



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://generos.hipatiapress.com>

The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS

Joseph Makanda¹

1) University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Date of publication: June 25th, 2019

Edition period: June-October 2019

To cite this article: Makanda, J. (2019). The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 8(2), 135-159. doi: 10.17583/generos.2019.3814

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/generos.2019.3814>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to [Creative Commons Attribution License](#) (CC-BY).

The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS

Joseph Makanda

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

The increasing embeddedness of the jihad feminist within the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operations is eliciting works on the role of women in terrorism. However, there is yet to be a more constructive analysis that adequately accounts on the interface between Jihad feminism and Female Subjugation within the operations of the ISIS. This paper is among the first attempts to draw on the Jihad Feminism Theory (JFT) to develop a conceptual discourse that explains the relationship between jihad feminist fighters and promotion of patriarchal practices and beliefs within the ISIS group. Far from standing against any forms of Western feminization, as espoused by jihad feminists, the paper argues that jihad feminism has further subverted Muslim women to sedentary roles within the ISIS as a way of sustaining the organisations' operations and existence. This is a qualitative paper that relies on a desktop analysis of secondary sources of data.

Keywords: feminism, Islam, ISIS, Jihad Feminism, terrorism.

La dinámica yihadista feminista del terrorismo y la subordinación de las mujeres en el ISIS

Joseph Makanda

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

La creciente integración de la yihad feminista en las operaciones del Estado Islámico de Irak y Siria (ISIS) está provocando investigaciones sobre el papel de la mujer en el terrorismo. Sin embargo, aún no se ha realizado un análisis más constructivo que responda adecuadamente a la interfaz entre el feminismo yihadista y la subyugación femenina dentro de las operaciones del ISIS. Este documento es uno de los primeros intentos de utilizar la Teoría del feminismo yihad (JFT) para desarrollar un discurso conceptual que explique la relación entre las luchadoras feministas yihad y la promoción de prácticas y creencias patriarcales dentro del grupo ISIS. Lejos de oponerse a cualquier forma de feminización occidental, como defienden las feministas yihad, el artículo sostiene que el feminismo yihad ha subvertido aún más a las mujeres musulmanas a roles sedentarios dentro del ISIS como una forma de sostener las operaciones y la existencia de las organizaciones. Este es un documento cualitativo que se basa en un análisis de escritorio de fuentes secundarias de datos.

Keywords: feminismo, Islam, ISIS, Feminismo Jihad, terrorismo

Many Studies on terrorism have often taken the usual bias towards studying and analysing this phenomenon from a male-dominated perspective. However, there is a growing shift that some scholars are taking in explaining the logic of involvement of women in acts of terror. In *Women as Explosive Baggage: Boko Haram and the Gender Dimension of Suicide Bombing in Nigeria*, Agara (2015) argues that women represent a growing, if not already established, presence in myriad terrorist organizations officially identified as national security threats to their respective states (Agara, 2015). Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan (2014) argue that while women had been traditionally considered as victims, there is an increasing number of women suicide bombers since 1970s. According to Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan (2014), there are multiple psychological, economic, political, religious and sociological factors that contribute to the causes that drive women towards terrorism. However, *Jihad* feminism has become a new justification attracting women from all corners of the world into joining male-dominated terrorist groups (Makanda, Matambo & Mncibi, 2018). With terrorism cognitively understood as a male dominated arena, Waddell-Harris (2017) argues that the fight for political, social, economic and cultural equality with men forms the logic behind the radicalisation of feministic movements globally. Some of the radicalised feminist terrorist groups include, the Tamil Tigers of Eelan in Sri Lanka, the Black Widows in Russia, Chechnya-and to a varying degree- the United States of America, *jihad* brides in the ISIS and more recently, the ‘militant feminism’ of the Boko Haram, in Northern Nigeria. According to Zenn and Pearson (2014), what is common among many feminist movements is the quest for balance of power between women and men.

To-date, many male-dominated terrorist groups have been forced to consider instrumentalizing women into their organisations’ frameworks in their operations and sustenance (Brown, 2017). For instance, in Syria, the incapability of the government to mitigate internal conflict led to the outbreak of civil war in 2012. This led to the establishment of the ISIS. In 2013, the ISIS started to make calls for skilled women to help the organization to build the Islamic state. Female doctors, engineers, nurses, teachers joined the ISIS (Baker, 2014). Blaskie (2016) explained that in the city of Raqqa in 2013, the ISIS recruited and deployed female police whose aim was to ensure that local

women in the city abided to the dressing code that is stipulated by the Islamic law. Some women from Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey volunteered to join the operations of the ISIS in Syria (Stenger, 2017). Through social media, the new ISIS female members started to campaign for Muslim women in the West to come to Syria to help fight against the dissolution of Islam. Moran (2016) argued that there were other women who are helping in the kidnapping and trafficking young women and girls from the other parts of the world into ISIS in Syria. On one hand, it can be said that by joining the ISIS, women are meant to increase the human power and populace of the Islamic state. On the other hand, by joining the ISIS, women are striving to emancipate, liberate and assert their equality to men within the male-dominated arena of terrorism - women seeking equality in socio-cultural, political and economic operations of terror groups. That said, it is logical to argue that without the involvement of women in acts of terror, we cannot think of women terrorists.

To this end, the central focus of this paper is to establish an interface between the luring of Muslim women into terrorism and the veiled justification of the patriarchal beliefs and ISIS's male oppressive social system. While there is compelling evidence -anchored substantially on case studies from countries such as Iran, Somalia, Nigeria, and Syria, - suggesting that there is increasing participation of women in terrorism, the role of *jihad* feminists within the ISIS has lightly been analysed (Blaskie, 2016; Brown, 2017; Khelghat-Doost, 2017). This paper is arguable, among the first attempts to draw on the *jihad* feminism theory (JFT) to develop a conceptual discourse that explains the relationship between *jihad* feminism and promotion of patriarchal practices and male-domination within the ISIS's operations and governance.

