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Caliphate Women Limbo and the Action of the European Union*

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Abstract: Thousands of European women moved to the so-called Caliphate in Syria and Iraq over the past decade. Today, they are in legal limbo, waiting for a response at the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) detention camps in various zones. They took part in Daesh's functioning, responding to the gender role the organisation gave to them. However, whether they have to be considered terrorists is unclear. Moreover, the counter-terrorist strategies put into practice by states and international organisations are gender-blind. Whether or not they have to be repatriated is controversial, and European countries are giving mixed responses. This article examines three arguments. First, whether the Caliphate women have to be considered terrorist foreign fighters. Second, if the EU is giving or not a gender perspective of counter-terrorist action concerning them. Finally, which would be the implications of the EU Comprehensive Approach for the WPS agenda and its member states? The article suggests that only a truly transformative feminist agenda would eliminate violent extremism in the world.

Keywords: women, gender, terrorism, Daesh, ISIS, Caliphate, European Union

Introduction

The twentieth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 marked a milestone in international law and feminism. The international commitment developed in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda changed the traditional focus on conflict and post-conflict management, emerging as evidence that the strategies put into practice in the past century and before were gender blind around the globe. Nevertheless, in these twenty years, many scholars and practitioners have stressed the UNSCR 1325 boundaries, while states policies are plenty of a normative military approach that ended up reducing the chances for a real transformative feminist agenda.

The military approach is reinforced when addressing violent extremism, terrorism and violent Islamism. The need to implement a gender perspective in anti-terrorism strate-

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gies is, in this sense, urgent. Unfortunately, states and international organisations have developed traditionally gender-blind policies for the specific situation of women and girls. The case of Daesh¹ and the so-called Caliphate is a definitive non-example of practices for preventing and confronting violent extremism.

In addition to the women previously living in Iraq or Syria, we need to consider the foreigners responding to the Caliphate call from 2014 to 2019. More than 52,000 people from more than 80 states moved to the Daesh controlled territory, in what has been seen as the biggest 20th century diaspora. Approximately 13 per cent were women and girls.² The gender dimension of the phenomenon is urgently needed due to the lack of assessment encountered in international strategies concerning its treatment and understanding. Whether they have been situated in the very core of feminine social construction by all kinds of actors is beyond doubt. Certainly, assumptions have failed, and Daesh women have revealed a very complex reality.

In general terms, the conviction of these people to participate in the edification of an ultra-conservative fundamentalist society in a territory that is currently lost, put them at the core of security threats. Radicalisation and indoctrination in violent practices were already completed, still lacking a non-punitive policy from international organisations and states that would move forward with a more comprehensive and holistic view of the phenomenon.

The article will analyse four aspects of this problem. Firstly, the different roles women have developed in the so-called Caliphate as well as the complex situation they are living in the post-Caliphate limbo. Second and third, the article will analyse the counter-terrorist strategies put into practice at the international and the EU levels, taking into account the securitisation perspective given to the issue and the possible risk for fundamental rights in the knowledge of the adopted rules. Fourthly, after twenty years of UNSCR 1325, I will argue how international actors forget their primary significance and the duties they are meant to undertake. Finally, as the issue of foreign terrorist fighters represents a global threat to peace and security, the use and understanding of the WPS agenda have to be the key to developing policies and practices.

In conclusion, I propose a positive gendered approach to violent extremism, far from the traditional convention that places men as aggressive and violent and women as victims. It is also far from the belief that radicalisation can be defeated with a narrow punitive approach and should assist us in extracting good elements of practices that can move us toward a more self-conscious society.

1 Using DAESH instead of ISIS delegitimises the group's claim to be an 'Islamic State'.

2 Cook and Vale 2018.

Women's Roles in the Caliphate and Post-caliphate

Women have always developed remarkable roles in traditional conflicts as combatants: from the ancient divinities to modern reality, where the latest technological armed forces have increased the number of females. Also, they have performed all kinds of positions inside militias, guerrilla or national liberation armies. Women have been not only victims in wars but also combatants. In the scenery of terrorism and, particularly, Islamist terrorism, women have been participating inside organisations since its establishment.

