



# **‘The Greatness of Her Position’: Comparing Identitarian and Jihadi Discourses on Women**

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*[W]hen women get involved a movement becomes a serious threat. Remember it was women that got Trump elected and, I guess to be really edgy, it was also women that got Hitler elected.*

Lana Lokteff, IX<sup>th</sup> Identarian Ideas Conference, 2017

*To women everywhere, especially those who care about the ummah, may you be aware that the ummah of Muhammad (pbuh), which would not rise without your help, do not disgrace the caliphate, but serve it even if it is by one word, may your sons be the bricks and mortar in the tower of majesty and minarets of the state of Islam. Allah bless you and your patience, you are of us and we of you.*

Khansa' Manifesto, 2015

# Introduction

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**T**he role of women in extremist movements today is as multifaceted as it is extensive. They are active across the ideological spectrum and, in the context of identitarianism and jihadism in particular, are considered to be especially fundamental for in-group survival, both as child-bearers and vehicles for the socialisation of future generations. Through this lens, their 'choice' to prioritise domestic life is framed as a heroic and altruistic deed in service of the community – this is a form of extremist maternalism that couches conservative, stay-at-home values in radical terminology and bestows counter-cultural appeal upon the very idea of patriarchal subservience.

In this report, we explore this phenomenon, assessing similarities in how identitarian and jihadi extremists delineate what it is to be a woman in their respective in-groups. We do this by cross-examining two texts published by two disparate manifestations of political extremism (in terms of both ideology and praxis): one a speech by Lana Lokteff given in 2017, a leading member of the identitarian right in the United States;<sup>1</sup> the other a manifesto from 2015 on gender published by the Islamic State's female policing unit. While neither text can be taken as a standard account of either identitarian or jihadi gender politics (both ideological spectra vary hugely), they are nevertheless representative of important subsets of each ideological current. Recognising this, we unpack similarities in how, despite their profound operational disparities, each frames the character of the 'ideal' woman. By seeking answers not just to *what* these texts 'mean' but *how* they 'mean' too, we also develop a better understanding of the rhetorical forms they rely on in reaching out to their target audiences.

There appears to be a structural quality that these two extremisms deeply share when it comes to the issue of gender. Both see the ideal woman as a submissive heroine and the ideal man as their daring vanguard. They are positioned as complementary actors through which the utopian project – whether it is that of identitarians or jihadis – can ultimately be realised.

The report proceeds as follows. In the first section, we frame the issue of extremism in general, provide a summary of the literature on women and extremism in particular, and set out our research methods. The second section presents our findings. It is split into three, one subsection for each of the shared thematic priorities of the texts, each of which begins with extracts followed by description and interpretation. The third, concluding section summarises our key findings and touches on the issue of gender as a tool for bringing extremist discourses into the mainstream.

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<sup>1</sup> Lokteff identifies in various ways – far right, white nationalist, alt-right – depending on the context in which she appears (i.e. in-group communication compared with public interviews). While this may be earnest on Lokteff's part, in that she articulates her belonging as she believes it to be, it is also certainly a way for public far-right figures to disassociate from 'violent actors' with attendant legal and political benefits. For a very recent work on how women of the 'radical' right identify compared with public identification, see: O'Brien, Max. In the Right. Presentation by Lara Whyte, *BBC Radio 4*, BBC News, 26 March 2019, [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0003twc](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0003twc).

Before proceeding, one caveat: while we believe these respective attitudes towards gender to be similar enough to compare, our goal is not to propose, suggest or argue that identitarian and jihadi extremism are the 'same' nor do we intend to claim they are reciprocal. Rather, in this early stage of comparative exploration, we only hope to show evidence that they share an ideological logic when it comes to the issue of gender. This is likely not the only structural substrate shared between jihadism and the far right, and more research is required to investigate the others. It is our hope that this preliminary exploration, which strives to go beyond the anecdotal, will offer an example that others may follow.

## Related Literature

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### Extremism

The word 'extremist' is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as someone or something that 'holds extreme political or religious views.'<sup>2</sup> As Schmid points out, the word 'extremist' is, at base, a relative term, something that requires a benchmark 'that is (more) "ordinary", "centrist", "mainstream" or "normal" when compared with the (extreme) political fringe.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, it can only be understood by comparing it with the accepted sociopolitical conventions of the day. Hence, as our notions of what is 'ordinary' change with time, so too do our notions of what is 'extremist.'<sup>4</sup> Because it is context-specific, most eschew a uniquely values-based definition of 'extremism.' Instead, they adopt a more flexible mode of categorisation that can be used in the context of both actions ('behavioural radicalization') and beliefs ('cognitive radicalization').<sup>5</sup> This means that a group or individual can hold 'extremist' views without necessarily adopting 'extremist' actions, or, indeed, can hold conventionally acceptable views but attempt to realise them through 'extremist' – and sometimes violent – measures.

Accounting for this, Wibtrope speaks of three categories of extremism: groups or individuals who both have extreme objectives and use extreme means; groups or individuals who have extreme objectives but do not use extreme means; and groups or individuals who have conventional objectives but use extreme means to realise them.<sup>6</sup> If what is known today as violent extremism is encapsulated by Wibtrope's first category – in which a group or individual uses 'extreme' means to achieve 'extreme' ends – then non-violent extremism constitutes his second category, in which a group or individual works towards achieving 'extreme' ends by using conventionally acceptable means.

In the context of this discussion, we adopt Berger's structural definition, which holds that extremism is 'a spectrum of beliefs, not necessarily a simple destination.'<sup>7</sup> Whether violent or non-violent, religious or secular, extremist movements revolve around the same 'value proposition,' which holds that the 'extremist in-group offers a solution' to a threat-based crisis that is rooted in the existence of an out-group. This 'solution' consists of 'hostile actions against the out-group in an effort to resolve the crisis.'<sup>8</sup> Here, 'hostile actions' represents a range of behaviours, anything from hate speech to violence. The key criterion is that they are considered to be:

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2 Stevenson, A., 2010. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 621.