The paper begins by providing a conceptual discourse that revolves mainly around the *jihad* feminism theory. It then reviews the nexus between *jihad* feminism and male dominance within the ISIS. The third part looks closely at the combustible relationship between luring women into terrorism by *jihad* feminists and the ISIS's politics of women subordination in Syria. Particular attention is paid to *jihad* feminist attempts to interpret religious equality based on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. The section also brings into view reasons as to why *jihad* feminists in the ISIS submit to their male counterparts. The conclusion summarises the key points. In this section, by highlighting the contribution of women, *jihad* feminism institutionalizes

patriarchal practices and male domination further, as a normal human social construct within the operations and leadership of the ISIS.

Conceptual Framework: The *Jihad* Feminism Theory

At the outset, it is critical to clarify the meaning of concepts *Jihad* and Feminism and how they are understood in this paper. The concept ‘jihad’ is quoted from the Qur’an to describe “holy war”, waged against ones inner enemy or external war against people, units and states that oppose/and or try to bring about the dissolution of the religion of Islam (Latif & Munir, 2014; Tibi, 2017). This description of *jihad* captures the inner calling to Muslims to wage war against any threats to their religion and any group of persons that threaten the solidarity of the global Muslim community (Tibi, 2017). According to Saikal (2016), the concept of *jihad* is subdivided into two interpretations. Firstly, there is the greater *jihad* (or *jihad al kabir-*) that refers to *the struggle against one’s self to be a selfless, decent and virtuous human being* (Saikal, 2016: 314). Secondly, there is smaller/lesser *jihad* (or a *jihad al saqhir*) that is used to describe the engagements of Muslims in wars waged against outsiders who pose any form of threat to the stability and solidarity of the Muslim community and the religion of Islam (Saikal, 2016). While *jihad* is subdivided into two interpretations, according to Khan et al (2016), it is a multi-gendered trajectory that calls for both sexes of the Muslim community to engage in holy war against (1) one’s inner enemy and (2) external threats to dissolution of Islam. In this paper, *jihad* is understood as a combination of both holy wars which Muslims of both sexes wage against their inner enemies and threats to Islam as they strive to attain individual peace.

Feminism on the other hand primarily advocates for relative equality between men and women in social, economic and political spheres (Beasley, 2008). At the heart of the feminist agenda is on how women maneuver about academic and empirical structures to find solutions and strategies that can reform the dominance of patriarchal influences in all aspects of life (Beasley, 2013). However, there is a strand of feminism known as Islamic feminism that emerged in the 1990s as a challenge to Western feminists’ interpretations regarding how female subjugation is carried out in the Islamic religion. In this regard, Islamic feminism asserts that Western models of feminism are inapplicable of interpreting Islamic practices and thus tend to provide

misguided and sometimes biased understandings of principles that guide the coalescence of religion and equality of women to men in Muslim communities (Beasley, 2013). As a response to Western feminist' misinterpretation of male oppression in Islamic communities, there emerged a new brand of radical Islamic Feminism known as *jihad* feminism or “gendered *jihad*”. In this paper, the concepts *Jihad* feminism and gendered *jihad* are used interchangeably. *Jihad* feminism has become totally in opposition to Western feminist thinking (Jacoby, 2015). Still, *Jihad* Feminism is a propagandistic construct of Islamic feminism that advances the belief that it is a *jihadi* feminist duty of all Muslim women to join a terrorist group and fight alongside their Muslim male counterparts. The overriding focus of the paper is on *jihad* feminism, its link to terrorism and promotion of patriarchal practices and male domination within the leadership and operations of the ISIS. Hargreaves (2006) argues that *jihad* feminism is a form of a feminist movement that empowers and justifies the ‘divine rights’ that Muslim women have. One of the rights as espoused in the current paper, is a Quranic calling for all Muslim women to part and take part in either frontline or supportive military roles and defend the religion of Islam and the entire *ummah* (Muslim community) from external threat (Stenger, 2017). Also, *jihad* feminism is a radical discourse that is embedded in providing religious interpretations of women equal to men from the Quran and Hadith (de la Fuente, 2015).

There are three key tenets of *Jihad* feminist theory. JFT challenges the interpretation of the Western feminist in both Islamic and non-Islamic states regarding how male oppression and women subjugation is carried out in the Muslim religion. According to *jihad* feminists, Western models of interpreting women subjugation are based on a misguided understanding of principles that guide the coalescence of religion and equality of women to men in Muslim communities (Kynsilehto, 2008; Brown, 2017; Makanda et al., 2018). For instance, In her weekly media briefings, Shohana Khan, a *jihad* feminist representative for the *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, extensively argues that although Western women are free to wear as they want in public and business spheres, their dressing codes entices men to have sexual desires towards them (Wali, 2017). According to Khan, the dressing codes of Western women makes them to be sexually abused and harassed by their male. On the other hand, Khan is admitting that Muslim women dress code eliminates such desires and liberates’ women from being exposed to sexual harassments and abuses that

emanate from *incomplete dressing styles* (Wali, 2017:14). What Khan is saying is that Western feminists interpret covering of Muslim women as a form of abuse and male domination. However, for Khan, it has to be known that it is the covering of all parts of a woman's body in the Islamic world that is responsible for the reduction of Muslim women falling victim to unwanted sexual advancements that men would make towards them if they are not covered (Welch, 2018:14).

