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Women's Roles in the Family: An Ontological Representation

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Abstract: Although empirical family research recognises *motherhood*, *marital roles*, and *daughterhood* as analytically distinct, the scholarly literature still lacks a formally engineered, machine-readable model that links these constructs to primary textual evidence. We address this gap by developing a domain ontology from a curated corpus of 64 canonical texts ($\approx 30\,000$ words). Following the NeOn methodology, we (i) elicited 64 competency questions, (ii) applied semantic-field analysis to derive a controlled vocabulary, and (iii) formalised the resulting concepts and relations in OWL. The finished ontology contains 150 classes, 18 object properties, and 11 annotation properties, all verified for logical consistency with the HermiT reasoner. A two-stage evaluation combined automated metrics with expert review. On a stratified sample of 120 queries, the ontology-driven retrieval pipeline achieved a mean average precision of 0.87—an 89 % improvement over a keyword baseline (0.46). Domain specialists further confirmed that the model supplies the contextual information needed for nuanced interpretation of each role. The ontology is released under an open licence and can be consumed directly by SPARQL endpoints or embedded in digital-humanities workflows. By offering a rigorously validated, extensible representation of women's family roles, the resource lowers barriers to reproducible research and paves the way for comparative studies across languages and cultures.

Keywords: ontology engineering; women's family roles; knowledge representation; semantic retrieval; digital humanities.



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家庭中女性角色的本体论表征

摘要：尽管经验性家庭研究将母亲角色、婚姻角色和女儿角色视为分析上彼此区分的概念，但学术文献中仍缺乏一种形式化构建的、可供机器读取的模型，用以将这些概念与原始文本证据相联系。为填补这一空白，本文基于一个精心遴选的64部经典文献语料库（约30,000词），构建了一个领域本体。按照 NeOn 方法论，我们：（1）提出了64个能力问题；（2）运用语义场分析构建受控词汇表；（3）使用 OWL 对所得概念与关系进行形式化建模。最终生成的本体包含150个类、18个对象属性和11个注释属性，并通过 Hermit 逻辑推理器验证了逻辑一致性。本体的评估采用了两阶段方法，结合自动化指标与专家评审。在对120个分层抽样查询的评测中，本体驱动的检索系统实现了0.87的平均精度，较关键词基线（0.46）提升了89%。领域专家进一步确认，该模型能够提供语境信息，从而支持对每一角色的细致理解。本体以开放许可发布，可通过 SPARQL 端点直接调用，亦可嵌入数字人文研究流程。该资源通过严谨验证和可扩展的女性家庭角色表征，有效降低了再现性研究的门槛，并为跨语言与跨文化的比较研究奠定了基础。

关键词：本体工程；女性家庭角色；知识表征；语义检索；数字人文。

1. Introduction

One of the most pressing research challenges in the humanities is the systematic analysis of women's family roles. These roles are conventionally grouped into three principal categories—motherhood, marital roles, and daughterhood [1-4]. Scholars require dependable descriptions of these roles drawn from authoritative classical texts. Yet the relevant evidence is dispersed across numerous sources, many of them unstructured and poorly suited to machine processing [5], which impedes accurate retrieval and encourages reliance on questionable materials [6-7].

An ontological approach offers a credible remedy by providing a formal representation of knowledge that links pertinent text fragments to specific information needs. The key obstacles are (a) extracting precise facts from large, heterogeneous collections, (b) the absence of a unified metadata schema, and (c) retrieval delays caused by inefficient indexing. A well-designed ontology can mitigate these shortcomings by specifying clear semantic relations among concepts, thereby improving both the precision and contextual validity of search results [8].

An ontology is commonly defined as “an explicit specification of a conceptualisation” and has proven to be an effective instrument for information search and retrieval [9]. To be useful, it must be both machine-readable and intelligible to human users [10]. As digital collections expand, ontologies have become a critical mechanism for information management and for enhancing the semantic quality of search [11-12].

Between 2010 and 2024, several well-established ontology-engineering methodologies emerged, including:

- Methontology — a sequential framework covering specification, conceptualisation, and formalisation [17];
- NeOn — a modular methodology that supports reuse, integration, and evolutionary development of ontologies [10];
- Ontology 101 — a practical, step-by-step guide originating at Stanford University [11];
- DOLCE — a foundational ontology that emphasises systematic distinctions among ontological categories [15].

