

Hallar Abderrahaman Mohamed

# Woman and ISIS: Social Diagnosis and Interventions

## 1. Introduction

The question of the so-called global terrorism is an essentially historical, social, and political phenomenon, although the present article applies an approach based on a social and psychological perspective focused on individuals. One of the key aspects to consider in this analysis of global terrorism is that it comes from a manipulated interpretation of the Quran. Jihadist terrorists intend to create a single Muslim state and to eradicate any form of thinking and living that is different from their precepts. Their target are all non-Muslim people as well as Muslims who do not think like they do. They constitute a terrorist organization that is expanding by virtue of the global access to recruiting young people. They use social networks, new technologies and any other public space, mosques, neighborhoods and associations bringing young people together, to capture new recruits willing to join their cause.

The present flow of Western fighters departing for Syria and Iraq is one of the biggest problems for Western governments because it poses a great threat. Governments face the challenge of designing strategies to control the growth of this phenomenon and to stop the radicalization processes here, in Western Europe. That is the reason why it is necessary to understand and learn in depth how jihadism is penetrating into our society.

Men constitute the central core of the terrorist group. They are given the most important and cruelest tasks in the jihadist fight, such as kidnappings, decapitations or immolations. However, we observe a significant increase in the number of women joining in combat, which accompanies a lack of information on the role they play within the Daesh.

Historically, although they have participated in violent conflicts around the world, the role of women has always been related to domestic tasks. Traditionally, the role of women in the Daesh was limited to assisting fighters in their needs, to educate their children – who would be future fighters – and to taking care of their homes. They are also used as a tool to attract more fighters, and there are records of real cases in which they have participated in terrorist acts.

The gradual incorporation of women to fight in support of the Daesh is a reason for great concern. From an analysis of the multiple discriminations suffered by

women (especially of Arab descent) in the world because of their race, religion and their status as women, it is observed that this incorporation does not respond to a process of equality between men and women, Rather, women are used as weapons, which is a form of exploitation and perpetuation of their traditional roles.

Strategies to prevent and block jihadist terrorism need to be designed. This implies the incorporation of disciplines such as social work and other social and legal sciences. The starting point needs to be an analysis of radical and terrorist violence aiming to apply theoretical information to the practical field and to work on the people, families, groups, and communities adding synergies to the fight against radicalism.

The aim of this paper is to expound the elements that lead women to make incursions into the current terrorism which is preached by the Daesh.<sup>1</sup> What are the motivations to commit barbarous acts and what kind of processes of manipulation are used to achieve these ends are questions that remain without answers. This paper tries to analyze the possible motivations of women and, at the same time, to examine the role they play inside these terrorist organizations. In short, the aim of this investigation is to get closer to the answers to many emerging questions about women's migration to become part of Daesh, and to create efficient measures, starting with an intervention of social work to prevent radicalism which is the main source of this phenomenon.

## 2. Islam and Muslim Women

The Quranic revelation brought real changes to women's way of life in Arabia, as it started a dynamic liberalization of women, anchored up until that moment in a strictly patriarchal regime. Before the arrival of Islam, the birth of a baby girl was considered a disgrace and even a shame in Arabia. Terrible facts such as burying them alive by the parents might occur, as they were considered a threat to the family's honor:

*And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide (Quran 16:58–59).<sup>2</sup>*

---

1 Name received by the self-proclaimed Islamic State, Daesh, in plural *dawaesh*, means fanatics imposing their point of view on the others.

2 The noble Quran, *And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief, He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground?*

Adult women were considered sexual objects that could be bought, sold and inherited, ignoring their qualities, their intellectual and personal abilities and reducing them to mere instruments for men's sexual pleasure.

It was even questioned whether women were humans or if they had a soul. However, Islam provided this oppressed sector of society with a legitimate place in life. From a position of inferiority and legal incapacity, Islam put women in a position of great influence and prestige within family and society. Islam proclaims: *O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female* (Quran 49:13).<sup>3</sup>

*O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer* (Quran 4:1).<sup>4</sup>

Men and women are from the same family, and as such, they have the same rights and duties as promised by Allah: "*Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another*" (Quran 3:195).<sup>5</sup> The arrival of Islam meant an important change regarding the privation of basic and fundamental needs that were provided to women by society. There was an evolution leading to involve women in the society at the time. Tribal laws were transgressed and women tried to end their humiliating ancestral habits. They collaborated arm in arm with the new community; women reclaimed their rights and participated in every political act of the time.

