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ISIS AND PROPAGANDA: HOW ISIS EXPLOITS WOMEN

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1. Introduction

ISIS, the popular acronym for Islamic State, currently poses the largest terrorist threat to the international community and to world peace. 77% of those questioned in a YouGov poll of the European public's global concerns in September 2014 reported international terrorism as their greatest worryⁱ. Significantly, this concern came ahead of other important issues such as armed conflicts, pandemics and climate change.

World leaders have discussed various measures to counter ISIS. As of 2014, NATO and US-led forces have been attacking ISIS strongholds in Syria and Iraq. But despite armed resistance from world nations, ISIS continues to advance, suggesting that efforts to defeat the group have not yet been successful.

Over the span of a few months last year, ISIS rose from being an unknown terror group to challenging the security of the world. It has established itself in vast areas of Iraq and Syria as a self-declared Caliphate, and many perceive it as a state. Its leaders have introduced a specific interpretation of sharia law; one that is brutal, one-sided, and with little regard for human life. Muslim scholars across the world condemn this theological interpretation, and underline that phrases taken by ISIS from the Quran or Hadith to justify their law are used without context.

The group endorses physical and sexual exploitation of women and children. They torture and kill non-believers. Muslims who belong to other sects or disagree with the definition of faith by ISIS are declared as apostates, and can be killed as such. All this ISIS does in the name of Allah.

Today in Syria, half of the country's population have been forced to leave their homesⁱⁱ, while in Iraq sectarian violence is part of everyday life, including areas not under ISIS control.

The paradox remains that despite their perceived brutality, ISIS continues to successfully recruit young people to join them from all around the world. A recent UN report recorded an increase in foreigners joining the terror group, with 25,000 people coming from more than 100 countries; of these 4,000 foreigners are identified in Interpol databaseⁱⁱⁱ. ISIS controls a population of nearly 8 million people as its power and influence expands. Terror cells from neighbouring countries, such as previous Al Qaeda members from countries such as Afghanistan and Libya are joining ISIS. Nigerian terror group Boko Haram has also pledged its allegiance to ISIS.

ISIS differs from any other terror group that has emerged before. Firstly, the group poses a bigger threat to other countries due to the fact its goals and aims are not limited to a specific area or region, as it claims to be fighting for a new world order. ISIS fighters therefore do not belong to a particular nationality, and come from various countries such as the US, UK, Norway, Syria, and Yemen.

The second aspect of ISIS is that this is a terror group of a contemporary nature, meaning that they use modern technology such as social media to achieve their goals. They are therefore capable of presenting advanced propaganda material to a larger audience than previous terror groups such as Al Qaeda, who due to geographical limitations and less inclination towards modern means of communication, reached much fewer.

Much consideration has been given by Western countries to understanding the on-going appeal of joining ISIS's ranks. Islamic religious extremists are compared to right wing groups, and their

prejudices analysed. Psychological approaches have attempted to explain why young people are attracted to ISIS, and why young men and women raised in relatively moderate European cultures are willing to commit themselves to the very different way of life within ISIS. Issues in the personal lives of individuals are examined and discussed. The importance of this approach cannot be overvalued.

However, there is a real danger that the humanising effect of seeking reasons behind the brutalities can ultimately play directly into ISIS's own propaganda, by creating an empathetic quality, a sense of understanding that serves to encourage potential recruits to join. Therefore this paper will take a different approach in that I will examine ISIS through analysis of their propaganda methods, and particularly how the roles and attitudes towards women are manipulated according to factors such as the intended audience and desired effect.

Women feature noticeably more in ISIS propaganda than in the earlier material of previous Islamic terror organisations, and are also portrayed very differently. To illustrate ISIS's global reach, I will compare ISIS's propaganda methods with that of the previous terror group, the Taliban. Unlike the Taliban, ISIS relies heavily on women in their publicity, and I will consider why ISIS is using women in this way.

This paper will also suggest that ISIS actively uses women for propaganda purposes because such reports guarantee media coverage and headlines in Western publications. As journalists are forbidden entry to ISIS-controlled territory, online posts and videos are an extremely efficient way of spreading news and information widely and quickly, while maintaining control of the content.

A widespread online presence is also a vital tool for the purpose of recruitment. In ISIS's online promotional material in the West, ISIS's female recruits post photos of themselves on the Syrian battlefield, wearing the niqab and holding a gun. On social media, women have described their role in law enforcement as part of the women's police force. The appeal to the potential 'Jihadi Bride' appears to be the promise of personal power combined with a united society, fighting together for a common cause.

In order to answer the question of how women are used in ISIS propaganda, I examined multiple examples of ISIS propaganda material in which women were used. I also did a field trip to Iraq. After assessing the material I concluded that the portrayal of women falls into three distinct categories presented in this paper in chapters 6, 7 and 8. The first case is the ISIS guide/manifesto for women. The second is the concept of Jihadi brides traveling from Western countries. The third and final case is the Fatwa on sexual Jihad, and the resulting sexual enslavement of Yezidi women. Before that, I will also do a short comparison to Taliban and their use of women in propaganda. In my conclusion I summarize the purpose behind their strategy.

2. ISIS

The group was established in 2004 in Iraq as a division of Al Qaeda, and was rebranded as ISIS. The founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, ruled the Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda for many years. His methods were more brutal than those of Al Qaeda, and often resulted in conflict with its central leadership. He was killed in an American airstrike in 2006, leaving a legacy of well-equipped Jihadi fighters with military expertise on the battleground.

