

## **Female Sympathisers of ISIS as Muhajirahs in ISIS-Affiliated Media**

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### ***Abstract***

International media have reported on the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), an international terrorist organisation based in Syria and Iraq since 2014. Women, often young and unmarried, were leaving their homes and families to sneak into Syria and join ISIS, according to reports in the international media (Neumann, 2015). Sjoberg and Gentry (2011) assert that the media's portrayal of female terrorists and the factors that encourage women to support terrorist organisations have not been sufficiently investigated. This study examines the discursive strategies employed by ISIS-affiliated media outlets to represent female sympathisers as *muhajirahs*. Using Critical Discourse Analysis – the Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016), this paper will analyse the diverse and often contested ways in which the Self versus Other (Wodak, 2009) schemata is prominent in the representations of ISIS female sympathisers. The data were taken from ISIS-affiliated media, including the Manifesto from the Al Khansaa Brigade and six Dabiq magazines. This paper will focus on referential, predicational and argumentation strategies (topoi) in the selected ISIS-affiliated media. This paper intends to pave the way for an examination

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of gender and terrorism that explores the complexities of representations by examining gender through multiple lenses.

**Keywords:** Gender, terrorism, ISIS, critical discourse analysis, ISIS-affiliated media

## **1. Introduction**

Since June 2014, international media reported on ISIS as an international Islamist-motivated terrorism group centred in Syria and Iraq led by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. ISIS's ideology is based on the Ghuluw Fii Takfir thoughts, in which all who resist and do not join ISIS are deemed infidels or apostates (Masmuhah et al., 2019). ISIS is regarded as a Salafi jihadist Islamist group that aims to build a state based on historic Islamic caliphates (Wagemakers, 2015). Between 2014 and 2016, an estimated 27,000 to 31,000 individuals from 86 countries travelled to Syria and Iraq to join violent extremist groups (Barrett, 2017). ISIS uses media platforms to persuade, influence, and recruit people to join them. A research report by (Cook & Vale, 2018) stated that the number of recruits for ISIS members from April 2013 to June 2018 reached 41,490 people from 80 countries, and about 13% were female members. It has been estimated that approximately 600 to 1,000 women have moved from their homes in the West to territories previously controlled by the Islamic State (Biswas & Deylami 2019). The female sympathisers were persuaded to migrate (perform 'Hijrah') to ISIS-held territory to support their brothers and sisters (Neumann, 2015). According to Martini (2018), ISIS mainly called these female sympathisers of ISIS who migrated *muhajirat* (or *muhajirah* in the Arabic singular form, meaning those who make the Hijrah, the Muslim sacred pilgrimage).

According to Sjoberg and Gentry (2011), the way women terrorists are represented in the media and the motivations that encourage women to join and support terrorist organisations have not been adequately explored. Furthermore, the media also very often portrays women involved with terrorist groups as acting in ways that are not only different from their male counterparts but also in ways that are specifically suited to their gender as well as their perceived gendered roles (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). ISIS caters to women, too, evident in the fact that they published materials directed specifically at women. Although women are not allowed to take up arms, the media groups inspire them to perform gendered roles within ISIS. According to (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020), men's and women's ISIS trajectories were influenced and shaped by gender, especially by a desire to solidify masculine and feminine identities in ISIS's Caliphate, where

traditional gender roles were glorified and brutally enforced. Some of the gendered roles performed by ISIS female sympathisers include cooking, nursing and showcasing sewing skills, as mentioned in a document entitled *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study* released by the media wing of ISIS's all-female Al-Khansaa Brigade.

The number of women who made hijrah (migration) to ISIS territories is historically unprecedented (Tarras-Wahlberg, 2017). Moreover, the phenomenon has drawn significant media attention and created panic around the globe (Neumann, 2015). The notion of hijrah (emigration) is central in the messaging targeting women outside ISIS territories (Lahoud, 2018). Thus, this study attempts to contribute to the existing literature on these female sympathisers of ISIS. This research examines how ISIS-affiliated media use discursive strategies in representing these female sympathisers of ISIS as *muhajirahs*.

