# Making Women Terrorists into "Jihadi Brides".
# An Analysis of Media Narratives on Women joining ISIS.

Alice Martini*

PhD candidate. *Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy* | *Autonomous University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain*

*alice.martini@sssup.it | alicecmartini@gmail.com

**Journal:** ***Critical Studies on Terrorism***

Published online: 07 Mar 2018

https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1448204

PhD candidate at Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies of Pisa, Italy and the Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain. Co-convenor of the Critical Studies on Terrorism Working Group (BISA). Her areas of interest include critical security studies and critical terrorism studies, peace and conflict studies.

# Making Women Terrorists into "Jihadi Brides". An Analysis of Media Narratives on Women joining ISIS.

Although the involvement of women in terrorist activities is not new, it is still considered to be an exceptional phenomenon. The figure of a woman militant contradicts the main gender constructions and thus produces a certain shock and disconcert in societies. In the case of "Jihadism", women who willingly join a terrorist organisation also challenge the Western Neo-Orientalist perspective on Muslim women in the West. Starting from these theoretical issues, this article focuses on a group of terrorists that recently has received a lot of attention: ISIS women jihadis. Based on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of three main UK broadsheets, this article presents, deconstructs and problematises the main depictions that were used to describe these subjects. Furthermore, it also discusses how the frames described reconcile these women's actions with the gender and Neo-Orientalist constructions that circulate in Western societies, safeguarding the deriving hegemonic narratives. In other words, the article focuses on how women terrorists are made into "Jihadi Brides".

**Keywords**: ISIS, Jihadi Brides, gender, women terrorists, Neo-Orientalism, Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

## Introduction

The present article aims at providing a reflection on the language that is used to make sense of women joining ISIS[1] in "Western societies"[2]. The ways in which these jihadis are described are usually far from neutral, and common patterns are identifiable in the way the media report on these militants. More specifically, they are usually described through gender stereotypes and a Neo-Orientalist view of Islam, discourses which have shaped these societies' understanding of, for example, Islam. These depictions matter because they frame political phenomena and convey a particular knowledge about them. This process of knowledge production is at the centre of the analysis of this article.

The present text focuses on how public language has been used to frame the stories of "Western" women joining ISIS. This research is based on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of articles reporting on (Western) women joining the organisation that were published in three of the leading British broadsheets from June 2014 to May 2017. However, before detailing the results of this analysis, the first part of this article will present a theoretical reflection on the discourses on gender and Neo-Orientalism in Western societies and how these intersect when, for example, ISIS women's actions are narrated. Here, the role the media have in the propagation of discourses will also be addressed. This first part aims at discussing theoretically how these terrorists' behaviour jeopardises the above-mentioned constructions. The second will describe the central narratives identified through the analysis and problematise them through the previously described theoretical framework.

## Muslim women at the intersection of gender and Neo-orientalism

Rephrasing Epstein (2008, 2), gender can be defined as "a cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations" that frame biological sex in a specific way and therefore "delimits the possibilities for action in relation to it." The discourse on gender constructs "a regime of truth" on biological differences (Foucault 2002, 49) and assigns fixed behaviours and attitudes (Sjoberg and Tickner 2013; Wilcox 2007). Discourses maintain unequal relations of power and regulate access to it (Milliken 1999, 29) and individuals internalise these driving precepts and reproduce them without being governed by any rule (Bourdieu 1991, 2). In this sense, gender is a primary signifier of a hierarchy between the sexes, which awards greater access to resources and power to the category of "men" (Scott 1986, 1067; Okin 1999, 12-13). A discourse can be considered both a social construction – as it is socially, politically and historically contingent – and a social constructor – because it shapes the way reality is understood and positions subjects in a system of power relations. For example, women are usually constructed as peaceful, domestic, and caring mothers; whereas men are considered strong, autonomous and political individuals.

In the case of Muslim women, the discourse on gender intersects with the one on Neo-Orientalism. This depicts "Western values" (and the "Western civilisation") as superior to those of other cultures, and as universal, desired and sought after by all. This Orientalist narrative maintains a specific hegemony: the one of "the West" on "the Orient" (Said 1978). Within this last category, Islam has become a very productive "Other" in international relations: against this concept the "Western civilisation" can create its boundaries and, consequently, define its identity. Paraphrasing Foucault (as quoted in Prozorov 2006, 95), it may be argued that an island of civilisation cannot exist unless there is a barbarian other that lives outside of it. This image becomes even more productive when the barbarian resists or fights against "the West", as in the case of "Islamic terrorism"[3].

It is within this context that a specific production of knowledge about Muslim women has taken place and has created a "Western" understanding of these subjects. This has changed throughout the centuries (Kahf 1999; Yeğenoğlu 1998; Zine n.d.), and nowadays Muslim women are usually portrayed as victims of the barbaric nature of Muslim men – and their culture in general. In other words, Muslim women are mainly understood as oppressed and passive victims, and this image is reinforced visually by Islamic garments such as the *hijab* or the *burqa,* which the West usually interpret as signs of oppression (Hoodfar 1992).

These categories have played a significant role in the legitimisation of the "war on terror"[4], which not only took place on a military (or material) level but also on a more ideological and ideational one. Related to the latter, the "war on terror" – among other processes – entailed the construction of a political interpretation of Muslim women: here, these subjects have become an "object of otherness" (Zine n.d., 2), productive because of their passivity. This specific depiction was exploited to "reinforce existing, and create new gender inter/national relations" (Hunt and Rygiel 2008, 3), and even more racialised/Orientalist ones. Whereas Western women were assigned the role of mothers or wives of the (men) soldiers joining the war (Pettman 2004), their Iraqi and Afghani counterparts were constructed, as famously argued by Spivak, as brown women to be saved from brown men (by white men) (1988). Gradually, the "Western appropriation" (Mohanty 1984) of their stories and voices expanded metaphorically to Muslim women in general (Tickner 2002).

Fighting against enemies who, in Bush's words (as quoted in Sheperd 2006, 26), "live in caves" required the hypermasculinisation of the conflict but also the infantilisation of these women and the demonisation of "their men" (Nayak 2006; Sheperd 2006). Paraphrasing Deylami, the "war on terror" was built on the idea of

homoterritoriality defined as "the perpetuation of territorial conquest through masculine/male relationships in which women are rendered as objects of contest between two male enterprises – empire and terror" (Deylami 2013, 178). This process took place not only in geographical terms (e.g. in the legitimisation of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq) but also in ontological ones. The representation of these women as "needed to be saved" from the barbaric terrorist others – physically and metaphorically – permeated within Western societies and shaped the interpretation of Muslims and Islam.

**Who is afraid of women joining ISIS? The need to construct "Jihadi Brides"**

The gender and Neo-Orientalist discourses are challenged by the woman jihadi, who not only refuses to be saved but joins the "Muslim terrorist oppressors". As Ali (2012, 145) argues, the "female jihadi shatters this edifice of passivity through her acts of violence and in doing so turns against her would be liberators". So, what happens when, paraphrasing Iris Marion Young (2003), "good women" living among "good men" (and in their "side of the world") willingly join the "bad men"? Here, there are several depictions safeguarding the discourse, many of which have already been analysed in the existing literature on the involvement of women in political violence (Elshtain 1987; Stiehm 1983), of women in terrorism (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011, 2007), or of women suicide bombers (Ali 2012; Brunner 2007a, 2007b). Nevertheless, there is something specific about women joining ISIS which will be discussed in this article.