Traditionally, it has been considered that roles assumed by women in terrorist groups were mostly passive. As a consequence of this belief, it has been considered that they offer fewer elements of examination to the study of the phenomenon.³ However, even though their work remained in the shadows, women have always been involved in terrorist organisations, seeking their economic funding, facilitating financial procedures, carrying out support tasks, or supplying jobs, although this work has always remained unnoticed.

It is well known their key role as recruiters, and their actions as Female Suicide Bombers (FSB), not only in the context of Daesh but in previous battlefields like Chechenia or Palestine. Although, it remains still in the dark the reality of some female functions in the defeated Caliphate, including the differences between foreigners and nationals.

Connecting women with the so-called Caliphate leads us to consider in the first place the international crimes committed against Yazidi women. These gender-based crimes lie beyond the scope of this article. However, the systematic enslavement, human trafficking, and sexual violence committed against a specific group of women may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Therefore, it needs to be deeply considered in separate research.

Focusing on the women and girls inside Daesh, it is widely recognised that the organisation, as a manifestation of violent extremism, created clear margins between women's and men's functions. They divide the ideal man and woman in the so-called Caliphate based on misrepresented religious interpretations. This implied that women are under the protection of men, and both sexes would be performing ultra-traditional roles in society. According to the Al-Khansaa Brigade manifesto, the principles governing women's lives are based on the emulation of the considered first Muslim women in the VII century: "Mariam, Asia, Jadiya, Fátima, Aisha, believers' mothers and the wives of fellows of the Prophet."⁴

Under this structure, women were allowed to leave the house only in three possible circumstances. The first one is to make the *jihad* when necessary. The second circumstance

³ Jaques and Taylor 2008, 304

⁴ Torres 2015, 109.

when women are allowed to leave the house is to study religion. Finally, they can also do it to perform as a doctor or teacher, observing the Sharia Law.

Considering the construction of a 'Caliphate' as a situation of extreme need, women were called to develop major roles in the organisation, adopting extraordinary functions to cooperate in edifying a new extremist society.

Considering that the participation of foreign women in Daesh range from 80 different countries of origin, it is essential to understand that this origin is also key to the role they are called to perform in the group. The motivations and previous experience of women, plus the economic condition and family relations, influenced the position they will obtain in Daesh. The dynamics in the region of origin would set the tone of their participation and return. An example can be women from the Western Balkans, where many of them who travelled to Daesh controlled territory joined the organisation with their husbands or family to perform traditional roles,⁵ facing huge difficulties such as family prejudice and social stigmatisation when they return.⁶ On the other hand, it has to be underlined that many western young women have joined the organisation with a radical agenda and the desire to see action.⁷ While women in the Caliphate were mainly thought in their reproductive role, they also performed other violent roles.

The general rule, either way, is the diversity of experiences. The lack of a 'single profile' challenged the gender construction of feminine attributes. The background of women and whether they came from a conflict or post-conflict territory have marked their assignation of violent or non-violent roles. Even though, we have to consider that there are two types of recruitment: forced and voluntary. The first, which includes physical violence or coercion (mainly by their family members), has provoked a true level of automatism. These women are mainly involved as cooks, porters, cleaners or in the tasks which could contain essential elements of international crimes, such as forced marriage or sex enslavement. Also, in this circumstances, the phenomenon of Female Suicide Bombers can appear. Regarding voluntary enlistment, the controversy focuses on voluntariness when it comes to minors and on the illegality of their participation in terrorist offences, whether forced or voluntary. However, it seems that the interesting aspect may be the fact that they self-define their behaviour as voluntary. Therefore, the analysis in this regard cannot treat them as taxpayers devoid of any nature.

