terrorist attack, after she had been radicalised by the well-known Al Qaeda preacher Anwar Al Awlaki<sup>[13]</sup>.

Female radicalisation has recently become a hugely interesting phenomenon<sup>[18]</sup>, owing chiefly to the considerable number of young female Muslims who have made hijra (migration) from the West to Syria in order to join Daesh<sup>[19]</sup>. This issue, according to researchers like De Leede *et al.*<sup>[20]</sup> has surprised specialists in the field considering the group's openly misogynous discourse.

It has been demonstrated that the radicalisation of men and women follow different patterns<sup>[21]</sup>. In their analysis of Islamic extremist websites in Indonesia, as they themselves classify them, Johnston *et al.*<sup>[22]</sup> have pointed to the use of a different language to recruit men and women, thus, clearly fostering gender inequality.

After analysing the social networking sites used by Western female recruits, Loken and Zelenz<sup>[23]</sup> have concluded that they are basically attracted by a religious ideology with very strict gender rules. Both Daesh and Al Qaeda understand that men and women have different roles, whose complementarity is essential to the stability of their projects<sup>[24]</sup>. Women are considered to be fundamental pillars for their survival, insofar as they are tasked with educating and socialising future generations<sup>[9]</sup>.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation<sup>[21]</sup> establish two reasons why women feel attracted by the ideology of these groups: pull factors (ethnic-religious discrimination, identity conflicts, the feeling that the

Muslim community is being persecuted and attacked and the religious duty to construct an Islamic 'state', among others) and push factors (feelings of sisterhood and belonging and the desire for romance and adventure, among others).

Some authors hold that the women who join these groups are tricked into doing so with the romantic promise of marrying a Mujahid, suggesting that, if only they reasoned correctly, they would refrain from doing so<sup>[23]</sup>. According to Windsor<sup>[16]</sup>, they are mainly young women who are not fully aware of the sort of life that they will expected to lead once they have established themselves in the territory controlled by Daesh. For their part, Pearson and Winterbotham<sup>[25]</sup> claim that women would steer clear of these groups if they really knew the social role and reality awaiting them, a result of their rigid interpretation of Sharia law. Nonetheless, Emily and Fellow<sup>[26]</sup> consider that, as with men, they are motivated by the notion that they are participating in a common cause in which their role is both essential and indispensable. Furthermore, Nuraniyah<sup>[15]</sup> alleges that most women join willingly since they feel accepted and empowered by these groups.

Research has been conducted on how Daesh and Al Qaeda employ their propaganda magazines to radicalise Muslims living in the West. Be that as it may, few studies performed to date have focused on analysing articles specifically aimed at Muslim women, an exception to the rule being the research conducted by Musial, albeit solely focusing on Daesh's magazine Dabiq. Thus, the intention of this study is to fill the research gap in this regard. Specifically, it focuses on analysing the gender narrative employed in those articles aimed at Muslim women appearing in the digital magazines of Daesh and Al Qaeda. This allows for determining the factors that may encourage these women to join both groups and for gaining a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon<sup>[27]</sup>.

Considering the particular message conveyed by these groups to address and, consequently, to engage Muslim women, different studies have advocated for including a gender perspective in the preventive strategies to be adopted<sup>[22]</sup>. However, some authors have maintained that the incorporation of a gender perspective in the majority of preventive strategies limits the role of Muslim women exclusively to that of mothers, thus contributing to perpetuate gender stereotypes<sup>[28]</sup>. Muslim mothers have become the target of diverse preventive socio-educational strategies<sup>[29]</sup>. Due to the belief that they are in an ideal position to detect early signs of radicalisation in their children<sup>[30]</sup>, initiatives like that of the international organisation Women without Borders are aimed at 'empowering' mothers as key agents in the prevention of

violent extremism. Nevertheless, further empirical evidence supporting these strategies is still required<sup>[31]</sup>. Some of the critics of this initiative believe that women are placed in a situation in which they are obliged to give precedence to state security over their family lives, as well as considering them to be responsible, in some way, for their children's radicalisation<sup>[32]</sup>.

Including a gender perspective in preventive strategies is not a trivial matter. In this respect, it should be stressed that many Muslim women do not identify with what they regard as a hegemonic Western-centric and colonising<sup>[33]</sup> feminism, reckoned as the only possible means of women's emancipation<sup>[34]</sup>. It is in this context in which the so-called 'Islamic' feminism, emerging at the end of the 1990s with the aim of showing, on the strength of Islamic sources, that Islam promotes gender equality<sup>[35]</sup>, has become particularly important. Those defending this stance consider that discrimination against Muslim women is primarily grounded in the following: the patriarchal culture and traditions prevailing in many countries in which the majority of the population is Muslim<sup>[36]</sup>; the patriarchal context in which the Qur'an was revealed and the exegesis performed above all by men<sup>[37]</sup>.