In general terms, these terrorists challenge the construction of women as peaceful, life-givers – they become violent life-takers – and as private and domestic individuals because terrorism belongs to the realm of the political. In other words, they blur the boundaries of Elshtain's (1987) famous dichotomy of men as "just warriors" and women as "beautiful souls". By halting their performance of gender, they undermine its realness

since gender is "real only to the extent that is performed" (Butler 1990a, 278). They expose the social construction of the discourse and cause a "destabilisation of gender itself, a destabilisation that is denaturalising and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate" (Butler 1993, 128).

It has been argued within critical terrorism studies that it is difficult to define "terrorism" and its characteristics because this is a linguistic and political label more than an ontological phenomenon (Jackson et al. 2011; Jackson, Breen-Smyth, and Gunning 2009). However, it is usually acknowledged that this term refers to a kind of violence that is lethal, destructive, and, above all, illegal[5]. Because of these features, "terrorism" is usually associated with the sphere of masculinity and the "ideal-typical terrorist" is usually a male one (Sylvester and Parashar as quoted in Jackson, Breen-Smyth, and Gunning 2009, 179). Because of its "Islamic" precepts and the different conceptualisation of the social sphere (that clashes with the Western one), Jihadism[6] is an even more problematic kind of violence. Therefore, the fact that women may willingly join these groups is a challenge to the Neo-Orientalist frame.

The superiority of the West is usually based on a better status these individuals supposedly enjoy in Western societies. Consequently, their act of joining a Jihadist organisation is incomprehensible and interpreted as a betrayal. Moreover, these subjects' actions disrupt the Western construction of passive Muslim women as victims who need to be saved from Muslim/Arab men and from Islam (Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt 2008, 6). Their engagment in terrorism jeopardises one of the pillars that was legitimising the "war on terror" and that still nowadays shape the Western understanding of Islam: not only do these women do not want to be saved, but they turn against their savers – i.e. Western men, Western "civilisation" and values.

There are then some specificities about women joining ISIS that need to be discussed. Since the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014, the group has received a lot of attention, because of its territoriality – among other things – which was challenging specific principles regulating the international order (Martini 2016a). Because of its "state-building" project, ISIS women's violence has been more potential than real[7]. In this sense, what makes these subjects dangerous is their potential use of violence, an element representative of one of the epistemological crises of terrorism – the "waiting for terror" (Jackson 2015, 35). Jackson (2015, 36) argued that "the known of the epistemological crisis is the assertion that, no matter what, there will be more terrorist attacks; we are simply waiting for the next inevitable terrorist outrage". It is not known if ISIS women militants will attack, but they might; this makes the nature of the threat they pose unknown, an element that renders their character more frightening, in the logic of countering terrorism.

Lastly, what is specific about the individuals described in the articles analysed (here, both men and women) is that they have a Western background. This is visible in many aspects that the media tend to emphasise: the Western clothes and shoes they wear, the Western snacks they eat, the way they use social networks, and so on. Consequently, these militants blur the (constructed) boundaries between the West and Islam, taking the West into the "Islamic" "terrorist" world. Because of the organisation's patriarchal structure, women in ISIS end up taking the roles of mother and wives, further confusing the discourse: they become "good" and "bad" women at the same time.

To safeguard the "narrative fidelity" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011, 179) of what it means to be a Muslim woman, terrorist men and women are thus narrated in very different ways (Ness 2008, 6). In the case of the latter, the focus is shifted from the violence these subjects display to their more personal and private issues in a process that constructs a

"terrorist" that is neither credible nor dangerous (Cunningham 2003, 237). Framing "female terrorism as an instance of a patriarchal world" (Jacques and Taylor 2009, 505) not only safeguards the discourse but also reinforces and reifies its ontological status by proving its veracity in such an extreme case. How this process takes place will be described after a short reflection on the role of the media in the maintenance of discourses.

**The media as the locus of production of "Jihadi Brides"**

The existing literature (Nacos 2016; Nacos and Bloch-Elkon 2011; O'Loughlin 2016) has widely described how the media and terrorism are in a "symbiotic" relationship (Schmid 1989; Spencer 2010, 5). Margaret Thatcher (as quoted in Spencer 2010, 5) famously argued that the media provide terrorism with the "oxygen of publicity". On the other hand, terrorism offers "what contemporary media crave the most" (Nacos and Bloch-Elkon 2011, 692): stories of exceptional, shocking and dramatic events which will give them an audience. Although they are not usually perpetrating terrorist attacks, the mass media displays a great interest for the stories of ISIS women militants because this is "one of the many apparent contradictions that make ISIS appear bizarre and novel" (Hussein 2016, 74).

The media have a crucial role in the reproduction, creation and reinforcement of discourses (Bleich et al. 2015; Nacos 2016; Norris 1997b; Spencer 2010; Weldes 2006). In general terms, the news is often narrated through specific frames: "interpretative structures that set particular events within their broader context" (Norris 1997b, 2). These are culturally specific, contingent and are co-constituted by the interaction of sources, media, and audiences (Gans as quoted in Norris 1997b, 7). These frames depend on the narratives that are available to describe specific phenomena, which are themselves a product of a specific discourse (Martini 2016b). In other words, discourses produce a set

of options available to describe a phenomenon – the narratives – and an array of possible reactions to it. Consequently, the way ISIS militants are depicted are both choices made by the journalists and a consequence of the discourse. Reporters are "like anyone else […] bound by discourses"[8] (Spencer 2010, 81), and so are the consumers of the media who make sense of the news through these frames.

Because discourses have an intertextual nature (Fairclough 1992; Jorgensen 2002), both "high data" – produced by elite institutions – and "low data" or "popular culture sources" play a significant role in their production and maintenance (Weldes 2006). In this sense, "low data" is the "social" side of a "social construction" because members of society interact mainly with these sources (Spencer 2010). As Enloe argues (as quoted in Weldes 2006, 185), we must search for power in unconventional and unexpected places – e.g. the media — because power "is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 2002, 121-122). Consequently, how the news is reported is "intimately related to practices of power […] (media) define and defend 'reality'" (Sheperd 2006, 20). It is essential to question how language is deployed in these contexts and this is one of the goals of the present article. By analysing and problematising how ISIS women are described, this study examines how discourses work and thus deconstructs power hierarchies they safeguard.

**Methodology**

The method – and theory – that has been used to conduct this study is critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1992; Jørgensen 2002). First and foremost, this stems from the fact that a linguistic and constructivist view of reality drives this research. Accordingly, this work assumes that, paraphrasing Onuf (2009), we make "Jihadi Brides" what (we say) they are. Or, in other words, that "women joining ISIS" are what societies

make of them (paraphrasing Wendt 1992) – and the West constructs them as "Jihadi Brides". Secondly, the approach used is a critical one because this article aims at problematising how the language that is deployed maintains unequal power relations through a process of subject positioning – i.e. the construction and recreation of specific identities (Stump and Dixit 2013, 108).

