

Ninni Varanka

***“THERE WAS NOT ONE STORY OF ISIS
WOMEN, BUT MANY SEPARATE STORIES”:***
A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of the
Representations of the “ISIS Women” in
British Broadsheet Media

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences
Master's Thesis
April 2020

ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis

Tampere University

Master's Programme in English Language and Literature

April 2020

The purpose of this thesis is to study the representations of the “ISIS women” in British Broadsheet media, that is, the women affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) currently residing in the refugee camps in Syria. The study separates the gendered terminology used of these women into four categories: *ISIS bride/brides*, *ISIS mother/mothers*, *ISIS wife/wives*, and *ISIS woman/women*. Each category is analyzed separately in order to detect specific discursive factors affecting the creation of these representations. The results of the categorical analysis are then compared to the findings of previous studies to reveal similarities and differences, as well as new possible emerging representations. In addition, prevalent frames are detected to understand how they impact the formation of these representations. Previous studies have mostly focused on the term “Jihadi Bride”, whereas other possible, specific forms of reference have been left unstudied. In addition, parts of the terminology studied have just started to emerge into news media. This study takes the first steps in creating a more holistic picture of the noun phrases used when referring to the female members of ISIS.

The data for this thesis consists of a corpus containing 247 British broadsheet articles from *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *i*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, and *telegraph.co.uk*. The articles were gathered from the online archive Nexis Uni, after which they were analyzed with the help of AntConc 3.5.8. The thesis is a corpus-based critical discourse analysis, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods were employed in recognizing the collocates and concordance plots of each term, after which qualitative methods were employed in studying the contexts these words appear in through close readings. The analysis was divided into two: the first part focused specifically on the four categories, and the second part was focused on recognizing the most prominent frames around Muslim subjects in the news texts.

The study revealed that there exist differences between these terms, and they are certainly not always interchangeable. The *brides* and *mothers* were most often discussed in their singular forms, whereas the *wives* and *women* were addressed collectively in the plural form. The *bride/brides* category revealed a similar form of representation as previous studies have found, so that those subjects are perceived as young and naïve. The *mother/mothers* are women who likewise fulfill a similar position as previous studies have found, so that they are placed in traditional feminine gender roles as mothers and are hardly ever discussed apart from their children. The *wife/wives*, however, are perceived as an intrinsic part of the organization and are presented as taking part in the violent acts of the organization. Similarly, the *woman/women* category presents subjects that might have been young upon joining ISIS, but who have now become violent beyond rehabilitation during their time in the camps. The frames detected followed traditional patterns of terrorism framing, employing mostly episodic frames that place focus on individual subjects and the newest developments of the current situation. In addition, traditional ways of framing Muslim subjects in media were spotted, which in great deal affects the representations of these women.

Keywords: media discourse, gender, representation, ISIS, critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, framing theory

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Pro gradu -tutkielma

Tampereen yliopisto

Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma

Huhtikuu 2020

Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tarkoitus on tutkia brittimediassa esiintyviä representaatioita ”ISIS-naisista”, eli Islamilaiseen valtioon (ISIS) liitetystä naisista, jotka tällä hetkellä oleskelevat Syyrian pakolaisleireillä. Tutkimus erittelee naisiin liitetyn sukupuolitetun termistön neljään kategoriaan: *ISIS-morsian/morsiamet*, *ISIS-äiti/äidit*, *ISIS-vaimo/vaimot*, *ISIS-nainen/naiset*. Jokainen kategoria analysoidaan etsien kategoriakohtaisia määrittäviä kielellisiä tekijöitä. Analyysin tuloksia verrataan aikaisempiin tutkimuksiin erojen ja samankaltaisuuksien sekä uusien kehityssuuntien tunnistamiseksi. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa havainnoidaan mitä kehyksiä uutismedioissa esiintyy ja miten ne vaikuttavat representaatioiden muodostumiseen. Aikaisemmat tutkimukset ovat keskittyneet pääasiassa termiin ”Jihadi Bride” (suom. Jihadimorsian) ja muut termit ovat jääneet huomiotta. Tämän lisäksi osa tutkimuksessa esiintyvistä termeistä on vasta alkanut nousta esille mediassa. Tämä tutkimus ottaakin ensiaskeleita kokonaisvaltaisen kuvan luomiseksi ISISin naisjäseniin liitetystä termistöstä.

Tutkimusaineistona toimii brittilehtien artikkeleista koostuva korpus, joka sisältää yhteensä 247 artikkelia seuraavista julkaisuista: *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *i*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph* ja *telegraph.co.uk*. Artikkelit kerättiin Nexis Uni -tietokannasta, jonka jälkeen ne analysoitiin AntConc 3.5.8 -ohjelmaa apuna käyttäen. Tutkimus toteutettiin korpusperustaisena kriittisenä diskurssianalyysinä, joka yhdistelee niin kvantitatiivisia kuin myös kvalitatiivisia menetelmiä. Kvantitatiivisia metodeja hyödynnettiin termien kollokaattien ja konkordanssijonojen tunnistamiseen, jonka jälkeen kvalitatiivisia metodeja hyödynnettiin sanojen kontekstien tarkempaan tunnistamiseen. Analyysi suoritettiin kahdessa osassa. Ensimmäinen osio keskittyi erityisesti neljään määriteltyyn kategoriaan, ja jälkimmäinen osio keskittyi tunnistamaan uutisteksteissä esiintyviä kehyksiä muslimihenkilöiden ympärillä.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että eri termien taakse kätkeytyy erilaisia representaatioita, eivätkä ne ole aina keskenään vaihdettavissa. *Morsiamiin* ja *äiteihin* viitattiin useimmiten yksikössä, kun taas *vaimoihin* ja *naisiin* monikossa. Kategoria *morsian/morsiamet* osoitti, että *morsian* on yleensä nuori ja naiivi, kuten aiemmatkin tutkimukset ovat näyttäneet. *Äiti/äidit*-kategorian representaatio seurasi myös aiempien tutkimusten tulosten löydöksiä, sillä *äidit* täyttivät hyvin perinteisen sukupuoliroolin mukaisen aseman ja esiintyivät harvoin uutisissa ilman viittauksia lapsiinsa. *Vaimo/vaimot*-kategoria esitettiin erottamattomana osana terroristijärjestöä sekä väkivaltaisina toimijoina. Niin ikään myös *nainen/naiset*-kategoria piti sisällään henkilöitä, joiden katsottiin olleen nuoria ISISiin liittymisen aikana, mutta joista on tullut leireillä niin väkivaltaisia, ettei rehabilitointi ole heidän kohdallaan enää mahdollista. Tutkimuksessa havaittu kehystys noudatti terrorismiuutisoinnille tavanomaisia kehystyskäytäntöjä ja uutisissa esiintyvä jaksottainen kehystys keskittyy yksittäisiin henkilöihin ja tilanteen uusimpiin kehityksiin. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa havaittiin tavanomaisia kehyksiä, joita mediassa esiintyy muslimihenkilöiden ympärillä, joka omalta osaltaan vaikuttaa siihen millaisia representaatioita näistä naisista ilmenee.

Avainsanat: mediadiskurssi, sukupuoli, representaatio, ISIS, kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, korpuslingvistiikka, kehysteoria

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Master's thesis is concerned with the discursive construction of the representations of the women affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria¹ (ISIS) currently residing in the refugee and detention camps in Northern-Syria. Female terrorism continues to be an extremely contested topic of discussion as female terrorists challenge the stereotypical notions of women as domestic, peaceful individuals, instead making them violent actors in political sites of confrontation (Martini 2018, 460). The women affiliated with ISIS make the perfect subject for the purpose of this study, as they have been widely addressed in news media during the past year due to the fall of the ISIS² caliphate in 2019 and the following increase of population in the refugee camps appearing in the news, namely al-Hol, al-Roj, and Ain Issa, in Syria. There have been camps already before 2019, however, the fall of the caliphate in 2019 created a mass influx of people, both ISIS affiliates and internally displaced persons, fleeing the areas formerly controlled by the terrorist organization. As the camps kept expanding and time wore on, the global press awoke to the situation of the women and children on the camps and the question arose: What to do with the "ISIS mothers" and "ISIS children" of the camps? Especially so, when it was not clear who really had been connected to ISIS and what was the gravity of their crimes. The women particularly rose to the center of attention because it was estimated that hundreds of women from the West had joined ISIS. However, it soon prevailed that the countries of origin of these women were rather unwilling in having their citizens return, not to even mention assisting them in returning. For example, in 2019, Britain announced that it would remove the citizenship of one Shamima Begum who had left Britain to join ISIS in Syria (*The Independent*, 17.2.2019), and the former prime minister of Finland Antti Rinne stated that Finland would not retrieve its citizens from al-Hol and declared that they were, however, free to return on their own (Yle.fi 17.8.2019). The news reportage started to fill with references to "ISIS mothers" and "ISIS women", for example, and it was quite unclear just who these ISIS women were?

¹ Also known as Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Syria and Levant (ISIL), and Daesh.

² For the sake of clarity, all references to the organization by the researcher will be made by using the acronym "ISIS".

Therefore, in order to shed light on the emerging new narratives, this study will focus on the discursive construction of the representations of the women affiliated with ISIS in British broadsheet media. To complete this task, the study will be carried out as a corpus-based critical discourse analysis. Corpus linguistics (e.g. Baker 2006, McEnery & Wilson 2012, McEnery & Hardie 2001) will provide tools for analyzing larger amounts data, thus being the starting point of the analysis. Critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 2001, Wodak 2001) will offer more in-depth methods for the analysis of data and will be performed hand in hand with news framing analysis to offer more insight into the complex issues of news framing, especially to gendered framing of terrorism. The theorizations on the intersections of gender, violence, and terrorism (e.g. Banks 2019, Gentry & Sjoberg 2007, Nacos 2005) will also be of great importance when addressing the position of women in the framework of a violent terrorist organization.

1.1 Aims of the Study

As stated above, this study is concerned with the discursive construction of the representations of the women affiliated with ISIS, and the main focus falls on the terms *ISIS bride/brides*, *ISIS mother/mothers*, *ISIS wife/wives*, and *ISIS woman/women* as these noun phrases have started to frequently appear in news media during 2019. This research problem will be answered to with the help of the following research question:

1. *What are the representations of “ISIS brides”, “ISIS mothers”, “ISIS wives” and “ISIS women” like? Should there be any differences, what is the nature of these differences?*
2. *How do the findings of this study compare to the findings of previous studies?*
3. *What frames can be identified from the media texts in question?*

The first question will help in detecting possible differences between these terms as they are sometimes used in rather specific manner and at times interchangeably. Previous studies have focused

on the terms *Jihadi Bride/Brides*³, as they have been used to describe women who have joined ISIS, especially in British media. However, a broader study into the gendered terminology on such women has been missing from the field. Therefore, this study will focus on the previously mentioned four terms, in both singular and plural forms, in order to better understand what label receives which attributes since such an analysis is missing from current literature. The use of nouns such as bride, mother, wife, and woman may seem quite unbiased as they all are indeed female-specific terms, however, there exist semantical differences between these terms and their usage may have quite different implications than at first could be expected. That is why a closer analysis of these terms is needed in order to detect any possible asymmetry or bias.

The second question will be analyzed against current research and literature. As previous studies have suggested (see e.g. Martini 2018, Azeez 2019), the depictions of women joining ISIS have been heavily focused on the fragility and victim-status of the women. Although the narratives of women joining jihad have, in part, been viewed as distorting the Neo-Orientalist narrative that casts Muslim women as the victims of Muslim men (e.g. Martini 2018, Azeez 2019), the women have still been found to be “mostly regarded as being ‘trapped’ and in need of safety . . . of ‘home’” (Azeez 2019, 129). In addition, women’s participation in terrorism has often been depicted through gendered lenses and they have been “considered peripheral players . . . typically relegated to support functions such as providing safe houses or gathering intelligence” (Cunningham 2003, 173) and “are said to have engaged in political violence for personal (private) reasons” (ibid., 186). Other studies have revealed narratives that depict women partaking in violence as extremely “bad” or “mad” (see e.g. Gentry & Sjoberg 2007), however, these narratives are adjusted and explained through means that would “make sense” of their behavior as female subjects, as women’s motivations for partaking in violence are seen as rooted in the women’s personal lives and motivators, whereas the male counter-

³ E.g. Martini 2018, Azeez 2019. Additionally, Owe has conducted a study aiming at revealing the discourses around these women: Owe, J. R. (2017). *Runaway jihadi bride: media framing of Western female foreign fighters to ISIS*. University of Oslo. Master’s Thesis.

parts' motives are usually self-evident as men are naturally cast as committers of violence. It is necessary to compare the currently existing representations with the findings of previous studies, since now that the caliphate has fallen, solutions should be found to the current situation and the media have power in potentially affecting public opinion. Furthermore, now, as many women are possibly waiting for return to their homelands, their potential return is actualizing so that they are no longer "women who have joined ISIS", but "women who have joined ISIS and *now* want to return".

The third research question of this study focuses on the aspects of framing. Framing has become a useful tool in studying terrorism in the field of communication sciences, and Norris, Kern, and Just (2003) have theorized that news framing has power in shaping public opinion, especially when it comes to framing terrorism. The main focus points for this study in terrorism news framing will be the division into episodic (focus on specifics) and thematic (focus on contextualization) framing (ibid.), as well as the distinction between the "domestic homegrown" versus "international" terrorism frames (Brinson & Stohl 2012), out of which the "domestic homegrown" has been found to cause more fears due to the feeling of the terrorist being "within" (ibid.). The power of frames lies in the way they situate information into specific, well, frames, that have an organizing function in news media, so that the importance is not solely in the representations, but in the frames, as well.