One of the most notorious violent women's experiences in Daesh was the Al-Khansaa Battalion. With primary functions being propaganda, recruitment and morality police, the feminine Daesh Battalion spread a manifesto in 2015 to the world,⁸ establishing the role of women in the new constructed Caliphate in an 'idealistic' fundamentalist territory

5 Kelmendi 2019, 21.

6 *Ibid.*, 25.

7 Gaub and Lisiecka 2016.

8 Torres 2015.

that would put women in an ultra-traditional *modus vivendi*. Its function as morality police made these Daesh women (approximately 800 – 1,000)⁹ torture other women in Syria when they were suspected not to follow the Islamic Law properly.¹⁰ From the severe dress code to the appropriate behaviour, women were victims of physical torture, economic sanction and other sentences whenever Al-Khansaa the Battalion monitored either rural or metropolitan areas. In many cases, the violence inflicted on women was targeting feminine attributes, so they could be aware they were not performing as ‘good women.’

The ‘jihadi brides’ respond as well to a variety of profiles. At the same time, the majority of women were attracted to Daesh based on the aforementioned ‘idealistic’ Islamic society (where violence is not needed and they only express the desire to be able to lead a ‘normal’ life).¹¹ Other ‘jihadi brides’ were important members of the Al-Khansaa Battalion, and they also had bigger remuneration than unmarried women.

An undetermined number of Daesh women also performed as Female Suicide Bombers (FSB).¹² This phenomenon is neither new nor atypical for terrorist groups when the numeric necessity implies using women for ‘military’ purposes. As if it were a reserve army, they develop a new active role when women are needed.¹³ Tactically speaking, women gave the group a variety of advantages, such as the element of surprise, the relaxation of police controls, the raising of less suspicion due to their traditionally baggy clothes, less thoroughness in inspections and greater freedom of movement, among others. All these factors are supported by norms of the patriarchal system, favouring the stereotypical beliefs of women that move them away from an image of violence to bring them closer to a model of peace and submission.

Their role as recruiters has been greatly extended in Daesh.¹⁴ The indoctrination in groups such as the Al-Khansaa Battalion needs to be added to the extraterritorial recruitment with a great relevance of social media, as well as familiar and social nets.

In sum, there is no unique Daesh women profile, and only terrorist organisations benefit from homogenising feminine experience in terrorism. However, this counterpart is not the only one that tends to cut down the variety of experiences of women. So do international organisations and states in their counter-terrorism strategies, as analysed in the following section.

9 Faraj 2018.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Almohammad and Speckhard 2017.

12 Al-Tamini 2017.

13 Schweitzer 2006.

14 Almohammad and Speckhard 2017.

Counter-Terrorism, Post-caliphate and Gender at the International Level

The flow of foreign fighters from all over the world to the extinct Caliphate was a global threat to peace and security that motivated controversial legislative changes. The most relevant was the UNSCR 2178 (2014) at the international level. This resolution fully introduced the concept of ‘foreign terrorist fighter,’ making it questionable how it mixes two different international humanitarian law (IHL) notions so far: a fighter and a terrorist.¹⁵

UNSCR 2178 is also a way to make possible certain fundamental rights restrictions that are contentious to NGOs and academia. It has been considered by many humanitarian organisations the need for counterterrorism measures to comply with international humanitarian law (IHL), interfering with humanitarian action, such as penal laws criminalising any form of support to individuals or groups designated as ‘terrorists’; sanctions regimes aimed at ensuring that no resources benefit such individuals and groups; and ever stricter and more cumbersome counterterrorism clauses in funding agreements between donors and humanitarian organisations.¹⁶ UNSCR 2368 (2017) includes three groups of people to be added in the sanction list of assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo:

- “(a) Participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf of, or in support of;
- (b) Supplying, selling or transferring arms and related materiel to;
- (c) Recruiting for; or otherwise supporting acts or activities of Al-Qaida, ISIL, or any cell, affiliate, splinter group or derivative thereof.”