The research question that this study attempts to answer is:

- How does ISIS-affiliated media represent these female sympathisers of ISIS as *muhajirahs*?

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of 'discourse of difference' is vital in this study. Hall (1989), as mentioned in Wodak (2009), says that the discourse of difference distinguishes between 'us' and 'them'. To be identified as a group, any group must be differentiated from the 'others' – internal and external. Hall (1989) further suggests that any identity is primarily defined as different from the 'other'. In this study, the meanings of 'we' and 'they' imply identification with and differentiation. This concept is ideologically constructed and is made clear through linguistic analysis. This study examines how discursive strategies are used to represent female sympathisers of ISIS in the ISIS-affiliated media through this binary.

Chilton (2004) mentions that political discourse is viewed in terms of social groups who exploit and control language from another point of view. He also notes that language indicates what is beneficial or harmful or just and unjust. Undeniably, language is an essential tool to impart ideologies. According to van Dijk (2008), we can see how our minds set up and communicate different worlds of actors and actions in terms of cognitive representation. Concerning this, due to the world's complexity, one must try to understand it by reading the minds, intentions, and motives. These can be done by analysing different discourses (van Dijk, 2008). Thus, this study will employ

critical discourse analysis, Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), to unravel this binary surrounding the female sympathisers of ISIS in the ISIS-affiliated media.

The majority of women's roles in terrorist organisations were confined to supporting roles (Cunningham, 2003). In addition, Elshtain (1995) insisted that throughout history, stereotypes of men as 'just warriors' and women as 'beautiful souls' have been utilised to secure women's status as non-combatants and men's identity as warriors in wars and insurgencies. In the case of ISIS, according to Brown (2016), religious argumentation is strategically utilised to ask female sympathisers to perform gendered roles. Thus, it is deemed desirable to comprehend the gendered roles as muhajirahs that female ISIS sympathisers performed, as represented in selected Dabiq magazines and The Manifesto by the Al Khansaa Brigade.

There are other studies investigating the phenomena of ISIS female sympathisers. For instance, two hundred (ISIS) defectors, returnees, and incarcerated ISIS cadres from over thirty-five countries participated in a study by Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020). This study investigates their demographics, context, and other qualitative differences concerning their psychosocial vulnerabilities and motivations for joining ISIS. Termer and Duyvesteyn (2022) conducted a critical discourse analysis of ISIS publications between 2015 and 2017. Their studies reveal three gendered narratives that ISIS has used to substantiate its recruitment of women. These narratives depict women as builders of the Ummah, representatives of Islam, and guardians of the Caliphate.

De Leede (2018) found that female Western ISIS supporters are motivated by various factors. These include ideological or religious motivations, the pull of the cause, frustration and anger over the perceived global oppression of Muslims, and the search for a sense of purpose and belonging. It is mentioned that women suffering from the same form of oppression, such as patriarchalism and gender inequality in the society from which they emerged, had caused the number of female members of terrorist groups to continue to rise. A study by Lahoud (2018) states that ISIS crafted its messaging to men and women in distinct ways to achieve its recruitment, governance, control, and state-building objectives. This study also found that women are given a voice in ISIS publications, and evocative efforts are made to portray this as agency and even empowerment. Yet, when reconciling the various voices and messages employed, the content of the messaging is about empowering ISIS and not the female sympathisers.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study will employ the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to analyse the data. Using Critical Discourse Analysis – the Discourse Historical Approach by Reisigl and Wodak (2016), subsequently DHA, this study will explore the diverse and often contested ways in which the Self versus Other (Wodak, 2009) schemata is prominent in the representations of ISIS female sympathisers. Chilton (2004) states that political actors often act coercively through language, positioning themselves in self and other schemata in specific relationships to exercise power. Using DHA, the linguistic strategies explored in this study are limited to referential, predicational and argumentation strategies in the ISIS-affiliated media.