The role of formal education as a medium-and long-term preventive strategy has been highlighted in several studies<sup>[38]</sup>. The UNESCO has advocated for multidimensional educational strategies in which the accent is placed on cultural and digital literacy through the creation of counter-narratives<sup>[39]</sup>. A good example of this is the magazine *Haqiqah* with the participation of several Islamic scholars, whose aim is to counter the messages conveyed in Daesh's magazine *Dabiq*. Researchers like Schmid<sup>[31]</sup> stress the need to involve second-and third-generation Muslims who have knowledge of both their countries of origin and residence, in these strategies. This would allow them to create narratives that contribute to counter the argument that Islam and the West are incompatible. In short, there is a need for educational approaches that press for intervention before the outbreak of violence<sup>[40]</sup>.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objects of analysis were the official digital magazines of Daesh and Al Qaeda. The focus was placed on these two groups owing to the fact that they have had the greatest impact on the West<sup>[3]</sup> and on their digital magazines since women are generally recruited on the internet<sup>[19]</sup>.

**Inspire:** An English-language magazine published by Al Qaeda's media foundation on the Arabian Peninsula

(AQAA) between 2010 and 2017 with a total of 17 numbers. By and large, all the numbers include the following sections: prologue; interviews with religious leaders like Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al-Awlaki; biographies of Mujahideen (combatants in the violent jihad); operations carried out by the group; 'Hear the world', a section setting out the arguments deployed by the group's enemies and 'Open source jihad', the magazine's last section in which step-by-step instructions are provided for carrying out attacks.

**Dabiq:** The title of the digital magazine distributed by Daesh through the media channel Al-Hayat Media Center, its 15 numbers with an average of 61 pages per number, were published between 2014 and 2016.

**Rumiyah:** The magazine substituting *Dabiq*, with a total of 13 numbers and an average of 45 pages per number, was published from 2016-2017.

An analysis was performed on the articles appearing in the 45 numbers published by the three magazines. The articles were selected following two criteria: articles written for Muslim women and articles in which women are specifically mentioned (Table 1).

Daesh's two magazines have a format very similar to that of *Inspire*, with sections including a prologue, interviews with religious leaders and Mujahideen, operations launched by the group and the reaction of its enemies. However, they have a much neater and more professional layout than *Inspire*. The articles analysed here are listed below in Table 1.

This study employed the qualitative content analysis technique, which has been widely used in propaganda studies because it allows for a better understanding of the message<sup>[41]</sup>. To create the analytical dimensions and categories, thematic criterion following the phases proposed by Miles and Huberman<sup>[42]</sup> was employed:

**Pre-analysis:** An exhaustive review was performed on the literature dealing with the object of study. Subsequently and following Oleinik *et al.*<sup>[43]</sup>, three coders read the aforementioned articles several times with an eye to becoming familiar with their content.

**Elaboration of dimensions and categories:** Each coder produced a rough draft of a dimension and category system based on thematic criteria and an inductive process deriving from the reading of the articles analysed here. The three coders then designed a consensual final system based on the criteria of clarity (the extent to which each category was established clearly and precisely) and relevance (the correspondence between the category and

Table 1: Articles aimed at women and/or specifically referring to them

Magazine	Year	No.	Title
Inspire (I)	2011	4	Roshonara and Taimour: followers of the borderless loyalty
	2013	10a	Women of the glorious ummah
		10b	My wish: if only I was a mujahid
Dabiq (D)	2014	12	Mujahidah, wife of a mujahid
	2015	13	My little boy
	2015	7	A brief interview with Umm Basir Al-Muhajirah
		8	The twin halves of the muhajirin
		9	Slaves-girls or prostitutes?
		10	They are not lawful spouses for one another
		11	A jihad without fighting
		12	Two, three, or four
		13	Advice on ihdād
		15	The fitrah of mankind and the near-extinction of the western woman
Rumiyah (R)	2016	1	O women, give charity
		2	Stories of steadfastness from the lives of the sahabiyyat
		3	Abide in your homes
	2017	4	Marrying widows in an established Sunnah
		5	I will outnumber the others nations through you
		6	Wala and bara, O women
		7	The flesh of your spouse is poisonous
		8	Zuhd in the dunya is the way of the salaf
		9	The woman is a shepherd in her husband's home
		10	Be a supporter, not a desmoralizer
		11	Our journey to Allah
		12	The female slaves of Allah in the houses of Allah
		13	The hijrah of Umm Salaym Al-Muhajirah