This thesis has the potential to offer something new to the field of discourse and communication research, and the implications of this study can be seen as fourfold. First, it focuses on specific terminology that has not been studied before. Second, as Britain has been reluctant to have its citizens return home from Syria, conducting an analysis of the media discourse in Britain might reveal a certain narrative. In addition, analyzing the news media content from Britain is of key importance when kept in mind that other countries publish reproductions of articles written in Britain⁴. Third, I believe that the discourse surrounding these women is in key position to affect not only their future but the future of their children, too. If the general public receives representations that are hostile and extremely negative, it would be sensible that there would be resistance to the idea of having these

⁴ Azeez 2019, 123.

women return. Fourth, this thesis may offer more insight into the ways threats are communicated in present day media. As stated in Nohrstedt 2010, “The role of media is dual – on the one hand side they often contribute to the discursive constructions of dangers and risks as threats, at the same time they blow the whistle . . .” (27), meaning that the power media holds is loaded with potential to either exaggerate or belittle the threats in question.

1.2 Background for the Study

As the ISIS caliphate fell on February 2019, there were many people fleeing the formerly ISIS-controlled areas in Syria. From that moment onwards, the camps of al-Hol (alternatively al-Hawl), al-Roj (alternatively Roj), and Ain Issa (alternatively Ein Issa) had former ISIS supporters and other persons trapped inside the caliphate filling the camps in only a matter of weeks⁵. The largest of the camps, al-Hol (or al-Hawl), received majority of the news media coverage in the West, and it is currently⁶ inhabited by an estimated 70,000 people who fled the former ISIS areas. The caliphate saw its final demise in the spring of 2019 with the loss of Baghouz (also written as Bāghūz and Baghuz) (ICCT Policy Brief, October 2019), followed by a surge of women and children arriving at the camps, some captured by the Kurdish forces as ISIS affiliates and some refugees fleeing the battle areas. According to the United Nations report released in September (OCHA, 29.9.2019), ninety-four per cent of the inhabitants of al-Hol were women and children, out of which fifty-five per cent children under twelve. The situation of the camp slowly rose to unbearable, as guards were quoted calling al-Hol, for example, “a ticking timebomb” that was growing “increasingly unstable” (*The Independent*, 4.10.2019). It is understood that al-Hol holds the most aggressive women affiliated with ISIS and is guarded by armed Kurdish forces, whereas al-Roj would not be inhabited by the “most dangerous” individuals with de-radicalization efforts taking place inside the camps. The now-closed Ain Issa was mostly inhabited by internally displaced persons who had fled Raqqa⁷, for example (Reliefweb.int,

⁵ Syria apparently holds multiple camps within its borders, but these three camps are the ones appearing in news coverage, supported by the findings of the data used in this study as well.

⁶ During the writing of this thesis that situated in the beginning of 2020.

⁷ Reliefweb.int 31.10.2019, Camp and Informal Site Profiles Overview

Camp Profiles⁸). Majority of the population on the camps is from Syria and Iraq, with around 20 British women and at least 30 children between these camps (*The Independent*, 4.10.2019). Al-Hol alone holds 12,000 other country nationals (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 16.1.2020).

⁸ It must be noted that accurate information is hard to find, as all the camps hold people from the caliphate, either being refugees or detained ISIS affiliates, but it is certain that al-Hol is the largest and considered to be the most dangerous of all the camps.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section introduces the theoretical framework for this study. The study is located on the fields of linguistic, communication, and media research employing corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis and framing theory. Each of the previous will be discussed in sections of their own, beginning with 2.1 introducing the field of media research central for this study. This section will introduce the terms *discourse* and *media discourse* and explore the relevance of the study of media discourse. Section 2.1.1 explains one of the key concepts of this study, *representation*. Section 2.1.2 presents one of the main theoretical foundations of this study, framing theory, and 2.1.3 discusses the aspects of terrorism news framing. Section 2.2 is dedicated to corpus linguistics, and 2.3 will discuss critical discourse analysis, and introduce the combination of the previous; corpus-based critical discourse analysis. To better contextualize this study, section 2.4 will address the complex intertwinement of women, gender, and terrorism, especially in connection to ISIS. Additionally, previous studies on this matter will be discussed in section 2.5, as they will provide the basis for interpreting the results of this study.

2.1 Media Research

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to define what is meant by discourse in this context before we can discuss media discourse or any further analysis of it. *Discourse*, most likely, has as many meanings as there are researchers, but the definition this study follows is much like in Brown and Yule (1983) and Flowerdew (2012), that is, language in its context of use. More specifically, discourse is “the system that tells us how to use and understand language in specific contexts and situations of use” (Gee 2018, 20). According to Parker (1992), discourse does “not simply describe the social world, but categorize[s] it”, and provides “frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways” (ibid., 4-5). Discourse is by no means a separate, unattached element of society that would exist on its own, but is situated into a time and place, produced and interpreted historically (Wodak 2001). Further, because discourse is not a “neutral” element of social interaction and social practice, it is inherently linked to the concepts of power and ideology (ibid.;

van Dijk 2011) and is perceived as being able to carry, construct, and re-construct meanings. Recognizing discourse as social practice of this sort means that discourse is understood as being “socially constitutive as well as [being] socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, Wodak 2011, 394). It is precisely this constitutive aspect that has made discourse studies such a fruitful ground of study across disciplines, especially in the media discourse research which will be discussed next.

The focus of this thesis falls on the multidisciplinary field of *media discourse*, more specifically, discourse in news media. Modern media “serve a vital function as public forum” in modern democratic societies (Talbot 2007, 3) and media discourse, then, is “interactions that take place through a . . . platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer” (O’Keeffe 2012, 221). (Linguistic) research of media discourse has been widely interested in the textual aspect of news media because the texts in media encapsulate “values and ideologies that impact and reflect the larger world” (Cotter 2015, 801). Such focus on text does not mean a rigid examination of text as an unchangeable or context-detached variable, quite the contrary. For instance, Cotter suggests that studying texts is beneficial for the ability that texts - spoken, written, or visual - have as “ideology-bearing discourse or representation[s] of the social world” (ibid., 802). In linguistics, there usually exists a distinction between the terms *text* and *discourse*, that Talbot explains to be an analytic distinction (2007, 9). According to this distinction, text is the “observable material”, the completed product, and discourse is the process. According to Talbot, then, “text is the fabric in which discourse is manifested” (ibid.). Due to the nature of discourse as process, the analysis of discourse demands the observance of text, interaction, and the context in which the discourse is embedded in (ibid., 10). Positioned into the context of news media, it is the news text that create the fabric for media discourse.

To examine the representational claims of news media, it needs to be acknowledged that news media does not exist on its own but is created *by humans for humans*. When studying news texts, one

must consider the positioning of the news in relation to the audience: how does this affect the creation of news? How does this affect choices in style? Who is the news written for? (Cotter, 809) Like stated in the O’Keeffe citation at the beginning, texts are “oriented” to a reader and therefore, it would be useless to write a news piece that is not directed to any audience, especially in the contemporary economic environment where the competition for readership is a constant. O’Keeffe calls attention to the fact that precisely because news media is “manufactured”, has a role in “meaning-making” (O’Keeffe, 441-442) and possesses “ideology-bearing” abilities, it is fruitful for the study of discourse, especially for the study of discourse that takes a critical stance (2.3). Put simply, the study of media discourse is necessary because “discourse plays a vital role in constituting people's realities” (Talbot 2007, 3).

2.1.1 The Concept of Representation

To understand the “representation[s] of the social world” (see section 2.1), we must address what exactly is meant by the term *representation*. Especially so, when we consider that the term is widely used in academic research and media without further definitions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, representation is: “The action of putting forward an account of something discursively; a spoken or written statement, esp[ecially] one which conveys or intends to create a particular view or impression”. Already from this phrasing we see that there exists a linkage between representation and linguistic aspects, as representation cannot truly happen without the means of language use. Hall has specifically emphasized the connection between representation and language, and explains that at its very simplest, “representation is the production of meaning through language” (Hall 2013, 2). It is through language that we give meanings to the concepts and ideas in our heads as well as “‘make sense’ of the world” (Hall 2013, 3), and communicate about these concepts in a manner that is understandable to others. Further, we do not only create meanings for the things easily visible to us, such as animals and furniture, but to rather abstract concepts as well, such as war, marriage, or terrorism. It is also important to note that we possess these mental concepts about places and persons we have never seen or met (*ibid.*), and that the concepts we hold are hardly ever fully objective or neutral.

While connecting these factors, the end-result may be at the very worst an “acceptance” of negative representation that can lead to fears, discrimination, and racism. For example, negative media representation of the Muslim population has led to the rise of Islamophobia in Britain (see e.g. Baker, McEnery & Gabrielatos 2013; Jasper & Cinnirella 2010). The study of representations is vital in revealing and understanding possible biases in texts. Further, the study of language, specifically, is central in the study of representations, as Hall explains that language is the system of representation through which we translate our mental systems for others to understand (Hall 2013, 4). In this manner, language works as the communicative ground through which representations are discursively constructed.

2.1.2 Framing Theory

Credited to be originating from Erving Goffman’s 1974 frame analysis, social scientific framing referred to the way individuals organized and communicated reality. The modern-day term “framing” that mass media and communication research draws from was coined by Bateson in 1972, and now refers to the “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 2001 qtd. by Reese 2010, 17). Framing is a growing field of communication research, with much of the research focusing on political and mass communication (D’Angelo and Kyupers 2010, 1), as frames act as agents for ideological processes (Reese 2010, 18). Framing has been defined and described in a multitude of ways, being called a theory, an approach, an analytic technique, a method, and a paradigm (ibid), leading to framing becoming a rather fragmented field. Due to this exact fragmentation, it is important to note that in this study, framing will be understood as a theory because although framing offers tools much like a methodology would, understanding framing as a theory will give this thesis a basis and a construction on which it can operate in. As “frames are viewed as organizing principles that structure the social world” (Volkmer in Sage eReference, 409), framing becomes a system through which information organizes and constructs our social realities. Therefore, addressing framing only as a methodology would ignore the effect frames have in our minds and they many ways they function in. Framing

theory allows the inspection of how words in action participate in the construction of reality and seeks to unveil how calling attention to one aspect of reality might omit other possible realities (Azeez 2019), as well as how one “point of view is used to interpret reality” (Hardin & Whiteside in D'Angelo & Kuypers 2010, 313). Framing has been chosen as one of the key theoretical frameworks for this thesis because discourse analytic studies have, in abundance, leaned on framing theory to explain the ways “interlocutors construct and make sense of social experience” (Gordon 2015, 325). According to Gordon, “Discourse analysts have used and developed [framing theory] to uncover and explain how, through linguistic . . . means, interlocutors create and negotiate meanings, relationships, and identities.” (Gordon 2015, 324). In addition, many of the “framing devices” employed in the process of framing derive from “linguistics structures such as metaphors” that communicate frames (Reese 2010, 19) making linguistic research and framing research inherently intertwined.

2.1.3 News Framing of Terrorism

The focus of this thesis falls on the “news frames” on terrorism in journalistic news media (D'Angelo & Kyupers 2010, 1). Before continuing any further with the discussion of news frames on terrorism, it is important to take a moment and address the concept of “terrorism” briefly in more detail. Although most of the population may have a concept of what they perceive as terrorism, there still does not exist one universally applicable definition of terrorism (Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal 2001), as it is a contested term “open to multiple meanings” (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 6). The United Nations offers the following explanation which is possibly the most common definition of the term: “acts of violence that target civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2008, 5). Norris, Kern, and Just’s definition follows along similar lines, with the addition of “systematic”, so that terrorism is “the systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilians for political goals” (ibid.), indicating that acts of violence understood as terrorism need to be connected somehow. Acts of terror employ the use of assassinations, kidnapping, torture, rape, and mass bombings, for example (ibid.) designated to raise fear and anxieties amongst the targeted population. Consequently, a terrorist is a person that employs the methods of

terrorism in their actions. For the purpose of this study, then, terrorism will be understood as the systematic use of violence targeting civilians to achieve politically or ideologically motivated goals in order to cause fear.

To continue on the meaning of news frames, the definition that Brinson and Stohl offer for “media frames” could be applied here as well: media frames are “frames [that] form the narrative structure through which newsmakers produce, organize, and explain events or issues” (2012, 271) and elaborated by Norris, Kern, and Just by stating that news frames refer “to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context” (2003, 10). D’Angelo and Kyupers suggest that news frames is a better suit over media frames since news media is the “most prominent discursive site” (2010, 1) in which researcher aim at understanding frames and framing. Such frames can be many and varied, with each frame offering an alternative way of explaining an event (e.g. de Vreese in D’Angelo & Kyupeers 2010). As we learned in section 2.1.2, framing has become a highly fragmented field in which the divisions and distinctions between frames are many and plenty, thus, in this study, it has been deemed relevant to focus on the distinction between what are titled the *episodic* frames and *thematic* frames (see e.g. de Vreese 2010, 190), because they have been recognized to be especially prevalent in terrorism news framing (e.g. Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003, Nacos 2005). Originating from the works of Iyengar on news frames, the former present incidents in relation to specific events and occurrences, whereas the latter places them into larger, systemic contexts (de Vreese 2010; Norris, Kern & Just 2003). The use of episodic frames has been found to affect public consensus in a way that there appears support for harsher punishments towards individuals involved with terrorism, when thematic framing activates the will to fight the root causes of terrorism on a larger scale (see Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003, 135-136). Moreover, episodic framing appears as more sporadic, in a sense, so that the focus jumps from updates in individual interest stories and government responses, for instance, according to what is the newest development, and thematic framing stays on a more abstract and general level (Iyengar in Schaffner & Sellers 2009, 186). In the present-day commercial environment, it is no surprise that many media organizations

employ the episodic frames, as in this manner they stay “current” and keep their storylines running with quick “anecdotal accounts” of “complex issues”, whereas the thematic storylines require a heavier production and may expel readers and viewers due to their in-depth nature (ibid.).