#### **3.2 Data Sources**

##### *Data collection Procedure*

The data collection process of this study started from 2014 to the end of 2016. This period is chosen as these two years saw the emergence and the fall of ISIS. Each article was kept in a separate folder (one folder for each newspaper). For this study, Anthony Laurence's *Antconc* software was used to generate frequency analysis to have an accurate number of occurrences of certain words to find salient features in the text. Then these articles were analysed based on discursive strategies in DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Coding procedures were also conducted with the help of two other researchers to ensure inter-reliability. The percentage agreement for the inter-reliability of this dataset is 82%.

##### *ISIS -Affiliated Media*

This study will examine two sets of documents from ISIS. The first document is the Manifesto from the Al Khansaa Brigade, and the second set of documents consists of six online Dabiq magazines. This study intends to analyse the women section of the Dabiq magazines.

##### *Manifesto from the Al Khansaa Brigade*

In collecting data from ISIS-affiliated media, all the magazines were downloaded from the website ([www.thequilliamfoundation.com](http://www.thequilliamfoundation.com)). In this study, the analysed documents included the Manifesto

written for women by the Al Khansaa Brigade (women police of ISIS) and translated by Winter (2015). The document's title is *Women of Islamic State, Manifesto and Case Study*.

### *Dabiq Magazines*

All Dabiq magazines were downloaded from The Quilliam Foundation website. The content of Dabiq 7 to Dabiq 12 about women was analysed. That said, a section in each Dabiq magazine focused on women was chosen. The reason for selecting only Dabiq 7 to Dabiq 12 was because these are the only editions with sections on women, while Dabiq 1 to Dabiq 6 has no sections on women. In total, six Dabiq magazines were analysed. The table below summarises the ISIS-affiliated media analysed:

Table 1: List of Dabiq magazines analysed

<b>Issue Number and Name</b>	<b>Issue Release Date</b>	<b>Topic Female Article (Pages)</b>	<b>Pages</b>	<b>Author</b>
Issue 7: From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone	12 February 2015	To Our Sisters: A Brief Interview with Umm Basir al-Muhajirah	50-51	Al Hayat Media Center (2015a)
Issue 8: Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa	30 March 2015	To Our Sisters: The Twin Halves of the Muhajirin?	32-37	Al Hayat Media Center (2015b)
Issue 9: They Plot and Allah Plots	21 May 2015	From Our Sisters: Slave Girls or Prostitutes?	44-49	Al Hayat Media Center (2015c)
Issue 10: The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men	13 July 2015	From Our Sisters: They Are Not Lawful Spouses for One Another	42-48	Al Hayat Media Center (2015d)
Issue 11: From the Battles of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions	9 August 2015	To Our Sisters: A Jihad Without Fighting 40 –456 pages	40-45	Al Hayat Media Center (2015e)
Issue 12: Just Terror	18 November 2015	To Our Sisters: Two or Three, or Four	19-22	Al Hayat Media Center (2015f)

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) consists of various methodologies and methods. Nonetheless, the theoretical construction of discourse and methodology that CDA tries to operationalise may come from multiple disciplines. This process entails working in a transdisciplinary way where the logic of one sentence can be put to work in the development of another (Wodak, 2009). One prominent theorist of CDA includes Norman Fairclough and his dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 1995). Not forgetting, CDA also consists of the Socio-Cognitive approach (van Dijk, 1984), socio-semantic representation of Social Actors (van Leeuwen, 1996), and Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). This study believes that the discourse historical approach helps achieve the research objective and answer the research question of this study.

### *Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)*

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2016), the discourse historical approach relates to critical theory on social and philosophical orientation. Moreover, DHA defines ideology as an (often one-sided) perspective or worldview composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, and evaluations shared by members of a particular social group. In this instance, the studied social group consists of ISIS female sympathisers.