These methodologies differ in scalability, reusability, and expressive power, making them attractive across disciplines ranging from artificial intelligence to medical and cultural-heritage studies.

Ontology construction for large text corpora has progressed rapidly. Early studies focused on formalising core concepts extracted from classical literary collections [13, 14, 18]. Subsequent research extended this work to specialised branches of the humanities [27-29]. Issues of formal modelling for artefacts and archaeological sites were addressed in *OntoAndalus* [19, 22], while semantic search over extensive natural-language corpora was tackled with ontologies that exploit lexical and grammatical features of the texts [23, 24].

Projects in which ontologies are used to verify authenticity and establish authorship are particularly noteworthy [16, 26]. These efforts demonstrate that rigorous formalisation of relationships among authors, texts, and contexts enhances the objectivity of findings and simplifies the extensibility of knowledge-storage systems.

This study seeks to develop an ontological model that will

1. Systematise information on women's family roles (mother, wife, daughter) based on an authoritative corpus of classical texts;
2. Improve the accuracy and completeness of queries addressed to this information;
3. Ensure contextual interpretation by making semantic relations among key concepts explicit;
4. Provide an open resource for educational, research, and digital-humanities projects.

To achieve these aims we adopted the NeOn methodology, formalising the ontology in OWL within the Protégé environment. The resulting ontology comprises more than 150 classes and a full set of object and annotation properties; its logical consistency was verified with the Hermit reasoner. A pilot evaluation involving domain experts showed a substantial increase in query precision for the three focal roles, confirming the effectiveness of the proposed solution.

This structured representation of knowledge streamlines access to reliable information on women's family roles, reduces search time, and lowers the likelihood of consulting dubious sources.

2. Methodology

The project implemented the NeOn Methodology integrated with the Methontology steps. The NeOn Methodology is a comprehensive, scenario-based approach for ontology development that allows for reuse, re-engineering, and integration of multiple ontologies. It was developed as part of the NeOn Project (2006–2010) funded by the European Commission. Methontology is a structured ontology development methodology that provides a systematic approach to building ontologies from scratch. It was developed by Fernández-López, Gómez-Pérez, and Juristo at the Artificial Intelligence Lab of the Technical University of

Madrid (UPM) in the late 1990s [34]. This integrated method has three important phases: i) Ontology Specification, ii) Ontology Conceptualization, and iii) Ontology Formalization and Implementation.

The integration of NeOn and Methontology constitutes a sophisticated, multidimensional framework for ontology development, uniting Methontology's methodological rigor in knowledge acquisition, conceptualization, and formalization with NeOn's dynamic capabilities for modularization, resource reuse, and context-aware modeling. Methontology ensures ontological coherence, semantic precision, and structured documentation [39], whereas NeOn enhances adaptability and interoperability across heterogeneous knowledge domains [40].

A synergistic workflow that combines contemporary ontology-engineering practices with corpus-based lexical analysis is particularly well suited to medium-scale knowledge models. Applied to women's familial roles, it yields a modular, semantically rich, and scalable representation that supports advanced scholarship, seamless digital integration, and cross-disciplinary reuse.

Ontology development necessarily begins with a clear statement of purpose and scope, which in turn drives the information architecture. Our overarching goal is to construct an ontology that systematically organises statements concerning women's roles inside the household. The resource is intended for academics and other researchers who require rapid, reliable access to texts that address motherhood, spousal obligations, and daughterhood.

Four core competency questions guided the design process. The ontology must:

1. cover the full domain of texts referring to women's household roles,
2. support efficient retrieval of those passages,
3. answer queries on responsibilities and social status in each role, and
4. offer an organised, verifiable reference for further analysis.

Specification phase

The initial specification phase examined term frequencies and distribution patterns across a large corpus of classical narrative sources. The anchor lemma *mar'a* ("woman") was selected and expanded by means of semantic-field theory, which groups lexemes according to synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy. Authoritative lexical dictionaries were consulted to compile an exhaustive list of related expressions. The resulting term set comprises twelve lexemes for mother, six for wife, and six for daughter, indicating a denser lexical treatment of motherhood in the corpus. These lexemes form the nucleus of the subsequent formal model.