Following a different path is the 2018 UNGAR 72/284 on The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review¹⁷ and the UNSCR 2462 (2019)¹⁸ regarding Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts: Preventing and combating the financing of terrorism. The first one calls for states to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. The second encourages states to assure the effective prosecution of terrorism in a manner consistent with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. It can be noted that similar considerations are excluded from Paragraph 6 of UNSCR 2178,¹⁹ one of the key provisions of the instrument.

15 Sánchez Frías 2018.

16 International Committee of the Red Cross 2020.

17 UN Security Council 2018.

18 UN Security Council 2019.

19 UN Security Council 2014.

As mentioned above, women have developed violent and non-violent roles in terrorist organisations. Also, their tasks have ranged from active to passive assignments, including the ‘jihadi brides.’ Accordingly, they are being partially targeted by international counter-terrorism strategies when affecting recruiters or supporters of terrorist activities. Being aware of the roles adopted by women in this organisation, it seems like at some point, they are included in the groups targeted by UN Security Council in UNSCR 2368 (2017).²⁰ Nevertheless, there is no specific mention of their contribution to the alluded terrorist organisations.

This punitive focus of UN strategies leaves out other roles developed by women in terrorist groups under the circumstances directly influenced by their position in society and, specifically, in fundamentalist societies. Moreover, no counter-terrorism strategies consider the roots of terrorism in certain conflicts and their connection to gender.

The same approach is adopted by the Council of Europe through the Riga Protocol,²¹ supplementing the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. In terms of participating in an association or group for the purpose of terrorism, Article 2 includes people who are effectively contributing to or committing terrorist offences, thus leaving out those who are taking part in terrorist groups in non-violent or central roles. The aforementioned gender roles in Daesh make it complex to consider some women as terrorists, according to Article 2. The condition of being a terrorist would be key to getting women included in transitional justice strategies in this post-Caliphate era.

The post-Caliphate involve a huge amount of deconstruction and reconstruction processes in the territory of Syria and Iraq. Still, it also has implications outside the territory in the case of foreign Daesh members. The *sine die* retention of women in north Syria when acting as ‘jihadi brides’ during the Caliphate cannot be sustained with conceptions contained in UNSCR 2178 or Riga Protocol.

Returning home for these women has varied depending on state policies, remaining thousands of them in limbo in the region. In addition, many of these women have borne children during their stay in the Caliphate or the detention camps, aggravating the humanitarian and legal spot.²²

The problematic lack of an agreed notion of ‘terrorism’ is to be added to the punitive-limited effect of the narrow concept of ‘terrorist foreign fighter.’ Depending on the roles taken by women in the Caliphate, they can be included as terrorists or not, as we already mentioned.

20 UN Security Council 2017.

21 Council of Europe Treaty 2015.

22 Cook and Vale 2019.

But this would also have a harmful outcome: if they lie outside the concept, they lie outside the reconstruction strategies as DDR. When in 2002, DDR strategies began to have a gender dimension.²³ UN follow a protocol designed to include women: For women to be part of the concrete actions launched by the United Nations, they must be within the target population.²⁴ In the case of women, the organisation's reports and documents clearly state the requirements they must meet and the phases of the process in which they can join.

There are three groups of women that can be part of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration strategies according to the new approaches of these programs.²⁵ First, there are women combatants: women and girls who have been part of an armed group and actively in hostilities. Second, there are women associated with armed groups (voluntarily or forcibly): women and girls who have performed support work in armed groups, known as FAAFAs. And third, there stand dependent women: women or girls supported by a combatant. In universal and regional counter-terrorism strategies fighting Daesh, women in the second or third situation seem to be ignored by international society, remaining not only in geographical limbo but also legal.