DHA also believes ideologies play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining unequal power relationships through discourse. Discourses either legitimise or delegitimise power (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Texts are often sites of social conflict because they manifest traces of competing ideologies' power and hegemony struggles. Thus, this study focuses on how female ISIS sympathisers utilise linguistic forms in their various expressions of power and manipulations.

Strategies of positive self-representation and negative presentation of others are evident in DHA. Exclusion or inclusion of social actors in linguistic representations can serve various social and political purposes for the speakers (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). It is believed, therefore, that linguistic exclusion and inclusion can have discriminatory effects. Therefore, this study aims to investigate what is omitted and included in the representation of ISIS female sympathisers as *muhajirah* in ISIS-affiliated media.

It is also essential to examine the narratives of hijrah in ISIS to comprehend the discursive strategies chosen for this study. According to Lahoud (2018), hijrah refers to the year 622, the beginning of the Muslim Hijri calendar, commemorating the hijra performed by the Prophet

Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers when they migrated from Mecca to Medina. Due to persecution, Muslims could not practise their faith and beliefs in Mecca at the time. They migrated so that they could freely practise their Islamic faith. According to Toguslu (2019), Dabiq editors use the same argument as a reason for migration, claiming that Muslims in other countries face restrictions on their religious practice and, as a result, cannot fully practise their religion and hence the hijrah to ISIS is deemed obligatory.

Moreover, Dabiq develops this concept of hijrah in various ways (Toguslu, 2019). In ISIS's strict jurisprudence, the distinction between Darul Islam and Darul Kufr is based on the separation between the believers and the disbelievers. Dabiq further claims that true Islam can be practised in ISIS territory and that Muslims should migrate to ISIS and abandon their current homes.

The second focal point of Dabiq's hijrah narrative is the characteristics of a true Muslim and how to practise Islam. Toguslu (2019) asserts that Muslims must reject societies based on non-Islamic human law and perform hijrah to ISIS territory. Toguslu (2019) noted that in Dabiq magazines, a Muslim who does not perform hijrah and continues to reside in a non-Islamic society would be considered a sinner. He also stated that according to ISIS, the religion of Muslims who continue to live in non-Islamic societies would be annihilated.

There are five types of discursive strategies in DHA, which involve the justification/legitimation of inclusion/exclusion of members of groups (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). In relation to the narratives of hijrah in Dabiq, this study attempts to analyse referential, predicational, and argumentation strategies in the ISIS-affiliated media to focus on the self and other construction of the female sympathisers of ISIS. This study believes that referential and predication strategies are subordinates to the persuasive intent of the ISIS-affiliated media analysed. Furthermore, argumentation strategies are the formal or content-related warrants which connect the argument(s) with the conclusion. Thus, analysing these three strategies will help understand how these ISIS-affiliated media persuade and legitimise the need for these female sympathisers of ISIS to perform hijrah to ISIS. In the examples discussed in the analysis section, the ones in italics refer to the self (ISIS), while the ones in bold refer to the other (West). The table below illustrates the discursive strategies, purposes and linguistics devices analysed in the study.



Table 2: Types of discursive strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016)

Strategy	Purpose	Linguistics devices analysed
Referential	Discursive construction of social actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deictics and phoric expressions</li> <li>• Ideological anthroponyms, collectives</li> </ul>
	Discursive construction of objects/phenomena/events (Hijrah)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material, mental, and verbal processes (Verbs)</li> </ul>
Predication	Discursive characterisation of social actors and phenomena (more or less positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjectives, modalities,</li> </ul>
Argumentation	Persuading addressees of the truth and normative rightness of the claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topoi</li> </ul>