3 Schmid, A., 2014. 'Violent and non-violent extremism: two sides of the same coin?' The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, May, 11.

4 In the United Kingdom in the 1920s, the suffragettes were routinely attacked as 'terrorists' fighting for the 'extremist' goal of votes for women. See Morgan, R., 2001. 'Single-issue terrorism: a neglected phenomenon?' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23:1, 255–265.

5 Neumann, P., 2013. 'The Trouble with Radicalization,' *International Affairs* 89:4, 873–893.

6 Wibtrope, R., 2012. *Rational extremism: the political economy of radicalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 79.

7 Berger, John M., 2018. 'What Is Extremism?' *Extremism*, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 69.

8 *ibid.*, 76.

*[...] unconditional and inseparable from the in-group's understanding of success. [...] For instance, most white nationalists believe that white people can never be successful unless and until non-whites are removed from in-group society by means of segregation or extermination. This demand is definitional, non-negotiable and unconditional. To abandon the demand would be to abandon white nationalism.<sup>9</sup>*

As Berger also notes, '[e]xtremism is incredibly diverse.' Indeed, countless forms of it exist, often within their own unique cultural and ideological milieus. Therefore, a first step in studying the phenomenon is disaggregation, 'distinguishing between the structure and the content of extremist ideologies.'<sup>10</sup> All too often, efforts to compare extremist movements are stymied by the fact that group methodology and strategy varies widely; consider, for example, the loosely organised 'leaderless resistance' of right-wing extremism and the tightly organised global insurgencies associated with jihadi extremism.<sup>11</sup>

However, this is not to say that extremist movements are beyond comparison. If researchers disaggregate their lines of enquiry, focusing on specific ideological or operational aspects and not allowing their analyses to be skewed by the presupposition that all extremisms are the 'same,' their efforts will be bound to yield more practicable results.<sup>12</sup> We have attempted to do that here by focusing on the aspect of gender – specifically the way they envision 'ideal' roles for men and women within the movement – using extremist 'content' regarding the ideal woman to inform our understanding of the 'structures' that underlie its deployment.<sup>13</sup> While the resultant analysis does not give definitive answers as to what it is that actually drives extremism (we made a conscious decision not to make such claims), it does provide numerous insights into the structural systems that sustain it.

For the purposes of this study, we define identitarianism as an ethnopolitical ideology that is committed to ending multiculturalism. Its adherents claim they 'work to influence political and socio-economic activity in an effort to protect and preserve racial, ethnic, and cultural identity.'<sup>14</sup> Just as is the case with other forms of extremism, there exists an identitarian continuum with both violent and non-violent manifestations. The Christchurch attacker, Brenton Tarrant, has been identified as an identitarian due to his manifesto's reference to Grand Replacement theory, while groups like Generation Identity in Europe and Identity Europa in the United States publicly eschew violent action. To define jihadism, we adopt Heller's definition of Salafi-jihadism (which we refer to simply as 'jihadism'). He holds that it is a theopolitical ideology committed to imposing religious rule through violence, but with a specifically Salafi interpretation of Islam. This focus leads

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9 *ibid.*, 45.

10 *ibid.*, 43.

11 For histories on the strategic choices made by white radical organisations including the shift to 'leaderless resistance' and the rise of 'lone wolf' adaptations to violence in the US contexts, see the history of World Church of the Creator (now known as the Creativity Movement) from Michael, G., 2006. 'RAHOWA! A History of the World Church of the Creator.' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18:4, 561–583.

12 Berger, 43.

13 It is important to note that these texts construct gender through a binary (men/women) and heterosexual framework. Thus, explicit constructions of women's proper roles provide implicit information about how these texts/speakers understand the construction of men's proper roles. For instance, both texts include multiple references to the dangers of 'feminised' males or masculinity as a facet of contemporary life put forward by feminism and other plots against in-group ideals.

14 See also recent discussions on the interrelations of identitarian ideas and other radical, far, and alt-right group ideology: Ahmed, R., & Pisiou, D., 2019. 'What does the New Right have to do with the Christchurch attack? Some Evidence from Twitter on Discursive Overlaps', <https://www.voxpol.eu/what-does-the-new-right-have-to-do-with-the-christchurch-attack-some-evidence-from-twitter-on-discursive-overlaps>.



its adherents to an expansive definition of idolatry and a readiness to excommunicate and execute Muslims that they consider to be idol-worshippers and apostates – critically, this includes Muslim rulers, whom they consider to be *tawaghit* (false gods).<sup>15</sup>

## Women and Extremism

The conventional wisdom – at least, according to mainstream media discourse – is that women are at best unwitting and at worst passive when it comes to their participation in extremist movements. This framing is rooted in long-standing narratives around the absence of female agency in the political sphere and the idea that women are 'pulled into' extremism because of their 'love' of boyfriends, husbands, sons, fathers, or brothers.<sup>16</sup> It is a belief that stems from deeply held cultural norms that assert that women are more 'compassionate and loving' and less interested in politics and nation-building than men. Aside from a handful of much-cited cases that suggest otherwise, it has proven to be largely unfounded, with two decades of research on gender and extremism showing it to be stereotype-laden, problematic and dangerous.<sup>17,18</sup>

Despite these advances in the research literature, much media discourse around women's involvement in extremism remains reductive and outdated, providing a false view of why women participate.<sup>19</sup> This has manifested most clearly in the context of the so-called 'Isis Brides' – women who left their countries of origin to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq – who are generally seen as brainwashed fools arrogantly rejecting their position as 'western women' (and, therefore, as equals of men) in favour of a life of violence and subservience. Whether positioned as 'evil' or 'naive,' the 'Isis Bride' is thus dehumanised: she either has no heart because of her want for violence or she has no brain because she fell into the clutches of 'evil' men.<sup>20</sup>

As is further discussed below, the prevailing belief that extremist women have no agency is vehemently challenged by extremist women themselves.<sup>21</sup> More often than not, women in the far right adamantly reject the notion that they are 'little wives chained to their stoves' and, in much the same way, jihadi women routinely emphasise their

15 Heller, S., 2018. 'Rightsizing the transnational jihadist threat.' *International Crisis Group*, December. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/rightsizing-transnational-jihadist-threat>.