Own elaboration

Table 2: Analytical dimensions and categories

Dimension	Definition	Category	Definition
Generic data	Identifying aspects of the articles	Author's sex	Sex of the person signing the article
Theological character	References to sacred texts or religious personalities	Women's section	Inclusion in some or other specific section aimed at Muslim women
		Qur'an	Inclusion of some or other quote from the Qur'an
		Sunnah	Inclusion of some or other quote from the Sunnah
Feelings of sisterhood and/or belonging	Expressions that foster a feeling of Muslim community, in general and sisterhood, in particular	Wives of the Prophet	Allusions to the 'Mothers of the Believers', as the female role models that should be followed
		References to the Ummah	As a global community of Muslim believers, Allusions to Muslim sisterhood, References to women as sisters
Characteristics attributed to Muslim women	Personality traits attributed to Muslim women	Brave	Ready to face and endure danger or pain courageously
		Fragile	Not strong or sturdy; delicate and vulnerable
		Patient	Able to accept or tolerate delays, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious
		Combatant	A person engaged in fighting during a war
		Firm	Showing resolute determination and strength of character
		Chaste	The estate or practice of refraining from extramarital, or especially from all, sexual intercourse
		Modest	Behaviour, manner or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency
		Obedient	Compliance with an order, request or law, or submission to another's authority
		Ambitious	Having or showing a strong desire and determination to succeed
		Faithful to her husband	Never having a sexual relationship with anyone else
		Jealous of her husband	Feeling or showing a resentful suspicion that one's partner is attracted to or involved with someone else
		Submissive to her husband	Ready to submit to the authority or will of others; meekly obedient or passive
		Extravagant	Lacking restraint in spending money or using resources
Traditional roles given to Muslim women	Roles given to women as mothers and wives	Gossipy	A person who likes talking about other people's private lives
		Family support	Women's emotional support for their husbands and children
		Reproductive	Mothers of the next generation of Mujahideen
		Educational	Their role in educating their children
		Polygamy	Practice of taking more than one wife
		Ihdād	Period of mourning after the death of a husband or divorce
		Saby	Capturing and enslaving women in times of war
		Fitrah	Belief that new-born children have the predisposition to worship one God
Rules of the 'Caliphate'	Behaviour expected of Muslim women based on the interpretation of Sharia law	Abiding at home	Abiding at home as a predetermined rule and the rules when going out

Own elaboration; The definition of the characteristics attributed to Muslim women have been retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3aWjL5K>

the dimension in which it was introduced). Following this, inter-rater reliability was measured using Krippendorff's alpha-since it can be applied to any number of coders<sup>[44]</sup> with the KALPHA macro for SPSS v.26 whose results confirmed an optimum inter-rater reliability for criteria clarity  $\alpha = 1$  and relevance ( $\alpha > 0.8$ , according to Krippendorff<sup>[45]</sup>). A total of six dimensions and 29 thematic categories were established (Table 2).

**Article coding:** The coders then performed a content analysis on the articles selected using the Atlas.ti v. 7.5 software package.

## RESULTS

**General data:** Al Qaeda's magazine only devotes five articles to Muslim women while Daesh's two official magazines include quite a few more, 21 to be exact.

Only one of the articles appearing in Al Qaeda's magazine is included in a section called 'sister's corner' (I. 12). Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the other articles are also aimed at women because, unlike the rest of the magazine's content, they contain stereotyped images and colours associated with them, such as the domestic setting and tones of pink, respectively. While in Daesh's magazines, 81% of the articles destined for women are included in a section called 'to/from our sisters'.

As to the authorship of the articles, 80% of those published in Al Qaeda's Inspire are signed by women (Umm Yahya, Taiel Haya and a woman who signs herself as 'your dear mum') and 20% by men (Muhammad al-Sanaani). As regards the articles appearing in Daesh's Dabiq and Rumiya, only 33% are signed by women (Umm Basir, Umm Sulaym and Umm Sumayyah, followed by the epithet 'Al-Muhajirah' which means 'migrant woman').