As a result of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, ISIS began to gain supporters, which led to a rise in sectarian violence and Shia-Sunni confrontation. The large Sunni community of the country was suppressed and the Sunni tribes suffered gravely under the Shia rule of Nouri Al-Maliki. Maliki presented himself as a pro-American Prime Minister, with the support of the occupying force. However, he showed himself unable to maintain a bipartisan attitude towards the varying religious groups of the country. In an interview in March 2015, President Barack Obama admitted that the rise of ISIS was "an unintended consequence" of American policy and invasion, and blamed his predecessor, President George W. Bush, for causing this conflict^{iv}.

The popular uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and the later Syrian civil war, gave ISIS new ground for further expansion. The group successfully recruited new fighters as many young Syrians were angered and frustrated by what they felt was unfair treatment by President Bashar al-Assad and his regime. Al-Assad drove a brutal and aggressive policy towards his own people, and these angry young men started joining ISIS to fight against the Syrian army. At this juncture, the rest of the opposition and other resistance groups were seen as protectors of foreign interests. These groups were also weak and fragmented. Many powerful and influential foreign players were engaged in the conflict due to their own interests, and many Syrian citizens felt victimised by what they felt was an international power game. They wanted protection, revenge, and to regain their civilian rights, and ISIS appeared to be a mighty force that would achieve these objectives.

War in Syria was also turning into a sectarian conflict. Through its proxy in the region, the Lebanese Party Hezbollah, Iran started supporting the regime in Damascus. Hezbollah sent fighters to ensure Assad remained in power. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia had a political interest in countering Iran's Shia domination in the region, and showed support for Sunni militant groups. Turkey's political interests meant the 500-mile border with Syria was consequently left open, allowing Westerners to cross and join ISIS. In June 2014, ISIS seized Mosul in Iraq.

At that stage, America and the West were unaware that the group would rise with fatal speed in the span of few months.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a cleric born in Samarra in 1971, became ISIS's leader in May 2010. At that time, his only known appearance on film was a grainy mug shot from a stay in U.S. captivity at Camp Bucca during the occupation of Iraq. On 5th July 2014 year, he stepped into the pulpit of the Great al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul to deliver a Ramadan sermon, as the first caliph of a newly created Islamic Caliphate, known as the Islamic State. He was the first person to declare himself as caliph of the

Muslims in generations, and in this capacity he also technically became ruler of all Muslims of the world. He proclaimed himself with the acronym "Caliph Ibrahim"¹.

However, Baghdadi and his force never pursued a policy of bringing all Muslims under one rule. ISIS strives to enforce an extremist Wahhabi and Salafi-inspired interpretation of sharia and Islamic law. This specific definition of Islam and its tenets is central to their rhetoric when recruiting from other countries. The majority of Muslim scholars and world leaders condemn this philosophy as hateful and divisive. They reject their actions, and strongly disagree with their views, criticising them as un-Islamic.

Today, ISIS controls large parts of Syria and North West Iraq. They rule an area larger than the UK, with a population of 8 million people. Reports suggest that they raise between US\$1 and US\$2 million a day from oil smuggling, taxes imposed on the people living in areas under its control, extortion money and smuggling of antiques.^v The inflow of Jihadists from many countries continues uninterruptedly.

¹ Caliphs among Muslims are seen as political successors to the Prophet Muhammad. The first caliphate, a political-religious state comprising the Muslim community and people under its dominion, was created after Prophet Muhammad's death in 632. Baghdadi, taking same title, tried to communicate that he was extending the same message, and line of succession, that began at the time of Prophet.

3. Propaganda

In what follows, I will define the term 'propaganda' in order to address how ISIS uses it to pursue its strategies.

Propaganda is: "any systematic attempt to influence opinion on a wide scale. It is a form of communication that seeks to promote or discourage attitudes as a means of advancing or injuring an organisation, an individual or a cause. Propaganda proceeds by deliberate plan for calculated effects. It usually addresses a mass audience through mass media or is targeted at special audience and media that provide access to mass opinion" (Cole, 1998).

Jack C. Plano and Milton Greenberg define propaganda as communications aimed at influencing the thinking, emotions or actions of a group or public through careful selection and manipulation of data. Political scientist Harold D. Lasswell argued that propaganda is "the making of a deliberately one-sided statement to a mass audience". Michael Balfour, a British propagandist during the World War II, defines propaganda as "the art of inducing people to leap conclusions without examining the evidence" (Cole, 1998).

Historically, propaganda has served the purpose of being a strong tool in warfare, and can be traced to a time before the advent of literacy. Propaganda has been a negatively loaded word associated with lies and half-truths. It was linked to Nazi Germany and the former Soviet Union and was used to disseminate their ideologies.

Contemporary understandings of propaganda see it as existing in value-neutral terms: as neither a good nor a bad thing. Leading powers of the world today rely heavily on propaganda to win support of the public for their policies, particularly in times of war. Propaganda is used as method to gain military support and to justify use of violence.

Academics categorise propaganda as 'white' or 'black'. The former refers to propaganda put out by modern democracies. Theoretically, this kind of propaganda carries the facts and truthfully states its origin, and is also known as public relations. Conversely, 'black' propaganda comprises false information or half-truths. The sources are hidden, and the information may be questionable or falsified.

