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The Good, the Bad, and the Women

A Critical Discourse Analysis on Media Constructions of Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê and the Western Muhaajirat in Syria

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Abstract

This study focus on Western constructions of two categories of women – the female Kurdish fighters of the YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat – actively engaging in the Syrian conflict at the time of writing. Using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis in combination with postcolonial feminist theory, I have scrutinized 12 news pieces selected from Swedish, British and North American influential news media houses, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the discourses underpinning these constructions. The outcome of the analysis show that news media tend to reproduce reductionist and orientalist views on these particular women. The YPJ is generally constructed as the liberated woman and the ideal Other, whereas the Western Muhaajirat tend to be understood as the victim and/or conservative and backwards, thus neatly positioning them as opposites so as to promote specific (Western) ways of progression, development and gender equality. Women's agency is constructed and judged according to Western standards, and results in the continuous reproduction of imperialist discourses and the European gender order where femininity remains less valuable than masculinity.

Key Words: women's agency, Syria, news media, imperialism, critical discourse analysis

List of Abbreviations

BBC = British Broadcasting Corporation

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

CNN = Cable News Network

DN = Dagens Nyheter

GNM = The Guardian News and Media Ltd. referring in this study to the Guardian online

IND = The Independent

ISIS = the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also commonly known as IS, Daesh/Da'ish or ISIL

NATO = The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NYT = New York Times

PKK = Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan's Worker's Party)

SvD = Svenska Dagbladet

SWE = Sweden

UK = United Kingdom

USA = United States of America

YPG = Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Unit)

YPJ = Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê (Women's Protection Unit)

WP = Washington Post

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

The nationwide uprisings in Syria in March 2011 sparked an outbreak of violence which still as of today has seen little progress on the way towards any peaceful solution. The now full-blown war in Syria has become central in understanding the socio-political landscape of the decade, not only in Syria but in most regions of this globalized world. Syria has additionally become the epitome of Mary Kaldor's 'new war' with numerous actors involved and the failure of the nation-state (Kaldor, 2012; UCDP, 2015).

As many scholars have pointed out, news media is a powerful discursive actor in framing armed conflict and affecting public opinion in relation to these events (Carruthers, 2011; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; van Dijk, 1988). Even with access to incredible amounts of knowledge in this digital era, it is hard to keep track of who is involved how in the context of today's Syria and unfortunately there is a significant lack of representation of women even in the reports produced by the most well-known news agencies (Ohlsson, 2015). There is an understandable issue in finding reliable sources and information in contexts of armed conflict (Sundberg & Harbom, 2011: 90), especially when taking into account the violence directed towards journalists and aid workers by extremist groups such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Nevertheless, there remains an interesting inequity in which actors are deemed newsworthy in relation to Syria. A few women in Syria have made a significant enough impression on the press in order to be included in the news reporting on the conflict (Ohlsson, 2015) even though there are many involved in different ways in Syria[1]. In this context I will focus on two categories, which interestingly are on the opposite sides of the same battle: The female fighters of the Kurdish *Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê* (YPJ) and what I will refer to as the *Western Muhaajirat of ISIS*.

The YPJ is an all-female faction of *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (YPG) - the Kurdish militia famous for fighting ISIS in Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) in 2015. The YPG and YPJ serves as the military defense in the now autonomous Kurdish controlled regions in Northern Syria, under the name Rojava (Bengio, 2016: 39). The societal structures of Rojava have sprung out of the ideas of Abdullah Öcallan, the infamous leader of the Kurdish PKK (Kurdistan's Worker's

[1] See the only field study report, at the time of writing, on Syrian women's activism and peacebuilding in Syria published by Kvinna till Kvinna and Badael Foundation at: http://kvinnatillkvinna.se/publication/2015/10/16/peacebuilding-defines-our-future-now/.

Party) in Turkey (ibid.: 34f.). Rojava is said to be based on principles of democracy, social justice and gender equality and is therefore considered to be a case of its own in the Middle East (ibid.: 37ff.). BBC (2015) even labels Rojavan society as a place where "gender equality extends from the homes to the frontline." The female fighters of the YPJ has become symbols of hope and progress in the struggle against ISIS and a representation of gender equality at its peak (Bengio, 2016; SvD, 2015-05-24; IND, 2015-12-09).

The Western Muhaajirat of ISIS takes active part in the struggle for ISIS success, and have come to symbolize a backwards and conservative way of treating women, consequently they are treated much differently from the YPJ in Swedish, British and North American news media. The word *Muhaajirat* (plural) refers to women who perform *Hjira*, which has come to mean migrating to Muslim land, and has been framed by the self-proclaimed leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as a religious duty (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 495). These women remain difficult to approach for many Westerners, journalists and scholars alike, because of these women's anti-West sentiments and because of limited understandings of why women would turn to a conservative and separatist community when they have been part of the 'liberated' West (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 495; Gentry, 2011: 179). Indeed, it is quite astonishing how these women leave a comparably safe milieu for that of a war-torn country, yet the neocolonialist framework merely seems to understand them as manipulated and brainwashed thus depriving them of agency (Gentry, 2011: 179ff.). Instead, there seem to be a complex array of personal and ideological motivations for these women to travel across the world to participate in the struggle with ISIS which need to be acknowledged and further studied (Peresin & Cervone, 2015; Pearson, 2015).

These two categories of women create an interesting tension which has potential to reveal societal expectations, roles and demands of women during times of armed conflict. Worth noting is that this study has no intention of speculating on why these women have chosen respective sides or comparing one cause with the other. Instead the interest is with how they are constructed in Western news media and the discursive implications of these constructions, which will be explored through Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) in combination with postcolonial feminist theory.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

Based on the research problem described above, the aim of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the Western construction of women's agency in the Syrian conflict through problematizing the Western hegemonic media discourses on these two categories of women –

the female fighters of the YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat of ISIS. As recommended by Creswell (2009: 200ff.) I have turned this aim into a central question and deconstructed it into operational sub-questions. Hence, the main question is as follows:

How are the female fighters of the YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat of ISIS constructed in texts by Swedish, British and North American influential media houses?

The following questions will be guiding the research process:

- How are the YPJ constructed in the news material, and what discourses have allowed these specific constructions?
- How are the Western Muhaajirat of ISIS constructed in the news material, and what discourses have allowed these specific constructions?
- What do these constructions suggest about the news media order of discourse?
- What wider sociocultural processes are these constructions part of and what are the likely effects of these constructions?

1.3 Relevance to Peace and Conflict Studies

This thesis explores two seemingly opposing roles women may take on in a setting of organized violence specifically in Western news media. The study of organized violence is central to Peace and Conflict Studies and this thesis contributes with an interesting discussion on the stereotypes and hegemonic narratives of women in conflict, and adds specifically an analysis, which focus on two groups of women who are actively engaged in different ways in the Syrian conflict. Research on actors in the Syrian conflict is so far scarce, as noted above, and this is the first study in which this comparison is made. Further it adds a postcolonial perspective to the apparent discrepancy between what is known about these women and the media representation of them, thus bringing into light hegemonic discourses which affect how we judge and compare women as participants in armed conflicts. Women notably engage in many different ways in conflict and post-conflict, but are typically portrayed as victims through certain contextual gender roles (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011; Moser, 2001; Skjelsbæk, 2001). Armed conflict is gendered, and this study focus on this gendered dimension articulated through media's discursive power, thus filling a gap in the Peace and Conflict literature on the war in Syria.

1.4 Delimitations

The focus of this study is mainly focused on the intertextual analysis stage of CDA, and in regards to the production, there is a larger interest in the discursive processes of production, rather than institutional processes within each media house. I will also limit myself in regards to conclusions on sociocultural practice and the effects of the discursive practices on non-discursive, as there is limited insight into non-discursive practices. Lastly, I will avoid speculations or comments on the possible perspectives of the women or the different actors they support in different ways. The interest is directed towards the imperial powers, as my own background is within this context, and, additionally, this is advised as a necessity by Said (1999) because of the powerful meaning-production by these, both in regards to distribution and ideological hegemony elaborated on in chapter three.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This study consists of six chapters. This introductory chapter has meant to outline the areas of interests and the foci of the research as well as announcing the choice of methodology and analytical framework. Additionally, it has positioned this study within Peace and Conflict Studies. Chapter two, *Background*, encompasses a comprehensive outline of what we can claim to know about these two categories of women actively engaging in the conflict in Syria. Following this, chapter three, *Analytical Framework*, maps out the theoretical framework that guides the analytical stages of the study. Considering the design and topic of this study, there is no chapter solely dedicated to previous research, instead, this is embedded within chapter two and three. Chapter four, *Methodology*, highlights methodological considerations, where a large part will be focused on developing a transparent approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in relation to the chosen material. In chapter five, *Analysis*, the analytical framework of postcolonial feminist theory in combination with CDA is applied to the selected data. Lastly, chapter six, *Conclusions*, concludes the findings of the study in relation to the research questions introduced above and ends with an identification of areas for future research.

2. Background

Here I provide a descriptive account of academic consensus about these two categories of women. Both groups are not extensively researched, which makes it difficult to make claims on what we know about these women, and there is a general call for more research on women's active participation in militant and terrorist organizations (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011). Partly, this section outlines some previous research on females' participation in terrorist activities, whether religious or non-religious, then moves on to a summarization on the little information there is on the two specific groups of women's historical and contextual situation, and serves as a contrast to the analysis of Western media representations.

2.1 Women, Terrorism and Militant Activity

In the 21st century, women's active involvement in different terrorist organizations has come to draw public attention. Several accounts point to a trend of increasing participation by women in terrorism, both in supportive roles and combatant roles (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011; Peresin & Cervone, 2015). First, it is, however, necessary to highlight that defining 'terrorism' has been a complicated matter within academia and so far there is no general definition consistently applied in research. Nevertheless, there are a few implications to keep in mind in relation to the concept. Terrorism and its agents ('terrorists') are subjectively defined based on one's cultural and political context, and some scholars have noted a general divide between the Global South and the Global North in the understanding of terrorism (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011: 8). An instrumental example is Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned and labelled 'terrorist' by the political powers in South Africa, and today serves as the personification of justice and freedom globally. The common denominators found in the scholarly definitions of terrorism is that its goal is essentially political and targets a wider audience with psychological impact(s) often caused by violence on civilians/noncombatants (ibid.: 8ff.). In addition, there is a general conceptual confusion when terrorism is contrasted with guerrilla warfare, which is perceived as more legitimate because of the supposed accidental harm of civilians in the acts of violence against the established system (ibid.). This becomes interesting in the light of the two groups of women in focus in this study, as one is generally perceived as conducting guerrilla warfare (in spite of ties to the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK) and the other as (outspoken) supporters of terrorist activity. Some have further argued that the difference in the 21st century is found in scope, scale and general aims of the organization (ibid.: 9f.). While militant guerrilla activity is generally domestically

oriented, and the aim is perceived as independence and freedom, terrorist organizations are international in scope and the fight is legitimized internally through discourses rejecting the Western idea of civilization (ibid.). Today, terrorism is generally in media, the scholarly community and policy-making associated with extremist Islamist movements, in particular al-Qaeda and now its successor, ISIS, thus tending to an Orientalist narrative (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011: 12). A significant marker was of course after the attacks on 11 September 2001, when many of the world's largest states (and other powerful international actors) decided that "terrorism as such […] could be fought against" (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011.: 12) and the fundamentalist Muslim Other became hegemonic as the image of the terrorist (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011; Thobani, 2007; Qazi, 2011).

Within these studies, women have been generally devalued as actors, and consequently not been central as foci of research (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011). The general fault in relation to women engaging in militant or terrorist activities has been to attribute women's motivations to the personal and the men's to the political, thus failing to acknowledge the complexity of motivations of all genders, which usually consists of both personal and political dimensions (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011; Pearson, 2015). In addition, if the women partake in actual combat, their motivation might be extended to fighting for women's liberation, because this is typically perceived as the main (and only) political cause relevant to women generally (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2011: 74). As a result, "[w]hen a woman commits an act of terror, the resulting propaganda is more about her (and her womanhood) than the act she has committed" (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal, 2011: 18).