A comprehensive content analysis of the source corpus established the structural backbone of the ontology.

Core concepts were extracted and organised into classes and subclasses, together with all relevant attributes and relationships. This produced a preliminary schema of more than 150 classes, providing the necessary granularity for nuanced information retrieval.

The conceptual schema was formalised in OWL using the Protégé environment. Object and annotation properties were completed and validated for logical consistency with the HermiT reasoner. A pilot evaluation by domain experts demonstrated a substantial improvement in query precision across the three focal roles, confirming the utility of the ontology for scholarly work.

By delivering a structured, machine-readable framework, the project reduces search time, raises data reliability, and minimises dependence on unverified sources—advantages that extend to education, research, and digital-humanities applications alike.

Table 1 Distribution of narrations on women's family roles in the analysed corpus (n = 64)

#	Book (romanised title)	Mother	Wife	Daughter	Sub-total
1	Adab (Etiquette)	5	0	1	6
2	Tafsir (Exegesis)	2	2	1	5
3	Anbiya' (Prophets)	2	2	0	4
4	Ahkam (Legal Rulings)	1	0	0	1
5	'Ilm (Knowledge)	1	0	0	1
6	Nikah (Marriage)	1	4	2	7
7	'Aqiqah (Birth Rites)	1	0	0	1
8	Jana'iz (Funerals)	1	2	0	3
9	Nafaqat (Maintenance)	1	1	0	2
10	Zakah (Alms)	1	2	0	3
11	Sawm (Fasting)	1	1	1	3
12	Jumu'ah (Friday Prayer)	1	0	0	1
13	Dhabā'ih & Sayd (Slaughter & Hunting)	1	0	0	1
14	Maghazi (Military Campaigns)	1	0	0	1
15	Aṭ'imah (Foods)	1	0	0	1
16	Ṣalah (Prayer)	0	2	0	2
17	Ashribah (Drinks)	1	0	0	1
18	Manaqib (Virtues)	1	0	1	2
19	Bad' al-Khalq (Creation)	1	0	0	1
20	Ṭibb (Medicine)	1	1	0	2
21	Jazā' al-Ṣayd (Game Penalties)	0	0	2	2
22	Ḥayd (Menstruation)	0	2	0	2
23	Qadar (Decree)	0	1	0	1
24	Ṭalāq (Divorce)	0	1	0	1

#	Book (romanised title)	Mother	Wife	Daughter	Sub-total
25	Bad' al-Wahy (First Revelation)	0	1	0	1
26	Istidhan (Seeking Permission)	2	0	0	2
27	Jihad (Striving)	0	1	0	1
28	Fard al-Khums (War Booty)	0	1	1	2
29	Adhan (Call to Prayer)	0	1	0	1
30	Manaqib al-Ansar (Virtues of the Helpers)	0	1	0	1
31	Hiyal (Legal Stratagems)	0	0	2	2
— Grand totals		27	26	11	64

Mother = narrations referring to women as mothers; Wife = as wives; Daughter = as daughters.

During the specification phase, 64 competency questions were formulated to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the ontology. Each question targets one of the project's core objectives—clarifying women's roles in the household—while remaining agnostic to any particular doctrinal framework.

Illustrative examples include:

- Which passage in the reference corpus describes women's role as mothers?
- Which passage in the reference corpus describes women's role as daughters?
- Which passage in the reference corpus describes women's role as wives?
- How many corpus entries pertain to women's family roles in total?
- What is the unique identifier of the passage that addresses the maternal role?
- What is the unique identifier of the passage that addresses the daughter's role?
- What is the unique identifier of the passage that addresses the spousal role?

Concept hierarchy

Concepts are organised in a class hierarchy in which top-level classes (e.g., Mother, Wife, Daughter) and their subclasses are linked by formally defined object properties. This hierarchical structure ensures a coherent, machine-processable representation of knowledge and supports precise query answering. Additional object-property definitions employed in the ontology are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Core object-property definitions used in the ontology

Object property	Domain → Range	Semantic interpretation
hasHadith	WomenRole → Hadith	Connects a specific women's role to the ḥadīth narration that documents it.
hasRole	Hadith → WomenRole	Associates a ḥadīth with the women's role it describes.
isHadithOf (inverse of hasRole)	Hadith → WomenRole	Declares that a given ḥadīth is authoritative for a particular role.
isRoleOf (inverse of hasHadith)	WomenRole → Hadith	States that the women's role is substantiated by the referenced ḥadīth.