**Theological character of the articles:** More than half of the articles appearing in Al Qaeda's and Daesh's magazines contain Qur'anic passages (60 and 90%, respectively). With respect to the Sunnah (the teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, comprising the second most important source of Islam) while Al Qaeda's articles do not include any passages from this body of literature, they appear in 90% of those published in Daesh's magazines.

Another indicator employed to analyse the theological character of the articles are the references to the wives of the Prophet, called 'Mothers of the Believers'. They are referred to in 40 and 90% of the articles appearing in Al Qaeda's and Daesh's magazines, respectively.

The aim of both groups is to prescribe how Muslim women should behave at all times, presenting female characters like Khadija bint Khuwaylid and Aisha (both wives of the Prophet Muhammad), among others, as role models. This is illustrated in the following quotes in which it can be seen that in Daesh's magazines Muslim women are urged to raise funds for the violent jihad while in Al Qaeda's stress is placed on the important role that they play in supporting their husbands in this struggle:

If this was the condition of the Mothers of the Believers and the women of the Companions regarding charity and spending for Allah's cause-and they are who they are-then is it not more appropriate for those Muslim women who are less than them [...] to make preparations for the everlasting life while they are able and living? (R.1).

If she happens to hear the sound of bombs and missiles or about the imprisonment of some of the Mujahideen friends of her husband, she should support and encourage him. She should never abandon him in this moment of need. Jadiya, the wife of the Prophet, tried to calm and reassure him (I. 12).

**Feeling of belonging/sisterhood:** In all of the articles analysed, both Daesh and Al Qaeda refer to the Ummah (the universal Muslim community), with the intention of reflecting the strong sense of fellowship and unity characterising the religion:

They pretend to forget that they have another family, different from their real family who are also their real sisters [...]. Our daily life is nothing compared with the anguish and pain of our sisters in Palestine, Burma, Sudan, Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan (I. 10a).

Al Qaeda refers to the repression suffered by its Muslim sisters in the Arab world: 'O sister, how can you sleep and live in luxury while your sisters are suffering these tragedies' (I. 10a), whereas Daesh refers to its sisters in the 'Caliphate': 'Here, I whisper into the ear of each muhajirah sister who has suffered the loss of her husband on the battlefield here in the state of honour: be steadfast, my dear sister, be patient and wait for your reward' (D. 8).

Both groups employ expressions like 'my dear Muslim sister' and 'my dear sister in Islam' in their articles, arguments that foster a feeling of sisterhood and belonging among Muslim women. In their magazines, both Al Qaeda and Daesh use expressions of this type to a similar degree (40 and 48%, respectively).

**Characteristics attributed to Muslim women:** Al Qaeda and Daesh concur that Muslim women should be steadfast and patient in the face of adversity (Fig. 1 and 2). Unlike Daesh, Al Qaeda portrays them as brave women, for instance when praising the terrorist attack carried out by

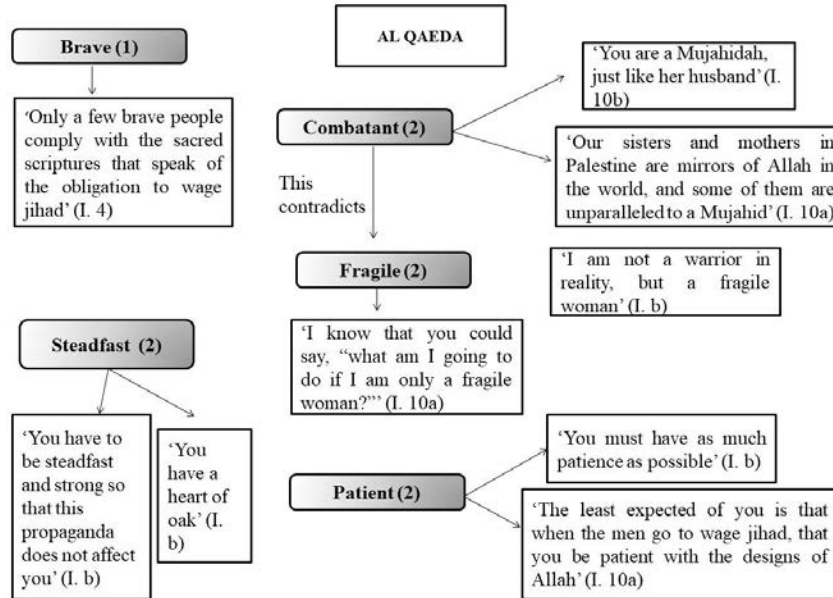


Fig. 1: Characteristics attributed to Muslim women in Inspire (Al Qaeda). Own elaboration, drawing from Inspire