2.2 The Female Fighters of the YPJ

At the time of writing, some reports are surfacing from organizations and academia on the social experiment that is Rojava (Saed, 2015; Bengio, 2015; Faucet, 2015). The people of Rojava began the struggle for autonomy in 2011, when the Syrian state lost control over the northern parts of the country (Gupta, 2016: 42). Rojava is said to be based on gender egalitarianism and democratic confederalism, and even though numbers differ, it is estimated that approximately 35-40 % of the entire militia (YPG and YPJ) are women (Faucet, 2015). The YPJ specifically is estimated to consist of 7,500-10,000 voluntary women, and Nesrîn Abdullah, a member of the YPJ, emphasize that it is a *defense* force meaning that they claim to never attack without being under threat (ibid.: 42f.). The motives of joining are seemingly diverse, but today they are most famous for their battles against ISIS and Westerners travel to join them in the fight (Faucet, 2015; Navest, de Kooning & Moors, 2016).

The women of the YPJ transgress gender norms reserved for women in many societies and some resistance from families and the surrounding society is to expect when women decide to join as combatants (Bengio, 2015: 38ff.). What has been a major critique towards these militias is, however, not solely tied to their gender. Many who want to join are still young and even underage, which causes problems especially when they die in battle (Tavakolian, 2015: 43; Human Rights Watch, 2015). However, women's advancement within Rojavan society has impressed many and the YPJ has been the outstanding example with women organizing ideologically *and* physically against Islamist forces (Bengio, 2015: 39). Their military activity now generally symbolizes women's emancipation, and it is hard to contend whether their activity is allowed to extend to include the Kurdish anti-capitalist liberation as well. Unfortunately, scholars, media and decision-makers have a tendency to frame women's liberation as the *only* political struggle women are interested in (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2011: 74, Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal, 2011: 5). Ofra Bengio (2015) enthusiastically describes the Rojavan struggle as that of a "double revolution", but greatly emphasizes women's liberation in comparison to the general Kurdish liberation. It is here noteworthy that the YPG and the YPJ have connections to the PKK which is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States of America (Gupta, 2016: 43), yet still the violence of the YPJ is generally considered legitimate, or at least the violence is not problematized except for the cases of under-aged combatants.

The people of Rojava, including the women of the YPJ, are explicitly anti-capitalist and if successful they might actually pose a threat to the Western consumerist society, where capitalism permeates the USA, the UK and Sweden alike. However, it is difficult to conclude whether this gender egalitarianism and new way of life will persist throughout the Syrian conflict and the post-conflict challenges that will face the region in the future. Research on liberation struggles, secular or religious, where women have joined violently in militias suggest that this equality negotiated during conflict, rarely survives in post-conflict societies (Eliatamby, 2011: 49; Skjelsbæk, 2001: 58, 64f.).

2.3 The Western Muhaajirat of ISIS

A significant portion of research has been done on violent acts by female terrorists, particularly in Chechnya, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan (Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal, 2011: 18 ff.; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2011). Women's participation in terrorist activities are still a new and emerging area of study and considering the current situation in Syria, it is understandable that women in this context are particularly understudied. Still there are some commonalities that

shed some light on the women travelling from the West to join ISIS in establishing a caliphate. Even though the Quran demonstrates examples of legitimately violent women, this is still contested within the minority of strains of Islam that advocates violence (Qazi, 2011). Violent female terrorism has within patriarchal terrorist movements been used as a way of shaming men into violent practice, but largely, women uphold a supportive role within these organizations, which interestingly corresponds with the expectations of women in societies more generally (Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal, 2011: 5). They are meant to give birth to and educate the children, and motivate the men to fight. Additionally, they might be given tasks of fundraising, recruiting other women, and limited amount of professions, such as nursing. But the most honorable and highest status purpose for women in these Islamic terrorist organizations is to raise their sons for *jihad* (Qazi, 2011: 47).

The group of women – the Western Muhajirat of ISIS – in focus in this study is understood to largely uphold these seemingly nonviolent roles, and those women defying this norm is a great minority. One example is the case of Roshonara Choudhry, a British Muslim woman, who managed to interpret online propaganda in favor of violence committed by women resulting in her 'self-radicalization' and stabbing of a male member of British Parliament (Pearson, 2015). Still, Choudhry had some similarities with her nonviolent female peers, in particular the process of online radicalization. Many of the women travelling to join ISIS are reached by videos of Anwar Al Awlaki, who delivers sermons in English directed towards a Western audience (Pearson, 2015: 8), or other Western Muhajirat who already have joined the group (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 499ff.). There are some indications that a significant portion have family or other loved ones in Syria, thus travelling to join them in the fight (ibid.).

Never before have so many in such a short period of time been mobilized from the West to join *jihad*, and even though exact numbers are hard to come by, it is estimated that over 200 women had left Europe 2015 for this purpose and there is no sign of stopping to this trend, most of them aged 16 to 24 (ibid.). Approximately 10 % of all Western members of ISIS are said to be women, and because of the limitations in communication and access to these women it is difficult to understand their motivation and even more difficult to know anything of their real life conditions in ISIS's caliphate (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 499ff.; Pearson, 2015). What we do know is that ISIS media and propaganda strategies are efficiently gendered and tailored to its targeted audience, and that ISIS are targeting young women to join willingly, seeing as these enthusiastically support the cause in different ways as opposed to the local women in the area who largely have been forced into this role against their will

(Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 500). In addition, women who choose to leave the West in favor of this way of life perform a symbolically powerful act, which seems to cause confusion in the eyes of Western institutions (Gentry, 2011: 179) and simultaneously becomes a "morale booster" for the male combatants of ISIS (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 500).

Lastly, it is worth noting that while women generally are not advised to join the fighting on the frontlines of ISIS's battles, there is today an all-female brigade (or perhaps rather a women's activist group considering their multitude of activities), known as Al-Khanssaa, which was established by a British woman in 2014 (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 500; Al-Khanssaa Brigade, 2015: 5). However, this brigade targets women in the areas controlled by ISIS, and aims to make sure that women comply to the codes of conduct in Islamic law. Otherwise, there is no sign that the leaders of ISIS will be embracing the advancement of violent roles for women, especially as they manage to recruit enough *man*power for these purposes (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 501f.). Rather, women are more needed in the roles of mothers and educators in order for ISIS to truly establish the sustainable caliphate they have set out to do (Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 499ff.; Al-Khanssaa Brigade, 2015: 17ff.).

3. Analytical Framework

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive outline of the analytical framework used in this study. The analytical framework of this thesis is based on the theory of discourse as outlined by Fairclough, which is necessary due to the fact that critical discourse analysis (CDA) comes as a package of both theoretical and methodological considerations that must not be separated in application (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 10). A critique towards CDA has been that discourse analysts use broad concepts such as power and ideology too loosely (Fairclough, 2008: 817) which is why I deem it necessary to elaborate on these basic definitions already in this chapter. With risk of repeating myself, I will first outline the basic theoretical assumptions of CDA, with particular focus on news media, and further elaborate on the methodological considerations of CDA in the subsequent chapter. CDA with its origins in linguistics should preferably be complemented with social and/or cultural theories (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 75) and suitable for this study is postcolonial feminist theory, which will include a discussion on gendered stereotypes in conflict. By combining these perspectives which problematize the reductionist views on non-Western women and women in conflict, I hope to provide a more nuanced representation of women in conflict and through this study counteract the oppressive and potentially dangerous view of women as a monolithic and homogenous group.

3.1 Discourse

> Discourse has a quite specific meaning. It refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world, which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. (Rose, 2001: 136)

Discourse analysis builds upon *social constructivism*, where all social phenomena, including discourse, are constructed through processes of meaning-making which occur in social action and interaction (Creswell, 2009: 37f.). This means that humans engage with and makes sense of their surroundings based on their social and historical backgrounds, and meaning is generated socially from negotiation occurring in and out of interactions with the community and context of the individual (ibid.).

Norman Fairclough uses two different definitions of discourse. In a more abstract sense, discourse is language as a sociocultural practice, which refers to discourse as *constitutive*,

hence it is continuously engaged in a dialectical interaction with other sociocultural practices no matter if they are discursive or non-discursive (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 62f.), much like the above opening quote from Gillian Rose. Another definition of discourse is distinguished by Fairclough's use of a grammatical article, e. g. *the* discourse, or *a* discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 72). If discourse is language in use, *a* discourse refers to a particular way of expressing meaning from a particular perspective which is distinguishable from other discourses, such as a liberal discourse, feminist discourse et cetera. Norman Fairclough's understanding of discourse (in either definition) essentially differs from that of Laclau and Mouffe's, as Fairclough only includes discursive practices as a sociocultural phenomenon separated from non-discursive practices, in order to be able to acknowledge and account for inequities that are structural within society, and, consequently more rigid and difficult to change than other practice (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 41f.). Laclau and Mouffe includes both discursive and non-discursive, and has been critiqued for the optimistic (and unrealistic?) possibilities for social and political change (ibid.: 42). Within Peace and Conflict theory, a normative discipline, flexibility facilitating the possibilities for change is needed within the scholarly community, otherwise there would be no reason to actually engage in conflict transformation, resolution or the facilitation of peace (Skjelsbæk, 2001: 50ff.). According to Johan Galtung, there is a need for this inclusion of awareness of cultural and structural resistance to change from dominating actors and to further acknowledge that structural violence might not be realized as violence by it victims (Galtung, 1969: 173). Thus Norman Fairclough's understanding of discourse as language in use allows for an understanding of this rigidness of societal structures (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 42), hence I deem it most theoretically appropriate in relation to Peace and Conflict.

Lastly, language might seem as a limited understanding of discourse, considering its role in constructing social identities and practice. However, in Fairclough's defense James Paul Gee (2011: 30) argues, "[s]ince different identities and activities are enacted in and through language, the study of language is integrally connected to matters of inequity and justice."

3.2 News Media: Power and Ideology

> Media enable a perpetual connectivity that appears to be the key modulator of insecurity and security today, amplifying our awareness of distant conflicts or close-to-home threats, yet containing these insecurities in comforting news packages. (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010: 2)

Discourses contribute to processes of construction of social identity, social relations and knowledge production (Fairclough, 1995). Furthermore, they are considered to function in an ideological manner, which means that underlying ideologies create meaning that reinforces unequal social orders. *Ideology* is here understood as a constructed interpretation of reality which serves legitimizing purposes for power (ibid.: 14). *Power* within the theory of discourse is not what might be traditionally associated with the term, but is rather in a Foucauldian sense something that does *not* belong to specific agents (Rose, 2001: 137; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 20). Instead it is understood as permeating the sociocultural practices of everyday life (ibid.). Power is in this sense a productive force which is not reduced to being solely oppressive, rather power disciplines human beings into certain ways of seeing, being and acting in and with our social surroundings, and conversely delimit what can be understood and said about the same, thus excluding alternative options (ibid.). Further, there is an intimate relationship between power and knowledge, and Gillian Rose (2001: 138) describes this as follows: "[…] that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."

News media upholds an incredible potential for power, as it is an institution, which explicitly aims to produce knowledge on specific events, such as, armed conflict (Fairclough, 1995: 2ff.). Moreover, news media, much like scientific production, is commonly perceived as giving a comprehensive and objective account of the communicated event resulting in an unawareness of media as a discursive actor expressing particular representations of reality (Fairclough, 1995: 12; van Dijk, 1988: 289). It becomes even more problematic when reviewing what type of visual material is used in news reporting. Rose (2001: 6) argues that it is necessary to take images seriously, because not even photography or recordings should be considered to provide "transparent windows on to the world" (ibid.), thus should never be rendered "innocent" (ibid.). Rather an image is always interpreted, and as pointed out by Fairclough (1995: 7) an image might be captured from the perspective of the police, conversely telling a different story if the image would have been from another actor's point of view.