Clear examples of evolution, participation and influence are those of Jadiyahya, A'isha (wives of the prophet Mohammed) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the notable Sufi woman), who occupied significant positions at the beginning of Islam. A'isha, the prophet's wife, was a cultured, distinguished woman who transmitted her knowledge, her wisdom and her political sense to generations of Muslim wise men. She lived for a long time after the death of the prophet, and her house was like a

---

*Unquestionably, evil is what they decide*, available at <http://quran.com/16/58-59>, accessed 4 January 2016.

3 The noble Quran, *O you who have believed, do not put [yourselves] before Allah and His Messenger but fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing*, available at <http://quran.com/49>, accessed 4 January 2016.

4 The noble Quran, *O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer*, available at <http://quran.com/4>, accessed 4 January 2016.

5 The noble Quran, *Alif, Lam, Meem*, available at <http://quran.com/3>, accessed 4 January 2016.

reference centre in the religious sciences. She was an authority herself and came to occupy an important place in society. Visitors came from all over the Islamic world to ask her and follow her advice. No fact of Islamic history could be valid if she would not approve it. At the age of 42, she led an army onto the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

We can affirm that Islam recognizes women's rights to participate in politics, to occupy public positions and to take part in legitimate debates, to fraternize and to exercise any profession that can be executed by men. But as time went by, and as Islam spread across the whole territory, the interpretations that arose by the mediation of the imams deteriorated women's position and manipulated the original message, according to patriarchal interest, in order to create the Islamic society on a rigid, patriarchal base.

### 3. Gender Stereotypes

The present phenomenon of women joining up with the self-proclaimed Islamic State has grown to thousands, including more than a hundred women of European descent. The interest of the scientific community and the society in general to learn about the role played by these women and why they are joining the terrorist fight has increased.

To be able to understand the role of women in the Daesh, we need to make an overall analysis of what are the gender stereotypes, what features do they lend to women in general, and to female terrorists in particular. By this we mean the group of existing beliefs considered as adequate features of men and women, placing women in the private sphere dedicated to their homes and children, while men occupy the public sphere. The stereotypical personality traits associated to women find them tender, compassionate, sensitive to necessities, loving and submissive, and those who cry easily; whereas the traits associated to masculinity are leadership, love for risk, individualism, aggression, strong personality, athleticism, selfishness and toughness. These characteristics strongly match what must be an authentic terrorist which were lacking in women.<sup>7</sup>

The same stereotypes are revealed and perpetuated in the militant leaders' argument on the role of women in conflicts. This drives the myth which translates into a belief that women are not political; as a consequence, the tasks of man and women are divided according to physical differences between them, which

---

6 H. Padilla, *La mujer en el islam, feminismo islámico*, Centro de Estudios Internacionales para el Desarrollo (CEID), Buenos Aires 2011.

7 M. Lopez, J. Morales and A. Lisbona, *Evolution of Gender Stereotypes in Spain: Traits and Roles*, "The Spanish Journal of Psychology" no. 11 2008, pp. 609–617.

produces a belief in the capacity of one, and not the other group, to carry out certain acts. What is more, it is believed that the purpose and primary function of a woman is to be a mother and wife instead of having an identity. The same gender stereotypes are found at the root of the conventional wisdom that, even when it tends to ignore the role of women as central actors, is quite certain that women play support roles in favor of the terrorist groups, as it is understood that women are in a better position to provide and keep safe homes, to act as bait or to carry out surveillance tasks or be messengers. The gender stereotypes try to separate women from the conflict and keep the position of women as guardians of civil life, generating the extended belief that women only play support roles and are not main actors in the planning and execution of attacks.

An article published by the Institute el Cano about women and the so-called Islamic State reflects that the role reserved to women within Daesh has been very much discussed and shows the emergence of a feminine jihadist subculture which understands jihad as a holy war and in which women are given more operational functions, thereby overcoming the established gender clichés, supported in this regard by both the traditional Islamic sources and the Salafist ideology lead by Daesh. Even if it is true that in some very specific cases tasks given to women surpass the domestic environment, it is not less true that, until today, we have not been able to affirm that there is a real break with it.

To understand and learn about the gender stereotypes within Daesh, it is necessary to analyze the process of attraction, radicalization, and the role played by women within the organization where they are, once again, discriminated.