In general, news framing has become an important field of study for anyone interested in influencing public opinion (Volkmer 2009, 408). Volkmer writes that “As media maintain a fourth estate role in democratic societies, media researchers find framing theory helpful to analyze the imbalances and underlying power structures that mediate political issues.” (408). Further, de Vreese (2010) claims that public opinion is shaped by the way news media frame their topics, hence the distinction of the episodic and thematic mentioned above. Studying frames helps us to better understand the representations media creates of its subjects, and how framing partakes in the creation of the identities and affects the public perception of them. In addition, it is important to distinguish intertextualities in news discourse in order to study whether similar frames are used. Norris, Kern, and Just (2003, 4-5) have theorized that conventional frames help the individual situate news narratives into a time and place and that they assist the mind in making sense of new information through familiar concepts. Such frames are important since they “furnish consistent, predictable, simple, and powerful narratives that are embedded in the social construction of reality” (ibid.). The importance of the study of news frames on terrorism lies in the fact that the frames presented by media are expected to have an influence on the public’s understanding of terrorism itself and the threats thereof (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 5). This relates to what Nohrstedt types one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century: communicating threats (2010). Nohrstedt writes that “when a risk is politicized, it tends to be formulated as a threat” (26), and that is indeed what has happened with the women of ISIS as well. Nohrstedt defines “threat” as something that directs the fear or danger towards an object. This aspect is the objective aspect, whereas the subjective aspect of threat is created through an agent who is considered to deliberately expose someone else to danger (ibid., 25-26). Such a subject could then be a terrorist, for example. This type of positioning leads to the division of “us” versus “them”, which affects the “othering” of an individual or a group of individuals in order to create “the Others”

that pose a threat to “Our” community (ibid., 27). These “others”, then, may be experienced to be threatening one’s safety. Nohrstedt suggest that the analysis of media should include the analysis of constructed identities since the framing of threats has “repercussions for . . . identity constructions” (28). As an example, many authors refer to 9/11 and to the time after when president Bush declared the “War on Terror” leading to the othering of Muslim identities that carries serious consequences even to this day (see e.g. Nohrstedt 2010, Brinson & Stohl 2012, Norris, Kern & Just 2003), so that for many the mention of Islam will falsely connote terrorism. Further, Islam has become the “Other” against which the Western world can construct its concept of its “Western civilization” (see e.g. Mamdani 2004, Martini 2018). As Nohrstedt writes, “words will connote danger irrespective of whether or not this is explicitly mentioned” (i.e. Islam in terrorism discussions) (37). For the sake of threat-building, it would be necessary for the “Other” to be given an identity, a collective identity under which they can be grouped into one, so that there exists no need for individual assessment of their situations. Such identities can be defined as relational identities, which are socially constructed identity categories assigned to or imposed on people in relation to other identities (Gee 2018, 75). Relational identities are thus seen as fluid since they are based on relations (Saphiro 2010) that may change over time. The fluidness means that there is a constant renegotiation of these identities especially in the context of a conflict (ibid.), however, some relational identities may be more rigid than others, especially if they are assigned based on ethnicity or race (Gee 2018, 75). When such relational assignments start occurring, we usually can start noticing classifications of “better” and “worse” based on the relations (ibid.). Relational identities could also be elaborated with the concept of ascribed identities (Camauër 2010). These are identities seen by others without the input of the ascribed persons themselves, likely to affect public opinion in a negative manner (Camauër 2010). Yet again, the importance of media is highlighted when the role of news media is understood to be a crucial one with the potential to construct our understanding of reality (Camauër 2010, 141) and consequently of

these identities. The study of news frames is important since while media construct these representations, they put forward specific depictions of identity categories while ignoring other possible representations (ibid.).

2.2 Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics is an area of linguistic research that employs computational tools in the analysis of real-life language samples. Corpus linguistics uses corpora, large databases of “naturally occurring language”, in order to discover “linguistic patterns which can enable us to make sense of the ways that language is used in the construction of *discourses*” (Baker 2006, 1, original emphasis). Corpus linguistics differs from most area of linguistic research in the way that it is not focused on the study of any particular aspect of language, but it is an “area which focuses upon a set of procedures, or methods, for studying language” (McEnery & Hardie 2012, 1). The electronic tools used in corpus linguistics allow the manipulation of data for different purposes, not to distort it but to organize and arrange it according to the question(s) one is trying to find answers to. Examples of such tools include keyword lists, concordance plots, collocations, and clusters, to name a few. Since corpora are handled with computers, the benefits of using corpus linguistics lie in the fact that it allows the mass analysis data that would otherwise be humanly impossible (Flowerdew 2012, 160) in a speed that well exceeds that of a human processor. In addition to being an efficient tool for analysis, corpus linguistics provides more objectivity for any study focused on language use, since building a corpus will help evade the selection of data in a way where the findings would only support the hypothesis of the study. This sort of approach to corpus linguistics is called *corpus-based* linguistics, and is usually more focused on corpus linguistics as a method than a theoretical field (McEnery & Hardie 2012, 6). The starting point for corpus-based studies is a hypothesis based on other factors, such as current literature, that can then be validated, refuted, or refined with corpus tools (ibid.). In the field of corpus linguistics, there exists a dichotomic opposite called *corpus-driven* linguistics that believes that corpora themselves should be seen as basis for any hypotheses about language, pushing corpus linguistics towards

being a theory about language (ibid.), however, corpus linguistics are generally seen as more of an approach to studying language than a theoretical field of its own.

Nevertheless, stating that the use of corpora adds objectivity does not mean that corpus linguistics would be without its problems. Both Baker (2006) and Flowerdew (2012) note that solely using corpora and only focusing on the findings among the words searched in a corpus removes discourse from its context. Therefore, contextualization of data is always in place when analyzing data through corpus processes, and to understand the contexts of recorded discourse, it is important for the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data in question and the environment it is embedded in. Baker suggests that one way of doing so is to build a corpus from scratch (2006, 25) which allows the researcher to get acquainted with the texts already during the gathering of data. Another factor that is important to keep in mind while doing corpus-based research is the extent to which we can make generalizations about language use (Baker 2006). Especially when studying smaller databases of text, no matter how carefully thought-out they may be, we are usually focusing on a certain aspect of language appearing in a certain environment. McEnery and Wilson remind that corpora “allow us to observe language, but they are not language itself” (2012, 26). Baker suggest that it would be hypothetically possible to collect a corpus so comprehensive that it could be said to be fully representative of language, however, explains that “gathering a large representative corpus can be difficult and time consuming” (ibid., 6) and for the purposes of many studies it would be rather unnecessary. The abovementioned is not to suggest that corpus linguistics would be without any accuracy, but that its strengths and weaknesses should be recognized, much like with any other field of linguistic research.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The driving force behind the study of discourse is the importance and role of language in constructing our social realities. We often become blind to the ways in which language works in this equation, and stated by Parker in the introduction to *Discourse Dynamics*, “Language is so structured to mirror power relations that often we can see no other ways of being, and it structures ideology so that it is

difficult to speak both in and against it.” (1992, xi). It is this very constructive role of discourse “in the reproduction and transformation of meaning” (xiii) that gives rise critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis in general has been used in various academic fields, psychology, social sciences, and anthropology, to fulfill multiple various functions (Brown & Yule 1983, viii). However, it is specifically CDA that is interested in the deconstruction of the aspects of power and ideology in discourse, and is at its very best in studying “the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk 2015, 466). Described by Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak “as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda” (2011, 394), CDA is a field of linguistic research that takes a special interest in the relation between power and language (Wodak 2001, 2). Due to the critical nature of CDA, it is employed in the study of institutional, political, and gendered discourse, for example (ibid.). According to Wodak, a truly critical account of discourse acquires theorization of the social processes as well as societal structures that “give rise to the production of text” (3), meaning that if for any area of linguistic research the understanding of the context of text is important, for CDA it is in the very core of the research movement. CDA has been going through an upsurge in its popularity as an answer to critical interest in language, and the increase in the level of “popular consciousness about sexist and racist ways of using language” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, Wodak 2011, 396), signaling how CDA aims to problematize the way language works in maintaining power imbalances. To fulfill this task, it needs to consider the societal factors behind the texts that have given them form, as well as note the time and place the discourse appears in. Baker, McEnery, and Gabrielatos note that due to this context-situatedness, CDA needs to be referential in the analysis stages in order to ‘make sense’ of the historical and societal factors affecting the formation of discourse and to help “explain why certain linguistic patterns of representation” are found and why others are not (2013, 20). As discourse is tied to these societal contexts, it does not exist as separate units of text, but is formed by “social actors” (Hodges 2015,42) making choices that might be biased even without realizing. As

CDA is distinctive in the way it positions itself on the side of the dominated and oppressed (Fairclough, Mulderrig, Wodak 2011, 395), it needs to be noted that like discourse, so does the researcher come from a background, from some position in society that must be recognized. Jäger correctly remarks that no researcher of discourse, even critical one, is situated outside of this scheme and writes that

Any researcher conducting such an analysis must, moreover, see clearly that *with his/her critique he/she is not situated outside the discourse he/she is analysing*. If not, he/she places his/her own concept of discourse analysis in doubt. Apart from other critical aspects which discourse analysis also comprises, he/she can base his/her analysis on values and norms, laws and rights; he/she must not forget either that these are themselves the historical outcome of discourse, and that his/her possible bias is not based on truth, but represents a position that in turn is the result of a discursive process. (in Wodak & Meyer 2001, 4. My emphasis)

To this very research bias Baker, among others, has suggested the deployment of *corpus-based* critical discourse analysis, which shall be discussed next.

This thesis is concerned with studying language with the help of corpora, instead of it being a corpus linguistic study per say, and therefore it is conducted as a *corpus-based* critical discourse analysis (Baker 2006, 1) rather than being solely a corpus linguistic or critical discourse analytic study. Both O’Keeffe (2012) and Cotter (2015) mark that corpus-based analysis of media discourse can be extremely beneficial, especially in revealing different framings of events and topics. Using corpora allows the study of extensive data instead of doing close readings of a few chosen articles and like mentioned in section 2.2, corpora increase the objectivity of research. Such objectivity is vital for studies aiming at revealing constructed identities, representations, and frames that might shape our understanding of the world, especially for studies taking a critical stance to avoid research bias (see Jäger’s citation above). When aiming to focus strictly on the discursive representations, it is important to remain objective to avoid over-reading and over-analyzing the data according to some inherent ideology. CDA is commonly used with corpus linguistics to study media discourse since it is a great tool for studying social power abuse and inequalities (O’Keeffe 2012, 448). CDA has generally focused on smaller instances of text (*ibid.*) offering results that cannot be applied to larger contexts (Baker 2009, 2) but it has been noted that the field of CDA would greatly benefit from the

addition of corpus linguistic approaches. CDA has also been criticized of “cherry-picking” its data (see e.g. Baker 2009), however, using corpora can assist avoiding such claims. As written by Baker, “it becomes less easy to be selective about a single newspaper article when we are looking at hundreds of articles” (2006, 12). Although this thesis needs to be contextualized with the studies of women, violence, and terrorism (section 2.4), and the approach is a critical one, it is not the intention to aim towards any predestined outcome. Therefore, the discourse analytic sections of this study will be performed hand in hand with the methods offered by corpus linguistics.

2.4 Women, Gender, and Terror

To understand certain frames and the history, origins, and long-term trends of the phenomenon in question, it is important to discuss the topic of gender, violence, and terrorism in more detail. This will help to better contextualize this study, so that the analysis will be better tied to a certain field and will not be unattached from the current, societal environment. That women partake in violent activities, whether it be in wars or terrorism, is certainly not a new phenomenon. Feminist research has, however, recognized that it is still clear that whatever the form of violence may be, women are still viewed in a gendered manner that paints them as non-political actors lacking agency (e.g. Martini 2018). Sjoberg and Gentry explain that

Media, scholarly, and policy world reactions to women’s participation in violence classified as terrorism” is to treat women’s terrorism “as not terrorism but women’s terrorism, and women terrorists are at once characterized as aberrant, personally motivated, and beyond the agency of the female perpetrator. (2016, 145 (qtd. In Banks 2019, 182)).