Secondly, JFT propagandistically campaigns that it is a Quranic duty and Islamic responsibility of all Muslim women in the world to be active participants of the *jihad* ideological agenda being carried out by the ISIS. According to Ali (2015), ISIS claims to be fighting external threats that Islamic religion is facing. In this case, JFT radically advocates for militaristic and combative participation of women in the terrorist activities to help the ISIS's agenda. What can be said at this point is that, by fighting alongside male ISIS members, equality and dignity of Muslim women who are pioneering any form of *jihad* agenda is achieved (Ali, 2015). Therefore, JFT calls for all Muslim women to be combatants when there is a shortage of their male counterparts as a result of their captivity by oppositional forces. This justifies the increasing numbers of veiled *jihad* feminist who are partaking in suicide bombing across the world (Welch, 2018). JFT also advocates that Muslim women to be wives to their male *jihad* fighters as a way of increasing the ISIS populace. In the field of education, JFT insists that *jihad* feminists study the Islamic religion outside battlefield and educate others on how to become *jihad* feminists to defend threats levelled against Islam and as a way of gaining external support from Muslims residing far from Syria (Huq, 2009; Auchter, 2012).

Thirdly, while it can be argued that *jihad* feminism is as an obligation that lies upon every member of the Muslim community (*ummah*) and not upon some part of the Muslim community, JFT constitutes an obligatory duty that equates Muslim women to men. In this case, JFT purports that by being a (i) "*jihad* brides"- fight alongside their husbands and (ii) wives to *jihad* husbands, Muslim women gain the equality and dignity of fighting against the dissolution of the religion of Islam. As a result, *jihad* feminists fulfil the Quranic interpretation of the holy war that is waged against one's inner enemy or external war against people, units and states that oppose/and or try to bring

about the dissolution of the religion of Islam (Latif & Munir 2014; Tibi, 2017). From the foregoing explanation, the paper is of the view that Muslim women have an obligation to participate in *jihad* as part of honouring their religious beliefs (Von Knop, 2007) and not that of their male counterparts.

What has been discussed so far is that by identifying themselves with their male counterparts within the ISIS as espoused in the preceding paragraph, *jihad* feminists' quest for balance of power between men and women in ISIS is realised (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). In this regard, JFT provides invaluable insights into the current paper's quest for understanding the combustible issue of the role of women in the operations of the ISIS. Therefore, the paper draws on JFT to make sense of the nexus between the luring of women into terrorism and promotion of patriarchy and subordination of women within the operation and governance of the ISIS terrorist group.

Methodology

The paper draws heavily on a desktop review of literature on the nexus between women and terrorism (Bhattacharjee, 2012). To be clear, this article is not about the evolution of *jihad* feminism and dynamics of women insurgency. Instead, my objective here is to take up a new question in the ISIS literature: What is the nexus between *jihad* feminists and women subjugation within the operation, dynamics, and governance of the ISIS? This question is grounded in a desktop-based review of discourses on the role of women in terrorism. Therefore, the article is non-empirical qualitative research rather than quantitative as it has heavily depended on literary sources as a primary reservoir for its data (Dan, 2018). While it would have been more credible to use primary data, the choice of desktop review of the available literature proved to be the quickest and cheapest way of collecting data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) for this paper rather than traveling to the ISIS strongholds to collect primary data.

The data collected from the various kinds of literatures represents the primary data for the analysis being that was analysed through discourse analytical method (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Analysis of data involved coding scholarly discourses on the combustible issue of women and terrorism into one key theme; an interface between *Jihad* feminism and female subjugation in the ISIS's Operations. Coding of data from the secondary data was of

immense significance to this paper. According to Wodak and Mayer (2009:111), *coding is done in order to produce a coherent and comprehensible analysis for readers who are not directly acquainted with the social world of the participants*. Discourse analysis was also used to engage the data with existing literature on the notion of *jihad* feminism.

Surveying Scholarship on the Nexus between *Jihad* Feminism and ISIS

The official declaration of the Islamic State, inaugurated in the city of Mosul in Iraq on the 10th of June 2014, unleashed a socio-political course of Islam (Welch, 2018). The inauguration of ISIS dismantled and destroyed homes, communities and societies -in pursuit of rebuilding its Caliphate state in Syria and Iraq. This has thrown a number of Muslim communities and families across the globe into a state of flux and confusion. The role and importance of women, as agents that can successfully establish and sustain the operational and the continuity of the Islamic state has increased (Mabon, 2017). ISIS has rigorously resorted to recruiting women- notably, doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyer and even female political activists- in the groups' establishment, sustenance and operations of the Caliphate (Nováková, 2018). In most cases, ISIS has used propaganda to recruit women and young girls from all over the globe to join ISIS as *jihad* brides and wives who would bear children who would become the next generation of '*jihad* fighters' of the Islamic State. Irrespective to the vast knowledge of oppression and abuse carried against female ISIS members as purported by some media houses, ISIS still receives a good influx of women from different parts of the world into its operations in Syria and Iraq (Bakker & De Leede, 2015). This paper acknowledges that women who are joining ISIS's from countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan share some similar sentiments and motives as compared to those who join ISIS from other parts of the world. However, I put emphasis on the deeper sense of a shared family ties that cut across regional borders (of Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan) and avenging the deaths of intimate family members lost during the Syrian wars, constitute key factors that influence the radicalisation of Syrian, Iraqis and Lebanese women into ISIS (Ortbals & Poloni-Staudinger, 2018) than women from other parts of the world.