## **4. The Role of Women in Daesh**

### **4.1 Terrorist women profile**

The profile of these women constitutes a typological diversity causing an obstacle when establishing particular features in the case of religious ideology. They are young female converts or come from Muslim backgrounds, both practicing and non-practicing families, that in principle were not especially devoted to the Islamic religion in many cases. It would frequently happen that they would become radicalized after suffering traumas, or as a consequence of a subtle, skilled manipulation process by extremist groups.

Regarding education, broadly speaking, the educational level of women recruited is low or very low, covering only the most basic education. Except for a few of them having higher level studies, some of them reaching university level, the social groups to which they belong can be both rural or urban, middle class or disadvantaged so-

cial and economic environments. This situation makes them much more vulnerable to suffer manipulation by insurgent groups, given their lack of culture and the fact that many of them had never left the confines of their small world.<sup>8</sup>

Several studies conclude that the age range of these women is generally between 15 and 35 years old and in most of the cases their civil situation is single in all countries.

In terms of social environment, the recruited girls may have worked in licit or illicit professions – sometimes both of them – and had unstructured or normalized lives, having solely a European social-cultural outlook, or this mixed with habits from the country of origin. The wide game of sociological features makes it impossible to determine a standard profile.<sup>9</sup> But despite not having a standard profile, we can point to certain psychological and social vulnerabilities, used by radicals to guarantee that women join the terrorist war.

## 4.2 Recruitment Process

To explain the enormous attraction the new global terrorist matrix is causing among many Muslim women we need to underline the implementation of a recruitment campaign designed specifically for them. The efforts to recruit women to Daesh start with the identification of possible matches undergoing a moment of psychological and/or social weakness. Once the woman is located, the organization makes considerable effort to convince her that these kinds of actions contradict neither the Islamic principles nor the usual responsibilities of a Muslim woman, which is another clear example of manipulation.

Daesh, aware of the importance of recruiting young women, uses social networks like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc. to reach them. Knowing that the youngest of these women spend a lot of time on the Internet and it is an ideal space to take advantage of disaffection toward Western culture and, at the same time, increase the extreme identification with radical ideas.

---

8 A. Rubin, *Woman says she told police about paris attacker's hide-out*, "The New York Times" 2008, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/world/europe/woman-says-she-told-police-about-paris-attackers-hide-out.html?ref=topics&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/world/europe/woman-says-she-told-police-about-paris-attackers-hide-out.html?ref=topics&_r=0), accessed 6 January de 2016.

9 R. Torres, L. Ponce, *Reislamización digital y yihadismo europeo: claves comprensivas para la intervención social comunitaria*, "Sistema" no. 240, 2015, pp. 101–116.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue analyses the importance of the romance factor as one of the motivations that make young women join a terrorist group in the occupied territories.<sup>10</sup>

Up until 2012, female participation in such activities carried out in the Spanish territory was promoted mainly by the attraction of a male (relative or partner) and related to support tasks and housework (other tasks such as, legalizing the man's administrative situation). It was not related to the operative's activities in terrorist militancy. From 2013, in the context of conflict in Syria and Iraq, the situation has changed: the first cases of mobilized women – motivated by their partners and by themselves, after being recruited and radicalized normally through social networks connected to Daesh – were reported. According to the families' testimonies, most of the times they were seduced by a romantic vision of life in the Caliphate, while only a small proportion of them joined with the intention to form the first line of combat, something that, in the end, would not happen since the active practice of violence is very far from the Daesh idea of what the feminist jihad should be.<sup>11</sup>

In the recruitment process, women play a very important role of recruiting other women. As Ramachandran says, the terrorist groups have taken advantage of the “martyrdom” of female suicide bombers through an extended use of propaganda, getting more attention and publicity for their cause. The image of young women fighting desperately against the powerful (be it Israel, Russia or the USA) through the extreme practice of blowing themselves up has an immediate global effect. Even though the suicide attacks causes wide condemnation, the vision of a woman that sacrifices her life for the Palestinian cause defying traditions, draws the attention to the desperation an entire people.<sup>12</sup>

The Daesh recruitment networks do not miss out on the great capacity of women to spread propaganda and recruit new members through their profiles in social networks, where tales about the crisis in Western values can be found, as well as frustrations from the difficulties in practicing their religion in their countries of origin to the satisfaction of living alongside their “sisters” and “living honorably under Sharia law”, spreading an idyllic vision of the life project

---

10 C. Garcia, *Las Mujeres del Estado Islámico*, Instituto Elcano 2001, available at [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/terrorismo+internacional/comentario-garciacalvo-las-mujeres-del-estado-islamico](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/comentario-garciacalvo-las-mujeres-del-estado-islamico), accessed 5 January 2016.