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Women as *Muhajirahs*

Women are represented as *muhajirahs* in the ISIS-affiliated media. Before discussing further, defining the term, '*Muhajirah*' is crucial. '*Muhajirah*' is an Arabic term referring to women who perform Hijrah. According to Martini (2018), ISIS addresses ISIS female sympathisers as *muhajirah* in the Arabic singular form, meaning those who make the hijrah, the Muslim sacred pilgrimage. According to Lahoud (2018), hijrah refers to the year 622, the start of the Muslim Hijri calendar, commemorating the hijra performed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers when they left Mecca for Medina. She further mentioned that according to Islamic tradition, the hijrah resulted from the persecution and oppression the first believers endured because of their faith. It symbolises their willingness to abandon their possessions in search of a secure location to establish God's teachings. When ISIS calls on Muslims to perform the hijrah, it hopes this history of sacrifice and reward will encourage men and women to travel to the territories it controls (Lahoud, 2018). The articles from the Dabiq magazines and The Manifesto from the Al Khansaa Brigade narrated the experiences of these *muhajirahs* migrating from their respective countries to ISIS territories. Moreover, some of these articles emphasise the benefits these women will receive upon their migration to ISIS.

*They believe in Hijrah as an obligatory act.*

*Example 1*

Here I want to say with the loudest voice to the sick-hearted who have slandered the honour of the chaste sisters *a woman's hijrah from **dārul kufr** is obligatory* whether or not she has a mahram if she can find a relatively safe way and fears Allah regarding herself. *She should not wait for anyone* but should escape with her religion and reach *the land where Islam and its people are honoured*.

Dabiq 8

Through the clause ‘a woman's hijrah from Darul Kufr is obligatory,’ the narrator asserts that hijrah is a religious obligation. This female sympathiser can even travel to ISIS without her mahram (male guardian). According to Khelghat-Doost (2017), women's lower incorporation into jihadi organisations is justified by the concepts of mahram and sexual purity, drawing on classical Islamic sources. According to these beliefs, a Muslim woman must always be accompanied by a male mahram in public (either her husband or a prohibited relative). Due to the nature of war zones, women warriors would inevitably find themselves in the unlawful company of males who are not their close relatives. Therefore, jihadi organisations initially forbade women from participating in jihad to avoid such allegedly sinful circumstances. However, according to Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020), ISIS recognises that urging women to travel alone is incompatible with ISIS ideology that imposes strict restrictions on women's movements. Therefore, the argument favouring women's hijrah is tied to women's obligation to protect their religion. Furthermore, the clause, ‘she should not wait for anyone,’ emphasises the urgency of performing hijrah. ISIS is also portrayed favourably in the phrase ‘the land where Islam and its people are honoured.’ Thus, moving to ISIS is preferable because the female sympathiser will be respected and honoured in ISIS, unlike in their current countries of residence. The phrases ‘should escape’ and ‘should not wait’ emphasise the importance of her migration as hijrah to ISIS is regarded as a religious obligation. In addition, the phrase ‘should escape’ implies that these female sympathisers want to run away. These female sympathisers, too, will be honoured in ISIS as mentioned in the word, ‘Islam and its people are honoured’. This also implies that they believe Muslims are dishonoured in other places, thus making ISIS the only attractive place for them to migrate. From another

perspective, this example states that Muslims will be able to deem their dignity in ISIS. This becomes a strong reason for female sympathisers to migrate to ISIS. ISIS honours them, unlike their native countries. The promise that they can redeem their dignity motivates the female sympathisers to migrate to ISIS. This is in line with Leede's (2018) study that demonstrates ISIS female sympathisers are motivated to go to ISIS due to a variety of factors such as ideological or religious motivations, frustration, and anger over the perceived global oppression of Muslims, as well as the search for a sense of purpose and belonging.

*They are emotionally, mentally, and physically strong.*

*Example 2*

*The muhājirah sister* thereby passes over **the obstacle of family** through ways and measures that Allah (subhānah) facilitates and then goes through the hardship of a long journey that is also *exciting* and *full of memories*.