In order to provide a theoretical understanding of the role of media in conflict today, Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin (2010) have suggested the use of the analytical terms *new media ecology* and the *mediatization of war*. The new media ecology proposes that the globalized media technologies has been part in revolutionizing the environment in which

media is produced and distributed. With the access to any material through internet, media seeks to uphold a "perpetual connectivity" between participants of conflict (through blogs, videos etc.) and recipients of media, emphasizing and transforming the use of media as a powerful tool of warfare (ibid.: 2). This is referred to as the mediatization of war, and proposes that conduct of war and organized violence cannot in current times be fully understood without taking into account the role of media (ibid.: 4ff.). Consequently, previous theories on audiences, propaganda and war have to be rethought and understood in the context of this new ecology and the political discourse on terrorism, which is marked by "effects without causes" (ibid.). Today anyone can record, archive and distribute material on an event almost instantly, and news media often buy images and recordings from civilians who have happened to be there at the time of the event, which add to this chaotic element of things seemingly happening out of nowhere. In addition, news media is already known to often fail to contextualize acts of organized violence, such as the attacks on the Twin Towers 11 September 2001 (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Carruthers, 2011).

Further, the globalizing technological advances have been part in assuring the global domination of North American and European news media, causing cultural disjunction between producers and consumers (Fairclough, 1995: 36ff.). There also occur temporal and spatial disjunctions, referring mainly to the movement of the communicative event from the public into the private sphere (ibid.). Fairclough uses the notion of a chain of communicative events to illustrate this movement and it is meant to highlight the collective process of media production and consumption (ibid.). These are defining properties of mass media as we experience it today and it makes possible to understand text and discursive practices of media as evolved into cultural commodity (ibid.: 38). The marketization of public space has further provided a pro-capitalist stance because of the powerful economic incentives enforced by competition (ibid.: 42ff.). In this way, audiences are interpreted and framed as spectators of events consuming entertainment, rather than participating citizens, which affects the potential of agency, and sense of responsibility among readers (Fairclough, 1995: 42ff.; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010: 37ff.). This emphasizes the authority of the reporter who has the right to share the supposed 'facts', and projects the audience as passive recipients of knowledge (Fairclough, 1995: 4, 42ff.).

What is particularly interesting with news media is the reliance on legitimized sources. These refer to officials in different governmental institutions, and technical or scientific experts which supports the 'facts' presented in the material (ibid.: 49). Ordinary people, however,

plays an entirely different role. They are usually included to provide reactions to the communicated event in the text, such as weeping widows mourning their loss. They provide a sort of emotional legitimacy and are "entitled to their experiences but not their opinions" and Fairclough calls this the *hierarchization of voices* (ibid.). The result is a social construction of reality and 'facts' from an institutional point of view, but unfortunately this does not necessarily translate into a truthful or nuanced representation of reality (ibid.).

3.3 Postcolonial Feminist Theory

> [T]he application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the third world colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political *agency*. (Mohanty, 1988:79, original emphasis)

Postcolonial studies generally aim to recognize and renegotiate the dominance of Western value systems and ideology established during colonial times (Nealon & Searls Giroux, 2012: 155-159). Further, postcolonial theorists argue that colonialism is not a thing of the past, but rather still characterizes current times financially and culturally (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 14). Globalization, a well-known concept put simply as referring to the increasing interconnectedness of the world, has become well-researched and the body of literature massive, particularly in regards to its financial processes and considerations (ibid.). Much of research on globalization have been criticized by postcolonial theorists to be guided by Eurocentric perspectives and consequently reinforcing an asymmetric power relation between the 'West' and its Other. While globalization is a result of colonialism, thus connecting colonial times with today, the central focus of postcolonial theory is globalization of culture, which has transformed previously more confined cultures into cultural flows (ibid.). Additionally, culture, identity and ethnicity are increasingly attributed political dimensions in the public sphere, particularly visible in the political climate after the Bush administration declared war on terrorism (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 14; Cloud, 2004; Thobani, 2007: 169f.).

Fundamental queries in postcolonial research center on how cultural identity is constructed in global society, and further explores what possibilities there are to construct alternative identities that move beyond that of the hegemonic Western norm (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 15f.). In this line, there is a strong relationship between culture and imperialism, which affects in what terms the world can be understood and what is desirable in terms of economic and cultural development. Imperialism is defined by Edward Said (1999: 9) as, "the

practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" and is in the age of mass media most visible in the global domination of North American and European news media houses as mentioned in the previous section. However, these imperialist attitudes have become much subtler in comparison to the outspoken racial doctrine dominating the first half of the 20th century, even though the Orientalist representations can be argued to be stronger today than during those times (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 20f.). Orientalism, developed by Said, is a concept used in order to explain how Western actors still reinforces an 'us' vs. 'them' binary through the conflation of heterogeneous non-Western cultures into the homogenous category of 'the East' (Cloud, 2004). This and other similar binary oppositions (nature/civilization; man/woman; normal/abnormal etc.) are often ideological in that they are reductionist, that is, they do not allow anything in between the opposing parts, and effective in hiding asymmetric power relations (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 18). To summarize, the 'East'/'West' binary facilitated the use of oppressive reductionist views of the 'Orient' beneficial to colonial powers.

The two opposing parts of binary oppositions are known to work as being defined by each other, in other words, what one is, the other is not (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 18-21; Skjelsbæk, 2001; Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011). The 'East' (or the 'Orient') came to symbolize irrationality, despotism, seduction, femininity, and regressive attitudes, which allowed the 'West' (also referred to as the 'Occident') to remain in the masculine domain of representing progress, rationality and democracy (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 20f.; Mohanty, 1988: 65). Postcolonial feminist theory poses that this feminization of the colonized peoples results from the historical hegemonic gender order of Europe (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 23). These interpretative frames in combination with other discursive practices allowed the construction of a certain representation of the colonized woman which made possible for the colonial powers to legitimize colonialism as a progressive mission of modernization and liberation (Spivak, 1999: 2193). Thus women's societal position became a measurement of progress and development in imperialist discourse, which even Western feminist scholars reproduced through treating Third World women as a homogenous group, and as the negative reflection of the white, liberated and 'free' woman (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn, 1999: 23ff.). As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999: 2193) highlights, the white man becomes the savior of the "brown women from the brown men." Further, Western middle-class women became and are still constructed as the norm in

academia, and as a normative group they become the point of reference, which tends to result in stereotyping of other women as uneducated, poor, religious victims of the traditional norms of a regressive (non-Western) society (Mohanty, 1988: 65ff.). Implicitly, this suggests that Western women are well-educated, modern, and liberated from oppression. However, as Chandra Mohanty (ibid.) points out, if this in fact was true, there would be no need for political feminist struggle in Western contexts. However, worth noting is that Western feminist scholars are not the only ones at risk of using themselves as the implicit referent. This is a tendency in much academic literature, even in the case of Third World Women writing about rural or lower-class women in their context. What is specific for the case of Western scholars is the discursive power the 'West' generally holds in relation to its Other (ibid.: 64, 80 ff.).

In the light of the above, there is an additional interesting tension between the West's construction of its Other and its 'universalization of universalism' through the international community. The Western hegemonic narrative in the postcolonial era then asks of the Other to nurture and maintain the 'authentic' culture, to remember and affirm the difference from Western culture, but at the same time the Other must adhere to 'universal' values and rights, and particularly to patterns of development. Difference is necessary for the West to maintain its powerful discursive position, but must simultaneously be expressed on Western terms (Minh-ha, 1989: 222). This means that difference is acknowledged in order for the West to possess a position of civilized superiority, but that all phenomena, such as women's liberation, in non-Western countries are unfairly judged "under Western eyes" (Mohanty, 1988: 61).

3.4 Gendered Stereotypes in Conflict

> [W]omen play a myriad of roles in the face of war and peace, in violence and intervention, in competition and collaboration – and […] their roles are hardly monolithic. (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011: 284)

Discourses surrounding armed conflict are highly gendered. Gender serves as an important ordering principle when it comes to issues of power, control and agency (Moser & Clark, 2001: 5) and the long withstanding European gender order positions women and men in an asymmetrical relationship where "[v]alues associated with masculinity are prized *only insomuch as they are superior to* values associated with femininity" (Via, 2010: 43, original emphasis). Femininity and masculinity are understood as antonyms, as binary opposites, which in discourses on organized violence and armed conflict translates into an uneven

construction of who is capable of agency and violence, and conversely, who is not (Sjoberg & Via, 2010: 3; Moser & Clark, 2001: 5 ff.). A common misperception of women in conflict is that they are passive victims of the violent conflicts of men. This further adds to the idea that women are the most targeted group in conflict and that men consequently cannot be victims, simply because of their perceived gender (Via, 2010; Zarkov, 2001). While this might be true in some instances, a growing body of academic literature suggests otherwise. In fact, a study published in 2005 showed that women were actively engaging in armed forces in 55 different conflicts and studies on female terrorism confirm that there is so far no sign of an end to this trend (Eliatamby, 2011: 37; Peresin & Cervone, 2015: 499ff.). Simultaneously, studies on genocide show that civilian men are the most targeted group, because of the belief that men are potential combatants and consequently never quite become understood as non-combatants as civilians actually are supposed to be regardless of gender (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011: 1; Jones, 2006).

In studies focusing on female terrorists and suicide bombings, there is a growing critique of interpreting these women within the narrow framework of traditional gender roles, thus depriving them of agency, when there is a growing need to understand women not merely as victims (of violence or manipulation) but as willing perpetrators in conflict (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011: 62). Generally, in this body of literature religious explanations have been used, in combination with violent forms of manipulation, but this again strips these women of making an active choice and utilizing individual power for agency and reduces them to the traditional feminine stereotype in war (ibid.). Sandra I. Cheldelin and Maneshka Eliatamby (2011: 3) argues that women's agency in conflict must be acknowledge as "the capacity for women to make choices – good and evil – and to impose their choices on the world." Unfortunately, including violent and evil actions as something any ('normal') woman would actively choose, strongly contradicts the hegemonic construction of the woman as a mother and a 'giver of life'. At most women have been acknowledged supportive roles during war, such as taking upon themselves traditionally masculine roles in order to complement the absence of men in the local and regional contexts (ibid.).

Masculinity and femininity are both normative ideals which have evolved over time and space and have resulted in conceptualizations which includes both plurality and hierarchy and is now widely acknowledged within the scholarly community (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 835; Jones, 2006: 462). In modern times, military forces, protection and violence has largely been dominated by men and masculinity, because of the constructed interrelation between

masculinity and militarism argued to have been necessary in order to legitimize violence in the name of protection of the 'Motherland' (Moser & Clark, 2001: 9; Jones, 2006: 454; Skjelsbæk, 2001: 61). This is particularly evident in media, where women have been limited to a few roles in conflict even though the reality might have been experienced differently (Skjelsbæk, 2001: 52ff.; Salla, 2001: 71). Even women who enter these militarized settings are expected to make a claim to masculinity, rather than fulfilling, developing and understanding their own militarization within femininity (Via, 2010: 44; Simic, 2010: 190).

Nevertheless, Inger Skjelsbæk (2001), researcher at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), has provided three categories of representations of femininity derived from women's own accounts in three different contexts of armed conflict, which can be useful in the analysis of female representations in media. These categories are *victimized femininity, liberated femininity,* and lastly, *conservative femininity*. Victimized femininity is characterized by vulnerability caused by the loss of the male members of the community, and as women they become symbols for the ethnic group they represent. The grieving mother, helpless and passive, serves as an illustration of this type of femininity (ibid.: 55f.). Liberated femininity, on the other hand, spring out of contexts where the ideology of liberation is a main factor in legitimizing violence and where men and women are united in the battles against the enemy. Women perceive themselves to be liberated during conflict from previous gender structures, and women's participation in combat is considered as a token of equality, hence women's participation serves a double agenda (ibid.: 57f.), which is not necessarily embodied in the society in post-conflict times (Eliatamby, 2011: 49). Lastly, conservative femininity does not exclude women as soldiers or perpetrators of violence, but is marked by that women seize the opportunity in a gender-conservative way. In other words, women take part in battle but choose not to do the same things as the men. Instead they develop feminine ways to conduct the acts of warfare. Similarly to liberated femininity, the efforts of women come to symbolize that everyone is needed against the enemy, but there is no underlying agenda of women's emancipation or liberation. Rather, they fill the need of numbers, adding to the conflict with (wo)manpower and emphasize loyalty to the husband, the community, and the state (Skjelsbæk, 2001: 59-61).