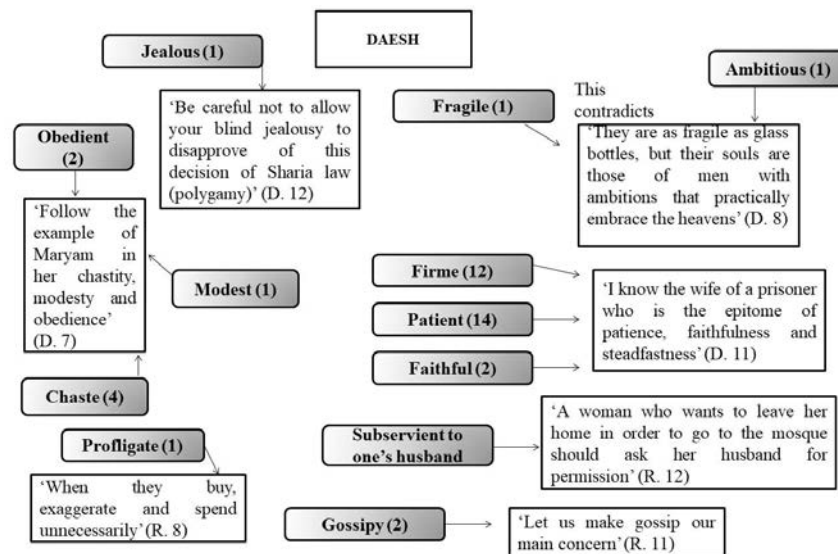


Fig. 2: Characteristics attributed to Muslim women in Dabiq and Rumiya (Daesh). Own elaboration, drawing from Dabiq and Rumiya

the British woman Roshonara Choudhry. The group even goes so far as to compel men to follow their example: 'For the men of the Ummah: follow the example of this woman and you will be successful in life' (I. 4). Moreover, for Al Qaeda they are 'Mujahidah' (combatants) in two of the articles published in Inspire (I. 10a; I. 10b), although paradoxically they are also depicted as fragile at the same time. In contrast to Al Qaeda, Daesh transmits the idea that Muslim women

should be chaste, modest, obedient, faithful and subservient. By the same token, the group criticises jealous, profligate and gossipy women. Although, as with Al Qaeda, the group regards them as fragile and paints them as ambitious (Fig. 2):

**Traditional gender roles assigned to Muslim women:**  
For Daesh and Al Qaeda, ‘women are the essence of our Ummah [...]. If it were not for you, we would not be

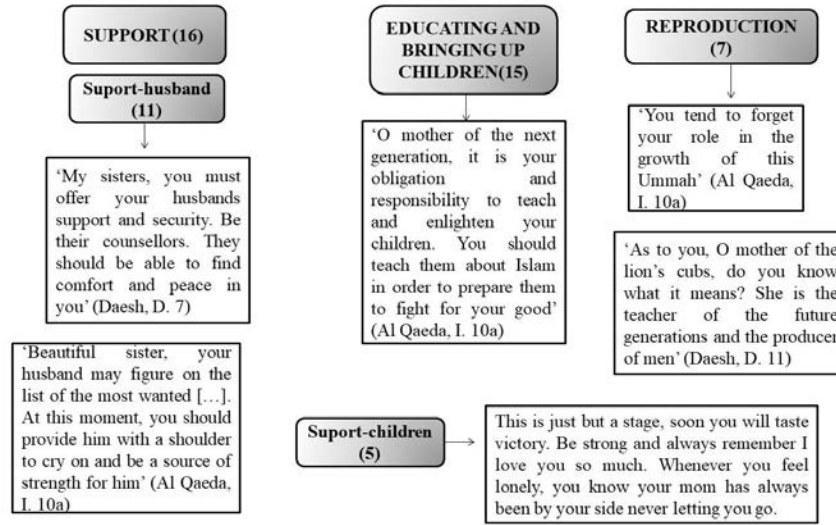


Fig. 3: Traditional gender roles assigned to Muslim women by Daesh and Al Qaeda. Own elaboration, drawing from Inspire, Dabiq and Rumiya

anything and there would be no future for our children' (I. 10a) and 'they bear the weight of religion and the Ummah on their shoulders' (R. 2).