11 Ibid.

12 S. Ramachandran, *Women Suicide Bombers Defy Israel*, “Asia Times”, available at [www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle-East/EJ25Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle-East/EJ25Ak02.html), accessed 2 January 2016.

offered by Daesh, as documented by Carol Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford and Ross Frenett, in their empirical work “Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS.” The authors point out that these women support the brutal use of violence with the same intensity as their male companions and they manifest it as such in their social network profiles, even though only very few of them are interested in practicing it in an active way.<sup>13</sup>

### 4.3 Motivations to participate

The reasons why they travel are as varied as the women themselves. We could look at several reasons that motivate them to go; one of them is ideology – just as men, women are convinced that they would go straight to paradise if they die fighting for Islam. A new vision of Islam is presented to them in a very attractive manner, as the only way to bring themselves closer to God. Theocratic cosmopolitanism is another reason, most women express their deep grievances at the treatment of Muslims across the world, and deplore the West’s foreign policy, they have feelings of hate for everything they consider foreign, and their only solution is an ideal Islamic society built on their strict interpretation of Islamic law where they can carry out their practice. The feelings of rejection from the society to which they belong but with which they do not identify, the search for an Islamic identity and the sense of unity and sisterhood are also key causal factors for women who travel.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, one possible motivation is the women’s demand for equality that they have not had in their place of origin. This struggle for equality is causing women to be used by certain groups and people with specific interests. It encourages them to give everything for this desired equality that many will probably never reach, no matter how many empty promises they receive or how much they try to convince them with acts of uncertain temporality. Sadly, the eagerness of these women to escape a life predestined to man’s subordination and dedicated to the exercise of irrelevant and accessory social tasks, remains a failed attempt. It is clear that within these groups women are blatantly discriminated against, and that it is not even hidden in the public sphere.

---

13 C. Hoyle, A. Bradford and R. Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2015, available at <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/publications/>, accessed 4 January 2016.

14 Ibid.

## 5. Proposals for Prevention and Intervention in Radicalization

### 5.1 Social integration as prevention's key aspect

Dealing with social integration requires working to make people feel like members of the society in which they live, with the ultimate aim to protect them from radical discourse and influence. It is about providing identity and a sense of belonging to the targeted population – especially the second or third generation of young people descended from migrants – and providing an answer to their aspirations which might otherwise be satisfied by the radicals.

To make integration possible, there are two conditions which need to be present: the social context has to be favorable to this integration, on the one hand and, on the other, people must be able to participate in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the society. Both are closely related in a way that, if people did not have the chance to develop their capabilities and abilities, they would not be able to take advantage of their chance to participate. Therefore, they must be offered the necessary opportunities, protecting the weak and recognizing the right to create, innovate and differ in opinion. The population needs to be prepared to live together, respecting everyone's dignity, prioritizing non-violence and solidarity.

It is necessary to take into account global systemic inequality when analyzing integration processes, to identify and recognize that Muslim and specifically migrant women do not hold the same rights and opportunities as the rest of the society. It is important to recognize the fact that their gender as well as their racial and religious origin deepen their exclusion and hinder their social inclusion.

One of the common characteristics of many women joining Daesh is that they do not feel like members of European society where they live. For them, the only community for reference is the one of Muslims in general and, particularly, the one of the Mujahidins fighting in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. Working difficulties, family and social isolation, as well as the absence of opportunities and/or incapacity to apply the social rights and not participating in the social, cultural, economic and political life, make women contemplate the society and the country they live in as enemies. No doubt this affects their recruitment to extremism.