16 For examples of the discussion around the issue of ignoring women's participation in extremism, see: Blee, Kathleen M., 2003. *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. California: University of California Press; Pearson, E., 2019. 'Shamima Begum: How Europe Toughened Its Stance on Women Returning from Islamic State.' *The Conversation*, 21 February, <http://www.theconversation.com/shamima-begum-how-europe-toughened-its-stance-on-women-returning-from-islamic-state-112048>.

17 Blee; Berger; Pilkington, H., 2017. 'EDL Angels Stand beside Their Men...not behind Them': The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in an Anti-Islam(ist) Movement', *Journal of Education*; Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., & Petö, A., (eds) 2017. *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. London: Palgrave MacMillan; Lehane, O., et al. 2018. 'Brides, Black Widows and Baby-Makers; or Not: an Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in English-Language Jihadi Magazine Image Content.' *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11:3, 505–520; Musial, J., 2016. "'My Muslim Sister, Indeed You Are a Mujahidah' – Narratives in the Propaganda of the Islamic State to Address and Radicalize Western Women. An Exemplary Analysis of the Online Magazine Dabiq.' *Journal for Deradicalization*, 9, 39–100. See also recent popular press discussions by Cynthia Miller-Idris and Hillary Pilkington (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/24/women-far-right-gender-roles-radical-right-migrant-muslim>) and Policy Research from the Blair Institute from Elizabeth Pearson and others (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/debunking-myths-gender-and-extremism>).

18 It is worth noting that this argument has also been asserted for decades about mainstream culture in feminist literature, particularly in relation to white supremacy. See: Hill Collins, P., 2008. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Conscious, and the Politics of Empowerment*; Hooks, B., 2015. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*; Lorde, A., 1984. *Sister Outsider*.

19 Berger, 41.

20 Pearson.

21 See quotes from extremist women: Bowman, E., & Stewart, I., 2017. 'The Women Behind The "Alt-Right".' *NPR*; Darby, S., 2017. 'The Rise of the Valkyries.' *Harper's Magazine*; Davenport, C., 2016. 'The Women That Feminism Forgot.' *Altright.com*; Musial.

personal autonomy.<sup>22</sup> For both, a sense of wilful empowerment courses through their social media profiles and propagandistic texts.<sup>23</sup> Participation in the movement is framed as a rejection of dominant, disempowering cultural norms that have upended the 'essential' role of women. This participation, which revolves around child-bearing, child-rearing and care-giving, is positioned as an active 'choice' to benefit the in-group. Because extremism is conventionally understood through the lens of political action, whether violent or non-violent, this 'choice' is often overlooked in public discourse, something that has given rise to a disparity between what non-extremists consider to be active participation in the in-group and what extremist women consider to be active participation in the in-group.<sup>24</sup> As this analysis demonstrates, even if their involvement looks inactive from the outside, it is positioned as active from the inside.

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22 Lokteff, L., 2017. 'How the Left Is Betraying Women.' *YouTube*, Red Ice TV, 9 March, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2TtTabPCY&t=85s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2TtTabPCY&t=85s)

23 Saltman, Erin M., & Smith, M., 2015. "Til Martyrdom Do Us Part" Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon' *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 3–75, [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf); Hoyle, C., et al. 2015. 'Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS' *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 3–47, [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969\\_Becoming\\_Mulan\\_01.15\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf); Winter, C., 2015. 'GUEST POST: Women of The Islamic State: Beyond the Rumor Mill.' *Jihadology.net*, <http://www.jihadology.net/2015/03/31/guest-post-women-of-the-islamic-state-beyond-the-rumor-mill/>.

24 Pearson, E., 'CHAPTER 2: Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber.' in Zenn, J., (ed) 2018. *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines*, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, 33–52.

## Methodology

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As noted above, the identitarian text we have selected for comparative analysis is a 15.5-minute speech given by Lana Lokteff at the IX<sup>th</sup> Identitarian Ideas Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, which was videotaped and posted on YouTube in 2017. This represents one of the few (if only) substantive far-right speeches about women's roles ever given publicly by an identitarian orator (and, incidentally, it was the only speech at the conference given by a woman).<sup>25</sup> It has two core premises: i) white civilisation is facing an existential crisis; ii) white women are obliged to work actively to defend it. It is a useful text in the current comparative context owing to Lokteff's position as a leading ideologue of the global identitarian movement and because of the level of detail she goes into in discussing what is 'right' for women. She is heavily involved in fundraising and talent-pooling for a loose conglomeration of web-based white nationalist and identitarian 'infotainment' producers.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in partnership with Henrik Palmgren, her husband, she produces her own identitarian content spanning European and United States contexts, which is published via their online outlets *3Fourteen Radio* and *Red Ice TV*. Besides her appearances at overtly identitarian events such as the conference in question, Lokteff regularly speaks at far-right conventions in Europe and the US and has produced hundreds of media products, including both podcasts and videos (many of the latter have hundreds of thousands of views).<sup>27</sup> As a recognised arbiter of global identitarianism, we consider her views on gender to be an especially useful paradigm on which to base this comparison.

The jihadi text we have selected for analysis is an Arabic-language document entitled 'Women in the Islamic State: A manifesto and case study.' It was first distributed in 2015 on a password-protected forum favoured by Islamic State supporters. Its author was left unidentified. Instead, it was simply attributed to the outreach wing of the Khansa' Brigade, an all-female policing unit that operated inside the caliphate. The first and only of its kind, this extensive treatise clarifies a number of issues regarding the role of women in the Islamic State that had hitherto been obscured by sensationalist media reportage and deliberate misinformation. It is split into three sections: the first portion deals specifically with feminism, education and science, setting out a jihadi response to these 'corruptions'. The second part is purportedly based on the author's (or authors') eyewitness account of life inside the Islamic State in 2014. The last section is a diatribe against Saudi Arabia; it compares the lot of women living there with that of women in the then-caliphate in Syria and Iraq. The document is not an official

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25 As noted previously, far-right extremism is an umbrella term covering myriad groups. There are, however, some logics that overlap between them. Recently, intentional cross-exchange of ideas has become more prevalent among groups. See also: Ahmed & Pissou.