Of course, we have to consider those women participating in terrorist offences as well. In fact, when they have returned, they have been prosecuted as members of a terrorist organisation, including those charged with serious crimes such as the enslavement of Yazidi women.²⁶ Even though it is widely believed that women have been private from information about Daesh more than men, it makes the prosecution of other Daesh members more complicated. Moreover, states lack accurate sex-desegregated data, making the *ex-post* analysis difficult.

Included or not in the narrow notion of 'foreign fighters,' women have been denied access to gender-conscious rehabilitation and reintegration programs,²⁷ in accordance with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as will be addressed later.

23 United Nations Security Council 2002.

24 Vaño 2010, 348.

25 United Nation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Center 2006.

26 Cook and Vale 2019, 32.

27 *Ibid.*, 34.

Counter-Terrorism, Post-caliphate and Gender at the EU

Counter-terrorist strategies at the European Union have also been adopted, following a securitisation approach, providing exceptional responses based on notions such as danger, threat or risk.²⁸ In the 2015 European Agenda on Security,²⁹ terrorism was identified as a priority, and the European Commission declared its intention to update the existing criminal law legislation in this area to meet these new challenges. One of these new challenges was the return of foreign terrorist fighters, as the issue is usually described. The returning of the Western recruits of Daesh was seen as a major threat to the EU and its member states. According to the EU Commission, approximately 5,000 EU citizens took part in Daesh in Syria and Iraq. As stated by Europol, “although only a small contingent of returning fighters might be committed to carrying out attacks in the EU, individuals who have travelled to conflict zones will continue to pose a heightened threat to all EU Member States.” This focus is in accordance with the UNSCR 2178, the first step towards the EU Directive on Combating Terrorism (2017).³⁰

Regarding the EU strategy of returning foreign fighters, some problematic issues emerge. Firstly, the usual description of these people as ‘foreign terrorist fighters.’ Second, the ‘EU security culture’ crystallisation based around pre-emptive forms of security practice.³¹ And third, the completely gender-blind focus of the strategy.

The aforementioned three elements are present in the 2017 EU Directive on Combating Terrorism. The Directive calls upon the states to adopt all the necessary measures to make them punishable, including many terrorist offences. The most challenging articles are Article 9 and Article 10. Article 9 refers to travelling for terrorism, and Article 10 to organising or facilitating travelling for the purpose of terrorism, which can be seen as the criminalisation of travelling *per sé*.³² In addition, the Directive constitutes a narrow understanding of returning foreign fighters as well as the securitisation of migration and the EU border.³³

To understand why the EU embraces this limited perspective, it is necessary to deepen the notion of ‘foreign terrorist fighter.’ Since the beginning of the notion with UNSCR 2178, other international rules have followed the trend that limits the scope of foreign fighters to terrorism. Not all foreign fighters had conducted terrorist activities, and not all foreign terrorist developed their roles as fighters. In the words of Baker-Beall, “foreign fighter can occupy multiple categorisations depending on how and what context the term is being

28 Baker-Beall 2019.

29 European Commission 2015a.

30 EUR Lex 2017.

31 De Goede 2011.

32 Sánchez Frías 2018.

33 Baker-Beall 2019, 437.

used.”³⁴ Even when these people decide to travel with the purpose of terrorism, neither do they act as so when they arrive, including cases of disappointing and, in other cases, travelling purpose to develop humanitarian action in conflict.³⁵

The second problem is how the EU is articulating migration control based on a counter-terrorism perspective, including using a pre-existing database that allows the detection of what can be considered ‘suspect movements.’ The ‘EU security culture’ also holds gender stereotypes shaping specific profiles as ‘suspect.’ The use of pre-emptive forms of security jeopardises an adequate comprehension of a complex phenomenon whose dynamics are diverse and changing. The spirit of these instruments of ‘EU security culture’ implies transforming a *praetor delictum* into an actual crime.³⁶