The analysis has been carried out on theee broadsheets that are known internationally for their coverage of global news and politics, but also for their different political ascriptions: *The Guardian* (and its Sunday edition, *The Observer),* a central-liberal leaning broadsheet; *The Independent,* a more left-leaning newspaper; and *The Telegraph,* a right-leaning broadsheet (Bleich et al. 2015). The research was aimed explicitly at obtaining articles reporting on (Western) women joining ISIS in a timeframe that goes from June 2014 until May 2017[9]. The distribution of the results is detailed in table 1[10].

**[Table 1 near here]**

The language used throughout the various sources was codified and categorised[11]. This process allowed a transversal analysis and the identification of themes which were then reconstructed into narratives. This division is artificial as elements overlap in many ways; however, it permits the observation of how these constructions work. The focus of the analysis was the language journalists (or their sources) used to describe women joining ISIS. In these articles, the descriptions of "foreign fighters" were also coded, to contrast them with the categories used for their female counterparts. The process also kept track of the women's own voices – mostly blog posts or Tweets[12] – whenever reported in these sources. This last element was considered significant because their statements clash

with the media depictions, a dynamic that is representative of how, paraphrasing Spivak (1988), the subaltern can speak but is never heard.

## Making terrorists into "Jihadi Brides": the main narratives making sense of ISIS women

Because of the intertextuality of discourse, the specific frames identified in this article may be found in other contexts of knowledge production on terrorist women (Brunner 2007a; Deylami 2013; Gentry 2012). They were, for example, also deployed to make sense of "Black Widows" (Gentry and Whitworth 2011), female Jihadi suicide bombers (Ali 2012), or even women in politics (Nacos 2005, 2016; Norris 1997a). These previous depictions laid the bases for the creation of the discourse on "Jihadi Brides", as discourses always draw on previously constructed knowledge (Spencer 2010, 81). Although ISIS women display some specificities, all these cases have in common the fact that these gender-biased assumptions result in the demonisation of these actors and "explain away the possibility that women make a conscious choice to kill or injure" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008).

The rest of the article will discuss and problematise the narratives identified through the analysis – see figure 2 for a general overview. It should be remarked that not all the themes appear equally among the three broadsheets and this is mainly a consequence of the ideological stance of the newspaper[13]. Similarly, because of the discourse encountering reality, themes do not appear with the same frequency. In other words, discourses provide explanations of real events, therefore the dominance of some narratives depends mainly – though not entirely – on ISIS radicalisation strategies, aimed at (similar) subjects that would prove more useful for the organisation.

It has also to be noted that this article does not argue that the issues described should be entirely dismissed when analysing dynamics of radicalisation. In general terms, it is difficult to escape the ways in which discourses might or might not affect people's actions, as these are "highly rigid regulatory frame(s)" and to perform them is not voluntary (Butler 1990b, 45). Terrorists carry out their actions in a gendered world and therefore terrorist organisations are also gendered (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011, 236) – and so is ISIS structure. What this article aims at problematising is that, although radicalisation is mainly considered multi-causal and contingent, the media simplify excessively these women's decisions. In other words, instead of recognising women as "complex actors making complex choices" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2016, 2007), their decision to join ISIS is interpreted through a gender lens, a process that constructs these subjects as not political and mostly not agential.

**[Table 2 near here]**

***The label "Jihadi Brides"***

Categorisations are never neutral and always problematic. The process of labelling may be considered an act of epistemic violence because it ascribes specific subject positions to the ones that are categorised and thus silences their voices. This is also the case for the designation of "Jihadi Brides", the epithet the media have used to dub women joining ISIS. Through it, women were assigned a (pre)determined gender role within the organisation – that of fighters' brides. The application of this name provided an *a priori* and simplified interpretation of these militants' actions and aims – i.e. becoming a combatant's bride.

This label clashed with the one the media mainly used to refer to men joining the group: "foreign fighters". This is also a gender-biased category and its application

entailed the same epistemic violence – i.e. men were assumed not to have any other reason but wanting to fight. However, this name still retained men's agency, and it assigned the fighters a brave, epic or exotic nature because of its historical background[14]. On the other hand, "Jihadi Brides" attached a woman's project to a man's agenda and resulted in the acknowledgement of women's agency only within the frame of marriage.

One thing that is notable is that the organisation mainly called these women *muhajirat* (or *muhajirah* in the Arabic singular form, meaning those who make the *Hijrah*, the Muslim sacred pilgrimage). On the other hand, men were mainly named *mujahideen* (singular *mujahid*, the fighters). Although both categories depicted individuals in a gendered way, it is interesting to observe that the agency of the individuals was somehow maintained.

***The vulnerable, confused and naïve jihadists***

Many ISIS militants were very young, an element that was usually emphasised in the news and that was used to moralise and dehumanise the terrorist group. Their usually young age may explain why the narrative depicting women terrorists as vulnerable, confused and naïve subjects was the primary frame in terms of frequency. These women were depicted as "very young and naive, they don't understand the conflict or their faith, and they are easily manipulated" (Sherwood et al. 2014). Similarly, it was argued that "the Syria-bound schoolgirls aren't jihadi devil-women, they're vulnerable children […] – the rockstar barbarism of Isis is designed to recruit impressionable teenagers" (Iqbal 2015).

By depicting women as naïve subjects, the political commitment that may have driven them to join ISIS was erased. The emphasis on their young age constructed a terrorist that is neither dangerous nor violent – and that, therefore, was not credible. This

construction also neglected the possibility that their acts may have been intentional. Consequently, these women were interpreted as vulnerable subjects that needed to be saved or be protected from ISIS recruiters in a process that resembled the one of homoterritoriality discussed above. The violence they may have displayed and their intentionality were thus neglected and hidden.

These women's own words somehow clashed with this narrative. Their statements presented a certain kind of political awareness and these subjects' violent nature, as the following examples display: "if you show no mercy with us then why should we with you?" (as quoted in Withnall 2015); "you and your countries will be beneath our feet and...will be destroyed […] your blood will be spilled by our cubs" (as quoted in Cramb 2015); "to those who are able and can still make your way, hasten hasten to our lands ... This is a war against Islam and it is known that either 'you're with them or with us'. So pick a side" (as quoted in Sherwood et al. 2014); "so the US want to bombarded us with airstrikes in iraq and not give a damn whos killed […] but want cry when a dusty journalist is killed? [sic]" (as quoted in Khaleeli, 2014). It is important to note that this frame was not identified in relation to men militants.

***Lured, groomed, and enticed jihadists***

Some specific words were deployed systematically when reporting on women terrorists: "lured", "enticed", "used" or "groomed". These were mainly used in a passive voice as in the following examples: "(women are) lured by Isis" (Malik 2015b); "young Muslim girls from around the world have been enticed to join Isis" (Alibhai-Brown 2015); "(Jihadi Brides are) victims of grooming" (Dodd 2016); and "British women being used by Isis to incite acts of terror at home" (Eleftheriou-Smith 2015).

The passive voice neglected the agency of these subjects and played a significant

role in their homoterritorialisation. These women were depicted as objects of conflict and as victims of the men terrorists who, contrastingly, did exercise their agency. The infantilisation of these individuals was observable, and so was the moralisation of the recruiters – i.e. "to groom" also identifies the crimes of paedophilia. These women's own words did not support this frame as they usually supported their husbands in their statements. For example, one of them was reported to have written the following: "I'm proud my husband was killed by the biggest enemy of Allah [USA], may Allah be pleased with him, and I will never love anyone but him" (as reported in Whitehead 2015). It should be remarked that some of these verbs (mainly "lured") were identified in relation to men, however their use was not as systematic.