ISIS practices the latter. What they state is not always true, reliable or trustworthy, exemplified during their negotiations with Jordan for the release of the captured pilot, Muath Safi Yousef al-Kasasbeh. His release was eventually guaranteed in exchange for the release of captives in Jordanian jails. ISIS released a video showing his death by burning on 3 February. However, the Jordanian government assessed that al-Kasasbeh was actually killed on 3 January. If correct, it would confirm that ISIS never intended to exchange him for prisoners.^{vi} The publicity around the graphic online video of his execution suggests that ISIS deliberately used this situation as a propaganda opportunity. The resulting global media coverage of the event is evidence of their success.

4. Communication strategies of ISIS

ISIS's propaganda material is in many cases advanced, contains elements of the truth, and crucially is presented using modern techniques. But despite the rise of social media, it scores badly when people are asked to rate its accuracy and reliability^{vii}. ISIS propagandists know this fact. They therefore structure their propaganda to have a wide appeal. ISIS adopts many methods to make sure that the global media use their own material and "facts" provided by ISIS, thus giving the group access to millions of homes, and credibility it would not otherwise achieve. The following are the methods used to ensure coverage in the world's traditional media.

Firstly, ISIS has isolated areas under its control. They have declared journalists an enemy, and prevent them from visiting or observing the situation on the ground. Going into an area in Syria and Iraq controlled by ISIS considered suicidal by Western journalists, as is probable that any such "intruder" would be kidnapped and used as a propaganda tool, or kidnapped by another group and sold to ISIS. A journalist, particularly if the person is prominent or works for a big media enterprise, is worth lot of money and much needed media attention, and ISIS have showed themselves fully aware of this.

In 2014 ISIS beheaded American journalist James Foley for propaganda purposes. Journalist Steven Sotloff, humanitarian worker David Haines, French citizen Hervé Gourdel, British humanitarian worker Alan Henning, American Peter Kassig, Japanese Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto have also been executed. ISIS used these kidnappings for publicity to support their image as group that is brutal and can go to any extent to achieve its goals. The beheadings served the purpose of ensuring the group international media coverage, and this publicity ensures that ISIS is introduced to a larger number of people. It is interesting to note that many Syrian and Iraqi journalists have also been killed, but these killings rarely receive global media attention.

As a result, large media companies have banned their employees from travelling to ISIS-controlled areas, showing ISIS's propagandist means of deterrence have succeeded.

Controlling the flow of information is nothing new, but ISIS's treatment of foreigners and attitude towards journalists is different from other terror organisations. Frequently, military regimes and terror organisations have seen the relationship with a journalist as one of mutual interest, and many, such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda, considered cooperation with journalists as a useful tool to deliver their propaganda. This cooperation allowed them to build bonds with media personnel and writers, enabling a degree of manipulation over journalistic stories. Methods of cultivating influence with a journalist would include providing the relevant person exclusive access to a certain area, or an interview with a coveted subject. In exchange, they expect the journalist to write a good piece on them while utilising an opportunity to manipulate information for their own benefit in a story. Furthermore, 'embedded' journalism frequently portrays the situation with a more humanistic and sobering coverage. This policy is known by different names but is still common practice by many authoritarian regimes around the world.

ISIS's distinct strategy of excluding journalists from their arena to ensure total control over the information differs from the above system by forcing journalists to become solely dependent on ISIS propaganda. As a result, many media groups, journalists and researchers have adapted new methods and techniques such as monitoring ISIS through visiting Kurdish Iraq. However, the fact remains that

international media today is still partially dependent on the material provided by ISIS propagandists. ISIS strictly controls the online activities of people living in their areas. Through this method, they successfully control the outflow of any unwanted information from within their territory. People in these areas have very limited access to online facilities, and even these are under strict regime control. Reports coming from people inside ISIS areas suggest that surveillance cameras are installed around dwellings, and that ISIS agents hack into personal computers and investigate social media profiles of Internet users. According to opposition sources, any discrepancies are punishable, and any breach of these strict rules can lead to the death penalty^{viii}.

Secondly, they have professionalised their own propaganda techniques. They provide packaged, ready-to-be-published material in high quality. They write and offer reports from daily life inside ISIS areas, exclusive interviews and pictures, and ensure the dispersal of this information through social media.

A recent US report concluded that ISIS is winning the social media war. The internal State Department paints a dismal picture of the efforts by the Obama administration and its foreign allies to combat the Islamic State's publicity machine^{ix}. On a daily basis, ISIS supporters post up to 90,000 tweets to publicise their objectives and argue their cause. Twitter, Facebook and other social media companies are facing a dilemma due to pro-ISIS online campaign. This situation is particularly dangerous in that the terror group uses social media in their pursuit of recruitment from Western countries. Social media companies face a dilemma; banning terrorism-related subject matter in their systems may help prevent its spread, but allowing propaganda to remain available enables officials and agencies of various countries to track Jihadists.

Another challenge for Twitter in particular is that shutting down one account inevitably results in another being opened. It is becoming almost impossible to control and censor these ISIS agents.

ISIS's Media Centre

ISIS has a media centre called al-Hayat, its logo identical to that of Al Jazeera. Al Hayat means "life" in Arabic and was established in the early 2014. In many of the cities under ISIS control including Raqqa and Deir el Zoor in Syria, and Mosul, Diyala and Saladin in Iraq, separate media divisions have been established.