Dabiq 8

The female sympathiser is referred to as 'the *muhajirah* sister' in this instance. The phrase 'obstacle of the family' implies that she faces opposition from her relatives. She requires considerable emotional fortitude to defy her family and parents. The phrase 'difficulty of a long journey' describes the journey to ISIS as arduous. The term 'passes over' signifies victory. This may be interpreted as an attempt to entice readers to perform hijrah to ISIS. Consequently, overcoming the obstacles above and enduring a difficult journey to ISIS demonstrates the female sympathisers' physical, mental, and emotional strength. She is able to survive the journey to reach ISIS. Adjectives such as 'exciting' and 'full of memories' describe these obstacles as positive events for the female sympathiser. In this example, the female sympathiser is portrayed as an active social actor who voluntarily leaves her family members for ISIS. This is congruent with the finding by Bloom and Lokmanoglu (2020) which states that ISIS describes the female sympathisers' hijrah as a journey full of hardships for which strength is a prerequisite. They further mentioned that once these female sympathisers arrive in the caliphate, ISIS frequently emphasises that life for the female sympathisers is not without obstacles.

*They are happy to arrive at ISIS.*

*Example 3*

While we would discuss *the stories of hijrah*, we would all agree upon a feeling that overtakes every *muhājirah* during her journey. It is as if **we leave from darkness to light**, from **caves of darkness to a welcoming green land**.

Dabiq 8

The collective ‘we’ in ‘we would all agree’ emphasises the happiness shared by most of these *muhajirahs*. The noun clause ‘the stories of hijrah’ implies that several narratives were told to pique readers’ interest in ISIS. In addition, the referent ‘every *muhajirah*’ generalises that all *muhajirahs* felt the same way, i.e., that they were pleased to have arrived at ISIS. The verb ‘overtakes’ emphasises the overwhelming feeling they experienced upon arrival. For these *muhajirahs*, the phrase ‘from darkness to light’ symbolises a new source of hope. ISIS is characterised as a ‘welcoming green land’ with positive connotations. In contrast, their native countries are referred to negatively as ‘dark caves’. This also implies that these women’s futures in their home countries will be bleak, as the cave may represent hopelessness. The entire clause assumes that these women are hopeful for a new beginning and a better life in ISIS. This example illustrates that these female sympathisers are progressing toward a better and happier place, ISIS. According to Lahoud (2018), some of the more common push factors that made the female sympathisers leave their native countries included feelings of discrimination, not belonging to their society, seeking independence, and grievances related to foreign policy.

*They are firm in their decisions to perform hijrah.*

*Example 4*

When the *Caliphate* was announced, we knew where to go and *what we wanted*.

Dabiq 15

*Muhajirahs* are also portrayed as steadfast in their decision to migrate and support ISIS. They deliberately choose to be members of ISIS. In this instance, the phrases ‘knew where to go’

and 'what we wanted' indicate that the women knew exactly what they desired and would not renounce their decision to support ISIS. These phrases emphasise their convictions and desire to settle in ISIS. The phrase 'the caliphate was announced' indicates that the caliphate's establishment was publicised. These female sympathisers make a deliberate decision to join ISIS. Moreover, the announcement of the caliphate's establishment is a significant event for all ISIS members. This example is congruent with (Lahoud, 2018) stating that, albeit always in gender-specific terms, the narratives suggest female sympathisers of ISIS are awarded active agency. From another perspective, Martini (2018) stated that the fact that female sympathisers may willingly decide to join the terrorist organisation challenges the mainstream gender and Neo-Orientalist understandings of these actors. In Western societies, these discourses have intersected around the figure of Muslim women and constructed them as vulnerable and passive subjects who are the prey of Muslim men and their culture in general. However, their act of joining the terrorist organisation demonstrates a high level of initiative, consequently putting these constructions in jeopardy (Martini, 2018).

#### 4.2 Argumentation Strategies - Topoi

Three topoi are found in the theme of women as *muhajirahs* in the ISIS-affiliated media. The topoi found include topoi of threat, history, and religious obligation.