***Marriage as goal***

Usually, women were married as soon as they joined ISIS, as a consequence of the organisation's nation-building project and its Islamic background. Because of this reason, it was very common for the media to reduce the militants' actions to a fervent desire to be married. For example, in many cases it was claimed that these militants "flew out to Syria to marry an Isis fighter" (Stone 2015). Similarly, it was stated that "Many (women) are also attracted to the idea of marrying a foreign fighter, seen as a heroic figure willing to sacrifice himself for a cause" (Khaleeli 2014).

This frame depicted women militants as erotic dysfunctional: subjects unable to find a husband and so decided to join a terrorist organisation to fulfil "their biological destiny of becoming wives and mothers" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008, 10). By reducing their actions to the pursuit of marriage, this interpretation hid these subjects' possible political commitment. A feeling of pity was generated in the audience because the jihadis were seen as incomplete women trying to become "full ones". This constructed them as

irrational and non-credible terrorists because they were willing to join a terrorist organisation to find a husband. This last portrayal reified the constructed role marriage had for women – its importance became seemingly evident when some of them were willing to risk their lives to achieve it.

Again, terrorists' statements clashed with this frame. One of these jihadis was reported as saying that, in case her husband died, she "will stay here (ISIS territories) because I didn't come here for him". In similar circumstances, another one stated that "I wouldn't like to go back to the UK. I'll stay here, raise my children, focus on the Arabic language to communicate with the Syrian people" (as quoted in Dearden 2014b). In the case of men, it was sometimes argued that they would be "awarded women" (but not expressly a "bride"), however, this was not a systematic description. Moreover, the gendered interpretation of ISIS militants became evident in some statements as, for example, the following one: "Dozens of female jihadists have travelled from the UK to become 'jihadi brides' for Isis […] (and) Hundreds of British men are also believed to be fighting with the group" (as quoted in Dearden 2015).

***Physical appearances: beauty and "Islamic appearances"***

Women terrorists' physical appearances usually receive a lot of attention in the media which tend to emphasise, as the results show, their beauty and their "sweet, peaceful, intelligent" nature (Eleftheriou-Smith 2014). This was also the case for ISIS militants, and some of them were described as "poster girls" (Paterson 2014). This emphasis on physical appearances was used in sensationalistic terms to "dramatise the contrast between these women and their violent occupations" (Nacos 2005, 439). These depictions shifted the focus from these militants' political claims or actions to their looks.

Usually, these portrayals also displayed a Neo-Orientalist bias. These women were generally wearing a *burqa* or a *niqab*, Islamic garments that received a lot of attention in the media. The "oriental subject" always has a certain fascination on the Western reader because "the veiled existence is the very truth of Oriental women […] (which) seem to exist always in this deceptive manner" (Yeğenoğlu 1998,45). These items of clothing were used as a visual tool to depict the radicalisation of these individuals and their new condition of "prisoners" and "victims", not only of ISIS but also of "Islamic patriarchy". The process of radicalisation was reified linguistically: women went from wearing "jeans and trainers" (Sherwood et al. 2014) to becoming "unrecognisable under niqabs so full that even their eyes can't be seen" (Khaleeli 2014) or from being a "blonde-haired, blue eyed Catholic girl" to being "clad in a *niqqab*, with only her eyes showing" (Alexander and Mees 2014).

These statements were also representative of the construction of Western superiority over the Islamic culture which is structured in levels. The first one is occupied by the "white/Christian woman", which is followed by, rephrasing Mamdami's (2005) dichotomy, the "good Muslims and, lastly, by the "bad Muslims". In other words, the display of their religion reinforced the construction of these women's nature as aberrant. This practice made them "bad Muslims" because "'good' Muslim women are those who confine their religious practice to private space" (Hussein 2016, 74). Furthermore, this Neo-Orientalist bias was strengthened by the focus on any "Western" piece of clothing (men and women) militants may wear – e.g. Western brands were usually emphasised. These were contrasted with their "Islamic garments" and interpreted as a sign of the impossibility – or unwillingness – to give up "Western" traditions – which confirmed Western superiority.

***Their failures as women: marriages and motherhood***

Women terrorists were also depicted as deviant through a focus on their (failed) marriages or their (non-standard) behaviour as mothers. Related to the former, it was argued that a militant was "'groomed' by Isis recruiters who had preyed on her vulnerability following the collapse of her marriage" (Morris 2016). Associated with the latter dynamic, a dichotomic behaviour was identified. On the one hand, a militant was described as having "abandoned her two children to join Isis in Syria" (Australian Associated Press 2015). On the other hand, another woman who brought them with her was depicted as a mother who "kidnaps (her) […] children and flees to Syria to join Isis" (O'Connor 2015).

Overall, these portrayals constructed deviant subjects that failed either in their marriage or in raising their children. This deviance was based on what is understood to be the standardised woman, and these militants did not fit within it. In this sense, these depictions hade a moralising and dehumanising effect, and they pushed these women out of the realm of "normality". They were thus interpreted as "deviant subjects" and as such did not represent a challenge for the discourse – as they were already outside of it.

***Islam***

When a jihadist group like ISIS was addressed in the news, Islam – and the possible role this may have had in radicalisation processes – was usually at the centre of attention. Examples of this were also identified through this analysis. Here, it was stated that a militant's father "watched as she became gradually more religious" (Toup Bouchanan 2015). The Neo-Orientalist gaze was also visible: the family of one of the terrorists was reported to have stated that they "do not know exactly what it was that turned her from tomboyish Christian to bloodthirsty Islamist. […] 'the devil' took from her. Until then she had been a 'lovely, sweet child' who excelled academically […] (and) 'she loved

church" (Rayner 2016).

It has already been argued in the literature (Gunning and Jackson 2011) that the focus on the religious component of a terrorist group results in a depoliticisation of their actions. This matter is also observable in the reported examples, where a demonisation of these militants – and their religion – takes place. Both these processes neglected women's agency, safeguarding the discourses on gender and Neo-Orientalism.

***Liberation, rebellion, adventure, and feminism as goals***

The decision to join ISIS was also interpreted as an adventure, a quest for liberation, or as a gesture of rebellion. One of the common arguments that was identified was that "for Isis women, it's not about 'jihadi brides': it's about escape" (Khan 2015). Similarly, it was argued that "teenage infatuation is nothing new, nor is running away from an unhappy or restrictive home. Yet […] To run of your own free will into what is essentially slavery is freakish and disturbing" (Pearson 2015). The jihadis' actions were also described as "an obscure expression of feminist jihadism" (Saul 2015), and it was claimed that "Isil women have a new hook for enticing women to join them: a warped version of feminism" (Sanghani 2015).

The themes of rebellion and adventure were also used to make sense of men joining ISIS, although this had different effects. Gender constructs men as adventurous and rebels –therefore their joining ISIS fitted the narrative. Women, on the other hand, are usually understood as obedient and compliant, and their actions were thus made sense of through different elements that went from their unhappiness and bad relations with their parents to "feminism". In this sense, although their agency was acknowledged, their political commitment was denied through the childish and irrational connotations that

were attached to their acts. Again, they were thus constructed as terrorists that were not credible.

