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Kommentare ( 0 )

## ISIS' Politics of Sex

By Mathieu Guidere

Part III of our [series](#) on ISIS

In the late summer of 2014, the international community watched helplessly as ISIS unleashed widespread serious human rights violations against civilians across Syria and Iraq. Of note, were the different forms of sexual abuse initially directed against women from the Yazidi community of Sinjar, but rapidly expanded to women from many regions and backgrounds. Far from being attributable to isolated incidents or to the behavior of a few individuals, the abuses were, and continue to be, part of the “sexual politics” implemented by ISIS in all “wilayas” (regions) under its control and endorsed by its military hierarchy. The abuses represent a clear example of the use of rape as a weapon of war, based on the “theology of sexuality” in a war zone. Fatwas and theological arguments inspired by the medieval practices of historical Muslim armies provide the justification for the policies and practices.

The underlying principles and guidelines of ISIS's “sexual politics” first appeared in the official journal of ISIS, *Dabiq* (Issue 4, October 2014). In November 2014, ISIS also circulated blogposts and an explanatory booklet entitled “Questions and Answers on captive women” in the larger cities and towns under its control, particularly Mosul and Raqqa. The booklet provides an in-depth insight into the new gender and sex policy implemented by ISIS in the territories it controls.

A thorough study of the principles of ISIS's “sexual politics” show an underpinning in the law of war in Islam (*fiqh al-harb*) and in the legal status of non-Muslims (*ahl al-dhimma*) living in Muslim territories. ISIS propagandists have therefore not invented new principles of ‘sexual politics’, but instead, reactivated and reinterpreted old legal rules and fatwas that were utilized from the Middle Ages until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1. Women and Sex in ISIS “Law of War”

Within the Islamic “law of war”, the mainstream position of medieval theologians which has inspired the current sexual politics and practices of ISIS, was to consider captured women as “spoils of war”, that is, captured women were considered “booty” to be treated as “mere property”. Ancient sources also emphasized the need to distinguish Muslim women from non-Muslim women, as well as the application of different rules to “married” versus “unmarried women”.

In practice, military commanders implemented the policy by “sorting” captured women after each victorious battle. In the first instance, women's sorting was aimed to identify Muslim women, as it was not licit to enslave them. Moreover, for sexual relations with Muslim women, their consent is required. However, even a woman who is a Muslim can be found to be a ‘concubine’ or even a ‘slave’ by ISIS. This is the case when she is Shiite, and thus considered to be a heretic. In other words, for the internal theology of

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ISIS, only Sunni women are considered 'Muslim' and therefore protected from enslavement.

The second sorting process, which generally occurs at the same time, seeks to separate 'married women' from 'unmarried women'. The reason for this sorting is twofold: first, if the woman is a Muslim and if she is married, it is prohibited – according to the Islamic theology – to have sex with her unless she divorces her husband or he is dead. In addition, a 'captive mother' cannot be separated from her 'minor children', and if she is pregnant, it is forbidden to 'sell' or 'exchange' her according to ISIS theologians. Yet, if she is not married, this means she is still a 'virgin', given that sex before marriage is forbidden in Islam and regarded as 'fornication' (*zina*). The 'virgin status' has two 'advantages' for the jihadist perception. Not only it is possible to have sex with a virgin, but also the 'virgin intercourse' is often perceived by jihadist groups as a 'taste of paradise.'

This 'quest of virginity' has led ISIS fighters to seek sexual intercourse with increasingly young girls, sometimes barely at the age of adolescence. Theologically, the 'female booty' or spoils of war is classified to be 'woman' as soon as menstruation starts, which implies she can become pregnant and give birth.

## 2. Sexual Intercourse with non-Muslim women

Relations with non-Muslim women in Muslim-controlled territories are managed historically and theologically, under the Islamic status called "dhimma", which literally means "protection". Since the beginning of Islam, non-Muslims are considered "dhimmis", literally "protected residents", but that this "protection" incurs a price that "dhimmis" are required to pay as an additional tax, called "Jizya".

Pursuant to an agreement signed at the beginning of Islam by the second Muslim Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644), the status of "dhimmi" applies primarily to those of Christian and Jewish faith residing in Muslim territories. It excludes other religions and beliefs – such as Yazidis – who are considered heretics or infidels. For those without 'dhimma' or 'protection', it is deemed lawful, to reduce them to slavery and treat non-Muslim women as "slaves". This means that they can be used for one's own sexual pleasure or "offered" or "sold" on the "female slaves market" (as *jawari*).

Moreover, it is the perception of many jihadist groups that the more non-Muslim women are captured, the more "score points" are earned for faster entry to Paradise. Indeed, the action of converting to Islam a non-Muslim woman is the best guarantee for Paradise in the Hereafter. Unsurprisingly, this belief usually leads to forced conversions of women, after suffering forced 'marriages' (rapes).

## 3. Sexual Innovations within ISIS

ISIS has issued a number of "theological innovations", especially designed to attract and recruit increased numbers of young fighters and supporters.

One of ISIS's most effective innovations is to authorize the "distance marriage" which involves a young woman and man uniting religiously and remotely, through audiovisual internet (eg. through Skype). This "innovation" has attracted many candidates, male and female, originating mainly from European countries. It has also assisted ISIS with facilitating and accelerating the process of conversion of non-Muslim men, as, according to Islamic Law, it is not permissible for a Muslim woman to marry or to have sex with a non-Muslim man, while the opposite is permissible for a Muslim man. As I argue in my book "**Sexe et Charia**" (Rocher, 2014), many young

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sexually frustrated men have joined the ranks of ISIS due to its “sexual politics”. Moreover, these new rules have helped ISIS to strictly control the sexuality and intimate lives of its fighters and followers.

Despite protests from many Muslim religious authorities around the world, who consider these practices as outliers and non-Islamic, ISIS and affiliated organizations continue to refer to the ancient time of the Muslim Empire (Caliphate) and to thrive on the ruins of failed states and popular ignorance.



**Mathieu Guidere** is a full professor at the **University of Toulouse II** (since 2011). A scholar of Islamic Studies, he has held other professorships at such prestigious institutions including the **University of Geneva, Switzerland** (2007 to 2011) and the French Military Academy (**Ecole Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr**), France (2003-2007). Dr. Guidere is co-founder of the **Radicalization Watch Project** based in Washington, D.C and has been awarded a **Fulbright Prize** in 2006 to advance his research on the psychology of terrorism. He has been also editor-in-chief of the ***Defense Concepts Journal***.

Dr. Guidere has published several books on the **Al-Qaeda** organization and its activities in North Africa and the Middle East.

Tags: dhimmi, iraq, IS, isis, islamic state, rape, sex, sexual violence, sexuality, syria, yazidi

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