These three categories are by no means a representation of actual reality in regards to women and their role in conflict, but serve an analytical purpose in which empirical reality can be abstracted and made sense of. Most importantly, the constructions of the two groups of women in focus in this study do not necessarily reflect any of the lived experiences of them or

other women involved in Syria today. The news media representations of them are adapted to contextually fit the discursive practices of Sweden, the UK and the USA, which is where I argue these women are judged according to Western standards (and Western women). The conceptual outline of discourse and media suggest theoretical presumptions on which this study is based, that is, the powerful practices at work and the potentially dangerous pitfalls of reductionist constructions, whilst postcolonial feminist theory and gender in conflict rather sets the analytical lens of which the representations of the women will be understood as a complement to that of CDA.

4. Methodology

Discourse analysis is a qualitative strategy of inquiry (Creswell, 2009: 44) and is essentially social constructivist (see chapter three). The strength of approaching the issue with an inherently social constructivist view is that it conceptualizes the possibility for change necessary to Peace and Conflict scholars, especially those adopting a feminist gender perspective in research (Skjelsbæk, 2001: 52). Considering discourse's dialectical relationship with the social world, discourse analysis is generally of interest to social scientists. Thus choosing to deal with Western representations of women rather than exploring the women's perspectives on the issue is not merely a matter of accessibility. Analyzing representations such as those dominating the media does not unveil any materiality or lived experiences, but it does expose value attached to certain roles and expectations in relation to normative ideals (Mohanty, 1988: 68). This is why I am analyzing written and visual representations of these two seemingly opposing categories of women, not the women's agency itself.

As noted, using the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) includes both methodological and theoretical considerations, and I have done my best to outline the basic theoretical assumptions in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will focus on the methodological tools used in the analytical stages, which is Fairclough's three dimensional model with complementary considerations derived from Gillian Rose's methods of discourse analysis on visual data. Fairclough's CDA is suitable for discourse analysis in media, and he has himself dedicated much time to analyze news media specifically (see Fairclough, 1995), which profitably provides me with an extensive set of examples on how to conduct the analysis. Lastly, I will in this chapter take the opportunity to reflect upon my role as a researcher as well as the material used.

4.1 Fairclough's 3D Model

When analyzing discourse, there are two dimensions that are necessarily in focus: the *communicative event* and the *order of discourse* (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 72). The communicative event is the specific text under scrutiny (ibid.: 73), which in this case refers to the news texts selected. The order of discourse is a concept used in order to describe the collective sum of all kinds of discourses used within a social institution (ibid.), which would translate into the discursive order of news media in this study. An order of discourse which is connected and constitutive to a specific sociocultural practice, is not to be confused

with genre (ibid.). The central genre in this study is the news genre, which refers to the specific conventions relevant for how a text should be structured within this discursive order.

Each communicative event can be argued to have three dimensions in total. The communicative event is necessarily some form of *text*, be it written or spoken, visual, or as in the case of most news articles in focus of this study, multimodal (1995: 54f.). The communicative event is also a *discursive practice*, which refers to the processes of production and consumption of the text and thus places it within one or several discursive orders through the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Lastly, the communicative event as part of a discourse becomes as a result an expression of *sociocultural practice*. These three dimensions make up the three essential building blocks of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of analysis.

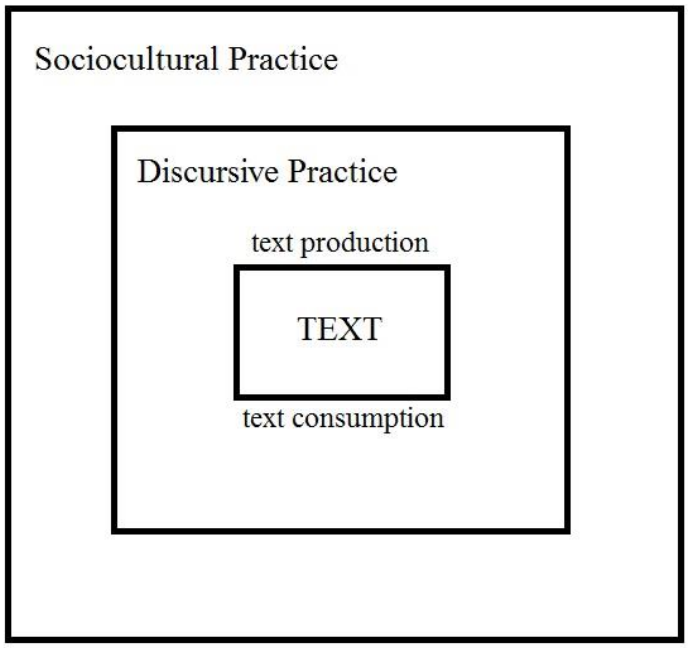


Fig. 1: Fairclough's three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995: 59).

For each communicative event, all three dimensions must be included in CDA, otherwise the study risks to stray and fall under other similar methods of analysis. As mentioned, I will in this research analyze multimodal texts and by that I mean news media articles which include both written text and visual component(s), usually one or several photographs. Photographs are frequently used in this discursive order because of the potentially dangerous assumption that photography is 'a window into reality' (Rose, 2001: 15; Griffin, 2010: 7). Furthermore, critical approach to imagery includes addressing both cultural practices and the cultural meanings the images produce in different sites of meaning making (Rose, 2001).

When analyzing the text, the researcher focuses on the text's linguistic structure. This means, more practically, to identify elements and their relation to the other elements in the text, and consider how they together generate meaning. A properly executed discourse analysis is in addition sensitive to both what is in the text, and what is excluded. To be able to reach the aim of CDA practically then requires of the researcher to formulate questions that allow for this, and being newly introduced to this method I am guided by Norman Fairclough's own questions (1995: 201ff.; see *Appendix I*). However, this only includes the written text and does not include the photographs positioned with the text. To modify the questions accordingly, Gillian Rose (2001) suggests considering the image's content, color and spatial organization (see *Appendix I* – Visual analysis). During this stage of the analysis, I will focus my attention on how the two categories of women are constructed linguistically, who is entitled to agency and what attributes are central in the construction.

Discursive practice is separated from the text during the analysis, even though it is inevitable when analyzing the texts structure and meaning-making to not touch upon the production and consumption of the text (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 74f.). But the dimension of discursive practice is used to explore how the producers of texts make use of other discourses and texts to generate certain meaning (Fairclough, 1995: 58ff.). This is summarized in two concepts – *interdiscursivity* and *intertextuality*. This type of analysis aims to "unravel the various genres and discourses […] which are articulated together in the text" (ibid.: 61). Whereas linguistic analysis of the text tends toward being more descriptive in nature, intertextual analysis tends to be interpretative as it focuses on the discursive dimension which serves as the link between the multimodal text and its sociocultural context (ibid.: 59-61). Additionally, what is found during the linguistic analysis can be used as evidence in the intertextual stage, but is during this stage interpreted so that the text can be positioned in relation to its order of discourse (ibid.: 61f.). To do this, I will then make use of the linguistic constructions in relation to the gendered narratives created by Inger Skjelsbæk (2001) elaborated on in chapter 3.4.

Sociocultural practice tends to include different levels of abstraction depending on the research question guiding the research process (Fairclough, 1995: 62). As pointed out by Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2000: 75), CDA according to Fairclough is linguistically oriented, hence is suitable for analysis of discursive practice. This suggests the use of complementary theory in order to grasp and theorize the sociocultural reality of the text, which consists of both discursive and non-discursive practice (Winther Jørgensen &

Phillips, 2000: 75; Fairclough, 1995), and to amend this issue I complemented the theoretical framework of CDA with postcolonial feminist theory outlined in the previous chapter.

4.2 Objectivity and Subjectivity in Qualitative Research

An epistemological assumption within social constructivist ontology is that there are multiple subjective understandings of sociocultural phenomena (Creswell, 2007: 20). A central premise is consequently that objectivity is constructed, and that academic research take part in discursive struggles of hegemony within its discursive order (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 111). Academic knowledge production, like all other discursive practice, emphasizes particular understandings of social relations and identity, consequently forcing some understandings out into the periphery (ibid.), and this study is no exception. This can be deemed problematic, because there is no truth to simply unveil, rather the researcher's 'truth' becomes one possible version of understanding the world. How, then, can the researcher privilege one's own perspective over others'? Additionally, in most qualitative research, the researcher takes upon an instrumental role during the analytical stages, thus a qualitative study heavily relies on the processing of information in the researcher's own mind (Chambliss & Schutt, 2016: 240).

The solution within social constructivist academia is reflexivity, which suggests reflecting on the researcher's perspectives that might have influenced the way questions are asked or how the material is interpreted (ibid.: 240). At the very least, reflexivity facilitates reflection on own bias through the continuous and outspoken motivation to why choices are made in the research process (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 112). Reflexivity goes hand in hand with validity in qualitative research, seeing as this transparency regarding personal bias supports other researchers to determine whether, how, or to what extent this might have affected research outcomes. Critical theory, including CDA, highlights that all research "is authored by a raced, gendered, classed, and politically oriented individual" (Creswell, 2009: 112), and postcolonial critique towards academia must necessarily extend to the author. I too partake in the (re)production of certain discourses with imperialist implications, and strive to reflect upon my own use of potentially problematic linguistics (see Fairclough, 2008: 813) as best I can. Thus the analytical framework constructed for the data (see chapter three) is composed so as to support me as a researcher to acknowledge my own biases, and create awareness of things otherwise distant to me because of my sociocultural background as a 'Westerner' myself. Theory in this research process is therefore used both as an explanatory medium for attitudes and behaviors (ibid.: 111), and as a theoretical lens in order to

complement my subjective stance as a researcher. Furthermore, Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2000: 92) suggest what they refer to as critical awareness of the use of language in the study, which means to write, at the very least, concluding remarks in such a way that the social groups of interest of the study could read and understand the text. This does not mean translating any part of the text into their mother tongue (ibid.), rather, it merely suggests to make the language as accessible as possible beyond the academic realm.

4.3 Material

4.3.1 Reflections on Primary Sources

The data has been selected based on accessibility and language skills of the researcher, as the scope of the research is rather short, and to direct accountability I prefer not to rely on an interpreter for the stages of the analysis itself. These are two main considerations in the selection of data and consequently narrowed down my options to English or Swedish news reports accessible online.

Limiting myself to influential news media in the UK and the USA, and excluding other English-speaking countries, was based on a few considerations. The United Kingdom is a previous colonial power since long identifying as belonging to the idea of Western Europe. Additionally, UK media houses generally reach a larger audience than for instance Australian news media (Fairclough, 1995: 36ff.). The USA similarly reaches out to a great audience both nationally and internationally, and the country is since decades regarded as a powerful international actor with considerable influence over sociopolitical and financial processes globally (ibid.). In addition, the USA happens to currently have an interesting political tension with its NATO-ally Turkey in regards to supporting the Kurdish militias in Syria (Gupta, 2016: 43). Sweden on the other hand can be considered as a contrast in many ways from both the UK and the USA. For one, Swedish media does not reach out to such a large audience, and secondly, Sweden has long been considered a role model when it comes to social issues, and particularly women's rights (Nilsson & Lövkrona, 2015: 30ff.). In many ways, Sweden has been portrayed as a feminist country, even though this is debatable, and mainly shows in comparison with other nation-states (ibid.).

Among the most read daily newspapers, two have been chosen in each country respectively, based partly on distribution but also on available material on the two categories of women. Choosing two is because of the scarce and varied type of reports dedicated to the YPJ. The scope included 2013 to 2015 reports seeing as both groups have gotten the most news

attention during this period. Using this sort of purposive sampling and selecting a few representative texts is common in qualitative research, in particular when the topic is not well-researched (Creswell, 2009: 268-269).