26 For more on infotainment see: Thussu, Daya K., 2007. *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*. London: Sage.

27 Lokteff gave a series of mainstream media interviews between 2017 and 2018, including with NPR (US National Public Radio) and *Harper's Bazaar* among others. In late 2015, she was a panelist at the National Policy Institute's (NPI) 'Become Who We Are' conference, which gained notoriety on account of videos of Richard Spencer's keynote speech, during which audience-members gave Nazi salutes.

Islamic State publication and reads more like a personal dispatch than a statement of organisational policy. Nevertheless, it provides an unprecedented and detailed clarification of the Islamic State's position on women and, for that reason, we consider it to be ideal as a comparative paradigm for this study.

As mentioned, this is an exploratory attempt to subject two prominent forms of contemporary extremism – identitarianism and jihadism – to comparative analysis. The report does not pretend to be exhaustive, nor does it seek to offer generalisations. The methods used are both grounded and directed. The discursive composite approach upon which it is structured was developed by the first author in 2018 in the context of Lokteff's speech in 2017. In that work, three narrative strands were identified as central to the identitarian view of women's proper roles: gendered complementarity, (alt-)maternalism, and Western civilisation as the ultimate romantic gesture (i.e. 'gift'). Together, these were found to form a single 'discursive composite', a synthesis of narrative strands that overlap and complement to produce a coherent, persuasive whole.<sup>28</sup>

We use this composite as an aid to our reading of the Khansa' manifesto. First, Mattheis coded the text according to a loose rendering of the three narrative strands mentioned above, checking for points of convergence and divergence. Winter then reviewed this analysis with the aim of verifying correct application and appropriate textual understanding. Adjustments were made as needed and any coding disparities were resolved through discussion. In the course of these discussions, the above narrative frameworks of the identitarian discursive composite were transposed into a more abstract, less culturally specific framework. Similarly tripartite, it revolves around three slightly broader presuppositions:

- i) men and women have discrete roles when it comes to the protection and perpetuation of the in-group (gendered complementarity);
- ii) the essential function of women is child-bearing, child-rearing and care-giving (the domestic ideal); and
- iii) advancement of the in-group is a function of male activism (a gift of patriarchy).

Having done this, the analysis was re-verified and the data were independently checked for reliability by two outside coders familiar with both far-right and jihadi extremism. Any outstanding disparities were then resolved through discussion. This approach allowed for a structured analysis in which both authors identified similarities and differences in the texts, while working to minimise their subjective biases. The results of that analysis are presented in Section II.

A final methodological note before proceeding: Instead of using in-text quotations from the Lokteff speech and Khansa' manifesto, the discussion follows an extract-description-analysis structure. In other words, each thematic subsection begins with extended

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<sup>28</sup> Mattheis, Ashley A., 2018. 'Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: (Alt) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right.' *Journal for Deradicalization*, 128–162.

quotations from the texts that were deemed to be representative of the themes in question. Emphasis was added to highlight key words and ideas. These extracts are followed by broader contextual descriptions of their significance and then, finally, by our interpretative analysis. We opted for this method instead of drawing out individual sentences or parts of sentences because it better preserves the original meaning of the texts and offers readers an ability to weigh our claims against the data.



# Findings

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## Structure, Premise and Purpose

Each text emerged in a very different political context. Notwithstanding this, the intent of both is very similar: to set out the ideal character of the in-group woman. These similarities become clearest when one considers how they engage with their respective target audiences. Both Lokteff and the Khansa' author are talking explicitly to female members of their in-group but demonstrate awareness that male members of their in-group will also encounter these texts. They are also clearly attempting to make their arguments legible for potential in-group members, people that Berger would term the 'eligible in-group' demographic.<sup>29</sup> As such, their arguments are similarly couched in specialised language and familiar rhetorical forms, things that are expected by the in-group. Both, for example, speak about the supposedly genocidal intent of the out-group and the potential destruction of the in-group and its 'proper' roles and attitudes, claims that are geared towards animating pre-existing emotions in the target audience and fostering a sense of persuasive solidarity. Similarly, out-groups are labelled using specialised, in-group specific terms: for her part, Lokteff refers to 'commies,' 'leftists,' and 'the Marxist media,' whereas the Khansa' author speaks about 'crusaders,' 'idolaters,' and 'the apostate media.'

In dealing with these themes, both texts fall in with extremist convention by presenting in-group solutions to out-group-fomented crises.<sup>30</sup> In each case, the purported crisis revolves around the same two poles: first, there is the physical dimension, in which the in-group is told it is facing an invasion and that the invading party is genocidal; second, there is the cultural dimension, in which the in-group is told about the ills of succumbing to the corrupt practices of hegemonic feminism. Both hold that the in-group's ability to resolve this crisis falls in large part to the conduct of in-group women and, in this regard, feminism is positioned as an ideocultural plot promoted by enemies of their respective civilisation.<sup>31</sup>

Both texts also contend that it is only by returning to 'what is right' that the in-group will be able to prevail in the long run. They make the case for this by deploying the same set of rhetorical motifs – 'mythic heroines,' 'anti-feminism' and 'violence against women' – which together work to buttress their three core propositions that: i) men and women have discrete roles when it comes to the protection and perpetuation of the in-group (gendered complementarity); ii) the essential function of women is child-bearing, child-rearing and care-giving (the domestic ideal); and iii) advancement of the in-group is a function of male activism (a gift of patriarchy). Below, we consider these propositions in turn, demonstrating how, in the context of both identitarianism and jihadism, they together make the case for extremist maternalism.

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<sup>29</sup> Berger, 69.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Given that both the far right and jihadi extremism have pseudo-religious authoritarian conservative tendencies, these rhetorical similarities should not come as a surprise.