Both groups reserve a traditional role for women as mothers and wives. Al Qaeda refers to women as the 'mothers of the next generation of Mujahideen' in 60% of its articles while in Daesh's there are slightly more references of this kind (76%). Curiously enough, Al Qaeda refers to them as 'the wives of Mujahideen' in 40% of its articles whereas Daesh does so in 90%.

Both groups concur that women should play three basic roles: supporting the family, i.e., their husbands and children bearing children with a view to increasing and strengthening the Ummah and bringing up and educating their children (Fig. 3).

**Rules of the caliphate:** This dimension is only addressed in the articles appearing in Daesh's Dabiq and Rumiya. As to the construction of the caliphate, the group refers to the religious obligation that both men and women have to make hijra from the land of the infidels to that governed by Sharia law (D. 8; R. 13). The group systematically resorts to the discourse of 'us (Muslims living in a territory governed by the law of Allah) versus them (Westerners living in a territory governed by laws created by men)'. Specifically, it claims, 'In Europe they prohibited what He [Allah] permitted and permitted what He prohibited' (D. 12).

**Polygamy:** Polygamy is one of the issues that, according to Daesh, Allah allows and is prohibited in Europe for the alleged purpose of defending women and human rights.

In the group's view, this message has reached many Muslims through the secular media. It contends that polygamy is a Mubah prophetic Sunnah (any permissible but not obligatory action) that is very beneficial for the Ummah (R. 11), Islam being the religion that established the maximum number of wives (four) that a man can lawfully take, a rule that does not exist in Christianity or Judaism.

Daesh lists the benefits of this rule for women, envisaged in Sharia law (D. 12): insofar as they are more numerous than men, they face many dangers and difficulties in life; young men prefer virgins and abstain from marrying widows or divorcees; if Allah punishes women by making them barren, Islam allows men to marry other women, provided that they honour their barren wives and given their nature, at some time in their lives women cannot satisfy the marital rights of their husbands, as is the case with menstruation, childbirth and postpartum bleeding.

**Ihdād (mourning):** Quoting a large number of Hadiths, Daesh sets out the strict rules that widows of shuhada (martyrs) should obey in the lands of the caliphate during the period of mourning (4 months and 10 days), including the following (D. 12): they cannot wear anything that adorns them (jewellery, perfume, etc.); if they need to go out, they have to return before sunset; they can only meet occasionally to learn about Islam, pray or maintain family ties and no man can ask for their hand in marriage.

According to Daesh, Allah allows women to remarry other men after the death of their husbands: 'whoever slanders a woman who has married another man after her

husband has died or has been murdered, should be careful when opposing something that Allah has legislated and allowed for his slaves' (R. 4). The group then goes on to explain that only the wives of the Prophet were prohibited from remarrying other men, criticising women who are against the remarriage of widows and offering the example of the daughters and granddaughters of the Prophet, some of whom married three times.

**Saby:** This practice refers to the capture and enslavement of women in times of war. Daesh holds that it is a great prophetic Sunnah that has many religious benefits and even refers to the life of the Prophet who according to the group, took women as slaves and concubines:

Today they say no to saby while some slave-girls in our State are now pregnant and some of them have even been set free for Allah's sake and got married in the courts of the Islamic State after becoming Muslims and practicing Islam well. Our father Ibrāhīm took Hājar as a concubine and she bore him Ismā'il and our Prophet took Māriyah as a concubine and she bore him a son whom he named Ibrāhīm (D. 9).

Likewise, Daesh criticises the media that have recently published falsehoods about the enslavement of Yezidi women (an ethnic minority persecuted by Daesh), arguing that Islam, a religion that the infidels consider to be barbaric, commands that even slaves should be treated kindly. Something that is conspicuous by its absence in the West as regards prostitution:

Are slave-girls whom we took by Allah's command better, or prostitutes-an evil you do not denounce-who are grabbed by quasi men in the lands of kufr where you live? A prostitute in your lands comes and goes, openly committing sin. [...] As for the slave-girl that was taken by the swords of men following the cheerful warrior Muhammad, then her enslavement is in opposition to human rights and copulation with her is rape? (D. 9).

**Fitrah:** This refers to the belief that new-born children have the predisposition to worship one God. The 'us versus them' narrative yet again crops up in Daesh's discourse, decrying what it calls 'Western modernism', governed by philosophies such as sodomy and feminism, which for them are 'at war' with the fitrah:

The role of man and woman was mixed up, as was the responsibility father and mother had towards daughter and son. Woman need not be a mother, a wife, or a maiden but rather, she should work like man, rule like man and have intercourse like an animal without being conscious of her Lord watching both her and her heinous partner in crime (D. 15).