The YPJ is greatly underrepresented in media in comparison to the Muhaajirat, which resulted in either choosing material where the categories of women are either central or merely mentioned. I chose to analyze articles in which they were the focus of the news material, thus excluding an exploration of the absence of them. I proceeded with selecting what was available on the YPJ, and then based on that selected similar material on the Muhaajirat in each newspaper to facilitate consistency despite the varied structure and format. The variation could be argued to weaken aspects of the study, however, when engaging in discourse analysis, this variation can be considered a strength as they are all produced within the same discursive order. The important thing is to be aware of the differences between the texts and to account for this during the analytical stages.

In American English, a news report refers to both the shorter type of 'objective' text, and the typically longer and more illustrative type of news reportage. Reportage belongs mainly to British English, but will be used here in order to differ the two types in order to avoid confusion. The last type of text is opinion pieces, which either comes in the form of an op-ed (opposite to the editorial) or in political blogs which is increasingly popular for news agencies, particularly by news media producers in the US. Because of the argumentative nature of an opinion piece, many voices appear to be brought forth and the textual elements are generally more careful in phrasing 'truths', however, who is allowed to submit an opinion piece (mainly journalists or scholars) greatly tells of the hierarchization of voices elaborated on in section 3.2.

The two first types of text are aimed at being 'objective', but news reportage allows for a more dramatic language and a longer format. In this category of news reportage, I have also included photographic reportages, which might have shorter written text, but plenty of photographs. The photographs are illustrative and, as argued in section 3.2 and 4.1, make claims towards an 'objective' truth. The photographic reportages are most commonly also included in the category of news (domestic or international) and usually not among for instance opinion which makes them more appropriate to treat as news reportage.

In total, 12 multimodal texts will be analyzed, published by six different news agencies online. These are *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) (SWE), *The Guardian* and *The Independent* (UK), and *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (USA). Links to the texts are provided in a separate section in *References* and for more detailed information on data selection processes see *Appendix II.*

4.3.2 A Note on Secondary Sources

Information on the two categories of women in focus in this study is, as mentioned, scarce, and the scholarly community has yet to produce reliable information about the motivations and real-life situations of both categories. In the second chapter, I have tried to avoid questionable and unnecessary information, as much tends to be speculations, and instead tried to point out the few indications we do have, such as approximate age group of those who we know have left Western countries and later appeared in Syria or Iraq. No government, no organization and no scholar can provide exact numbers on how many women have joined ISIS and the war-torn situation of Syria limits communication with groups such as the Kurdish militia. Because of this problematic situation, I have conducted source criticism and compared the information between sources in order to provide the most reliable information as of now. Additionally, I tried to avoid certain presumptions and value-laden conclusions offered by some on either of these women, and rather just problematize the constructions of them in order to show that their reality might not be what we make of it.

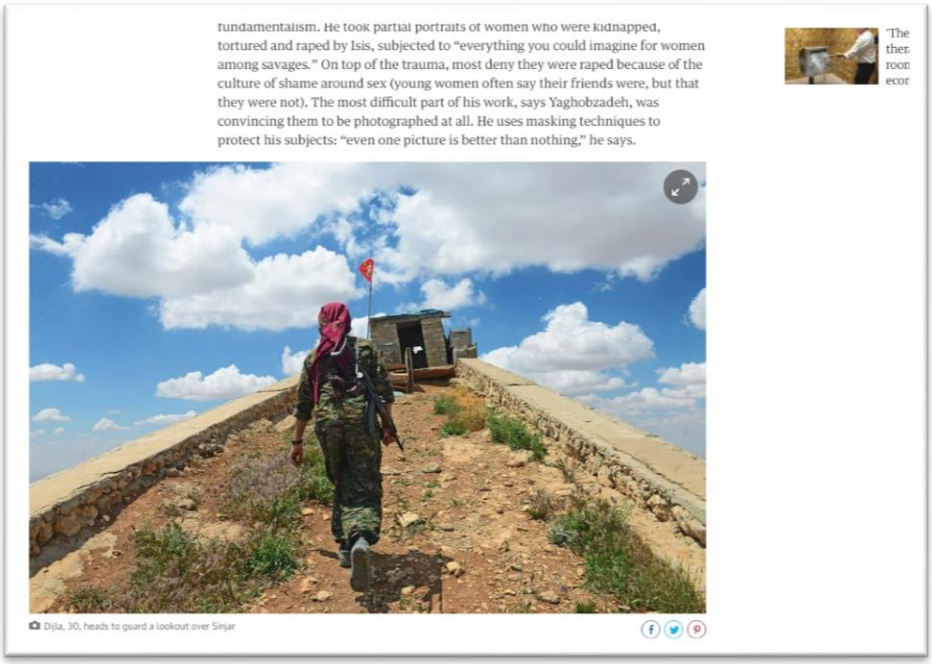
5. Analysis

5.1 The Textual Dimension

The textual dimension of the analysis is focused on mapping out linguistic elements which show how discourses are manifested textually (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 87). As mentioned, it is mainly descriptive, but overlaps with the discursive practices thus making it to a lesser extent interpretative as well (see chapter four). I have paid particular attention to the construction of women's agency and claims to 'truth'.

5.1.1 The YPJ

All texts, emphasized by their visual components, distinguish between female combatants and female civilians within the Kurdish societies. Starting with the photographs, most combatants have their attention towards something else than posing for the camera (which can be questioned when taking into account their apparent cleanliness compared to activities in battle) and the pictures emphasize motion. Angles, often simulating hills, are used to facilitate associations of conquest, victory and success, such as the example below from GNM (2015-09-11).


fundamentalism. He took partial portraits of women who were kidnapped, tortured and raped by Isis, subjected to "everything you could imagine for women among savages." On top of the trauma, most deny they were raped because of the culture of shame around sex (young women often say their friends were, but that they were not). The most difficult part of his work, says Yaghobzadeh, was convincing them to be photographed at all. He uses masking techniques to protect his subjects: "even one picture is better than nothing," he says.

Dijla, 30, heads to guard a lookout over Sinjar

These components all emphasize agency and promote an understanding of the photographs as glimpses of the reality they are depicting, rather than being staged, thus emphasizing the photographs as 'objective' and 'truthful' (Griffin, 2010: 8ff.). They are always depicted with

their weaponry, whether these are hanging unused on their shoulder (SvD, 2015-05-24), held up in an active position (WP, 2015-12-23; NYT, 2014-10-13) or even stationed somewhere in the out of focused background (See for instance images 7 and 8 in GNM, 2015-09-11). They are never absent, but ranges from active use to 'ready-to-use' – always close at hand.


EDITORIAL
A Baffling, Hard-line Choice in Israel

DAVID BROOKS
Why Is Clinton Disliked?

ROGER COHEN
Australia's Offshore Cruelty

Women Fight ISIS and Sexism in Kurdish Regions

By JAKE FLANAGIN OCTOBER 13, 2014 6:21 AM 28

Mohamed Messara/European Pressphoto Agency

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As soon as 2016, American women in the United States military will begin serving in combat roles for the first time. Across the world, in what some might think of as an unlikely place, it's an age-old practice.


Even empowered, it's disturbing to see the sheer youth of the fighters. One image shows a uniformed soldier, barely a teenager, visiting her mother and siblings in a refugee camp. Her father was killed, and her mother encouraged her to fight. She wears her fatigues, a denim hoodie, a pink string bracelet and a gun. Nearby, her little sister sits in a bubblegum pink T-shirt and carries a pink handbag.

Yazidi fighter Mrali, 16, visits her mother and siblings living in a refugee camp in the mountains

Though it's a proactive decision to fight, it's out of calamitous necessity - aid is hardly forthcoming. "Europe closes their eyes, because they have their own

There is one exception: a female commander (whose military status is apparent through the adjoining text) (DN, 2013-05-12). Note that the movement is blurred, making it seem like the movement is fast, steady and determined.


Världen

Här tränar de för strid vid fronten

PUBLICERAD 2013-05-12

Bild 16 av 17 Andisak är befälhavare vid YPG:s bas i Shekh Maksoud i Aleppo. Foto: Niklas Mellio

I Syriens norra provinser slåss landets kurder för

The chess game can be interpreted in many, not necessarily exclusive ways. For instance, it can be understood as portraying intellectual or mental training (the headline of the news piece is "Here, they are preparing for battle at the frontline"[2], DN, 2013-05-12, my translation) and perhaps even as practice in strategic thinking in regards to their upcoming battles. It can also be understood within a gendered narrative where the women are advancing in a male dominated territory, such as the military. Nonetheless, she is portrayed as an agent committing an act towards another. Textually, the same active position is reinforced through phrasings such as: "And she ['Avesta', a *nom de guerre* for a YPJ fighter interviewed in the text, my note] and her fellow fighters are well prepared to take on ISIS as a result, she says." (NYT, 2014-10-13). The female factions of the Kurdish militias are understood as entangled, and the YPJ and their Iraqi counterpart are treated as inspiration and role models for other females joining the battle against ISIS, such as Yazidi women, which is most evident in GNM's (2015-09-11) news reportage.

The female noncombatants, on the other hand, are mainly described as lacking agency, often portrayed as victims of violence of ISIS or patriarchal structures of their own society: "He [the photographer, my note] took partial portraits of women who were kidnapped, tortured and raped by Isis […]. On top of the trauma, most deny they were raped because of the culture of shame around sex" (ibid.). This is not the combatants only contrast. Many times the Western Muhaajirat are used as the passive opposite to the Kurdish female fighters' active position in the texts as demonstrated in the following "The women's [YPJ's, my note] military success is a far cry from the role that would be ascribed to them under Isis rule, where Muslim girls can be 'legitimately' married to militants from the age of nine […]" (IND, 2015-12-09). The lives of civilian Kurdish women are given space in Jake Flanagin's opinion piece (NYT, 2014-10-13), however, they are not given a prominent position and is quickly belittled by the prominent finishing sentence: "Life for Kurdish women may not be perfect – but they are making strides towards equality that are anything but 'symbolic'". With this sentence, he equalizes the military successes of the female militias with tangible "strides towards equality", after just describing a very problematic context for noncombatant women with the help of 'experts' of his own choosing, thus effectively placing his own 'objective' view on the top of the hierarchy without including the voice of a noncombatant woman currently living in Kurdish society.

[2] " Här tränar de för strid vid fronten" [Original citation]

The YPJ are explicitly allowed to reject the victimization in interviews but also in summarizations and interpretations made by journalists and scholars. One example is: "'Their [the female fighters, my note] decisions are in their hands, no longer in the hands of their families or their brothers'" (Yaghobzadeh in GNM, 2015-09-11). In addition, they are generally constructed as linguistic agents who wants to challenge traditional roles ascribed to women:

> - The traditional image of the woman in war has been the one who flees, the one who provides food, health care and take care of children, or the mother who sacrifices her sons for the cause and gives birth to new warriors… That image, clarifies Aryen Gunes, the YPJ want to challenge[3]. (SvD, 2015-05-24, my translation)

Yet male relatives (and their consent) are of interest in the news pieces, as in for instance the photo from DN (2013-05-12) depicted below, where a male figure lingers in the background with a boy. An example textually can be found in SvD (2015-05-24, my translation) where the interviewer explicitly asks the YPJ fighter: "What does your male relatives say about you fighting?"[4]


Världen

Här tränar de för strid vid fronten

PUBLICERAD 2013-05-12

Bild 8 av 17 17-åriga Zanubia kvitterar ut sin första egna automatkarbin. Zanubia har ett års militärutbildning och kommer nu att skickas till fronten. Foto:

[3] "Den traditionella bilden av kvinnan i krig har varit hon som flyr, hon som sörjer för mat, sjukvård och tar hand om barn, eller modern som offrar sina söner för saken och föder nya krigare… Den bilden, förtydligar Aryen Gunes, vill YPJ göra upp med." [Original citation]

[4] " Vad säger dina manliga släktningar om att du krigar?" [Original citation]

Another interesting element is that they are described as "unmarried" (WP, 2015-12-23) or choosing not to marry (DN, 2013-05-12), when they are not allowed to marry because they will then be expected to leave the force, which is a rule that only applies to the female fighters (Gupta, 2016: 43). This restriction is completely absent from all texts, thus promotes the idea that the life in YPJ is permeated by freedom of choice and independence. With this said, the fighters are generally framed as women with floral scarves and dreams of home (see photo below, clarified by the textual content, in SvD, 2015-05-24) that transgress societal norms of *their* (non-Western) patriarchal society through entering the military force and consequently transform into a source of pride for their male relatives when they have managed to get used to the idea of a female fighter.