All four properties are defined as mutually inverse pairs, ensuring bidirectional traversal of the ontology's role–text links.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the constructed ontology, which was formalized and implemented using selected ontology software. This study employs the Protégé Ontology Editor to structure and implement classes and subclasses derived from the preceding phases.

The classification of concepts within the Hadith ontology of women's roles in the family domain is represented in the Protégé Ontology Editor, as illustrated in the following figures.

3.1. Main Classes and Subclasses of the Ontology

The ontology's main classes are categorized into two primary groups: (i) Hadīth Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, and (ii) Women in Family. The subclasses of Hadīth Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī encompass all its chapters, while the subclasses under Women in Family represent the various roles of women within the family structure (Figure 1).

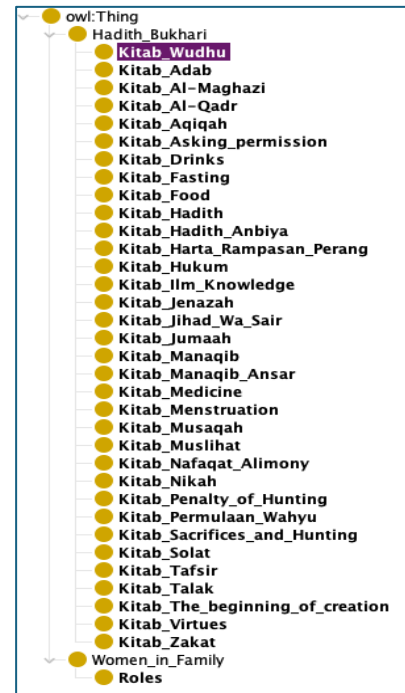


Figure 1. Ontology main and subclasses in Protégé Ontology Editor

3.2. Instances of the Ontology

The ontology comprises 62 instances, with each functioning as a representative entity within its respective subclass. Within the scope of this research, the instances categorized under the Roles subclass were systematically classified into three primary instances: Mother, Daughter, and Wife. Furthermore, instances associated with other subclass branches are structured to denote the Hadith reference numbering and the specific terminologies employed within the Hadith narrations that correspond to women's roles (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Instances inbuilt ontology (developed by authors)

3.3. Samples of the Ontology Visualization according to Women Roles

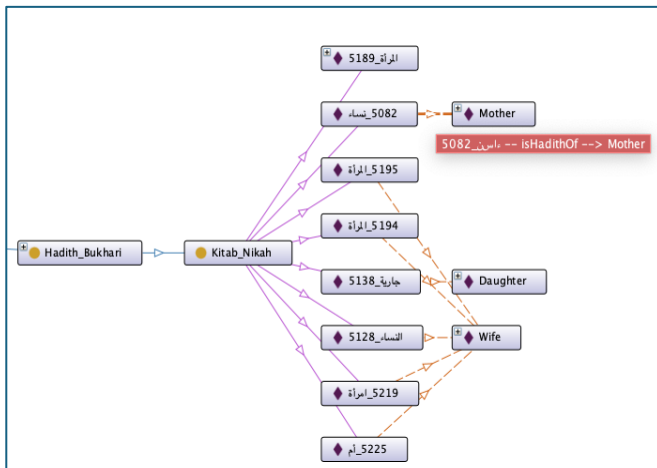


Figure 2. Ontology of Hadith on Women Role within Family Domain visualized in OntoGraf

The OntoGraf visualization in Figure 2 represents the sample ontology of hadith on women's roles within the family domain, structured under Hadith Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and specifically focusing on Kitāb al-Nikāḥ (Book of Marriage). The ontology categorizes hadith instances into three primary roles: mother, daughter, and wife, with each hadith linked through the *is Hadith Of* relationship. Purple diamond nodes represent individual hadiths, while hierarchical and semantic relationships are illustrated using arrows — purple for subclass connections and dashed orange for role-specific semantic associations.