In Daesh's view, the fitrah implies, among other things, the following (D. 15): the attraction that men feel for women and vice versa; women dedicate their time to

maternity while men work to provide for their families; men are responsible for women and women should be modest and chaste.

In this connection, the group criticises Christians, claiming that, nowadays, Western women bear no resemblance whatsoever to the Virgin Mary, for the West encourages them to shun maternity, chastity, femininity and heterosexuality: 'The pagan Christians contradict themselves and the fitrah once more [...]. They encourage the Western woman to be everything opposite to Mary' (D. 15).

**Abiding at home:** Daesh contends that the duty of Muslim women, under Allah's command, is to abide at home and to abstain from going out unnecessarily (D. 13; R. 3; R. 12). Referring to the practice of prayer at the mosque, the group even goes so far as to assert that congregational prayer is not an obligation for women, as it is indeed for men, it being preferable that they pray at home to protect themselves from prying male eyes (R. 3). When they leave their homes, it must be out of necessity, either to fetch water, to care for the wounded on the battlefield, to visit their friends or relations or to go to market. And they can only do so with the prior permission of their husbands, fathers or tutors: 'The Muslim man must remember that his wives are part of his flock, for whom he is responsible. The man should not let his wife have free rein in this regards' (R. 3).

Based exclusively on the Hadiths, rather than on the Qur'an, Daesh tells women that if they wish to leave their homes to go to the mosque, they must, among other things (R. 12), ask their husbands for permission, refrain from adorning themselves and avoid walking in the middle of the street, choosing the sides instead.

After arriving at the mosque, they must obey the following rules, among others (R. 12): to sit in the backrows, leaving the front ones for the menfolk; to prevent the men present from hearing their voices, since this may tempt them; to leave the mosque before the men; to participate in meetings at the mosque for memorising the Qur'an and learning about Sharia law and not to raise their voices (a rule that also goes for men but to a lesser degree).

## DISCUSSION

While other studies have found a lack of representation of women in the images of these magazines (Lehane *et al.* 2018), in this study we have detected how Daesh and Al Qaeda include articles aimed at Muslim women in them, something that shows a clear concern for conveying a specific message.

In our study, we have detected that in its two magazines Daesh includes a larger number of articles of this type, thus revealing a greater concern or a clearer



strategy as regards this aspect. As to Al Qaeda, most of the articles aimed at women appearing in its magazine are signed by Muslim authoresses, giving them the role of recruiters.

There are several factors motivating radicalisation that have been highlighted in previous studies and reports<sup>[20, 212, 25]</sup>. In our study, we have discovered that both groups generally resort to the following aspects in order to engage Muslim women.

A feeling of sisterhood and belonging to a collective. The articles appearing in Daesh and Al Qaeda's magazines foster both a strong feeling of belonging to the universal Islamic community (Ummah) and relationships among Muslim women as the sisters they are. This is an appealing discourse for women who do not identify with any group, culture or society.

The religious duty to construct an Islamic 'state'. In this respect we detected the main strategic difference between Daesh and Al Qaeda, also noted by Novenario<sup>[6]</sup>, namely while the construction of this 'state' is a priority for Daesh, it is not for Al Qaeda. In the articles appearing in Daesh's magazines, we have even found references to the rules governing its 'Caliphate'. This group places the accent on a set of strict social norms and standards for women such as the obligation to abide at home, how they should mourn for a dead husband, etc.

Female empowerment. Both groups stress the essential role played by Muslim women in the success of their projects, helping them to develop a feeling of empowerment by making them aware of their importance in Islamic society. Of the two it is particularly Daesh that underscores the essential role that they are playing in the construction of its 'Caliphate'.

However, we are of the mind that it would very interesting to conduct further research based on the testimonies of women who have joined these groups, in order to verify the relevance of these factors.

We have confirmed that both Daesh and Al Qaeda evidently promote gender inequality which can be clearly seen in the characteristics that they attribute to Muslim women and in the traditional social roles that they expect them to adopt.

Daesh stresses gender stereotypes to a greater extent, attributing Muslim women characteristics such as chastity, obedience, loyalty, submission and fragility.