5.1.2 The Western Muhaajirat

As opposed to the women of the YPJ, the Western Muhaajirat *as a category* are treated as passive objects that are restricted by the laws, or the men, or even by some other women in ISIS. Some examples are that the women are "lured"[5] to the caliphate (WP, 2015-11-17; NYT, 2015-01-21; GNM, 2014-11-06; SvD, 2014-11-28; DN, 2015-02-05) instead of choosing to join, or they are in different ways used by terrorists for different purposes instead

[5] In SvD and DN, they use the Swedish translation "locka".

of actively participating or, again, choosing to participate as in this quote from the NYT (2015-01-21): "Terrorists are strategic about using women, in increasingly chilling ways".

A continuous emphasis on them being "young" (DN, 2015-02-05; GNM, 2014-11-06; SvD, 2014-11-28) adds to the idea of their passive position, under the eyes (and in need) of a guardian. The three following examples are additionally headlines, suggesting that the youth of the women needs to be highlighted: "Why young American women are joining ISIS" (WP, 2015-11-17); "Young Swedish women are joining IS" (SvD, 2014-11-28, my translation)[6]; "Women in IS: 9 year olds can be married off"[7] (DN, 2015-02-05, my translation). In contrast, the age of the YPJ fighters are typically expressed in numbers and even when their youth is acknowledged as problematic, they are seen as "empowered" (GNM, 2015-09-110) and their choice to fight is seen as a mature decision based on "necessity" (ibid.).

ISIS, jihadists and terrorists are a manipulative force disguised in mystery, without photographs from Western sources and no direct quotations available from people, be it migrants or locals, women or men, in these anti-West movements. The few ways their opinions are voiced are through social media and private texts by women of the Western Muhaajirat to their friends (GNM, 2014-09-06), through Quilliam Foundation's publication of the Al-Khanssaa Manifesto (DN, 2015-02-05; NYT, 2015-01-21; WP, 2015-11-17), or other sources of propaganda published and distributed by ISIS' many media associates and their followers, such as the photograph below originally published by Al-Furqan Media and republished in DN (2015-02-05).

[6] " Unga svenskor ansluter sig till IS" [Original citation]
[7] " Kvinnor i IS: 9-åringar kan giftas bort" [Original citation]

Kvinnor i IS: 9-åringar kan giftas bort

PUBLICERAD 2015-02-05

Flickor kan giftas bort när de är nio år, kvinnors plats är i hemmet, modebutiker är djävulens verk. I en färsk skrift beskriver kvinnliga jihadister kvinnors roll inom Islamiska staten.

Terrorists can thus be perceived as generally male, fanatically religious and aggressive in a violent and physical manner and it is commonly expressed through the use of religious words ("jihadists"), and the passive position of the Western Muhaajirat as a group, all emphasized by the photograph above. But, what the Western Muhaajirat and the Al-Khanssaa brigade have showed, are that ISIS, jihadists and terrorists are not solely men. Women do commit or support violent acts as well, but those who do are treated differently from the comprised category of passive women. Instead, female perpetrators (from a Western perspective) are mentioned by their real names thus effectively turning some into individual exceptions from the norm. In addition, they are often linguistically positioned as agents as in the following quotes: "She [Aqsa Mahmood, my note] tells her followers everything from what to pack […]" (GNM, 2014-09-06). "In fresh print, female jihadists [the Al-Khanssaa Brigade, my note] explain women's roles within the Islamic state"[8] (DN, 2015-02-05, my translation). Aqsa Mahmood is the reoccurring example of this (GNM, 2014-11-06; IND, 2015-06-28). Noteworthy, the acts on social media (and texting) by these women are portrayed as something peculiar: "They [the social media posts, my note] are a jumble of religious quotations, glorifications of murder, banal chat and internet memes – complete with Instagram-posted pictures of sunsets and ubiquitous photos of cats" (GNM, 2014-09-06). Another example, positioned even more prominently, can be found in the same news piece (ibid.):

[8] " I en färsk skrift beskriver kvinnliga jihadister kvinnors roll inom Islamiska staten." [Original citation]

> A young woman cheerfully tweets two British friends, 'I'm making pancakes, and there's Nutella, come up in a bit'. Her friends tease each other in response: 'come b4 I finish dem mwhaha :p'; 'oi … you have my back dont snake it'. Punctuated by emojis and slang, it's hardly a sinister exchange, until it becomes clear that all three have joined the Islamic State (Isis) – and are using their social media accounts to encourage other women to join them in Syria.

It seems as though this contrast is problematic for the writer. These women make claims to being 'normal (Western) teenagers', which they are not entitled to, as they symbolically have turned their backs on the 'West'. The acts on social media of many young people all through Western societies, becomes deceitful when committed by the Muhaajirat despite their strong ties to 'Western' culture.

The Al-Khanssaa Brigade is also constructed as an exception – they use violence towards other women, who "[…] may tweet about practising shooting or post photos of their guns, but experts say there is no evidence they are allowed to fight" (GNM, 2014-11-06). The deviating behavior of the Al-Khanssaa Brigade is further emphasized by photography. The first photo below on shows the Brigade and is the only photograph of them in the news material published by a female recruiter under the name "Ummu Fidaa" (SvD, 2014-11-28), while the other, informal and private, photograph (GNM, 2014-11-06) is more representative for the images commonly used in the news material to depict the Western Muhaajirat.


Världen

Unga svenskor ansluter sig till IS

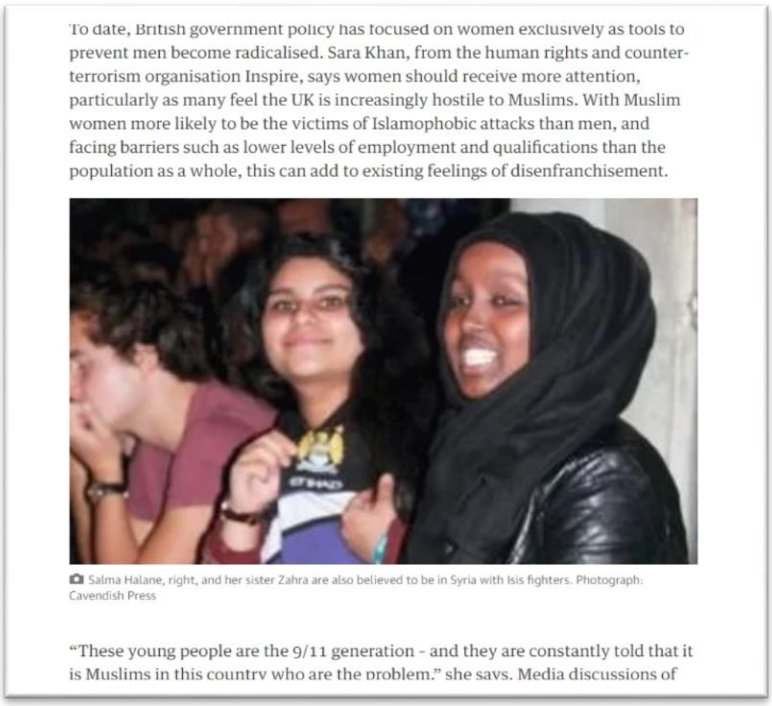
På några månader har minst åtta unga kvinnor från förorterna på Järvafältet i Stockholm rest till Syrien, sannolikt för att ansluta till Islamiska staten (IS). Oron ökar nu inom den svensksomaliska diasporan, som vädjar om samhällets hjälp. Säpo väljer bort kontakter med kvinnor eftersom de inte anses utgöra ett hot mot Sverige.

Av Andreas Örwall Lovén
28 sep, 2014
Spara artikel
31 delningar

Exklusivt för dig
Utvalda fördjupningar, tips, råd och guidande journalistik – bara för dig med SvD digital
Läs mer

Bilden kommer från "Ummu Fidaas" facebooksida och är från Syrien tidigare i år. Fler svenskar är med på bilden. "Jag och mina systrar", skriver "Umma Fidaa" om kvinnorna och barnen som håller upp islamiska statens flagga. Foto: PRIVAT

Annons



To date, British government policy has focused on women exclusively as tools to prevent men become radicalised. Sara Khan, from the human rights and counter-terrorism organisation Inspire, says women should receive more attention, particularly as many feel the UK is increasingly hostile to Muslims. With Muslim women more likely to be the victims of Islamophobic attacks than men, and facing barriers such as lower levels of employment and qualifications than the population as a whole, this can add to existing feelings of disenfranchisement.

Salma Halane, right, and her sister Zahra are also believed to be in Syria with Isis fighters. Photograph: Cavendish Press

"These young people are the 9/11 generation - and they are constantly told that it is Muslims in this country who are the problem," she says. Media discussions of

"Experts" (GNM, 2014-11-06; WP, 2015-11-17) try to explain the phenomena of female radicalization and their knowledge is complemented by the family's experiences, particularly the parents'. Aqsa Mahmood's parents explain their daughter as typically female ("sweet, intelligent and peaceful" GNM, 2014-11-06) but, as opposed to the pride that the YPJ seemingly bring to their male relatives, Mahmood is a "disgrace" (IND, 2015-06-28). The Western Muhaajirat is generally a source of confusion, not only to their parents but to society as a whole, and generates questions such as the following from SvD (2014-11-28, my translation): "Why do young women abandon their family and the safety in Sweden in order to join an organization which is marked as terrorists by the UN?"[9]

5.2 Discursive Practices

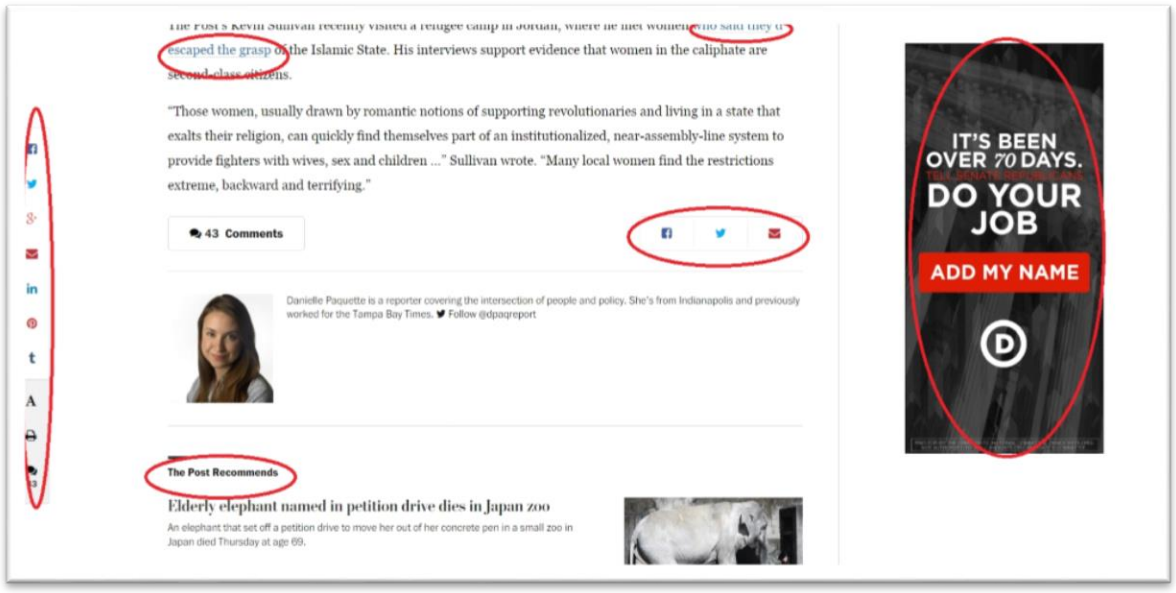
The discursive practices are explored through asking how the texts build upon other texts and what discourses they rely on, i.e. what understandings of the world have shaped the text Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 85f.). It is also of interest whether there is a high or low degree of interdiscursivity because, according to Fairclough (1995: 60ff.), this gives an indication of whether discourses are reproduced or changing. A high degree of intertextuality, however, does not indicate change, rather references to multiple texts can be used to reinforce specific discourses thus maintaining the status quo (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 85f.).