It is true that socio-political integration is not the final trigger in the process of radicalization and jihadist recruitment, but it is a factor to be taken into account since, in the long term, this lack of integration may become a key element for socially conflictive identity based on resistance. However, even though it is not a definitive factor, the existence of high levels of socio-political integration may serve as a radicalization brake and benefit from the management of social

problems through peaceful and democratic channels. An effective combination of integration measures in the socio-economic and socio-political-cultural areas would contribute to preventing radicalism.<sup>15</sup>

Group empowerment, as a social intervention tool through women's associations or organizations, increases people's self-esteem, their personal networks and may become an adequate tool in combating the multiple inequalities that many women suffer. From the perspective of the community empowerment, bringing women together can foster social collaboration. Furthermore, the group empowerment is a fundamental instrument to fight against poverty and social inequality, to modify the social contexts in which the problematic situations are generated.<sup>16</sup>

There is no doubt that women's role in the Muslim world, and also in other cultures, is crucial when it comes to education based on a transmission of values and cultural references. From that perspective, women's empowerment would not only provide them the role they deserve as social actors, but also generate a collective profile that exerts positive leadership which would transform structures that sustain armed struggle and radicalism, and would allow developing different strategies oriented on the integration, development, and peaceful coexistence among cultures.

## 5.2 The role of social work in radicalization prevention

Social work is a profession based on practice and a social discipline that promotes change and social development, social cohesion, people strengthening and well-being. The principles of social justice are human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity. Backed by the social, human and cultural theories, social work requires both the subjects and structures to face problems, necessities and risks in a joint effort.<sup>17</sup>

The intervention in social work is understood as the action organized and developed by social workers with people, groups and communities, with the aim of generating changes that help satisfying their needs; overcoming physical and non-physical difficulties, social problems and obstacles that interfere or limit equal

---

15 M. Castells, *La era de la información. Economía, Sociedad y Cultura. Volumen II: El poder de la identidad*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1998.

16 M. Silvestre, R. Royo, E. Escudero, *El empoderamiento de las mujeres como estrategia de intervención social*, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, 2014.

17 Definition of social work adopted by the General Assembly of the International Federation of Social Workers, Montreal, Canada, July 2000.

opportunities; increasing people's capacities; and, finally, contributing to promote social integration.

The social worker represents a fundamental bond that contributes in the organization and functioning of institutions and services for the population's integration and social wellbeing. As such, its role as a subject of this article becomes especially important.

The lack of knowledge and practical experience in the development of actions oriented on the intervention and prevention of radicalism requires expert debate by people who, understanding radical and polarized interpretations of Islam, are able to analyze and propose strategies that offer a framework to develop social intervention, from the viewpoint of investigation, prevention and awareness-raising.

There is no doubt that the social sciences play a fundamental role in the analysis and development of processes for the intervention and prevention of radicalism. There is a necessity to possess an integral and multidisciplinary vision on the subject to be able to face it and provide answers to the existing challenges. The intervention must contemplate three axes: prevention (to avoid the creation of conditions favoring the radicalization processes), signaling (of individuals in the process of becoming radicals or those promoting extremist ideas) and intervention in the detected cases.

Social work can contribute to modify the structural factors that explain radicalization through integration in the long term, intercultural dialogue and the fight against inequality and discrimination. To that end, there is a need to involve Muslim communities in the prevention and the fight against terrorism, generating a network that makes it harder to present the recruitment offer as attractive. Furthermore, this discipline can contribute to the socio-economic and socio-cultural integration of immigrants as they arrive, but even more so to their descendants, due to the importance of paying attention to second generations and how they integrate in society. The bet must be on a multicultural integrative model that respects and integrates the different cultures, and be proactive and propose alternatives to reach communities from community social work.

The message used by the recruitment networks could be neutralized by intercultural dialogue and promoting forums for debate, reflection and training, mainly in those places where people are brought together, with special attention on places like prisons, cyberspace or places dedicated to religious training or prayer. It would be necessary to prevent extremist messages from being disseminated, while, at the same time, generating alternative messages that build objective realities regarding the Quran and its interpretations. The voices of the majority must prevail over the voices of extremists. From that perspective, the work has to

be carried out to promote a better knowledge of Islamic cultural values in Europe and improve the perception of Islamic cultures.

### 5.3 Islamic feminism as a source for preventing radicalism

The religious fundamentalisms stand for a global phenomenon that requires a global answer. The resistance offered by the activists of Islamic feminism and women rights can provide an answer by virtue of a diverse, transnational and consistent action.

