

Abram de Swaan

Against Women

The Worldwide War By Rightists And Jihadists Against Liberation

Three themes continually recur in the news, on the opinion pages, and in the social media: issues of women's emancipation, the menace of jihadist groups and the rise of right-wing extremist movements in the West. This book-length essay brings these three themes together in an original and comprehensive vision that is both global in scope and long-term in perspective: are rightists and jihadists each other's mirror image, both motivated by their resentful resistance to women's liberation?

In the past hundred years, women have made enormous progress, in the West since roughly a century, in the rest of the world since fifty years or so. Women's gain is not necessarily men's loss, but for many men it certainly feels that way: male honor is bound up with dominance over 'their' womenfolk. Women's emancipation is therefore all too often experienced as men's humiliation and may well provoke male rage.

Jihadists and other fundamentalists as well as rightists can be shown to be driven by this anger and by the urge to keep women in their traditional position.

Obviously, these are very broad subjects, much too broad for any feasible empirical project in social science or history. But social scientists and historians have made available huge amounts of pertinent information and so have journalists in the printed and electronic media. I use a selection of these sources. Moreover, much of the public and semi-public discussion occurs on the worldwide web. I have visited many old-right and alt-right sites in English and Dutch (and some French sources).

My method is not to posit a hypothesis borrowed from an established social science theory, which is then tested against, preferably numerical, data for, preferably statistical, significance. The main question, in its spatial

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scope, temporal perspective, and thematic ‘triplicity’, guides my choice of source materials for their relevance in providing answers. Although I try to be impartial in the selection and application of these texts, this is not an entirely detached essay: I am personally involved in the subject-matter, as is everyone else. Even if I would try to sound impartial, readers would suspect from miles away my commitment to human equality and therefore to women’s emancipation as against right-wing or fundamentalist male supremacy. Being partial is all the more reason for trying to be fair, and I will.

With all these caveats, the argument gets its strength from its structure. Women have been oppressed throughout history, especially in the ‘military-agrarian regimes’ that prevailed across most of the globe in the past two or three millennia. The enormity of this oppression appears only now that women have been emancipated in many respects and have proven themselves capable in almost any field of human endeavor, most of which remained closed to them until a century ago. If women can do it now, they must have been able to do so then and were forcibly prevented from it. This ‘*domination masculine*’ (Bourdieu), or ‘patriarchy’ as it has been called in feminist literature, is usually rendered as cultural oppression, imposed mainly through, custom, religion and law. I argue that, in last resort, it relied upon physical violence. Most instances of male violence against women were and are not incidental but systemic. Wherever the perpetrators can act with impunity and their deeds become widely known, they serve to reproduce a regime of intimidation and terror against women. The fact that many (mostly elderly) women were or are complicit in this regime is not unique to the oppression of women. Complicity is part of the complexity of every regime of oppression, whether it pertains to slaves, serfs, workers, or ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

In the first part of the book, I discuss the violent regime of male supremacy as part of a ‘General Human Pattern’ (Romein), prevailing almost everywhere for the better part of written history. Male supremacy, in first instance, is founded on a small but decisive advantage in physical force, which allowed men to further magnify their domination through the monopolization of weapons and of religious authority. I discuss a sequence of violent interventions in the lives of girls and women aimed at sustaining patriarchal regimes up to the present day: the disposal of newborn baby girls (and nowadays much more often the abortion of female fetuses); female genital mutilation; child marriage; blinding by acid; punitive rape, and honor killings.

The position of women began to improve spectacularly in the West in the past century or so, and in the rest of the world since the 1960s. For one,

mechanization in agriculture and manufacture, and the expansion of the administrative and service sectors, have made physical prowess increasingly irrelevant. Thus, the one 'natural' advantage of males over females was mostly neutralized. Second, as education spread, initially for boys, young women too went to school in increasing numbers and toward ever higher levels, in one country after another. Third, mostly as a consequence of schooling, in part also because of more effective and accessible contraceptives, partly on account of rising incomes, from 1965 on, and across the globe, average birth rates per woman began to decrease spectacularly, from an almost perennial and global 6.5 children per woman to 2.5 at present – and this in a period of only half a century.

Increasing numbers of young women began to acquire much the same qualifications as young men, they worked in paid jobs for an income of their own, they married later, postponed childbirth, had fewer children and could now survive independently outside of marriage. There is plenty of social science evidence to document these recent advances for women across the world and women scholars have done much to add to it. In this second part of the book, I discuss at some length the global developments in education throughout the twentieth century and beyond, elaborating on the ideas of John Meyer a.o. about the impact of the world system on national school systems. Teresa de Castro demonstrated the statistical connection between the lengthening of women's education and the decrease in children born to them.