The different areas of propaganda are managed by different departments; for example while Al Furqan and Al Itisam provide visual material, Al Furqan focuses on material that shows military strength, while Al Itisam deals with ceremonial and religious activities^x.

One of the group's most widely read online publications is *Dabiq*, named after a small place in Syria said to be the location of a historical battle, according to Islamic mythology. Published regularly, it is translated into English, French and German, and therefore accessible to a wide audience. The language is well written, and it contains professional pictures. The magazine is described as appearing sophisticated and visually pleasing. According to reports in al-Monitor, some of the writers in their media divisions are believed to be former journalists who once worked in cities now in ISIS control and were presented with two options: to work for ISIS or be killed. Several hard copy editions

of the *Dabiq* were sold in paperback form on global company Amazon's websites in the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain^{xi}. They have since been removed².

Dabiq contains reports of everyday life in ISIS areas. It portrays a romanticised image of their caliphate as a restoration of an Islamic golden age. It reports on their military victories and successes and presents an idealised picture of life in ISIS controlled areas. It offers religious teachings as well as news about various social activities. The magazine uses Islamic terminology to spread its message, such as tawhid (unity), manhaj (truth seeking), hijrah (migration), Jihad (holy war) and jama'ah (community)^{xii}.

ISIS also runs news bulletins in English, Arabic and Russian on its al-Bayan radio network. In these broadcasts it provides an overview of its activities, and discusses topics such as suicide attacks and military combat^{xiii}.

Beheading videos

ISIS's beheading videos remain some of its most viewed and shared propaganda media. The videos often show "infidels" in the deserts of Iraq or Syria with a knife to their throat. Assessment of the videos had shown that HD quality cameras are used; the good sound quality is attributed to a microphone placed on the victim to achieve maximum auditory impact.

The beheading video of the American journalist James Foley, their first internet-published beheading of a foreign journalist, will remain one of the group's most notorious propaganda pieces. It received enormous international coverage, and it was through this video that many people worldwide heard of the group for first time.

James Foley was kidnapped in 2012. The founder of ISIS Abu Musab Al Zarqawi introduced the brutal methods of mass killings and beheading to the group in early 2000. In 2004 his group beheaded 10 people and the images were made public. The beheadings were so shocking that even Al Qaeda leaders felt these actions were too violent.

The group claims that they believe in overwhelming the enemy with fear and terror and admits that this is part of their tactic. They use Islamic literature to justify this, such as referring to hadith. They adhere to one of the Prophet's hadiths from the early wars of Islam: "We came to you through slaughter". Another reads: "Allah made me victorious by awe" ([by frightening my enemies]). Other texts are similarly adapted to solidify a fighting doctrine within the ranks, and justified it through the promise of paradise without accountability.

ISIS have also demonstrated skilful use of shock tactics in their propaganda. When beheading videos began to lose effect, ISIS took other measures to maintain media coverage. Their next execution video showed the Muslim Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasabeh being burned to death, sparking anger across the globe. In the Muslim world, people and leaders expressed particular horror at this method of killing a Muslim as many scholars of Islam burning is an act of God, and humans are not permitted to use this method as punishment^{xiv}. ISIS therefore appears to have exploited this belief to maximise the horror of the execution.

² It is illegal under British law to become involved in an arrangement that makes funds available for the purposes of terrorism.

5. Women and other terror groups: The Taliban

When comparing ISIS's treatment of women to other movements, we can see that women faced brutal suppression and maltreatment under similar Islamist rule such as the Taliban regime. Abuse and persecution of women under the Taliban was one of the reasons given by the West to gain support for the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

The Taliban at the time demanded that all women wear a burqa, and not leave the house without a blood relative accompanying her. Women were systematically segregated and isolated from society. They were forbidden to work or to receive an education after the age of nine. Violation of this was punishable with flogging or public execution^{xv}. Women were banned from appearing on radio and television, and could not take part in public gatherings. The Taliban also banned the photography and filming of women; publishing pictures of women in newspapers and books or displaying female pictures within homes was also prohibited. They demanded that windows of homes be painted over to prevent women from being visible from the streets.

The point here is that, under the Taliban, women were not a visible part of the society or community. Therefore, despite the harsh treatment of women, they were never an important part of their propaganda, although there are some pictures and videos of Taliban police beating women publicly, and video footage of a public execution of a mother of seven, accused of killing her husband³.

ISIS similarly forbids female education and metes out brutal punishment on women who do not meet the dress code. However, compared to the Taliban, there are two significant differences in the way ISIS present women in their propaganda. Firstly, women appear in their publicity in a range of guises, whereas Taliban portrayed women in one consistent role. Secondly, ISIS heavily sexualises females as an object.

³ Like ISIS, Taliban punishments were carried out in large stadiums, as a public show to spread fear

6. ISIS's 'Manifesto for Women'

At the beginning of 2015, ISIS published what is believed to be the first document of its kind, a guideline for women under the title *Women of the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case study*. The manifesto was published in Arabic on various online Jihadi forums. It was translated by the British think tank the Quilliam Foundation, a counter-terrorism organisation, and provides an insight into the lives of women within ISIS^{xvi}.