##### 1. Topoi of threat

###### *Example 5*

Living in the lands of the kuffar, not making Hijra, and not even enjoining good nor forbidding evil is a dangerous state to be in. *Who of us can say we are safe from **the evil around us?** So many sisters I have seen over the years have lost their Religion trying to integrate with society... **a society rid of blessings, a community built upon the blood of the innocent, a society at war with Islam and the Muslims.***

Dabiq 15

At the start of the sentence, the actor is backgrounded. Hence, the one performing hijrah is not explicitly mentioned. Next, the clause, 'not even enjoining good, nor forbidding evil,' indicates

that the female sympathisers should allow themselves to join ISIS. The verb ‘enjoining’ implies that the action is prescribed and should be performed by these female sympathisers. They are expected to perform hijrah of their own will. Furthermore, they should not be silent and must express their support for ISIS. Here, the Western other is described as evil. Thus, living with the Western other should be avoided at all costs. The threat is also intensified in the sentence, ‘Who of us can say we are safe from the evil around us?’. There is no guarantee that they will be saved from the other as the other is believed to be at war with ISIS. The phrase, ‘so many sisters I have seen over the years’, implies that the process of integration and assimilation between the other and the Muslims have been occurring for a long time. However, for ISIS, the process of assimilation did not work well. The determiner ‘so many’ pluralises the number of Muslim women willing to sacrifice their religion to blend into the Western culture. The verb of seeing, such as ‘I have seen’, is used to increase the validity of the fact that the assimilation between the Muslims and the others is more of a threat to these female sympathisers. The threat is visible as these women have stated that they are being threatened by the Kuffar (other). This could be one of the main reasons these women perform hijrah.

Negative attributions are given to the other as exemplified through phrases like ‘land of the kuffar,’ ‘a society rid of blessings’, ‘a society built upon the blood of the innocent’, ‘and a society at war with Islam and the Muslims’. The other is mitigated as the tyrant. This example, too, serves as a firm reminder for these women to leave their native countries for ISIS. They should not compromise with a society that does not accept and respect their religion (referring to the Western other), as stated in the example in the sentence, ‘a society rid of blessings, a society built upon the blood of the innocent, a society at war with Islam and the Muslims’. ISIS believes in separating itself through the self and the other binary. Anyone who is not part of them is deemed their enemy. This is a clear example of how ISIS distinguishes itself from others. Nonetheless, the female sympathisers are reminded to avoid sacrificing their religion just to fit in the Western world. According to Vale and Cook (2018), ISIS propaganda exploits these feelings of alienation and exclusion and links them to the grand narrative of the persecution of all Muslims by ‘the West’.

*Example 6*

*Instead, we only report on truths here.* The foremost among them is that *the migrant families were faced with torment and extreme humiliation* from **the vengeful nationalists** that **dominated the groups above.**

Manifesto

This example mentions that ISIS is only reporting the truth. The discourse marker ‘foremost’ implies that the female sympathisers and families should be considered migrants. The referent ‘migrants’ functionalises and legitimises their existence. Negative adjectives such as ‘vengeful nationalists’ describe the other as an enemy. ‘The migrant families’ is passivised using the past tense ‘were faced’. Adverbs ‘tormented’ and ‘extreme humiliation’ indicate that Western female sympathisers could not defend themselves and were previously tortured and abused in their countries of origin. Such adverbs are used to intensify the abuse they received from the other. Due to the abuse, hijrah is the only option for them to run away, as they believe that ISIS will protect them. Furthermore, the noun phrase, ‘vengeful nationalists’, implies that the other is fighting for their nations and are not motivated by religion, unlike ISIS. The last clause, ‘dominated over the groups’, implies two things. First, at the moment, the other is controlling but not winning the war. Secondly, the families who migrated come from different groups of people. This intensifies the number of people being tortured by the other. In conclusion, the female sympathisers faced threats, thus causing them to move to ISIS.