[9] "Varför överger unga kvinnor sin familj och tryggheten i Sverige för att ansluta till en av FN terrorstämplad organisation?" [Original citation]

5.2.1 Intertextuality

Intertextuality has in a sense become more tangible in news media production online, and plays a key role in the hierarchization of voices. Different texts, which the author of the news piece refers to explicitly, are merely a click away for the reader, neatly integrated not to disrupt the readability of the piece (see for instance WP, 2015-12-23). What becomes interesting with this technological function are which pieces are entitled to this easy access and how they effectively reinforce certain sociocultural norms of whose voice is privileged, or in other words, who is considered to be qualified to engage in knowledge production. The power relations between voices are less evident, especially if the reader choose not to engage with the referred texts, because then officials and civilians are not competing in the same manner for space and prominent positions in the text. Instead, reinforcing the arguments made in the news piece takes place beyond the text. Thus the discursive practice which reinforces the existing asymmetrical power relation between the producer and the consumer, and between civilians and officials represented in the text (see section 3.2), are effectively reproduced.

This technical function also becomes an effective marketing strategy, where the photographers and authors refers to own product(s) as in GNM (2015-09-11), where the photographer's current work and previous experience get notable space. In addition, several websites provide recommendations of which texts the reader should consume next, i.e. which texts that the news producer deems relevant for the consumer (for instance IND, 2014-09-06; SvD, 2015-05-24; WP, 2015-11-17). In the print screen below, derived from NYT (2015-11-17), the red circles are added by me in order to highlight examples of strategies.



Less evident as marketing strategy are the intertextual references to other news agencies and organizations, which mainly (re)produce similar constructions of for instance ISIS as the ultimate Other (violent, religious, barbaric, savage). The tendency is to refer the reader to other well-known news agencies, the national scholarly community or an NGO engaging in the matter (see for example DN, 2015-02-05; GNM, 2014-09-06). That they refer to solely English sources (some have the option of choosing a different language when arriving on the website) are not particularly problematic considering that the text one starts with is English (with exception of the Swedish material), however, what becomes problematic is the reference to sources which contribute to the same universalist discourses as the authors'. Even the few times where a reference is made to for instance the Al-Khanssaa manifesto (Al-Khanssaa Brigade, 2015), based on a religious fundamentalist and anti-Western ideology, the text is found on a "counter-extremism" think tank's website, which explicitly promotes "liberal democratic values" and dominating news agencies such as BBC News and CNN (quilliamfoundation.org/about/). In addition, the person who translated the manifesto for the think tank, offers an analysis which is added to the manifesto and positioned before the parts of the text which is produced by Al-Khanssaa, and through that privileging the words of the Western man over the actual authors of the manifesto (see Al-Khanssaa Brigade, 2015).

Consequently, meaning risks not only being lost in translation, the ideology of the Other is only referred to within the hegemonic neoliberal framework which reinforces the dominant construction in the news material of the Western Muhaajirat as irrational, naïve and young. Even though family and the religious community are allowed to share their perceptions and experiences on the Western Muhaajirat (see section 5.1.2) it is not quite fair to expect them to

understand or provide insight to the radicalization process of these women, because a devoted Muslim and a radicalized Islamist should not be assumed to share the same views of the ideal society or the means to get there.

Intertextuality of the YPJ texts tends to be lower than in those speculating on the Western Muhaajirat, probably because the fighters themselves are interviewed. Sometimes the interviews are intertextual, in the sense that another journalist from the same news media house has been 'in the field', or, as is the case with the famous quote "ISIS are afraid of girls" (IND, 2015-12-09), from another news media producer. This particular quote is difficult to trace throughout news media because of its frequent use even in the Swedish news material, thus it is a great example of intertextuality between news media producers. It shows their tendency to rely heavily on each other (the Swedish news media texts also rely on UK or US sources, see for instance DN, 2015-02-05 and SvD, 2015-05-24) when there is lack of access and knowledge because of armed conflict. The reuse of this particular quote (GNM, 2015-09-11; IND, 2015-12-09; NYT, 2014-10-13; SvD, 2015-05-24) in text is rarely questioned (an exception can be found in NYT, 2015-01-21) and it is always framed as an insight shared by the young female soldiers who are interviewed. The truthfulness of the quote can thus be argued to be reinforced because of both the maintenance of the status quo between officials ("experts") and civilians, and for its dramatic effect in the construction of ISIS as the Other.

5.2.2 Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity in the analyzed news material is fairly low and does not strive from the typical conventions of news media as a discursive order. Jayne Huckerby's "When Women Become Terrorists" (NYT, 2015-01-21) is the most apparent interdiscursive among the texts, where her scholarly background becomes apparent in the way she structures the text and the critical and advocatory stance she expresses. The following example is the finishing line of her piece: "To fight them [terrorists, my note], we have to move past simplistic assumptions about gender and terror and get serious about helping women and girls who are on this deadly path, as well as their would-be victims." It advocates a more efficient approach in dealing with the problem of female terrorists, and is highly critical of the way the West so far has been responding to the increase of women joining terrorist forces. However, she, like other authors, presupposes the existence and a general coherent definition of terrorism. The examples of Boko Haram, female jihadists and of course ISIS directs the understanding somewhat. ISIS are, considering the choice of primary material, central in the construction of the terrorist throughout the majority of the texts. This reflects a specific Western narrative,

which became more apparent after the Bush-administration declared war on terror, where the terrorist has become mainly a religiously oriented, irrational and aggressive savage, who's "target is women" (IND, 2015-12-09).

Some binaries are more or less explicitly expressed and provide insight on the dominant discourses, which have made possible the constructions of the two categories of women in the news texts. These can be summarized into collective/individual, active/passive, liberated/restricted and religious/secular. Women as a collective, whether part of the Kurdish society or the ISIS, are, as argued above, typically constructed as passive victims of violence. This is in stark contrast to the combatants of the YPJ, who are generally understood as protagonist agents, and the perceived perpetrators of the Western Muhaajirat (mainly Aqsa Mahmood and the Al-Khanssaa Brigade), who are portrayed as deviations and antagonists. 'Innocent' women in these non-Western societies can thus be understood as reduced to a collective, whilst the YPJ and the female perpetrators of the Muhaajirat are understood as part of a collective, but are constructed so as to maintain their individuality. This individuality allows them to become actors with the freedom of choice central to liberalism, and which the collective category of women is not perceived to have. They are unfree and restricted by Kurdish patriarchal structures (SvD, 2015-05-24), conflict (GNM, 2015-09-11) or Islamist agents (IND, 2015-12-09) in the texts. The YPJ are an active force moving forward, progressing towards a secular society (religion is left out from the construction of this group) with the central goal of women's emancipation, while the female perpetrators of the Western Muhaajirat are actively regressing towards an anti-Western backwards society, where women's roles are restricted by religion and the patriarchal structures that comes with. It appears as though secularism is highly valued in Western societies, seeing as it reinforces claims to knowledge production as objective, rational and independent, something that is highly valued in all countries in focus of this study, and has been for a long time.

The "sedentary" (IND, 2015-12-09) roles that the Western Muhaajirat are entering in ISIS – "as homemakers, wives and mothers" (ibid.) – are deemed problematic in contrast to the YPJ's emancipatory project. The Muhaajirat is perceived to be restricted to these roles rather than actively choosing them (DN, 2015-02-05; GNM, 2014-09-06; IND, 2015-12-09) while the choices of the YPJ is treated as more or less self-explanatory (DN, 2013-05-02; NYT, 2014-10-13). The Muhaajirat's claims to freedom of choice is quickly disregarded through treating them as young and in the need of guidance as described in section 5.1.2. A few of the news pieces acknowledge that there can be another perception of freedom than that

constructed in the majority of the texts. For instance, in GNM (2014-09-06), Melanie Smith, an 'official' voice from King's College International Centre, comments that "[…] no woman she has spoken to is considering coming home. 'They see it as emigrating to a better life. They say they feel free'". Unfortunately, these comments are not positioned prominently and are not allowed the same authoritarian voice as the 'objective' journalist, but they still show that there is some friction in how these women can be constructed and understood.

Combining traditional feminine roles with the lack of choice in non-Western contexts (emphasized by the construction of the YPJ fighter's rejection of marriage) risks devaluing unpaid work in the home and traditional feminine roles. Instead, it glorifies the violent role of the YPJ, which seemingly promotes masculinity tied to the existence of nation-states. For instance, the fighters are visually depicted with their weapons (a phallic symbol of militarized masculinity), but there are always feminine components present, such as flowers, pink or floral patterns on fabrics, or just that the women always look surprisingly clean, which is not the case in images of male fighters (see comparison below from DN, 2013-05-02).


Världen

Här tränar de för strid vid fronten

PUBLICERAD 2013-05-12

Bild 4 av 17 Den dominerande politiska och militära kraften i kurdiska Syrien är PYD, Demokratiska unionen. Den väpnade grenen av PYD heter på kurdiska Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, vilket fritt översatt betyder "Folkets skyddskommittéer" och förkortas YPG. I YPG:s träningsläger i utkanterna av städens

The represented discourses are slightly more diverse, and includes the extremist Islamism promoted by Al-Khanssaa. But as highlighted earlier, they are all represented through the lens of Western feminism and an imperialist idea of 'appropriate' development, where (Western) women's emancipation is used as a yardstick. In regards to the YPJ, militarism and democratic confederalism are fitted to be equalized to that of Western neoliberalism and egalitarianism. They are perceived as sharing 'our' basic values such as gender equality and human rights. What is much less mentioned are their firm anti-capitalist stance (it is implied in SvD, 2015-05-24; WP, 2015-12-23), which, similar to the discourse of the Muhaajirat, can be argued to be a threat to the 'West' if successful and sustainable.

In sum, interdiscursivity is generally low and does not apt for much of a discursive power struggle, which suggest that the texts mainly reproduce hegemonic discourses surrounding femininity, masculinity and knowledge. The combination of capitalism, individualism, universalism and Western feminism contributes to an Orientalist framework, which discursively affect how women and development should look like in order to be legitimately recognized by the international community. However, the complexity of the roles of both of these categories of women, in text and in reality, forces more complex and creative ways of discursive practices which might facilitate changes when these 'phenomena' are more accessible and well-researched in the future.

5.3 Implications on Sociocultural Practice

The news texts are here understood as expressions of sociocultural practice, i. e. as part of the construction of identity and affecting social interaction. Of interest are the ideological,

political and social outcomes of the discursive practices and whether the discursive practices reinforce and conceal the asymmetrical power relations of interest to this study, or if they reveal the asymmetry creatively, consequently offering possibilities for change (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000: 85ff.).

All the texts are clearly connected to sociocultural practices such as globalization and the marketization of public space discussed in chapter three. The marketization is visible in the possibilities of 'sharing' the news piece on social media, the promotional elements mentioned and the presence of advertisements surrounding the texts online (see section 5.2.1). All these three elements enforce a construction of the audience as consumers with the power of the customer within a capitalist society. The power, however, is very limited and it gives, in a way, a false sense of agency by this possibility of participating in the promotion of a certain newspaper or article. Combining this with the façade of objectivity in the news reports and reportages, there is a tendency to rely heavily on the content and calls for little action and responsibility regarding critical reading and source criticism. Thus the authority of the news producer can be said to remain unchallenged.

The YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat are posed as opposites, either in the active/passive binary, or as protagonists/antagonists when both are positioned as active. This has clear implications on how a Third World woman should progress, think and act in a globalized world. In many ways, the women of the YPJ are constructed as if they are constantly striving to realize hegemonic masculinity in the flesh. They are perceived as rational, independent and brave defenders of their national identity (the Kurdish, which territorially is not realized yet) who knows when it is *necessary* to kill – i.e. committing 'civilized' and 'legitimate' violence. They are (successfully?) entering the domain of masculinity, yet still maintain some femininity (through the floral scarves, long hair, etc.), similarly to how the ideal Other of the West should maintain their authenticity but adapt some 'basic universal values' in the construction of cultural identity (see section 3.3). Thus the women of the YPJ fit perfectly into the narrative of the liberated femininity as described by Skjelsbæk (2001; see section 3.4). The Western Muhaajirat, on the other hand, seem to easily fit into the image of the backwards, religious Third World woman (see section 3.3), but because of their ties to the West they are not easily constructed as such. This is why the inclusion of the ideology of the Ultimate Other (ISIS) and emphasizing young age are necessary. The women in the YPJ are often explicitly positioned opposite to the religious fundamentalist ideology of Western Muhaajirat and women in ISIS generally (see 5.1.1), yet the YPJ is generally excluded from

the texts about the Western Muhaajirat. As for the Western Muhaajirat, the constant highlighting of their young age and the references to teenage behavior make way for legitimization of the paternalistic project of 'liberating' women for their own sake. When the passive role of victimization is not enough in the construction, they are perceived as antagonistic deviations from the other women – i.e. perpetrators of illegitimate violence, yet remaining within the narrative of conservative femininity (see Skjelsbæk, 2001; section 3.4). Thus, they all are in some way restricted, either by their own conservative ideal or by the violence of men (and women), whether they know it or not, whilst the YPJ are liberated and 'free' women. What is completely lacking is a feminist discourse which promotes femininity as being *as valuable as* masculinity, hence the hegemonic European gender order is reproduced through the constructions of these women and the feminization (in an orientalist manner) of the East continues. Instead, it appears as though now the ideal woman, similarly to the ideal man, is being constructed on the frontline – a both symbolic and physical place where social identity is negotiated (Steans, 2008: 165).

In sum, the unproblematic use of the 'war on terror' narrative (see section 5.1.2) indicates a social standpoint similar to that of clash of civilizations by Huntington. This in combination to that above indicates neocolonialist and imperialist discursive legitimization of 'Western' sociocultural practice, and that the discursive power of the West remains fairly unchallenged from within.

6. Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the results from the analysis into general conclusions, and answers the main research question through the sub questions outlined in chapter 1.2. Lastly, I dedicate some space to reflect upon what this study has contributed with to Peace and Conflict Studies specifically, and social science in general.

6.1 The Constructions of the YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat of ISIS

The construction of the female fighters of the YPJ can mainly be understood as an expression of liberated femininity, where they are perceived to have a double agenda consisting of the Kurdish liberation struggle, but largely fighting for their own emancipation from patriarchal structures in non-Western society (i.e. the Middle East). The ideology of liberation legitimizes their violence in the news material, and they are seen as role models in regards to gender equality despite their ties to the PKK. Instead of acknowledging the differences between their revolutionary agenda and the Western feminism expressed by the authors, similarities are emphasized, for instance human rights and gender equality. In addition to this, their current enemy is the same as 'ours', thus the constructions of these women reinforce ISIS (and terrorists) as the ultimate Other of the West.

The Western Muhaajirat is as a collective category usually understood within the narrative of victimized femininity, however, instead of the loss of a male family member, they have rather lost their way. They are usually described as passive young victims of radicalization, propaganda, or manipulation by members of ISIS. Their agency is usually denied, while the agency of the YPJ is constantly emphasized through different linguistic elements. They are typically reduced to the 'Third World woman' – in need of (Western) wisdom and (Western) liberation. The Western Muhaajirat as individuals (Mahmood) and deviations (Al-Khanssaa) fit better into the notion of conservative femininity, as they are constructed as violent antagonists, and indeed the Al-Khanssaa Brigade is accused of physical violent acts. In addition, their violence is illegitimate and performed in a gender-conservative manner. Even though Aqsa Mahmood explicitly writes that violence is not for women in ISIS, she is constructed as manipulative and becomes a perpetrator of violence towards other women when her recruitment is successful. Al-Khanssaa's violence is also directed towards other women to make sure that they comply with codes of conduct in Islamic law. These deviating exceptional women are effectively separated from the victimized women generally, and are then more easily constructed as antagonists and members of ISIS.

6.2 The Western Narrative

What this suggests, is that women are still mainly understood within traditional gender roles, and the 'Western liberated woman' is still reproduced as the universal norm. Freedom and liberation for women is equalized to being able to enter the most masculine domain – the military – and the most impressive thing a woman can do is to fight like a man, or better. This does not change the devaluation of feminine attributes, but maintains the patriarchal status quo that no author acknowledges as part of 'Western' culture or history. Fighting for 'non-universal' values and joining the 'wrong' side of the battle, reduces you to a victim of the Other's violence, thus transforming you to an object that needs to be saved from yourself and others. The news media order of discourse permeating these texts can thus be argued to be reductionist and sensationalist, yet is meant to be regarded as objective, rational and a mere representation of the 'truth', emphasized and bolstered by the frequent use of photographs. Additionally, history and sociopolitical relationships are backgrounded or even absent, especially those concerning problematic choices made by decision-makers in the home country. Colonial history and imperialism are certainly never mentioned, thus remain in the distance as something irrelevant and as a 'thing of the past'.

It becomes evident that the news media productions in focus in this study are produced through and reproduce the powerful discursive position of the 'West'. The YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat are constructed as binary opposites, where the YPJ are understood as the ideal Other, who manages to balance cultural authenticity and 'Western' universal ideas. The construction of them as the ideal Other reinforce the universalism of Western culture, thus unfortunately fails to challenge the superiority of Western 'civilization' and knowledge production. The Western Muhaajirat actually becomes more interesting in this light. These are surely constructed in the light of the 'Western liberation project', explicitly carried out in Afghanistan by the Bush administration (see Cloud, 2004; Thobani 2007; Steans 2008), and additionally, they provide a necessity for similar action. How this liberation project will be carried out non-discursively is still a matter of discussion and there is no coherent or unified strategy for the international community yet. Even though the Western Muhaajirat is generally robbed of their agency, the deviations pose a challenge for the hegemonic news media houses under scrutiny in this study, and the friction between them being women, 'Westerners' *and* 'terrorists' is not easily dealt with. This suggests that *if* there will be a discursive shift within the lifespan of 'terrorism', it probably will spring out of the least expected group: The Western Muhaajirat.

6.3 Closing Remarks and Suggestions for Further Research

This study identified a gap in Peace and Conflict literature on women's agency in the context of Syria today, and compared Western news media constructions on two opposing categories of women – the YPJ and the Western Muhaajirat. Even though similar studies have been conducted previously in other countries permeated by conflict, women in Syria are generally under researched and academia is so far catching up on much of the happenings in the region. Thus this study is so far one of a kind and contribute with valuable insight on how Western news media actors understand the actions of these women. As it is a qualitative study with limited resources, much more can and should be done on the topic, especially if we are to interact or intervene in any way in the Syrian conflict without doing more harm than good. News media play a key role in reflecting and reproducing cultural practices, and if potentially harmful constructions are not addressed, discursive practices will maintain an asymmetrical power relation complicating collaboration between actors.

Moreover, it is important to extend the research to including perceptions of the women themselves and explore the complex array of motivations for choosing to actively participate in armed conflict. Without this knowledge, it will be much more difficult to facilitate any constructive conflict resolution and to combat the victimization of women in conflict. Considering the shift in warfare from 'old' to 'new', it becomes increasingly important to create awareness and nuanced knowledge on different actors involved in conflict, otherwise it will be impossible to counteract organized violence, whether in the form of guerilla warfare or terrorist activities.

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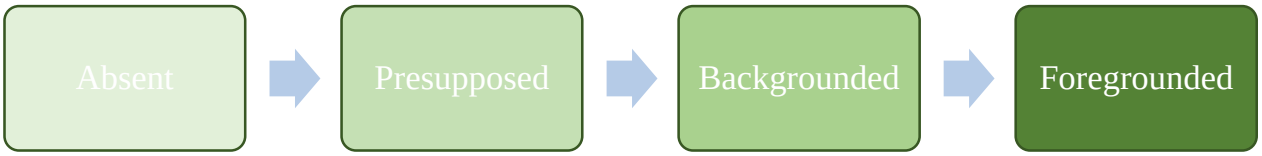
Appendix I. Analysis

In order to scrutinize the material more in detail, I have constructed specific questions based on questions outlined by Fairclough (1995: 202ff.), but also based on suggestions from Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000: 66-92). The questions for the visual material are influenced by the same and additionally from Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2001). Lastly, I put the elements and actors in a scale of positioning ranging from whether it is completely absent to foregrounded in the text (Fairclough, 1995: 106ff.).



Text Analysis:

- Which actors are constructed as passive/active subjects (and how)?
- Whose voices are positioned prominently, and whose are marginalized?
  (This is not merely a question of how much space they get, but also about when/where are they placed in the text (headline and finish = prominent) and how what is said is reinforced.)
- If, and how are the boundaries maintained between the representing discourse (the mediator/writer/photographer) and the represented discourse (voices)? (Ex: direct quotation or indirect speech (summarizations, blurring of who phrased what).
- What relationships are set up between participants, i. e. journalists – officials – civilians – audience?
- What genres does it rely on and how is that visible in the text?
- What other kinds of texts are necessary to have previous knowledge about in order to understand the content?
- What ideologies are represented (in the represented and representing discourse)?
- What gendered narratives are in play?

Visual analysis:

- What characterizes the visual composition and editing in general?
- What meaning is generated by the elements in the image?

- How is lightning, framing, perspective, camera-angles and movement applied to generate meaning?
- What meaning is generated in the combination of text and image(s), which neither could generate on its own?
- What relationships are set up between text and image?

Appendix II. Material

The news material consists of, as mentioned, varied types of texts with slightly varying conventions.

The YPJ are Kurdish female fighters among others, and some names are used interchangeably in the understanding of different Kurdish militias, sometimes making it difficult to understand the complexity of the Kurdish and other guerrilla movements engaging in Syria. Consequently, sometimes the pesh merga, the Iraqi Kurdish milita, was equalized to the YPJ, thus I tried this as search word in the selection process where the results were scarce or non-existent. Search words used when selecting the material on the YPJ and the search results on each broadsheet respectively is represented below, in order to provide a glimpse of the scarcity and potential confusion of names. Note that "Female fighters Syria" gets the most hits because usually it includes the female jihadists as part of the search results.

	YPJ	**Female fighters Syria**[10]	**Female Kurdish fighters**[11]	**Kurdish Women Syria**[12]
DN (SWE)	3	32	3	-
SvD (SWE)	9	259	57	-
GNM (UK)	59	18,200	16	20
IND (UK)	13	194	5	11
NYT (USA)	0	69	1	2
WP (USA)	4	165	6	3

With the Swedish and British news media, I have managed to select the most read liberal and conservative broadsheet, however, the conservative option for North American media was Wall Street Journal, but they lacked material on the YPJ entirely. Thus I chose the Washington Post instead, because there was little emphasis and interest in relation to the explicit positions of the media houses, as the selected opinion pieces does not necessarily have to express this standpoint. What was most important in the selection was actually in relation to their readers, otherwise claiming that they are influential in their respective country would be incorrect.

[10] For the Swedish news agencies I used "kvinnliga soldater Syrien".
[11] For the Swedish news agencies I used "kvinnliga kurdiska soldater".
[12] This was not used at all for the Swedish news agencies.