The manifesto was drafted by the al-Khansaa Brigade, a female-militia setup of ISIS, largely comprising educated Western women. It operates as an ultra-oppressive police force, monitoring females. This police force imposes punishments on anyone who does not follow the strict guidelines of behaviour for women in this society. Enforceable rules include the requirement that all females dress only in black, including their shoes, cover every inch of their bodies, and wear gloves to cover their hands and fingers^{xvii}. One of the leading figures in the al-Khansaa brigade is 20-year-old British girl Aqsa Mahmood. She was reported missing by her parents before surfacing in Syria, and has become one of the main female figures of ISIS through her social media activity.

The role of women

The manifesto in its translated form has 41 pages. It states that women should remain hidden and veiled. Fashion shops are banned and described as the work of the devil. It states that men and women are not equal. They have distinctly different roles under Islam. It is the fundamental function of a woman to become a mother and serve her husband and children. Women can only leave the house in exceptional circumstances – to wage Jihad, when there are no men available, or to study religion. Female doctors and teachers are permitted to leave their homes but must keep strictly to sharia guidelines as described by ISIS.

The document further states that if a woman is forced to work outside the house, it should not be for more than three days a week, and should not involve long working hours. It condemns Western society as materialistic, causing women to depart from their role as wives and mothers. The Western model for woman has failed, it claims. Women who work take on "corrupted ideas and shoddy-minded beliefs instead of religion (...)". The model preferred by infidels in the West failed the minute that women were "liberated" from their cell in the house, it reports.

The manifesto also accuses the ruling Royal family of Saudi Arabia of deviating from the true path of Islam - for example that Saudi officials do not seem religiously committed to the ban on woman driving, even if they impose it.

Education and marriage

The document gives a year-to-year guide on how a girl, later a woman, should live her life. In order to become a good housewife and mother, it encourages some education, mainly religious^{xviii}.

The manifesto says: "From ages seven to nine, there will be three lessons: fiqh (understanding) and religion, Qur'anic Arabic (writing and reading) and science (accounting and natural sciences)".

"From ages 10 to 12, there will be more religious studies, especially fiqh, focusing more on fiqh related to women and the rulings on marriage and divorce. This is in addition to the other two subjects. Skills like textiles and knitting, basic cooking will also be part of girls' education".

"From 13 to 15, there will be more focus on sharia and as manual skills (especially those related to raising children) and less of the science, the basics of which will already have been taught. In addition, they will be taught Islamic history, the life of the prophet and his followers".

The manifesto states that a girl can be married at the age of nine, and urges that all girls be married by the age of 16 or 17, while they are still "young and active".

The manifesto cultivates a heavily propagated picture of women's lives in Raqqa and Mosul. It displays pictures of happy children playing in parks, elderly people sitting and eating together, and young girls and women in veil in female classes. A picture of a multinational society is presented, where men and women fulfil their duty according to their perception of Islam.

The manifesto is written in Arabic and was not made available in other languages. Much of the ISIS propaganda is translated in many languages, and many experts therefore believe that the Manifesto is aimed at an Arabic audience. ISIS seem to be aware that this description of life as one of its members would repel potential female recruits from typical Western societies, and therefore adopt a different strategy when approaching women outside its territory.

7. Jihadi brides – ‘Jihadi Feminism’

An estimated 500 European Muslim girls have made the journey abroad from their homes to join ISIS^{xix}. Why Western women find it attractive to join ISIS remains a topic of debate. However, there seems to be a universal factor that drives both women and men to ISIS: the promise of an adventurous life in a religious outfit, fulfilling the need for excitement while appearing to give life meaning. Once again, ISIS presents a glorified picture, and women travel to ISIS's zones with an idealised image of life in Syria and Iraq. This life, however, is portrayed with noticeable differences to that of the Manifesto, as I shall examine.

Many girls are influenced by the social media activity of those who have already joined ISIS, and post online idyllic pictures of a fun, harmonious life within the Islamic State. They tell stories of happy families, post pictures of cats on Twitter, and share recipes. They use social media to express their grievance at the treatment of Muslims across the world, and their perception of ISIS as a truly Islamic society, built on sharia law. They spread the belief that it is a feminist duty of all female Muslims to travel to ISIS areas. They believe that in this world they will get everything they need, not only a man that loves her, children, a beautiful house, but also recognition as women warriors fighting alongside men on the battlefield for a just cause. Some of the girls travel from the West to meet militants they encountered online.

20-year-old Aqsa Mahmood, originally from Britain, has a leading role among the women of ISIS. Mahmood herself was slowly radicalised as a teenager by articles and posts she read online from her room in UK. Her parents described her as sweet and intelligent, and were totally unaware of her radicalised mind-set. Before her blog account was suspended, her online presence showed several hundred posts about life in the group, and she is suspected of playing a major role in the recruitment of many young girls from the West.^{xx} Known as Umm Layth, she was one of the most active ISIS figures online, keeping a blog and engaging in debate on Twitter. She guided young women through the process of joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq, advising other girls on daily practicalities, such as what clothes to bring to Syria and Iraq in cold winter. She also took on a counselling role to prepare and support young women in the emotional upheaval of leaving home.

"The first call you make once you cross the border is one of the most difficult things you will ever have to do in your life. Your parents are already worried enough about your whereabouts. They will ask whether you are okay and what has happened. How can a parent with little Islamic knowledge and understanding comprehend the decision of their child. Why their son or daughter has left their well-off life, education and a bright future behind to go to live in a war torn country", she wrote on her blog 11th September 2014.