Religious fundamentalism is by definition opposed to women's autonomy; the fundamentalists' projects operate by undermining women's rights as well as human rights in general and their development. Many young people have been exposed to a fundamentalist interpretation of religion and do not hold the critical resources to analyze radical messages. This can seriously impact women in that they may think and feel that they are not entitled to any rights at all, that others may influence their decisions regarding themselves, their minds and bodies, and even make these decisions for them. This involves accepting that they are second-class citizens.<sup>18</sup>

The role of Islamic feminist is crucial, since they are dedicated to combat any kind of violence, especially when it is carried out in the name of Islam, like violent extremism. The network of Muslim women fighting for peace declares: *We, Muslim women, must reclaim the mantle of cultural, intellectual, and religious authority, declaring our opposition to violence with a powerful and unified voice. We must announce our Commitment to resisting injustice generally and violence specifically through peaceful means and from the unique perspective of women. We must speak comprehensively and holistically to a diversity of discourses to effectively oppose violence.*<sup>19</sup>

They also express their jihad as fighting against violent radicalism, declaring their commitment to compassion, peace and social justice, just like the Islamic doctrine says, and aspiring to unite people to create harmony, cooperation and collective achievement and prosperity. At the same time, violent extremism breaks

---

18 A. Sardá, *Las y los activistas por los derechos de las mujeres definen los fundamentalismos religiosos*, "Shareen Gokal and Saira Zuberin" 2007, available at [http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/las\\_activistas\\_definen\\_los\\_fundamentalismos\\_religiosos.pdf](http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/las_activistas_definen_los_fundamentalismos_religiosos.pdf), accessed 8 January 2016.

19 Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality, *Muslim Women Leaders at the Frontlines of Change*, available at <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org>, accessed 4 January 2016.

individuals, families and communities, preventing people from completely reaching their potential as social and spiritual beings. It mutilates societies, causing them to fall, and creates relationships based on mistrust and intolerance at the core of the society. Violent extremism damages the name and reputation of Islam globally, spreading flagrant distortions about the Quran and the example of the prophet Muhammad.

The feminist fight of Muslim women is structured around the principles and values of women's rights and social justice ordained by the Quran. The emergent movement of Muslim women in search for gender equality acts from an Islamic perspective to bring about a change of laws and culturally discriminatory or restrictive habits, to eradicate discrimination and the patriarchal cultural practices contradictory with the Quran, such as ablation, stoning to death, forced marriages, physical punishment, political isolation and social seclusion.

One of the goals of Islamic feminist networks is to highlight the value of the gender equality principles from a religious perspective through investigation, documentation, information, divulgation and the capacity to create and build strategic interventions for empowerment, with the aim of achieving gender equality.

## 6. Conclusion

The conclusions that can be outlined from this chapter can be divided as follows. The current phenomenon of women joining Daesh has increased in numbers, but their role in it remains the same: it is still concentrated at a domestic level with less support and a secondary role compared to that of men. The belief that women only carry out supporting tasks corresponds to gender stereotypes that associate women with tenderness, compassion, sensitivity, affection, care and submission. Stereotyping as with the division of labor between men and women is based on physical differences and the different capacities to carry out certain acts and the purpose and primary task of a woman is to be a mother and wife instead of having an identity. Accepting those stereotypes, female terrorists become an anomaly, something irrational.

Another important point in the development of this research is the profile and the motivations of these women. The first is so varied that it becomes impossible to determine a standard portrait. In the same way, the motivation they find to seek and immerse themselves into the conflict is very wide and there is no possibility to draw a clear line of argument. We can only conclude that their social and psychological vulnerability and religious extremism make the recruitment easier and the combination of the two factors is an invitation to radicalization.

Detachment from Western values and culture and from the way of practicing religion by the majority of Muslims become common causes in the minds of these women to see Daesh as an idealistic society, where they can develop their strict and, at the same time, extreme interpretation of the Islamic law.

One of the saddest conclusions that can be drawn from this work is that the use of women to commit suicide attacks is one of the most extreme forms of women's manipulation and exploitation.

As the above point makes clear, it becomes necessary to develop a system of intervention to prevent radicalism, based on the following key factors:

- A social community intervention oriented in two ways, to the Muslim communities and the societies where they are integrated, so that “difference” changes from being controversial and a source of mutual mistrust, into being an incentive to mutual social knowledge that would benefit the empowerment process of Muslim women.<sup>20</sup>
- Group empowerment from a community perspective related to women and gender inequality toward Muslim communities and the societies where they integrate.
- The utilization of Islamic feminism as a key prevention point, the European Muslim communities and the Islamic feminist movement wish to fill a place of full civic and social belonging, associated in a natural way to the values and principles of human rights and the European and international judicial heritage. The normalized coexistence among cultures and religions in the European setting is not an option – it is an inevitable destiny according to the current era of coexistence and fusion of civilizations, one of the most benevolent effects of globalization. The social reaction in favor of diversity requires a community intervention where social work, an independent scientific discipline, can provide solid support, finding the contexts where Muslim women suffer discrimination, and taking appropriated actions to end it. We need to develop an integrative and holistic perspective of human rights within gender specialization networks.