***Family relations***

As discussed previously, women terrorists were often depicted as lured or groomed into terrorism by a male relative, and this was also the case for ISIS women. They were sometimes described as fleeing to Syria to join a brother, their husband, a cousin, etc. An example is the way one of these women was described: she was a very active and important figure within the group but she was still said to have "travelled from Kent to Syria in 2013 to join her husband" (Malik 2015a).

This frame neglected women terrorists' political commitments and, although their intentionality was recognised, their actions were understood as belonging to a man's agenda. In this sense, their full agency was denied because the presence of a man had driven their actions –and this reconciled their acts with the discourse. Therefore, these militants only existed as terrorists when attached to these men. The process of infantilization and homoterritorialisation of these women was thus observable: they were victims of Muslim men to be protected from their male relative(s). Men, on the other hand, were not usually depicted to join ISIS because of a female relative.

***Personal traumas***

The media also tended to emphasise personal traumas that may have led these jihadis to join ISIS. For example, it was said that a militant joined the organisation after the "death of (her) mother from cancer and father getting remarried" (Dodd 2016). Another one was described as "a former model" who "converted to Islam after her father's death in 2010 and began wearing conservative Muslim clothes" (Worley 2016). Another element that

received attention was the "domestic violence" (Mortimer 2016) some of these women suffered.

Shifting the focus to their personal problems hid these women's political commitment. This frame only made sense of women terrorists within a certain degree of exceptionality: only a significant trauma in their lives may explain their engagement in violence. Furthermore, a sense of pity was generated in the audience which somehow excused these women for their violent occupations. This compassion infantilised them as subjects and irrationalised their actions. Once again, they were thus made into a terrorist that was not credible and the discourse on gender was safeguarded – their actions were "only" a result of their traumas. A Neo-Orientalist element could be detected: their conversion to Islam – when this was the case – was sometimes narrated as a consequence of these traumas.

***The "hormone driven" jihadists***

A further narrative employed was the one describing women as "hormone driven" jihadis. It was, for example, claimed that "The jihadi girls are just part of a long line attracted to mad, bad men […] (these men) can whip up female hormones alarmingly […] In the dark web of the female psyche lie these desires for pain, self destruction and annihilation" (Alibhai-Brown 2015). Similarly, but through a Neo-Orientalist perspective, it was also said that "Raqqa's warriors wield a sexual power […] Marrying one is a religiously approved way to channel the mad, hormonal energy that powers all teenagers" (Iqbal 2015).

These statements fit within the broader "erotomania" narrative. According to this, women terrorists display sexual deviance that explains why they join a terrorist group: these subjects are presented as deviant because standard women "have a discreet and

controlled sex life" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008, 10). Again, these portrayals returned the image of a terrorist that was not credible. These women were depicted as irrational and immature, driven only by sexual desire and not by political commitment. In this sense, women were once again victims, both of terrorist men, of their hormones, and of sexual appetite. Because of these characteristics, they were deviant subjects, not standard ones; consequently, they did not represent a challenge for the discourse. In this specific case, a Neo-Orientalist element could also be observed in the depiction of the pursuit of a religiously-approved marriage conveyed through a certain degree of irrationality.

Overall, men were not narrated as "hormone driven". In some instances, men were said to have joined the group because of "promises of cash and women" (Fitzherbert 2016), but this returned a different, agential picture of these militants. The voices of these women seemed to clash with this frame. One of them was described as having said the following: "We're not stupid young brainwashed females, we've come here to Syria for ALLAH alone" (as quoted in Dearden 2014a).

***The betrayal of "Jihadi Brides"***

The Neo-Orientalist perspective interpreted these women's actions as a betrayal of the "Western" generosity. Here, the tone used to describe these militants was of strong condemnation. For example, it was said that "if teenage girls want to join Isis in the face of all its atrocities, then they should leave and never return" (Dent 2015). Similarly, it was claimed that "If you make your bed with barbarians, you can lie in it" (Dent 2015) and, that, therefore, "if [female] Britons want to join Isis, let them go" (Dejevsky 2015). One militant was described as having "'betrayed' (her) family through her radicalisation" (Eleftheriou-Smith 2014). This frame was also identifiable in relation to men jihadis who were defined "hopeless hypocrites who claim to despise the West but who pathetically

wear Nike trainers and daub their temples with expensive Chanel cologne (Egoiste, appropriately, the preferred aroma)" (Johnson 2015).

Overall, these depictions reinforced the Neo-Orientalist idea of superiority of the "generous" West and constructed their engagement with ISIS as a betrayal. Jihadis were depicted as guilty of their actions in very derogative ways which demonised their actions and irrationalised them. In this sense, their political commitments are neglected, and their actions depoliticised. Specifically, in the case of women, the condemnation of their actions also resulted in an infantilisation of these subjects.

Interestingly, some of these women seemed to respond to this Neo-Orientalist view and restated their rejection of the West. They were reported to have said that "I might be only 18 but I know coming to shaam [Syria] the best decision staying in the UK completely diminishes your Islam [sic]" (as quoted in Dearden 2014a). Another militant was described as having claimed that "If we had stayed behind, we could have been blessed with it all from a relaxing and comfortable life and lots of money. *Wallahi* [I swear] that's not what we want [sic]" (as quoted in Sherwood et al. 2014). Another woman was described as having tweeted "follow the examples of your brothers from Woolwich, Texas and Boston […] If you cannot make it to the battlefield, then bring the battlefield to yourself" (as quoted in Khaleeli 2014).

## Conclusion

The present article presented an overview of how Western media made sense of the phenomenon of women joining ISIS. As it has been argued, the fact that these militants may willingly decide to join the terrorist organisation challenges the mainstream gender and Neo-Orientalist understandings of these actors. These discourses have intersected in Western societies in the figure of Muslim women and constructed them as vulnerable and

passive subjects, and as prey of Muslim men and their culture in general. However, their act of joining the terrorist organisation represents a great gesture of agency and, as such, jeopardises these constructions.

It is because of this reason that the media make sense of these women through specific narratives which, in one way or another, reconcile these subjects' actions with the discourses. The focus when reporting these women's story is systematically shifted to their personal issues. This process irrationalises them, denies their agency and their intentionality and, overall, constructs a terrorist that is not credible and is apolitical. These processes may be divided into two main strategies: on the one hand, these subjects are presented as deviants, and therefore they do not represent a challenge to the discourse because they are already outside of it. On the other one, they are interpreted as "too standard" and their actions as ways to fulfilling their role "by all means". Both these strategies safeguard and reify the discourse and, more specifically, the construction of the normative "Muslim woman" in Western societies.

More in general, the present article aimed at problematising the misleading comprehension of ISIS women militants. A narrow, gender bias interpretation may limit the understanding of these women's actions to their personal problems and thus restrict a vision that should take into account more elements. In other words, this process prevents fully grasping the phenomenon and, consequently, to provide an effective response to radicalisation dynamics. Therefore, the present article aimed at providing a reflection that may contribute to the critical deconstruction and denaturalisation of the status of the discourses on gender and the on "the Orient" present in Western societies.

[1] Different names are used to refer to this organisation with specific political implications: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State (IS) or Da'esh (from the Arabic *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-ʿIrāq wa-sh-Shām*). In this article, the name used to refer to the group is ISIS because this is the one employed in two of the three broadsheets analysed (*The Guardian* and *The Independent; The Telegraph* names it ISIL).