Subsequent paragraphs discuss women's increasing participation in the labor market (and the persistent wage gap with men), as well as their - haltingly - growing access to positions of political and administrative power. In these respects, the class background of women makes a major difference in what they can achieve.

Of course this is not a zero sum game, but men did lose power over women, and women did gain independence vis a vis men. Much more than about material loss, this is about male honor, since men's prestige is bound up with control over 'their' wife and daughters. (And this remains the case in contemporary western societies, much more than most of us - men - care to admit). Men who experience such a loss of prestige may well react to this 'humiliation' with resentment or even 'narcissistic rage'. (The key role of early humiliation and unacknowledged shame has been amply demonstrated in the careers of violent criminals; Scheff, Gilligan).

It is in this light that, in the third part of the book, the emergence of rightist groupings in the West, (both of a fundamentalist religious persuasion and of a fascist or identitarian orientation) as well as the rise of

jihadist movements in Africa and Asia are interpreted. Here, widely quoted primary sources, such as the writings of Anders Breivik or Abu Bakr Naji, and the abundant postings on relevant web sites provide the material.

This perspective on rightists, jihadists and other fundamentalists as driven by resentment about women's emancipation is not the last word on the subject, nor the first. Quite a few feminists (Faludi, Steinem) have long ago identified resistance to women's emancipation as the driving force behind 'reactionary' movements. There are indeed surprising similarities in the vision of gender relations among the widely divergent religious fundamentalists of every hue and secular right-wing extremists of all sorts. Their perspective closely corresponds to the feminist depiction of 'male chauvinism' and 'misogyny'. Yet, I have not come across another book which interprets the rise of both the old and new right as well as the religious right and the Islamist jihadists in a single, comprehensive approach along these lines.

In the third part of the book, I discuss in successive paragraphs jihadist ideas on the position of women (as codified in a radical and modern reading of the shari'a); marianismo and machismo in Latin American Catholicism; Evangelical fundamentalists in the USA and elsewhere; ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel. The second half of this third part of the book deals with the world of the worldly right: the old right and the alt right: neo-nazi's, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacist militia's (and their women members...); white identitarians (it's all about 'culture' as an inherited affinity to the *Volk*), and finally the '*manosphere*' (*lust, fear and fury*) of enraged men, 'victims of divorce'; and, young adolescents fantasizing about becoming 'alpha men' who can seduce and subdue any woman, 'bump and dump her'.

In a final chapter I summarize the argument and present some conclusions.

Women are not determined by their gender alone. They are bound by ties of class and caste, of faith and conviction, ethnicity and region. Almost all of them have strong loyalties to the men in their lives, as daughters, sisters, spouses, mothers, colleagues and friends. That adds to the complexity of the choices each one of them makes. It also explains why many women keep their distance from the women's movement or even actively oppose it.

Notwithstanding the huge impact of the male backlash against women's emancipation, women everywhere are slowly but surely gaining economic and political power, and increasingly also cultural and moral authority.

The women's movement functions not with tightly structured and permanent mass organizations, like, say, trade unions. It operates in loosely

coordinated ‘waves’ around a single issue that suddenly captures the public imagination, e.g. the surges around the right to vote in the early 20th century, about the right to abortion in the eighties and around sexual harassment today. But the present success in the West owes everything to the use of social media and to careful preparation by small groups of women who in recent times have come to occupy influential positions as authors and editors, as lawyers and judges, as officials or representatives at every level of government and as functionaries in the financial industry. Women in the rest of the world carry on their own struggles with even greater courage. They know what women elsewhere have brought about by now and they set their own sights accordingly. Every little girl in the world will become aware how much women can achieve nowadays. The spell of women’s inferiority has been broken once and for all.

‘More woman, more human: that’s what A. de Swaan subscribes to’ -
Stephan Sanders in weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer* 30 5 2019).

‘In many respects vintage De Swaan, this book: a complex and global issue is explained with a consistent vision and in crystal clear language[...] an extremely lively and readable argument, which fearlessly blazes a trail through contemporary political minefields with an appealing mixture of sociological insights, relativizing self-reflections and *cut the crap* (sic) reasoning’ - Baukje Prins, in daily *Trouw*, 4 mei 2019.

‘Luckily, there still are scholars who are not afraid to cast their net widely. And who are most readable to boot.’ - Raymond van den Boogaard blog 28 4 2019.

De Swaan presents an unerring, even quite compelling demonstration that jihadists and rightists are reactionaries in the sense that they don’t come up with anything new, but hark back to primeval arguments and clichés. - Marja Pruis, *De Groene Amsterdammer*

Against Women has been included in the long list (with 29 others) for the Bookspot Prize, the largest Dutch literary award (winner to be announced in October 2019).