In another post, 3rd of June 2014 she praised motherhood, saying:

"Feeling ungrateful to your mother? Are you irritated by her nonstop talking and asking about you? You feel like just shutting your door and stop her from entering your room? Wallah, you're such a shame. How can you do and be like that to your mother?"

Earlier this year, 2015, Aqsa Mahmood posted a photograph of herself, holding a severed head of a Syrian man executed for criminal acts in Syria. She was standing alongside young children at the time.

The sisters Zahra and Salma Halane also draw awareness through their activity on social media. They have become inspiring role models for others in the process of joining ISIS. The girls were 16 when they left their homes in Manchester. They married ISIS Jihadists in Raqqa; both husbands were killed in war, and the young girls now live as widows in Raqqa. They post pictures of mundane, everyday events, and also of themselves practising target shooting, and wearing black abayas and niqabs. In one picture, one woman holds a pistol while others fire Kalashnikov automatic rifles. "Fun day training for self-defence in the Islamic state with humble sisters," the Twitter account which posted these pictures reads^{xxi}.

Their parents, originally from Somalia, have travelled to Syria repeatedly in search of their daughters. Recently three schoolgirls from east London, 15-year-old Shamima Begum and Aamira Abbas, and 16-year-old Kadiza Sultana, travelled from London to Turkey and then on to Syria. Their travel and Jihad-venture captivated the whole of the UK, leading Prime Minister David Cameron to state that minds are being 'poisoned by an appalling death cult'^{xxii}.

8. Sexual Jihad and the Enslavement of Yezidi Women

The concept of Fatwa is heavily disputed in the Muslim world. Discussion concerns who is eligible to issue a Fatwa, when it should be issued, and on what grounds. Fatwa is an Islamic term for a legal opinion given by a Mufti or cleric in a situation in which Islamic law is not clear enough, or can be interpreted in various different ways. A Fatwa can be regarded as a tool for understanding the true message of God. In the West, the 1979 Fatwa declaring a death sentence on writer Salman Rushdie for his book 'Satanic Verses' ignited an intense debate. Many in the West became aware of this term from the Fatwa issued by Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini against the writer. In practice any Imam can issue a Fatwa, despite their being no requirement for a formal education for an Imam, unlike an Alim (scholar) who must have formal education and study Islamic fiqh and jurisprudence extensively. The practice provided an avenue for many Imams affiliated to mosques to use their authority to issue a Fatwa.

'Nikkah ul Jihad' stems from the Tunisian government's war effort against Al Qaeda-linked terrorism in the region bordering Algeria, and became public in 2013. It is a controversial Fatwa that suggests women should offer themselves as sexual servants to Jihadi fighters. The purpose of this is purportedly to relieve a man of distracting sexual frustration during times of war. The Fatwa gives a man permission to marry a woman for a week or for a few hours, to have "halal" sex with her, so that he is able to pursue his Jihadi mission more effectively on the battlefield. In Tunisia, this was reported to have resulted in many women returning home pregnant and carrying diseases having been expected to have sex with 10-20 men^{xxiii}.

The concept originated from the Saudi Wahabi cleric Sheikh Mohamad al-Arefe, who is also very active on Twitter. He called upon Sunni women to present themselves for sexual Jihad, in support of the Mujahideen fighting Bashar al-Assad and his regime in Syria. This is now widely practiced in ISIS controlled areas.^{xxiv} Their logic is that Islam is, like Christianity, a missionary religion. To spread the message of God, anything forbidden normally becomes "halal" in times of Jihad. For example, suicide is expressly forbidden in the Koran; however, if it serves the purpose of Jihad, it is allowed. Similarly, the Koran states that sex before marriage is not permitted, with the exception of times of Jihad, where it may increase a man's capability on the battlefield.

Many Muslim scholars condemn this and consider "Nikkah ul Jihad" to be prostitution. According to people in ISIS areas, they recently amended a "temporary marriage order" extending it to civilians in peaceful areas and not just in war zones. Reports suggest this new practice has led to increased sexual violence, and that everyday life for many women in ISIS is miserable. Both Muslim and non-Muslim women are victim of sexual abuse and harassment in the name of Islam^{xxv}.

Slavery

In August 2014, ISIS conquered the areas around Sinjar in Kurdish Iraq, forcing almost 50,000 Yezidis to escape. Yezidis live in South Turkey, Northern Iraq and Syria, and are a minority regarded as 'devil worshippers' by ISIS, who refers to them as 'pagans'. The religion is similar to Zoroastrianism, and has ancient roots. One cannot convert to the religion, only be born into it. Today, there are between 100,000 – 500,000 Yezidis in the world. ISIS enslaves their women and abuses them sexually, arguing that they can rightfully keep Yezidi women as slaves in order to perform better Jihad because they

are not Muslim. ISIS fighters do not need to marry these women for sexual gratification; a fighter can keep a Yezidi woman as slave for his own pleasure. They are given to men as a "gift from Allah".

After attacking a village, ISIS typically separates the men and women. Men aged 14 and above are killed. The women are stripped naked and their bodies examined for breast size and attractiveness, and virginity tests are performed. A price is decided, and the women are sold at a market, with the youngest and prettiest get the highest price^{xxvi}.