Although there is no evidence to support claims that violent men and women would be fundamentally different when it comes to motivation, for example, the treatment and representation of female terrorists in public arenas follows suit with representations of women in general (Nacos 2005), leading to “women in professions associated with masculinity” to be identified first and foremost by their sex as women soldiers and women terrorists, for instance (Sjoberg, Cook & Neal 2011, 3), which then are represented in a gendered manne. Gender has been, in modern days, separated from biological

sex and understood as a social construction to which people grow into through the process of socialization, so that one does not have a gender, but one rather *performs* a gender⁹ (e.g. Cohn 2013 ; Gentry & Sjoberg 2011). Gender encompasses sets of social rules, norms, and behavioral patterns that guide the way representatives of each gender are expected to act and behave. Gentry and Sjoberg write that although gender is constantly changing and shifting, gender subordination remains a constant feature of social organization (2007, 6). Gendered manner of reporting puts women's personal and private lives, looks, and sometimes even sanity at the forefront of news reporting and academic research in an attempt to make sense of deviation from the accustomed stereotype of women as fragile and soft, because the "notion of women as militants, terrorists, or suicide bombers goes against the grain of many cultures' prevalent concepts of femininity" (Sjoberg, Cook, & Neal 2011, 4). Banks (2019) discusses the different explanations for the motivations of terrorist and elaborates on how understanding motivation "showcases gender differences in terrorism" (182). Banks argues that the motivation of male terrorists has always been self-evident and understandable, whereas the motivations of women to partake in violent activities has been depicted as unexplainable since "women are viewed as the victims of violence and not as its perpetrator" (ibid.), showing how the gendered stereotypes carry on even in the frames of terrorism. Cohn and Jacobson state that such "gendered politics of war" (2013, 104) affect our understanding of women and wars, and women in wars. In fact, Cohn and Jacobson claim that it is specifically the "inextricability of gender and war" shaping women's political participation that creates a situation where the relation of women to wars is "always already inherently political" (ibid.). They explain that it is the discourses surrounding wars and violence that position women in a political position, however, it must be noted that this politicism is not acknowledged in the 'grand narrative' of things. But it is indeed an interesting point that the discussion surrounding women's participation in violence is charged with ideological understandings of women's true roles and natures that are, inevitably, politically loaded even if women would not be perceived as political actors in these frames. It needs to be understood that the roles women carry do not exist alone, but in

⁹ Judith Butler developed the idea of gender as a performance in *Gender Trouble*, 1990.

a framework of social understanding of the gendered roles on men and women. As already discussed above, it is unlikely that women's participation in violent and terrorist activities would be described just violence or terrorism but is always described as "women's violence". This stems from the almost "hegemonic" understanding of men and women's "natural roles" in our social orders (Cohn & Jacobson 2013, 105). On the contrary, the fact that women are unreluctantly cast in the agent position of terrorism may in turn affect the fact that terrorist organizations employ women in terrorist activities since they can manage with less scrutiny and reservation (Cunningham 2003, 171-172). This in turn increases the restlessness surrounding female terrorism since women have the ability to carry and mother a child and thus have "more access to sensitive areas" of life, so that their attacks carry more shock value when executed (Sjoberg, Cooke & Neal 2011, 5).

Religion and the obscure division into the "West" and Islam, too, have affected the way women's participation in violent activities has been represented. Islam has, especially in the "Western" hemisphere, been casted as an outdated religion throughout history and Muslim women have been "mainly understood as oppressed and passive victims . . . reinforced visually by Islamic garments such as the hijab or the burqa, which the West usually interpret as signs of oppression" (Martini 2018, 459). This is because Islam is considered as not only incapable, but also resistant to modernity (Mamdani 2005, 19). Relating to Islam, Mamdani discusses the dichotomy between the "good Muslim" and "bad Muslim", in which the "bad Muslim" is one who has taken part in terrorist activity, and the "good Muslim" is anxious in trying to prove their allegiance to the collective group of "Us" while denouncing the acts of violence (2005, 15). The central message, according to Mamdani, is the fact that every Muslim is "bad" until proven "good". In the frames of female terrorism, this could be understood as the split between the "good Muslim" women who stay in the "West" adhering to the societal norms there, and to the "bad Muslim" women who have deserted the "West" to participate in religious violence.

This positioning has also caused the fact that "Western women were assigned the role of mothers or wives of the (men) soldiers joining the war" (Martini 2018, 460) since that is the accustomed

stereotypical role of a woman, whereas the Muslim women have traditionally been in need of saving from the “brown men” (Martini 2018, 460). Furthermore, Cohn and Jacobson write that many women use the role of “mother” and “motherhood” in explaining their political action, since it is a way for women to explicate “oppositional political action” (2013, 107) that is so inherent to the female stereotypes. Sjoberg and Gentry explain that the “mother narrative” carries with it “gendered assumptions” of what is acceptable female behavior (2007, 33). In addition, there have been two versions of this ‘mother’ recognized, namely the “nurturing mother” and the “vengeful mother”, out of which the former is mostly a non-threatening one that falls in line with the “Western notions of femininity” (33). The latter is a “dangerously disturbed” (34) woman who is after vengeance due to her losses, or due to the either real or perceived failures as a mother. In these cases, it is either the frustration caused by the previous reasons or her inability to bear children or achieve marriage that drives the vengeful mother into violence (35). Another narrative recognized and discussed by Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) is the “monster narrative”, that presents women’s violence as a biological flaw since women whose main task is to nurture and to protect are not supposed to commit violence. These women are recognized as inherently deviated and “inhuman monsters” (37). Finally, the third line of narratives is the “whore narrative” (Gentry & Sjoberg 2007). Gentry and Sjoberg give an example from Britain, where women joining the World War II were assumed as sexually deviant and the participation in war activities caused fears of the women’s “sexual impropriety” (44). Inside the whore narrative, there are multiple smaller narratives, but one specifically fits together with the narratives of Islam. That is the one that considers women as sexual objects of men, so that it is the male figures who have control and ownership of the women’s bodies and actions. In this manner, it is the men who pressure the women into violence (49).

Gender-focused terrorism and media research has recognized that such narratives affect the way we view women in politically violent frames, so that all focus falls on the biological make-up of women, instead of their “intellectual capability” to make decisions for themselves (Gentry & Sjoberg

2007, 50). Cohn and Jacobson (2013) claim that it is specifically these narratives that demand that women's participation in wars and violence needs to be understood as inherently political.

2.5 Previous Research

Feminist research on women and terrorism is an academic field certainly on the rise. With the rise of organizations like ISIS actively appealing to women and using women in their ideological propaganda¹⁰, the academic field has simultaneously seen a rise in relevant topics of study. One finds a multitude of academic work on women in terrorist organizations, and two studies conducted on the representations of women joining ISIS will be presented next. These two following studies have worked as guiding lines for the analysis of this study as well, and the results will be compared especially to these two articles in the discussion section (5.). Firstly, Martini has conducted a critical discourse analytic study examining how women terrorist are made into "Jihadi Brides" (2018). In her study, she concluded that the Western societies and media give birth to discourses which construct the Muslim women as "vulnerable and passive", and as "prey of Muslim men and their culture in general", although the decisions of these women to leave "the West" challenge this dichotomy. Therefore, the media need to create specific narratives that "make sense" of these deviations (471). Martini also concluded that narrow, gender-biased narratives simplify the issue of women joining jihad, while simultaneously complicating the understanding of the entirety of the phenomenon. In addition, they detected that mentions of religious elements in news reflected the division into Mamdani's (2005) "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims", which meant that the "good Muslims" were the ones who kept to themselves and kept their religious practices to private spheres and in a way, stood with the "West" in opposition to the "bad Muslims", who participated in public portrayals of religion which was seen as reinforcing their perceived "aberrant" nature (Martini, 468). Muslims committing acts of terrorism would then obviously be viewed as "bad Muslims".

¹⁰ See e.g. Vale, G. (2019). *Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps*.

Secondly, Azeez (2019) in their likewise critical discourse analytic study observed how “the media represents women and men who have left their home countries to join ISIS” (115). Azeez found that media rely on the normalized narrative that casts these women “Beautiful Souls”¹¹ who are oppressed by the Muslim men that surround them. Furthermore, Azeez explained that media used little filtering in order to mediate between the overtly jingoistic and paranoid, and more nuanced perceptions, that is seen to prevent audiences from receiving a balanced representation of things. In addition, Azeez concluded that the collective “Jihadi Brides” were portrayed as non-violent and pacific, and only certain individual persons received violent undertones. The Jihadi Brides were also lacking agency through infantilization, and the occasional individual aspects aimed in great deal to humanize these brides. Further on, it was found that the process of radicalization is obscured, so that any deeper understanding of the conflict and phenomenon is left out (Azeez 2019, 132-134).

¹¹ More on the “Beautiful soul” narrative in e.g. Sjoberg, L. (2010) “Women fighters and the ‘beautiful soul’ narrative”, *International Review of the Red Cross*. 92(877); 53-69.

3. DATA AND METHODS

In the following section, the data and methods employed in this study will be explained in more detail. Section 3.1 will go through the process of data collection and corpus design, and will elaborate on the decisions made when collecting data. In addition, to provide more objectivity to this research, this section will address some obstacles in the collection of data as well as concerns that might rise from the composition of the corpus. Section 3.2 will discuss the process of analysis in a more thorough manner, explaining the concepts of collocation and concordance so that the analysis in section 4. will have a basis on which to build on.

3.1 Data Collection and Corpus Design

The corpus this study utilized was a specialized corpus, that is, a corpus that was built to study particular aspects of language, such as newspaper language (Baker 2006, 25). The benefit of using a specialized corpus in discourse analysis stems from the fact that in this manner, the corpus will obviously have lesser words but the frequency of occurrences will be higher than in using a reference corpus. The data were collected from Nexis Uni, formerly known as LexisNexis Academic. Nexis Uni is a large online archive that collects different forms of texts, such as newspaper and law texts, that can then be used for various purposes. Since the focus of this thesis falls on the noun phrases used when referring to the women connected to ISIS, the following query terms were used:

- *ISIS bride*
- *ISIS brides*
- *ISIS mother*
- *ISIS mothers*
- *ISIS wife*
- *ISIS wives*
- *ISIS woman*
- *ISIS women*

The following words have been chosen based on preliminary searches on Nexis Uni and the News on the Web corpus. A quick search using the NOW corpus shows that before 2019, the noun phrases were most often in the form “bride of ISIS”, “wife of ISIS”, etcetera, but as 2019 came around the form where “ISIS” precedes the female nouns have become more common. Therefore, the query

strings in the form of “ISIS noun” have been chosen for this study. All query strings above include the acronym “ISIS”¹² as premodifier for nouns referring to female subjects. Although the nouns post-ISIS refer to female subjects, they have a different referent. Whereas the nouns *bride/brides*, *mother/mothers*, and *wife/wives* depict a relation between persons, *woman/women* could be understood as the most neutral one generally referring to a representative of the female sex. Additionally, when suitable, the words may be all be used when referring to the same person, but they can be just as well used when referring to separate persons. Including each of the mentioned query strings will allow this study to cover a broader area of research of feminine-type phrases in connection to ISIS. Since the focus of this study falls on news media discourse, the data were collected from newspaper articles in both online and print media, covering news articles, features, and opinion pieces, all published in some platform of news media. No instances outside of news media were included, meaning that social media postings were not included unless if an article contained them. Timeline of the data ranged from 1.2.2019 until 29.2.2020. The date 1.2.2019 was chosen as the starting point since this was when the Syrian Democratic Forces began their attack on the final areas under ISIS’s control (Wilsoncenter.org). This attack started the influx to al-Hol, which later was sped up with the final fall of the ISIS caliphate around 22.3.2019 (Wilsoncenter.org; The New York Times March 23rd, 2019). The cut-off point of 29.2.2020 was used because February was the last whole month before starting the collection of data. In this way, the time period under inspection covers a period of a little over a year. The time between February 2019 and February 2020 covers the beginning and final fall of the ISIS caliphate. Thus, it will cover the growing number of people fleeing the former ISIS areas and accommodating the camps that became a consistent part in daily news media reportage in 2019.

Following the suggestion made by Azeez (2019), the focus of this study will be limited to reportage from one country, the United Kingdom (the UK), in order to get a better view of country-specific cultural representations. Focus on a single country will allow a broader inspection of certain identities and frames apparent in the UK, especially when considered that the attitudes towards Muslims in the

¹² Or “ISIL” as demonstrated in section 3.2.

UK have not been on the positive side (see e.g. Baker, McEnery & Gabrielatos 2013). The focus on Great Britain was chosen based on Azeez’s study where the results showed a heightened level of mentions of “jihadi brides” in Great Britain with much of the other countries’ news reportage relying on the news produced in the UK¹³. Azeez discusses the globalized nature of modern news media that allows the spread of “the framing of the issue to audiences in the United Kingdom . . . [to] pass largely unchanged to audiences from different cultures” (Azeez 2019, 119). The data will be limited to national newspapers and their online versions from the UK, including the following publications:

- *The Daily Telegraph*
 - Including its Sunday paper, *The Sunday Telegraph* and its online platform *telegraph.co.uk*
- *The Guardian*
 - Including its Sunday paper, *The Observer*
- *The Independent*
 - Online only
- *i*

The newspapers in question were chosen based on their circulation and their online readership in the UK¹⁴ and on what was available on Nexis Uni. Unfortunately, Nexis Uni does not hold records of *The Times* or *The Sunday Times* which are among the broadsheets with the highest circulations. The name “broadsheet” has usually been used when referring to the size of the physical publication and is still used to separate the “quality journalism” from the more scandalous, tabloid papers. The broadsheets were chosen because of just this reason: tabloids tend to be more “scandalous” in nature, whereas the broadsheet presupposes a certain level of objectivity.

The data consisted of the news texts extracted from Nexis Uni using the query strings listed above. The search was conducted using the “Advanced Search” option that Nexis Uni offers by inserting all the query strings separated with the connector “OR” that Nexis Uni provides. In this manner, the results already included texts in which the words appeared in collocation so that they would

¹³ Azeez’s study covers 15 countries, out of which Great Britain accounts for nearly 1/3 of the jihadi bride mentions (see Azeez 2019), in contrast to only 2 mentions of the male-typed query strings, based on which it can be concluded that the women of ISIS are under much discussion.

