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The Representation of Kurdish Women in US American Media after 2013

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1. Introduction

The USA loves their superheroes. Everybody who grew up with US-American pop culture knows about Superman, Spiderman, Batman or even Wonderwoman. But since the USA is fighting the new super villains of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) they have created new superheroes: the Kurdish women.¹

In 2013 Western media outlets began to celebrate the fighting of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) against ISIS in Northern Syria frenetically and especially the participation of the all-female militia: the Womens' Protection Units (YPJ). Although the involvement of female fighters in a military struggle is presented merely as a new discourse in Western media, Kurdish female fighters have been part of the Kurdish struggle for decades. For example, in the late 19th century, Kara Fatma led a battalion of almost 700 men in the Ottoman Empire and furthermore helped to insert 43 women into the army ranks which was very unusual at that time (Dirik 2014). The strong sense for gender equality in many Kurdish communities is manifested in Abdullah Öcalan's theory called jineology. The ideological representative of the Kurdistan's Worker Party (PKK) has written much about his vision of a stateless democracy and the important role of gender equality in order to reach it. In Öcalan's (2013) opinion, democracies can never be free if women are not (Ibid.: 60). Especially Rojava, the Kurdish area in Northern Syria, is often named in media articles when talking about gender equality in Kurdistan. The communities in Rojava have crafted a social contract where gender equality, environmentalism and direct democracy are enshrined in law (Knapp et al. 2016).

In August 2014 after hearing about the Yazidi genocide on mount Sinjar, Barack Obama announced that he would support the Kurds with airstrikes in order to fight ISIS back in Syria and Iraq (Cooper et al. 2014). Afterwards, it was even claimed that the US and the Kurds exchanged battle information as well as in 2017 the US started to support the Kurds with weaponry (Stewart 2017). Since then, media attention for the Kurdish

¹ When I write "Kurdish women", I mean all who identify as women and as Kurdish. However, since I am analyzing the media discourse, "Kurdish women" become also objects identified and defined by different parties engaging in the discourse. I am going to elaborate on that more in Chapter 2. Although, I am going to make some distinctions between different Kurdish groups, I do not think it makes sense to refer to Iraqi, Irani, Turkish or Syrian Kurds. These groups might be physically divided by national borders and have different political aspirations, but throughout the war against ISIS most Kurds cooperated and shared a sense of Kurdish unity which transcended borders.

struggle increased extensively by especially presenting the image of the Kurdish female fighter as a symbol for the general Kurdish movement in Western discourse.

As journalist Dilan Dirik observes, the hyper-representation of Kurdish female fighters in European and US-American news has led to a “Western fascination with badass Kurdish women” who challenge Orientalist and neo-Orientalist premises that all women in the Middle East are oppressed by their cultures (Dirik, 2014). As I noticed, media coverage of the role of the Kurds in the war against ISIS often mentions “progressive” gender equality and most of the time comes with a portrayal of Kurdish female fighters. The reporters would talk about the looks of the female soldiers (e.g. hair or lipstick) and how “badass” they were fighting against ISIS. Even fashion magazines *Marie Claire* and *Elle* featured stories and pictures of Kurdish fighters, focusing on the “supposed contradiction between their femininity and their ‘incalculable’ courage” (Griffin 2014; Toranian 2014, as cited in Begikhani et al. 2018). Moreover, even the fashion industry jumped on board when H&M started advertising khaki jumpsuits resembling the uniform worn by Kurdish female fighters (Ismail 2014). Therefore, the question arises if this sensationalized and at times sexist portrayal of Kurdish women within US-American media is just occasionally done by a few media outlets or if the above mentioned examples are part of a larger phenomenon? And if yes, how and why is this specific image of Kurdish women created, what are the roots of this representation and what purpose might it serve, especially with regard its political context, the US „War on Terror“?

Therefore, I decided to explore the representations of Kurdish women in the US-American media discourse between 2013-2018 in order to see *how* they are represented and if that specific representation might be guided by different ideologies.

The topic of Kurdish women is generally understudied. There are, however, some scholars who explore the links between feminism and nationalism in the Kurdish movement, in Iraq as well as in Turkey (Al-Ali/Pratt 2011; Mojab 2001; Yüksel 2006). Most of them argue that women have been used mostly as pretty faces for nation-building. However, some of them, like Ofra Bengio (2016), argue that the Kurdish nationalist agenda did not exclude the feminist agenda and that the so-called Arab Spring actually worked as a catalyst in order to improve the social status of Kurdish women. There is also historical work on Kurdish women. Martin van Bruinessen (2001) for example looked at female political leaders in Kurdish history, whereas Mirella

Galletti's (2001) work explores historical European narratives of Kurdish women depicting them as an antithetic to the Arab, Turkish or Persian woman and focusing on the high level of freedom they enjoy (Galletti, 2001).

There is a considerably large body of research by feminist scholars and sociologists alike about the intersection of gender and nationalism in the US 'War on Terror'. Some scholars have focused on the war in Iraq, especially on the prisoners' abuse in Abu Ghraib, and how it reflects not only the gendered notion of war in general but also how it served as a performative stage on which to reconfirm US national virility in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Jeffreys 2007; Enloe 2007; Tétreault 2006; Puar 2004). Furthermore, there has been done research about the media narration of the rescue of private Jessica Lynch who was constructed as a hero and became a symbol for the West's progressive attitude towards women and thus justifying the US's mission to "liberate" the people of Iraq (Feitz/Nagel 2007; Kumar 2007). A similar argument can be found in studies looking at the representations of Afghan women and how the war in Afghanistan became waged as a fight "for the rights and dignity of women" (Abu-Lughod 2013; Ayotte/Husain 2005; Berry 2003; Gul Khattak 2002). All these studies prove how Muslims are constructed as the *Other*, as the antithesis to women's rights and modernity in general and it shows how women are used to justify wars they did not sign up for. Many scholars argue that the *Othering* of especially Muslim men is used in order to legitimize the US' imperialist agenda. This is not a new phenomenon as many postcolonial scholars have shown in their work (Said 1979, Hall 1992, Fanon 1965 etc.)

The links between the war against ISIS and the media portrayal of Kurdish women has not been explored as extensively. However, in May 2018 the Kurdish Studies Journal released one issue dedicated one issue to the topic of "Women and War in Kurdistan". In this issue the authors discuss ideas on Kurdish women and their intersection with topics of war and peace from a feminist perspective. Especially interesting in this issue is Glastonbury's (2018) work on the pop singer "Helly Luv" who underscores the trope of a "badass" Kurdish hero who is defending her nation. However, in his work Glastonbury (2018) links the pop singer to a project called Brand Kurdistan which is working closely with an US-based PR firm in order to prove to Western audiences that the Kurds are a "liberal exception in the illiberal Middle East" (p. 111). He argues that Brand Kurdistan and Helly Luv are thus reproducing the binary world discourse of the 'War on Terror', which describes the US as the defender of liberal society and women rights in opposition to a backward Middle East. Furthermore, he

talks about the gendered nationalism in Kurdish Iraq and how the image of the “badass” female fighters of Rojava became, due to their “hyper-presentation” in the media, the synonyms for the Kurdish freedom movement in Western discourse (p. 116).

Especially interesting is the work of Mari Toivanen and Bahar Baser (2016) who looked at the representation of Kurdish women in British and French media during the war against ISIS. They argue that the media frames used made their stories palatable for French and British audiences and let them forget about the PKK’s violent past. Furthermore, they say that topic was newsworthy because “these women were newsworthy in the Western media because these women were contesting Orientalist stereotypes of women in the Middle East” (Ibid p. 310). However, I think that Toivanen and Baser’s work lacks a contextualization of their findings and does not help comprehending the reasons behind the specific portrayal. That is why my work builds up on theirs. By conducting a discourse analysis instead of a media analysis, I hope to gain more insight on the question *why* the Kurdish women are portrayed in that specific manner and what greater political narratives this might serve.

As I have examined the already existing work regarding Kurdish nationalism and gender and the gendered ‘War on terror narrative’, I can say that there is a need for a thorough discourse analysis about the media discourse in the US which builds upon the pre-existing literature and would most definitely add to Glastonbury’s argumentation. I chose to examine the media representation of Kurdish women in US media discourse between 2013 and 2018. I think that this topic is relevant in many ways. Firstly, as a feminist activist scholar it strikes me as essential to uncover seemingly sexist media portrayals of women and explore why a certain homogenous narrative is being circulated. Secondly, I believe that my work sheds light on the link between US foreign policy and the media representations of Kurdish women. I want to spread awareness how topics like these are being used to sell a certain story and to justify wars, instead of promoting Kurdish feminism. Thirdly, I think that the media portrayal does not live up to the actual fights Kurdish women are fighting on a daily basis – whether misogynist ISIS, Kurdish patriarchy or oversimplified and sexist media coverage. Concerning my positionality as a researcher, I must say that the idea for my research emerged from a feminist approach and was obviously influenced by a critical discourse on US-American imperialism in the Middle East. However, I am aware of my external position and I do not claim to speak for Kurdish women in my work or make any authoritative knowledge

claims about their lives. I simply want to raise awareness for the ways they are talked about in US-American media.

In the following, I will analyze 38 media articles of eight different US-American media outlets of the USA. By doing so, I will show that Kurdish women are represented as being presented as “badass” female fighters in order to support the liberal image of the Kurds in an otherwise “illiberal Middle East”. I will further argue how this representation is created to legitimize a certain US-American foreign policy of imperialism, by creating a binary between the liberal, progressive Kurds and the traditionalist, backwards (Arab) Muslim is created in order to re(create) the self-image of the US as the beacon of freedom and progress through *Othering*. Additionally, I will argue that the dominant “type” featured in the US media portrayal is that of the Kurdish female fighter which consequently, prevents other Kurdish female voices from being heard in the media discourse.

In order to answer my questions and to see if my hypotheses prove right, I am going to use the framework of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze my data and furthermore, I am going to explore theories from postcolonial and feminist scholars in order to explain my findings. I figured that an abductive approach might be the best choice for my undertaking. An abductive strategy “implies a movement back and forth between inductive and deductive approaches” for a more holistic understanding (Graneheim, Lindgren, and Lundman 2017). First, I am going to do work inductively, by describing the representation of Kurdish women in different media outlets. Then in a second step, I am going to use a deductive approach by using theory to contextualize and to explain the representations and narrative I encountered in my analysis. Therefore, the first question guiding my analysis is: How are Kurdish women portrayed in the US-American media? And in a second step I will answer the following questions: How can this specific portrayal be explained? Is there somehow a correlation between the portrayal of Kurdish women in the media and the US-American foreign policy?

In Chapter 2.0, I am going to introduce gender theories and discuss the idea of agency and representations, in order to establish a gender definition for my work and to understand the perils of dealing with gender representations in the media (2.1).

In the third chapter I am going to introduce the method that I will be applying: a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a feminist scope. Accordingly, I am going to

explore the main pillars of a critical discourse analysis departing from Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse and adding more recent work on CDA. Moreover, I am going to introduce different notions of power and ideologies and how they play out in discursive practices, especially in relation to gender (3.2).

After introducing my theoretical and methodological approach, I will then start analyzing my case study (4). In order to do so, I am going to assemble my archive and set the scene for my analysis. Firstly, I am going to undertake a structural analysis, where I examine all 38 articles I selected in order to get an overview of the topics and subtopics talked about and identify the discourse positions of the six media outlets (4.5). After that I am going to make sense of these findings and try to identify the different discourse strands in the discourse about the Kurdish women which will help me make sense out of it. Furthermore, the discourse positions will help me select two articles which strike me as the most typical and which I am going to analyze in the detailed analysis. The detailed analysis (5) is where I look more into detail how the images of Kurdish women are constructed and embedded in different argumentations in order to get a more profound understanding of what is "behind" the written words and the ideologies which drive the discourse. In chapter 6, I am going to draw upon postcolonial and feminist theories dealing with the 'War on Terror' and gender and military to help me contextualize my findings. In the end, I am going to present my findings and how I think they could contribute to the discussion about the representation of Kurdish women (7).

2. Constructing Realities

Theories of poststructuralists like Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler provide a way of studying the production of knowledge and challenging structuralist conceptualizations. Their approach is that in order to comprehend an object it is essential to study not only the object itself but also the systems of knowledge that produced it. Structuralist and post-structuralist realizations provided the foundations for important feminist, gender and queer-theoretical approaches by unmasking patriarchal and heteronormative premises and questioning them (Babka/Posselt 2016: 23). Especially Foucault's work is very important for gender and queer theory, since he

began historicizing sexuality and lay bare that within the modern sexuality dispositif², knowledge, power and subjectification are closely interwoven (Babka/Posselt 2016: 26). In *The history of sexuality*, Foucault explores “sexuality” as a discursive object and argues that the concept of every individual having a sexuality is a very recent phenomenon in Western societies (Foucault 2012). The book “offered a powerful and provocative counter-narrative to the longestablished story about Victorian sexual repression giving way to progressive liberation and enlightenment in the 20th century” (Spargo 1995: 11). Furthermore, by looking at power and governance structures, which constitute individuals in relation to others as subjects, Foucault introduced key concepts in order to analyze those practices and technologies which naturalize and normalize the gendered body and sexualities (Ibid.).

Since my work is based on this idea of unmasking constructed realities with regard to gender, I am going to introduce some essential thoughts on gender and representations of gendered practices in the following chapter.

2.1. Gendered Representations

A representation is a central characteristic of linguistic or symbolic processes and signifies some sort of operator or delegator. However, as one might have guessed, representational systems are not suited to mirror “reality” adequately. Therefore, representations are not to be understood as displays or symbols of someone or something, but rather they should be understood as part of a complex process of a discursive reality construction (Babka/Posselt 2016: 84 pp.). For that reason, representations of women are often central to feminist critique. Coming from a poststructuralist perspective representations are often defined as cultural constructions. For Judith Butler (1990), for example, neither the biological sex nor gender are a representation of a “natural” reality, but rather imitations and through this performative process they are constructing the “original” which they are actually imitating (Ibid.).

It was her work *Gender Trouble* (1990) which started a paradigm shift in feminist research which was more leaning a essentialist perspective before. Butler draws upon

² A dispositif constitutes the context of knowledge structures of discourses and hence, describes various institutional mechanisms which establish and maintain power structures within the social (Jäger 2015: 113 pp.).

deconstructivist ideas of Derrida and Foucault, as well as psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan) and includes the perspectives of *difference feminism*. In her book, Butler dismisses the distinction between (biological) sex and (culturally constructed) gender. She argues that both gender and sex are constructed and that it is rather predominant normative mechanisms (such as speech, representations or dress codes) operating on the body and thus constituting concepts of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality. It is these norms which are produced and reproduced in everyday life interactions that form the “biological sex” and the social gender. Thus, she says that the seemingly obvious “source” of gender identity, the biological sex and the body, are performative effects which are produced and reproduced in plenty different discursive practices and thus normalized. With regard to the body, she states that, consequently, “the body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning” (Butler 1988: 531).

However, if gender is constructed and integrated in a normative structure, it is consequently difficult to speak of a fixed subject of women as a political agent who claims political demands. Butler therefore says, that it is first and foremost, important to render these power hierarchies and the regulations visible which subjectivates people and assess these critically (Butler 2004: 37 pp.).

Butler’s concept of *gender as a performance* has provoked severe criticism from fellow feminist scholars. Seyla Benhabib, for example, argues that Butler’s understanding of the subject being produced through discourse automatically dissolves notions of “intentionality, accountability, self-reflexivity and autonomy” (Benhabib et al.1995, 20 pp.). She argues further, that this would be against the feminist goal of empowering women. Behabib therefore dismisses Butler’s notions of subjectivity when she says that it is not possible to make feminist claims without certain stable “regulative” ideas (Ibid. 21). Nancy Fraser (1995) however, says that one must not decide between Benhabib’s and Butler’s positions. She concludes that one has to “remain critical of regulative ideals but at the same time one has to continue to “(re)formulate them” (Magnus 2006: 81). However, as Kathy Dow Magnus points out, Butler’s work in “Kritik der ethischen Gewalt” (2003) overcomes the problems of her previous accounts of agency. Here, she is not reducing the subject to the effects of language by “incorporating an innovate account of intersubjective recognition into her discussion of the interpellated subject” (Magnus 2006: 82). It is interesting here that although Butler argues that the subject is

constituted by the discourse, she does not mean that it is determined by the discourse. To put it in her words: “The constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency” (Benhabib et al. 1995: 45 pp.) In that sense, Butler understands agency as some sort of a linguistic performance, meaning that the subject can “resist” the existing social order by articulating words “in contexts that invest them with new meaning” (Magnus 2006: 83). Magnus (2006) strikes Butler’s definition of agency as very negative. And I agree with her, when she says that Butler’s dismisses different forms of subjective agency. As Magnus states, Butler thus underestimates “the power of subjects to work together to determine their lives and the social conditions that structure their existence” (Ibid.: 83). I do agree with Magnus in the sense that feminist scholars have to be open-minded when it comes to the different kinds and forms of subjective agency.³

However, I think that for my approach, gender is a combination of the several positions I discussed beforehand. I do believe that sex and gender are discursively (re)produced and thus constituted by the social. However, I do think that it is, generally speaking, absolutely crucial to integrate non-discursive practices into research because there are other factors of the social which constitute gender as well. Nevertheless, I believe that Butler is right when she says that one has to first understand these regulative processes which constitute gender and critically assess them before acting against them. This leads me to my research which is completely located in the discursive realm. Not because I do not acknowledge the non-discursive practices of Kurdish women which are practiced right now in many different forms and shapes, but because I believe that in order to study counter-narratives and agency, one first has to understand the regulative discursive processes which are constituting the discourse in order to change it – discursively and practically.

3. More than Words and Things: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Since my research question is touching on the issues of power and gender, I chose discourse analysis as an adequate method for my undertaking. Analyzing discourses

³ One example for this plurality of agency in feminist studies is Sabah Mahmood’s (2011) work on the agency of Muslim women in Egypt.

renders power hierarchies visible and helps to unravel the meanings behind what is actually said.

However, making sense of discourse analysis is like chopping one's way through the undergrowth. The term discourse analysis remains very vague. That is because it is used in different academic fields and has therefore always slightly different meanings. Moreover, it is not a method per se, but rather a research concept, which can be modified and altered concerning the research purposes. Furthermore, there are different foci within the field of discourse analysis. Especially linguistic theory, of course, focuses mainly on the linguistics of a discourse while others, especially social scientists, look at "the ways in which issues are given a particular meaning within a specific social setting" (Bacchi 2005: 199). Foucault said that the key question in linguistics always is: What are the rules that constructed a specific statement and following which rules could other similar statements be constructed too? But when describing the events of discourse, Foucault says one poses the following question: Why is it that one specific statement was published and not another one instead? (Foucault 2010: 27). However, for my undertaking, both approaches are relevant since I want to explore how Kurdish women are portrayed in the US American media discourse and what this specific portrayal means in that context.

Therefore, I am going to discuss a few concepts on discourse analysis, which I borrow mainly from the Social Sciences and Feminist Studies. Since the focus of my analysis will be on the categories of power and gender, I will focus on the Foucauldian idea of Discourse Analysis and the method of Critical Discourse Analysis and combine it with a feminist-theoretical take on the methodology.

Discourse Analysis as a methodological concept is embedded in a discourse itself about the idea of truth, reality, knowledge, and power. It is the post-structuralist idea of realizing that there is no absolute truth in reality and that we only construe certain truths based on our own knowledge: This assumption constitutes the foundation of this method (Jäger 2015: 11).

Foucault provided the theoretical grounds for Discourse Analysis. In his book *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he stresses that discourses are not "a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, colored chain of words" (Foucault 2010: pp. 54). Consequently, Foucault encourages researchers analyzing discourses to get behind the idea of how these discourses are constructed and

to reveal the systematic creation of them and how they shape the way we talk about certain objects.

“Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (longue) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault 2010: pp. 55).

In order to get behind this “more” and explain the system of power, which constitutes the discourse, it is important to understand the power relations playing out in a discourse.

Power is one of the important pillars in Critical Discourse Analysis. First of all, it is important to note that the Critical Discourse Analysis which emerged in the 1980’s does not claim to produce objective or absolute truth (Jäger 2007: 15). Therefore the approach of a Critical Discourse Analysis is rather to identify different strains within the discourse and critically assess them. This endeavor implies that the personal backgrounds and stakes of the researchers themselves influence the analysis (Ibid.).

Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer stress the influence of Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School to the formation of the CDA. Thus, the idea of Critical Theory is to be “directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity” and to “improve the understanding of society by integrating all the major social sciences, including economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology and psychology” (Wodak/Meyer 2009: 6). The aim of CDA is to produce critical knowledge that “enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection” (Wodak/Meyer 2009: 7). Having that said, the characteristics of CDA are thus methodologically the interdisciplinary approach and on a content level: the emphasis on “revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies” (Wodak/Meyer 2009: 8).

Since I am not only looking at power and underlying ideologies, but also specifically looking at the linkages of power and gender, I am going to add feminist theories to my approach. The idea to develop a feminist lens for the method of CDA emerged in the field of Feminist Studies where many scholars of course already have dealt with discursive social injustices (Lazar 2007: 141). Thus the aim of a FCDA is to “show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced,

sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Ibid.: 142).

In the following, I am going to define certain characteristics of the discourse and discuss concepts which are helpful to analyze them.

3.1. Defining the Discourse

“[...] a discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of worlds and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice” (Foucault 2010: pp. 48).

This quote shows how Foucault sees the discourse not as a mere description of reality but rather as a realm on its own which constitutes realities. Foucault states that “beneath a visible formulation, there may reign another that controls it, disturbs it, and imposes on it an articulation of its own; in short, that in one way or another, things said say more than themselves” (Foucault 2010: pp. 110). This is the correlation between “words and things” which he often emphasizes. In that sense discourses construct things which have a historical-social significance, such as “madness” or “sex” (Link/Heer 1990, as cited in: Jäger 2015: 23).

Furthermore, for him it is especially this “group of rules” which governs discursive practice, which researchers have to discover. As discursive practice he defines the institutions, the rules of knowledge collection and production, as well as the authoritative authors that are engaged in the discourse (Link/Heer 1990, as cited in: Jäger 2015: 23). The discourse is furthermore part of the disciplines, meaning there are different discourses, such as a medical or a juridical one. Moreover, Foucault does not perceive discourse as an enclosed text document, but rather as a scattering of statements that transform through time and space (Ibid.).

The Critical Discourse Analysis makes use of Foucault’s understanding and expands it on several levels. One, for example, is the idea of space. Jäger describes it as a river of knowledge meandering through time (Jäger 2015: 26). Talking about geographies, Jäger (2015) introduces the concept of space in the field of discourse analysis. He believes that discourses construct space and time which can be understood as “products of collective thinking” (Durkheim 1981, as cited in: Jäger 2015: 28).

However, thinking of discourses as spaces one has to acknowledge that these spaces often overlap and that they do not have distinctive borders. Therefore, one has to grasp them as what they are: a construct which changes meaning.

3.1.1. The What: Statements, Archive and Objects

In the following, I am going to use theories from CDA and Foucault in order to introduce certain characteristics of the discursive practice that are essential to discourse analysis.

The statements

Statements constitute discursive formations. In “Archeology of Knowledge”, Foucault asked himself the following questions: What are statements and how can they be described? And how can they be grouped? And how can these relations between statements be described? In the following, I am trying to answer these questions by linking Foucault and CDA’s theories.

For Foucault, the definition of a statement seems to be still a conundrum. He can rather say what a statement is *not*: “the statement is not the same kind of unit as the sentence, the proposition, or the speech act; it cannot be referred to the same criteria but neither is it the same kind of unit as a material object, with its limits and independence” (Foucault 2010: 86). Instead of a structure or an object, Foucault describes the statement rather as a “function of existence” which cuts across a domain of structures and units and which “reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space” (Foucault 2010: pp. 86). It is this function that researchers have to describe as such, “that is, in its actual practice, its conditions, the rules that govern it, and the field in which it operates” (Ibid.: 87).

In *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault poses the question of how statements can be grouped. He has a set of various hypotheses. One is that statements which dispersed in time and are different in their form constitute an entity when they relate to the same object (Foucault 2010: pp. 31). However, he states that it can be problematic to know “whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are

continuously transformed” (Ibid.: 32). For example, the unity of discourses on madness, would not be based on the existence of the object “madness”, but rather it would be “the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time” (Ibid.: pp. 32).