There are about three main categories of women who are joining the ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Firstly, there are those women who follow their male spouses to Syria or Iraq (Navest, de Koning & Moors, 2016). In *Chatting about marriage with female migrants to Syria*, Navest, de Koning & Moors (2016) argue that most women desire to be married to the ISIS male. Rather than desiring to become female fighters, they see themselves as being good wives who would want to be married to male ISIS fighters. In this context, some women join the ISIS mission in search of love, romance and adventure. Secondly, some women are forcefully trafficked and initiated into the ISIS's operations by male fighters or female sympathizers (Cockayne & Walker, 2016). Thirdly, there are those women who are joining the operations of the ISIS in their quest for Islamic feminization. The third category of women join ISIS to wage holy war against external threats that want to bring dissolution of religion of the Islam as called upon them by the Quran. The assumption in the category of women is the belief that *it is a Quranic jihad feminist duty of all Muslim women to travel to Syria and Iraq as active participants of the ideological agenda being carried out by the ISIS* (Makanda et al., 2018:13). This category of women is convinced that by joining the ISIS, a Muslim woman brings dignity to herself and asserts her equality to any male ISIS's fighter. In this regard, any Muslim woman who joins the ISIS empowers and justifies her Quranic right to proactively undertake frontline or supportive military role in defense of the religion of Islam in Syria and Iraq that is they perceive to be under external threat (Stenger, 2017) from the West. In one way or another, it can be argued that the third category of women see their participation in the operations of the ISIS as a form of emancipation, liberation, and equality to men (Zakaria, 2015). This is a new discourse in feminism studies (*jihad* feminism) that this paper emphasises on. Accordingly, it can be said that any Muslim woman who joins the ISIS is in pursuit of challenging the dominance of the male in the operations and governance of activities of the ISIS terrorist group.

A survey of the foregoing literature shows that it is within the quest of *jihad* feminists to correct the misinterpretation of women oppression in Islamic states by Western feminists. However, digging deeper into specifics of *jihad* feminists who join the ISIS, there are scholars who argue that instead of challenging the dominance of male in the operations and governance of activities of the group, *jihad* feminism has become a powerful discourse that

accords sedentary and passive roles to women within the ISIS's operations (Chatterjee, 2016). For instance, in *ISIS and Propaganda: How ISIS Exploits Women*, Ali (2015) argues that most *jihad* feminists who join the ISIS group focus on being good supportive wives to their jihadist husbands, good mothers to their children and carrying out all domestic duties within the ISIS operations. Khan, Watson, Ali & Chen (2018) argue that the call by *jihad* feminist for Muslim women to join the ISIS and be good brides, wives and mothers, makes them turn a blind eye to the absurd construct of women agency and male oppression within the ISIS's operations. Kneip (2016) says that the call by *jihad* feminists for Muslim women to be good *jihad* brides, wives, and mothers when they join the ISIS, masks women not to see any form of oppression and abuse that they face within the operations of the ISIS. In end, far from standing against any forms of Western feminists' interpretation of women subjugation in the Islamic world, *jihad* feminists promote an array of patriarchal practices and beliefs in the ISIS operations.

The assertion in this paper is that there are a number of patriarchal practices that *jihad* feminist abets in the ISIS's operations as espoused by the foregoing scholars. This being the case, many *jihad* feminists have subverted the Quranic role of Muslim women being equal in waging holy war against external threats to Islam. Firstly, the works of (Lia, 2007) highlights how *jihad* feminism promises and assures Muslim women that male ISIS fighters will guarantee women's security and that of their family members. What Lia (2007) is saying is that *jihad* feminists join the ISIS group so as to protect their children and families from the ravages of war in Syria and Iraq and not to wage holy war against external threats to Islam as commanded to women by the Quran. Implicit in this is that *jihad* feminist cannot alter any power relations or male dominancy within the ISIS operations since their security is dependent not on women's capability to wage holy war but on that of their male counterparts. While it may be argued that *jihad* feminist maybe motivated by the interpretation of the Quran to join the ISIS, what is evident is that Muslim women who join the ISIS have no potential ability to dismantle and disintegrate power relations within ISIS's operations and governance. Scholars like Cockayne and Walker (2016) argue that by promising security to their female counterparts, the male ISIS members create a form of continuation of the future generation of *jihad* fighters and suicide bombers

(male). The logic here is that most women who are recruited in the ISIS are used for reproduction and breeding of male children who are forcefully reintegrated into the operation of the ISIS. Still, most women who join ISIS are used for carrying out carryout domestic responsibilities rather than fighting alongside their male ISIS counterparts.

Secondly, more recently, the paper by Foster and Minwalla (2018) point out that *jihad* feminists are used by their male counterparts as recruiting agents of other men and women from neighboring and far distant countries into the operations of the ISIS. In this regard, Foster and Minwalla (2018) argue that it is within the desire of the male ISIS members to use female as a way of encouraging and challenging more male fighters to join the group. It is believed that women who join the ISIS project other Muslim men who are not willing to join ISIS as weak followers of Islam (Winter, 2015b). For instance, in the thirteenth issue of the IS' Diqab- ISIS's magazine- the ISIS publicly lauded Tashfeen's (woman) act of terrorism during California in 2015 shootings as heroic and hyper-sensationalising. This became a recruitment tool that shamed other Muslim men for not participating in the protection of Islam (Alexander, 2015). Bakker and De Bont (2016) elucidate that some *jihad* feminists have become trafficking agents of the ISIS. In this case, some women who join the ISIS traffic young girls and boys to join the ISIS. For instance, in 2014, Yazidi women were kidnapped by ISIS's women fighters (Otten 2017). Winter (2015) also says that there is a number of young girls from different parts of the world who have been reported to have either been lured or trafficked into the operations of ISIS. Some of the trafficked girls and women become a source of finance to the ISIS group. Welch (2018) notes that some young women and girls are sold off as domestic servants and sex slaves within the Middle East and some European countries. This generates funds that the ISIS group uses for sustaining and intensifying its agenda and operations.