¹⁴ News Consumption in the UK: 2019. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/157914/uk-news-consumption-2019-report.pdf

not just be in the text separately, since that would have been irrelevant for the data when the aim was to focus on the specific query strings. Nexis Uni allows restrictions based on date range, location of publication, language, and others. In addition to the aforementioned dates, the following restrictions were set:

- Newspapers
- Language: English
- Place of publication: International => Europe => The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Publications: *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph**, *The Independent*, *i*

Table 1. The Distribution of the Search pre-processing

| Name of Newspaper | Number of Texts after Initial Search | Number of Texts after Initial Clearance |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 30 | 26 |
| <i>The Independent</i> | 104 | 93 |
| <i>i</i> | 24 | 23 |
| <i>The Observer</i> | 3 | 3 |
| <i>The Telegraph</i> * | 124 | 42+7+53 |
| In total: | 285 | 247 |

**The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *telegraph.co.uk*

All in all, the search in Nexis Uni returned 3,824 results in all the news during the time period of 1.02.2019-29.02.2020. Out of these, UK covered for 2,454¹⁵ hits, clearly demonstrating the popularity of the topic. After limiting the search to the broadsheets in question, the search returned in total 198 results. Interestingly, *The Daily Telegraph*¹⁶ returned zero results for any of the query strings, however, after searching around with different terms, it came clear that *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, and *telegraph.co.uk* prefer the term ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), and when

¹⁵ For the query strings with “ISIS”. For the ones with “ISIL”, the total number of hits was 321 out of which the UK returned 156 hits.

¹⁶ And its online publication *telegraph.co.uk* and Sunday print *The Sunday Telegraph*.

“ISIS” was replaced with “ISIL” in the query strings, results were found. The total number of mentions for the versions with “ISIL” were 321, out of which 156 were in the UK, and 153 of those were in versions of *The Telegraph*. Likewise, the results for *The Observer* had to be searched separately, since it did not automatically offer *The Observer* in the publication list. After the initial searches, the results were limited using the Group Duplicates -selection offered by Nexis Uni, leaving 30 hits for *The Guardian*, 104 for *The Independent*, and 24 for *i*, 124 for the versions of *The Telegraph*, and 3 for *The Observer*, totaling at 285 articles as shown in Table 1. These were then downloaded in PDF form, converted into text form with the help of AntFileConverter and loaded onto AntConc. Both are freeware tools developed by Laurence Anthony, and they can be downloaded free-of-charge from Laurenceanthony.net. AntFileConverter was used in converting the downloaded PDF files into plain text documents that could be downloaded to AntConc. The version of AntConc used was 3.5.8 for Windows 10. Next, the texts were skimmed through in order to remove any duplicates that might still be left even after the Group Duplicates -selection offered by Nexis Uni. The duplicates were removed if they contained texts that were almost or entirely alike. In this case, the one published first was kept and if there were no such time-specific details available, the “first edition” or the one otherwise marked as the oldest of each piece of news was kept. In addition, all irrelevant texts were removed, meaning that texts which contained mentions of titles of other news inside them, so that the query strings were not in fact in the title or in the actual text, or texts that had the words “ISIS”/“ISIL” and “woman”, for example, but with multiple words or even paragraphs in between them so that they did not refer to the same object. The text files were also cleaned from extra text: Nexis Uni adds certain classifications after the texts, so all text after and including “classification” was removed in order to remove all irrelevant texts that might falsely affect the frequency or relevancy of words. An example of this is given in Figure 1.

```

Classification
Language: ENGLISH
Publication-Type: Newspaper; Web Publication

^800 jihadists to wreak havoc if Britain does not take back fighters, US warns
Page 3 of 3
Journal Code: WEBDTNS
Subject: ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ & THE LEVANT (90%); TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS (90%); TERRORISM (89%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (75%); PUBLIC OFFICIALS (75%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (72%); TERRORIST ATTACKS (70%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (67%)
Geographic: UNITED STATES (97%); UNITED KINGDOM (95%); EUROPE (94%); SYRIA (93%); MIDDLE EAST (79%); IRAQ (79%)
Load-Date: February 17, 2019
End of Document

```

Figure 1

Further, if the title of the text appeared multiple times in the top of pages, only one title was kept so that they would not distort the data by adding multiple mentions of “ISIS bride”, for example. After this, the corpus held altogether 247 articles and consisted of 185,226 words in total. The breakdown of the query strings in the corpus is presented in Table 2. It must be noted that multiple articles held strings of text that were the same, however, as articles that were full copies of each other were removed, articles that differed in some matter although having similarities were kept since they were published as different articles. Such cases were, for example, situations where similar or the same quotations from persons were used in multiple articles. Looking at the numbers in Table 2., it is clear they are not as high as they ideally would be, nor is the corpus as large as others might be, however, the study is focused on specific occurrences in a specific environment throughout a timespan of only a year generating a specialized corpus. That said, the smallness of the corpus will allow a closer look into these concepts and offers more room for semantic comparisons between them.

Table 2. Distribution of the Query Strings

| Query Terms | Number of Occurrences | Normalized Frequency per 10,000 words |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ISIS bride | 107 | 5.77 |
| ISIS brides | 15 | 0.80 |
| ISIS mother | 2 | 0.10 |
| ISIS mothers | 2 | 0.10 |
| ISIS wife | 3 | 0.16 |
| ISIS wives | 26 | 1.40 |
| ISIS woman | 4 | 0.21 |
| ISIS women | 22 | 1.18 |
| ISIL bride | 90 | 4.85 |
| ISIL brides | 21 | 1.13 |
| ISIL mother | - | 0 |
| ISIL mothers | - | 0 |
| ISIL wife | 6 | 0.32 |
| ISIL wives | 10 | 0.53 |
| ISIL woman | 2 | 0.10 |
| ISIL women | 14 | 0.75 |
| In Total | 324 | 17.4 |

3.2 Methods of Analysis

As already stated before, the analysis will be conducted as a mixed methods, corpus-based critical discourse analysis, including both qualitative and quantitative methods with the quantitative analysis guiding the focus of the qualitative section. The corpus linguistic approach will provide the quantitative approach, and the CDA will answer for the qualitative needs. McEnery and Wilson note that

using corpus-based methods for quantitative analysis will allow the study to be more statistically reliable and offer results that are more generalizable (2001, 77). This does not of course mean that, for example, the results of this study would be applicable as they are to the news genre as a whole, but that they are relevant in the context they are studied in and are applicable in that environment.

The first step, the corpus phase, included the inspection of concordance plots and collocation. Concordance is defined by Baker as “simply a list of all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context that they occur in” (2006, 71) and by McEnery and Wilson as the “characteristic co-occurrence patterns of words” (2001, 85), thus concordance plots allow the inspection of the relevancy of certain strings of words in the corpus. The concordance tool, “the single most important tool available to the corpus linguist” (McEnery & Hardie 2012, 35) is also extremely useful when analyzing the context in which the specific words appear in. This may reveal, for example, negative or positive biases. What Nohrstedt wrote on the negative connotations of words (2010, 37. See section 2.1.3 of this study) could for example be studied with the help of concordances. Basically, “the object of creating concordances” is to look more closely to the patterns of language use in order to identify certain patterns that can help us detect certain discourses (Baker 2006, 77). Furthermore, “Concordancing is a valuable analytical technique because it allows a large number of examples of an item to be brought together in one place, in their original context.” (Evison 2010, 129). Concordances can be looked at by limiting the search to certain range from the query string, so that we can look at words directly attached to the query string, or then at words one, two, three, or more to the right or left. Some concordance lines appear shorter and some longer, hence the context of concordance must be considered before making any conclusions. Collocation, then, is the appearance of certain words frequently near each other, used as a tool to understand meanings and associations between words (Baker 2006, 96). In short, collocates are words with statistically significant co-occurrence, thus appearing in collocation (*ibid.*). Collocation could be understood as an elaboration to concordance analysis, as it indicates that the meaning of a word is not tied to the word itself, but rather revealed through the company it keeps (McEnery & Hardie 2012, 122-123).

In this study, each individual query string will be analyzed with the use of concordance plots and collocations, as well as frequencies and clusters. Frequencies are relevant in collocation analysis especially since it needs to be taken into account whether the word in collocation is of high or low frequency. Frequencies of certain words will also reveal possible keywords (words with a relatively higher frequency in the corpus in comparison to a reference corpus). In many cases grammatical words or function words (pronouns and determiners, for example) top the keyword lists of many corpora, however, this study will not place emphasis on keywords, specifically, but on the collocates of words. Of course, it is necessary to acknowledge whether a collocate is significant in its frequency. When identifying clusters in the analysis, the singular and plural forms of words were analyzed separately in order to discover any distinctions between the use of the words. Furthermore, each term included in the study (bride*, mother*, wife/wives, wom?n*), was checked individually for their concordances and collocates to offer more insight into the terms. It was deemed necessary to expand the scope outside of just the strings with *ISIS* or *ISIL* in them to understand the semantic differences of each noun in more detail. In addition, many of the articles used multiple terms, so that it could be presupposed that the mentions would cross-reference each other. The collocate search was limited to four words left and four words right and the minimum of hits required was five. The collocates were then sorted according to the tools AntConc offers, and the chosen sorting method was the combination of the MI (mutual information) score and log-likelihood $p < 0.05$. MI score calculates the strength of the collocation “by examining all of the places where two potential collocates occur in a text or corpus” (Baker 2006, 101). Then, it calculates the probability of the collocation of these words based on their frequencies and the size of the corpus. However, the MI has been criticized for its tendency to score low-frequency words higher in the corpus than they realistically should, thus fuzzing out the actual collocates. Therefore, the MI score is used along log-likelihood to offer more balanced results. After each search for collocates, they were organized by the “Sort by Stat” tool. When analyzing the collocates, even after they were calculated with the corpus tools, they were checked for relevance, so that the analyzed collocates would truly be accurate and significant.

Thus, the first step of the analysis included the recognizing of the collocates. If there were significant collocates available, those were then analyzed further. If there were no significant collocates available, the analysis leaned on concordance plots and recognizing recurring patterns there. Then, the analysis was continued with methods of CDA through close readings guided by the collocate and concordance analysis in order to broaden the understanding of the results. The first part of analysis was focused on the four categories (*bride/brides*, *mother/mothers*, *wife/wives*, *woman/women*), whereas the second part was focused on recognizing the way the media construct the “Other” in contrast to the “West” on a larger scale through specific frames. The second part was conducted because it is known (see 2.4) that religious factors play a part in this equation, and similar patterns were detected in the first part of analysis here, too.

4. ANALYSIS

This section is focused on the analysis of the research and consists of two parts. Section 4.1. will be dedicated to the corpus-based analysis of the four main categories divided according to the query strings, so that the female categories of *bride/brides*, *mother/mothers*, *wife/wives*, and finally *woman/women* will all be assessed in subsections of their own. These sections will briefly go through the query strings, their concordances and collocates, recognizing aspects that are specific for each category as well as common ground for all four. Each section, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, and finally 4.1.4, will include a table of the most important collocates of each category and a broader discussion of the collocates and their concordance plots. Each subsection begins with a discussion of the query strings including *ISIS* and *ISIL*, continuing with analysis on the female nouns without the modifier *ISIS/ISIL* to offer more insight into the semantic differences between these noun phrases. To continue, section 4.2 will, in more detail, explore the construction of the division between the “Us” and the “Other” in the data. The focus falls on religious symbols of Islam, as religion and the ideas of Islam have been found to affect the Muslim women are portrayed in media. Section 4.2 will also help in identifying certain frames at play in the news reporting.

4.1 Categorical analysis

To begin this analysis section, we could first take a look at the most frequent clusters with both acronyms in the corpus. The top ten most common two-word lexical clusters with the acronyms *ISIS* and *ISIL* in the corpus are shown in Table 4. below, and the non-person clusters are marked with italics. The clusters themselves do not tell us much at first, however, what becomes evident through these clusters is the fact that all the mentions of gender are made through feminine words, so that it is clear from the start that the representation of these women follow the common pattern of putting their gender first¹⁷. The table shows the frequency of the female-specific clusters in relation to the clusters

¹⁷ A search from NexisUni for the same period of time with the corresponding terms for males reveals 106 occurrences, out of which majority are in the form of “ISIS men” and in cases were the terms *father* or *husband* occur, they are in connection to the women, e.g. “she and her ISIS husband” or then in citation marks as in “ISIS father”, often connected to the women as well.

where gender is not self-evident from the nouns used. By looking at the concordance plots for *ISIS fighter/fighters* and *ISIL fighter/fighters* we see that all the instances refer to male counterparts, portraying how with men, the references to violence are direct, however, with women, the issue is more complex. Therefore, it is beneficial to pay closer attention what these noun phrases hide behind them. It appears that for both acronyms, *bride* is the most frequent collocate, and therefore close attention will be paid especially to the instances of *ISIS/ISIL bride/brides*, as well as the appearances of *bride/brides*. From the list of clusters, we see that *ISIS/ISIL mother/mothers* are not significant clusters in the corpus, and therefore focus will be placed mostly on the occurrences of *mother/mothers* and their collocates. Both *ISIS/ISIL wife/wives* and *ISIS/ISIL woman/women* appear to be frequent clusters in the corpus.