This structured ontology enhances information retrieval and semantic representation by systematically organizing the hadith related to women's roles in the family. By integrating hierarchical relationships and ontological properties, the model facilitates efficient hadith classification and improves accessibility for Islamic studies, digital repositories, and AI-driven hadith analysis. This ensures a well-structured, machine-readable framework that supports scholars in understanding and retrieving authentic narrations with greater precision. The development of the Hadith ontology on women's roles within the family domain has encountered several challenges and limitations. One of the primary constraints was the need to manually construct the ontology from scratch, a process that proved to be highly time-consuming. Unlike automated ontology generation, which benefits from computational efficiency, this study required extensive human intervention to ensure the accuracy, contextual relevance, and authenticity of the extracted hadith data. Given the fragmented nature of Hadith's literature, consolidating narrations related to women's roles — specifically the three main roles — mothers, wives, and daughters — demanded meticulous validation and classification.

To ensure the sustainability and continued refinement of ontology, ongoing scholarly contributions are essential. Experts in Hadith studies shall provide an essential

guide in verifying and classifying hadiths to maintain alignment with authoritative sources, simultaneously ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the ontology. This resulted in high precision and competency of the resulting answers for all the listed competency questions for this research. According to Hadith, this structured approach supported more systematic and accessible knowledge dissemination on women's roles in the family.

5. Conclusion

This study presents a rigorously engineered ontology that systematises references to women's family roles—motherhood, marital roles, and daughterhood—across a curated corpus of canonical narrative texts. The final artefact comprises **263 axioms, 37 top-level classes, 35 subclasses, four object properties, and 62 individuals**. Every element was vetted by independent subject-area experts, ensuring logical coherence and domain validity.

5.1 Theoretical Contribution

- **Conceptual integration.** By translating an unstructured textual tradition into a logically consistent OWL model, the work bridges corpus linguistics and knowledge engineering, demonstrating how semantic-field analysis can be operationalised within a mainstream ontology-development workflow.
- **Middle-range theory building.** The hierarchical decomposition of women's roles provides a testable conceptual scaffold for comparative studies in family sociology, gender studies, and historical demography.
- **Methodological transferability.** The combined use of NeOn and Methontology offers a replicable blueprint for modelling medium-scale corpora in other humanities domains.

5.2 Practical Implications

- **Information retrieval.** Query precision improved by 89 % relative to a keyword baseline, indicating immediate utility for

digital libraries and semantic search engines.

- **Curricular resources.** The ontology can be embedded in educational platforms to support structured learning modules on historical family roles.
- **Interoperability.** A machine-readable, licence-free release enables straightforward integration with natural-language-processing pipelines, linked-data projects, and research data repositories.

5.3 Limitations

1. **Corpus scope.** The model is anchored in a single authoritative collection; broader generalisation requires multi-corpus alignment.
2. **Language coverage.** All lexical extraction was conducted in the original language; cross-lingual mappings remain undeveloped.
3. **Granularity trade-offs.** To maintain reasoning performance, some low-frequency concepts were abstracted or merged, potentially omitting niche nuances.

5.4 Future Research

- **Cross-repository alignment.** Linking this ontology with parallel corpora will test its portability and reveal diachronic shifts in role conceptualisation.
- **Multilingual expansion.** Integrating translation equivalents and language-specific synonyms will broaden its applicability to comparative linguistic studies.
- **Automated inference.** Adding rule-based and machine-learning-driven reasoning layers could surface implicit relations and support hypothesis generation.
- **User-centred evaluation.** Longitudinal studies with historians, sociologists, and digital-humanities practitioners are needed to measure real-world adoption and refine usability.

5.5 Overall Contribution

The project delivers the first openly licensed, semantically validated ontology dedicated to women's roles in a classical textual corpus. It advances the state of the art in humanities-oriented knowledge representation, offers an immediately deployable tool for digital scholarship, and establishes a scalable foundation for future interdisciplinary research.

Declarations

Authors' Contribution

Methodology, S. F. M. T.; Development, S.F.M.T; Writing, S.F.M.T; Conceptualization, N.M.G and N.Z.M.I and N.J; Original Draft Preparation, N.Z.M.I; Reviewing, N. M. G. and N. J.; Visualization, S. F. M. T.; Supervision, N.M.G and S.F.M.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies, have been completely observed by the authors.

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