Thirdly and foremost, Ali (2015), Saikal (2016), Von Knop (2017) and Khelghat-Doost (2018) argue that it is within the envisioned quest of *jihad* feminism to challenge the inequality of the sexes within a dominant patriarchal systems by standing alongside their male counterparts in waging holy war against any form of external threat to Islam. However, the foregoing scholars concur that the ideological trajectory of *jihad* feminists cognitively subverts the role of women members to male obedience and supportive wives.

Ali (2015), Saikal (2016) and Khelghat-Doost (2018) argue that the degree of submissiveness and obedience women embodies in ISIS, determines the kind of respect, societal appreciation, acceptance, dignity, and solidarity they get within the organisation's operations. For instance, Von knop (2017) says that *jihad* feminism implicitly encourages women to accept a lower social status within the ISIS's operations. What this entails is that women in the ISIS ought to be obedient to all instructions given to them by their male counterparts. Agara (2015) and Khelghat-Doost (2018) emphasise that while *jihad* feminism encourages women's involvement in terrorism, *jihad* feminists cannot change their supportive role in the ISIS's operations and governance. In combative front, *jihad* feminists are instructed to engage in a *jihad* that is permitted by their male counterparts and not as permitted by the Quran or their will (Ebner, 2017). The foregoing assertion highlights subaltern *jihad* feminist voice and agency of Muslim women who often live in multiple worlds. What evidence is that there is male dominance in both the world that they are forced to flee to join the ISIS and, in the world, they are forced to inhabit (ISIS's operation).

An Interface between *Jihad* feminism and Female Subjugation in the ISIS's Operations

It can be argued from this point onwards that literature on *jihad* feminism and terrorism links religious interpretation of the Quran and Muslim women joining terrorist groups. However, what has been lightly studied is the link between *jihad* feminism and women subjugation within the operations of the ISIS and other terror groups. Also, there is a scarcity of literature on how *jihad* feminists justify the patriarchal beliefs, male domination, and oppressive ISIS's operations. It is within the realm of this paper not to gainsay the apparent tenet of *jihad* feminism that women who relinquish their rights towards actively participating in societal activities- such as driving, acquiring an education beyond a basic primary level and engaging in social activities such as sports- liberate themselves from strains of having to labour hard in competition with men (Winter, 2015a). However, the argument by *jihad* feminist that women who undertake strenuous roles that are aligned with those undertaken by men interfere with their femininity and ability to be household

nurturers in any society needs to be dismissed as a tokenist vehicle that bolsters status quo, women subjugation within the ISIS's operations.

A guide book published for women in the ISIS, by the Al Khansaa Brigade (an organisation consisting of a female policing unit of the ISIS), substantially argues that women who join the ISIS are to confine themselves to supportive duties and roles in the group's operations (Moaveni 2015; van den Elzen, 2018). In *the hidden face of terrorism: an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Spencer (2016) argues that it is within the guidelines of the ISIS that women members of the group be given an education that empowers them to take care of their households. Furthermore, Shanks (2016) and Maurer (2018) say that women who join the group progress to a higher level of education. The assertion in this paper at this point is that offering education to women who join the ISIS, the group is transforming and empowering the lives of such women. However, Ali (2015) says that higher education to women in the ISIS is restricted to an education that is of benefit to the group's operations such; media and communication, recruitment, surveillance, and intelligence. This means that in most cases, ISIS prefers a form of education that radically indoctrinate females not to question groups operations. This may include male dominance and female subjugation. What this calls for is a sober assessment of how *jihad* feminism is a form of radicalisation (for women and young girls) for the sole purpose of promulgating and reinforcing the ISIS's patriarchal agenda.

Based on the above, it would appear that firstly, *jihad* feminism uses the Quranic interpretation in addressing the oppressive modes of the ISIS's governance structure that is dominated by men and prejudice that subordinates the role of women. What is clear is that *jihad* feminism thrives on the misconception of *jihad* and terrorism from religious scriptures such as the Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah (Kneip, 2016). Although *jihad* feminism draws its strength on the Quran, Sunnah, and Hadith to romanticise women's acts of terrorism as heroic (Winter, 2015a), it masks *jihad* feminists with Islamic religious sentiments that legitimises their sedentary roles within the ISIS's operations (Kneip, 2016). In fact, the whole logic of *jihad* feminism is to radicalise women (and young girls) for the sole purpose of promulgating and reinforcing the ISIS's male domination. This is no different from a 'return' to a version of society (where *jihad* feminist is running away from) in which governance is dominated by men and women serving as objects. Secondly,

jihad feminism thrives on a strong sense of outrage and a powerful psychological desire for revenge and retribution as a result of the unjust killing of their intimate family members by the regime of Assad and external forces in Syria (Russia, USA, and China) (Saltman, 2019). While it can be argued that the ultra-violent turn of *jihad* feminist began after the official declaration of the Islamic state, women joined the ISIS operations as heroic defenders of the religion of Islam as frontline military and suicide missions (Alexander, 2015) and not as an obligation of the Quran. The key point here is that although Muslim women have the Quranic obligation to participate in a holy war in defending their religion from external threats just as their Muslim men, they joined ISIS to avenge for the deaths of their husbands and family members.