Table 3. The 10 most frequent clusters for both acronyms

| Cluster | Hits in Corpus | Cluster | Hits in Corpus |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| ISIS bride | 107 | ISIL bride | 90 |
| ISIS fighters | 57 | ISIL fighters | 37 |
| ISIS members | 36 | ISIL brides | 21 |
| ISIS wives | 26 | ISIL fighter | 14 |
| ISIS fighter | 21 | ISIL <i>territory</i> | 16 |
| ISIS <i>territory</i> | 21 | ISIL women | 14 |
| ISIS brides | 15 | ISIL members | 16 |
| ISIS women | 22 | ISIL wives | 10 |
| ISIS <i>caliphate</i> | 15 | ISIL wife | 6 |
| ISIS <i>territories</i> | 9 | ISIL member | 4 |

4.1.1 Category *bride/brides*

Out of all the hits for the query strings, the *ISIS/ISIL bride** is the most frequent with 197 hits for its singular forms and 36 for plural. Looking at these numbers, it becomes clear that *bride* is most often used in its singular form, preceded by a modifier of some sort, like *British, former, runaway*, describing a specific person. There does not appear to be much difference between the collocates of *ISIS* and *ISIL + bride* except that *ISIL bride* returns a lower number of collocates. After looking at the occurrences more closely, it becomes evident that the query string *ISIS/ISIL bride* is focused specifically on one person: Shamima Begum. Based on the amount of collocation between *Shamima + Begum + bride*, it almost seems that Begum has become *the* ISIS bride in Britain. All in all, Begums name appears in clusters such as “ISIS bride Shamima Begum” (31), “ISIL bride Shamima Begum” (18), and in titles (6) like “Shamima Begum: ISIS bride will not be allowed to return to UK from Syria” (*The Independent* 29.9.2019), for example.

Table 4. Collocates for the category *bride/brides*

| Query String | Collocates based on MI score and Log-Likelihood (frequency in brackets) |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ISIS bride ¹⁸ | <i>runaway (6), Shamima (43), says (12), Begum (45), former (7), son (7), baby (5), family (5), return (6), citizenship (6), UK (9), British (8)</i> |
| ISIL bride | <i>become (6), Shamima (25), former (8), says (7), Begum (32)</i> |
| bride | <i>runaway (9), jihadi (32), teenage (8), Shamima (76), ISIL (92), become (10), says (22), ISIS (113), former (9), stripped (10), Begum (83), birth (6), wants (5), son (9), baby (6), allowed (5), citizenship (13), British (20), return (22)</i> |
| brides | <i>jihadi (12), called (6), ISIL (23), ISIS (20), British (8), children (5), Syria (7)</i> |

¹⁸ The plural forms of *ISIS/ISIL brides* did not return any significant collocates

Therefore, it must be noted that the analysis of *ISIS bride* will obviously include the analysis of the representation of the most famous one, Begum, especially so when taken into consideration that Begum's last name alone appears in the corpus 994 times. The linkage between Begum and the term *ISIS bride* explains why *bride* so often appears in its singular form, as Begum's case is currently probably one of the most known of all the British "brides". Aside from Begum, there appears a few additional names along *ISIS bride*, however, Begum takes the lion's share. Other collocates of *ISIS bride* revolve around Begum too, such as *son*, and *baby* in articles where her children are brought up (see e.g. *The Independent*, 3.2.2019). Especially prevalent are the references to the "ISIS brides" citizenship, Britain, and the UK, as Begum along with other British women has had her citizenship revoked due to her connections with ISIS (e.g. *i*, 12.3.2019; *The Independent*, 22.10.2019). This also in part explains the collocation between *ISIS bride* and *bride* with *son* and *baby*, since the discussion of Begum's citizenship also addresses the right of the child to return to the UK, however, the baby dies before the UK government made any moves to assist the child's return (*The Independent*, 9.3.2019). We could, therefore, take a closer look at *citizenship* as it has been under much discussion lately with the removal of Begum's citizenship, and consequently, the possible removal of other citizenships, as well. The word alone appears in the corpus 439 times, retrieving multiple collocates, such as *eligible* (5), *revoking* (8), *cancel* (6), *revoke* (24), *removing* (16), *removal* (7), *revoked* (22), *stripped* (49), *stripping* (12), and *removed* (5), to name the top 10 collocates. Aside from *eligible*, all the collocates refer to the loss of citizenship, ranging between lower and higher levels of deprivation. Altogether fifteen collocates of *citizenship* discuss the loss of citizenship, and only three address the "gaining" or "remaining" of citizenship. Examples 1 and 2 portray the discussion around the revoking of citizenships with both mentioning Begum as an example:

(1) Britain **has stripped citizenship from several of its citizens**, including Shamima Begum who **fled the UK for Syria** when she was 15. (*The Guardian*, 20.1.2019)

(2) Questioned on whether Isis "bride" Shamima Begum **could be legally stripped of British citizenship** or handed an exclusion order, Mr Gauke said he would not comment on her case. **"The priority of the government has got to be to protect society as a whole,"** he added. (*The Independent*, 19.2.2019)

Example 2 reflects the fears that surround these individuals about what should happen if they were to return from Syria to Britain, implying that these truly are dangerous individuals who should be feared. Another surprising issue that arises from Example 2 is the fact that it appears to be a part of the government officials that fear the return and the effects of it for the society. However, Examples 3 and 4 defend Begum and others, claiming that Britain should carry the responsibility of its civilians so that whether there has been a crime committed or not, appropriate legal matters should be carried out in their native country.

(3) Labour MP David Lammy wrote on Twitter: “Stripping individuals of citizenship sets a very **dangerous precedent**. We should **take responsibility for our own citizens** and try them for crimes in British courts, not leave them stateless. This is the rule of law.” (*The Independent*, 21.2.2019)

(4) **Shamima is British**. Going off to **join Islamist extremists in Syria makes her no less British** than Joyce going off to fight with the fascists in Spain. Amongst the responses to the dilemma that Shamima, and people like her, pose for the British government, **denying her citizenship should not be one of them**. (*The Independent*, 15.4.2019)

Example 4 demonstrates the understanding that no matter if a person has “left” Britain to join ISIS, it does not mean that their inherent “Britishness” has decreased as an outcome, and they should still be eligible to the juridical procedure offered by Britain.

An interesting aspect relating both to *ISIS* and *ISIL bride* is the transformational nature of the status of the “bride”. For example, *ISIL bride* retrieves the collocate *become* and appears in concordance lines such as “travelled to Syria to *become* an *ISIL bride*” (see e.g. telegraph.co.uk 10.10.2019), signaling that her going to Syria triggers the transformation into an *ISIL bride*. In 4 out of 6 instances, the *becoming* is accompanied by verb forms suggesting “fleeing” or “running away” from home (the UK). When cross-checked with *ISIS bride* by limiting the search to 1R and 2R to find similar patterns, we find none. Then again, we find another transformation in status through the collocate *former* which is often used when describing Begum, so that she is a “former *ISIS bride*” (see e.g. *The Independent* 22.10.2019), indicating a shift in her “bridal” status. Such transformative aspects in relation to the status of “bride” imply that being an “*ISIS bride*” is not something one acquires for the rest of one’s

life, but something that is first sought after, and afterwards lost. Additionally, it seems that the transformation to “ISIS bride” happens suddenly, and demands simply leaving the UK for Syria. In Example 5, we see a suggestion that the life of the bride is something ‘passing’ and ‘temporary’, activated by the use of “she lived the life” and “she wants the **ordeal** to be over”:

(5) For four years she has **lived the life of a jihadi bride**, witnessing the **casual brutality** of the regime on a daily basis. Now, **she wants the ordeal to be over**. She wants to **return home** to Britain. (*The Daily Telegraph* 15.2.2019)

However, although “the brides” may want the “ordeal” to be over, they are left with their titles, effect of which is discussed in 6 below:

(6) Remove the inflammatory **dog-whistle references to Isis brides** and jihadi runaways and how **much more likely is Shamima Begum to incite our pity and mercy?** How much more likely are we to prioritise our duty of care to her as a British citizen? (*The Guardian* 19.2.2019)

The noun phrase *ISIS bride* is also often used with the adjective *runaway*¹⁹, appearing in clusters such as *runaway ISIS bride*, echoing strongly with the common phrase *runaway bride* used to describe a bride who has left their future spouse on the altar. However, the difference here is that there has been no “spouse to leave” in the UK, but a supposed marriage in Syria after the departure as demonstrated in Example 7. This example also implies that the motivation to leave the UK was to achieve marriage. Example 7 additionally demonstrates the correlation of “becoming an ISIL bride” with going to Syria.

(7) The **Isil bride who travelled to Syria to marry a terrorist** is ‘traumatised’, according to her lawyer, who likened his client to a World War One soldier. (*Telegraph.co.uk*, 18.2.2019)

To continue, the adjective collocate *runaway* is an interesting one as it conveys a state of “being out of control” (Oxford English Dictionary). If we look at the concordance plots for *runaway* and a corresponding colloquial verb form *ran away* in more detail in the corpus, we notice they are often used to describe a *schoolgirl* as in a “runaway schoolgirl” (*i*, 18.2.2019), or “schoolgirl who ran away” as in Example 8:

(8) **The British schoolgirl who ran away to join Isil** has appealed for public sympathy following the birth of her son, as a row intensifies over whether she should be allowed to return to the UK. (*telegraph.co.uk* 18.2.2019)

¹⁹ One instance of *runaway* was made in reference to another articles name

As becomes clear from collocates of both *runaway* and *ran away*, they are respectively used with *bride* and *schoolgirl*. Such instances add to a certain level of infantilization on part of these “brides”: if they are addressed as “runaway schoolgirls”, one might perceive them only as erratic children who have not had any agency behind their decisions. This of course goes hand in hand with the narrative of the “teenage brides” we find behind the adjective collocate *teenage*. It is interesting to note while looking at the concordance plots for *teenage + bride* that most of them are used in referring to Begum as a “teenage bride”. Another factor worth noticing is the way *teenage* is used to elicit sympathy in referencing the age of the “brides”, either upon their departure as in Example 9,

(9) Imagine this: **a British teenage girl is groomed online** at the age of 15. Stay with her nationality for a moment. **She is British.** She is **indoctrinated by one of the world's most brutal terrorist cults** and within 10 days of fleeing her home country is **married to an extremist fighter. Stay with her age for a moment. She is 15.** Four years later, two of her children have died and she has escaped across the desert, nine months pregnant, to a refugee camp. **There, aged 19,** she gives birth. And now **she is asking to come home.** (*The Guardian*, 19.2.2019)

or at the time of their will to return to Britain as in Example 10. Example 9 elicits even more sympathy by adding the sentence final “she is asking to come home”, almost as if a child has run away and is now asking for her parents to take her back. To be noted is the fact how her Britishness is emphasized here, as well. Example 10 also mirrors a sentiment a parent could give to their “out of control” child: “Actions have consequences”.

(10) Shamima Begum: **Government turns back on pregnant teenager** as another **Isis bride's father pleads for return** to UK; ‘**Actions have consequences,**’ security minister says as government refuses to assist passage out of Syria (*The Independent* 14.2.2019)

There are also voices that demand the disposal of all forms of modifiers when discussing these “brides” as was demonstrated in Example 6 above, suggesting that regardless of what is being said, such terms as *ISIS* or *ISIL bride/brides* will harm the public perception of these women.

Whatever the case, we cannot escape the fact that mentions of Begum keep peppering almost every article in the corpus, so much so that the news are less about the “brides” in general, and revolve around “the bride” while still mentioning the others. Therefore, it can be concluded that the way *the*

ISIS bride Shamima Begum is discussed directly as well as indirectly affects the way the others will be perceived as well, although they are most often left unnamed.

4.1.2 Category *mother/mothers*

The category of the *mother/mothers* is an interesting one since it is often assumed that women in terrorist organizations hold roles that are not directly linked to armed battle, but carry the backbone for the organization in the form of giving birth and raising the next generation of fighters. In addition, the role of the mother is one of the main ones women have been recognized as holding in violent organizations as explained by in section 2.4. As seen from Table 5., the query strings *ISIS/ISIL mother/mothers* do not appear to retrieve any significant collocates, and as shown in Table 2., we see that the noun phrases appear in the corpus in total of four times and it is easy to conclude that they have not become established phrases at least in this context. All in all, it seems reasonable to focus on the nouns *mother* (101 hits) and *mothers* (27 hits) in this case because although they appear without the acronym *ISIS/ISIL*, they appear frequently in the corpus in connection to the terrorist organization, and *ISIS* is one of the collocates for both *mother* and *mothers*.