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ABRAM DE SWAAN – AGAINST WOMEN; THE WORLDWIDE WAR BY
RIGHTISTS AND JIHADISTS AGAINST LIBERATION

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Liberation*

by Abram de Swaan

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‘Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating
events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.’ –
Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*

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From: Patriarchy as a reign of terror

There is one common denominator among all societies and throughout history: in almost all places and almost all times, men have been elevated to a higher status than women.

How did this happen?

The first part of the explanation is physical. Women bear, give birth to, and breastfeed children. Men do not. Furthermore, most men are stronger than most women. And they are usually a great deal stronger than women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Until some fifty years ago, and as long as we can look back in history, women gave birth to an average of five or six children, often far more. For the majority of their young adulthood and during the prime of life, they were therefore physically defenceless in relation to men. Men exploited that advantage. With that strength differential, they were able to keep celts, spears, bows and arrows, knives and swords, pistols and muskets, out of women's hands. In almost all human societies, men successfully secured and sustained a monopoly on weaponry.¹ All ownership and use of arms was the prerogative of men. That made the strength differential between the sexes virtually insurmountable.

This imbalance in the tools of violence led to an imbalance in the tools of authority, sustained by religions that proclaim the superiority of men to women and impose that supremacy. Men have appropriated religions. Not everywhere, not always, but the major religions of our age are men's work. There is always an accompanying form of worship venerating female saints, but only under the strict supervision of men. Let us not get into the underlying mechanisms, but in all those religions, men outrank women. In all those religions, it is largely men – even today – who lead services; women are excluded from leadership roles. Yes, there are a few recent, progressive Western exceptions, but in the main, women are barred from serving as priests or ministers, imams or Brahmins, rabbis or lamas. And many women, even some who are quite modern and emancipated, largely accept this situation and continue to meekly attend places of worship as second-class citizens. Everywhere where religion elevates itself in orthodoxy, the first step is to humiliate women.

Even if you have scarcely a vestige of faith left, and your religion has been gnawed down to the bone, virtually all men, and a majority of women, have internalized a barely conscious notion of men's elevated status. In the millennia of male domination and the oppression of women, until quite recently, women rarely had opportunities to achieve prominent positions or accomplishments in public life. Only women of high rank or with a private fortune were able to acquire prestige. In almost all cases, they were the mothers, the daughters, or widows of important men. They therefore achieved their status not entirely through merit, but at least in part through their connections to a man.

Even under the weight of patriarchal relationships, some women in fact achieved a great deal, but in large measure, their accomplishments have simply been erased from the annals. Their achievements have been attributed to a man, they have been ignored, or their names have been consigned to oblivion. Any rare expressions of rebelliousness would probably have been erased straight away. Still, here and there, veiled protestations must have been preserved. Anthologies have been published of texts written by women in earlier centuries. Like most writings by men, most are dull, meek, and retrospectively predictable. Otherwise they would have been immediately censured out of existence. Even so, there is always an occasional obstinate, self-willed woman who strikes a dissonant note.

The standard formula would go: 'A woman can surely never ...' followed by whatever activity was deemed the exclusive prerogative of men. And since women were not permitted to do whatever it was, it appeared that they were not able to do so. No woman had ever done such a job or achieved such a goal. There you are then! 'Women are far too ...' And this standard sentence too was followed by whatever characteristic was ascribed to women: women were too weak or too emotional, too tender-hearted or too impulsive, too ignorant or too devious. Whatever suited the purpose. That no woman had ever served as supreme court justice clearly proved that women lacked the essential quality of reason. That no woman had ever served as sea captain was sufficient proof that women were too timid for such a post. And given women's lack of reason and their timidity (not to mention their instability) it was just as well that they were never appointed to such demanding positions of responsibility.

It is only in the past fifty to one hundred years that women have finally started working in almost all these positions, frequently with great success. The cause for this change is not hard to identify: precisely the two universal,

permanent differences between men and women – physical strength and pregnancy – have gradually declined in importance.

First, the heavy work was gradually taken over by machines and mechanical devices, so that the physical strength of men gradually declined in importance over the past century and a half. This has abolished countless jobs that once belonged to the male domain. Today, strength is decisive only in sport and in a few heavy combat duties in the army.

Second, although women still have children, in the past fifty years they no longer have an average of half a dozen, as they did throughout the previous centuries: something that was seen in all parts of the world as part of the immutable pattern of human existence. The brood of youngsters would completely occupy their mothers' attention for at least twelve years of their adult lives. The global average number of children per woman started to fall sharply around 1965 and stands today between two and three. The responsibility for childcare is still primarily a woman's task. However, that work takes up far fewer years of her life than before. Furthermore, in some countries, day care centres and preschool clubs take over a large proportion of these responsibilities.