The use of specific tools such as the Passenger Name Record (PNR) agreement in counter-terrorism strategies is an example of how Human Rights can be challenged by the EU, as stated by the CJEU.³⁷ This can be directly linked to the lack of impact assessment in the adoption of the Directive.³⁸ This deficiency was justified in terms of exceptionality and ‘urgent need’ in line with the ‘EU security culture’ approach. As the Explanatory Memorandum stated: “Given the urgent need to improve the EU framework to increase security in the light of recent terrorist attacks including by incorporating international obligations and standards, this proposal is exceptionally presented without an impact assessment.”³⁹

One unintended risk of profiling terrorists is leaving women outside of the focus. The security policy based on data profiling is necessarily anticipatory and constructed in terms of stereotypes. When talking about returning foreign Daesh individuals, practices appear to have shifted significantly in recent times considering evolving understandings of the roles of women departed in Iraq and Syria.

As mentioned before, the phenomenon of ‘jihadi brides’ existed, but female Daesh members were not limited to it. Unfortunately, this passive stereotype was often assumed by states in the control of returnees, overlooking the reality of female roles and changing practices.

In any case, the issue of returning ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ have remained in the EU and its member states’ security agenda in the last ten years with an inconclusive outcome. In fact, while the number of returnees was expected to rise when the Caliphate collapsed,

34 Baker-Beall 2019, 438.

35 Reed, De Roy van Zuijdewijn, and Bakker 2015.

36 Sánchez Frías 2018.

37 Roda 2020.

38 Sánchez Frías 2018, 216.

39 European Commission 2015.

the reality turned out different. From 2018 figures began to decrease.⁴⁰ Few member states reported returning ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ in 2019 due to the travel ban,⁴¹ with some exceptions in Netherlands or Belgium. None of the Western Balkan countries reported travel movements for terrorist purposes toward conflict areas in 2019. Moreover, recent security practice reveals the difficulties for member states to collect evidence that proves individuals’ implication on conflict zone terrorist groups, as Belgium expressed it.⁴² To be added is the existence of undetected returnees on EU soil and sleeper cells. Nevertheless, the number of terrorist attacks in the EU is still very low, even more, if we look at returnee’s data.

When talking about Daesh, “due to differing national legislations, women are prosecuted (for offences such as providing support to IS) in some EU Member States, but not in others.”⁴³ Therefore, concerns about their radicalisation and free movement in the Schengen area remain. However, no EU de-radicalisation strategy is being developed or envisioned.

Regarding the members of Daesh detained in SDF camps, there are still many EU citizens exposed to a high mortality rate and, in some cases, to the death penalty in Iraq prisons. SDF reported 7,000 foreign fighters in detention and 70,000 of its family members. It is interesting in this respect to appreciate how SDF identified foreign fighters and their family members (including women) in different groups. This fact gives us some clues about the social consideration of women in detainee camps and, at some point, whether they are being considered terrorists by SDF or not.

However, it is widely recognised that Daesh members, including women, have constructed parallel ‘institutionalisation’ in the detainee camps, including morality police imposing severe sentences.⁴⁴ According to EUROPOL, the humanitarian situation makes it possible for women to become involved in smuggling networks to escape from the camps.⁴⁵ The strict restriction to travel and the possible consideration as “foreign terrorist fighters” when returning to their countries of origin favour maintaining the status quo, waiting for a way forward that may protect them and their children.

It urges a specific strategy that addresses the gender perspective of the de-radicalisation of these women and the necessary implication for the EU and its Member States to accomplish with the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

40 Scherrer 2018.

41 EUROPOL 2020, 45.

42 *Ibid.*, 45.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Damon, Khadder, and Laine 2019.

45 EUROPOL 2020, 46.

Women, Peace and Security and Its Implications in the Post-caliphate

The absolute invisibility of the effects of armed conflicts on women and girls and their discrimination in all spheres of the post-war period was common in the pre-1325 international agenda. When the United Nations Security Council started its Women, Peace and Security agenda in 2000 with the adoption of the mythical Resolution 1325, the need to change the peace processes' focus became evident. Twenty years after the program's start, the resolutions seem to have changed something in the idea of gender insecurity and post-war reconstruction.⁴⁶ It already seems a generally accepted thought the need to implement a gender approach to new threats to peace and security, bringing it to the international security and defence agendas, being an indispensable issue in the global conception of security.