*2. Topoi of religious obligation*

*Example 7*

*And here I call on you to make hijrah to us here in the lands of the blessed Islamic State! Then come, make your way to Darul-Islam. And I remind you of the personal obligation of every Muslim and Muslimah to make hijrah from dārul kufr to Darul Islam.*

Dabiq 10

In this example, performing hijrah is regarded as a religious obligation. In Dabiq 10, the example given is a direct order for these women to migrate in the form of an imperative sentence. This example also indicates that ISIS seems to have the authority to instruct these women to move to ISIS. The verb phrase ‘to make hijrah’ is mentioned twice, and ‘make your way’ insists that these women should migrate to ISIS. The writer refers to ISIS as ‘the lands of the blessed Islamic State’. Moreover, the phrase ‘the individual obligation’ stresses that performing hijrah is an individual obligation befalling them, and they must perform hijrah to ISIS despite their circumstances. The determiner ‘every’ emphasises that the burden to migrate befalls every Muslim and Muslimah (female Muslims), thus intensifying the importance of performing hijrah. A form of othering is evident whereby positive attributes such as ‘Darul Islam’ is used to describe ISIS while ‘Darul Kufr’ is used to describe the other. Clearly, migrating to ISIS is described as moving to a better place for these female sympathisers. The sentence, ‘Then come, make your way to Darul Islam,’ is an open invitation for them to ISIS. This reaffirms that ISIS believes in fundamentalism, whereby they insist that there is a clear distinction between the female sympathisers (self) and the other (West). Biswas and Deylami (2019) stated that ISIS perceive the West to be the primary instigator of a war against Islam. Consequently, the female sympathisers view joining ISIS as a means of opposing the war and supporting ISIS.

## **5. Conclusion**

The analysis on the theme of women as *muhajirahs*, as mentioned by the ISIS-affiliated media, emphasises that it is fundamental for these women to perform hijrah as the Western other oppress them in their native countries. Concerning Islamic history, these women are expected to emulate the era of the golden age of the four caliphates as stated in the topoi of history. On topoi of threat, these women are reminded that they are tortured by the other in the West, thus causing them to move to ISIS. In her study, Brown (2016) concurs with this, suggesting that the female sympathisers of ISIS talk about not belonging in the West, thus making them move to ISIS. In the topoi of religious obligation, these women believe Muslims are dishonoured in other places, thus making ISIS the only attractive place for them to migrate. Schmidt (2014) also mentioned that Al Qaeda used similar strategies to create a narrative that builds on the notion that Muslims have been humiliated by the West. The only redemption is said to be through faith and sacrifice (Schmidt, 2014). These female sympathisers want a fresh start in ISIS. As Qazi (2018) mentioned, some



women are willing to accept a new identity, name, and place to start over after being oppressed in their own countries. Furthermore, according to her, most female sympathisers want a new version of themselves. Perhaps for them, this is a way to seek redemption.

This study is crucial as it sheds light on how ISIS female sympathisers are represented in the ISIS-affiliated media. The portrayal of ISIS female sympathisers as *muhajirahs* is essential to understanding how discourse and ideologies on ISIS female sympathisers are constructed in the ISIS-affiliated media. The choice of linguistic structures and discursive strategies help to prioritise specific topics, images and themes or exclude others. Brown (2016) suggested that the notion that women's radicalisation occurs because they are ignorant or 'brainwashed' to mask cultural and material considerations in their literal and intellectual journey to ISIS might need to be reconsidered. Hence, this study hopes to unravel the power struggle and the asymmetrical relationship between the self and the other using CDA methodologies, specifically DHA, in the case of these ISIS female sympathisers in the ISIS-affiliated media. Specific considerations on how to help these women should be discussed in depth upon understanding how they are discursively constructed in the media. Nonetheless, it is necessary for society to critically reflect on how these female sympathisers of ISIS and other women involved in insurgencies are viewed.

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