Second, Foucault says that a group of statement should also be identified by their form and type of connection (Ibid: 33). As an example he describes how from the nineteenth-century medical science was characterized less by its objects but rather by a certain style, “a constant manner of statement” (Ibid.). Furthermore, he proposes the ideas that statements could be grouped by “determining the system of permanent and coherent concepts involved” (Ibid.: 34) or looking at the “identity and persistence of themes” (Ibid.: 35).

CDA theorists agree with Foucault and also emphasize that statements should not be understood as sentences but rather as a common thread which can be extracted from sentences, texts or even pictures (Jäger/Jäger 2007, in: Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: pp. 29). They are rather atoms of the discourse. Jäger and Jäger (2007) furthermore say that discourse formations are the structures which distribute statements and group them together as discourses (Ibid.).

The archive

Foucault defines the archive as “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 2010: pp. 130). The archive enables to grasp the mode which constitutes the conditions and possibilities of a historical period of time that are important for the emergence of the statements. Foucault, thus, understands the archive as an overarching discourse of one certain society at a certain time (Ibid.). In that sense, he acknowledges the limits of the term’s epistemology because one can never get a hold of the complete archive of one society or civilization. Furthermore, he says that this also means that one can never constitute their own archive since we are subjected to the rules of the overarching archive (Ibid.).

Building on Foucault, CDA has coined this understanding of the archive as the “discourse of the whole society”. Additionally, they define the archive for a certain project (also called *corpus*) as the total of the discourse fragments of the analyzed discourse strand (Jäger 2010: 27).

The objects

Foucault states that there are many conditions necessary for the emergence of an object of discourse: There has to be the right historical condition in order for people to 'say anything' about it, several people have to say different things about it and it has to exist in relation to other objects. Furthermore, he states that most importantly an object has to establish relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference and transformation to other objects. Or simply put in Foucault's words: "one cannot speak of anything at any time" (Foucault 2010: 44). Another important aspect is that the object always exists under the "positive conditions of a complex group of relations" (Ibid.: 45). These discursive relations are not internal to discourse, they rather determine the group of relations that a discourse must establish in order to talk about an object, in order to classify, categorize or name it (Ibid. 46).

3.1.2. The How: Uncovering the discourse

Siegfried Jäger's work is interesting because he tries to pin Foucault's theoretical considerations down in order to craft some sort of guidance to researchers who want to conduct a discourse analysis. Furthermore, he adds some valuable ideas from critical discourse analysis and thus gives a very tangible approach of a critical discourse analysis.

In the following, I am going to use Jäger's framework of CDA and introduce helpful concepts for analyzing discourses.

Discourse fragments and discourse strands

Jäger differentiates between discourse fragments, discourse strands and discursive events. The fragment of a discourse is mostly a text which is about one specific topic, let us say "feminism" (Jäger 2015: 80). When analyzing the media discourse, articles can be defined as discourse fragments. Discourse fragments combine to discourse strands. Furthermore, the collection of discourse fragments is necessary in order to extract the statements, which I discussed beforehand (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: pp. 16). Furthermore, a discourse strand is constituted by discourse fragments of the same topic (Jäger 2015: 80). Therefore discourse strands could be interpreted as thematically homogenous flows of knowledge meandering through time and space (Jäger 2015: 81).

Discourse entanglements

Discourses are most of the time a bustle of various discourse strands which is produced and reproduced on different discourse levels (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 47). This bustle needs to be unraveled in discourse analysis. Nevertheless, it happens many times that discourse strands are partly entangled and, thus, produce certain effects (Ibid.). Jäger and Zimmermann (2010) allege an example for the entanglements of discourse strands when they talk about the ethnicizing of sexism in the immigrant discourse (Ibid.). Meaning that misogynist behavior is often attributed to immigrants and, thus, produces racist effects (Ibid.). Sometimes an entanglement of discourses becomes apparent in one single sentence. Jäger and Maier (2009) call this a discursive knot (p. 47). Helpful concepts to detect these discourse entanglements are innuendos, presuppositions and collective symbolism. (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 47).

Discursive event

A discursive event is an event which is widely discussed within the discourse, especially in media and politics and has, therefore, a major impact on the discourse itself. For example Tschernobyl could be identified as such an event because it highly influenced the discourse on nuclear power (Jäger 2015: 82). Identifying discursive events can be especially important when analyzing discourse strands since they help to understand the context of it (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 17).

Discourse level

Discourse levels are defined as the social spaces where the discourse takes place, or better: from where individuals, institutions etc. are “speaking”/engaging in the discourse (Jäger 2015: 84). However, it is important to note that these different discourse levels influence each other, refer to each other or use each other (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 17). Drawing again upon the discourse on nuclear power, this would mean that there are different levels on which this topic is discussed. For example, a scientific level, a political level, a corporate level and a public level (influenced by the media level). On all these levels, individuals discuss the topic of nuclear power and have different opinions on it. Furthermore, it is important to note that the discourse levels determine the different power structures of the individuals engaging in the discourse.

Discourse Positions

CDA introduced this concept in order to better identify the heterogeneity of a discourse. A discourse position is the (political) standpoint which enables a participation in the discourse and an assessment of the discourse. The discourse position produces and reproduces discursive entanglements of discourse participants from situations they lived through or they are currently living in (Jäger 1996, in: Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 17). Furthermore, the discourse position of media outlets becomes evident in their reporting (Jäger et al. 2009: 49). "Subjects develop a discourse position because they are enmeshed in various discourses. They are exposed to discourses and work them into a specific ideological position or worldview (...)" (Ibid.). As Jäger et al. (2009) make sure, this relationship also works the other way around: Discourse positions add to and reproduce the discursive entanglements of subjects (Ibid.). Most interestingly, Jäger et al. (2009) state that within a dominant discourse, discourse positions are fairly homogenous, which itself is already an effect of dominant discourse (Ibid.: 50). Discourse positions, which differ from the dominant discourse position, are defined as counter discourses.

Collective symbols

Jäger and Maier (2009) understand collective symbols as "cultural stereotypes" which are handed down and used collectively (Drews, 1985, as cited in: Jäger/Maier 2009: 47). These symbols are familiar to all members of a society and provide "the repertoire of images from which we construct a picture of reality for ourselves" (Ibid.: pp. 47). Sometimes there are images connected to certain statements, such as a "flood of immigrants" which symbolizes a threat from outside (Ibid.). It is safe to say that the media plays a crucial role in establishing or altering collective symbols for there audience. (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 70).

Innuendo

An innuendo is a term borrowed from linguistics and is a rhetorical figure to hint at something which is not expressed explicitly (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 25). Thus, Jäger and Zimmermann conclude that the decoding of innuendos creates a proximity between the discourse participants because it is based on common knowledge (Ibid.). This means that innuendos have an excluding or an including effect on discourse participants. In CDA, the analysis of innuendos is beneficial because it helps to grasp the linkage

between a discursive (societal) meaning and a subjective (personal) meaning (Ibid.). Furthermore, innuendos can refer to other discourse strands and thus render a discourse entanglement visible and additionally, they help to define a discourse position (Ibid.).

Presuppositions

This is another term which CDA has borrowed from the linguistics. A presupposition describes an obvious/taken-for-granted condition of speech which thus does not have to be denoted (Jäger/Zimmermann 2010: 101). Looking at presuppositions is an eternal part of a detailed analysis in CDA since it helps to understand the unsaid agreement of discourse participants about topics in a discourse (Ibid.). All in all, one can say that presuppositions explicate the discursive context as a part of a new constitution of discourses (Ibid.).

3.1.3. The Researcher: Positionality and Reflexivity

In his book the *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault states that in order to really grasp a discourse, one has to get rid of the continuities of a discourse. For example, one has to get rid of a set of terms, such as “tradition” which functions as an element to connect different people, despite place and time. To put it in his own words: “We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign” (Foucault 2010: 22) It is the same case with the classification and differentiation of different types or groups, such as the different sciences. Foucault states the example of the book, which through its material appearance seems like an object which has an economic worth and marks a determined space in itself. However, as I will refer to it later when talking about my data collection, every book has its limits and every collection of text supports a certain discourse and is the result of many foregoing choices (Ibid.: 23).

CDA is aware of this embeddedness of the researcher in multiple of discourses, therefore, an important feature of the CDA is the scholar's own positionality. Jäger thinks that even by choosing a discourse as a researcher is a critical moment. For example, when you decide that you want to work on a publicly highly debated topic, your choice can be linked to a critical stance (Jäger 2015: 151). We are trapped in different discourses ourselves (Jäger 2015: 145). Of course it is not possible to analyze these discourses as objects with an entirely empirical lense. Rather it is necessary to question the researcher's own system of knowledge production and the ways he or she perceives the world. Therefore, the researcher needs to contextualize his or her own research historically and socio-theoretically. As Jäger and Maier put it, the analyst has to understand that his or her critique is never situated outside the discourse since the categories and norms she or he uses are constructed through discourses too (Jäger/Maier 2009: 36).

Although researchers are, of course, also trapped in their discourses which shape their reality and influence their analysis, Jäger claims that there is a way to critically interpret discourses by simply appealing to morally and "human reasoning" (Jäger 2015: 153). Of course, there are many different ideas and concepts of what moral signifies in different societies all over the world, but Jäger believes that researchers of CDA are able to create models which make tolerant criticism possible (Jäger 2015: 157). I understand what Jäger is implying, but I am not as convinced by the solution of simply appealing to "human reasoning". However, I think it is important to state one's socio-cultural background and explain in which discourses one is moving and what could possibly influence one's work.

At this point, I am going to include Lazar's standpoints about the reflexivity of feminist researchers. She states, for example, that it is essential to talk about what one means specifically when talking about 'emancipation'. Since feminist researchers are often trappend in a discourse on difference feminism or liberal feminism, there is a need to discuss one's own position. As some contemporary feminist theorists have pointed out that many liberal feminist positions draw upon the liberal ideas of equality and freedom and, thus, promote questionable notions of universalism and 'sameness' (Ibid.: 153). Therefore, Lazar points out a few liberal feminist notions which have to be tackled in order to undertake a feminist CDA.⁴

⁴ Firstly, equality often means 'same as men' which already implies that men function as the yardstick. This approach is highly problematic not only because it requires women to fit in the prevailing

Despite acknowledging and criticizing the notions of liberal feminism, it is important to acknowledge one's own academic and other practices in order to avoid, how van Dijk (1994) has coined it, a form of 'academic ethnocentrism' (as cited in Ibid. 155). Lazar acknowledges that speaking as a 'woman' is not the same as speaking from the perspective of a feminist (Ibid.: 145). Speaking from a feminist point of view entails a certain critical distance on gender and on oneself (Ibid.). However, Lazar stresses that feminist critical researchers do not pretend to have a neutral stance on their research topics, but they rather make their biases part of their argument (Ibid.: 146).

Furthermore, it must not necessarily be problematic when white scholars conduct research about women from the Global South. However, if one does so from an external position without cooperating with native scholars, it could lead to scholars from the Global North making authoritative knowledge claims about communities in the South and often re-enact "historical imperialism in academic neo-imperialistic terms" (Ibid. 155). Furthermore, feminist scholars should be aware of *gender essentialism* and *cultural essentialism* concurrently. Uma Narayan (1998) has talked about the term *gender essentialism* which she identifies as the generalization of "women topics" which is mostly based on privileged women (Western, white, middle class). In order to avoid *gender essentialism*, Narayan states, many feminist researchers have fallen into the trap of *cultural essentialism* (Narayan 1998: 87). By *cultural essentialism*, she means that in order to avoid this generalization of "women-topics" many researches tend to use very rigid categories of "African women" or "Muslim women". Consequently the use of these categories not only creates a dichotomy between Western and non-Western women, but also generalize these categories by using one dominant group as a reference point (Ibid.: 88).

3.2. Power Relations, Ideologies and Gender

One of the most important categories of critical discourse analysis is power. Foucault acknowledges that discourses themselves inherit power which is manifested in certain

androcentric structure instead of completely shifting the gender order, but also because on a practical level it is not possible for women to achieve this 'equality' because of unchanged gendered social structures (Ibid. 153). Second, the proposed 'sameness' of all women which lead to the fact that middle-class Western white heterosexual women started representing the experience shared by all women universally, ignoring the differences within different women's groups all over the world (Ibid.).

rules structuring the discourse by for example defining what is “truth” and what is not (Foucault 2017: 17; 1981: 72). He also acknowledges that certain institutions and individuals have the power to tame the discourse and some even possess more power because there is certain knowledge associated with them, e.g. a doctor.

CDA incorporated these ideas on power but developed them further. CDA’s definition of power is that it is a “systemic and constitutive element/characteristic of society” (Foucault and Giddens, as cited in Wodak/Meyer 2009: 9). However, besides dealing with power as a structural feature of social life, CDA is also concerned with the notion of struggles for power and control and competing discourses in various spaces (Pühretmayer / Puller 2011, Wodak/Meyer 2009: 10). On that note, it is important to realize that discourses themselves exercise a certain power since they are “carrying” the knowledge and are therefore able to start other discourses or affect the practices of people collectively (Jäger 2015: 38).

The author and the disciplines

The main argument Foucault poses at the beginning of *Orders of discourse*, a lecture that he gave at the Collège de France on December 2 in 1970, is that in every society the production of the discourse is controlled, selected, organized and channeled by processes which are meant to suppress the “dangers of the discourse” (Foucault 2017:11). By the “dangers of the discourse”, he suggests that a discourse is by no means a transparent or neutral element but rather a place where people seize upon the power to control the discourse (Ibid.). Foucault talks about three different kinds of these processes to control the discourse: prohibition, demarcation and the will to truth.

The process of prohibition is the most obvious one and simply means that not every individual has the right to say everything and cannot talk about everybody (Ibid). With the second one it is a little trickier. When Foucault speaks about demarcation he introduces the reader to the example of the “lunatic” whose word does not count in the discourse. Foucault simply suggests that some individuals are automatically excluded from certain discourses, whereas others have more say in it (Ibid.: pp. 12). This is how he introduces the importance of the author. Foucault thinks that it does not make sense to deny the existence of individuals who invent and create discourses. However, he clearly states that the socio-cultural context of his epoch has an immediate influence on the author’s work (Ibid.: 21). Therefore, it is essential to ask the following questions: “Who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use

this sort of language (*langage*)? And who is qualified to do so?" (Foucault 2010: 50). Asking these questions lays bare how the discourse is controlled by power structures which are linked to the discourse participants engaging in it and forming it. There are certain rules which decide if individuals have the right to speak, like a doctor whose status involves criteria of competence and knowledge, or certain institutions or jurisdiction which gives a legal right (Ibid.).

The third process is the difference between truth and falseness. That is another process of exclusion, which is entangled with the latter one. Foucault states, that the idea of truth is based in an institutional net just as the other ones and which constitutes the truth of different discourses or institutions, such as the jurisdiction (Ibid.: pp. 16). However, Foucault states that the will to truth is the most powerful process (Ibid.: 17).

Besides the idea of the author, Foucault introduces the disciplines as a realm which defines certain objects or a corpus of information seen as the truth, a web of rules and definitions which is accessible to everybody. As examples, he refers to botanics or medicine. It is this "discipline" which influences the principle of the author. However, he differentiates the principle of the discipline from the principle of the comment since it is possible to create new statements in the discipline and not repeat what has been thought already (like the comment) (Foucault 2017: 22). However, he reminds the reader that the disciplines do not merely consist of true statements, they also consist of misconceptions. However, to be considered a true statement, a statement must be "in truth", as Foucault puts it (Ibid.: 24). He refers to the example of Mendel whose statement about genetic inheritance was a true statement, but was not considered true in the discipline because Mendel was not "in the truth" of the biological discourse of his time (Ibid.: 24 pp.). But how does one manage to be "in the truth" of the discourse of his or her time? Foucault states, that one can only be "in the truth" when following the set of rules of a somehow "discursive police". Therefore the discipline also controls the production of the discourse.

All in all, this proves, that power relations in the discourse relate to the person speaking, but also where the person speaks and how it affects their status.

Doctrines and Ideologies

Another element of the discourse is the *Doctrines* which differ from the *Discourse society* in the regard of the persons speaking. The individuals who form part of a doctrine tend to be fewer, however a doctrine tends to spread further. Individuals who form part of

this discourse ensemble feel a certain belonging since they acknowledge the same truths (Ibid.: p. 28 pp.). The doctrine binds the subjects to certain sets of statements and therefore prohibits them to use others. However, the relationship between a doctrine and its subjects is reciprocal. Because the doctrine itself uses typical statements of the subjects to link them with each other (Ibid.: 29). These systems, Foucault calls “subjection to the discourse” (Ibid.). He uses the example of education as a political method to adopt a certain discourse including its knowledge and power in order to sustain it or change it (Ibid.: 30).

This leads us to the term of ideology which is constituted by such doctrines and belief systems. Jäger states that from a critical discourse analytic perspective ideologies inherit a certain materiality, which emerges from preceding and current discourses (Jäger 2010: 67). Although Jäger states that CDA scholars tend to be careful with the definition of ideology, he makes clear that when ideologies form part in dominating structures they become a definite subject for critique (Ibid. 68).

Gender as an ideological structure

This brings me back to one ideological structure that I am going to focus on in my thesis: gender. I already introduced influential thoughts on gender in the second chapter of my thesis. Nevertheless, I think at this point it is necessary to come back to the topic of gender and connect it with the previously introduced concepts of CDA.

Michelle Lazar coined the term Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis in 2005 and collected concepts from CDA and gender theories and modeled them into an applicable method. Lazar describes gendered practices on two different levels: “First, gender functions as an interpretative category that enables participants in a community to make sense of and structure their particular social practices. Secondly, gender is a social relation that enters into and partially constitutes all other social relations and activities (Lazar 2007: 145). Ideologies are understood in that regard as “representations of practices formed from particular perspectives in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance” (Lazar 2007: 146). That is, because ideology is a form of knowledge. As Rätzsch (1997) argues, “people make sense of their experience by referring to given, eternal values that they argue in an ideological form” (p. 63). Gender is, from a feminist perspective, such an ideology inheriting a structure which divides men and women into two classes based on “a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination” (Ibid). In this ideological structure, men are privileged in the sense that

the structure allows them to have a 'patriarchal dividend' in terms of access to symbolic, social, political and economic capital (Connell 2005: 79). The most striking aspect of gender as an ideological structure is that the domination that comes with it, is not seen as such, it becomes naturalized and accepted in most communities (Connell 1987, Lazar 2007). Thus this patriarchal structure is enacted and renewed in social practices and institutions of a society. The female body is often subject of these practices and institutionalizations of gendered processes. Recalling Butler who argued that the body is a "materiality that bears meaning" (Butler 1988: 521), one could conclude that the body is, thus, a materialization of discourse. One realm in which the institutionalization of gendered bodies and practices is discursively acted out is, of course, the media. Research in media studies show how stereotyping is a common form of coverage because "real practices are messy and complicated, ideological representations of them squeaky-clean" (Connell 1987: 246).

One important goal for feminist CDA is to analyze the structural oppression of women in its endless variety (Ibid.: 148). Power relations are seen as a struggle over interests which are "exercised, reflected, maintained, and resisted through a variety of modalities, extents, and degrees of explicitness" (Ibid.: 148). Of course, visible forms of gender asymmetry which include physical violence against women, sexual harassment and denigration of women are still a reality for many women. At the same time, there are power structures which are not that visible and substantively discursive in nature, as I discussed extensively beforehand (Ibid.). However, from a feminist perspective, it is important to note that although these power structures are 'everywhere', they have different effects on gendered subjects (Ibid.). Lazar notes that when talking about discursive power it is necessary to complement the concept of modern power with the idea of power relations as dominance, especially in the Gramscian term of hegemony (Ibid.). Understanding that modern power and hegemony is so effective because it is grounded in an internalization of gendered norms and is acted out in texts and speech on an everyday basis (Ibid.: 148). In order to challenge these power relations, e.g. in the form of sexist representations of women in the media, FCDA's task is to "examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or (counter-) resisted in a variety of ways...". This sums up what I discussed earlier that when talking about the oppression of women, one has to make sure to acknowledge the agency of actors who are countering these predominant narratives (Ibid.).

However, when talking about power relations and gender, one has to bear in mind that the gendered social practices are not affecting all groups of women the same way. Just as Connell states that the hegemonic masculinity is mainly benefiting white heterosexual men, Butler claims the same for women when she says that systems of heterosexism combined with gender afford more privilege to heterosexual women than to lesbians (Ibid. 149). A similar hierarchy appears when looking at the 'race' category where white women enjoy more privilege than black women. Consequently, it should be noted that it is often many categories which are overlapping and, thus, creating sometimes multiple power hierarchies affecting one individual.

Feminist CDA looks at the dialectical relation between the social and the discourse and how social aspects are discursively represented in ideological ways (Ibid. 50). On a practical level, the discursive constitution of the social can be analyzed in terms of representations, relationships and identities (Ibid.: 150). The feminist take on that is to look at ways how "gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in text and talk" (Lazar 2007: 150). These practices become especially visible when looking at the media. R.W. Connell (1987) describes gendered representations in the media as follows: "real practices are messy and complicated, ideological representations of them squeaky-clean" (p. 246). Furthermore, Karen Ross (2010) looked at media coverage with regards to gender and she states:

"News frames constitute highly orchestrated ways of making sense of social (including gendered) relations which encourage a commitment to share a particular interpretation of and ways of seeing the world which are entirely partial and preserve the male ordered status quo. News media and in particular television, with its huge audience share, are arguably the primary definers and shapers of the news agenda and perform a crucial cultural function in their gendered framing of public issues and in the gendered discourse they persistently promote" (Ross 2010: 93).

In order to analyze these highly gendered presentations, one can pay attention to *gender relationality*. This principle of analysis entails a focus on two kinds of relationships: The first one is on discursive co-constructions of ways of doing and being a woman and a man in particular communities of practice (Ibid.). The second focus is on the dynamics between forms of masculinity, "specifically, in terms of how these participate within hierarchies of oppression that affect women" (Ibid.).

When discussing the hegemonic gender ideology it is necessary to remember that although it appears to be permanent and widely accepted in society, it *is* contestable. Since the structure is perpetuated by individuals through social practices, there are ruptures in this ideology. Carol Bacchi (2005) therefore notes that many feminist theorists intent to preserve “room for subjects to move within the constraints imposed by the hegemonic discourses” (p. 201). However, this is a complicated undertaking because one has to go beyond the discourse, leaving aside the separation of consciousness the local historical activities of people’s everyday lives, as Smith argues. Therefore, she calls on researchers concerned with discourses to incorporate “the locally organized practices of actual people” (Smith 1999:98). Bacchi studied some discourse analysis in order to see how feminist researchers use the term discourse and she found out that while some theorists try to incorporate the social practices of “actual people” there is also a tendency for theorists to get caught in a binary structure while analyzing a discourse. Bacchi argues that many researches use “a Foucauldian perspective when reflecting on the ‘common people’ and a more Marxian perspective when considering the actions of elites” (Bacchi 2005: 206). This leads to the fact that the theorists are somehow denying the “common people” the agency because they assume that since they are constituted within the discourse, these people lack power to challenge the dominant meanings (Ibid). Furthermore, this leads to the general understanding that the elites are located outside the meanings of the discourse and thus have the power to “marshal and deploy discourses for instrumental purposes, to advance their own interests” (Ibid.). Saida Abbas shares the a similar on agency view when she states that many theorists use the term as an interchangeable name for resistance or domination. She therefore defines agency as “the capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (Abbas 2014: 61). Furthermore, Abbas, who mainly researches the discussion on the agency of Muslim women, stresses the contextualization of the concept and sees agency as a concept through which the construction and performance of gender norms can be questioned.

4. Case Study: Kurdish Women in US-American Media

The discourse I am going to analyze revolves around the object of Kurdish women. As I discussed before, there has to be a specific historical condition for people to say

anything about objects and, additionally, they need to exist in relation to other objects. Kurdish women were not a widely discussed topic in the US media until the emergence of ISIS. As one can see in Google Trends, it was only until 2014 that US media outlets started covering the Kurdish women more extensively (Google Trends 2018). Therefore, I argue that in order for Kurdish women to be talked about in US American media, there needed to be a discursive relation established to the object of ISIS and the US American involvement in Syria and Iraq. I chose the media discourse level because it reflects normative practices and at the same time (re)creates them.