[2] The author recognises the problematic use of the following categories: the "West", "Western values", "Western civilisation", "Western societies" or "Western world". These monolithic understandings are against the main aim of this article, however, these were used to ease the arguments made. The same logic applies to the labels "Islam", "Muslims", "Muslim women" and "Muslim men".

[3] The author recognises that "terrorism" or "Islamic terrorism" are highly problematic labels.

[4] The phrase "War on Terror" refers to the US-led international military, political, legal and cultural action to counter-terrorism and regimes supporting it. Although the label was rejected officially by the US government in 2009, it still shapes nowadays political and popular understanding of counter-terrorism activities. For a deeper analysis of the discourses legitimising "post-9/11" counter-terrorism measures see, among others, Jackson, R. 2005. *Writing the War on Terrorism. Language, politics and Counter-Terrorism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[5] The category of terrorism entails much more than this. For example, the instillation of fear (terror) in a specific (sub)group of a society, or the fact that this violence is usually pressuring a secondary subject (which is not the direct target of this violence). Many are the (contested) characteristics of "terrorism", but the ones that are relevant to the argument of this article are, above all, the fact that it is a lethal, destructive and illegal violence.

[6] The use of this term is problematic, however most of the groups that are usually identified with this word mostly self-identify and self-label themselves as "jihadists".

[7] Until May 2017, very few ISIS women were involved in terrorist attacks in ISIS territories. This depended on the structure and strategy of the organisation that assigned women the role of mothers of the future generations of terrorists more than as fighters involved in the conflict.

[8] It should be recognised that there is also a sensational way of narrating the news which is a choice made by the journalists.

[9] I have conducted this research using the following keywords: "Jihadi Bride(s)", "female jihadi ISIS", "Woman jihadi ISIS", and "Women/Woman join(ing) ISIS". The time frame has been determined by the declaration of the Caliphate (2014) and the moment in which these lines have been written –May 2017. Moreover, I have deliberately left aside general phrases as "women - ISIS" as the terrorist organisation was known for kidnapping and enslaving women belonging to other ethnic groups – e.g. the Yazidis. Stories dealing with these issues were the results when more general researches were conducted.
Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the terms used to conduct the research may, in part, have returned biased results. However, my aim was to focus specifically on women jihadists to be able to discuss in deep the resulting frames. Besides, I have tried to compensate this bias by using a wide selection of keywords and by tracking the ways "foreign fighters" were described.

[10] Mainly, the articles were published in the news sections (e.g security, international, ISIS, etc); some were also editorials or opinion/comment pieces.

[11] The results were codified with Nvivo 11. The following analytical questions have driven the analysis: what are the (described) reasons that drove these women to ISIS? How are subjects depicted? What personal aspects are highlighted? What are the assumptions that drove these descriptions and what are the meanings they attach to these women's actions?

[12] Considering the nature of ISIS, it is likely that some of the social media profiles that are considered to belong to these women will turn out to be hoaxes. However, the fact that the articles treat these profiles as real is more important for the argument made here.

[13] Although some differences emerged both in the coverage and in the tones used in the descriptions, there was little variation in the way the identified frames were used to portray these women. As a matter of fact, despite the different political ascriptions, all the frames identified could be found in all the sources in a quite homogenous way (see table 2).

[14] For example, "foreign fighters" was the label used to define the non-Spanish citizens joining the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939).

**Declaration of interest statement**
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**References**

Alexander, H., and A. Mees. 2014. "Dutch jihadi bride: 'Is she a victim or a suspect?'", *The Telegraph*, November 23.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11247941/Dutch-jihadi-bride-Is-she-a-victim-or-a-suspect.html

Ali, N. 2012. "Terrorizing Women: Re-Thinking the Female Jihad". In *Knowing al-Qaeda. The Epistemology of Terrorism,* edited C. Hellmich and A. Behnke, 145-166. Farnham: Ashgate.

Alibhai-Brown, Y. 2015. "The jihadi girls are just part of a long line attracted to mad, bad men", *The Independent*, February 22.
Accessed 18 June 2016
http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-jihadi-girls-are-just-part-of-a-long-line-attracted-to-mad-bad-men-10062909.html

Australian Associated Press. 2015. "Sydney mother allegedly abandoned her two children to join Isis in Syria", *The Guardian*, May 26.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/26/sydney-mother-allegedly-abandoned-her-two-children-to-join-isis-in-syria

Bleich, E., H. Stonebraker, H. Nisar, and A. Rana. 2015. "Media Poortrayal of Minorities: Muslims in British Newspapers Headlines, 2001 - 2012". *Journal of Ethic and Migration Studies.* 41. 6, 942-962. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.1002200

Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex".* New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. 1990a. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". In *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre,* edited by S. Case, 270-282. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Butler, J. 1990b. *Gender Trouble.* New York: Routledge.

Brunner, C. 2007a. "Occidentalism Meets the Female Suicide Bomber: A Critical

Reflection on Recent Terrorism Debates; A Review Essay". *Signs*. 32. 4, 957-971. https://doi.org/10.1086/512490

Brunner, C. 2007b. "Discourse – Occidentalism – Intersectionality. Approaching Knowledge on 'Suicide Bombing'". *Political Perspectives*. 1.1, 1-25.

Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cramb, A. 2015. "'Jihadi bride' denies recruiting London girls", *The Telegraph*, March 16.
Accessed on 20 June 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11475714/Jihadi-bride-denies-recruiting-London-girls.html
Cunningham, K. J. 2003. "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism.* 26, 171-195.

Dearden, L. 2015. "Isis Austrian poster girl Samra Kesinovic 'used as sex slave' before being murdered for trying to escape", Independent, December 31.
Accessed on 20 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-austrian-poster-girl-samra-kesinovic-used-as-sex-slave-before-being-murdered-for-trying-to-a6791736.html

Dearden, L. 2014a. "Islamic State: 'David Cameron's head will be on a spike,' says British woman in Syria", *Independent*, September 9.
Accessed on 20 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/islamic-state-david-camerons-head-will-be-on-a-spike-says-british-woman-in-syria-9721757.html

Dearden, L. 2014b. "James Foley beheading: 'I want to be the first UK woman to kill a Westerner', says British jihadist in Syria", *The Independent*, August 22.
Accessed on 20 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/james-foley-beheading-i-want-to-be-the-first-uk-woman-to-kill-a-Westerner-says-british-jihadist-in-9684908.html

Dent, G. 2015. "If teenage girls want to join Isis in the face of all its atrocities, then they should leave and never return", *The Independent*, February 23.
Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/if-teenage-girls-want-to-join-isis-in-the-face-of-all-its-atrocities-then-they-should-leave-and-10065516.html

Deylami, S. 2013. "Female Suicide Bombers and the Making of American Empire". *International Feminist Journal of Politics.* 15. 2, 177-194. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2012.699782

Dejevsky, M. 2015. "If Britons want to join Isis, let them go", *The Guardian*, February 23.
Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/23/if-britons-want-to-join-isis-let-them-go-london-schoolgirls

Dodd, V. 2016. “Four London schoolgirls who left UK for Syria married men approved by Isis”, *The Guardian*, January 19.
Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/19/four-london-schoolgirls-who-left-uk-for-syria-married-men-approved-by-isis

Eleftheriou-Smith, L. 2015. “British women being used by Isis to incite acts of terror at home”, *The Independent*, January 18.
Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/british-women-being-used-by-isis-to-incite-acts-of-terror-at-home-9985869.html

Eleftheriou-Smith, L. 2014. “Aqsa Mahmood: Parents of 'bedroom radical' fighting in Syria plead for return of daughter”, *The Independent*, September 4.
Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/iraq-syria-crisis-parents-of-isis-bedroom-radical-plead-for-daughter-to-come-home-9711447.html

Elshtain, J. B. 1987. *Women and War.* New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Epstein, C. 2008. *The Power of Words in International Relations. Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse*. Cambridge: The MIT Press ed.

Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change.* Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing.

Fitzherbert, Y. 2016. “The most dangerous job in the world. The smugglers who rescue the women kidnapped by Isil”, *The Telegraph*, August 27.
Accessed 17 October 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/27/the-most-dangerous-job-in-the-world-the-smugglers-who-rescue-the/

Foucault, M. 2002. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.

Gentry, C. 2012. “Mia Bloom. Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics.* 14. 1, 170-172. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.631432

Gentry, C., E. and K. Whitworth, 2011. “The Discourse of Desperation: the Intersections of Neo-Orientalism, Gender and Islam in the Chechen Struggle”. *Critical Studies on Terrorism.* 4. 2, 145-161. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.586202

Gunning, J., and R. Jackson. 2011. “What's so ‘religious’ about ‘religious terrorism’?”. *Critical Studies on Terrorism.* 4.3, 369-388. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.623405

Hoodfar, H. 1992. “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women”, *Resources for Feminist Research.* 22. 3/4, 5-18.

Hunt, K., and K. Rygiel. 2008. *(En)gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hussein, S. 2016. *From Victims to Suspects. Muslim Women since 9/11.* Sydney: NewSouth Publishing.

Iqbal, N. 2015. "The Syria-bound schoolgirls aren't jihadi devil-women, they're vulnerable children", *The Guardian*, February 24.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/24/syria-bound-schoolgirls-arent-jihadi-devil-women-theyre-vulnerable-children

Jackson, R. 2015. "The epistemological crisis of counterterrorism". *Critical Studies on Terrorism.* 8. 1, 33-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1009762

Jackson, R., L. Jarvis, J. Gunning, and M. Breen-Smyth. 2011. *Terrorism. A Critical Introduction.* New York: Palgrave MacMillian.

Jackson, R. M. Breen-Smyth, and J. Gunning. 2009. *Critical Terrorism Studies. A New Research Agenda.* New York: Routledge.

Jackson, R. 2005. *Writing the War on Terrorism. Language, politics and Counter-Terrorism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Jacques, K., and P. J. Taylor. 2009. "Female Terrorism: A Review". *Terrorism and Political Violence.* 21, 499-515. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550902984042

Johnson, B. 2015. "Young British Muslims should Realise that Extremists like Jihadi John are not Honouring Islam", *The Telegraph*, March 1.
Accessed 17 October 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11443487/Young-British-Muslims-should-realise-that-extremists-like-Jihadi-John-are-not-honouring-Islam.html,

Jørgensen, M., and L. Phillips. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publications.

Kahf, M. 1999. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque.* Austin: University of Texas.

Khaleeli, H. 2014. "The British women married to Jihad", *The Guardian*, September 6.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/06/british-women-married-to-jihad-isis-syria

Khan, D. 2015. "For Isis women, it's not about 'Jihadi Brides': it's about escape", *The Guardian*, June 21.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/21/isis-women-its-not-about-jihadi-brides-its-about-escape

Malik, S. 2015a. "The British Islamic State members facing UN sanctions – Profiles", *The Guardian,* September 29.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/29/four-british-members-islamic-state-sanctioned-un-profiles

Malik, S. 2015b. “Lured by Isis: how the Young Girls who Revel in Brutality are offered Cause”, *The Guardian*, February 21.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/push-pull-lure-western-women-isis

Mamdami, M. 2005. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror.* New York: Three Leaves Press

Martini, A. 2016a. “El terrorismo global como amenaza al orden internacional. El caso del Estado Islámico” [International terrorism as a threat to global order.The case of the Islamic State]. *Relaciones Internacionales.* 32, 79-95.

Martini, A. 2016b. “The Construction of the Discourse on ‘Terrorism’”. *Politikon-IAPSS.* 30, 92-105.

Milliken, J. 1999. “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 5.2, 225-254.

Mohanty, C. T., 1984. “Under Western eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse”. *Boundary 2.* 12. 3, 333-358.

Morris, S. 2016. “Tareena Shakil: 'I don’t Want Sympathy … it was my Decision to go to Syria'”, *The Guardian*, January 29.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/29/tareena-shakil-i-dont-want-sympathy-because-it-was-my-decision-to-go-to-syria

Morris, S. 2014. “Missing Yusra Hussien showed no sign of radicalisation, family and friends say”, *The Guardian*, October 3.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/03/yusra-hussein-teenager-uk-missing-bristol-syria

Mortimer, C. 2016. “Tareena Shakil guilty: Woman who took Toddler Son to Syria to join Isis convicted”, *Independent*, January 29.
Accessed 12 May 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/tareena-shakil-woman-who-took-her-toddler-son-to-syria-to-join-isis-convicted-a6842386.html

Nacos, B. 2016. *Mass-Mediated Terrorism. Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and counterterrorism.* Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Nacos, B. L., and Y. Bloch-Elkon. 2011. “The Media, Public opinion and Terrorism”. In *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media,* edited by Edwards G., L. Jacob, and R. Shapiro, 690-709. New York: Oxford Press University.

Nacos, B.L. 2005. “The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism”. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism.* 28, 435–451. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180352

Nayak, M. 2006. “Orientalism and ‘saving’ US State Identity after 9/11”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics.* 8. 1, 42-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740500415458

Ness, C. 2008. *Female Terrorism and Militancy. Agency, Utility, and Organization.* New York: Routledge.

Norris, P, ed. 1997a. *Women, Media, and Politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Norris, P. 1997b. "Introduction: Women, Media and Politics", in *Women, Media, and Politics,* edited by P. Norris, 1-18. New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Connor, R. 2015. "Chechen Mother Kidnaps Dutch Children and Flees to Syria to Join Isis", *The Independent*, March 16.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/chechen-mother-kidnaps-dutch-children-and-flees-to-syria-to-join-isis-10112106.html, [visited on 18.06.2016]

Okin, S.M. 1999. "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?". In *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* edited by S. M. Okin, 9-24. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

O'Loughlin, B. 2016. "Media Coverage of Terrorism". In Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies, edited by R. Jackson, 276-286. New York: Routledge.

Onuf, N. 2009. "Making Terror/ism". *International Relations.* 23. 1, 53-60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117808100609

Paterson, T. 2014. "Austrian 'Jihad Poster Girls' tell Friends: we want to come Home". *The Independent*, October 13.
Accessed 19 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/austrian-jihad-poster-girls-tell-friends-we-want-to-come-home-9792123.html

Pearson, A. 2015. "Let's stop Making Excuses for these 'Jihadi Brides'", *The Telegraph*, February 25.
Accessed 19 June 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11434343/Lets-stop-making-excuses-for-these-jihadi-brides.html

Pettman, J. J. 2004. "Feminist International Relations After 9/11". *The Brown Journal of World Affairs,* 2. 10, 85-96.