With these changes, the most important male advantage, physical strength, has become largely irrelevant. Roughly simultaneously, childcare as the primary obstacle for a woman to pursue a professional career has greatly declined. Even so, the happiness of motherhood has of course endured – and indeed that of fatherhood as well. Biology is to some extent still destiny... but no longer more so for women than for men. For those biological differences have become far less relevant to women's opportunities in society.

Changes in the relationships between men and women are still progressing at a snail's pace, and are indeed often reversed by religious fanatics or reactionary regimes. They are held back, above all, by the omnipresent, obdurate, opaque and frequently impenetrable conservatism of men who blithely pass the ball to each other and nonchalantly side with one another. Yet the onward march of women's progress continues and in the long term it is unstoppable. As a result of long-term underlying changes in society, the innate differences in physical strength between the sexes are simply less important.

If women are now capable of performing in virtually every capacity, how can we explain that their mothers, grandmothers, and all those hundreds of generations before them, did not do so? It is only now, now that women have shaken off the restrictions that had been imposed on them all that time, that the full extent of what they might have achieved if they had not been blocked

from doing so is becoming clear. What prevented them? How could all that potential talent of myriads of women have remained unused and unseen, for century after century? Besides the physical discrepancy, the explanation lies in patriarchy and its reign of terror.

Patriarchy still tends to be discussed in far too benign terms. Outside feminist literature, it is often described as a religious and cultural regime of powerful persuasion and coercion if needs be. Women collaborated with it and helped to sustain it, so the story goes. And that is true. But like all oppressive regimes, it has ultimately been sustained by resolute, ruthless violence. In large parts of the world, this still applies today. Women are not restrained with the use of barbed wire fences and camp guards. No stormtroopers or firing squads have been needed. But for any woman who starts chipping away at the restrictions imposed on her and her sex, the threat hanging over her will often be a violent reprisal: in some cases, death.

The following pages give a brief, non-comprehensive catalogue of the acts of violence that are perpetrated against women, from before birth until advanced old age: a compact manual for patriarchy's reign of terror.

From: Before and at birth: sex-selective abortions and female infanticide

In many countries, something strange and disturbing takes place around the time a baby's birth. Far more newborn boys than girls are registered: around 120 boys for every 100 girls. In some places, the ratio is even more lopsided.

What is going on?

For as long as relatively reliable birth statistics have been recorded (which outside the Western world is not very long), under normal circumstances, approximately 105 boys are born for every 100 girls. This sex ratio at birth has been shown to be extremely stable down the centuries and throughout the world. Birth figures are among the most reliable of statistics and the sex of the newborn is unfailingly registered. When a clear deviation occurs from the boy to girl ratio of 105:100, something must be going on.

The small, natural preponderance of natal boys gradually evens out later on because of the slightly higher mortality rate among boys, largely resulting from fighting and accidents, and possibly also from a slightly greater susceptibility to disease. This explains why, in normal circumstances, when boys and girls reach marriageable age, their numbers are roughly equal. (Among the elderly, women outnumber men, since their life expectancy is a few years longer).

The sex ratio of 105:100 applies in the absence of any interventions during pregnancy or immediately after the infant's birth. However, such interventions do occur, and have occurred since time immemorial, on a large scale. They are seen principally in conservative, highly patriarchal societies, especially in large swathes of China and India and parts of the Middle East and North Africa. In many of these countries, the boy-girl ratio at birth fluctuates around 120:100 or even higher. This essentially means that for every 100 births of newborn girls that are naturally expected, 88 at most are officially registered. At least twelve of those girl babies – one-eighth of the total – have disappeared.

The missing girl babies have been tossed into a bucket and disposed of.

Female infanticide was always suspected but not discussed – it was a public secret. The Chinese writer Xue Xinran describes witnessing it after the delivery of a girl baby in a farming village in China. The newborn girl was unceremoniously drowned in the garbage can, her tiny legs still sticking out. 'Useless junk,' said the father. This practice was still common in the twentieth century. A midwife explained to Xinran that the best method was

to strangle the newborn girl with her own umbilical cord. This was still the most normal thing in the world, although the midwife did charge more for it than for assisting at the birth of a son; which was in turn more expensive than assisting in the birth of a daughter who was allowed to live.

‘But that has nothing to do with the oppression of women! Those poor innocents are not conscious of any of it!’

Whether or not that is the case, their mothers and sisters are certainly very conscious of it. And the message is loud and clear: girls are less desirable than boys: so much so that they may be disposed of.

‘That is simply the customary practice in those cultures.’