It is not only gendered representations that I will be looking at, but also orientalist stereotypes. The objects of the discourse that I will be looking at are “Kurdish women”. As I explained beforehand, with the help of Narayan, this category would be problematic if one assumes that “Kurdish women” is a homogenous group of women. However, since I am dealing exclusively with discursive practices, I choose the term “Kurdish women” in order to see how this category is constructed within the discourse and if there is a dominant group represented constituting the category.

In order to conduct my research, I am going to use the framework Jäger proposed for conducting a CDA as a point of departure. Therefore, I am going to explain first how I assembled my dataset, then I am going to conduct a structural analysis in order to define discursive events and discourse strands, as well as associated topics and subtopics, and finally the discourse positions of the newspapers. Afterward, I am going to choose two articles which are “typical” for a certain style and argumentation in the media discourse. The gender theories, which I introduced in my theory chapter, will especially guide this detailed analysis where I am going to look in depth at the representations of Kurdish women and how they are related to other objects of the discourse.

4.1. Assembling my Archive

As I said earlier, conducting a CDA involves a lot of decision-making. This is especially the case when assembling the corpus for the analysis, or as Foucault calls it: the archive.

First of all, I decided to focus on US-American newspapers because I was curious if and how the discourse on Kurdish women might relate to the very prominent US-American discourse on the ‘War on Terror’ and because the US was one of the more prominent Western allies of the Kurds in the war against ISIS. Most researchers

conducting discourse analysis on the media level, base their studies on daily print newspaper article because it is a very tangible and source of discourse fragments. I decided against this approach because I think that the media discourse has changed due to the increased mass communication possibilities and needs to be assessed accordingly. There are more media channels available now than ever before. People retrieve their daily news from various sources such as social media, blogs, YouTube, TV and printed newspapers, just to name a few. This opens up possibilities for people to engage in the public sphere, whose voices have not been heard before, but at the same time, the media landscape becomes more fragmented due to the abundance of information (Castells 2009: 368).

Especially newspapers which form an essential part of the US American news landscape have been hard hit by this change since more and more US Americans consume news digitally (Pew Research Center 2017). As the PEW Research Center states in their annual report on Media Consumption in the US: „In the U.S., roughly nine-in-ten adults (93%) ever get news online (either via mobile or desktop), and the online space has become a host for the digital homes of both legacy news outlets and new ‘born on the web’ news outlets“ (Pew Research Center 2017).

These developments in the US American media landscape have to be taken into account when analyzing a discourse on the media level. By simply examining the discourse within a couple of print newspapers, I would exclude a significant part of the discourse which is located online and which is crucial in shaping American public opinion. Moreover, I would not be able to gather enough data since Kurdish women have not been a very prominent topic in the print media, as a first glimpse at the data showed. Consequently, I need to take online news outlets into account too. But where to draw the line? Every legacy news outlet which originates in broadcasting, TV or print, has an online presence now which adds to the news outlets which have been “born on the web” (Ibid.). Additionally, Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) serve as a news platform, too. Here, news consumers can engage in public debates by commenting or sharing information. Furthermore, former print-only newspapers are producing their own videos and podcasts online too. Thus, the not only the lines between the producers of news but also the lines between the different modes of media are blurry.

However, since my question aims at analyzing the discourse in the media realm and not the public one, I decided not to look at Social Media content. Instead, I am going to focus on the most prominent legacy news outlets and the articles they publish online.

This way, I have more data and I am not excluding the online presence of the discourse which reaches most of the news-consuming audience.

After agreeing on using online articles, I decided to use the news outlets with the largest circulations in print: USA Today, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, New York Post, Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post (Cision Staff 2014). All these print newspapers have online presences too. Since the majority of print articles can be found online as well, I decided to depart from the online web pages to constitute my archive. I added the Huffington Post as the only non-print media outlet since it is among the most-read online news outlets (The Economist 2012).

In order to search for the articles published, I experimented with the search words. First, I only used the search words “Kurdish women”. I did so because in the beginning I was specifically interested in which “types” of Kurdish women were represented in the discourse. However, after a first glimpse at the data, my expectation proved to be right. It was almost only female fighters that were featured in these articles about Kurdish women. I consequently added “Kurdish female fighters” to my search words in order to collect more articles for my data selection. Additionally, I deliberately chose to not search specifically for Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian or Turkish Kurds in order to see if the news outlets were carving out the differences among the Kurdish groups themselves. Furthermore, I did also take articles into account which not specifically covered Kurdish women as a single subject, but sometimes just mentioned them in a side note. In that way, I can see how the topic of Kurdish women is interwoven in the story that the authors are telling in the articles.

Newspaper	Number of articles	Political Stance
New York Times	8	Left
Huffington Post	9	Left
Washington Post	6	Left-center
Los Angeles Times	5	Left
Wall Street Journal	4	Right-center
Chicago Tribune	2	Right-center
New York Post	2	Right-center
USA Today	1	Left-center

Table 1: Analysed newspapers, number of articles and political stance (Media Bias Fact Check 2018)

The time frame I used starts at the beginning of 2013, when the first all-female militias were founded in Iraq and Syria to defend their area against ISIS, and ends in the beginning of 2018, since there was another peak in the news coverage in the aftermath of ISIS, when 98% of the territory was recaptured (BBC News 2018). In total, I analyzed 38 articles from eight different media outlets for the structure analysis (See Table 1).

4.2. Structural Analysis

In a first step, I am going to analyze the body of discourse fragments. I ask for the author, the place, the graphic designs or the vocabulary of the articles in order to get an overview on the discourse. Furthermore, I search for topics and subtopics which are present in the discourse fragments in order to get an idea of which topics are used more frequently and how they are combined with others.⁵ Afterwards, I am going to define different discourse strands and group the topics and subtopics within the discourse strands. Additionally, I will look at the different arguments in the articles, in order to define a certain discourse position for each newspaper. Since the structural analysis is not only essential to sketch an outline of the whole discourse but also to make a pre-selection for the detailed analysis, I am also going to include noticeable vocabulary and use of collective symbol.

The following questions guided my analysis:

- What discursive events are mentioned? Are they influencing the course of the discourse?
- What discourse strands can be conducted? How they can be defined? How are they entangled?
- Which topics and subtopics are mentioned? How frequently are they mentioned? Can they be associated with certain discourse strands? Are there any correlations with discursive events? Are there topics that remain absent?
- How can the discourse position be defined? What collective symbols and vocabulary support the discourse position?

⁵ For the more detailed findings of the structure analysis, see Annex.

4.3. Discourse Positions

In the following chapter, I am going to look at the discourse position of each newspaper or online newspaper. As I explained beforehand, the discourse position is an analytical category which marks the space from where individuals or groups participate in or assess the discourse. It can, furthermore, be described as a political-ideological point of view (Jäger 2015: 85).

With regard to media outlets, one question that I pose to the material is: Which characteristics are typical for the newspaper? Meaning, that I look if there are certain patterns in the argumentations or if there are topics and subtopics or discursive events that appear frequently. Additionally, I am also going to look at collective symbols and if there is a characteristic use of them, as well as of representative vocabulary.

Furthermore, I will turn my attention to the topics which are *not* mentioned and therefore conspicuous by their absence. Also, I am going to count the citations of Kurdish women to see how this might influence the coverage or provide a possibility for a counter discourse position.

4.3.1. The New York Times

The New York Times was first published in 1851 and is one of the world's biggest newspapers (Britannica 2018c). They describe themselves as the "most powerful engine for independent, boots-on-the-ground, deeply reported journalism" (The New York Times Company 2018). Furthermore, they state that they "serve the global community" and that their employees and writers bring "different perspectives and practices" to the Times (Ibid.). Media Bias Fact Check attests to the NY Times progressive perspectives and a left-center bias meaning that reporters often use a wording that attempts to influence the audience to favor liberal causes (Media Bias Fact Check 2018e).

Most of the eight articles, which I analyzed, were published in the Middle East or the Op-Ed category. Op-Ed is a category where opinions from different writers are published (Political activists or scholars). However, most of the writers of the eight articles I analyzed were journalists, with the exception of one political activist. The same author wrote three of the articles: Rod Nordland, a Kabul-based correspondent. Only two of the six authors were women. Contentwise I counted the most variety of topics

and subtopics in the New York Times articles which speaks for a plurality of different aspects and perspectives in the coverage.

Concerning Kurdish women in combat, it is highlighted in five of eight articles that women fight alongside men. The female fighters are referred to as independent, female commanders” (Nordland 2018a) or as “female warrior” (Tax 2016) or “radical Kurdish female guerillas” (Tax 2016). Furthermore, there is one author who pays attention to the women’s looks more than others and describes fighters wearing “pink socks” or decorating their house with a “pink teddy bear” (Enzinna 2015). However, I am going to take a closer look at that in the detailed analysis. One author describes the fact that Kurdish women are taking up arms as a counter-image to the common victimization of women during war.

There is a clear focus on female fighters in the reporting. Nevertheless, there are four authors mentioning Kurdish female leadership not only on a military but also on a political level, in co-governance.

Despite celebrating the Kurdish women for fighting misogynist ISIS, there is also awareness for the patriarchy in Kurdish societies themselves, which is mentioned by three of the authors. Only one author describes the “Muslim Arab traditionalism” which Kurdish women face (Nordland 2018c). He talks about polygamy and sharia law and describes the men having trouble with the egalitarian idea as they are “overwhelmingly Arab, conservative and tribal” (Ibid.).

Most of the authors talk about the Kurds as a US ally (5). Generally, the Kurds are talked about very positively, most authors especially highlight the co-governance (4) and Kurdish secularism (3). However, they also shed light on the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds (5). Only one author thinks that the Kurds could be seen as a controversial ally because of the fact that the PKK is a listed terror organization in the USA (Nordland 2018a). Other than that, the Kurds are celebrated as the “only reasonable allies” (Aydintasbas 2014) or the “most effective ally” (Callimachi 2015). Nevertheless, there is a prevalent skepticism concerning Öcalan (4). Some authors talk about an Öcalan “cult” and call his theories “pretty dreamy stuff” (Enzinna 2015).

In general, the Kurds are presented as secular and democratic, but not undisputed. However, there is a connection made between Kurdish and US-American values. For example when Tax (2016) calls upon the USA’s values of “gender equality,

democracy and pluralism” which she also identifies in the Kurdish project, or when Aydintasbas (2014) proudly uses the word “our democracy” and Nordland calls the US the “American help” (Nordland 2018b).

ISIS is only dominant in the description when its violence is presented, especially the violence against women (3). Tax talks about “sex slaves” (Tax 2016) and Nordland uses strong verbs like “beating and abusing” when describing ISIS (Nordland 2018 c).

All in all, I would say that the Kurds are mainly celebrated by the New York Times. There are some more critical voices, but they never doubt the fact that the Kurds are the best possible US ally in the Middle East. The common sense is rather: they might be dreamy and not perfect, but still the best we have in the “illiberal” Middle East. Furthermore, they mention some of the key ideas of the Kurdish movement in Rojava, such as female leadership and democratic confederalism. But although some broach the topic of Kurdish women and their aspirations and ideas, there is not so much about their reasons to fight or their ideas behind the conflict or the Kurdish movement. Another topic which is not as visible is the fact that most of the Kurds are Muslims, it has been mentioned only once, while Kurdish secularism has been stressed more frequently.

4.3.2. The Huffington Post

The Huffington Post is an online newspaper which was founded in 2005 (Britannica 2018a). It features articles from different authors and has an opinion rubric, which features texts from “experts”, often scholars. Furthermore, they state that they believe in diversity and therefore in including a “diverse range of voices” in their reporting (Huffington Post 2018). The newspaper is generally known for its more left bias (Media Bias Fact Check 2018b). Regarding the nine articles which I analyzed, I must say that the perspectives on the discourse are diverse. Five of them were comments in the “blog” section of the newspaper. Various different authors contributed, among them scholars or teachers of Kurdish origin.

I found out that the main rhetoric was to portray the Kurdish women as brave heroes fighting misogynist ISIS. Nevertheless, only four of the authors of them drew the

connection to the USA's role in the Middle East. Two mentioned the history that the US and the Kurds share. Also two authors call on the USA to support the Kurds in order to bring democracy to the Middle East. In doing so they describe the Kurds as a "beacon of freedom, harmony, peaceful co-existence and democracy" (Karadaghi 2014) or "the beacon of democracy" (Hossain 2014). Another author describes the Kurdish women as "America's greatest ally" possible for the US because of the fact that they are fighting against ISIS, which is an enemy of women's rights (Hossain 2014).

Subtopics that were most frequently mentioned were: Gender equality in Kurdish institutions (3) and Kurdish secularism (2). However, one cannot claim that the Kurds have been portrayed as simply "feminist" since the subtopic "patriarchy in Kurdish societies" was mentioned three times in the data. One author points out that Kurdistan is one of the "few Muslim countries" where women are allowed to fight in the military (Hossain 2014). That is interesting because Kurdistan is legally speaking not a country and it, furthermore, indicates that "Kurdistan" differs from the rest of the Middle East in terms of gender equality.

As the most frequent subtopics it was mentioned that women fight "alongside men" and women fight "like men". Furthermore, three of the authors describe Kurdish female fighters as "fearless". A term which was often used to describe Kurdish women is "hero". Furthermore, the Kurdish female fighter Asia Ramazan Antar was mentioned in two articles, who has been dubbed the "Kurdish Angelina Jolie" in various news articles because of her resemblance with the Hollywood Star (Olmert 2016, Nelson 2016). I defined Angelina Jolie as a collective symbol because she has been described as a sex symbol several times in the media, and I would argue that most US Americans associate this reputation with her persona. Another author describes the Kurdish women as showing "both willingness and capacity to fight as soldiers" (Séenz 2016). Although it ascribes positive characteristics to the Kurdish women, I think this statement shows how exotic women in the military still are and therefore it has to be pointed out that they have the capacity to be soldiers.

Most interestingly, some authors have a more thorough position when it comes to the complexities of the reasons why Kurdish women join the fight. Two authors mention that fighting is a tool for some women to liberate them from a patriarchal society and others mention that Kurdish female fighters fight for women's rights in general (3).

In terms of the enemy that Kurdish women are fighting, ISIS brutality was mentioned three times, as well as “Muslim Arab traditionalism” was mentioned two times.

I would argue that after assessing all these different topic, subtopics, symbols, vocabulary and the arguments made by the authors, the general discourse position of the Huffington Post is a little bit more aware of the complexity of the topic, but still champions the Kurdish female fighters as feminist superheroes who they see as the bearers of the Kurdish ideology which embodies gender equality and women’s rights. There seems to be a general tendency in the Huffington Post articles to talk about the Kurds as very progressive US allies in the Middle East and then mention the Kurdish female fighters who are fighting misogynist ISIS. Furthermore, many of the authors call upon the US to further support the Kurds. Some articles also link the Kurds to a certain degree of secularism and juxtapose it with a traditionalism which mostly springs from Islam. However, although the main narratives can be identified in the discourse position of the Huffington Post, there are of course some authors which state the complexity of the Kurdish women’s involvement in the Syrian war and mention that for many Kurdish women the military is a way to escape from a restricted patriarchal society.

All in all, one can see here the entanglement of the three discourses (Kurdish discourse, gender discourse and ‘War on Terror’ discourse) and how it helps justifying the military role of the USA and the support of the Kurds. Furthermore, it can be said that there is a juxtaposition of secularism and religion, aswell as that the women are seen as bearers of progress in terms of gender equality.

4.3.3. The Washington Post

The Washington Post was published in 1877 in Washington D.C., first a four-page organ of the Democratic Party and then as a daily newspaper (Britannica 2018d). The paper describes its work as follows: “Diversity is at the core of Washington Post journalism. Accurately reporting stories from the United States and around the world means engaging a variety of voices as interviewees and first-person writers, striving for a staff that reflects a range of backgrounds and life experiences, and seeking feedback from all

who would give it" (The Washington Post Staff 2016). Media Bias Fact Check affirms a left-center bias (Media Bias Fact Check 2018h). Pew center research states that the paper is more trusted by liberal readers than conservatives. Nevertheless, in 2016 it published an anti-Bernie Sanders editorial and supported candidate Clinton (Media Bias Fact Check 2018h). Out of the six articles in total, two are written by the same female writer (Amy Austin Holmes) and three are written by the same editor (Ishaan Tharoor). The category in which the pieces were published differ a little bit: Three were published in World Views (foreign news), one in Checkpoint (a military blog) and two in Monkey Cage (political scientists category). With the exception of Amy Austin Holmes, a sociologist, all of the authors are professional journalists.

The most frequent subtopics mentioned in the gender spectrum were concerned about the motivation of the female fighters and the status of them in the military: Two authors mention that the Kurdish women fight for women's rights (2) and two mention that the fight alongside men (2). However, one also talks about the Kurdish women being treated as equals to men in the military, which is manifested in his description "dressed like their male counterparts" (Tharoor 2014c). The Kurdish women are often described as "fearless" and "tough", which is manifested in descriptions like this "she laughed in the face of death" (Horton 2017). Furthermore, one author acknowledges the patriarchy Kurdish women are facing in their own societies and this might go hand in hand with the motivation to fight is to free themselves from societal restrictions. One of Amy Austin Holmes' pieces stands out because it highlights the aspirations of the women very well and also sheds some light on the topic of the marginalization of women in the Kurdish movement. However, this thorough analysis can be explained by the fact that Holmes draws from her own research on Kurdish women.

The Washington Post's perspective is, in general, a rather positive one. However, there are many topics that the WP authors touch on but they seem not to limit their fascination with the Kurds in general. Although four authors describe the Kurds as a controversial ally, three of them also hint at the idea that they might be a controversial ally because of their links to the PKK (2). Furthermore, five articles talk about the fact that the PKK is a listed terror organization in the USA and describe their violence including "car-bombings, hostage-taking, night-time raids and executions" (Tharoor 2014b) Nevertheless, some authors bring up the discussion about the PKK getting de-

listed. Four authors speak about the general conflict between Turkey and the Kurds. However, four stress Kurdish secularism and only one talks about the Kurds being Muslims.

The Kurds are generally described very positively. Tharoor (2014c) for example calls them “forces for good”, but in another article, he describes them as a “Marxist-leninist guerilla” (Tharoor 2014a). In a third article, Tharoor praises them for their “anti-fundamentalist worldview” (Tharoor 2014b). Furthermore, Öcalan’s theory of democratic confederalism⁶ is mentioned frequently, along with his ideas on multi-ethnicism.

There is also a focus on the role of the USA. It is mentioned in two articles that the US forces supported the Kurds with airstrikes and furthermore Tharoor (2014c) describes the USA as the “liberal, democratic West” (Tharoor 2014c).

ISIS, on the other hand, is described as very brutal, “carrying out random slaughter, including beheadings” (Tharoor 2014a). The brutality is specified as violence against women (1). Ideologically, ISIS members are often described as “extremists” (Tharoor 2014b) or “jihadists” (Ibid). Only one author mentions that ISIS is against secularism (Tharoor 2014a).

All in all, I would say that the Washington Post is very in favor of the Kurds as US allies and appeal to the US to de-list the PKK as a terror-organization. Although the newspaper highlights the violent history of the PKK in Turkey, it still seems as if the current narrative of the Kurds which fits into the liberal democratic worldview of the West weighs more. They celebrate them for their anti-fundamentalist worldview and most importantly for their gender equality. Although the participation of women in the fight against ISIS is widely celebrated, there is one article which stands out and gives a more complex perspective of women in the Kurdish militias.

⁶ Democratic confederalism is a theory coined by Abdullah Öcalan. It is inspired by Murray Bookchin and believes in a democratic system without a state. Furthermore, Öcalan describes democratic confederalism as open towards different political groups: „It is flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented“ (Öcalan 2015: 21). Feminism and ecology are often named as central pillars of this concept.

4.3.4. The Los Angeles Times

The Los Angeles Times was first published in 1881 and is the fourth most widely circulated newspaper in the US (Misachi 2017). It has a 1.4. million readerships weekly and a 39 million LAtimes.com visitors monthly (Los Angeles Times 2018). Media Bias Fact Check attests LA Times a left-center bias (Media Bias Fact Check 2018c). The editors of the articles which I looked at were mainly men with one exception. All of them are journalists, some of them are special correspondences based in the Middle East.

There are not many subtopics that appear frequently in the articles concerning the gender discourse. Concerning the position of Kurdish women in the military, it is said that they are treated the same as men and that they are fighting alongside men. Furthermore, reasons why the female fighters are taking up arms, are mentioned as follows: to fight for the Kurds and to fight for women's rights. However, there is most certainly one article which stands out: One author looked at the reactions when H&M launched a new jumpsuit which resembled the military cloth of the Kurdish female fighters and stated that the Kurdish female voices are underrepresented in the Western media (Bulos 2014).

Although, topics were not very frequently talked about in the articles, in four articles I could identify the veil as a commonly understood collective symbol. Vocabulary which I found striking was, that when talked about the Kurdish women, it was mentioned that they were "not required to wear the veil" (Zavis 2018). Therefore, here veiling is applied to a very ideological meaning. I would argue that the veil in a Western context is mostly understood as a symbol for the suppression of Muslim women. Thus in this case "not required to wear the veil" would set the Kurds apart from Western imaginations of the Middle East and therefore makes them appear more liberal and secular.

Apart from the veil, the female fighter's height was often mentioned: "petite" (LA Times staff writer 2014) or "a commander barely 5 feet tall" (LA Times staff writer 2014). Talking about vocabulary, one author called the work of a group of Kurdish women in Northern Syria "feminism, Syria-style".

However, although it is mainly mentioned that the Kurdish women fight against misogynist ISIS, one author describes women in Northern Syria fighting against “Muslim Arab traditionalism” which is described as “deeply conservative”.

Three of the six authors mention that the Kurds are US allies. However, they seem to find different legitimations for the USA’s choice to support the Kurds. Two authors state that the Kurdish forces are the most effective ones and leading the war against ISIS, whereas two emphasize Kurdish secularism and their democratic aspirations by mentioning the theory of democratic confederalism. When the authors talk about the Kurds in general, they emphasize that they are “Muslim, but secular” (LA Times Staff Writer 2014) or “secular Syrian Kurdish militia men” (Johnson 2014) or even “staunchly secular” (Johnson 2014). Therefore, as Johnson (2014) states the Kurds provide an ideological counter to ISIS. Only one author (LA Times staff writer 2014) admits that the Kurds could be seen as a controversial ally due to their conflict with Turkey and the fact that Turkey is a NATO member, and additionally the fact that PKK is listed as a terror organization.

All in all, I would say that the LA Times supports the argument of the Kurds being “good Muslims” and, therefore, automatically good allies for the US, because (1) they are leading the war against terrible ISIS, (2) they are more secular, (3) they are feminist. One can see in this argumentation that the Kurdish women are again only used in order to justify the US support for the Syrian Kurds. However, the fact that the PKK is still an US-designated terror organization and that the Syrian Kurds (who have links to the PKK) are, therefore, a rather controversial U.S. ally, has only been mentioned in one text (LA Times Staff Writer 2014).

4.3.5. The Wall Street Journal

The Wall Street Journal is a daily newspaper, which was first published in 1889. The paper describes itself as a “critical resource of curated content in print, online and mobile apps” (Wall Street Journal 2000). The Media Bias Fact Check states that the WSJ has a right-center bias or a moderately conservative bias which motivates people for

more conservative causes (The Media Bias Fact Check 2018g). I analyzed four articles from six different authors who sometimes paired as co-authors. Three of them were women and all of them were journalists. All of the articles were published in the Middle East category of the website.

The most mentioned subtopic was that “Kurdish women are treated same as men” (2). Other than that the subtopics concerning the gender discourse were rather diverse and only mentioned in one article, such as “Kurdish women fight like men” or “Kurdish women fight alongside men”. Concerning the reasons why Kurdish women fight, there was only one author who mentioned that they fight to defend the Kurds (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). Furthermore, two authors talked about the family support Kurdish female fighters receive. However, Bradley and Parkinson break with that notion of family support when they write that their protagonist says that female fighters have to abandon every emotional attachment to focus on the fight (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). Another issue, which other media outlets mentioned quite frequently was the Arab Muslim traditionalism as an obstacle for Kurdish women’s egalitarian aspirations, which was only mentioned once in the WSJ and described further as a “mid east attitude” (Albayrak/Coker 2014). At the same time, the existence of patriarchy in Kurdish societies was mentioned by two authors. Bradley and Parkinson illustrate this topic by describing their Kurdish protagonist as “pressured to marry a man, she’d never met” (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). There are not as many descriptions of the women themselves, only Bradley and Parkinson describe their protagonist as a “battle-hardened guerilla” in order to emphasize her toughness (Ibid.).