Table 5. Collocates for the category *mother/mothers*

| Query String | Collocates based on MI score and Log-Likelihood (frequency in brackets) |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ISIS mother ²⁰ | - |
| ISIL mother | - |
| mother | <i>baby (8), child (10), Shamima (5), Begum (10), British (6), said (10), ISIS (5)</i> |
| mothers | <i>children (7), ISIS (6)</i> |

From the numbers presented in Table 5., we see that like bride, *mother* is also used most often in its singular form. Unsurprisingly, *mother* is often collocated by *baby* or *child*, and *mothers* by

²⁰ The plural forms of *ISIS/ISIL mothers* did not return any significant collocates

children, highlighting the motherly duties of the category in question as the discussion around *mother* revolves around their children and vice versa. If we look at the concordance plots the word *baby* appears in, we find a familiar name: Shamima Begum. Although she is not explicitly referred to as an “ISIS mother”, nearly all the hits of *baby* (146 in total) in the corpus are connected to Begum discussing her motherhood. It even appears that the *baby* has been the reason she eventually escaped the caliphate, since she “feared her baby would die . . . like [her] other children” (*The Independent*, 17.2.2019). Then, if we look at the collocates of *baby*, we find that the top three collocates include *newborn*, *boy*, and *died*. The collocates *newborn* and *boy* refer to Begum’s youngest son, her “new-born baby boy” (e.g. *The Independent*, 21.2.2019) as the baby has understandably been under much discussion due to the status of his mother. The British press has broadly addressed the fact that whether, after revoking Begum of her citizenship, the baby was still eligible for British citizenship. However, as becomes clear from the collocate *died*, we learn that the baby has died, just like Begum’s other children (*The Independent*, 22.10.2019). Grieffully emphasizing the message, each instance of *baby + died* (16 cases) refer to Begum’s children. Interestingly, the instances where *baby* and Begum are discussed revolve around certain aspects of failure: either the “failure” of Begum as mother in regards to raising her children in Syria (11) not to even mention having a child with a *foreign terrorist fighter* (12), or around the “failure” of the government to protect its most vulnerable citizen (13 and 14). Example 12 here is an interesting one, since it is not necessarily clear that is it a direct reference to these *mothers* as fighters, or is it a nod towards having a child with a *foreign terrorist fighter* as an act to support the continuity of the organization. The fact that the child would be the child of a *foreign terrorist fighter* does not negate the fact that the child was British, but it is still clear that blame here is directed towards the mother.

(11) She said she could see a future for herself and her son, whom she has named Jarah after **one of the two children she lost to malnutrition and disease in the last three months**, “if the UK are willing to take me back and help me start a new life again and try and move on from everything that's happened in the last four years” (telegraph.co.uk 18.2.2019)

(12) Mr Javid, who stripped the 19-year old Isis bride of her British citizenship, said any blame lay with jihadists. He told the House of Commons: “The **death of any British child**, even

those **children born to a foreign terrorist fighter**, of course, is a tragedy - but the **only person responsible for the death of that child is the foreign terrorist fighter.**" (*i*, 12.3.2019)

(13) The lawyer continued: "The baby has every right to come back to Britain though you are not going to separate a newborn baby from its mother. In effect, **you have barred that baby from coming back to the UK and left it in a warzone.**"

(14) It follows **the death of Ms Begum's newborn baby son**. He was a British national even though she had been stripped of her citizenship and banned from the UK. He could have come to Britain **if he had been taken to a British consul in a third country**, according to the Home Office. Baroness Williams made clear **Britain would not risk the lives of British officials** in Syria trying **to help those had left the UK to join a proscribed terrorist organisation**. But she added: "If a **British child** who has been in Syria **is able to seek consular assistance outside of Syria**, then we would work with local and UK authorities to facilitate their return if requested." (*telegraph.co.uk*, 10.4.2019)

Example 14 demonstrates an unreasonable request made for the child exclaiming that the children would be attended to, *if* they were first able to find consular assistance, almost suggesting that it would be up to the children to save themselves. As is known, the voyage in a war area like Syria demands a dangerous trek to a consulate that would be extremely dangerous to a single woman carrying a child and completely impossible for a child alone. There have been countless requests from the Kurdish forces for Western nations to retrieve their citizens, acknowledging that return is nearly impossible without anyone's assistance (e.g. *telegraph.co.uk*, 12.7.2019). Therefore, it can be supposed that the unwillingness of the British government to help the mothers leads to the suffering of these children, especially so when connected to the "failures" of the mothers in caring for their children. In addition to questioning Begum's capability to care and protect for her children, there are other instances where the ability of these mothers to parent their children are placed under suspicion (15, 16, and 17).

(15) **It fell to Kurdish fighters to provide** much of the medical care and try to reunite a sobbing toddler with his missing mother. They wrapped blankets around children who had **no coats** to shield them from the cold and in some cases were walking barefoot through the mud. Their **mothers called out for help** but made **no apology for dragging their children into this desperate situation in pursuit of their fanatical ideology.** (*The Daily Telegraph*, 1.3.2019)

(16) Afrimm had tried to get Alvin out of Syria before, following **messages from the boy** saying how frightened he was and how he wanted to get away. But **all attempts had been blocked by his mother who tried to force her son to join the child fighters of Isis**, "Cubs of the Caliphate", instead. (*The Independent* 4.7.2019)

(17) **Was it worth losing two sons** in battle and subjecting her other children to horrors of war? “We stayed in the Islamic State because we want heaven. And **we buy heaven with our souls and our children's souls**,” she said. “God didn't create us for this life, he created us for the next life.” (*The Daily Telegraph* 25.2.2019)

There appears, additionally, a composed polarization of the *children* in Syria opposed to the *children* in the UK. The name that keeps peppering the corpus, Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary, has been the one accused for the death of Begum’s child as he has been quoted as the man who stripped Begum of her citizenship (discussed in section 4.1.1). This is also visible in Example 12, where the death of the British child in Syria is formulated as being not an issue for the government, as it has not been the government who has taken the children to Syria.

(18) Sajid Javid, the Home Secretary, said last week that he would “not hesitate” to prevent the return of anyone who supported terrorist organisations abroad. He reiterated his stance in a Sunday newspaper article, **expressing compassion for any child** born or brought into a conflict zone, but stating that the **safety and security of children living in this country had to be the priority**. (*telegraph.co.uk*, 18.2.2019)

Examples such as 18 underline a troubling scenario, where it is up to the government to decide which citizens are counted as “worthy” of helping, and whether all citizens are counted as equally British and although “The sins of the father (and mother) are not the child’s” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13.3.2019), the future of the children cannot be separated from the mothers, since eventually, the destiny of the mothers and the children are inextricably intertwined. Paying attention to these little nuances in text, we see a gentle nod towards the children of ISIS affiliates being a “threat” to the children of Britons which will affect their reception in the UK.

If we look closer into the noun *child*, the top three collocates are *unborn*, *quietly*, and *third*, however, *quietly* appears on the list because a quotation from Begum has been used in the same form in seven different instances with her saying she “would do anything required just to be able to come home and live *quietly* with [her] child” (e.g. *The Independent*, 14.2.2019). Thus, it feels reasonable to ignore *quietly* from any closer inspection, and take a closer look of the following collocate, *groomed*. Interestingly, the adjective does not refer to the children of the mothers in the camp, but rather to Begum who was “groomed” as a child into joining ISIS, used as a way of eliciting sympathy

for the women (19 and 20). However, not everyone is yielding to the narrative of the “groomed child” as becomes evident from Example 21.

(19) There are around **150 British women in the world who can be called “jihadi brides”** – those who left places such as Luton, Birmingham and Burton upon Trent to migrate to the Islamic State and eventually marry its fighters - and Shamima Begum is one of the youngest. She **assumed this status as a minor, and the use of the term “jihadi bride”** by journalists and commentators to describe her is appalling, **a heaping of further trauma on a groomed child.** (*The Guardian* 26.2.2019)

(20) Community groups and residents in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets - home to dozens of second, third and fourth generation migrants who, **like Shamima's parents**, came to Britain to build a better life - are divided on whether she should be allowed back at all or whether, **given she left as a child who was groomed and brainwashed** by violent extremists, she should be given a second chance. (telegraph.co.uk 16.2.2019)

(21) “People are **trying to say she was a groomed child but ... she planned it herself, nobody dragged her onto that plane, no one kidnapped her** and put her there,” he added. (*The Independent* 26.2.2019)

Additionally, a little surprisingly, the collocates *Shamima* and *Begum* reveal that *mother* in these instances refers to Begum’s own mother in nine times of the total of fifteen when *Shamima/Begum + mother* appear in a sentence. Although the majority of hits for *mother* are in relation to the “mothers” on the camps, it is surprising to see in how many cases the family of the “mothers” in question are quoted in speaking on behalf of these women. Even so, when the women themselves have been quoted, there are still “mothers” and “fathers” used for comments on their “children”. Considering the combination of the groomed child narrative added to the comments from the family, we are able to see two lines of thought at work: first, we have the one eliciting sympathy, as Begum is a *groomed child* whose family is appealing for return, and second, Begum cannot be held accountable for her mistakes bearing in mind that she was indeed a child and could not have had an idea of what she was doing, now being spoken for by her family.

4.1.3 Category *wife/wives*

Moving on to the category of *wife/wives*, we once again see that *ISIS/ISIL wife/wives* do not return any significant collocates, however, we find in total 45 hits with the help of the concordance tool. Therefore, it is useful to take a look at the concordance plots of these query strings. There are altogether 9 hits for the singular and 36 hits for the plural forms, indicating that the term is mostly preferred when discussing the wives in groups rather than individually, contrasting with what we saw of *bride* in section 4.1.1, for example, where the “brides” were discussed mostly individually.

Table 6. Collocates for the category *wife/wives*

| Query String | Collocates based on MI score and Log-Likelihood (frequency in brackets) |
|--------------|--|
| ISIS wife | - |
| ISIL wife | <i>children</i> (5) |
| wife | <i>ISIL</i> (7) |
| wives | <i>holding</i> (6), <i>ISIS</i> (33), <i>foreign</i> (5), <i>children</i> (10), <i>ISIL</i> (10) |

When looking at the concordance plots, we quickly see lines that portray the questions revolving around these women in multiple cases: what should be done to the “ISIS wives”, and how guilty are they really (22)?

(22) **What role did the “wives” play** in Isis’s crimes? Did all women go **willingly**, or did they simply **follow their husbands**, as they believed was their duty? Did they see themselves as witting members of the caliphate? (*The Independent* 28.8.2019)

Looking closer at these articles, we see that the role of *ISIS/ISIL wives* has been quite similar as any regular stereotypical idea of marriage: the wife acting as a confidant for the husband. However, what sets these particular *wives* apart from any other “regular” wife, is the fact their role as a wife is described as a violent one, closely linked to the violence of the organization, as far as suggesting that their role in the organization has been a central one. This aspect is discussed especially in relation to the genocide of the Yazidis and the Yazidi women who were captured, tortured, and raped by the male counterparts of ISIS. The position of the *wives* is discussed in Examples 23 and 24:

(23) **Thousands of women came from abroad**, too, after being **equally as enthralled by the group's promises and propaganda**. Many came with their husbands, others came in search of one. They became **known as "Isis wives"**. (*The Independent* 28.8.2019)

(24) In the four years since the raid that killed her husband and led to her capture, Umm Sayyaf, 29, otherwise known by her birth name, Nisrine Assad Ibrahim, has been **the most important of Isis wives** in captivity; a **keeper** of some of the organisation's **darkest secrets** and an alleged **participant** in some of its **most depraved acts**. (*The Guardian* 31.5.2019)

and explained in more detail in 25 below where the Yazidis are also lifted into the focus:

(25) One damning charge has remained central to her infamy: that **she acted as jailer and enforcer** over Mueller, a humanitarian worker who had been captured by Isis 13 months earlier and was raped by Baghdadi in the Sayyafs' home. Another is that **she enslaved and brutalised nine Yazidi women and girls** who had been captured in Iraq and brought to the Isis leaders. Umm Sayyaf has also been charged by the US government with being a **party to a terror conspiracy** that led to Mueller's death in Raqqa in February 2015. (*The Guardian* 31.5.2019)

In addition, there are other references to the violence committed by *ISIS/ISIL wives*, underlining their dangerousness (26). Even when the violent acts are not specifically mentioned, the women are through citations connected to be parts of the "network of criminal[ity]" (*The Independent*, 28.2.2019) resulting in their roles becoming more assistive ones instead being the actual perpetrators of the crimes of ISIS, nevertheless remaining that the "wives" had an integral part in the workings of the terrorist organization.

(26) One **Iraqi Isil wife stabbed another to death** with a kitchen knife, according to a Kurdish official. They had apparently **quarrelled over the legacy of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, the leader of the caliphate who is now the world's most-wanted fugitive - if he is still alive. (*The Sunday Telegraph* 24.2.2019)

It appears that the *wives* are assumed to be the most faithful and loyal ones, either to their husbands or to ISIS, and for many the crimes of the husband are perceived as the crimes of the wife as well, demonstrated in a sentencing held for the four Kyrgyzstani women where "almost the entirety of **the evidence against them related to the men they had married**" (*The Independent* 28.8.2019). In contrast, British officials, for example, have declared that the "so-called Isis wives, pose just as much as a threat as the men" but as they lack concrete evidence to place "the wives" on trial, the country has arrived to a situation where they have showed no desire to bring any of these women home (*The Independent* 28.8.2019). This is caused by the very specific vagueness of the role of the *wives*, as explained in Example 27:

(27) The thinking behind that decision is inherently linked **to the ambiguity surrounding the precise role of Isis wives in the crimes of their husbands**. (*The Independent* 28.8.2019, my emphasis underlined)

What is interesting to note, is the fact that whatever the reality of the violence committed by these women would be, it is almost without exceptions linked directly to their husband, suggesting that there would not exist these “violent ISIS wives” if there were no “ISIS husbands” to begin with. Whatever the marriage situation has been before arriving to Syria, whether they were already married or arrived “in search of” husbands (23), the stories of these *wives* are tightly intertwined with their spouses. The blurring of the line between the crimes of the “wife” and those of the “husband” leads to a situation where “the true role of the Isis wives in the terror group's crimes is being left undiscovered” (*The Independent* 28.8.2019).

The rather saddening fact that rises from the stories of these “ISIS wives” is the fact that as they are being denied entries to their respective homelands, so are their children. The ambiguity of the crimes these women have committed is thus not only an issue for the “wives”, but for the children, too. *The Daily Telegraph* writes that “While the world debates the crimes of their parents, the children of the Islamic State are **bearing the brunt of the misery.**” (1.3.2019), suggesting that as time is spent on finding the ones to blame and debating the future of the “wives”, the true victims are being left without protection. Here we also see a linkage of the *wives* and the *children*.