Exactly. Everyone knows. No one talks about it. Everyone understands that a girl’s life is worth less than a boy’s. It is not incidental. It is systematic and structural. Even in her mother’s womb, a girl’s chances, her actual chances of survival, are less than those of a boy.

It has only been over the past few decades that this centuries-old practice in large parts of Asia and North Africa has come to an end. Even so, far fewer girls than boys are born there. So what is happening?

Over the past several decades, the sex ratio of newborns has in many cases become even more unbalanced. And contrary to expectations, this is seen not in the poorest, more traditional sections of society, but quite the reverse: in more affluent, urban, ‘modern’ milieus. The first writer to draw attention to this phenomenon was the Indian economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, in 1990. The birth figures for boys relative to girls kept climbing. In some parts of India and China, 120 boys were born for every 100 girls. Sen calculated that at least 100 million girls were ‘missing’. They were absent from the statistics. And they had apparently been really ‘terminated’. That extremely large number of missing girl infants was confirmed in later studies, though some have questioned it.

Amartya Sen had an explanation for the deficit of girls. It was the result of the wide availability of a new technology: around 1980, relatively cheap, user-friendly ultrasound devices appeared on the market. Using this device, an ordinary village doctor could determine the sex of a foetus after 12 weeks of pregnancy. The initial fee for this examination was around 100 US dollars, but it gradually fell to as little as 10 US dollars. This meant that it was no longer necessary to kill the newborn girl. The female foetus could be discreetly aborted. That too was a fairly recent technological innovation: that of virtually pain-free and almost completely safe abortions. And it had been the women’s movement that had campaigned everywhere for the legalisation of abortion as one of its primary goals, and with success. Now

this new technique was being used to prevent the birth of girls. That is one of the effects, it seems, of progress.

The selective abortion of unborn girls and the murder of newborn girls are demonstrative evidence for the perceived lack of value of girls and women. If it suits those concerned, into the garbage pail they go. The war against women starts before childbirth.

From: The unstoppable advance of women in today's world

After thousands of years, the immutable pattern of male domination is starting to collapse in almost all parts of the world. Even in societies that trundle along under a permafrost of religious mania, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, or El Salvador, male domination is groaning, splintering and crumbling. Saudi Arabia recently rescinded the ban on women driving cars: perhaps – who knows? – Saudi women will soon be permitted to go to the cinema. The bells are tolling for the beginning of the end of the patriarchal era.

This demise of male supremacy is not attributable to any sudden eureka moment in which men see the error of their ways, although hundreds of millions of them are in fact changing their minds – and tens of millions the wrong way around. The change is not even attributable in the first place to moral pressure or protest campaigns organised by feminists, although these have certainly helped. Rather, the cause is a combination of radical global trends that are combining to produce a revolutionary result. More and more women are attending school, and for longer, and those women are having fewer children, and at an older age. As a result, they are better educated and have more time for paid employment and other activities outside the home. Growing mechanisation and industrialisation mean that far fewer jobs demand physical strength and far more demand skills such as insight, oversight and foresight, in which women are at least the equal of men.

Let me start with my own experience. When I was attending kindergarten and primary school in the late 1940s, I was taught by 'Miss' Jonker and 'Miss' Van Kampen. There were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in my class – as had been the case in the Netherlands for over half a century. At secondary school, in the 1950s, the numbers were also more or less equal. It was not until I got to university in the 1960s that female students were a small minority. As for female professors: they were almost non-existent. I became a research assistant, and – very unusually – two of my colleagues were young women. The most brilliant of the two suddenly disappeared. She had become engaged, and evidently saw a university degree course, and certainly an academic career, as incompatible with the role of a married woman. Today, fifty years later, that is almost inconceivable in a Western country. In many non-Western countries, even where women can actually secure posts as assistant lecturers, such a view is still quite common. I was indignant about it at the time and I'm still indignant now. I was full of ambition and wanted to achieve something, but there was no honour in

competing in a field in which half of my rivals had millstones around their necks.

Over the past fifty-odd years, in virtually all parts of the world, women have been slowly but surely advancing in a triumphal procession towards equality with men. They are certainly encountering resistance along the way. The advance is not taking the form of spectacular revolutions, let alone that of tragic civil wars between men and women. The class struggle and the struggle for racial equality have been far more violent than the battle of the sexes. In the day-to-day scheme of things, the glorious advance of women looks more like a ponderous trudge through the glutinous mud of female hesitation or male privilege and a steep climb over the obstacles of laws and customs that have been erected during centuries of male supremacy. Even so, if you take a step back and review the medium term of half a century or more, it is clear that in spite of everything, women are advancing in a victory march. That advance has long been unstoppable.