The foregoing segment leads one to inevitably question why *jihad* feminisms advocates for Muslim women to join and fight alongside male ISIS fighters as an obligatory duty that equates Muslim women to men and yet, it justifies patriarchal beliefs and male domination within the operations of the group. Also, one questions why *jihad* feminism sees Muslim women to have an equal right and obligation to defend any form of threat against the Islamic state, yet their role is confined to what their ISIS's male counterparts permit. This is an overriding complex dynamic of power relations outlining the contrasting roles of *jihad* feminists in the ISIS. Rahmah (2016) argues that the ISIS media propaganda crafts visual portrayals of women as equal to men in combative *jihad* to mask the patriarchal practices of oppression within the organisation. In essence, *jihad* feminism is used as a tool that rubber stamps male dominance within the arena of terrorism and ISIS's operations. In this case, *jihad* feminism justifies the use of women by men jihadist to entice and force more Muslim men who were at first unwilling to join the organisation, to join ISIS. This is contrary to what *jihad* feminists seek to achieve: bringing dignity to Muslim women and asserting their equality to any male ISIS's fighter.

It is the view of this paper that when looking into the reality on the role of *jihad* feminists, as Bloom (2017) reveals, that by fighting alongside their male counterparts as *jihad* brides and wives, *jihad* feminist does not gain any form of equality and dignity they aspire for. Digging deeper into operation and leadership of the ISIS, Bloom (2017) argues that most of the time, *jihad*

feminist are often veiled, kept indoors and confined to carrying out sedentary household based duties. According to Bloom (2017), male members of the ISIS perceive their female counterparts as chattel, objects, and commodities and that they can be used by male jihadists. Bloom cites female suicide bombing mission like those done by Tashfeen Malik, Sally Jones and Coleen La Rose as some of the frontline and militaristic action did by Muslim women who belong to the ISIS. However, Winter (2015) and Bloom (2017) reiterate that the actions of the foregoing women Muslims were directed by the male leaders of the ISIS. In other words, the actual participation of women in ISIS's terrorist agenda is limited to that of household nurturers.

The notion of women subjugation within the ISIS persists through the work of scholars such as Cockayne and Walker (2016). According to Cockayne and Walker (2016), there exists an interplay of power relations that governs interactions between men and women within the ISIS's operations; male dominance. Additionally, Cockayne and Walker (2016) say that it is the male-hierarchical categorisation that determines interactions among female ISIS members. This hierarchical categorization corresponds with the types of treatment each woman member of the ISIS is accorded by their male counterpart/s. Zakaria (2015) indicates that women within the Al-Khansaa Brigade (women police or religious enforcement unit of the ISIS) are accorded the highest level of respect and honour by the male members of the ISIS. Women who are doctors, teachers, nurses and engineers receive the second highest level of respect and honour. However, the conduct and practices of this category of women is regulated by the Al-Khansaa Brigade (Zakaria, 2015). The other category of women in the ISIS is the *jihad* brides and wives. The exclusive role of *jihad* brides and wives is to be domestic workers, mothers and sexual pleasers of their ISIS's male counterparts. The bottom category comprises of women who are trafficked, kidnapped and abducted from a non-Muslim background or Muslim who do not believe and respect the ISIS's ideology or culture (women from Yazidi, the Turkmen and Christian regions). The bottom category of women succumbs to the worst forms of treatment. They are seen as spoils of war that can be used and abused as it fits the male ISIS's members. Some of them are sold into slavery or prostitution through inter-organisational human-trafficking networks that work hand-in-hand with ISIS (Welch, 2018).

While it can be argued that by joining the ISIS, women are striving to emancipate, liberate and assert their equality to men within the male-dominated arena of terrorism, the foregoing categorization is institutionalised relation that promulgates a systemic gender-based culture that indoctrinates, oppresses and subverts the role of women. This holds at least three significant implications on what *jihad* feminism stands for. One is that *jihad* feminism is a form of Islamic feminists that empowers and justifies the ‘divine rights’ that Muslim women have in being part of their male counterparts defending the religion of Islam and the entire ummah (Muslim community) from external threat. Another implication is *jihad* feminism is a powerful discourse that accords sedentary and passive roles to women within the ISIS’s operations thus, encouraging them not to undertake strenuous roles that are aligned with those undertaken by men. More importantly, it is within the ideological trajectory of *jihad* feminisms that *jihad* feminists’ role within the ISIS is cognitively subverted to male dominancy, obedience, respect, and categorization.

Conclusion

The paper has used the JFT to gain deeper insights into the role of women in the ISIS. At the onset, there is a presumption within the tenets of *jihad* feminism that the increasing numbers of *jihad* feminists will challenge, dismantle and disintegrate power relations within the ISIS’s operations and governance. From the above theme on the interface between *jihad* feminism and female subjugation in the ISIS, a question that spontaneously comes to mind is: can *Jihad* feminism be described as a means to emancipation or subjugation of Muslim women? The answer to this question is not an “either or” one. It is neither a “both-and” situation. Apparently, *jihad* feminism is an ideology, a social movement, and a particular kind of awareness. As an ideology, it joins the list of all other feminist ideologies that prizes the universal dignity of all Muslim women and aims to see that the global standard of Muslim become respected and reaffirmed in the male-dominated arena of terrorism. This is similar to other feminist ideologies that aim at reforming the dominance of patriarchal influences in all aspects of life. By joining the ISIS, *jihad* feminist strives to emancipate, liberate and assert their equality to men.

As a social movement, *jihad* feminism intends to bring about a particular end – Challenge the ISIS operation and governance where male dominance is a reality. As a particular awareness, *jihad* feminism seeks to talk to the Muslim women in a language that is their own. It is only by recognising the basic set-up in the Muslim world that one will come to realise the misconception of male dominance as alluded by Western feminist. This is why *jihad* feminism will suggest that Muslim women go back to Quranic and Hadith interpretations and find in them how the Western models of interpreting women subjugation are based on a misguided understanding of principles that guide the coalescence of religion and equality of women to men in Muslim communities.