## Narrative 1: Gendered Complementarity

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**T**he notion that men and women have distinct, sex-based roles is central to how both identitarian and jihadi groups conceive of gender. Both the Lokteff speech and Khansa' text encapsulate this well, holding that these roles are essential to the stability and integrity of the in-group (read, 'white civilisation' or 'Islamic caliphate') and, therefore, instrumental to any attempts to stave off out-group-fomented crisis. Through this lens, it is only when women fulfil their 'correct' function as women that men are able to be 'real' men and women are able to make the most of their intrinsic power.

Consider these extracts from the Lokteff speech (emphasis added):

*[F]or ages **Europeans [had] the perfect union of the sexes based on what was natural** in order to survive; based on the reality of how men and women were designed by mother nature. And, we especially up here in the north – think of Norse mythology. **We honored both gods and goddesses.** It wasn't a competition but each a piece of the whole that worked together to ensure our survival.<sup>32</sup>*

*The left is losing women to us [identitarians]. Why compare? The left offers **feminised males** in skinny jeans, who hold signs and say: 'refugees welcome.' They push ugly, fat positive feminists. They push fat, ugly positive feminists as the beauty ideal. And, **they tell us it's natural if our husband wants to dress like a woman here and there or have sex with a man occasionally to prove he's not homophobic. The white picket fence has been traded in for a tiny carbon-neutral apartment in a diverse neighborhood, enriched by third world immigrants. They've traded real men for hispters LARPing as lumberjacks who have never swung an axe in their life. No woman wants any of this – she doesn't.**<sup>33</sup>*

Likewise consider the following extract from the Khansa' manifesto (emphasis added):

*The central thesis of this statement is that woman was created to populate the Earth just as man was. But, **as Allah wanted it to be, she was made from Adam and for Adam. Beyond this, her creator ruled that there was no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband...** The problem today is that, **the role that is consistent with their deepest nature**, for an important reason, that women are not presented with a **true picture of man** and, because of the rise in the number of **emasculated men who do not shoulder the responsibility** allocated to them towards their ummah, religion or people, and not even towards their houses or their sons, who are being*

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<sup>32</sup> Lokteff.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

supported by their wives. This idea [that women may not be doing what is right for them] has not penetrated the minds of many women. **This has forced women away from their true role and they do not realise it. Because men are serving women like themselves, men cannot distinguish themselves from them** according to the two features referred to by Allah: 'Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth' (Qur'an 4:34).<sup>34</sup>

Both of the above posit that men and women have complementary, discrete roles when it comes to furthering the interests of the in-group. The dynamic they speak of is implicitly based on a binary (male/female) understanding of gender which is itself predicated, perhaps unsurprisingly, on the idea of heterosexual procreation. Importantly, in both cases, the responsibility for maintaining 'proper' gendered order is something that falls to women – the idea is that, if in-group women behave 'correctly,' in-group men will be less emasculated and, therefore, better at furthering the prospects of their community.

In this sense, both identitarian and jihadi conceptions of gendered complementarity frame women's 'ideal' roles as 'natural,' with the former positioning it as a biological inevitability and the latter framing it as a divine right and requirement. While these notions may at first seem fundamentally opposed, they are in many ways interchangeable. Both implicitly hold that women are what they are because it is in their nature to be as such – they are based on the idea that women have 'always been that way.' So, whether couched in religious terms or not, the intrinsic claim – that 'human nature' and, therefore, 'women's nature' are tangible qualities set in stone since time immemorial – is more or less the same.

It is in this context that they most prominently deploy the first of three rhetorical motifs, that of the 'mythic heroines.' Consider how Lokteff references the Norse goddess Freya, as well as the figure of the Viking shield-maiden (emphasis added):

*Let's not forget about Freya, the archetypal beauty. That's, that's what women want and that's healthy and we should have that. But they also honor family and home **but occasionally we have to pick up a sword and fight in emergency situations. The shield maidens, the Vikings right like today women [sic] of the right would love to simply tend the home and make their surroundings beautiful – and I wish that's all we have to do. And, I know our ancestors worked to the bone in order for us to be able to have that luxury, **but many women such as myself are realising that this is an emergency situation.** Our countries are being destroyed by leftists and anti-whites. And, the future for our children is looking gloom[y]. **Although, I think women are too emotional for leading roles and politics, this is the time for female nationalists to be loud.*****<sup>35</sup>

*Nothing motivates a man like a beautiful woman in need. **A soft woman, saying hard things can create repercussions throughout society.** Since we aren't physically intimidating,*

<sup>34</sup> Khansa' Brigade. 'Women in the Islamic State: A manifesto and report.' translated by Charlie Winter, January 2015, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Lokteff.

*we can get away with saying big things. And, let me tell you, **the women that I have met in this movement can be lionesses and shield maidens and Valkyries** but also soft and sensual as silk.*<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, the Khansa' author refers to the example that was set by early female supporters of the Prophet Muhammad (emphasis added):

*[Muslim women] **should emulate the women first called to religion, Maryam and Asiyya and Khadijah, Fatimah, A'ishah and the mothers of the believers, women of the Companions and their followers**, the biographies of whom were written down in ink of Light may Allah be pleased with them and may he please them.*<sup>37</sup>

*In the last of the Surat al-Tahrim related from Allah the Almighty, in which is given examples of the **two believers Asiyya and Maryam, two ideal women, the two qualities most celebrated were religion and chastity**: 'And [the example of] Maryam, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into [her garments] through Our Angel, and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and **was of the devoutly obedient**' (Qur'an 66:12).<sup>38</sup>*

In both cases, women's participation in the movement is cast as something heroic; necessary deviance from their 'proper' role – such as protecting their homes or families with violence – is positioned as permissible if specific circumstances require it. At the same time, women's participation is framed as a direct corollary to the participation and behaviour of in-group men. They position women's essential responsibility to the in-group as something that is naturally inevitable and/or divinely authorised, holding that there are many aspirational precedents for such idealised modes of behaviour. The notion of gendered complementarity courses through this idea: in days of old, it goes, women did 'this,' men did 'that,' and, as a result, everyone benefited.