For centuries, relations between the sexes have been less unequal in the West, especially in northwest Europe and the US, than in other parts of the world. In the non-Western world, the change did not truly set in until the 1960s.. We could point to a whole jumble of interrelated causes. But let's focus on the most important one: the expansion of education. First boys, but in due course girls as well, attended school in ever greater numbers.

No statistics are available on men's sense of superiority – or indeed on women's self-confidence. When it comes to the crunch, you have to depend on your sociological imagination. Even so, some existing statistics do show what may be going on between men and women – precisely in their intimate relations. The most intimate index of all, in human society, is that of reproduction. And here, statistics are extremely informative, since one result of these intimate interactions is so easy to measure: the birth rate.

The sociologist Teresa Castro Martín published a superb article discussing the link between women's educational attainment and their fertility rate in twenty-six countries. Her figures clearly demonstrate the inverse relationship between the two: ten years of school means two or three children fewer. Those better-educated women have roughly the number of children that they want. And there is no doubt about it: they want fewer children. Furthermore, well-educated women have a less fatalistic attitude to reproduction. They are less compliant. And yes, it has been studied and demonstrated: educated women use contraception far more frequently than those who are less well educated. They are better able to find the diverse contraceptive methods and know how to use them. Furthermore, women

who have fewer children have more employment opportunities: the prospect of a better job reinforces their commitment to stay in education.

This dry-as-dust statistical link between education and numbers of children is one of the most poignant findings that I know of in the social sciences. For what does it actually mean? Those women have not necessarily learnt, at their Islamic, Evangelical, or Catholic schools that they may use contraceptive methods – let alone that they should do so. They have certainly not learnt that they don't have to give in to their husbands' desires in bed. On the contrary, even in a country like Tunisia, in which the educational curriculum is highly conservative, more highly educated women want smaller families and use contraceptive methods approximately 50% more frequently than less well-educated women. They didn't learn that at school, it seems to me.

And yet they did. That is what is so poignant about it. Girls who have learned to read and write acquire greater self-confidence, whatever the teacher may have to say. They gain a stronger sense of their humanity. Perhaps they do not yet feel that they are the equals of men, but they do come to realise that they are not mere creatures for breeding and drudgery. Precisely among the 'People of the Book', reading and writing are seen as the skills that make someone into a complete human being. Those girls have attended school, along with boys. Evidently they were considered important enough to receive that attention. Clearly, they did not display less aptitude than the boys in their class. To us this may seem laughably obvious – it happened here about a century and a half ago – but it is about human development, or reaching one's potential and full equality, including for girls and women.

...

In large parts of the world, women have now achieved the same educational standard as men. Where they still lag behind, the gap has unmistakably narrowed. Women's healthcare, too, has greatly improved. Women's employment opportunities and pay still lag behind, although the past few decades have seen enormous progress. In spite of all the reforms that have taken place, the sphere in which women still lag behind most noticeably is in the realm of politics. Politics is about the redistribution of power.

...

Men have fought these changes tooth and nail, frequently in subtle – let's just say devious – ways. They are highly effective in suggesting that women are unsuited to the exercise of power. Once women do accede to a position of power, they soon face accusations that they are too hard (the 'Iron Lady') or too 'shrill', and that they are compelled to go against their 'feminine nature' in order to survive the hard world of politics. Women who do weather the storm are described as 'not real women' but 'shrews', 'battle-axes', or 'viragos' (all terms that are used in attempts to diminish a woman who vigorously defends her ideas and her supporters. If she holds her ground in the political arena and gets the better of her male opponents, she is soon vilified as a 'bitch', a 'dragon' or a 'harpy'.

...

Women in politics are tied down by a double bind. A woman who wants to succeed in politics has to outsmart the men around her; but the better she succeeds in doing so, the more she is hated. Peter Beinart cites the example of Nancy Pelosi, who led the Democratic caucus in the US House of Representatives for years and is now Speaker of the House once again. She was – and remains, without a doubt – the most powerful and effective Speaker in decades. She is also the most hated, partly among her own caucus, but above all by the Republicans, who depict her as a power-crazy monster who manipulates her male fellow Democrats in the manner of a puppeteer: 'She is in control'. That was certainly not meant as a compliment, but as deadly criticism of the woman. A more explicit reproach was not even necessary.

....

Loss of status or honour is shameful and humiliating. It hurts, burns, chafes and stings. It is hard to acknowledge that you are smarting, that you feel slighted. For such an admission would mean admitting that you have lost. Instead, the sense of umbrage festers into bitterness and resentment, a belief of having been treated unjustly. Then comes the rage: the fury about the great injustice that has been done to the man.

The final section of this book is devoted in its entirety to the social and political movements that are underpinned by that resentment and the desire for revenge: male rage and the humiliation that women's emancipation engenders in men.