While it can be argued that *jihad* feminism is one among many exploratory trajectories that seek to empower and emancipate Muslim women in waging holy war against threats to dissolution of the religion of Islam just like their male counterparts, it retrogressively work against the enhancement of women and adequately accounts for the justification of patriarchal beliefs and male domination within the operations of the ISIS. The sedentary role that women play within the operations of the ISIS is a deliberate and planned form of subjugation of women. In order to change the status quo, joining the ISIS by women seems not to be enough. At this moment, it can be argued that *jihad* feminism stand re-affirms the unjust and dehumanizing practice carried out by men to *jihad* feminists. Therefore, *jihad* feminism is reformation and not transformation. Reason being that the reformation of the ISIS group by implication means that *jihad* feminists accept the operations and governance of the ISIS. Transformation of the ISIS, on the other hand, should mean changing completely the operation and governance of the group and allowing *jihad* feminists to carry out their mission as they wish and not what men wish them to do. The paper concedes that the ISIS's system is a system of women subjugation and oppression that is actually nourished and sustained by the abundant presence of *jihad* feminists who are pro-male dominance. Accordingly, it is not striking that the fight for political, social, economic and cultural equality with men forms the basis for the radicalisation of *jihad* feminist in global terrorist movements such as ISIS (in Syria and Iraq), Boko Haram (in Nigeria) and Al Shabaab. What forms the basis of *jihad* feminism is the quest for an equal right and obligation to defend any form of threat against Islam. Therefore, *Jihad* feminism does not give Muslim women the

courage and ability to dismantle and disintegrate power relations within ISIS's operations and governance.

This paper concedes that *jihad* feminism can be described both as a means and an end that sustains male dominancy within the ISIS's and other terrorist organisations. As a means, *jihad* feminism does not empower *jihad* feminist to challenge all forms of patriarchal political, economic and cultural practices in the operations of groups like the ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab. And as an end, it creates a mindset that reaffirms male dominancy and opposes all forms of the emancipation of women who join terrorist groups.

References

- Agara, T. (2015). Gendering terrorism: Women, gender, terrorism and suicide bombers. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5(6): 115-125.
http://www.ijhssnet.com/view.php?u=http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_6_1_June_2015/13.pdf
- Alexander, Y. (2015). *Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2014*. International Law Institute. Retrieved from
http://www.potomac institute.org/images/ICTS/IUCTS_2015FINALTER RORISMNAFRICASAHEL2014.pdf
- Ali, M. (2015). ISIS and propaganda: How ISIS exploits women. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: 10-11.
- Auchter, J. (2012). Gendering terror: Discourses of terrorism and writing woman-as-agent. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14(1): 121-139. doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.619780
- Baker, A. (2014). How ISIS is recruiting women from around the world. TIME. Available at <https://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>
- Bakker, E. & De Bont, R. (2016). Belgian and Dutch jihadist foreign fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, motivations, and roles in the War in Syria and Iraq. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27(5): 837-857. doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1209806
- Bakker, E. & de Leede, S. (2015). European female jihadists in Syria: Exploring an under-researched topic. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. The Hague 6, no. 2 (2015).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2015.2.02>
- Beasley, C. (2008). Rethinking hegemonic masculinity in a globalizing world. *Men and masculinities*, 11(1): 86-103.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X08315102>
- Beasley, C. (2013). Mind the gap? Masculinity studies and contemporary gender/sexuality thinking. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 28(75): 108-124.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.761949>
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). Social science research: Principles, methods, and practices. Textbooks Collection. 3.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/oa_textbooks/3

- Blanco-Mancilla, G. (2003). *Citizenship and religion in Nigeria: Comparative perspectives of Islam and Christianity in Kaduna State*. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton.
- Blaskie, R. (2016). *Women in the religious wave of terrorism and beyond: The west versus the rest an analysis of women's motives and agency in al-Qaeda and the islamic state*. Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 2359. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2359
- Bloom, M. (2017). Constructing expertise: Terrorist recruitment and “talent spotting” in the PIRA, Al Qaeda, and ISIS. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(7): 603-623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1237219>
- Brown, K. E. (2017). Gender and Terrorist Movements in, Woodward, R. & Duncanson, C. (2017). *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* Springer: 419-435. doi 10.1057/978-1-137-51677-0
- Chatterjee, D. (2016). Gendering ISIS and mapping the role of women. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 3(2): 201-218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798916638214>
- Cockayne, J. & S. Walker (2016). *Fighting Human Trafficking in Conflict: 10 Ideas for Action by the United Nations Security Council*. Fighting Human Trafficking in Conflict, United Nations University. <https://unu.edu/fighting-human-trafficking-in-conflict>
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: Sage publications.
- Dan, V. (2018). Empirical and non-empirical methods. *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- de la Fuente, V. R. (2015). Feminist Hermeneutics of The Quran and Epistemic Justice. *Analyze–Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, 4.
- Ebner, J. (2017). *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism*, IB Tauris.
- Foster, J. E. & Minwalla, S. (2018). Voices of Yazidi women: Perceptions of journalistic practices in the reporting on ISIS sexual violence. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 67: 53-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.01.007>
- Hargreaves, J. (2006). Sport, exercise, and the female Muslim body: Negotiating Islam, politics, and male power in Hargreaves, J. & Vertinsky,