The perspective on the Kurds is rather skeptical. Although three of the authors mention that they are US allies, many of them shed light on more controversial issues. Two of them mention the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds and even one of them draws the connection to the fact that Turkey is a US ally as well (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). Three authors touch on the topic of the PKK being a listed terror organization and two mention the cooperation of PKK and PYD. Furthermore, Öcalan is mentioned three times but other than in previous newspapers, the tone is very condescending. One can see how critical most of the writers are of the socialist theories and the strong Kurdish nationalism (3) calling their aspirations “utopian goals” (Bradley/Parkinson 2015) or “militant Kurdish beliefs” (Abdulrahim 2018). In relation to the Middle East, Albayrak

and Coker describe the Kurds as “relatively progressive” (Albayrak/Coker 2014). However, especially Bradley and Parkinson are expressing an uneasiness with the structure of the Kurdish group and their socialist ideas when they describe them as “a cultlike Marxist inspired group” and a “terror-listed Maoist-inspired militias” (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). I identified terrorism as a collective symbol, which is most interestingly more often used in association with the PKK than with ISIS. Kurdish secularism has only been mentioned once, but at the same time, it is also said that Kurds are Muslims too. The more dominant focus seems to be on the warfare efficiency of the Kurds, than on their ideology.

All in all, I would say that the WSJ, in fact, has a more conservative, right-center discourse position. First of all, three articles focus on family issues, which has not been mentioned as extensively in other newspapers before (except for the more conservative New York Post). I identified the mother as a collective symbol since in two articles they were mentioned as worrying and caring for their fighting children. Furthermore, although the Kurdish female fighters are described as “defying Mideast attitudes and altering Kurdish society”, there is a general mistrust in the Kurds themselves (Albayrak/Coker 2014). This especially becomes apparent in the very condescending tone which runs like a common thread through the WSJ coverage. Therefore, I would say that the WSJ supports the idea of having the Kurds as US allies but not because they are celebrating them for their ideas and aspirations, but for their effectiveness in warfare and their “relative” progressiveness in regards of gender equality compared to the rest of the Middle East. However, they are also highly critical of the links to the PKK and the fact that the Kurds are sending teenagers to war.

4.3.6. Chicago Tribune

Chicago Tribune was first published in 1847 and is a daily newspaper based in Chicago, Illinois. It is the 8th largest paper in the US and has a right-center bias (Media Fact Check 2018a). In a statement of principles the paper has stated that it believes in the “traditional principles of limited government; maximum individual responsibility; minimum restriction of personal liberty, opportunity and enterprise” (Chicago Tribune 2016). The principles clearly indicate the very traditional standpoint of the paper. But

further, they state that the paper “embraces the diversity of people and perspectives in its communities” (Ibid.). The authors of the two articles I reviews are Bassem Mroue, a Mideast correspondent, and Haidar Khezri who is a Kurdish scholar. Both articles were posted under the “Nation & World” rubric.

Since I only found two articles suitable for my analysis, one could argue that the topic of Kurdish women has not been covered as extensively in the Chicago Tribune. As for the presence of female voices in the texts it is to say that in Mroue’s Text, there is one woman cited whereas in Khezri’s there is none.

In regard of discursive events, one article talks about the battle of Raqqa whereas one mentions the attacks on the Kurdish city Afrin. Mroue’s (2017) text talks about the Kurdish female fighters only in the beginning of his text and then continues by talking about the military success of the alliance (SDF and US). Khezri on the other side, talks exclusively about the Kurds, especially the Kurdish women and their struggles in the past and present. Both authors state the fact that the Kurds are a US ally. One talks about the cruelty of ISIS and emphasizes it by talking about the sexual slavery which has been associated with ISIS. Khezri (2018) gives a rather balanced account on the history of the Kurds and current situation of Kurdish women. He talks about their struggles against ISIS as well as in their own communities and comments critically on their representation in the media. Regarding the vocabulary used he calls the Kurds “exceptions” in the Middle East since they are the “most feminist”. Interestingly both authors refer to the covering of women, one talks about a headscarf and one about an “all-encompassing veil” which I see as a collective symbol here signaling the oppression of women.

To put it in a nutshell, I acknowledge the fact that both authors are from the Middle Eastern region and seem to be experts in their fields. The discourse position of the Chicago Tribune is not as homogenous. Whereas Mroue “uses” the Kurdish women in order to speak about the great war victories of the alliance of the Kurds and the US, Khezri gives one of the most in depth analyses of the situation of the Kurdish women in this corpus. He connects past and present and gives examples of inequalities in Kurdish communities. However, one has to take into account that he is an academic scholar and thus his opinion is more outside of the general discourse position. Therefore, I do not feel confident to make a general claim about the discourse position of the Chicago Tribune.

4.3.7. The New York Post

The New York Post is the fourth largest daily newspaper in the USA and was founded 1801 (Mcintyre 2017). Media Bias Fact Check attests to the New York Post a right-center bias (Media Bias Fact Check 2018d). They also use articles from Associated Press (press agency). I cannot say that much about the authors because it is only two, one is called Chris Perez (an US-American author) and the other article is written by an unnamed Associated Press author.

The topic has not been discussed in the NY Post that widely. Therefore, it is hard to define a general discourse position for this media outlet. However, in both of the articles, there is an emphasis on family.

One article describes the struggle of female fighters battling Kobane and portrays one woman who fights with her father and has a strong family support (Associated Press 2014). In the other one, the author describes the nameless women he portrays as “mothers, sisters, daughters” or even “soldier moms” and says about one woman: “even pregnancy can’t stand in her way” (Perez 2014). The same author mentions the motivation of the Kurdish women he portrays and says it is to protect the Kurds (Perez 2014), whereas the other author says that Kurdish female fighters are fighting to free themselves from cultural constraints (Associated Press 2014). Collective symbols that I would define as crucial here are motherhood and family. First and foremost, describing the Kurdish women as mothers sends the message of caring and strong women who are fighting for their family’s safety.

Furthermore, both authors describe the Kurdish female fighters as “fearless” and both mention the role of the US. Whereas one (Perez 2014) only mentions the US with regard to the invasion of Iraq, the other one (Associated Press 2014) talks about the numerous US airstrikes which support the Kurds in their battle in Kobane. Their enemy ISIS is described as a misogynist “self-styled caliphate”.

So generally speaking, I would say that the discourse position of the NY Post is more conservative because Kurdish women are first and foremost identified as fighting mothers or daughters. However, they are still used in order to justify the US alliance with the Kurds.

4.3.8. USA Today

The USA today is a national daily “general-interest” newspaper which was launched in 1982. It has the highest circulation in the US and is known especially for its feature that set it apart from other daily newspapers: “colourful graphics, very brief stories and a concentration on sports and celebrity” (Britannica 2018e). Media Bias Fact Check attests USA today a left-center bias. Furthermore, it states that USA Today has never taken any position in a US presidential election until 2016 when they broke that tradition by urging the readers not to vote for Donald Trump (Media Bias Fact Check 2018f). Since I only found one article which mentioned Kurdish women, it seems to me that the topic was not as big in the USA Today but I still wanted to include it since USA Today is such an important paper in the US.

However, judging from this one news article by Richard Hall (2014) I would say that the USA Today sees the Kurds as very progressive regarding gender equality. They use the fact that Kurdish women fight against misogynist ISIS as proof for this argument.

One of the major topics Hall touches on is gender equality by stating that Kurdish female fighters are fighting for women’s rights in general. Regarding the topics of the Kurds, he mentions that Kurds are leading the war against ISIS and he furthermore talks about the cooperation of Iraqi and Syrian Kurds. Hall states that the Kurds have “a leading role” and that they share a “progressive view on gender equality”.

ISIS on the other hand is presented as being very cruel, especially because of their violence against women. This is emphasized by the mentioning of the enslavement of women (Hall 2014).

Considering this one article I would describe the discourse position as very in favor of the Kurds. There is only one controversy mentioned surrounding the terror listing of the PKK. Other than that the coverage is very positive and especially stressing the unity of the Syrian, Turkish and Iraqi Kurds. Considering previous articles which I analyzed, I found it very striking that the US support of the Kurds has not been mentioned at any points.

4.4. Findings: Narratives, Discourse Strands and Discursive Events

All in all, the media discourse on Kurdish women is a rather homogenous one. With regard to the date, I noticed that most of the articles (15) were published in 2014 and also seven in 2015. This relates to the discourse event which I defined as “The Mount Sinjar Offensive” and which took place from August til December 2014. This event is mentioned in many articles because Kurdish militias from Iraq and Syria built a humanitarian corridor in order to save thousands of Yazidis who were trapped on Mount Sinjar and threatened by an ISIS genocide. This event lead to a US military intervention on August 8 because the US decided to support the Kurdish offensive with air strikes (Borger et al. 2014). It is important to note that Kurdish all-female militias formed part of this military offensive. Another event which was mentioned a few times is the “Siege of Kobane” which took place from September 2014 until January 2015. It was mentioned in several news outlets that the Kurds are defending the city Kobane against ISIS in Northern Syria. Although both events are talked about frequently I noticed that both events did not shape the discourse *per se* but made it possible “say anything” about Kurdish women, as Foucault would say it. Meaning, the event generated attention and many journalists started paying attention to the Kurdish movement, especially the women. This is especially the case with regard to the Sinjar Offensive, when female militias were part of the rescue of thousands of Yazidis trapped on a mountain, is mentioned frequently in relation with the female fighters.

After grouping the topics and subtopics mentioned in the discourse fragments, I defined three different discourse strands: a discourse on women in the Middle East, a ‘War on Terror’ discourse and a discourse on the Kurds in general. All these three discourse strands are entangled and produce certain discursive effects and furthermore constitute the representation of Kurdish women (See Figure 1).

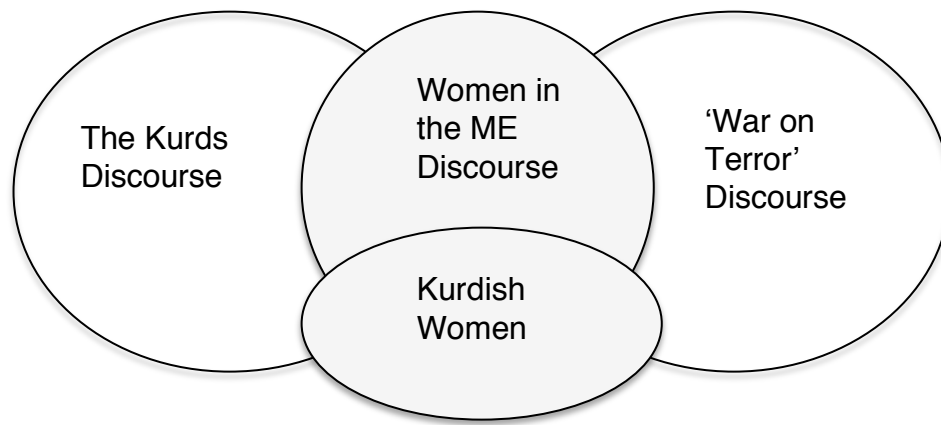


Figure 1: *Discourse Entanglements in the discourse on Kurdish women*

The 'War on Terror' discourse

The 'War on Terror' discourse strand is mainly split into three main topics: the military operation, the enemy and the allies. Concerning the military operation, authors mostly mention the US airstrikes as a support for the armed groups of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), especially the Kurdish militias, fighting ISIS on the ground and the exchange of combat information. Almost each and every article which I analyzed talks about ISIS as the enemy. Many articles refer to the cruelty of ISIS members against civilians, especially the violence against women. Another subtopic which I defined as "ISIS' backwardness" is often related to the subtopics of "ISIS against secularism" or "ISIS against women's rights". Furthermore, ISIS is often talked about in the light of "religious fundamentalism", and sometimes it is mentioned that ISIS members are mostly Sunni Muslims.

The third topic is talking about the allies of the US in its war against terror. The most frequent allies mentioned are Turkey and the Kurds. The subtopic "Turkey is a US ally" is mostly linked to Turkey being a NATO member. Nevertheless, the controversy of Turkey being an US ally is also often mentioned when the authors point out that Turkey is not taking any actions against ISIS. The Kurds are the most talked about US alliance. In that regard, it is often mentioned that although the Iraqi Kurds are official US allies, the Syrian Kurds are more controversial. That is because the PKK supports the PYD actively and the PKK is listed as a terror organization in the US. However, the topic of the military alliance is often linked to their warfare efficiency and their ideological stand.

Women in the Middle East Discourse

Within the gender discourse, authors mainly talk about the situation of women in the Middle East. They often hint at the “backwardness” of Middle Eastern societies, through mentioning the patriarchal structures and “misogynist” practices such as polygamy, honor killings or the sharia law. Furthermore, it is often mentioned that Muslim Arab males are more traditional or more skeptical towards gender equality than their Kurdish counterparts. Nevertheless, there are a few authors who mention patriarchy in Kurdish communities too.

The most central topic of the discourse are the Kurdish women. Here, I identified several substrands, which can be categorized as family, politics, military engagement and representations. When talking about Kurdish women, their family support is often mentioned or their role as mothers. On a political level, the policy of co-governance is often talked about and in that regard, the gender discourse strand overlaps with the discourse strand on the Kurds. Furthermore, there are many subtopics associated with the military engagement of Kurdish women, e.g. the way women fight in relation to their male counterparts or their motivation to fight.

The Kurds Discourse

The discourse concerning the Kurds or the “Kurdish Question” as it is often called, deals mainly with the fundamental elements of Kurdish politics. It is talked about the Kurdish claims to become independent from the nation state, or particular nation states such as Iraq. In that regard, it is talked about the idea of a Kurdish nationalism as opposed to the idea of democratic confederalism, which is pushed by Abdullah Öcalan. In that connection it is mentioned several times that the Syrian Kurds support the latter, whereas Iraqi Kurds are supporting the idea of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. Öcalan is often mentioned in regard to his theories on gender equality and political organization. On an international level, there is different subtopics related, some authors talk about the isolation of the Kurds and mention that they have no international support for their cause whereas others mention the US support for the Kurds or point out that the PKK is an internationally listed terror organization.

After the first analysis, the discourse on Kurdish women seems to be rather homogenous. I found that all three discourse strands are entangled and this creates or influences the representation of Kurdish women.

First, the argumentation used is very similar in all media outlets analyzed. Most authors celebrate the Kurds for being very progressive in terms of their democratic secular and egalitarian ideology. When it comes to gender equality, the discourse strand on the Kurds overlaps with the gender discourse strand. Here, Kurdish women become the bearers of progress and emancipation and are contrasted with “misogynist fundamentalist” ISIS or “patriarchal traditional” Muslim Arabs. The vast majority of the authors refer to female fighters when they talk about Kurdish women, only a few mention Kurdish politicians for example. Furthermore, most of the authors describe Kurdish women as “fearless” and “tough” who fight “like men” or are the “same as men”. Only a few authors stress the motherhood of female fighters.

This argumentation of progressive Kurdish feminism justifies the Kurds being a US ally. However, a few authors mention the controversy surrounding this alliance, e.g. the conflict between Turkey and the terror-listed PKK.

There is one news outlet which stands out because it follows a different argumentation. Most articles in the conservative Wall Street Journal are recognizing the Kurdish female fighters, however, they do not celebrate them as much as their center-leftists colleagues. Instead the main argumentation, which is used by the Wall Street Journal in order to justify the US-Kurdish military alliance, is to point out their efficacy in warfare and their “relatively” progressiveness in relation to the rest of the Middle East.

One topic that was not as frequently talked about is the patriarchy in Kurdish communities which was only mentioned by a few authors. Furthermore, only a few authors mentioned that the majority of Kurds are Muslim rather they stressed their secularity. This topic was a few times linked directly to the bodies of Kurdish women by stating, for example, that they are “not required to wear the veil”. Here authors established, in reverse, a connection between Islam and the oppression of women. Concerning the representation of Kurdish women, they were mostly talked *about* and only a few were cited (26 Kurdish women were quoted directly). A topic which also remained largely absent was the motivation of the Kurdish women to join the fight. Only two authors mentioned that the military is a possibility for Kurdish women to free themselves from traditional conventions.

5. Detailed Analysis

After establishing a rough outline of the discourse positions, the most frequent topics and subtopics, and the discourse entanglements, I am now going to look at two different articles which represent a different style of reporting. I am going to take a closer look in order to see if there is a common argumentation and how the different topics are linked. Furthermore, I am going to look how idioms, vocabulary, collective symbols, etc. are used in order to emphasize the argumentation. Here, especially the gender theories will help me to contextualize these descriptions.

A detailed analysis normally looks at the discourse fragments that are the most 'typical', regarding the use of collective symbols, illustration, argumentation, vocabulary, etc. (Jäger/Maier 2009: 54). I chose two articles, one from the New York Times by Wes Enzinna and the other one was published in the Wall Street Journal and is written by Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson. I decided on these two because they mostly touch on the same topics but represent a different argumentation when arguing for the Kurds as the best US allies. Both portray female fighters, but in a different manner.

The following question will guide my analysis:

- What is the context of the article? Why is it typical?
- Who is the author?
- How is the layout of the article? What about the structure?
- What kind and form of argumentation does the article follow? Which argumentation strategy is used?
- What innuendos and presuppositions does the article contain?
- What collective symbolism is used (linguistic and graphic)?
- What are the main narratives?
- What are the vocabulary and style?
- What actors are mentioned and how are they portrayed? (Especially: How are women portrayed?)
- What ideologies are supported and how?
- What concept of gender does the article presuppose and convey?
- How is unequal power relations/dominance maintained?

- Is there an internalization of gendered norms? How is power/dominance discursively produced, is it counter-resisted?

5.1. New York Times: Wes Enzinna

The first article I am going to look at is “A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’ Backyard – At a college in Kurdish Syria, Rojava tries to train its future leaders”, written by Wes Enzinna and published Nov. 24 2015 on the nytimes.com, a print version appeared on November 29, 2015, in the Sunday Magazine supplement of the NY Times, in the feature section.

Typicality

I chose this article for the detailed analysis since it is very rich in mentioned subtopics and vocabulary used. The article supports the NY Times discourse position in mainly celebrating the Kurds for their secularism and their gender equality in order to describe them as the best possible allies for the US. The bearers of the egalitarian and secular characteristics of the Kurds are the Kurdish women. Enzinna describes the female fighters as brave and “badass” and gives a lot of insight about the Kurdish project in Rojava. Along the line, Enzinna expresses criticism towards the cult surrounding the Kurdish leader Öcalan and calls his ideas “pretty dreamy stuff” (Enzinna 2015).

It is very typical for many of these articles because it juxtaposes the conservative/fundamentalist Middle East (especially in the form of ISIS or Muslim Arab men) and the liberal secular Kurds (in the form of emancipated female fighters). Furthermore, it stresses the participation of Kurdish women in the battle and sensationalizes them in describing the women as “tough” but at the same time emphasizing their femininity.

The author

The author is Wes Enzinna, a senior editor at Mother Jones, who publishes occasionally in the New York Times Magazine (Wes Enzinna 2018). Judging from his previous work, it does not seem that he is focusing on special areas. The topics he is covering are ranging from covering the Kurds in Rojava to portraying the world’s best hitchhiker. He

graduated from UC Berkley in Journalism (UC Berkley 2018). Recalling Foucault who asks about the rules of discourses which produce a certain power and is posing the question why an author is qualified to speak in the discourse I did not find any reference to specific knowledge or training concerning the Middle East or any personal connection to the Kurds. However, judging from what I know, he seems to be a white American male with a good education and maybe that is sufficient to qualify as a speaker in the white male-dominated US-American media discourse.

There is no specific occasion for the article mentioned. However, the author is visiting Rojava in 2015, a year after the attacks on Kobane happened, and at that time the media was focusing increasingly on the Kurds. Judging by his description, it seems as if the war was still going on when he was there. His motivation to write the piece appears to be to see for himself if the Kurds are really this secular and liberal ally as which they are celebrated in the West (Enzinna 2015).

Layout

Concerning the layout, there are six pictures showing Kurds in different situations and one map showing the location of Rojava in the Middle East. I am going to describe the pictures later on when I identify narratives in the text which they support on a visual level.

The heading is “A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’ Backyard” and the subheading reads “At a college in Kurdish Syria, Rojava tries to train its future leaders” (Enzinna 2015). Thus, the heading and subheading already hint at the style of reporting which is very optimistic concerning the Kurds’ future but at the same time calls their political ideology “utopian”. Background information is always interwoven with Enzinna’s personal experiences in the first-person narration.

There are no subheadings throughout the text, however, sometimes after a paragraph the first words of a new sentence are in bold type in order to mark a new unit of meaning. Firstly, Enzinna introduces the place of action and gives a short insight about Rojava and its controversies and how he came to teach at the Mesopotamian Social Sciences Academy in Qamishli. The second unit explains why the Kurds have been struggling without a homeland historically, the situation of the Kurds in Syria, and explained then how Rojava came into being in the midst of the Syrian war, Further, he introduces the military forces and describes his arrival in Qamlishi. Within the third unit, Enzinna talks about his first class to teach, about beliefs and feminism. The fourth

introduces Abdullah Öcalan, his connection to Bookchin and his theories of stateless democracy and gender equality. The fifth unit deals with the ways how Öcalan's ideas and principles are put into practice/lived up to in Rojava. In the sixth unit, the students are getting suspicious of Enzinna because he asks them about experiences four years before. In the sixth unit, Enzinna is asked to leave the school because the school was needed as a shelter for the fighters on the front lines. Enzinna then goes to El Brak to meet with fighters. Therefore the last unit is about the female fighters especially and the fight against ISIS.

Kurds are progressive

One narrative that I identified is the "Kurds are progressive" narrative. In his coverage, Enzinna explores many topics within the discourse on the Kurds. However, by celebrating their efforts in ecology, multi-ethnicism, direct democracy, secularism and most importantly gender equality, he paints a very positive picture. Right in the beginning, Enzinna writes:

"[...] within its borders the rules of the neighboring ISIS caliphate has been inverted. In accordance with a philosophy laid out by a leftist revolutionary named Abdullah Ocalan, Rojavan women had been championed as leaders, defense of the environment enshrined in law and radical direct democracy enacted in the streets" (Enzinna 2015).

In order for the audience to grasp the narrative, Enzinna uses the presupposition that topics like secularism, multi-ethnicism, etc. are linked to the idea of a liberal, modern, progressive society. This quote is especially interesting because here Enzinna contrasts the progressiveness of the Kurds in Syria with the caliphate of ISIS by saying the caliphate has been "inverted" "within its borders" (Ibid.).

Another juxtaposition can be found in Enzinna's description of Kurdish secularism: Enzinna talks about Ramadan ("the Muslim month of fasting") and then his observation that Kurdish students are still eating. He then writes: "Though about 90 percent of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, ISIS considers them to be *kafir*, infidels" (Ibid.). Here, he connects the fact that 90% of the Kurds consider themselves Muslim but they seem to deal with religious traditions differently by eating during Ramadan. This might be relatable to a modern US-American audience who might still consider themselves Christian but not go to church every Sunday. However, this somehow "modern" dealing with religion is then contrasted with the practices of ISIS. Because Enzinna then describes an incident where ISIS fighters kidnapped Kurdish college students and forced them to attend a jihadist religious school, "escapees were threatened with beheading"

(Ibid.). Here, ISIS approach to Islam is described as “jihadist” and their intransigence is shown by saying they would behead all the people who do not follow their ideology. In contrast to this, the Kurds appear even more secular and progressive, because ISIS is described as rigid fundamentalist and cruel. Departing from this, there is a transition to the level of the self. Enzinna introduces a student, Ramah, who describes himself as an atheist. Enzinna then says that the students asked him if Obama really was a Muslim or “if everyone in America was an atheist, like Ramah” (Enzinna 2015). The author is then responding with the following sentence: “I told them there were many Christians, Muslims, and Jews, though I said I didn’t believe in god (Enzinna 2015).” Here the author stresses the religious pluralism that the USA adorns itself with. By saying that he himself is, like the Kurd Ramah, an atheist too, the audience immediately connects the Kurdish to the US-American values.