Through the notion of gendered complementarity, both Lokteff and the Khansa' author provide a rubric for what constitutes appropriate action for in-group women. They set out the need for them to participate while simultaneously making the case for 'submissive' behaviour, emphasising that they can be of greatest benefit to the in-group if they are 'proper' and maintain the essential balance between male and female 'nature.' As a vehicle for this claim, mythic or religio-historical references are critically important: they frame willful submission to men as something that is instrumental to the in-group cause, thus casting it as perverse sort of emancipation.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Khansa' Brigade, 17.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 26.



## Narrative II: The Domestic Ideal

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**T**his narrative revolves around the idea of women as child-bearers, child-rearers and care-givers. Its fundamental logic is that women are able to best serve the in-group from the household. While Lokteff and the Khansa' author give it a uniquely extremist slant in these texts, it is worth noting that this idea is drawn from normative political culture: throughout history and across cultures, it has long been positioned as an 'ideal' for women.

In this context, it is rationalised through the claim of gendered complementarity, something it builds upon by stipulating specific guidelines regarding the familial role of in-group women. In so doing, it draws on mainstream cultural cues, anything from paternalist political frameworks that use the nuclear family as a model for the relationship between government, nation and people to the many marketing campaigns that leverage gendered stereotypes and frame motherhood as women's most valuable and important role in society.<sup>39</sup> As such, this discourse is very much grounded in the idea that motherhood is a woman's most important 'job' and something for which she has been specifically designed.<sup>40</sup>

Consider the following extract from the Lokteff speech (emphasis added):

*There are **three important things for a woman, and they are ingrained into our psyche. And, no matter how hard you try, they will never be removed. Beauty. Family. Home. Women want to be beautiful, attract the best mate possible and be protected and provided for until death. Any woman who says differently is lying to herself or will learn when it's too late. Beauty, family, and home – exactly what nationalism gives to women ... European nationalists and the alt-right in America are a very attractive, very sexy bunch – which is also [in] our favors [sic] – women are loving it if they can have their pick of the best and they are. I hear from women all the time. You say 'I want a husband. I'm 29, I need to have kids.'*** I say – come to a right-wing conference ... And, the good news is, I've been seeing matches made left and right, left and right, of the most beautiful, intelligent couples. So, it's eugenic. **It's a huge eugenic process** that we find ourselves here right? Right. **You've managed to jump through the correct [hoops] and now you will procreate.**<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mattheis, 128–162.

<sup>40</sup> A large body of literature exists on mothers' involvement in nationalist movements. For examples of literatures about mothers in far-right US history see: Jeansonne, G., 1996. *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II*. Chicago: University of Chicago; McRae, E., 2018. *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Lokteff.

Similarly, consider this from the Khansa' manifesto (emphasis added):

*The **greatness of her position**, the purpose of her existence is **the Divine duty of motherhood**. Truly, greatness is bestowed upon her. This is the command that Allah sanctified to His sons. The Righteous were distinguished from the others, 'And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant' [Qur'an 19:32], and the Prophetic ruling was '**Paradise is under the mother's feet**,' narrated by Ibn Majah, authenticated by al-Albani. ... **Indeed, carrying a son of Adam, nurturing and preparing him for life is a difficult job that Allah has bequeathed to the wife of Adam, because he has given the physical and psychological nature things which qualify only the woman for this arduous task that Allah bequeathed to her.**<sup>42</sup>*

Both these passages hint at the importance of motherhood, framing it as the single most important way that women can participate in and contribute towards their in-group cause. Lokteff's position is overtly eugenic: it is based on the contention that European civilisation can be furthered through the proper management of reproduction. This includes increasing white populations (historically argued to be the primary benefit of companionate marriage between middle and upper class white people) and decreasing all non-white and non-desirable populations.<sup>43</sup> The Khansa' author is not so explicit, though elsewhere the Islamic State has written that it considers Muslim procreation to be a demographic weapon capable of shaping its jihad by making more mujahidin.<sup>44</sup> In both cases, the core propositions are that women are responsible for expanding the in-group and the significance of all their other potential functions pales in comparison.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. For both orators, there are no two ways about it: bearing and rearing children 'for the cause' is the *raison d'être* for in-group women. If they fulfil this ideal, whether through birthing their own children or educating those of others, the idea is that they can become vessels for the cause, a way to foster future generations of the in-group and sustain it through periods of hardship or tribulation.

It is in this context that the second rhetorical motif, anti-feminism, appears especially prominently. Both texts cast feminism as a corrupting force that seeks to destroy social order by obscuring women's 'true nature' as mothers. This, in combination with the notion of gendered complementarity, means that it is not just women who suffer if they abandon what is appropriate for them, but their respective men, families and, ultimately, civilisations too.

42 Khansa' Brigade, 18.

43 Schoen, J., 2009. 'Teaching Birth Control on Tobacco Road and in Mill Village Alley: The History of Public Birth Control Services.' *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 20–25.

44 See, for example: The Islamic State. 'Marrying widows is an established *sunnah*.' *Rumiyah*, 7 December 2017.

Consider the following extract from the Lokteff speech (emphasis added):

*[The leftist media] refuses to acknowledge that nationalists, alt-right Pro-European women exist in great numbers and if they do, they push to untrue stereotypes on purpose. One, you have the neo-nazi, white trash, trailer park girl. How many times did you guys see that until you have the religious cult type who's frail and tied to the stove all day because that's where her husband wants her it [sic] in the kitchen. While internally she's dying to be a CEO of a fortune 500 company. **That's [what] real feminist[s] will tell you ...** They do this not only to signal how awesome liberals are because they attract fat positive feminists in great numbers but to tell other women: 'No. Stay away, it's all men.'<sup>45</sup>*