- P. (2006). *Physical culture, power, and the body*. New York: Routledge: 88-114.
- Huq, M. (2009). Talking jihad and piety: reformist exertions among Islamist women in Bangladesh. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15: S163-S182. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20527695>
- Jacoby, T. A. (2015). Jihadi brides at the intersections of contemporary feminism. *New Political Science*, 37(4): 525-542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2015.1089028>
- Khan, Z. H., Watson, P. J., Ali, H. N. & Chen, Z., J. (2018). Greater Jihad of society and self: Religious and psychological implications in Pakistani Madrassa and University students. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 8(4): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2018.1517016>
- Khelghat-Doost, H. (2017). Women of the Caliphate: the Mechanism for Women's Incorporation into the Islamic State (IS). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11(1): 17-25.
- Khelghat-Doost, H. (2018). The Strategic Logic of Women in Jihadi Organizations. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1430656>
- Kneip, K. (2016). Female Jihad–Women in the ISIS. *Politikon IAPSS Political Science Journal*, 29. doi: 10.22151/politikon.29.
- Kynsilehto, A. (2008). *Islamic feminism: current perspectives*. Tampere Peace Research Institute.
- Latif, A. & Munir, H. S. (2014). Terrorism and jihad, an Islamic perspective. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 2(1): 69-80.
- Lia, B. (2007). *Globalisation and the future of terrorism: Patterns and predictions*. London: Routledge.
- Mabon, S. (2017). Nationalist Jāhiliyyah and the Flag of the Two Crusaders, or: ISIS, Sovereignty, and the Owl of Minerva. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(11): 966-985. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1258863>
- Makanda, J., Matambo, E., Mncibi, V. (2018). The Syrian Conflict and Women Terrorists. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 11(1-2): 235-252. doi: 10.1525/caa.2018.000014
- Maurer, T. (2018). ISIS's Warfare Functions: A Systematized Review of a Proto-state's Conventional Conduct of Combat Operations. *Small Wars &*

157 *Makanda– The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS*

Insurgencies, 29(2): 229-244.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1435238>

Moaveni, A. (2015). *ISIS women and enforcers in Syria recount collaboration, anguish and escape*. The New York Times 21. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html>

Moran, M. J. (2016). *Trafficked into War. Investigating the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, how do women and girls continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking and systematic rape in periods of armed conflict and civil unrest?* <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/338629>

Navest, A., de Koning, M. & Moors, A. (2016). Chatting about marriage with female migrants to Syria. *Anthropology Today*, 32(2): 22-25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12241>

Nováková, S. (2018). *Central Asian Foreign Fighters in Syria*. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11956/101121>

Ortbals, C. D. & Poloni-Staudinger, L. M., (2018). *Women Engaged in Violent Activity as Terrorists, Guerrillas and Genocidaires. Gender and Political Violence*, Springer: 19-53.

Otten, C. (2017). *Slaves of ISIS: The long walk of the Yazidi women*. The Guardian. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/25/slaves-of-isis-the-long-walk-of-the-yazidi-women>

Raghavan, S. & Balasubramaniyan, V. (2014). Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or Regression? *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15(2): 197-211. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol15/iss2/13/>

Rahmah, U. (2016). *The Role of Women of the Islamic State in the Dynamics of Terrorism in Indonesia*. Middle East Institute.

Saikal, A. (2016). Women and Jihad: Combating Violent Extremism and Developing New Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Greater Middle East. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 36(3): 313-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2016.1216628>

Saltman, E. M. (2019). Western female migrants to ISIS: Propaganda, radicalisation, and recruitment. *Gender and Diversity: Concepts*,

Methodologies, Tools, and Applications, IGI Global: 1876-1899. doi: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7113-1.ch068

- Shanks, K. (2016). The changing role of education in the Iraqi disputed territories: assimilation, segregation and indoctrination. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 14(3): 422-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2015.1128807>
- Spencer, A. N. (2016). The hidden face of terrorism: an analysis of the women in Islamic State. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 9(3): 6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.3.1549>
- Stenger, H. (2017). *Gendered Jihad. Recruitment Strategy of the Islamic State*. Master Thesis Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/52151>
- Tibi, B. (2017). War and peace in Islam, in Tsagourias, N. & Gazzini, T. (2017). *The Use of Force in International Law*, Routledge: 47-64.
- van den Elzen, J. (2018). Radicalisation: A Subtype of Religious Conversion? *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12(1): 69-80. Available at <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/679/1351>
- Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(5): 397-414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701258585>
- Waddell-Harris, M. (2017). *(Wo)men in Terrorism: From Chechnya's Black Widows to the Women in the Islamic State*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10393/36518>
- Wali, F. (2017). Functionality of Radicalization: A Case Study of Hizbut-Tahrir. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10(1): 102-117. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.1.1525>
- Welch, T. (2018). Theology, heroism, justice, and fear: an analysis of ISIS propaganda magazines Dabiq and Rumiyyah. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 11(3),186-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2018.1517943>
- Winter, C. (2015). *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*. Quilliam London. <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/charlie-winter-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy>
- Wodak, R. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology. In Wodak, R. & Meyer, M (Eds.), *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 1-33). London: Sage (2nd revised edition).

159 *Makanda– The Jihad Feminist Dynamics of Terrorism and Subordination of Women in the ISIS*

- Zakaria, R. (2015). Women and Islamic militancy. *Dissent*, 62(1): 118-125. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/why-women-choose-isis-islamic-militancy>
- Zenn, J. & Pearson, E. (2014). Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram. *Journal of terrorism research*, 5(1): 46-57. doi: 10.15664/jtr.828

Joseph Makanda University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

E-mail address: makandaj@ukzn.ac.za