However, when global threats to peace and security come to the scene, the Women, Peace and Security agenda seems to be relegated from the front page. Examples can be UNSCR 2178 (2014) or 2332 (2016). The resolutions lack gender perspective and a coherent approach, conforming with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The treatment of these resolutions to the issue of terrorism and counter-terrorism exclude women from the landscape, not taking into account their experiences and the multi-layered question of their participation in Daesh.

The need to implement a gender perspective in conflict resolution and peacebuilding implies necessarily looking at the situation of women and girls and how gender discrimination in acting on the issue. This assumption can be easily inferred from any Women, Peace and Security resolutions. Nevertheless, in 2015 a new angle came to Security Council, including explicit reference to counter-terrorism and violent extremism. In this sense, the UNSCR 2242 (2015):

“Calls for the greater integration by Member States and the United Nations of their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism, requests (...) to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue throughout the activities.”⁴⁷

Despite UNSCR 2242 making a change in how it articulates women's participation, many scholars warned about “how quickly the language of countering terrorism and violent extremism has been absorbed into the women, peace and security apparatus.”⁴⁸ The progressive securitisation of gender⁴⁹ in the Women, Peace and Security agenda involves some risks of victimisation and militarisation of the issue. The very essence of UNSCR 1325 was

46 Kirby and Shepherd 2016.

47 United Nation Security Council 2015.

48 Heathcote 2018.

49 Rothermelm 2020.

to introduce a gender perspective into the peace processes and not to include securitisation into the woman's participation in conflict and peace processes.

Having this feature into account, a subsequent resolution regarding terrorism threats began to include reference to gender. One example is the UNSCR 2368 (2017) when:

“condemning in the strongest terms abductions of women and children by ISIL, ANF, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities and recalling resolution 2242 (2015), expressing outrage at their exploitation and abuse, including rape, sexual violence, forced marriage, and enslavement by these entities, encouraging all State and non-state actors with evidence to bring it to the attention of the Council, along with any information that such human trafficking and related forms of exploitation and abuse may support the perpetrators financially.”⁵⁰

Even when the resolution tries to include the situation of women and girls' victims of gender-based violence, the other side of the coin is excluded from the Security Council's narrow vision. As a result, Daesh women are invisible in UNSC terrorism and counter-terrorism related resolutions.

It is interesting to consider the EU Comprehensive Approach on Women, Peace and Security,⁵¹ a common framework for action and evaluation of policies and actions related to peace and security, and cooperation with third states. Distinctive emphasis is placed on political support for WPS resolutions, on offering gender-sensitive training in all elements connected with peace and security, such as those related to the Reform of the Security Sector (SSR) or cooperating with other international actors, both international organisations and states, particularly those immersed in peace processes.

Likewise, the need for evaluation and monitoring of the actions carried out by the European Union would be handled by the Women, Peace and Security Task Force to foster coordination and promote a correct approach to gender-related issues. To be added to this kind of regional plan, are the 2010 indicators⁵² and the 2016 revised indicators.⁵³ As a general overview, the EU's efforts to accomplish the WPS agenda is remarkable when looking at the indicators and the monitoring done in the last years. Even so, there has been very little impact on counter-terrorism strategies. Only in the 2016 revised indicators, violent extremism is added as a new concern as follows:

“21. Gender-sensitive policies countering violent extremism:

50 UN Security Council 2017, 2.

51 Council of the European Union 2008.

52 Council of the European Union 2010.

53 Council of the European Union 2016.

21.1 Amount and proportion of the EU's and its Member States' security and justice institutions' annual budget allocated to producing research on the topic of CVE and gender, including on drivers and deterrents.