*Our enemies have become so arrogant, they count on our silence and us doing nothing ... This is the time to speak ... **to our fellow sisters who have been bamboozled by Marxist agitators. It's our duty as women to speak to our friends who are feminists, who [are] caught up in this Marxist bullshit and bring them over to reason – to our side.***<sup>46</sup>

And these passages from the Khansa' manifesto (emphasis added):

*The model preferred by infidels in the West failed the minute that women were 'liberated' from their cell in the house. Problems emerged one after another after they took on corrupted ideas and shoddy-minded beliefs instead of religion, shari'ah and the methodology of life that was ordained by Allah. **The falsity of these ideas were made evident by governments giving salaries to those who return to their homes and raise their children, finally openly accepting that they are 'housewives.'***<sup>47</sup>

*[W]e are not going to present **a list of the negatives that are caused in communities from the 'women's emancipation' narrative.** These are apparent, unhidden from the distant observer, let alone the close observer. Rather, women have this Heavenly secret in sedentariness, stillness and stability, and men its opposite, movement and flux, that which is the nature of man, created in him. **If roles are mixed and positions overlap, humanity is thrown into a state of flux and instability. The base of society is shaken, its foundations crumble and its walls collapse.***<sup>48</sup>

Here, anti-feminist positions are similarly used to corroborate existing claims about the domestic ideal and gendered complementarity. They thus fold into an argument that frames motherhood as a means of empowerment and demarcates each belief system's reactionary take on dominant culture (be that dominant culture in the West or in Muslim-majority countries). In that sense, the motif of anti-feminism is being used to delineate the values of the in-group (white people

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45 Lokteff.

46 ibid.

47 Khansa' Brigade, 19.

48 ibid., 19.

of European heritage in Lokteff's case and Sunni Muslims in the Khansa' manifesto's case) and distinguish them from the norms of the out-group (feminists, leftists and migrants in Lokteff's case and Crusaders, Shi'ites and apostates in the Khansa' manifesto's case).

Ultimately, the idea of feminism, though a useful scapegoat for both Lokteff and the Khansa' author, is not a problem in and of itself. Rather, anathema to the domestic ideal, it is symptomatic of a broader programmatic effort by the out-group to dupe the 'eligible in-group' and undermine appropriate social order.<sup>49</sup> Thus conceived, feminism is seen as an adversarial mechanism geared towards fomenting crisis among women and, by extension, among men. The only solution to it is women's willful return to their 'essential' role, the specifics of which have been delineated already.

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<sup>49</sup> Berger, 51–74.



## Narrative III: Stability as a 'Gift' of the Patriarchy

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**T**his last narrative revolves around the notion that in-group security is an outcome of extremist patriarchy. Essentially, it holds that everyone – not just men – stands to benefit from blind support towards in-group men, because it is them and only them that can 'gift' the community with the ideal civilisation and, therefore, security.

In the context of the Lokteff speech, this idea is overtly framed as a romantic gesture that aligns with identitarian discourses around companionate marriage. White European civilisation is positioned as something that was built by white men for white women and their children. In the context of the Khansa' manifesto, though, the idea's framing is subtly different: instead of being positioned as a gift from men, the Islamic State is said to be a gift from Allah, facilitated by Muslim men for Muslim women and their children.

Consider the following extract from the Lokteff speech (emphasis added):

*We value the beauty of Western civilisation and the refined human form. **European men built civilisation** and facilitated beauty in all its forms. **It's the ultimate romantic gesture to European women. They built our civilisation to enable the home and the family and to protect women.** A nation is your extended family, your tribe, your support system. The comfort of your home and way of life remains **uncertain without your people as your neighbours.** The left provides us with nothing but ugliness, conflict, violence and anti-nature, false constructs. And, because of it, they are losing and they are terrified of gatherings such as this one for we speak the truth that resonates with people.<sup>50</sup>*

And this extract of the Khansa' manifesto (emphasis added):

***The above [an account of state-sponsored persecution in Mosul] is just a quick picture of what women faced in Iraq before the [male] soldiers of Allah were sent to save it, the beginning of a beautiful dawn that will not be forgotten in history books and is sure to be referred to in years to come, when the [male] soldiers of Allah triumphed over the Shi'ite army which fled almost immediately, when the [male] soldiers of the mujahidin broke down the city's fortifications and released hundreds of women prisoners and thousands of men from the al-Mattar prison, all of whom had been tortured by the rawafid. Many of those who go to Mosul since the establishment of the caliphate, even enemy journalists, see the sense of security that has washed over the land and now reaches all corners. This, of course, is the fruit of the divinely sanctioned punishments to any breach of***

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50 Lokteff.

**sanctity and hudud punishments.** *The people keep themselves safe, they look after their money and possessions, but also the roads between Iraqi and Shami states. This is the fruit of shari'ah law, implemented to maintain within it peoples, moneys and possessions. When the Islamic State fully undertook administration of the land, the people regained their rights, none more so than women.*<sup>51</sup>

The fundamental idea here is that the ideal in-group civilisation – whether it is Lokteff's unrealized white ethno-state or the Islamic State's Sunni Muslim caliphate – is a luxury facilitated by in-group men and enjoyed by in-group women. In both cases, it is positioned as being in dire need of protection and to protect it, both texts hold, is to protect the interests of future generations.

Both texts use the idea of real or potential violence against women as a vehicle for enunciating this narrative. They position out-group men as inherently and inevitably dangerous to in-group women, framing them as agents of impurity who seek to attack female dignity through rape in particular and immoral behaviours in general. While Lokteff blatantly trades on her audience's fear of sexual violence at the hands of non-white men, conflating the idea of otherness with sexual deviancy and a proclivity to violence, the Khansa' author opts for more coded language to make the same point. This is likely because Lokteff is demonising the out-group on an ethno-cultural basis drawing on the well-established myth of the 'black male rapist,' whereas the Khansa' author seeks to avoid accusations of indecency and vulgarity, and bases their position on the less culturally established idea of the irreligious enemy's moral bankruptcy. In any case, the result is the same; the only difference is the overtness with which the out-group man is cast as the ultimate evil.