Another characteristic of the Kurdish system is the direct, face-to-face government which is grounded in Öcalan’s ideas and enacted in Rojava. Enzinna seems to have witnessed a municipal assembly and has noted how the ideas came into practice. However, it seems that Enzinna, although he seems sort of impressed by the idea, is mocking the assembly. When the attendees discuss setting up extra patrols in order to identify jihadist coming to the city disguised as refugees, he describes one woman who wants to volunteer for patrolling as “a withered woman” and writes further: “The thought of her patrolling with an AK-47 was improbable, but no one questioned her” (Enzinna 2015). Not only is Enzinna here using insulting vocabulary, describing the woman as “withered”, but he also puts himself in a higher position in order to judge if she could handle a rifle or not. The explicit description of the weapon also signifies that he would know better (because he is a man?). I would say that he discriminates against the woman on two levels: because of her age and because of her gender. Furthermore, he underestimates the judgment of the other attendees because they did not “question her”.

However, there is a picture in the article which portrays nine women standing in a circle in a white room who seem to be discussing something, some of them are looking out the window. Three women are wearing jeans, some are wearing long garments and headscarves with colorful print. Their facial expressions appear serious. The caption reads: “Women gather after are meeting in Qamishli to decide how to deal with security in their neighborhood.” Most interestingly, I would argue that this picture sends a different signal than the description in Enzinna’s text because the women look young

and fierce. Except for one standing in the middle, she looks a little bit older than the others, holding what appears to be a book in her hands. However, these women who all dress differently and have a different age, but all have more or less a very decisive facial expression, send a very strong message of confident women who are decision-makers in their own communities.



Picture 1 (Addario, in Enzinna 2015)

One of the most important pillars of the Kurdish societal system, according to Enzinna, is gender equality. It is mentioned every once in a while throughout the whole article, for example when Enzinna talks about a police women-only force which “deals with sexual assault and rape” or when he mentions that men only receive their weapons after “two weeks of feminist instruction” (Enzinna 2015). However, where the gender equality topic really is discussed, is when he introduces the politician Hediye Yusuf and the female fighter Deniz Derik. Here the gender question becomes entangled with the discourse on Kurds, plus the discourse on the ‘War on Terror’.

Superheroes vs. Supervillains

This narrative is built upon many presuppositions and includes innuendos.

There are many levels to this narrative and how it unfolds. One is the juxtaposition of the Kurds to fundamentalist ISIS and traditional Muslim Arab men. Because I would argue that in order for the Kurds to be represented as progressive, they have to be juxtaposed to a group more “backward”.

The juxtaposition to ISIS becomes apparent in the following sentence: "In ISIS territory just 15 miles away, Kurdish girls were routinely tortured for being Westernized heretics – sometimes tied by their ponytails to car bumpers and dragged to their deaths" (Enzinna 2015). Here, the very cruel action of torture is signifying the backwardness of ISIS and at the same time the Kurdish girls are called "Westernized heretics". The description is intended to be a pejorative comment by ISIS, however in a Western context it means something else: "westernized" stands for some sort of liberal progressiveness which is embodied by the Kurdish girls who appear to be bearing the reputation of the Kurds as a progressive nation, and therefore juxtaposed to the backwardness of ISIS which appears to be rooted in fundamentalist belief. This is a presupposed fact, the writer hints at.

Enzinna uses a similar juxtaposition when he introduces Mirza, a Yazidi student who has been trapped on Mount Sinjar in August 2015 while the people in his hometown were "butchered" by ISIS (Enzinna 2015). Then an all-female battalion of YPJ soldiers "fought through ISIS lines and created a path for them to escape" (Ibid.). Here, the Kurdish female fighters are indeed acting as superheroes fighting the supervillains and freeing innocent people. And it is especially interesting because the Yazidis are a religious minority practicing Zoroastrianism. Later in the paragraph Enzinna talks about the freedom of religion which is enshrined in a social contract. And although Enzinna comments that the freeing of the Yazidis might have been a strategical plan to recruit them in the defense of Rojava, the idea of freedom of religion and multi-ethnicism that is linked to the Kurds, sticks with the reader.

But it is not only ISIS which is constructed as the super villain. It is also the Arab Muslim men who appear to be the antipode of the Kurdish women. In order to illustrate this, Enzinna first describes the Kurdish policy of "co-governance" where every position at the government is shared by a man and a woman. He introduces Yusuf, the co-president of Jazeera canton who shares power with "an Arab tribal leader named Sheikh Humeydi Daham al Hadi" (Enzinna 2015). The word "tribal", although used by many nations themselves, is a term frequently used by anthropologists and is connected to colonialism. So in that colonial sense, it stands for "uncivilized" or "primitive" people. However, Enzinna then cites Yusuf saying "Hadi is certainly not a feminist" (Enzinna 2015). By doing so, he inevitably connects the "Tribal Arab leader" to an anti-feminist mindset. Enzinna enforces this image even more by then citing Hadi saying "I didn't ask to share power with a woman [...]. They made me do it" (Enzinna 2015). Here, it

becomes apparent that Hadi who is represented as the conservative Muslim Arab man is not fond of gender equality at all. However, the “they” stands for the Kurds, meaning they forced him to share power. This is how the Arab/Muslim man is constructed as an anti-feminist non-progressive power who is facing the “feminist” Kurds.

Women as female fighters

The Kurdish superheroines are not only constructed in terms of juxtapositions, but also in the form of images and symbols. When Enzinna meets Deniz Derik, a Kurdish female fighter, he introduces her as follows: “ In one of the still stand-standing homes, we met Deniz Derik, a 24-year-old Y.P.J. commander who wore pink socks and a calculator watch, her coal-black hair pulled into a ponytail tucked beneath a backward camo cap” (Enzinna 2015). There are some characteristics here that are connected to normative gender roles: e.g. the calculator watch and the camo cap are military gear which is connoted as “masculine”. Contrasted with these “masculine” gadgets are the “pink socks” and the “coal-black hair”. I would describe the color pink as a collective symbol which is recognized by the Western audience as a symbol of femininity. Enzinna’s obsession with the color pink appears again when he describes Derik’s housing: “The house’s parlor, where I first met her, was decorated with two teddy bears – one pink, one yellow” (Enzinna 2015). It is interesting that the reader does not learn much about Derik’s appearance or interior design, apart from her possessing pink socks and pink teddy bears. Recalling Lazar’s idea of tracing power relations by looking at how the female gender is constructed in relation to the masculine. There is only one description of a male soldier and he is just described as “my Kalashnikov-toting escort” (Enzinna 2015). Here the focus is clearly on the very “masculine” action of toting a Kalashnikov. However, I doubt that Enzinna would have described a male soldier’s blue colored socks after all. All in all, I would say that the focus on the color pink and especially the description of the teddy bears not only stress the fact that Derik is a woman but it also makes her look smaller and more vulnerable.

This very typical description of the “female role” however, is contrasted with a very rough description of her. Enzinna writes: “In the breast pocket of her camo shirt, she kept a bullet and a cyanide pill, for suicide in case of capture”, (Enzinna 2015). This description paints a different picture of Derik. Her being always ready to kill herself in case ISIS captures her, means two things: First, she is very aware of her own death and secondly, that she is too proud to be tortured or killed by ISIS that she would rather kill

herself before. This evokes the image of a very “tough and fearless” woman. This is further stressed by the next sentence where Enzinna (2015) describes how her young cadets call Derik “‘Smilies’, because even under fire, she grins.”

Derik’s toughness is furthermore stressed when Enzinna asked her if she is afraid of dying and she answers: “Why should I be afraid? Being a martyr is the best thing possible... Fighting is ugly. [...] But fighting for this is beautiful. Fear is for your Western women in their kitchens.” It is interesting how it illustrates the fearlessness of Derik but also how committed she is to the Kurdish project when she says “Fighting for this is beautiful.” Most interesting is the last sentence. Although the quotes are of course selected by Enzinna in order to spin a certain story, I would say that Derik here counters some collective stereotypes that Westerners have when thinking about women in the Middle East. By turning that stereotype upside down, she presents the Kurdish women as the strong feminist fighter and contrasts it with Western women who are “in their kitchens”.

I find another form of counter-speech in Derik’s quotes when Enzinna asks her a very “typical” question: if she had ever wanted a husband. Derik’s answer is: “Are you proposing?” This is interesting because this answer adds to the image of the “tough female fighter” that Enzinna had in mind when writing this piece but on the other hand it could be interpreted as some kind of agency where Derik directly dismisses this gendered question. I would argue that this question is gendered because it is a “typical” question posed to a woman assuming that all women want to marry.

Generally speaking, this image of Derik as being the show pony of the typical tough and sassy female fighter, supports two messages: 1. Kurdish female soldiers are tough “like men”, 2. Kurdish female fighters are special because it is not the common sense, therefore their femininity is stressed in the style of reporting.

The toughness is furthermore emphasized on the visual level. There is one picture of a brunette woman wearing a camouflage uniform parading a large weapon in front of her chest. Her facial expression is very serious and resolute. The dirty white wall behind her is cracked and there are three weapons leaning towards the wall in the background. The caption reads: “Xwinda, 17, a soldier in training with the People’s Protection Unit”. The facial expression and the soldier position holding the weapon signals how she is ready to fight. The weapons in the background emphasize this message.



Picture 2 (Addario, in Enzinna 2015)

However, although Enzinna celebrates the Kurds for being progressive, especially related to their stance in gender equality, he also addresses controversies surrounding the Kurdish question.

Kurds are a controversial ally

Enzinna seems to be especially concerned about the “Öcalan cult”. He describes Öcalan’s admiration as a “Wizard-of-Oz like presence” or having a “visage” with a “gregarious, toothy grin obscured by a cartoonishly lush mustache” which appears to be everywhere (Enzinna 2015). By choosing “visage” over “face” and “grin” over “smile”, Enzinna makes sure that his aversion against Öcalan is understood.

Additionally, he calls Öcalan’s theories “pretty dreamy stuff.” However, it is interesting that Hediye Yusuf, the co-president of the Jazeera canton, is quoted saying “I don’t know why the West vilifies Öcalan.” It seems like this derogatory talk is not only reasoned by the “cult” of Öcalan but also linked to the controversy surrounding the PKK.

In the very beginning, Enzinna describes the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state. However, he states that the “effort” (of hoping to establish a Kurdish homeland and becoming independent) “has caused the death of 40,000 people, thousands of them civilians” and then in the next sentence he then says that the USA has designated the PKK a terrorist organization, whereas later he mentions that the CIA helped to capture Öcalan at that time (Enzinna 2015).

Another controversy Enzinna hails is concerned with the war crimes which PYD soldiers have committed, as a Human Rights Watch report proves. The organization

raised serious concern about an event where soldiers opened fire on unarmed civilian protesters and of teenage soldiers. Enzinna stresses this point by bringing in another report from Amnesty International saying that the YPG was “razing entire Arab villages as punishment for harboring ISIS fighters” (Enzinna 2015). However, by then quoting Hediye Yusuf admitting that “we were in the middle of a war and a revolution, we’ve made mistakes” and saying that the PYD was applauded by a Human Rights Advisor for their reaction to the report, Enzinna mitigates the accuse.

There are many different topics and subtopics touched upon in this article. It is interesting that all three discourse strands which I defined beforehand in the structure analysis are present and intertwined. Within the ‘War on Terror’ discourse strand, it is mentioned that the Kurds are a US ally in the ‘War on Terror’. However, the conflict between Turkey and the PKK is mentioned as well and the controversy that Turkey is a US ally as well. Also that PKK is a listed terror organization in the US. Furthermore, the cruelty of ISIS and especially their violence against women is mentioned in order to justify the ‘War on Terror’.

I defined several topics in the Kurdish discourse strand. On the one hand, there is a focus on Kurdish secularism, on the other hand, it is also mentioned that most Kurds are Muslims. Furthermore, it is frequently talked about the Kurdish idea of statehood and egalitarianism. Subtopics linked to that are gender equality, co-governance, multi-ethnicism, and democratic confederalism. When talking about the Kurdish history, PKK terrorism is mentioned. This sort of overlaps with the ‘War on Terror’ discourse strand. In general, these theories and ideas are often linked to the topic of the Kurds being a US ally. Anyhow, when talking about the Kurds it is also mentioned that during the Syrian war they committed several war crimes and furthermore, that they send teenagers to the battlefield.

A topic that is part of the gender discourse strand and resembles the egalitarianism topic in the Kurdish discourse strand, is the female leadership topic. Furthermore, I would also define the “Muslim Arab traditionalism” topic as part of the gender discourse strand, since it is mostly connected to male misogynist behavior and traditions. This topic is often juxtaposed with the ideas of gender equality and female leadership which creates a binary of the feminist Kurds vs. the misogynist Arab Muslims.

The author argues that the Kurds are not perfect by any means, but they are the best ally the US can have in a rather backwards and misogynist Middle East, because they organize upon similar values as the USA. Wes Enzinna uses certain strategies in order to convince his readers. First of all, he uses the notion of “being there” as proof for authenticity. He was in Northern Syria, and therefore saw the Kurdish project with his own eyes. Furthermore, he uses certain narratives in order to support his argumentation, such as the secular and progressive Kurds. The Kurdish female fighter he interviews becomes the bearer of this progressiveness and feminism. She is portrayed as “tough” and “fearless”. Although Enzinna criticizes the cult around Öcalan and the teenage soldiers the PYD deploys on the front lines, he still never questions the fact that the Kurds are a good US ally in the ‘War on Terror’. At the end of the article, he chose this statement of the female fighter Derik which sums it up in one sentence: “Everyone has to choose a side now. ISIS has chosen the side of slavery. We’ve chosen the side of freedom.” Freedom here functions as a collective symbol, as the quintessence of the American self-image.

Despite the controversies surrounding the Kurdish discourse, Enzinna seems to generally support the argument that the Kurds are worth to be supported and that they are the best US American allies in their ‘War on Terror’. Because of their ideology, especially their “feminist” idea of gender equality”, which makes them a very “bright spot” in the Middle East, and especially as emerging from the tragedy of the Syrian revolution.

This very strong image is linked to the fact that the Kurds are being US allies. One can see this very direct linkage between the gender discourse, the Kurdish discourse and the ‘War on Terror’ discourse in the following two sentences: “The territory is governed by [...] and an all-female force called the YPJ, or Female Protection Units. These forces have become key American allies in the region” (Enzinna 2015). Here it becomes apparent that Kurdish women are the bearers of the progress and are thus used as a justification for the US enmeshment in the Middle East and siding with the Kurds.

These very positively connoted characteristics of the Kurds are then projected on the self-image of the USA who sees itself as the most progressive, liberal, democratic and gender equal country. The dichotomy of this image becomes apparent when Derik states:

“ISIS has chosen the side of slavery. We’ve chosen the side of freedom.” Here the word freedom functions as a collective symbol which has a highly Western connotation and is inevitably linked to the USA.

In terms of the gender ideology behind this article, it becomes clear that the interpretational sovereignty lies of course with the male author Wes Enzinna. Apart from Derik and Yusuf, there are only two other women who are mentioned but nameless. And although Derik and Yusuf have been quoted several times, there is nothing mentioned about their own motivation to support Rojava, or the war. It seems like they are just answering the topics and reacting to the journalist. The topic which I defined as “patriarchy in Kurdish societies” is also not mentioned, on the contrary, it is only fundamentalist ISIS and Muslim Arab men who are described as misogynist and patriarchal. Furthermore, the description of Derik reveals how sensationalizing the coverage is and how women are being dubbed into these “tough” war heroines who are at the same time very “woman-like” and “unmasculine”. Therefore, although the Kurdish women are effectively stepping out of their confined gender role by taking up arms, they cannot escape the emphasis on their womanhood.

5.2. The Wall Street Journal: Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson

The second article, I am going to look at is “A Personal War –America’s Marxist Allies Against ISIS”, written by Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson and published July 24 2015 on the wsj.com. There is no note whether the article has been published in the print version or not.

Typicality

I chose this article for the detailed analysis since it features many of the subtopics, symbols, and vocabularies, which appeared frequently in most of the articles. However, the WSJ-article does not only differ from the NY Times-article in terms of the discourse position but also concerning the style which is more matter-of-factly. Bradley and Parkinson do support the Kurds being US allies, nevertheless, they have a different

strategy of argumentation. This article perfectly shows the WSJ's more conservative right-center discourse position on the topic. They do support the fact that the Kurds are being a US ally on the ground but not because they are celebrating them for their theories and aspirations, but for their effectiveness in warfare and their "relatively" progressiveness in regards of gender equality compared to the rest of the Middle East. However, they remain highly critical of the links to the PKK and their violent past. However, what this article has in common with the NY Times article is that it does portray the Kurdish women as very "tough" female fighters and superheroines in the fight against misogynist ISIS. However, unlike Enzinna's reportage it does not juxtapose the female fighters with the Muslim Arab men but instead mentions the patriarchal confinements which Kurdish women experience in their own communities.

The Author

Matt Bradley worked for the WSJ as a Middle East reporter until June 2016 and now works as a London-based correspondent for NBC News (Katz 2016). His colleague Joe Parkinson still works for the WSJ as the chief for the Africa Bureau. Before that, he covered Turkey in the Journal's Bureau in Istanbul (Wall Street Journal 2018). Judging from his previous work, he does have some experience in Middle Eastern topics. Both authors are white American males and have been educated at Western universities (Bradley at the Duke University in North Carolina, Parkinson at the London School of Economics).

There is no specific occasion for the article mentioned. However, the authors mention the rescue of the Yazidis from Mount Sinjar in the previous summer which marked the starting point for the military cooperation of the Kurdish militias and the USA. It seems like the main motivation of the authors was to see how the cooperation has evolved and how geopolitics play into this newly formed alliance.

Layout

Layoutwise, there are four single pictures, one picture gallery consisting of 11 pictures and one map showing the location of the Kurdish areas in the Middle East. I am going to describe the pictures later on when they support certain narratives on a visual level.

The heading is "America's Marxist Allies Against ISIS " and the subheading reads "A Personal War" (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). The heading already hints at the main topic discussed in the article which is the military alliance of the USA and the Kurds and

the surrounding controversies. Furthermore, it indicates the style of narration which seems to be trapped in a Cold War rhetoric and paints a rather unappealing picture of the Kurds' aspirations.

Concerning the way of narration the authors portray one Kurdish woman and link it to background information. There are only two subheadings which divide the text, one reads: 'We're not terrorists' and the other one 'Ms. Ruken's War'.

Firstly, Bradley and Parkinson introduce their protagonist the female fighter Zind Ruken and then move to the bigger picture by talking about the cooperation of PKK and PYD with the US military. Furthermore, they are discussing the controversies surrounding the alliance because of the linkages to PKK which is an enlisted terror organization and because of their struggle with Nato member Turkey. The second unit with the subheading 'We're not terrorists' talks about the Kurdish PKK and the PYD, as well as it briefly mentions Öcalan. Bradley and Parkinson furthermore say how their military performance and their approaches to gender equality have changed perceptions of the West and therefore dismantling the usage of the term terrorism. The third unit's subheading reads 'Ms. Ruken's War'. The "Ms." alone already signifies that the protagonist is a female and that has to be spelled out and linked to war. This unit mainly deals with Ruken's personal history and why she is fighting ISIS.

The controversial ally

The authors make sure from the beginning on that they see the Kurds as a very controversial ally. First of all, it is because of the violent past of the PKK. They state that in the USA the PKK is listed as a terrorist group because in the past it has been "accused of kidnappings, murder and narcotics trafficking" (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). Throughout the article, the authors elaborate more on the PKK's past by saying they have "car-bombed Turkish cities, kidnapped hundreds and killed Turkish and Kurdish state employees" (Ibid.). However, these actions are somehow explained in the next paragraph when a PKK spokesman is cited who says that the PKK was only defending their people against the "elimination policies of the Kurdish state against the Kurds" (Ibid.). Although Bradley and Parkinson do not water their description of PKK's violence down, they still provide the audience an explanation for the violence with that statement.

Furthermore, it is very interesting how they first explain the links between the PKK and the YPG, but then they bring in the argumentation of the Obama administration

saying that although they know of the PKK and YPG links, they “formally shun the PKK while dealing directly with the YPG” (Ibid.). By separating these two Kurdish groups, the US’ state officials legitimate the cooperation with the PYD, since it is only the PKK that is an enlisted terror organization with a violent past. However, two pages later the authors quote Zind Ruken, the protagonist, saying that there is no real distinction possible between the Kurdish groups: “It’s all PKK but different branches” (Ibid.). All in all, it might not matter for the Kurds for what group they are fighting but it does for the US in order to justify their policy change. Before the USA was supporting NATO partner Turkey in their battle against PKK (Ibid.). However, now Turkey is afraid that the Kurd’s new negotiating position would help them to push for independence.

Besides the PKK past and the ongoing conflict between the Kurds and NATO member Turkey, the authors mention another controversial point. Concerning the description of the Kurdish project in Rojava, the authors differ a lot from Enzinna’s approach. Although Enzinna, as I have analyzed before, was skeptical of the Öcalan cult and called some of their ideas “utopian”, Bradley and Parkinson use very different vocabulary. First of all, it is striking how often they use the words “Maoist” and “Marxist” in conjunction with describing the Kurds which echoes a Cold War-rhetoric. By emphasizing the “Marxist” in Öcalan’s theories and by describing the Kurds’ aims as creating “ a Maoist-inspired Agrarian society that opposes landowning classes, espouses gender equalities and distances itself from religion”, the authors are creating an *Otherness*.

The Kurds are a good ally in the ‘War on Terror’

Which brings us to the narrative which is used in order to justify the alliance of the Kurds and the US. First of all, it Bradley and Parkinson mention the efficiency of the Kurd on the battlefield and call them a “regional power player”. The Kurdish engagement in the ‘War on Terror’ is then contrasted with the resistance of Turkey who refused for a long time to take action in the war against ISIS (Ibid.). This argument emphasizes the need for the USA to ally with the Kurds since its usual partner in the region did not want to take action.

Besides their efficiency in warfare, another part of the narrative is that the Kurds are fighting “the right guys”, as a U.S. defense official puts it. The right guys here is, of course, an innuendo for ISIS. This statement reveals first of all, that the ‘War on Terror’ seems to be the most important undertaking of the US and it therefore does not really

matter as long as you are on the “right” side fighting the “right” guys. Secondly, it shows of the US are the ones to decide who, in the ‘War on Terror’ dichotomy, stands on the “right” and who on the “wrong” side.

As I mentioned earlier, the gender equality is the crucial topic in the narrative here. I described the very patronizing style of vocabulary which is used in order to describe the Kurds beforehand. However, when it comes to gender equality, it seems that this is one of the only pillars in the Kurdish ideology that the authors support. Somehow, they use the history of their protagonist Zind Ruken in order to construct again an image of superheroines fighting supervillians.

First of all, Ruken is described as a very tough fighter. She is a “battle-hardened guerilla, using machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades”. This very specific description of very “manly” war gear makes her appear as a very “tough” woman. This is further emphasized when Ruken confesses that the Kurds that join the PKK abandon their lives and stop thinking about “their families, their children, their lives”. This description emphasizes the image of Ruken being a very “tough” woman because family and children are normally a very “female” connoted topics and by refusing to think about them, she appears more “manly”. On a visual level, this image of Ruken is manifested in a picture showing her assembling a machine gun (See Picture 3). One can see her in the foreground of the picture wearing a khaki colored jacket and a colorful scarf slung around her neck. She is holding her arms high and seems to be adjusting something at a machine gun. Her facial expression seems confident, she is not looking into the camera lens but straight to the weapon. In the background, one can see a woman who appears to be sitting on the ground leaning towards a blue wall and directly facing the camera. Both women seem to be in a dark room. There is only some light shed on Ruken’s face. Because of the light, her strong gesture and her confident facial expression, she appears very resolute and tough. Furthermore, showing her assembling a machine gun, correlates with the description before calling her a “battle-hardened guerilla”. Interesting is the caption that reads as follows: “PKK fighter like MS. Ruken, 24, who demonstrates how to assemble her AK-47, have presented the world an appealing image of women battling as equals with male comrades against an appallingly misogynist enemy. ‘Perhaps Islamic State will stand for a while’, she says, ‘but they will fall’” (Ibid.). It is striking how aware the authors seem to be about the discussion concerning the “appealing image” of the female PKK fighters which is presented to the

world and contrasted with “appallingly misogynist” ISIS. And still, they reproduce that exact same image in this picture and throughout the article.