Both groups give, first and foremost, two traditional gender roles to Muslim women: that of mothers, whose role is essential for the biological reproduction of the family and for educating the next generation of Mujahideen and that of wives, especially as regards the support that they should lend their husbands in the violent jihad, a role on which Daesh places greater emphasis. In the articles that we have analysed here, the two groups strive to convey that those roles, which according to Windsor<sup>[16]</sup> can be considered to be passive, are vital for the survival of their organisations. The argument

according to which 'without women, there cannot be any warriors'<sup>[47]</sup> is totally consistent with the ideas that Daesh and Al Qaeda wish to transmit.

Researchers like Von Knop<sup>[48]</sup> contend that the women who join Al Qaeda make a specific interpretation of gender that she calls 'the female jihad', supporting their Mujahideen husbands and educating their children in the jihadist ideology. In light of our findings, we have arrived at the conclusion that, in the articles analysed, both groups do indeed convey a gender message specifically tailored to Muslim women.

In her analysis of the profiles of women who have joined Daesh, Fine<sup>[49]</sup> has, interestingly enough, detected how some of them engage in professional occupations, like nursing and teaching, in the 'Caliphate', roles that are not mentioned in the articles that we have analysed, which confine them exclusively to the family setting.

While researchers such as Saikal<sup>[50]</sup> hold that unlike Al Qaeda, Daesh encourages women to participate in the violent jihad, in our study we have not found any specific article aimed at women broaching this subject in Daesh's magazines, although, this has not been the case in Al Qaeda's. This is especially striking bearing in mind that Daesh created Al-Khansaa and Umm alRayan, two female police brigades in which women received arms training<sup>[51]</sup>.

After having confirmed here that Daesh's magazines provide a detailed description of the *modus vivendi* of women in its 'Caliphate' such as capturing women and using them as sex slaves in times of war, we believe that it is difficult to accept that at least the women who feel attracted to the group after reading these magazines are not aware of the future functions and roles that they will be expected to play. Although, when referring to the women who join these groups, Pearson and Winterbotham<sup>[25]</sup> consider that they are not fully aware of what will be expected of them.

In the articles appearing above all in Daesh's magazines, we have detected an unambiguously rigid interpretation of the social norms governing life in the 'Caliphate', offering Muslim women a vision of femininity and freedom differing from what is understood by these concepts in the West and, according to the group, based on 'Islamic' values. In the view of Khurshid and Pitts<sup>[52]</sup>, this discourse may serve to engage Muslim women who feel frustrated and marginalised by the very different Western-centric ideal of female empowerment, foreign to their culture, customs and traditions. For this reason, we are of the mind that some care is needed when including a gender perspective in educational strategies designed to prevent the radicalisation of Muslim women, since advocating for a Western gender equality discourse may be counterproductive<sup>[22]</sup>.

Taking into account the maternal role that Muslim women are given in the magazines of both groups, some might be led to believe that those preventive strategies

that include them as an essential factor for detecting possible signs of radicalisation in their children can be effective. However, we concur with those authors who are against such strategies<sup>[28]</sup>. In light of their findings, these authors have concluded that the view that mothers are in a better position to detect possible signs of radicalisation in their children owing to their innate capacity as carers does no more than perpetuate the gender stereotype promoted by both groups which confines them exclusively to the domestic/family setting.

Even though Muslim women play a very important role in the education of their children, we consider that beyond the family setting, they could play an important preventive role as religious leaders. A good example of this is the 'Morchidat' initiative implemented in Morocco, through which women are being trained to be imams at the Mohamed VI Institute, in order that they should disseminate moderate and tolerant Islamic teachings<sup>[53]</sup>. Considering the proposal for developing counter-narratives to the message conveyed by groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda<sup>[39]</sup>, we believe that these women could include the premises of Islamic feminism in their teachings, in attempt to give visibility to the crucial but often silenced, role played by the wives of the Prophet which as we have shown here, Daesh and Al Qaeda highlight as role models in the articles appearing in their magazines. A clear example that could be used in these counter-narratives is that of Jadiya who enjoyed a large degree of financial independence as a merchant<sup>[54]</sup>.

If the idea is to make a commitment to preventive measures that advocate for early intervention prior to the process of violent radicalisation<sup>[38]</sup>, we consider that it is especially important to adopt measures aimed at Islamic religion 'literacy'<sup>[55]</sup>, above all to counter Daesh's propaganda, insofar as it has more theological content than Al Qaeda's<sup>[56]</sup>. Such educational measures may prevent women readings these magazines from believing that the message that both groups convey is divinely ordained and, therefore, mandatory for all good Muslim women.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is a need to design measures as regards Islamic religious education that include notions of Islamic feminism.

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