Islam's position is categorical and unequivocal to the acts carried out by these people who call themselves Muslims: it categorically condemns terrorism. The issue in question is that the acts perpetrated by Daesh are not Islamist at all. In fact, it is offensive to the people professing Islam as the religion of peace. And its acts

---

20 R. Torres and L. Ponce, *Reislamización digital y yihadismo europeo: claves comprensivas para la intervención social comunitaria*, “Sistema” no. 240, 2015, pp. 101–116.

are condemned by the global Muslim community. There is no possible interpretation of the Quran that can lead to justifying beheadings, murder or torture to the people they call enemies. Islam defends and protects in its sacred texts freedom of creed and thought. The terrorists, however, go in the opposite direction to what Islam preaches. The proof to this categorical conclusion is that 20 billion Muslims in the EU and 40 billion in the whole European continent are characterized by being a majority which accepts the social and democratic rule of law.

The dimension of full social belonging is an underlying objective in every public intervention oriented to Daesh's eradication. The construction of a fairer global system and, inside this one, a European Union that returns to the expansive construction of social cohesion, remains an essential part of a long-term solution targeting violent radicalization. The social and cultural answer must be as firm as the one from the military and police; however, it is not yet visible, as shown by the Syrian refugee drama.

One contextual condition unavoidable in eradicating jihadist terrorism is still a pending subject: socio-political freedom and the democratization of countries with Arab Muslim majority. The geopolitics of Western countries, Russia and the countries of the region, create a dimension that has influenced a drift toward destabilization, conflict and internal wars, putting an end to the hopes of democracy born after the Tunisian Arab Spring. The result is the fragmentation of Syrian, Iraqi and Libyan territory and the return of the political support of dictatorships (like the one Egypt) which uphold the *status quo*.

## References

- M. Castells, *La era de la información. Economía, Sociedad y Cultura. Volumen II: El poder de la identidad*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1998.
- C. Garcia, *Las Mujeres del Estado Islámico*, Instituto Elcano, 2001, available at [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/riecano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/terrorismo+internacional/comentario-garciacalvo-las-mujeres-del-estado-islamico](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/riecano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/comentario-garciacalvo-las-mujeres-del-estado-islamico), accessed 5 January 2016.
- C. Hoyle, A. Bradfor, R. Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2015, available at <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/publications/>, accessed 4 January 2016.
- A. Lamrabet, *El Corán y las mujeres: Una lectura de liberación*, Icaria Antrazyt, Barcelona 2011.
- M. Lopez, J. Morales and A. Lisbona, *Evolution of Gender Stereotypes in Spain: Traits and Roles*, "The Spanish Journal of Psychology" no. 11, 2008.

- H. Padilla, *La mujer en el islam, feminismo islámico*, Centro de Estudios Internacionales para el Desarrollo (CEID), Buenos Aires 2011.
- S. Ramachandran, *Women Suicide Bombers Defy Israel*, "Asia Times", available at [www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle-East/EJ25Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle-East/EJ25Ak02.html), accessed 2 January 2016.
- A. Rubin, *Woman says she told police about Paris attacker's hide-out*, "The New York Times" 2008, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/world/europe/woman-says-she-told-police-about-paris-attackers-hide-out.html?ref=topics&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/world/europe/woman-says-she-told-police-about-paris-attackers-hide-out.html?ref=topics&_r=0), accessed 6 January 2016.
- A. Sardá, *Las y los activistas por los derechos de las mujeres definen los fundamentalismos religiosos*, "Shareen Gokal and Saira Zuberin" 2007, available at [http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/las\\_activistas\\_definen\\_los\\_fundamentalismos\\_religiosos.pdf](http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/las_activistas_definen_los_fundamentalismos_religiosos.pdf), accessed 8 January 2016.
- M. Silvestre, R. Royo, E. Escudero, *El empoderamiento de las mujeres como estrategia de intervención social*, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao 2014.
- R. Torres and L. Ponce, *Reislamización digital y yihadismo europeo: claves comprensivas para la intervención social comunitaria*, "Sistema" no. 240, 2015.
- The noble Quran, available at <http://quran.com/>, accessed 4 January 2016.