Jihadist Brides, Victims of the West

The Role of Women as Suggested by Extremist Online Propaganda

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WHAT WE KNOW (Cook, 2005; Ness, 2005; van Knop 2007; Laster & Erez, 2015)

➤ Digitalization offers terrorists new propaganda tools (social media, online propaganda)

➤ Increasing recruitment of women by Jihadist organisations (e.g. about 13% in the Islamic State, see Cook & Vale, 2018)
WHAT WE KNOW: Female Terrorism (Laster & Erez, 2015; Martini, 2018; Nacos, 2005)

➤ Stereotypes of female terrorists both by Western news media and Jihadist organizations’ propaganda

Under- and overvaluing women’s agency
WHAT WE KNOW: Female Terrorism (Laster & Erez, 2015; Martini, 2018; Nacos, 2005)

➤ Exemplary stereotype by Western media: “Jihadi Brides”

➤ Other stereotypes by Western news media: “naive girls”, “black widows”, “victims of the west”, or “martyrs”
“How are women and their roles portrayed and described in online magazines of Jihadist organizations?”
METHODS

Quantitative content analysis of all articles (N=308) and subset of images (N = 82) of Inspire, Rumiyah and Sunnat Khawlah (Intercoder > 0.8)

➢ Qualitative content analysis of a subset of articles (N=99)
FINDINGS
How often and in which contexts are women mentioned?

Women rarely represented in pictures and text

Significantly different contextualization of gender roles: Women mentioned in a religious and social but not political context (other than men)

N = 308
Who talks about women and their roles?

Men talk about women rather than women about themselves.

N = 99
OVERVIEW: WOMEN’S KEY ROLES

- Victim
- Traditional
- Active Member
- Fighter
THE VICTIM

- Oppressed 21.2%
- Killed 21.2%
- Raped 11.1%
- Suffered loss 11.1%

- Depicted as victims of Western soldiers during attacks and war
- Forced to give up wearing niqab/veil and other traditions
- Often vivid descriptions: wounded, tortured, raped, dishonoured
“America is arrogantly corrupting on earth and has killed innocent women and children in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen through their bombings.”
- Inspire, Issue 2: 23

“Muslim women around the world were being abused, vilified, imprisoned, and violated at the hands of the kuffar and their puppets”
- Rumiyah, Issue 51: 15
THE TRADITIONAL ROLE

**Brides** 36.4%
- “The wife of…”
- Respected and beautiful
- Sometimes as widow

**Mothers** 28.3%
- “Mother of believers”
- Teaching children right way of Islam
- Protecting children

**Housekeeper** 10.1%
- Taking care of household
- Cooking
- Washing

**Sister** 27.4%

**Daughter** 18.2%
THE TRADITIONAL ROLE

“My beloved sisters, our roles and responsibilities have not to come to an end. Rather, they have increased and have become of greater importance. “
- Rumiyah, Issue 11: 13

“O mother of the upcoming Mujahideen, the obligation and responsibility to teach and enlighten your children lies on your two shoulders.”
- Inspire, Issue 12: 49
mostly providing water and first aid on the battlefield

“We already washed and ironed eid clothes for men. We washed all dishes and sharpened knives. We filled all water containers as in these mountains no one knows when water supply is cut off”

- Sunnat Khawlah, Issue 2: 6
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martyr</th>
<th>7.1%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fighter</td>
<td>3%</td>
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- Mostly occurs in Sunnat Khawlah
- Often: "First martyr in Islam was a woman"
- In Sunnat Khawlah: **brave, heroized**
- In Rumiyah and Inspire: a **peculiarity, shameful**
THE FIGHTER

“A woman has shown to the ummah’s men the path of jihad! A woman my brothers! Shame on all the men for sitting on their hands while one of our women has taken up the individual jihad! She felt the need to do simply because our men gave all too many excuses to refrain from it”

- Inspire, Issue 4: 24

“Mother of believers Hazrat Jawariyya fought bravely. Also, Asma bint e Yazid who was from the tribe of Ansar, she killed nine Roman soldiers from the iron nail used to fix tents”

- Sunnat Khawlah, Issue 2: 22
WOMEN’S ROLES: How often do they occur?

Note: Only the occurrence of the most active role (in order: victim, traditional, member, fighter) was calculated, N = 99.
Mostly social calling (mother, wife, bride, sister) or display as victim of the West
FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ONLINE MAGAZINES

- Women are rarely visualized or mentioned
- Stereotypic roles:
  - victims of Western brutality
  - social calling/part of Jihadist community (bride, mother, sister)
- Associated with social and religious, but not political contexts
- No sign of emancipation/feminism
LIMITATIONS

➤ small sample and few occurrences of women’s roles
➤ unequal number of issues, comparisons across different groups
➤ magazines one of many potentially powerful propaganda tools
➤ representation vs. actual realization of women's roles within terrorism
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

ANY QUESTIONS?

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