From: The War on Women as waged by Jihadists and the Right

What is it that has driven both Jihadists and right-wing men to such extremes of rage? Every one of them is always able to produce a long list of grievances. They have been treated outrageously and by a host of people. Even where they are in the majority, they are really an endangered minority. The perpetrators of violent acts are almost always victims, and every attack is in effect no more than an act of self-defence. James Gilligan writes: ‘... no one feels more innocent than the criminals.’

There is one grievance that they all share: their eternal, holy birth right, men’s supremacy over women, has been undermined. Worse still, it has been reversed. That is against the will of God and against human nature. The war waged by Jihadists and the right is primarily a war against the emancipation of women. It is therefore time to take a closer look at their assertions.

...

That is how the perverse paradox of the Jihadist preachers works: by adopting extremely puritanical dogmas and codes of conduct that renders women ever more inaccessible to men in everyday life, it makes sexual pleasure increasingly hard for young men – and women – to achieve, with the exception of those who commit to Jihad, who choose war and death. For once a young man has become a Jihadi fighter, a bride will be found for him, who will completely devote herself to satisfying the desires of her warrior husband. In addition, as part of the spoils of war, fighters can claim sex slaves, with whom they can do whatever comes into their heads. And into those prim, pious heads plops without warning every conceivable foulness. When a Jihadist is killed, eternal, endless sensual delight awaits him on the other side of the gates of Paradise, with 5112 virgins and handmaidens.

...

Right-wing groups in the West are a miscellaneous crew ranging from the devoutest of zealots to the most libertarian of atheists. But there is one thing about which they all agree: women should stay where they belong: at home, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, and in the nursery. Rightists are also anti-immigration, favour tough sanctions for criminals, seek to protect ‘the People’, the white race, or the community of believers from ‘foreign stains’, consider the nation’s cultural heritage and ancient traditions to be under threat from faddism, while in the great majority they oppose abortion and

homosexuality. Furthermore, for some years now they have seen Islam in general and Jihadism in particular as posing the greatest threat to Western civilisation.

The religious right is also a very mixed bunch. Each religion has a narrow or wider band of political extremists. The Catholic fascism that triumphed under Mussolini in Italy and Franco in Spain still enjoys considerable support in Latin America and among a number of dissident groups in the US. The spearhead for orthodox Catholics is the anti-abortion movement. The Evangelical Church, which flourishes particularly in the US, is gradually expanding its flock in Latin America and these days in pockets of Asia and Africa. It is particularly successful in attracting women followers, in spite of its highly patriarchal views on the relations between the sexes. Among religious Jews, too, we find radical orthodox sects with highly reactionary ideas about women's rights. It is not hard to identify similar sects preaching extreme sexist views among Hindus and Buddhists. Anyone who thinks that it is only Muslims who are obsessed by male supremacy will soon have to recant. Patriarchal doctrines and traditions are an essential feature of all established religions. They stem from the social relations that applied in the era in which those religions emerged. In many cases, the rules that are now seen as restrictions on women actually amounted to an improvement in their position at the time.

...

For right-wing political parties in Europe, the central concern is the Nation, the Volk – sometimes the 'Race'. The love of one's 'own People' is generally phrased in negative terms: as opposition to immigration, which is presented as undermining the nation's identity and its internal cohesion. What is more, the growing globalisation of the business world, the media, and the universities is seen on the right as an assault on cherished traditional values. Immigration and internationalisation pose a threat to the employment of the local population: voices on the left also take up that refrain.

...

On social media, we encounter the views of other groups and grouplets that are less invested in racial issues and the question of national identity. They fiercely oppose the rise of women and rail most of all against feminists, as the organised vanguard of the women's movement. Here, the battle of the sexes is fought out openly in the form of personal attacks on every woman who dares publicly to champion women's rights. This is the virtual world of the 'mannosphere', websites that glorify the 'real man', the 'alpha male', who

mainly lives on, outside this bubble, in advertisements for cigarettes, sports cars, and watches. This real man is interested only in ‘real women’. These come in two varieties, one that men are allowed – the ‘bitches’ to satisfy their needs – and one that’s required – the mother types for marriage and procreation.

...

The Catholic Church in Latin America has elevated its double standards of morality to a religious ideal, under the banner of Marianismo. The Marianist ‘addiction to suffering’ is the perfect counterpart to machismo. There is a dual hierarchy: one ranking order in which women are subjected to men in their earthly lives, and another in which women are spiritually above them. And although men are superior to women, they are at the same time overgrown, badly-behaved children – incorrigible and not entirely in their right mind. Men live out their lives in the street, drinking, gambling, squabbling, larking around with other men and chasing after ‘loose’ women. Their wives stay at home, care for the children, run the household, keep the family together and maintain ties with other relatives, ensure that meals are served and that debts do not get out of hand.