However, this “tough manliness” represented in the photograph is contrasted with a subtle stress of the “feminine” in the reporting. The authors, for example, use the title “Ms.” in front of her name frequently, as if to stress that she is a female. They do not use a “Mr.” when they are referring to male soldiers in the article. Another hint is made in the last paragraph of the article. Here, the authors write: “Ms. Ruken said that she typically fought with an AK-47 or a Soviet-era-heavy-infantry machine gun about as long as she is tall”. Besides the description of the heavy armory, Ruken’s height is stressed. By stressing that the weapon is as tall as she is, it makes Ruken appear smaller. However, the image of Kurdish women being superheroines is also constructed by juxtaposing Ruken with misogynist ISIS and mentioning the rescue of the Yazidis.



Picture 3 (*Trieb*, in Bradley/Parkinson 2015)

Same as in Enzinnas’s article, all three discourse strands are entangled here. However, there is a bigger focus on the ‘War on Terror’ discourse strand and its entanglement with the gender discourse. Within the ‘War on Terror’ discourse strand, it is mentioned that the Kurds are a US ally in the ‘War on Terror’. But the controversies surrounding this alliance are mentioned as well, especially the PKK’s past and its conflict with the Turkish state. The brutality of ISIS is mentioned as well as its misogyny in order to justify the ‘War on Terror’.

The one strand which is surprisingly poor in topics and subtopics is the Kurdish discourse. Along with their efficiency in warfare, the Kurdish idea of gender equality is

mentioned. However, this is only mentioned with regard to women's position in the military and not in other institutions. Furthermore, the idea of "democratic confederalism" is mentioned but not in a positive way so that these Kurdish tropes would function as an argument for the alliance with the USA.

The main part of the gender discourse strand is dealing with one representative female fighter, Zind Ruken, who fled her patriarchal Kurdish community to fight for the Kurds in Syria and Iraq. However, same as in the previous article the protagonist is juxtaposed to misogynist ISIS but the patriarchy in Kurdish communities is also mentioned.

The argumentation which the authors follow differs fundamentally from Enzinna's. Whereas Enzinna was generally fond of the Kurdish project, Bradley and Parkinson dismiss the Kurds a group with "utopian goals [which] echo those of some Cold War-era leftist militias" (Bradley/Parkinson 2015). Instead, they base their argumentation on the fact that the Kurds are the most effective military outlet on the ground, that they are fighting the "right guys" and their deployment of female fighters. The Kurdish female fighter who is dubbed into a "tough" war heroine helps the reader to understand the egalitarian approach of the Kurds which makes them a suitable ally partner for the US. Furthermore, the authors talk about the USA's important role in the 'War on Terror' repeatedly and also mention how they helped the Kurds to defend their land.

Unlike in the previous article, Bradley and Parkinson do not celebrate the Kurds for approaches to direct democracy or multi-ethnicism. They rather focus on the Kurdish efficacy in warfare and on the gender equality of the Kurds. Although they are rather talking in a condescending way of the Kurds, they are fully aware of the general public's perception. This and how the discourse on gender strand and the discourse on the Kurds strand are entangled becomes apparent when they write "The group's largely pro-West stance, and its deployment of female fighters like Ms. Ruken, has brought sympathy from Western governments and populations" (Bradley/Parkinson 2015).

But besides that, they do construct the Kurds as the *Other*. First, by describing the PKK's violent past extensively but then through a very prominent anti-communist vocabulary which constructs the Kurds as the communist Other by reinforcing the self-image of the neoliberal USA.

It seems like the gender equality is the only value that both have in common. In order to emphasize this, the authors use protagonist Zind Ruken in order to constitute the image of the “tough” Kurdish superheroes fighting misogynist ISIS and rescuing Yazidis. Within Ruken’s description, the gender management of the military becomes visible. Although the authors describe her as a generally very “tough” and rather manly woman, they also emphasize the fact that she is a female by using the title “Ms.” whenever they mention her name and furthermore by mentioning her height in relation to her weapon.

6. Beyond Words and Things: The Representation of Kurdish Women

After describing all these narratives, images and argumentations which are constructing the representations of the Kurdish women, I am now introducing new theory to help me contextualize my findings.

6.1. A gendered battlefield: Women and War

In this chapter I am going to explain the emphasis of the media coverage on one particular “type” of Kurdish women: the Kurdish female fighters.. In order to understand this specific image, I decided to include theory on gender and military. Here, it becomes certain that in order to grasp their notion of women which is discursively produced, one has to add the discursively regulated image of men to the set of explaining theories.

Although there have been women fighting to defend their people and their lands in ancient history, it was only starting in the 1970’s that women were declared as fit for combat in most Western countries. However, it still seems that the combination of women and weapons occurs to some men (and women) as very exotic. That is, as Feitz and Nagel argue, because of the gendered, sexual nature of war which is not simply historical but is an ongoing characteristic of contemporary military organizations (Feitz/Nagel 2008: 201). The term *gendered organization* is originally coined by Joan Acker (1990) and means that “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control,

action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” in a specific organization (p. 146). The military is, referring to Helena Carreiras (2006), an “extreme case” of a gendered organization. Carreiras argues that the organizational structure is based on gender divisions in terms of power and opportunity and furthermore, there is a sexual division of labor in the military. Thus, she argues that “women are excluded from certain specialties and there are distinct patterns of gender representations by rank and functional areas” (Carreiras 2006: 40). Additionally, Carreiras states that hegemonic definitions of military merge into definitions of *hegemonic masculinity*. Connell (1995) has coined the term *hegemonic masculinity* and defines it as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the domination of men and the subordination of women.” This does not necessarily mean that these men who embody the ideal type of masculinity are the most powerful men, because it could also be film actors or even fantasy figures (Connell 2005: 77). However, Connell states that hegemony is only established if there is some “correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power” (Ibid.) He, therefore, hints at the top levels of business, government or military which provide a corporate display of masculinity. Lindsey Feitz and Joane Nagel (2008) agree and state that “attributes of hegemonic masculinities across time and space reference warrior traditions that emphasize bravery, toughness, daring, honor, strength, and courage” (p. 201). Consequently this display of hegemonic masculinity and the gendered processes in the military often lead to women being represented as the “the other” or the “weak” (Carreiras 2006: 43).

This becomes apparent when we look at the case study of Melissa S. Herbert (1998). Herbert conducted research and asked women who served the US military how they manage gender roles in the military. She echoes Joan Acker when saying that the military is a *gendered institution* because it is not only about war, but being “a man” (Herbert 1998: 7). Cynthia Enloe (1983) makes a similar observation: “Women may serve the military, but they can never be permitted to *be* the military. They must remain “camp followers” (p. 15). In order to show the military’s arbitrary attitude towards female soldiers, Enloe refers to a recruitment brochure of the US army showing a picture of a woman wearing a combat helmet which reads “Some of the best soldiers wear lipstick” (Ibid.: 119). This brochure is allegoric for the ideological notion of gender in military organisations. Women who fight are often being used in order to sell a narrative

on emancipation and progress. This is only possible *because* the military is a highly gendered organization. Because of the dominant idea of hegemonic masculinity associated with war and military, women are always the *Other*.

However, the image of women in arms is a collective symbol for emancipation because it seems like she is breaking away these established gender norms.⁷ First of all, it explains why the focus on the Kurdish women was always on their looks and seemingly “feminine” characteristics such as hair or the colour pink and contrasted with imagery of heavy military gear and especially weapons. By emphasising the fact that the Kurdish female fighters are women, they can be used in order to sell the narrative on Kurdish gender equality. In order to comprehend this rhetoric, one has to just imagine if it was the other way around. If military and war was not as hypermasculinized as it is in present times, the rhetoric of women emancipating themselves by joining the military, would not work. In the case of the Kurdish women, it is the USA using the female fighters to promote a egalitarian progressive image and in order to justify their alliance. By stressing the fact that the Kurds are “progressive” in terms of gender equality, they let the controversies surrounding the Kurds (e.g. PKK terrorism) slip aside. Furthermore, by emphasising the Kurds as the “only” possible ally in the Middle East because of their progressiveness in terms of gender equality, the US is projecting this egalitarian democratic progressive self-image onto themselves.

As I already stated in the beginning, there are many feminist scholars which link the ‘War on Terror’ narrative to the representation of women in war. Lindsey Feitz and Joane Nagel, for example, analyzed how gender and sexuality became militarized in the Iraq war. They state, amongst others, that when women participate in military organizations, they often become “gendered weapons in war in ways they did not sign up for (Einstein 2004, as cited in Feitz/Nagel 2008: 201). Furthermore, Feitz and Nagel argue that “the US ‘War on Terror’, including the war in Iraq, reflects not only the patriarchal assumptions of warfare in general, but also serves as a violent, performative stage on

⁷ There is an ongoing debate on whether the military could be a space for facilitating actual emancipation or not. Colonel Lorry Fenner for example argues for a greater integration of women in the army and in higher ranks (Fenner/DeYoung 2001). She wants to prove that women are capable of coping with the emotional and physical burdens associated with the military and sees the military as a place where women can aspire greater equality and liberation. I find this argument questionable. Not only because, as Kumar (2004) pointed out, the military often has exploited feminist aspirations of women and used them to promote an emancipated culture, but also because it strikes to me as a form of liberal feminism and I do not believe that gender equality means that women have to become like men or use the same means.

which to reassert US national virility following the attacks of 9/11." (Feitz/Nagel 2008: 201). However, it is not as homogenous as it seems at first sight.

Deepa Kumar (2004) did interesting work on the media construction of the story surrounding US-American soldier Jessica Lynch who was "rescued" 2003 in the US-led war in Iraq. As Kumar states, Lynch's story had many implications. First, it symbolized the presence of women in the US army. Second, it was also a "story of the 'dramatic' rescue of a young, vulnerable woman" which, as Kumar argues, evoked a more emotional discourse about the Iraq war. But most importantly, Lynch was constructed as a hero and became a symbol for the West's progressive attitude towards women, meaning that it would justify the US's argument that they were "liberating" the people of Iraq (Kumar 2004: 297 p.). As Kumar states, women most prominently play the role of the victim in war narratives. She refers to Susan Jeffords (1991) *protection scenario*⁸, in order to show how the 2001 war on Afghanistan was justified with the Taliban dubbed as the villains, the Afghan women as the victims and the US as the protector (Stabile/Kumar 2005 forthcoming, in Kumar 2004). And as Kumar states, Jessica Lynch was, thus, symbolized as part of the heroes, "as a female hero/soldier she came to reflect the US's "civilized" and emancipated culture, in contrast to a carefully constructed image of the Middle East as barbaric" (Kumar 2004: 299).

It is exactly this dynamic of the "civilized" heroes and the "barbaric" oppressors that Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) discusses in her book "Do Muslim women really need saving?". She unravels how news programs after the 9/11 attacks focused on the "cultural" aspect of the attackers, "as if knowing something about women and Islam or the meaning of a religious ritual would help one understand the tragic attack on New York's World Trade Center and the U.S. Pentagon" (Ibid.: 31). As Abu-Lughod argues, by focusing on these topics the media left the history of repressive regimes and the US enmeshment in the Middle Eastern region aside and, thus, re-created "an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims" (Ibid.: 32). The representations of the Afghan women as oppressed and the Muslim man as the oppressor were crucial to this imagery which legitimized the actions that followed 9/11. To give an example, she refers to a part of a speech where the First Lady at that time, Laura Bush, talked about the oppressed Afghan women and said: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Laura Bush 2001, as cited in Ibid.). The connection of

⁸ Susan Jeffords (1991) *protection scenario* builds up on Judith Hick Stiehms's (1982) work and states that there are three actors in the scenario of protection: the protected/victim, the threat/villain and the protector/hero (204).

these two issues resembled the colonial rhetoric which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) described as “White men saving brown women from brown men” in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1994: 93). In order to make sense of this narrative, I introduce the concept of *Otherring* which was especially coined by Edward Said (1979) and Stuart Hall (1992). The demarcation of *Otherness* refers to an identification of difference based on race, ethnicity, class or gender. This *Otherness* often results in forms of exclusion and is described as something „strange“ or „exotic“. Additionally, *Otherring* is acted out by describing the *Other* but it is primarily constructing the *Self*. With regard to the ‘War on Terror’ narrative, one can conclude, that race and gender are closely entangled in the ‘War on Terror’ discourse and are used to and are used to constitute the liberal, egalitarian *Self* by constructing the misogynist Muslim *Other*.

Or as queer scholar Jasbir Puar puts it: The patriotism after 9/11 was tied to a "reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality" which was sold as a hallmark of US modernity. At the same time, the USA was presented as "feminist" in relation to the Taliban (Puar 2007: 41). Sadia Abbas (2014) explains the dichotomy of West vs. Islam which is supporting the ‘War on Terror’ narrative further. She argues that the liberal aspiration of the word “freedom” is the predominant definition and it is directly linked to capitalism by at the same time completely ignoring the cruelty in the history of the empire. Islam is presented as the opposite or as a limitation of this Western form of freedom and thus calls into question the civilization of all Islamicate cultures (Abbas 2014: 2 pp.). Abbas also sheds light on the special role of women in this scenario. She describes the women’s body as an “ideological battlefield” which is seen as a bearer of Muslim identity by both, Muslims and non-Muslims (Abbas 2014: 35 pp.). Consequently, the Muslim woman becomes an object to imperial rescue and, thus, a justification for imperial warfare. But Abbas makes another interesting remark concerning the representation of Muslims. She does remain in these cleavages of „us vs. Muslims“ or „West vs. East“, but makes a differentiation between, as she says it „good Islam“ vs. „bad Islam“. She says that all these different images and symbols of the “veiled ‘pious’ Muslim woman, the militant, the minority Muslim injured by Western free speech, the ‘progressive’ feminists, the ‘secular’ Muslim intellectuals, etc., either stand for the “good” or the “bad” Islam, depending upon who is perceiving them and when (Ibid.: 4). Abbas further states: “Even as their goodness and badness depends on rapidly mutating political necessities, the seesaw of good and bad Muslim seems inescapable”

(Ibid.). With regard to the present time, she sees the work of Joan Scott (2010) and Saba Mahmood (2011), for example, as a sign for how the intellectual left now imagines the good Muslim as a apolitical pious Muslim which hypervisiblized in the discourse, whereas the secular Muslim woman disappears. I think that this is a very interesting perspective of a growing body of studies that deals with the agency of Muslim women.

And I do think that the concept of differentiating between “good” and “bad Muslims” is also very helpful to explore my findings, Since I analyzed the media discourse instead of a scholarly discourse, I believe that the imagery of the good and the bad Muslims differs from Abba’s example, I just cited. After examining the discourse on Kurdish women, I conclude that Kurds are presented as the “good” Muslims, whereas Muslim Arab men and especially ISIS are presented as the “bad” Muslims. Moreover, I argue that the bodies of Kurdish and non-Kurdish Muslim women serve as the most dominant signifier in this debate. While one presupposition in media discourse suggests that Muslim women in the rest of the Middle East are oppressed by their men and need to be liberated, the Kurds are presented as the progressive counter image. When analyzing the discourse fragments, I noticed that the fact that 90% of the Kurds are Muslims was not mentioned at all or if so, it was immediately connected to the discourse on Kurdish secularism. Therefore, I argue that the fact that Kurds are Muslims is not mentioned as frequently because it does not fit into the narrative as the Kurds being the “secular” “progressive” heroes and ISIS being the “misogynist” “fundamentalist” villains. By depicting the Kurds as almost as modern and „feminist“ as the constructed self-image of the USA, they become worthy allies in the US’ ‘War on Terror’. Thus the bodies of Kurdish women become a symbol for the supposed “freedom” they enjoy in contrast to their non-Kurdish Muslim counterparts which reflects on the discourse of the Kurds in general and on the self-image of the USA. However, it is not only the Muslim Arab men or ISIS who are being *othered* in the discourse. As I explored earlier, all Enzinna and Bradley and Parkinson are constructing another *Other*, the socialist Kurds. Although all three authors celebrate the Kurds for their gender equality and suggest that the Kurd and the US-Americans are very much alike, they make clear thath they differ from the Kurds ideologywise. By emphasising the “Marxis” or “Maoist” *Other* with the “utopian goals”, all three authors reinforce the neoliberal democratic *Self* of the USA.

7. Conclusion

It is safe to say that this research surprised me in many ways. I thought that I would encounter openly sexist portrayals of Kurdish women but the underlying gender presuppositions and stereotypes which I encountered in the discourse were much more subtle. This work also made me reflect my own work as a journalist because I know the danger of always looking for the story, the symbols, the “squeaky clean images”.

After analyzing 38 articles of eight different media outlets with the help of gender and CDA theorists, I can say that the discourse on Kurdish women in the US-American media is very homogenous. The structure analysis – where I searched for recurring topics, events and remarkable vocabulary etc. – has proven that the discourse on Kurdish women is actually constituted by an entanglement of three different discourse strands: the discourse on women in the Middle East, the discourse on the Kurds and the discourse on the ‘War on terror’. I found out that subtopics like “Kurdish gender equality” are often mentioned in the same breath as “ISIS’ fundamentalism” or “Muslim traditionalism”. Additionally, women are often described as “fearless” and as fighting “like men”. Topics that were not mentioned as extensively were the ones that I defined as “Kurds are Muslims” or “patriarchy in Kurdish communities”. Additionally, only a few authors mentioned that the majority of Kurds are Muslim, instead, they stressed their secularity. Concerning the representation of Kurdish women, they were mostly talked *about* and only a few were cited. A topic which also remained largely absent was the motivation of the Kurdish women for joining the fight. Only two authors mentioned that the military might be a possibility for Kurdish women to free themselves from traditional conventions. Especially the absence of certain topics speaks for the “squeaky-clean image” of the Kurds that some journalists wanted to paint. The main stereotype of the Kurdish women represented in the article is that of a female fighter. Only a few authors mention Kurdish politicians or even mothers (although that is a very common stereotype as well when talking about women and war) when talking about Kurdish women. The discursive events I defined, in the beginning, did not really have much impact on the style of reporting. Some authors referred to the battles of Kobane or Mount Sinjar as an entry point to speak about the female fighters taking part in the battle. The battle on Mount Sinjar is an exception though because it is often explicitly mentioned in relation to the Kurdish women rescuing the Yazidis from ISIS.

The main argumentation of the articles was that the Kurds are very progressive, which can be judged by their high level of gender equality. Additionally, they are fighting the misogynist terrorist enemy and, consequently, they must be supported by the US in their “feminist” endeavor. However, some of the authors did mention the controversy surrounding this military alliance, e.g. the conflict between Turkey and the US terror listing of the PKK. Nevertheless, although these controversies were shed light on, the baseline of the argumentation was still that the Kurds should be supported because they are “the good ones”. There is one news outlet which stands out because it follows a different argumentation. Most articles in the conservative Wall Street Journal are recognizing the Kurdish female fighters, however, they do not celebrate them as much as their center-leftists colleagues. The main argumentation in order to justify the US-Kurdish military alliance is to point out their efficacy in warfare and their “relative” progressiveness in relation to the rest of the Middle East. This is a very matter-of-fact argumentation which I did not find in any other articles. That is, among other, why I selected the WSJ article by Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson for my detailed analysis.

Which leads me to the findings of my detailed analysis where I analyzed “A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS’ Backyard – At a college in Kurdish Syria, Rojava tries to train its future leaders”, written by Wes Enzinna and published Nov. 24 2015 on the nytimes.com and “A Personal War –America’s Marxist Allies Against ISIS”, written by Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson and published July 24 2015 on the wsj.com.

Although both articles feature a very different style of reporting and focus on divergent topics and angles in their stories, I would argue that the three authors, nevertheless, support the same narrative. That narrative is, in short: The USA is supporting the Kurds in the war against ISIS because they are the best allies possible mainly due to their progressive commitment to gender equality. The line of argumentation, however, differs in both articles. Whereas Enzinna seems to be really fond of the Kurdish project and explores their approaches to a different societal system in depth, Bradley and Parkison remain highly critical of the Kurdish movement. In opposition to Enzinna’s their argumentation is based on three pillars: the efficiency of the Kurdish warfare, their approaches to gender equality and the fact that they have a common enemy. For Enzinna, the argumentation line seems much more nuanced. He is very supportive of the Kurdish societal structures and especially gender equality, (he however sometimes questions them as well, especially when it comes to Öcalan). His

argument is more ideological which becomes apparent when he uses the word “freedom” as a collective symbol and as a connector between the Kurdish and the US values. In both articles, however, there is a conglomerate of different ideologies and power structures which I detangled in my analysis.

First of all, I found that the representations of the Kurdish women are highly influenced by an underlying gender ideology. I have to recall Enloe’s (1983) words from the beginning when she stated: “Women may serve the military, but they can never be permitted to *be* the military.” As I found in the coverage, both articles treat the Kurdish female fighters fighting in a military outlet as something exceptional. When describing the fighter Deniz Derik, Enzinna focuses on very “female” normative stereotypes like the color pink or the question if she wants to marry but at the same time, he stresses that Derik is using weapons and military gadgets. As I explored beforehand, all these attributes and military, in general, have been connected to a hegemonic masculinity for centuries. Enzinna thus tells the story of a tough woman who is ready to kill herself if she has to, fighting “like men” against evil terrorists but at the same time he stresses her “femininity” through describing her teddy bears etc., to make sure that the audience knows that she is “still a woman”. With Bradley and Parkinson it is different, their protagonist Zind Ruken is described as a very “tough” fighter as well. They describe how she uses weapons, that she knows how to assemble a gun, but also that she left her family behind to fight. Different from Enzinna, it first appears as if they do not use any representation of “typical female” stereotypes while describing her. But then one realizes that she is always referred to as “Ms Ruken”. As if to remind the audience consistently that she really is a woman engaging in this “manly” military activities. So all in all, one can say that the gendered notion of the military which many women face daily are reproduced in a similar way in the media. And this gendered notion of the military makes it possible that men like Enzinna, Bradley, and Cooper can present the Kurdish women fighting as something “feminist” or “emancipatory”. Consequently, I would conclude that although the male authors might have intended to present the Kurdish female fighters they portrayed as very feminist, the contrary is the case. Through these specific representations, both authors help maintain unequal power relations by emphasizing how women who fight in the military are exotic and normally not a part of this hypermasculinized realm.

Another aspect of the representations is the juxtaposition of Kurdish women with ISIS or Arab Muslims. This is especially done in Enzinna's work where states that Kurdish women were tortured by ISIS for being "Western heretics". And furthermore when he describes the co-governance and how the "Arab tribal leader" is not so fond of sharing a political position with Kurdish female Yusuf. Interestingly, the veil is not a topic in both articles. But it was one in a few of the articles I analyzed in the structural analysis. There I argued that the veil functioned as a collective symbol for the oppression of women. However, the juxtaposition of Kurdish women to misogynist ISIS and patriarchic Arab Muslim men and that in combination with describing the Kurds as progressive in regards to gender equality, reminds me of Galletti's work in the beginning who said that Kurdish women were often portrayed in European historical narratives as the antithetic to the Arab, Turkish or Persian woman because of the seemingly high level of freedom they enjoy,

Furthermore, I found Saida Abbas' narrative of "good Muslims vs. bad Muslims" helpful in explaining the *Othering* happening in the coverage. In both articles the Kurds are described as the good Muslims. Especially Enzinna, stresses the secularism of the Kurds when talking about religiousness and again he uses gender equality as this trope which differentiates "progressive" Kurds from "traditionalist" Muslim Arabs or "fundamentalist" ISIS. So clearly, the US decided that the Kurds are the "good" Muslims who have the same values as the US-Americans whereas ISIS and also traditional Muslim Arabs are the "bad" Muslims. Nevertheless, this distinction is not as clean as it seems at first. Because other than Enzinna who describes the Kurds as very similar to the US-Americans with regard to gender equality and their pursuit of freedom, Bradley and Parkinson do not only *other* ISIS, they also *other* the Kurds themselves. But again *Othering* is used, in that regard, to create the "liberal progressive" US-American *Self*. By presenting the Kurds as the "communist" *Other* as I explained earlier, the USA reasserts its "liberal democratic" *Self*. But this cold war rhetoric is also found in Enzinna's coverage when he dismisses Öcalan's theories as "pretty dreamy stuff" or describes Rojava's model of society as "utopian". I think most of these representations of the Kurds are closely tied to the discourse the authors are forming a part of themselves. Thus this old cold war ideology seems to be present at times in their portrayal as well.