An article published by MailOnline reported, quoting the website IraqiNews.com as its source, that ISIS had published a document containing a price scheme outlining the going rate for women and children slaves.^{xxvii} According to the document, girls 9 years old and under fetch the highest price, and are sold for US\$170 each. 10-20 year olds sell for US\$130, while those between 20-30 years of age are sold for US\$90. The document states, "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 Mujahidin." According to the document, no one is allowed to purchase more than three slaves, unless they are foreigners such as Turks, Syrians or Arabs.

Videos online show ISIS Jihadists joking about buying and selling Yezidi women as sex slaves. One video shows young men relaxing and chatting about women slaves. "Today is slave market", says one. "Today is distribution day, God willing." The men tease a fighter who appears to be very young. "Can you handle one?" they ask, as he laughs. According to newspaper reports, bidding is offered first to the leaders, then the emirs, and finally the soldiers, and fighters frequently take up to 3-4 women as slaves. At slave auctions it is customary for buyers to haggle, driving down prices by pointing out qualities that reduce the worth of the commodities, such as a flat chest or unattractiveness. They are kept until the men tire of them, usually around a month, and then resold at market^{xxviii}.

Zainab Bangura, a UN special representative on sexual violence, says ISIS has institutionalised rape and sexual slavery as a terror tactic. "The countries I have worked in include Bosnia, Congo, South Sudan, Somalia and Central African Republic; I never saw anything like this. I cannot understand such inhumanity. I was sick, I couldn't understand... We heard a story of a 20-year-old girl who was burned alive because she refused to perform an extreme sexual act," she said^{xxix}. Some reports suggest that at the end of 2014 between 3,000 and 4,000 Yezidi women were still being kept as slaves.^{xxx}

In March 2015, my research took me to Northern Iraq, for the purpose of gaining an authentic impression of how life has changed for those now living in the region. One of my destinations was Khanke in Dohuk, a large refugee camp a few miles from the Turkish border, which hosts more than 18,000 Yezidis forced to abandon their homes by ISIS. As we approached the camp, refugees performed their morning routines among thousands of white tents. Women washed clothes, children prepared for school. A young girl peeled an orange with a sharp knife the size of her arm. They were all living here temporarily, unaware when they will be able to return to their homes and villages. ISIS left them nothing. All valuables were looted from their houses, and those who were too old or sick to escape were left behind and eventually killed.

I met and interviewed Basher Hamed Zido, whose brother had been killed by ISIS. He told me that "All Arabs support Daesh⁴". He does not trust anyone anymore, and his eyes are empty looking. He

⁴ A loose acronym for ISIS in Arabic. The name is often used by enemies of ISIS, and it has negative undertones

used to work for Peshmerga⁵; now he faces an uncertain future in which he does not know how to feed himself and his family. "I have to take care of 19 people", he told me, referring to his own sisters, children and wife, and the widow and children of his brother.

I also met 38-year-old Maoon, who used to work as a translator for the Americans in Mosul. Maoon had also worked in Germany, in a kebab shop. He described how the Yezidis were forced to abandon their homes when ISIS attacked their villages, slaughtering those left behind, and how for a week they were trapped on Mount Sinjar. He gave detailed descriptions of what happened to the women ISIS captured, and how one woman who refused to perform an extreme sex act was forced to eat her own child.

Many women taken by ISIS have committed suicide. Recently ISIS banned Yezidi women from wearing a scarf, in order to prevent them from committing suicide.

ISIS uses its English-language online magazine Dabiq to give a formal justification of its sexual abuse of women. In an article entitled "Revival of Slavery before the hour", published in October 2014, they claim it is done as a duty of Islam. The article states that as Yezidis do not belong to people of the book - that is Islam, Judaism or Christianity - their men must be killed and women kept as slaves. It references the Koran, and quotes Islamic verses regarding the treatment of war captives in support of their enslavement policy.

Professor of Law and Director of Program on Modern Day Slavery at Seton Hall University, Bernard K. Freamon, calls their acts hypocritical, ahistorical, and accuses ISIS of propagating a fantasy inspired by stories from the days of imperial Islam. Professor Freamon says that the Quran, like other religious texts, accepted the existence of chattel slavery as a fact of life at the time of its original revelation. However, in all of the references to slavery, the emphasis is on the emancipation as opposed to the capture or continuation of the institution of slavery. (For example, verses 2:177, 4:25, 4:92, 5:89, 14:31, 24:33, 58:3, 90:1-12.) Professor Freamon thinks ISIS is acting this way to satisfy the fantasies of many men, who would prefer to enslave and sexually abuse women. If they can justify their acts by citing the Quran then it becomes easier for them as it adds moral and religious immunity and they avoid condemnation, he argues.

Sexual guide

ISIS released in December 2014 a pamphlet providing its followers with guidelines on how to capture, keep and sexually abuse female slaves, allegedly published by the "Fatwa department". The following is a selection of some of the questions and answers ISIS has provided to its followers.

"Question 1: What is al-sabi?

Al-Sabi is a woman from among ahl al-harb [the people of war] who has been captured by Muslims.

Question 2: What makes al-sabi permissible?

What makes al-sabi permissible [i.e., what makes it permissible to take such a woman captive] is [her] unbelief. Unbelieving [women] who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the Imam distributes them [among us].

⁵ Military forces of Iraqi Kurdistan

Question 4: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive?