21.2 Amount and proportion of the EU's and its Member States' Statistical Offices' annual budget allocated to producing gender-sensitive CVE-related statistics, including on drivers and deterrents.

21.3 Amount and proportion of the EU's and its Member States total annual budget allocated to prevent violent extremism in partner countries that targets gender as a principal or significant objective.

21.4 Number and proportion of staff in the EU and its Member States' counter-terrorism bodies that have gender expertise.

21.5 Participation of women's organizations in the development of strategies to counter violent extremism. Provide examples of good practices, lessons learned and challenges."⁵⁴

The implementation of indicator 21 has not been monitored, nevertheless. Member states need to accomplish the general trends informed in the Comprehensive Approach and the Conclusions adopted by Council in 2018.⁵⁵ The Conclusion included several times references to the need to address counter-terrorism and violent extremism with a gender perspective, without deepening further practices to be applied:

“Gender equality is a central objective of all EU external action, including development, preventing and countering violent extremism, counterterrorism and migration. This ensures that women and girls in conflict-affected and fragile settings can fully participate in their societies' political, economic, security and social life. It is a prerequisite of sustainable development and peace.”⁵⁶

The action of the EU or its Members States related to Daesh women, specifically women in SDF detainee camps is not made relevant in any point of EU external policies. The link between the WPS agenda and counter-terrorism policies is limited to the calls to the Member States to include provisions in National Action Plans, as well as to establish some kind of communication among civil society, private sector and public actors, and has had a very poor outcome. A totally distinctive approximation to violent extremism from a gender perspective is imperative if international organisations and states are willing to make progress in de-radicalisation and equality.

54 Council of the European Union 2016.

55 Council of the European Union 2018.

56 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Women are not only victims of armed conflict and violent extremism but also perform multifaceted roles and may involve those previously reserved for men only. Women are also fighters in the as well as international criminals to be judged by the international and national courts (though in a small proportion). The role of women in Daesh cannot be understood as unique. On the contrary, a range of diverse positions in the group made women acquire different responsibilities and duties in terrorist action. Many women were developing non-violent roles inside these groups, following or meeting their husbands in conflict zones, with the primary function focused on their reproductive role. Nevertheless, this cannot be an essential element to consider de-radicalisation strategies. Preventing violent extremism in women urges to take in an integrated view, with a great emphasis on human rights, education, health and the rule of law. Essentialism means nothing but reinforcing violent extremism against women.

A truly transformative feminist agenda will minimise the effect of violent extremism in the world. The women's contribution to the phenomenon is multifaceted and diverse and emerges as a ramification of intersectionality posed on various cultural and religious stereotypes. Social constructions are being used not only by terrorist groups but only by international actors: states, international organisations and so on. We need to talk about peace instead of preventing violence, as Anderlini suggests, to avoid further exclusion and institutional ineffectiveness.⁵⁷

UN and EU policies mainly focus on the securitisation of gender in counter-terrorism and violent extremism. Policymaking and programming have to be centred on people and the so-called human security instead of national/international security. Severe restrictions such as the travel ban originated with UNSCR 2178 are in line with a policy of border control instead of de-radicalisation. Moreover, the very low rates of terrorist offences accomplished by the returnees have been demonstrated. Women continue to be in SDF detainee camps in a legal, humanitarian and social limbo, without a coordinated EU response following its own Comprehensive Approach on WPS. They continue to be exposed to stereotypes policies by every actor, without considering the very different experiences they may have had in the conflict zone. It is crucial to include all women in post-conflict strategies such as DDR and other further aspects of peacebuilding.

It is necessary to include women in the strategies for reconstruction and de-radicalisation of society, a key element of the WPS agenda. However, it needs to be done from a gender perspective that excludes women stereotypes and classical roles as mothers or victims. Putting the focus on peace, human rights, and transitional justice will drive violent extremism back, without the need for an only-punitive approach.

⁵⁷ Anderlini 2018.

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