Drawing back upon Foucault's ideas on power in the discourse, one can conclude that there are two different power structures present in the discourse. First of all, there is a

“West vs. Rest” power hierarchy visible which manifests in the depiction of ISIS and Muslim Arab men (who symbolize Islam in general) as backward and then on the other hand by portraying the Kurds as “progressive and secular” which mirrors the self-image of the West. The second power structure is present with regard to gender. Kurdish women are only represented in order to fit the narrative and not because of their own feminist aspirations and projects.

I think I have shown in this thesis that the entanglement of the three discourse strands not only produces the representation of the Kurdish women as the “tough” feminist fighters but also helps to justify the ‘War on Terror’ against ISIS and the US’ role in that by supporting the only possible ally in the “illiberal” Middle East: the “relatively progressive” Kurds. Thus, I would argue that the whole discourse on Kurdish women seems actually like a proxy discourse for a discourse on culture, modernity, and women.

Therefore, I think that counter-narratives of Kurdish women need to be present in the media to tell a different story. But in order to do that, I think there is a need for research on “the locally organized practices of actual people”, as Smith says (1999), because otherwise there would be squeaky-clean representations again instead of nuanced stories. What I have asked myself in the process of analyzing Enzinna’s article was, if there is actually a possibility to identify counter-narratives in the media discourse? Because the portrayal of Derik, when she dismissed his marriage question or when she said that “fear is for your Western women in their kitchens”, I saw some agency by her dismissing this image that Enzinna was painting of her. But on the other hand, it was Enzinna who had the power of choosing the quotes he needed to create the story he was writing. Therefore, I am not sure if one could identify counter-narratives in media representations at all.

Another topic that I think needs further discussion is the seemingly “emancipatory role” of the military or its limits. Some authors mentioned that the Kurdish women saw the military as a possibility to escape traditional constraints in their communities. And there are scholars who share this opinion as well. Cemgil and Hoffmann describe the militarization of women as a “liberation from patriarchal bonds” (Cemgil/Hoffmann 2016). But there are also scholars, like Giloti, who call it an alarming trend which implies that only the women that “turn into men of arms” become worthy of respect (Giloti 2016). This is also a concern that I share, especially after analyzing all

these articles who often referred to the Kurdish women as “same as men” or “fighting like men”. Personally, I find this position of liberal feminism with regard to the military highly problematic. It would be interesting how the Kurdish women think about this topic and also how they see their role with regard to the Kurdish movement itself.

Furthermore, I think that the discourse on Kurdish women will slowly fade away in the near future. Since I argue that their representations are only used in order to justify the role of the US in the war against ISIS and now the war has “ended”, so there will be no need any for these narratives anymore. Consequently, the expectations of some individuals to get the PKK removed from the US terror list or for Rojava to be acknowledged as an equal political entity by the USA seems to be very unlikely.

8. Bibliography

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9. Annex

Abstract English

In 2013 the US media celebrated the fighting in Northern Syria of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) frenetically and especially the participation of the all-female militia: the Womens' Protection Units (YPJ). I argue that the very prominent representation of Kurdish women as the "badass female fighters" is intertwined with a discourse on the Kurds in general, a discourse on women in the Middle East and a discourse on the 'War on Terror'. The gendered bodies of Kurdish women fighting in military outlets becomes an "ideological battlefield" itself. By contrasting the Kurds, and especially Kurdish women, with misogynist ISIS and Muslim Arab men and by emphasising the high level in gender equality in Kurdish areas, the USA re(produces) its self-image as the beacon of freedom and progress and consequently justifying the US 'War on Terror' and the US imperialism in the Middle East.

Abstract Deutsch

Ab dem Jahr 2013 begannen vor allem US-amerikanische Medien die KurdInnen in ihrem Kampf gegen den Islamischen Staat (IS) frenetisch zu feiern. Dabei wurde vor allem die Beteiligung der Frauenmilizien, der YPJ, in Syrien oft hervorgehoben. In meiner Abschlussarbeit argumentiere ich, dass die prominenteste Darstellung der Kurdinnen als "badass female fighters" durch eine Diskursverschränkung aus dem Diskurs über die KurdInnen im allgemeinen, dem Diskurs über Frauen im Nahen Osten und dem 'War on Terror'-Diskurs konstituiert wird. Das führt dazu, dass die "gendered bodies" der KurdInnen, die in militärischen Organisationen kämpfen, selbst zu einem ideologischen Schlachtfeld werden. Durch die Gegenüberstellung der KurdInnen, speziell der Kurdinnen, mit dem misogynistischen IS und muslimischen arabischen Männern und durch die Hervorhebung der Geschlechtergleichheit in den kurdischen Gebieten, (re)produziert die USA ihr Selbstbild als das Sinnbild für Freiheit und Fortschritt und somit rechtfertigt diese Darstellung den US-amerikanischen 'War on Terror' und damit auch den US-amerikanischen Imperialismus im Nahen Osten.

Topic/Subtopics of the Discourse Fragments

Discourse	Topics	Subtopics		Subtopics			
War on Terror (Syria and Iraq)	The military operation	US airstrikes					
		death among fighters					
		Exchange of combat information					
	The enemy	ISIS' cruelty	ISIS' violence against women				
		ISIS' backwardness	ISIS against secularism				
		Religious fundamentalism	ISIS against women's rights				
	The allies	The Kurds are an US ally	ISIS is sunni				
			Iraqi Kurds are US allies				
			Syrian Kurds are a controversial ally			PYD links to PKK	
		Turkey is a US ally	Kurds are leading the war against ISIS				
			American volunteers fight alongside the Kurds				
			Turkey is not fighting ISIS				
Women in the Middle East	Women in the ME	Backwardness	Turkey is a NATO member				
			Turkey vs. Kurds				
			modern Turkey vs. Medieval ISIS				
	Kurdish Women	Muslim/Arab traditionalism	Sharia law				
			Polygamy				
			Honour killings				
		Patriarchy in Kurdish societies	motherhood				
			family support				
			Co-Governance				
		political level	Gender Studies				
The Kurds	Kurdish independence	Kurdish nationalism					
			Democratic confederalism				
	Kurdish unity	PKK and PYD					
			Peshmerga				
	Öcalan's Theory	Gender equality					
			mult-ethnicism				
	International level	environmentalism					
			Kurds are on their own				
			US allies				
			PKK = Terror organization				

Discourse Fragments

New York Times

NYTimes-1

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	USA and Turkey are “fighting with and against the same ally”, this is shown through the attack of a YPJ female fighter (attacking the Turks), neutral position towards women in the military, still it is something out of the ordinary
Date	28.01.2018
Citation	Nordland 2018a
Category	Middle East
Genre	Report
Place	Qamishli, Syria
Author	Rod Nordland (foreign correspondent, based in Kabul)
Headline	Female Kurdish Fighter Kills Turkish Troops in Likely Suicide Bombing in Syria
Cause	Suicide bombing attack in Syria, killing Turkish fighters
Graphic Designs	1 map, 2 videos, Twitter post (pics of Avesta), 1 pic (smoke over a city, Kurdish flag)
Summary	A female Kurdish fighter attacked a tank and killed Turkish soldiers and herself, reacting to the Turkish attacks on Afrin.
Topics, Subtopics	Avesta, Turkey vs. Kurds, YPJ, SDF, Kurds are a US ally, Syrian K. are a controversial ally, Afrin, Erdogan, Kurdish independence, K.f.f. fight alongside men, Kobane, teenage soldiers, PKK links to PYD, Kurds are leading the war,
Sources	Official statements (of US, Turkey), Kurdish news media
Vocabulary	“heroine”, Turkey: “Nato Member”, PKK: “Separatists who are closely allied with the Syrian Kurds”, “Women are a major component of

	the Kurdish militias”, “independent, female commanders”
Collective symbols	Suicide bombing (extremism)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only about Syrian Kurds, nothing about the Kurdish movement nor about the Kurdish women’s movement, or why exactly she attacked the tank.

NYTimes-2

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	USA should support the Kurds because of its own values (gender equality and democracy). Women in the military present a counter image to the victimization of women in war.
Date	18.08.2016
Citation	Tax 2016
Category	Op-Ed
Genre	Comment
Place	Sinjar, Iraq
Author	Meredith Tax (writer, political activist)
Headline	When women fight ISIS
Cause	Rescue of the Yazidis at Mount Sinjar
Graphic Designs	2 pictures
Summary	The author calls upon the USA to support Yazdis and Kurds. Talks about the Mount Sinjar offense and how the Kurds freed the Yazidis. Yazidis were inspired by the feminist Kurds and formed all-female militias too.
Topics, Subtopics	Sinjar, ISIS’ violence against women, Rojava, f.f. fight for women’s rights, ISIS’ brutality, K.f.f. fight to free themselves, patriarchy in K. societies, female leadership, women’s victimization in war time, co-governance, Turkey vs. Kurds, gender equality

Sources	Own opinion
Vocabulary	“gender equality, democracy and pluralism”, “sex slaves”, “female warrior”, “heavily patriarchal”, “radical Kurdish female guerrillas”, “feminism”
Collective symbols	War victims (women); female soldier (feminism)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	No one cited, interesting comment (linking US values with Kurdish “feminism”)

NYTimes-3

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	Kurds are very secular and liberal (unlike fundamentalist ISIS). Proof for that is that women and men are fighting together.
Date	03.10.2014
Citation	Aydintasbas 2014
Category	Op-Ed
Genre	Comment
Place	Istanbul, Turkey
Author	Asli Ayfintasbas (Turkish news reporter)
Headline	Turkey must save the Kurds
Cause	Kurds fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author argues that Turkey should get involved in the fight against ISIS and chose the Kurds as their ally because they are the only reasonable ally and they would provide a buffer zone for Turkey.
Topics, Subtopics	Turkey vs. Kurds, PKK terrorist organisation, natural resources, Kurdish secularism, K.f.f. fighting alongside men, fearless f.f. Kobane, modern Turkey, ISIS is backwards
Sources	/
Vocabulary	“modern Turkey”, “medieval radicalism”, “heroic”, “with or without American airstrikes”, “only

	reasonable allies”
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Interesting story: A female PKK guerrilla refused to flee the battlefield, even when men already deserted.

NYTimes-4

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	The Kurds are the most effective ally on the ground in Syria. Nevertheless, the US cannot admit officially that they are cooperation because of their links to the PKK. Still, the Kurds are practicing gender equality.
Date	10.08.2015
Citation	Callimachi 2015
Category	Middle East
Genre	Reportage
Place	Hasaka, Syria
Author	Rukmini Callimachi
Headline	Inside Syria: Kurds Roll Back ISIS, but Alliances are Strained
Cause	USA cooperating with the Kurds in Syria
Graphic Designs	8 pictures, map
Summary	The author investigates the military alliance between the Kurdish and the US army fighting in Syria.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurds are US allies, Turkey is not fighting ISIS, Kurds are leading the war, female leadership, Turkey vs. Kurds, Kobane, Öcalan, PKK, K.f.f. are fighting alongside men
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	“most effective ally”, “portraits of female martyrs”
Collective symbols	Terrorism (Islam)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	No women cited, Kurdish uniforms are “inspired by the US Marines”.

NYTimes-5

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	The Kurds are secular and supporting gender equality, unlike ISIS or Muslim Arab men. But at the same time the author is sceptical because of the Kurdish admiration for leader Öcalan.
Date	24.11.2015
Citation	Enzinna 2015
Category	NY Times Magazine – Feature
Genre	Reportage
Place	Syria
Author	Wes Enzinna (US-American journalist)
Headline	A Dream of Secular Utopia I ISIS' Backyard – At a college in Kurdish Syria, Rojava tries to train its future leaders
Cause	The author's visit to a college in Rojava.
Graphic Designs	Six pictures, one map
Summary	The author describes his experience of teaching at a college in Qamishli to understand the Kurdish project in Rojava and their role in the Syrian war.
Topics, Subtopics	ISIS' brutality, Rojava, Öcalan, Kurdish women are different from Western women, co-governance, K. secularism, PKK is a terror organisation, multi-ethnicism, female leadership, Turkey vs. Kurds, Kurdish history as a minority, Kurdish nationalism, democratic confederalism, Kurds are a US ally, teenage soldiers, war crimes, Kurds are Muslims, ISIS' violence against women, backwardness of ME societies, Muslim Arab traditionalism
Sources	Interviews, participatory observation
Vocabulary	"half-starved, half-dead, terrorized", "women championed as leaders", "feminist instruction", "women be

	made equal leaders", "pretty dreamy stuff", "ponytail", "Pink socks", "pink teddy bear", "withered woman"
Collective symbols	Pink (femininity); teddy (childlike); socialism (US enemy)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Maybe a fit for the detailed analysis. Print. Modern West vs. backwards ME, four women cited (one without a name)

NYTimes-6

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	The Kurds are succesfull and righteours US allies in the 'War on Terror'
Date	17.02.2018
Citation	Nordland 2018b
Category	Middle East
Genre	Portraits
Place	Syria
Author	Rod Nordland
Headline	Meet America's Syrian Allies Who Helped Defeat ISIS
Cause	The "defeat" of ISIS
Graphic Designs	Portraits
Summary	The authors portrays different fighters in Syria who fought against ISIS
Topics, Subtopics	Kurds are a US ally, Kobane, K.f.f. fighting alongside men, Kurdish f.f. are different from US-American female soldiers
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"helped defeat ISIS", "American help", "American-backed coalition", "grateful for the Americans", "alongside the Americans", "more equal"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Print (18.02.2018), emphasis is on the US-American support for the Kurds, only one woman portrayed who speaks more critically of Americans with regard to gender

	equality.
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NYTimes-7

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	The Kurds are very secular and feminist. Arab men have trouble accepting gender equality in Northern Syria.
Date	24.02.2018
Citation	Nordland 2018c
Category	Middle East
Genre	Reportage
Place	Manbij, Syria
Author	Rod Nordland
Headline	Women Are Free, and Armed in Kurdish-Controlled Northern Syria
Cause	Current situation in Northern Syria, concerning women's rights.
Graphic Designs	Four pictures, one map
Summary	The author explores the gender equality which has been installed by the Kurdish government in Northern Syria.
Topics, Subtopics	Kobani, patriarchy in K. societies, Öcalan, women's rights, PKK terrorism, women fighting alongside men, US ally, Arab/Muslim traditionalism, polygamy, Sharia law, Raqqa, co-governance
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"women officials", "beating and abusing", "gender egalitarian philosophy", American-backed coalition", "prosperity and stability", "overwhelmingly Arab, conservative and tribal"
Collective symbols	Arab Muslim men (against feminism)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Mainly focusing on Syrian women. Maybe a fit for the detailed analysis?

NYTimes-8

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Times
Discourse Position	Although Kurdish women face patriarchal structures in K. communities and ISIS, they make strides towards equality.
Date	13.10.2014
Citation	Flanagin 2014
Category	Op-Talk
Genre	Comment
Place	Syria and Iraq
Author	Jake Flanagin (US-American reporter)
Headline	Women Fight ISIS and Sexism in Kurdish Regions
Cause	Kurdish women fighting ISIS
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author talks about women in combat, fighting against sexism of ISIS and within the Kurdish communities.
Topics, Subtopics	Gender equality, women fight alongside men, Avesta, Patriarchy in K. societies, ISIS' violence against women, Turkey vs. Kurds, co-governance, K.f.f. are fighting to free themselves
Sources	Other articles
Vocabulary	"tarnished the family honor"
Collective symbols	Paradise narrative (men are scared of armed women)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Syrian and Iraqi women, no first hand interviews, two women cited.

Huffington Post

HuffPost-1

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	The USA should support the Kurds to bring democracy to the Middle East
Date	11.03.2014
Citation	Karadaghi 2014
Category	The Blog
Genre	Comment
Place	/
Author	Rashid Karadaghi (Kurdish-American English Teacher, Blogger, Santa Barbara)
Headline	For the Kurds, No Friends but the Americans
Cause	Kurdish-American cooperation
Graphic Designs	1 picture
Summary	The author talks about the American support of the Kurds. Goes into history, Ottoman Empire, etc. And argues then for an US recognition of the Kurds and help them become independent.
Topics, Subtopics	U.S. ally, Kurdish history, Kobane, Kurdish nationalism, history as a minority, ISIS brutality, natural resources, Iraq War
Sources	/
Vocabulary	“Beacon of freedom, harmony, peaceful co-existence and democracy”, “stable state”, ISIS a “brutal force”, “the grateful Kurdish mother”
Collective symbols	USA (freedom, democracy), motherhood (caring for the nation)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	A woman named her newborn “Obama”, one woman cited (with a name)

HuffPost-2

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish women are “heros” in the battle against ISIS

Date	08.09.2016
Citation	Nelson 2016
Category	News
Genre	News Report
Place	Minbic, Syria
Author	Sara C Nelson
Headline	Asia Ramzan Antar – the Kurdish Angelina Jolie ‘Killed While Fighting ISIS’
Cause	Death of a Kurdish female fighter that went public
Graphic Designs	1 twitter post of “We want Freedom for Kurdistan” with 2 pictures of Antar
Summary	Author reports the news that Ramazan Antar was killed in Minbic, talks about her resemblance to Angelina Jolie, and talks about the comments on the internet.
Topics, Subtopics	YPJ, K. w. fighting alongside men, K. w. fighting for women’s rights, focus on their looks
Sources	Twitter, Kurdish Project Website
Vocabulary	“hero”, “matyr”, “heroism”, “Angelina Jolie resemblance”, “Kurdistan’s hero”, her fight = “Symbol to all women”
Collective symbols	Hero, martyr (Nationalism), Angelina Jolie (Western sex symbol)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Ramzan Antar is being talked about by Westerners, by men; not a word WHY the women are fighting, no word from a woman at all

HuffPost-3

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish Women are brave because they fight against ISIS, fighting liberated them. Kurds in general are on their own with no real international support.
Date	03.09.2016
Citation	Ashrafi 2016

Category	Huffington Post (?)
Genre	Comment
Place	Syria
Author	Maryam Ashrafi (Photographer)
Headline	Meet The Brave Women Fighting ISIS In Syria – Photographer Maryam Ashrafi lived with Kurdish female fighters in Syria, experiencing their pain, sorrow, joy and triumphs.
Cause	The publication of the photo series of the photographer.
Graphic Designs	3 pictures of the women's fighters daily life (focus here is on the pictures)
Summary	It is about the photographer's experience with the female fighters. She wants to shed light on the women fighting, says they are underrepresented in the mainstream media and left alone by the international community.
Topics, Subtopics	Fearless female fighters, K. female fighters are fighting to free themselves, patriarchy in K. societies, Kobane, Women fight alongside men, PKK vs. Turkish, media representation, death among fighters, Kurds are on their own, ISIS' brutality
Sources	Personal encounter
Vocabulary	"taken up arms to rebuild and reclaim their lives", brave people", "gained some equality", "suffering"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Author says: "they helped me to understand the motivation of their fight" but never explains it, Syrian Kurds, No woman cited

HuffPost-4

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
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Discourse Position	Says “taking up arms” is an entry point for women to form a new social construction based on gender equity; Kurds are fighting ISIS and the Turkish State.
Date	18.03.2015
Citation	Sáenz 2015
Category	The Blog
Genre	Comment
Place	Syria, Iraq, Mexico
Author	Charlotte Maria Sáenz
Headline	Women Up in Arms: Zapatistas and Rojava Kurds Embrace a New Gender Politics
Cause	Defence of Kobane
Graphic Designs	1 picture
Summary	The author draws a comparison between the gender politics of the Zapatistas and the Kurds. Presents the “Jineology Committee “ as an approach to equality
Topics, Subtopics	Women fight like men, Kobane, Gender equality, Democratic Confederalism, Öcalan, Patriarchy in K. societies, ISIS’ brutality, Turkey vs. Kurds, K. equality in political institutions.
Sources	ALB noticias, opendemocracy. Net, Newsweek.
Vocabulary	“fighting for their survival against ISIS”, women “showing both willingness and capacity to fight as soldiers”, “heroic resistance to the ravages of ISIS”, “racist and repressive manipulations of the Turkish State”
Collective symbols	Women up in arms (gender equality)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Interesting, because the author describes “taking up arms as an entry point for women” to gender equality, speaks of Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, One women quoted, but no name, interesting because the author is not talking about the enmeshment of the US at all

HuffPost-5

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish women vs. Islamist ideology, it is up to women and their political allies to win the battle of gender equality
Date	24.11.2014
Citation	Begikhani 2014
Category	The Blog
Genre	Report
Place	Sulaimaniya, Iraq
Author	Nazand Begikhani
Headline	Why the Kurdish Fight for Women's Rights Is Revolutionary
Cause	Equality decree was passed in Iraq
Graphic Designs	2 pictures
Summary	The author talks about the struggle in Kobane and the equality decree passed in Iraqi Kurdistan which has prompted opposition from conservative Muslims.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurdish secularism vs. Muslim traditionalism, Kobane, ISIS against women's rights, K. w. are marginalized in the movement, religion, Kurds are Muslims, K. W. are fighting for women's rights worldwide, women's participation in political institutions, gender equality
Sources	Own research, interviews, citations of El Saadawi, etc.
Vocabulary	"grassroot participation", "they did not want to take Western feminist experiences as examples", "legendary", "equality," "radical democracy", "secret revolution", PYD="a sister party of the PKK", "new hope", "liberate women"
Collective symbols	Revolution (a radical and pervasive change in society and the social structure), Muslims (conservative, against equality)

Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Iraqi AND Syrian Kurds, but sometimes not clear, very differentiated explanation of what the Kurdish women want to accomplish.
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HuffPost-6

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	U.S. should support Kurds to hold free democratic referendums and treat them as political and not just as military allies, but instead they use them as cannon fodder.
Date	09.09.2016
Citation	Olmert 2016
Category	The Blog
Genre	Comment
Place	Syria (?)
Author	Dr. Josef Olmert (Professor, International Service)
Headline	The Kurds Are Betrayed Again – Never Mind Angelina Jolie
Cause	Asia Ramazan Antar died
Graphic Designs	/
Summary	The author argues that the Kurds have been betrayed by the USA again and are on their own.
Topics, Subtopics	Fearless K. female fighters, history of the Kurds, Kurds are on their own, Kurds are under Turkish attack, Turkey is an US ally, Internal struggles of the Kurds, Kurdish history
Sources	Own opinion
Vocabulary	“slaughter fields of Syria and Iraq”, “fearless”, “no better friend than the mountains”, “Kurdish Angelina Jolie”, “betrayed”, “natural allies”
Collective symbols	Middle East (a ticking bomb), Angelina Jolie (Western sex symbol)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Author does not really relate to Asia Ramazan Antar, just uses her as an entry point for his opinion, nothing sensationalizing about female fighters

HuffPost-7

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish women are fighting for women's rights worldwide and against religious fundamentalism
Date	21.05.2015
Citation	Begikhani 2016
Category	The Blog
Genre	report
Place	Erbil, Iraq
Author	Nazand Begikhani (Kurdish writer, researcher for Gender and Violence)
Headline	Kurds Develop Gender Studies To Face Fundamentalism
Cause	ISIS occupied the city of Ramadi + Gender Studies Centres operating in Kurdish Iraq
Graphic Designs	1 picture (of unimpressed women)
Summary	The author introduces the two Iraqi Kurdish gender studies centres which conduct a struggle against "reactionary ideologies and religious fundamentalism", with the help of the University of Bristol.
Topics, Subtopics	Patriarchy in Kurdish societies, Kurdish scholars are establishing Gender Studies, Kurdish women fight alongside men, religious fundamentalism
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"equality and social justice", "women's activism", "feminists and activists adopted Western terminology", "gander/gender"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Focus is only on Iraqi Kurds and the resistance they face from male colleagues while trying to promote gender studies, not so much about female fighters (rather as "that is a different struggle")

HuffPost-8

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	The US greatest ally are Kurdish Women, they fight against ISIS (who are against women's and human rights).
Date	03.09.2014
Citation	Hossain 2014
Category	The Blog
Genre	Comment, report
Place	Iraq
Author	Anushay Hossain (American Bangladeshi opinion columnist)
Headline	A Woman's Job: Kurdish Female Fighters on the Front Lines in Iraq
Cause	Recapturing the Mosul dam
Graphic Designs	1 picture
Summary	The author talks about the Kurdish Women in the Peshmerga.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurds are an US ally, ISIS are sunni, ISIS against secularism, ISIS against women's rights, natural resources, Kurds are leading the war, women fight like men, women are fighting to free themselves
Sources	Paradise narrative (men are scared of fighting women)
Vocabulary	"US military made tremendous gains" "America's greatest ally", "diplomats and feminists can thank the Kurds", "women are allowed to serve in the military", "Kurdistan is one of the few Muslim countries", "beacon of democracy in the Middle East, i.e. Iraq", "battle it out of the soul of Iraq"
Collective symbols	Beacon of democracy (USA)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only one Kurdish women is cited without a name. Nothing about why they fight, just that they fight against ISIS because they deny women's rights.