Consider this extract from the Lokteff speech (emphasis added):

*The other day, Trump referenced Sweden. We all know the truth about Sweden but **your average person, in the dark, indoctrinated by Marxist media** does not. They **deny actual rape of Swedish women by invading migrants**. If people could see what these women look like after these monsters are done with them. If the women who were raped, those who are still alive, got together and made their loud – made their voices loud to the world in a press conference saying: 'we were raped by migrants,' it could undo years of a massive cover-up in a matter of minutes. And, I'm always asking 'where are those women in Sweden? Why aren't they being loud?' Come to us. We'll promote you. We will get this message out. ... Our enemies have become so arrogant, they count on our silence and us doing nothing. A lady knows when to hold their tongue but also when to speak. This is the time to speak in defense of [a] mess of a nation and to our fellow sisters who have been bamboozled by Marxist agitators. It's our duty as women to speak to our friends who are feminists, who [are] caught up in this Marxist bullshit and bring them over to reason – to our side.*<sup>52</sup>

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51 Khansa' Brigade, 13.

52 Lokteff.

And this from the Khansa' manifesto (emphasis added):

*Jani al-Dakhil was made a victim of the Ministry of Interior and its strong man, Ibn Nayyaf, when she was imprisoned in the same manner used by CIA dogs, devoid of morality. Her house was raided and the children within it were intimidated. **The woman, in her twenties, was kidnapped in the absence of her family and transported, without a mahram, and to Hayir prison – may Allah kill its guards – and raped in the dirt, silenced although the perpetrator went unpunished.** ... This is the threat forever faced by Muslim women in the Gulf. It's just like that faced in Sunni places in Shi'a-ruled Iraq. Women are imprisoned just because they say the Lord is Allah. They are thrown in prison without trial. The lucky among them may sit before a judge to hear the ruling, she is lucky only because she is aware of the number of years she will be in prison and can count the days until freedom.<sup>53</sup>*

Ultimately, this motif works by juxtaposing the 'gift' of in-group security with the 'inevitability' of sexual violence and generalised indignity at the hands of the out-group. Both Lokteff's speech and the Khansa' manifesto use it to leverage fear of physical violence as a justification for racism and/or religious supremacy. In so doing, they legitimise in-group violence against the out-group, simultaneously shoring up the claim of gendered complementarity and posing the protection of women as one of the naturally or divinely ordained roles of men.

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<sup>53</sup> Khansa' Brigade, 38.



## Conclusion

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All three narrative strands from the original discursive composite derived from the Lokteff speech are present in the Khansa' manifesto, though they appear in slightly different guises. Their relative prevalence and importance varies between the two documents, but this is unsurprising given the obvious cultural and rhetorical disparities between the two texts.

The first two strands, posed in the abstract here as gendered complementarity and the domestic ideal, are both presented in a way that is strikingly similar. The few differences in framing seem to be borne of variations in the speaker or author's rhetorical sensibilities (secularism versus religiosity) and language conventions. There is, however, greater variance in the way the third strand is positioned, largely due to it being more culturally specific. Lokteff's 'romantic' framing, particularly the idea that women desire beauty and men desire to build them a beautiful civilisation, is specific to Western notions of love and romance as foundational to marriage. In the Khansa' document, on the other hand, marriage is positioned as something that is neither romantic nor rooted in love. Rather, it is a duty and a marker of piety and, instead of being a 'gift' from men, the Islamic State's ideal civilisation is positioned as being a gift from Allah. Crucially, though, this gift is facilitated and preserved by men, who are, the line goes, in need of support and procreation from in-group women.

Both texts deploy these narratives through the same three rhetorical motifs: 'mythic heroines,' 'anti-feminism' and 'violence against women'. Each of these works contextually to buttress the broader discursive composite. The first validates the fundamental idea that the intrinsic power of women is derived from the 'reality' of gendered complementarity and is therefore non-threatening to men. The second uncouples the notion of maternalism from feminist histories and recasts the domestic ideal as a specialised form of in-group activism. The third draws these two things together, aligning women's culturally learned fears of sexual violence with men's culturally learned anxieties over their inability to protect in-group women.<sup>54</sup>

Considered together, these motifs act as linking mechanisms between each part of the identitarian and jihadi discursive composite. In this, their utility is threefold: i) they encourage women to engage with ideological discourse; ii) they encourage women to participate in the ideological cause; and iii) they assist in-group women navigate the narrow path between submission and action. Importantly, these motifs are similarly 'meaningful' in the context of in-group men. Again, their utility is threefold: i) they work to mobilise male anxieties about out-group-fomented social disorder; ii) they reaffirm gendered roles that see men as fighters and protectors and women as mothers and supporters; and iii) they establish and legitimise the need for male control of the in-group. These motifs are, as such, a basis for the

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<sup>54</sup> This notion is linked to descriptions of 'toxic' and 'hegemonic' masculinity as described by scholars such as Jackson Katz (*The Macho Paradox*), Michael S. Kimmel (*Angry White Men*), and others.

ethos of each text – the quality that means the authors can be trusted and believed – which, importantly in this context, seems to derive in large part from their ability to recast core aspects of group ideology in gendered terms.

Both the Lokteff speech and the Khansa' manifesto texts are paradigmatic examples of deliberative extremist rhetoric. They identify a crisis/solution construct and seek to persuade their audiences – both those already in the in-group and those who are 'in-group eligible' – to engage in a course of action necessary to solve said crisis.<sup>55</sup> The proposed 'crisis' is the exigence for the text itself – 'white genocide' in the identitarian context and the preservation of Islam in the jihadi context – and the proposed 'solution' is what the texts argue their audience must 'do': in this case, to become 'active' in-group women or, indeed, in-group men who support active in-group women. Based on the above, it would appear that gender, at least as it is presented in these two texts, is not just exploited as occasional extremist content; rather, it works as a substrate of extremist activism and is a mechanism of transfer between extremist discourse and mainstream cultures, speech and politics.

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<sup>55</sup> Berger, 51–74.





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