...

This Machomarianismo functions as a perverse spiral, in which men and women circle around each other as opposites and become ever more deeply ensconced in twisted fantasies about themselves and the other. Ultimately, it can be sustained only by brute force ... Wayward women are held in check by the deadly threat of honour killing, the threat that is indeed intended to instil terror into all women, recalcitrant or not.

...

Right-wing chatter is loudest in the underwater world of social media. Adherents sometimes surface in the street. Some fanatics are driven to violence, and even murderous acts of terrorism. Nonetheless, the world of the far right is largely a virtual one. Anyone who wants to delve into it will need to do a lot of surfing, and learn a whole vocabulary of acronyms, emoticons, and terms of abuse. Newcomers find themselves in a crass world in which anonymous posters indulge freely in aggressive, obscene rants with few words but great emphasis. Provocative, odious even, but not always entirely serious.

...

The women of the Stormfront make it clear in their blogs and threads that their sole aim is to produce 'beautiful white babies'. The more the better. It is not about those children, it is a campaign against the black, brown and yellow mongrels that threaten to swamp white society. Because we all know, they insist, that those inferior races breed like rabbits. Nazis see it as their duty to give birth to children who will later fight for a 'European America' or a 'white Europe'. Women fulfil their calling as the incubators and nurturers of the child soldiers who must help secure victory for the white race. This perverted notion of children as ammunition in the clash of races also derives directly from Nazi Germany. Heinrich Himmler established the *Lebensborn* project, in which 'racially pure' SS men coupled with equally pure Aryan women to make children for the Führer and the Fatherland. Today's Nazis consider that they honour women for this exalted task, and indeed place them on a pedestal. The Stormfront women gracefully accept this position and express their enthusiasm for subordinating themselves to their husbands: 'I give him the final say. Period. The End.' The men offer protection, the women give their support in return.

...

It is the task of every real man to protect his wife and children from attacks by alien groups. Women cannot do that themselves. They need protection and are therefore dependent on men. Consequently, they must subject themselves to male authority. Only by doing so can they achieve the necessary peace of mind to bear and raise children and thus to ensure the survival of their own People. That is the natural order of things, and family life is structured around that premise. It is from such families that the Volk is composed.

...

The 'mannosphere' is an archipelago of sites, chatrooms, hashtags, where men can be 'real men'. These real men have a wholehearted loathing for women, while at the same time they want to seduce as many as possible. These things apparently go together very well: a loathing for self-confident women and a desire for compliant crumpet.

On these sites, a stripling can find instructions on ways of seducing a woman, or at least of finding a woman who will oblige him for a night. However, any woman who allows herself to be seduced in this way is by definition worthless. She is a slut or a bitch, or a sluturion (a coinage by analogy with the Roman centurion), a woman who has had sex with at least a hundred men. No man would want to marry such a whore.

Once the young man has sown his wild oats, he goes in search of a virginal woman for marriage and procreation. However, all that comes later. Or it doesn't come at all. These sites focus primarily on seduction techniques and the sensual delights that lie in store. This is the 'alt-light', the light, less bloodthirsty but still malevolent stream of right-wing thought, as obnoxious as it is comical: a toxic mix of lechery and misogyny. It is the ideology of onanism.

...

'Incels' ('involuntary celibate' men) are driven by a deep sense of entitlement – the conviction that young men simply have a right to have sex with any woman they fancy. This right, of course, exists only in a male fantasy of a world in which women themselves have no say in such matters. In the real new world, which the incels involuntarily inhabit, young women make their own decisions on education, career, and their choice of partner. What fuels the incels' rage is not so much that they are rejected, again and again, but that young women can make their own choices, just as they can.

From: Final remarks

Today, women in most Western societies are freer and have far more scope for action than their female ancestors – and more than women in many non-Western societies. This has not gone unnoticed by women who are still living in more traditional societies. Every time women in those countries go online or watch TV and see unchaperoned women walking down the street, going to school or work, meeting people at a café or going to see a movie; every time they notice that women in these other places can ride motor cycles, take judo classes, or go swimming in a mixed-sex pool, it proves to them that such things are possible. When a woman becomes an astronaut, is internationally acclaimed as an artist, wins the Nobel Prize for Economics, takes over as the CEO of a multinational, or is the only person to complete a 200-mile marathon, young women all over the world hear about it on social media or on the news. And every time such things are reported, they refute the old claims about women's incapacity and provide fresh evidence for what women can achieve. But if women in Iceland or Nicaragua can do it, so can women in Mali and Saudi Arabia. And then they start trying. That is why, in my view, the fight for women's liberation can no longer be halted anywhere in the world.