HuffPost-9

Newspaper/Outlet	Huffington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish Women are fearless, fighting ISIS together with US American volunteers
Date	21.06.2016
Citation	Higgs 2016
Category	The Blog
Genre	report
Place	Northern Iraq
Author	Johanna Higgs (Anthropologist)
Headline	Taking on Isis in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Female Fighters of the Peshmerger
Cause	Author's trip to Northern Iraq
Graphic Designs	3 pictures (women in combat)
Summary	The author talks about her trip to Iraqi Kurdistan, where she met a few female fighters.
Topics, Subtopics	ISIS' brutality, Kurdish secularism vs. traditional conservatism, patriarchy in Kurdish societies, K.W. are fearless, K.w. are fighting for women's rights worldwide, K. women fight like men, Fearless female fighters, K. f. f. are fighting to be free, US-American volunteers fight alongside the Kurds, Mount Sinjar
Sources	Personal experiences, interviews
Vocabulary	"her weapon casually leaned up against her", handle their weapons "with precision and notable calmness", "courage", "cultural norms and taboos", "made me feel proud", "like lions"
Collective symbols	Paradise narrative (men are scared of women in arms)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only Iraqi, motivation is stated, not much about Kurdish patriarchy

Washington Post

WashingtonPost-1

Newspaper/Outlet	The Washington Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish Women are tough, Kurds are the allies of the US, but controvert because of PKK
Date	28.06.2017
Citation	Horton 2017
Category	Checkpoint
Genre	Social-media report
Place	/
Author	Alex Horton (is a general assignment reporter, especially military and national security issues)
Headline	A bullet almost killed this Kurdish sniper. Then she laughed about it.
Cause	A viral video about a Kurdish sniper, explained
Graphic Designs	1 twitter-picture, 1 twitter-video, 1 picture of Kurdish fighters
Summary	The author talks about a video which went viral, it shows a female fighter who is missed by a bullet and then laughs about it. The author pushes back suggestions that the video is fake.
Topics, Subtopics	US ally, controversial ally, Öcalan, fearless K.f.f., PKK is a terror organisation, PKK links to PYD,
Sources	Video, Twitter, Syrian and Kurdish affairs analyst, Marine corps combat veteran
Vocabulary	"laughed in the face of death"
Collective symbols	None
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only online, constructing the "badass female fighter", one woman cited (without a name)

WashintonPost-2

Newspaper/Outlet	The Washington Post
Discourse Position	The struggle of Kurdish Women is more complex
Date	23.12.2015

Citation	Holmes 2015a
Category	Monkey Cage
Genre	Opinion (academic)
Place	/
Author	Amy Austin Holmes (Sociologist)
Headline	What are the Kurdish Women's Units fighting for in Syria
Cause	A research conducted on women of the YPJ
Graphic Designs	One picture, one map
Summary	Holmes conducted a research on some YPJ women and asked the question whether they want a separate Kurdish nation state or if they are supporting Kurdish confederalism. She also asked them why they were fighting.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurdish nationalism, democratic confederalism, Rojava, Öcalan, Kurdish women are marginalized in the Kurdish movement, Kurdish women fight for women's rights, patriarchy in K. societies, K.f.f. fight alongside men
Sources	Own research, interviews
Vocabulary	/
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Very critical, a lot about women's motivation and their problems in the K. society

WashingtonPost-3

Newspaper/Outlet	Washington Post
Discourse Position	Critical towards the U.S. enmeshment in the Middle East, supporting the Kurdish Project (?)
Date	02.02.2015
Citation	Holmes 2015b
Category	Monkey Cage
Genre	Opinion (academic)
Place	/
Author	Amy Austin Holmes (sociologist)

Headline	What the battle for Kobane says about U.S. overseas military bases
Cause	Liberation of Kobane, war strategy of US (Incirlik Air Force Base)
Graphic Designs	One picture, one map
Summary	The author examines the importance of the military base of Incirlik in the Syrian War
Topics, Subtopics	Turkey vs. Kurds, Kurdish secularism, Turkey is a US ally, Kurds are a controversial ally, Kurdish women fighting for women's rights, Kobane, PKK is a terrorist group, PKK links to PYD, Iraqi Kurds are not terror-listed,
Sources	Own research
Vocabulary	Incirlik as a "bargaining chip"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	No print, one woman cited

WashingtonPost-4

Newspaper/Outlet	The Washington Post
Discourse Position	PKK are considered terrorists, BUT they are instrumental in the fight against Islamic state (and secular, and feminists)
Date	22.09.2014
Citation	Tharoor 2014b
Category	WorldViews
Genre	report
Place	Syria
Author	Ishaan Tharoor (editor, foreign affairs)
Headline	The worst refugee exodus of the Syrian war is happening right now
Cause	Attacks of Kobane
Graphic Designs	Picture, video, map
Summary	The author explains the Islamic offensive on Kobane and the struggle between the Kurds and the Turks.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurds are US ally, PKK is a terrorist

	group, Turkey vs. Kurds, ISIS against secularism, Kurdish secularism, Kurds are Muslims
Sources	/
Vocabulary	“random slaughter, including beheadings”, Kurdish “secularism”
Collective symbols	ISIS (brutality) female fighters (feminists)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	US was supporting Iraqi Kurds, but not Syrian Kurds at that time

WashingtonPost-5

Newspaper/Outlet	The Washington Post
Discourse Position	The Kurds fit into the liberal democratic narrative of the West, anti-fundamentalist world view, Turkey sees them as terrorists.
Date	27.10.2014
Citation	Tharoor 2014c
Category	World Views
Genre	Comment
Place	/
Author	Ishaan Tharoor (Foreign News editor)
Headline	Turkey still thinks this guy holding a baby bear is a terrorist. Is he?
Cause	PKK is changing its image through the fight against ISIS
Graphic Designs	1 picture of a PKK fighter nursing a baby bear (from 2008)
Summary	The author explains how the PKK was long seen as a terrorists organisation but now gains more and more support in the West due to its fight against ISIS.
Topics, Subtopics	Turkey vs. Kurds, PKK are terrorist organisation, Kurds are a controversial ally, Kobane, Kurds are leading the war, history as a minority, Kurdish secularism, PYD, Kurdish history, K.f.f. are fighting same as men, Turkey is not fighting ISIS

Sources	Different news articles from the Washington Post, New Republic, Turkey's deputy chief of mission statement, most effective against ISIS on the ground
Vocabulary	"blood of thousands on its hands", "jihadists", "forces for good", "terror lists", "liberal, democratic West", "deadliest terror group", "anti-fundamentalist worldview", "female Kurdish fighters, dressed like their male counterparts"
Collective symbols	Terrorism (Radical Islam), women dressed like men (gender equality)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Online, nothing about women, just they look like men which plays into the narrative. Iraqi and Syrian Kurds.

WashingtonPost-6

Newspaper/Outlet	Washington Post
Discourse Position	The Kurds are a controversial ally, but they are very secular and "feminist" and therefore they should be de-listed (from the US terror list)
Date	11.08.2014
Citation	Tharoor 2014a
Category	World Views
Genre	News article
Place	Iraq
Author	Ishan Tharoor (reporter for foreign affairs)
Headline	A U.S.-designated terrorist groups is saving Yazidis and battling the Islamic State
Cause	Kurds rescue Yazidis at Mount Sinjar
Graphic Designs	One picture, two twitter comments
Summary	The author describes the conundrum of the US supporting the Syrian Kurds (who link to PKK) although the PKK is on the terror list.
Topics, Subtopics	Mount Sinjar, Yazidis, ISIS' violence

	against women, ISIS against women's rights, ISIS sunni, Kurds helped Yazidis, US ally, Turkey vs. Kurds, K.f.f. fight alongside men, Kurdish secularism, media representation, cooperation of Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, PKK terror organisation, Kurdish nationalism, Öcalan
Sources	Other news articles
Vocabulary	"Marxist-Leninist guerrilla"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Iranian or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	K.f.f. used for argument, no woman cited.

Los Angeles Times

LATimes-1

Newspaper/Outlet	Los Angeles Times
Discourse Position	Kurds are secular and women are allowed to fight. Therefore they provide an ideological counter to ISIS.
Date	12.10.2014
Citation	Johnson 2014
Category	Middle East
Genre	News article
Place	Mursitpinar, Turkey
Author	Glen Johnson (special correspondent from New Zealand)
Headline	Kurds describe intense combat in Kobani, Syria, but vow to fight on
Cause	Attacks on Kobane
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author describes the Kurds fighting ISIS in combat in Kobane.
Topics, Subtopics	ISIS' brutality, Kurdish secularism, Turkey vs. Kurds, Kurdish history in Syria, US ally
Sources	/

Vocabulary	“spraying bullets into a prone man’s head”, “staunchly secular and with leftist convictions”, “ideological counter”, “secular Syrian Kurdish militiamen” vs. “Islamist Syrian rebel fractions”
Collective symbols	Paradise narrative
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Not much information about Kurdish women and their motivation, men talk about f.f., no women are cited.

LA Times-2

Newspaper/Outlet	Los Angeles Times
Discourse Position	The Syrian Kurds regained Kobane, with the help of the US and the Iraqi Kurds.
Date	28.01. 2015
Citation	Johnson 2015
Category	Middle East
Genre	News report
Place	Kobane, Syria
Author	Glen Johnson (special correspondent from NZ)
Headline	Amid ruins of Kobani, Kurds relish victory over Islamic State
Cause	The Kurds regained the city of Kobane
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author describes the aftermath of the struggle of Kobani and the situation of the Kurds in Northern Syria.
Topics, Subtopics	Death among fighters, US ally, cooperation of Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, Kurdish unity, fearless female fighters, Kobane
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	“a hijab wrapped loosely around her face”, “victory for all Kurds”
Collective symbols	Hijab (women’s oppression)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	It is not so much about the female fighters, but also not sensationalizing them, 2 women

	cited.
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LATimes-3

Newspaper/Outlet	Los Angeles Times
Discourse Position	Kurdish female fighters are being used for stories, without acknowledging what their struggle is about.
Date	08.10.2014
Citation	Bulos 2014
Category	Middle East
Genre	(News) report
Place	/
Author	Nabih Bulos (special correspondent in Beirut)
Headline	Radical chic? Kurds say H&M jumpsuits mimic fighter garb
Cause	H&M sold a jumpsuit which some Kurds claimed on Social Media looks like their own fighter garb.
Graphic Designs	One screenshot
Summary	The author describes the reactions of some Kurds online to H&M's release of a khaki jumpsuit.
Topics, Subtopics	Kurdish women are different from Western women, media representation, Kobane, K.f.f. fight alongside men, K.f.f. fight for the Kurds
Sources	Online research
Vocabulary	"radical chic", "irresistible attraction to international news outlets", "crass appropriation", "sacrificing their lives"
Collective symbols	Military uniform (war)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	A focus on the Syrian Kurds, the author refers wrongly to the Syrian Kurds as Peshmerga, online reaction as agency?

LA Times-4

Newspaper/Outlet	Los Angeles Times
Discourse Position	Kurds are Muslims but more secular. Women are treated same as men in the military.
Date	09.09.2014
Citation	LA Times staff writer 2014
Category	Middle East
Genre	News report
Place	Syria
Author	A Los Angeles Times staff writer
Headline	Syrian Kurdish fighters pushing back Islamic State on their own
Cause	Attacks on Northern Syria
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author talks about the Syrian Kurds fighting ISIS without any international support
Topics, Subtopics	K. are leading the war, no ally, fearless f.f., Kurdish secularism, ISIS' brutality, ISIS' violence against women, democratic confederalism, Sinjar, martyrdom, natural resources, PKK is a terror organisation, controversial ally, Turkey is a US ally
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"terrorist group", "leftist philosophy", "a commander barely 5 feet tall", "giggled", "Muslim, but secular", "petite fighter", "barbaric"
Collective symbols	Terrorism (Islam), back veil (religious)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only Syrian Kurds, very sensationalizing descriptions of the women, one woman cited.

LA Times-5

Newspaper/Outlet	Los Angeles Times
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Discourse Position	The Kurds are progressive because of women's rights. Arab Muslims are backwards.
Date	08.01.2018
Citation	Zavis 2018
Category	Middle East
Genre	Reportage
Place	Arisha, Syria
Author	Alexandra Zavis (American journalist based in Beirut)
Headline	Feminism, Syria-style: Conservative tribesmen freed from Islamic State emerge into a world where women have rights
Cause	Displaced Syrians find refuge in Northern Syria in camps run by the Kurds.
Graphic Designs	Three pictures
Summary	The author talks about the difficulties Arab men face when living in Northern Syrian Kurdish communities where former traditions and practices are questioned.
Topics, Subtopics	Gender equality, democratic confederalism, ISIS' violence against women, US ally, Öcalan, Kurds are leading the war, K.f.f. fight for women's rights, ISIS are backwards, co-governance, Muslim traditionalism
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"feminism: Syria-style", "progressive ideas", "deeply conservative", "cover every inch of their skin", "not required to wear the veil", "highly traditional Arab tribesmen" vs. "leftist revolutionaries"
Collective symbols	Veil (women's oppression), polygamy (misogyny), feminism (modernism)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Kurds are depicted as mother whereas Muslim men are shown as backwards. Not a word about patriarchal structures in Kurdish communities.

Wall Street Journal

WSJ-1

Newspaper/Outlet	Wall Street Journal
Discourse Position	Kurdish women are progressive, feminist and “same as men”
Date	17.10.2014
Citation	Albayrak/Coker 2014
Category	Middle East
Genre	Report
Place	Turkey, Syria
Author	Ayla Albayrak, Margaret Coker
Headline	Kurdish Women Fight on Front Lines Against Islamic State – A Third of Kurdish Fighters are Women, Defying Mideast Attitudes and Altering Kurdish Society
Cause	Reportage about female fighters during the Kobane offensive
Graphic Designs	2 pictures, 2 graphics (2 maps)
Summary	Protagonist Dilar joins the YPJ (because of her teacher who died fighting), says that it is about them altering the Kurdish society, violence and death
Topics, Subtopics	Kurdish traditionalism, Arab/Muslim traditionalism, patriarchy in K. societies, death among fighter, US ally, Öcalan, co-governance, Kurds are Muslim, family support, ISIS’ brutality, Kobane, ISIS’ violence against women, K. f. f. are threatened the same as men, K. f. f. fight like men
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	“defending their lands”, Kurds are

	"relatively progressive", "freedom"
Collective symbols	Middle East (backwards), female heroism (gender equality)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Online, three women are cited

WSJ-2

Newspaper/Outlet	Wall Street Journal
Discourse Position	Kurdish are controversial, PKK banned child marriage but sends teenagers to war
Date	07.03.2018
Citation	Abdulrahim 2018
Category	Middle East
Genre	Reportage, Portrait
Place	Northern Syria (Hemo)
Author	Raja Abdulrahim
Headline	At 12 She Joined the Kurdish Militia – Seven Years Later She’s Had Enough – ‘I am tired’ says Berivan Ali, who was wounded twice and still has shrapnel in her head
Cause	Berivan Ali stopped fighting
Graphic Designs	2 pictures (letters + uniform)
Summary	Berivan Ali is battle weary, tells her story
Topics, Subtopics	Family support, PKK are a terrorist organization, controversial ally, Kurdish nationalism, Öcalan, ISIS’ brutality, teenage soldiers, Turkey vs. Kurds, death among soldiers, US ally, Raqqa
Sources	interview
Vocabulary	“risking her life”, “militant Kurdish beliefs”, “a militia allied with the U.S.”, “a hero’s welcome” (why not heroine?)
Collective symbols	PKK (terrorism); mother (caring), pink nail polish (femininity)

Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Online + print (08.02.2018), two women cited
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WSJ-3

Newspaper/Outlet	Wall Street Journal
Discourse Position	The US gained a controversial ally fighting ISIS, PYG' success is explained by female recruitment
Date	18.08.2014
Citation	Parkinson 2014
Category	Middle East
Genre	Reportage, report
Place	Derik, Syria
Author	Joe Parkinson
Headline	Iraq Crisis: Kurds Push to Make Mosul Dam as U.S. Gains Controversial Guerilla Ally – U.S. Jets, Drones and Bombers Pound Insurgent Positions to Ease Siege of Mosul Dam
Cause	Fighting ISIS at Mosul Dam, new ally: The Kurds, Sinjar Mountain Massacre (Yazidi)
Graphic Designs	2 pictures, 2 graphs
Summary	A story about the controversial alliance with the Kurdish fighting the U.S., Kurds are portrayed as successful in warfare, recruitment is boosted by the women who join, weapons as donations from Europe
Topics, Subtopics	PKK as a terror organization, Turkey vs. Kurds, ISIS is sunni, Mount Sinjar, US ally, PKK and Peshmerga links, Kurds are leading the war, controversial ally
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	“the deployment of women soldiers on the front line”, “seeking revenge”
Collective symbols	PKK (terrorism)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	One woman cited (without a name), Syrian Kurds

WSJ-4

Newspaper/Outlet	Wall Street Journal
Discourse Position	Their pro-Western stance and the recruitment of female fighters generated Western sympathy for the Kurds, critical about their Marxist theories and the PKK terrorism (very critical of Kurds)
Date	24.07.2015
Citation	Bradley/Parkinson 2015
Category	/
Genre	Reportage
Place	Sinjar, Iraq
Author	Matt Bradley, Joe Parkinson
Headline	A personal war- American Marxist allies against ISIS
Cause	Yazidi rescue of Mount Sinjar
Graphic Designs	Four pictures, one map
Summary	The author describes the battle of the Kurds against ISIS and the role of the US by portraying a female fighter (Zind Ruken)
Topics, Subtopics	Nount Sinjar, Kurds are leading the war, PKK terrorism, K.f.f. are treated the same, K.f.f. are fighting alongside men, exchange of combat information, US ally, Tzrkey is not fighting ISIS, Tukey is a US ally, Kurdish nationalism, Tukey vs. Kurds, PKK links to PYD, controversial ally, US-Turkey relations, American volunteers, natural ressources, f.f. fight for the Kurds, Öcalan, gender equality, Democratic confederalism, Kurdish secularism , patriarchy in K. societies, damily support, Kurdish unity, ISIS' brutality, ISIS against women's rights, K.f.f. are fighting to free themselves
Sources	Interviews, participatory observation

Vocabulary	“a battle hardened guerrilla”, “pressure to marry a man”, PKK: “cultlike Marxist-inspired group”, “terror-listed Maoist-inspired militia”, “utopian goals”, “fanatical devotion”
Collective symbols	PKK (terrorism), socialism (US enemy)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Maybe detailed analysis! Very critical towards the Kurds in general, one woman cited with a name

Chicago Tribune

ChicagoT-1

Newspaper/Outlet	Chicago Tribune
Discourse Position	Kurdish Women fight ISIS to liberate women
Date	20.10.2017
Citation	Mroue 2017
Category	National news & World news
Genre	report
Place	Iraq
Author	Bassem Mroue
Headline	Kurdish female militia vows to keep fighting IS militants
Cause	Liberation of Raqqa
Graphic Designs	None
Summary	In the beginning it is talked about the women being part of the fight in Raqqa, then it is about the coalitions fighting in Syria and its entanglements in the war
Topics, Subtopics	Kurdish Female Fighters, ISIS' brutality, Kurds are US ally, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia

Sources	Associated Press
Vocabulary	“liberate women”, “all-encompassing veils”, “sexual slavery”
Collective symbols	An all-encompassing veil (women’s oppression)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only online, one woman speaking (Nisreen Abdullah of the YPJ)

ChicagoT-2

Newspaper/Outlet	Chicago Tribune
Discourse Position	Kurdish women are feminists, they are progressive but they are far away from reaching gender equality
Date	02.04.2018
Citation	Khezri 2018
Category	Opinion
Genre	opinion
Place	Boston, Massachusetts
Author	Haidar Khezri (academic scholar)
Headline	Kurdish troops fight for freedom – and women’s equality – on battlegrounds across Middle East
Cause	Turkish Attacks on Afrin, Presenting a very thorough image of the Kurdish Women’s Movement
Graphic Designs	None
Summary	The author gives an overview over the situation of the Kurds (including history), and especially the Kurdish Women and their struggle (media representation + ISIS + inside their community)
Topics, Subtopics	US ally, women’s liberation, Turkish attacks on Afrin, Rojava’s system, PKK, media representation, no gender equality in Kurdistan
Sources	Associated Press
Vocabulary	Kurdish=“exceptions” in the Middle East; “one of the most feminist movements”, “not entirely

	equal”, fighting for “life and liberty”
Collective symbols	Kurdish vs. other Muslim women, headscarf (women’s oppression)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Originally published on: theconversation.com, no women speaking, just an opinion ON them

New York Post

NYPost-1

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Post
Discourse Position	The strong female fighters are first and foremost mothers, protecting their lands and people against ISIS.
Date	14.08.2014
Citation	Perez 2014
Category	News
Genre	News article
Place	Iraq
Author	Chris Perez (US-American reporter)
Headline	All-women battalion ready to fight jihadists terrorizing Iraq
Cause	Kurdish women fighting ISIS in Iraq
Graphic Designs	15 pictures
Summary	The author talks about an all-female battalion battling ISIS in Kurdish Iraq while stressing their role as mothers.
Topics, Subtopics	K.f.f. are fighting to protect the Kurds, women in the Kurdish military is not a new phenomenon, motherhood, K.f.f. are treated same as men, fearless f.f.
Sources	/
Vocabulary	“mothers, sisters, daughters”, “devoted their lives” “modern Muslim country” (Iraq), “unidentified mother”, “take care of households”, “soldier mom”, “pregnancy can’t stand in her way”
Collective symbols	Motherhood (caring, protecting their children from war)

Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Only covering Iraqi Kurds, two nameless women were cited.
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NYPost-2

Newspaper/Outlet	New York Post
Discourse Position	Kurdish women are fearlessly defending Kobane.
Date	02.12.2014
Citation	Associated Press 2014
Category	News
Genre	News article
Place	Kobane, Syria
Author	Associated Press (News Agency)
Headline	Kurdish female fighters risk all defending Kobane against ISIS
Cause	The involvement of female fighters in the defense of Kobane
Graphic Designs	Four pictures
Summary	The author tells the story of Pervin Kobani, a female fighter in Kobane.
Topics, Subtopics	K.f.f. are fighting to free themselves, family support, US ally, fearless f.f., Öcalan, cooperation between Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, ISIS against women's rights, Kobane
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"self-styled caliphate", "19-year-old daughter of a farmer", "free life, as a woman", "last drop of our blood", "hug him like a father"
Collective symbols	Family (support)
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	Mostly Syrian Kurds, female protagonist.

USA Today

USAToday-1

Newspaper/Outlet	USA Today
Discourse Position	The Kurds have a progressive view on gender equality since women are fighting misogynist ISIS
Date	24.12.2014
Citation	Hall 2014
Category	News
Genre	News article
Place	Quandil Mountains, Iraq
Author	Richard Hall (foreign news editor)
Headline	Kurdish women line up to take on Islamic State
Cause	New recruits are fighting for the PKK in Iraq.
Graphic Designs	One picture
Summary	The author describes the leading role of the PKK in the battle against ISIS, especially focussing on the K.f.f.
Topics, Subtopics	Gender equality, ISIS' brutality, ISIS' violence against women, Yazidi, Sinjar, K.f.f. fight for women's rights, Kurds are leading the war, cooperation of Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, Kurds unity
Sources	Interviews
Vocabulary	"a leading role", "progressive view on gender equality", "rape and beat", "female slaves", "the daughter of a farmer"
Collective symbols	/
Further notes (Print? Women cited? Iraqi, Syrian Kurds, Irani or Turkish Kurds?, etc.)	The article originally appeared on globalpost.com (content partner), one women cited