Prozorov, S. 2006. "Liberal Enmity: The Figure of the Foe in the Political Ontology of Liberalism". *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 35. 1, 75-99. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298060350010801

Rayner, G. 2016. "Family of 'Jihadi Junior' Isa Dare speak of their Fears for him after he is used as Isil Propaganda Tool". *The Telegraph,* January 2016.
Accessed 18 June 2017.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12081507/Family-of-Jihadi-Junior-Isa-Dare-speak-of-their-fears-for-him-after-he-is-used-as-Isil-propaganda-tool.html

Riley, L. R., Mohanty, C. T. and Pratt, M. B. 2008. *Feminism and War. Confronting US Imperialism*. New York: Zed Books.

Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient.* New York: Pantheon.

Sanghani, R. 2015. “AK47s, heart emoji and feminism: How jihadi brides are luring British girls to join Isil”, *The Telegraph*, May 28.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-politics/11635643/How-Isil-jihadi-brides-lure-British-girls-AK47s-emoji-and-feminism.html

Saul, H. 2015. “Isis wedding certificate shows jihadi bride demanding right to be a suicide bomber as condition of getting married”, *The Independent,* May 14.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-wedding-certificate-shows-jihadi-bride-demanding-right-to-be-a-suicide-bomber-as-condition-of-10250346.html

Schmid, A. 1989. “Terrorism and the Media: the Ethics of Publicity”. *Terrorism and Political Violence.* 1.4, 539-565. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546558908427042

Scott, J.W. 1986. Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. *The American Historical Review.* 91, 1053–1075.

Sheperd, L. 2006. “Veiled Reference: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan post-9/11”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics.* 8. 1, 19 – 41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740500415425

Sherwood, H., S. Laville, K. Willsher, B. Knight, M. French and L. Gambino. 2014. “Schoolgirl Jihadis: the Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join Isis Fighters”, *The Guardian*, September 29.
Accessed 20 June 2016.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria

Sjoberg, L., and C. E. Gentry. 2016. “It’s Complicated. Looking Closely at Women in Violent Extemism”. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs.* 7. 2, 23 – 30.

Sjoberg, L., and A. Tickner. 2013. “Feminism”. In *International Relations Theories. Discipline and diversity*, edited by T. Dunne, M. Kurki, and S. Smith, 205-222. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sjoberg, L., and C. E. Gentry, C.E. 2011. *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

Sjoberg, L., and C. E. Gentry. 2008. “Reduced to Bad Sex: Narratives of Violent Women from the Bible to the War on Terror”. *International Relations.* 22. 1, 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117807087240

Sjoberg, L., and C. E. Gentry. 2007. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics*. New York: Zed Books.

Spencer, A. 2010. *The Tabloid Terrorist. The Predicative Construction of New Terrorism in the Media.* New York: PalgraveMacMillian.

Stiehm, J. 1983. *Women and Men’s War.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Stone, J. 2015. “Aqsa Mahmood Branded a 'Disgrace' by her Parents after Claims she Recruited three UK Girls Flying to Middle East”, *The Independent*, February 22.

Accessed on 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/aqsa-mahmood-branded-a-disgrace-by-her-parents-after-claims-she-recruited-three-uk-girls-flying-to-10062151.html

Spivak, G. C. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271-314. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Stump, J., and P. Dixit. 2013. *Critical Terrorism Studies. An Introduction to Research Methods.* New York: Routledge.

Sylvester, C. and S. Parashar. 2009. "The contemporary "Mahabharata" and the many "Draupadis". Bringing Gender to Critical Terrorism Studies". In *Critical Terrorism Studies: a New Research Agenda*, edited by Jackson, R., Smyth, M.B., and Gunning, J., 178-193. London: Routledge.

Tickner, J. A. 2002. "Feminist Perspectives on 9/11". *International Studies Perspectives.* 3, 333 - 350.

Weldes, J. 2006. "High Politics and Low Data: Globalization Discourses and Popular Culture", in *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretative Turn,* edited by D. Yanow and P. Schwartz-Shea, 176-186. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Wendt, A. 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics". *International Organization.* 46. 2, 391-425.

Whitehead, T. 2015. "Widow of British Jihadist 'Proud' he was Killed by US", *The Telegraph*, September 15.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11866046/Widow-of-British-jihadist-proud-he-was-killed-by-US.html

Withnall, A. 2015. "Glasgow Isis Bride Aqsa Mahmood Writes Poem Praising Tunisia, France and Kuwait Attacks as Black Friday'", *The Independent*, June 28.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/glasgow-isis-bride-aqsa-mahmood-writes-poem-praising-tunisia-france-and-kuwait-attacks-as-black-10351113.html

Wilcox, L. 2007. "Gendering Offense–Defense Theory." Paper presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, IL, February 26–March 1.

Worley, W. 2016. "Kimberley Miners: Former Model who Converted to Islam Arrested on Terror Charges". *The Independent,* October 9.
Accessed 18 June 2016.
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jihadi-arrested-model-kimberly-miners-islam-convert-counter-terror-police-extremism-a7352566.html

Yeğenoğlu, M. 1998. *Colonial fantasies: towards a feminist reading of Orientalism.* Cambdridge: Cambdridge University Press.

Young, I. M. 2003. "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflection on the Current Security State". *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 29. 1, 1 – 25. https://doi.org/10.1086/375708

Zine, J. no date. "Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation". Available at http://i-epistemology.net/v1/attachments/691_Ajiss19-4%20-%20Zine%20-%20Muslim%20Women%20and%20the%20Politics%20of%20Representation.pdf Accessed 12 May 2017

**TABLE 1**

| **Broadsheet** | ***The Guardian / The Observer*** | ***The Independent*** | ***The Telegraph*** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Articles per source** | 87 | 78 | 80 | 245 |

Table 1. Distribution of the sources

**TABLE 2**

| **Source** / **Narrative** | **Total** | ***The Independent*** | ***The Telegraph*** | ***The Guardian / The Observer*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***The label "Jihadi Brides"***[14] | 50% | 48% | 64% | 37% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***The vulnerable, confused and naïve jihadists*** | 50% | 50% | 35% | 64% |
| ***Lured, groomed, and enticed jihadists*** | 49% | 59% | 43% | 45% |
| ***Marriage as goal*** | 49% | 51% | 56% | 41% |
| ***Physical appearances: beauty and "Islamic appearances"*** | 24% | 16% | 31% | 25% |
| ***Their failures as women: marriages and motherhood*** | 24% | 22% | 24% | 25% |
| ***Islam*** | 19% | 13% | 19% | 23% |
| ***Liberation, rebellion, adventure, and feminism as goals*** | 16% | 10% | 18% | 18% |
| ***Family relations*** | 13% | 10% | 16% | 9% |
| ***Personal traumas*** | 11% | 9% | 10% | 11% |
| ***The "hormone driven" jihadists*** | 10% | 3% | 10% | 6% |
| ***The betrayal of "Jihadi Brides"*** | 9% | 7% | 16% | 3% |

Table 2. Distribution of results