It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with the female captive. Allah the almighty said: "[Successful are the believers] who guard their chastity, except from their wives or (the captives and slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame [Koran 23:5-6]".

Question 5: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive immediately after taking possession [of her]?

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].

Question 6: Is it permissible to sell a female captive?

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 does not cause [the Muslim Ummah] any harm or damage.

Question 9: If the female captive was impregnated by her owner, can he then sell her?

He cannot sell her if she becomes the mother of a child.

Question 13: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female slave who has not reached puberty?

It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who has not reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse.

Question 19: Is it permissible to beat a female slave?

It is permissible to beat the female slave as a [form of] darb ta'deeb [disciplinary beating], [but] it is forbidden to [use] darb al-takseer [literally, breaking beating], [darb] al-tashaffi [beating for the purpose of achieving gratification], or [darb] al-ta'dheeb [torture beating]. Further, it is forbidden to hit the face.

Question 21: What is the earthly punishment of a female slave who runs away from her master?

She [i.e. the female slave who runs away from her master] has no punishment according to the Shari'a of Allah; however, she is [to be] reprimanded [in such a way that] deters others like her from escaping.^{xxxii} "

9. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the ways in which women are exploited by ISIS through their propaganda. Firstly, I have assessed how ISIS portrays women in their publications. ISIS sexualises women, as demonstrated by the summoning of Sunni women for Nikkah al Jihad, and by the official guidelines published on the price of Yezidi slaves, intended specifically for the sexual needs of Jihadi fighters. I have also shown that women are depicted in differing roles according to the purpose of the piece and its target audience. The 'Manifesto for Women,' for example, tells us that ISIS itself argues that a woman is firstly a mother. Her place is not in society but inside the home to please her husband and raise children. Women are not permitted to leave her house and should be veiled. The Manifesto is published only in Arabic, from which this paper surmises that it is intended for Arabic-speaking women. Therefore, we can conclude that the propaganda specialists of ISIS understand this sort of document will be an ineffective tool in recruiting women from the West.

To contrast this, I have presented the case study of Asqa Mahmood, who is an example of the 'Jihadi Bride' concept ISIS presents to Muslim women based in the West: traditional womanhood fused with an almost mythological 'warrior woman' role of masculine power. Mahmood and those like her present themselves as living the life of a 'true' Muslim and actively engaging as a fighting force for ISIS. The female police brigade al-Khansaa is another example of this. Photographs online show women in niqab and burqa, carrying weapons. Young women who travelled to Syria are posting images of themselves active on the battleground, acting as feminist Jihadists, which are seen by those still at home.

I have illustrated the use of women in ISIS's propaganda techniques by comparing their publications to those of the Taliban. This paper has illustrated that Taliban and ISIS both subjugate women, demonstrated by a comparison of traditional Taliban propaganda with ISIS's 'Manifesto for Women'. However, ISIS differs from Taliban in that it explicitly sexualises women, as discussed in the chapter on Sexual Jihad. Furthermore, comparison of propaganda pieces aimed at different audiences shows ISIS manipulates the roles and expectations of the women it portrays according to its target audience. In these ways ISIS's propaganda is markedly different from the Taliban, who were consistent in their portrayal of a woman's place as hidden in the home.

By comparing the propaganda of the two I have also shown that ISIS's strategies of propaganda are more contemporary and therefore more wide reaching than Taliban's, such as their reliance on social media. ISIS uses modern techniques to engage international media attention and ensure that the world media continue to publicise their propaganda material. As a result, most of the journalists' coverage of ISIS draws heavily on ISIS propaganda. The media use their pictures provided by ISIS, reports they publish from daily life, and images and videos that they choose to show to the world. The isolation of areas under ISIS control enforces this, ensuring very few journalists can go there and report independently.

I have also discussed how the basic tactics of ISIS's method are shock and surprise. For this purpose, they killed and burnt the Jordanian pilot as beheading videos became "normal". For the same purpose, they use women. In my opinion, ISIS is obsessed with sex, and the West is obsessed with the ISIS. Generating headlines and tabloid stories will further strengthen its cause. As such, the

stories published fascinate those who are already radicalised and inclined to join ISIS. Such activity therefore correlates with their recruitment efforts.

Through discussion of the case studies and analysis of the content of ISIS's media output, I have assessed in what way women are used in ISIS propaganda, and for what purpose. Publicity of cases such as that of Asqa Mahmoud generate headlines in traditional media such as newspapers, and this is one such purpose. Each case study illustrated a different audience targeted for recruitment purposes, which I have shown to comprise three distinctive subcategories:

- Arabic women, with literature such as the 'Manifesto for Women'
- Western women, as in the case of Asqa Mahmoud and the women's police brigade al-Khansaa
- Men, as in the fatwa on sexual jihad and endorsement of sexual jihad.

My analysis shows ISIS's endorsement of sexual jihad, both as a "free will" choice made by those answering the call of Nikkah ul Jihad and as enslavement by force. It shows the way in which ISIS portrays itself to men it hopes to recruit. In my view, ISIS is a state created by men, for men, to satisfy men obsessed with weapons, killing, torture, and with the urge to rape, abuse women and children, and giving them an Islamic justification that has no grounds in real Islam.

My own opinion is that despite the preoccupation with sex and sexual abuse of women, ISIS leaders delude themselves and their people that they act only according to true teachings of Islam, yet there is nothing Islamic about their actions.

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