Interestingly, once again, we find an individual story being lifted apart from a sea of many, as Nisrine Assad Ibrahim, referred to as Umm Sayyaf, appears in the corpus a total of 33 times in only two, almost feature article -like news pieces written about her (24 and 25). Umm Sayyaf is the one directly linked with the crimes, and has, according to reports by *The Guardian* (31.5.2019) been sentenced to death for her participation in ISIS. Umm Sayyaf has also been granted page space in the articles she is discussed in, where she speaks for herself and defends herself. Although she has worked as an informant for the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States and claims she is an “innocent party” in the terrorist organization, her interview is surrounded by narratives of violence that “vehe-

mently” dispute (*The Guardian* 31.5.2019) her own version of stories. What is notable from the interviews of Umm Sayyaf, is the “jealousy” aspect that these women allegedly experienced as their husbands raped the Yazidi women, so much so, that the anger of the “ISIS wives” is claimed to play “a part” in the downfall of the organization. (ibid.). Once again, we see a linkage between a traditional wife-husband dynamic where the “anger” of the wives is caused by the actions of their husbands.

If we, finally, take a look at the collocates of *wives*, we see that *holding* appears at the top of the list, and in many instances the wives are describes as being “held” in the camps in Syria, suggesting a state of being captivated and a need for their containment, enforcing the narrative of danger. In addition, the collocate *foreign* appears in collocation with *wives* and *holding*, appearing in plots such as “camp holding foreign Isil wives and children” (*The Daily Telegraph* 10.10.2019), echoing the noun phrase *foreign fighters* often used of male terrorists. Undoubtedly, the term *foreign fighter* is associated with violence, so referring to the *wives* as *foreign wives* might raise similar anxieties. It needs to be noted that out of all these four categories, *wife/wives* is the only one that does not directly collocate with *British*, when all of the other categories signal such a collocation. The *wives* are *ISIS* or *ISIL wives*, or then *foreign wives*. Although it is certain that *foreign* encompasses British as well since there are British women on the camps, the *wife/wives* category lacks the references to *British*. Further, considering that the category is portrayed as surprisingly violent, it must be questioned whether there is a bias present in the reporting of these news. If there is no specific **British** ISIS wife, there seems to be a greater chance the *wives* get grouped to as one violent group of *foreign* that creates an “Other” against the young and vulnerable British Brides, for example.

4.1.4 Category *woman/women*

The category of *woman/women* is interesting since it is presumably the most unbiased one as *woman* stands mostly in relation only to its polarized opposite *man*, but does not semantically suggest a relation between persons in the same way *mother* and *wife* do. However, it still places the gender at the forefront when compared with *ISIS member*, for example, which is the least charged term referring to male fighters as shown in Table 3. If we begin with *ISIS/ISIL woman/women*, we do not find any

significant collocates nor clusters to analyze further, thus, it would be reasonable to take a look at the concordance plots as we do find 6 hits in the singular form and 36 hits for the plural forms. Yet again, like with the category *wife/wives*, we can argue that the “ISIS women” are discussed as a *group* of “ISIS women” rather than as *individual* “ISIS women”. Let us then turn towards the concordances. The singular form is too low in frequency to make any plausible conclusions out of them, so based on what has been argued above, it seems reasonable to focus on the plural of ISI* women. The usage of both ISIS and ISIL women seem to be quite broad, with no specific pattern standing out from the rest.

Table 7. Collocates for the category *woman/women*

| Query String | Collocates based on MI score and Log-Likelihood (frequency in brackets) |
|-------------------|---|
| ISIS woman | - |
| ISIL woman | - |
| woman | <i>Alabama (6), vulnerable (6), young (19), joined (6), Muthana (5), British (21), left (7), Syrian (5), ISIS (12), citizenship (5), ISIL (6), said (13), children (5)</i> |
| women | <i>affiliated (7), Yazidi (19), marry (6), men (18), stories (7), agency (5), hundreds (11), children (115), detained (12), girls (19), thousands (13), foreign (29), remain (7), other (31), black (5), young (16), role (5), Muslim (6), believed (5), suspected (5), ISIS (61), camp (27), fighters (13), prison (5), people (20), terrorist (6), British (31), Kurdish (9), ISIL (18)</i> |

Nevertheless, it becomes clear that there is a level of agency granted to the “ISIS” and “ISIL” women in question as they “rose against internal security forces” (*The Independent*, 11.10.2019), “sliced the throat of a burial worker” (*The Daily Telegraph* 11.10.2019), and orchestrated a “mass breakout” (*The Daily Telegraph* 10.12.2019) from al-Roj. The agency of these women is discussed

in Examples such as 28, 29, and 30 which aim to shed light on the complex issue of addressing these women as “only” women married to ISIS fighters, instead of as capable actors inside the caliphate.

(28) Research into Isil women in Syria provides a body of evidence that shows **that they have not been passive actors** but are, more often than not, **active participants**. (telegraph.co.uk 15.2.2019)

(29) Women and girls who attach themselves to Islamic State are **driven by a complex combination** of factors **beyond just love or marriage**, including feelings of social exclusion and the **appeal of sisterhood**, according to research by a counter-extremism thinktank [. . .] The guidance says **marriage is a factor** in many cases but adds: “**A simplistic view** of the motivations of women and girls affiliated with Islamist extremism **can reinforce misleading stereotypes** and biases that suggest that women are passive followers **rather than active, ideological supporters**.” (*The Guardian* 3.11.2019)

(30) **Ignoring women’s agency** in this process **obscures our understanding** of all the ways, meaningful, oblique and direct, that women lent their power and numbers to Isis. (*The Guardian* 26.2.2019)

Interestingly, many of these cases refer to studies and researches, signaling the fact that there is academic interest behind these issues, suggesting maybe a forthcoming change in the attitudes, or at least a body of work that is aiming at changing the attitudes towards women joining jihad. In fact, it appears that as we move further from the “brides” and “mothers” we start finding signals of active participation, and even a level of loyalty to the organization on behalf of these women (31).

(31) A detention camp holding thousands of Isis families in Syria is becoming increasingly unstable **as women who remain loyal to the group have tried to continue its reign of terror** after the fall of the “caliphate”. (*The Independent*, 4.10.2019)

If we start reading the collocate list for *woman* from the top, *Alabama* seems to be a notable collocate for *woman*. That is because, yet again, a story of an individual woman named Hoda Muthana made headlines as she was, just like Begum, stripped of her citizenship when she tried to return to the United States from Syria. This also explains why *Muthana* is marked as one of the most notable collocates of *woman*. Interestingly, then, *Muthana* is the token woman to be affiliated with ISIS, much like *Begum* appears to be the token bride affiliated with ISIS. There is some overlap in the terms, so that a few times *Muthana* is referred to as an *ISIS bride*, however, *Begum* is not referred to as an *ISIS/ISIL woman*. Moreover, it is worth noting that the category *woman/women* is the one that quite explicitly refers to the youngness and vulnerability of these women, and often does it so without the

added pre-modifier *ISIS* or *ISIL*, thus eliminating the ingredient that underlines violence. Such is the case with Muthana as well, as demonstrated in Example 32:

(32) “Hoda Muthana was **a vulnerable young woman who was taken advantage of by these terrorist criminal masterminds** who ultimately brainwashed her and led her to make some horrible choices that she deeply re-grets.” (*The Guardian* 18.2.2019)

Looking at the collocate *vulnerable* more closely, we see that it appears in concordance often with *young* and *British woman*, so that it returns clusters like “young, vulnerable British woman” and “vulnerable young woman”. (Note how the *woman* is young in these instances instead of a young *girl*.) Unsurprisingly, the top three collocates for *vulnerable* are *young*, *woman*, and *British*. If we next focus on the collocate *young*, it is often used as an explanatory adjective to bring more sense into why these women had joined something as violent as ISIS and why they should now be granted amnesty as they are older (33), even by the women themselves (34).

(33) These young women, and many more from across Europe, **have somehow been brainwashed into giving up their entire lives** in order to fight for an ideology many of them were not brought up to believe in. (*The Independent* 21.2.2019)

(34) Muthana said she had not been in contact with US officials since her capture. “I would tell them **please forgive me for being so ignorant**, and **I was really young and ignorant** and I was 19 when I decided to leave.” (*Guardian* 17.2.2019)

However, although the age aspects are brought up in some articles, they are still reflected against the backdrop of violence and vehemence by a majority of the articles as we learn from the following examples (35, 35, 37, 38), and it appears that the explanation of youngness and naivety is not believable for these *women*.

(35) There are also the **escalating attacks on their Kurdish guards**, many of whom patrol the camps unarmed. In the latest incident over the weekend, **Isil women sliced the throat** of a burial worker, leaving him in critical condition. (*telegraph.co.uk* 10.10.2019)

(36) “With regards to the **women, some are too far gone**. They live in a parallel universe in which Isil is the oppressed one and was attacked for no reason. **Anyone** going to these sessions now is **at risk of being murdered**.” (*telegraph.co.uk* 10.10.2019)

(37) Over the past few months, **sharia courts have been set up by camp detainees** still loyal to the terror group. There has been **a spate of killings** targeting those who do not abide by the laws set by those courts. Riots have broken out and **guards have been attacked with knives**. (*The Independent* 9.12.2019)

(38) Despite **the current pleas and claims that they have been tricked or are blameless**, the reality is that **Isis women were and remain part of the narrative and the fabric of Isis extremism**. They committed **horrible crimes**, like the men alongside them, and they should not be incorrectly confused with real victims." (*The Independent* 28.8.2019)

Another collocate referring to youth is the collocate *girls* in the list. There appears to be some sort of pattern in differentiating between the *women* who joined ISIS and the *girls* who joined ISIS. Interestingly, however, the *girls* joining ISIS are not necessarily perceived to be young and vulnerable either, but to be very aware of the decisions they have made. One might ask here that is it the fact that these *girls* have become *women* during their time with ISIS that affects the emphasis on their agency.

(39) It comes as a report suggests that **many of the girls who have travelled to join Isil are far from vulnerable and naive**. A study by the Henry Jackson Society found evidence that while boys tended to join Isil under the influence of family members, **girls were more likely to have sought out extremist material** on their own. (telegraph.co.uk, 20.2.2019)

(40) The children considered by family courts included those who attempted to travel to Isis territories themselves, were taken abroad by their parents or were being radicalised at home. The report²¹ found that **girls in the sample were "more active and independent"** in seeking out extremist material, while boys tended to join a terrorist organisation under the influence of their families. (*The Independent*, 20.2.2019)

Finally, from the collocates of *women*, we could focus on the adjective *foreign*. The adjective is already surrounded by anxieties and negative bias as the male fighters coming from outside of Syria have been famously named *foreign fighters*. In this corpus, *foreign* appears to be used as an adjective to describe these women as *foreign* in Syria, meaning that they hold a variety of nationalities amongst them, like British, for example. However, as explained in *The Independent* (28.8.2019), the Iraqi courts have assumed undeniable blame on foreign women as demonstrated in 41:

(41) Apart from in very specific circumstances, Iraq's judicial system allows the presumption of innocence on wives of Isis fighters **who already lived** in the caliphate. **They do not presume their willingness to join Isis as they do foreign women because they did not travel thousands of miles to join it.** (ibid.)

Although it is clear that *foreign* encompasses British citizens as well, it is the collective identity of "foreign" that at its very worst raises xenophobia towards persons on these camps, even towards them

²¹ A Home Office document published in 2018

who actually would be citizens of Western countries. Further, emphasizing how some nations perceive the willingness to travel to Syria as a signal of guilt places these women to a questionable light in their respective homes.

Whatever the case might be, whatever the age might be, there is one form of rhetoric visible in the articles that disclaims that although the place of women in the caliphate might have been inside the home, it does not matter as “some of the most heinous of those **crimes took place within the home**” (*The Independent* 28.8.2019). Such rhetoric is undeniably necessary in trying to shed light on these issues, however, it does not change the fact that the stories of these women are incredibly blurred still, as multiple different narratives compete in the public eye. Nevertheless, it seems as if the “ISIS” and “ISIL” women are portrayed as intrinsic part of ISIS and the crimes committed, or, if they had not been such in the caliphate, the time in the camps after the fall of the caliphate has taken its toll on them (42), increasing the anxieties in having them return to their home countries. It appears that now, after the caliphate, the women have become the keepers of the ideology (43). Not even collocates *affiliated* and *suspected* that imply even the slightest amount of doubt to the relation between these women and ISIS soften this view, as they are surrounded by stories as in 44.

(42) After weeks of violence, the Kurdish administration warned that **the women had now become “as dangerous as the thousands of Isil fighters** being held in SDF detention centres.” (telegraph.co.uk 10.10.2019)

(43) **Defiant Isis women** have been filmed after fleeing **Baghouz shouting the terror group's slogans and justifying the enslavement**, while not far away Yazidi women have burned the black abayas they were forced to wear, after tasting freedom for the first time in years. (*The Independent*, 11.3.2019)

(44) Meanwhile, **women affiliated with Isis attacked security offices with sticks and stones** during unrest at a camp in the region where Turkey has launched attacks. (*The Independent*, 11.10.2019)

It thus looks that although a seemingly unbiased term, the category *woman/women* appears to be understood as an integral part of the terrorist organization, with a very vocal emphasis on the dangerousness of these women.

4.2 The Construction of the “Other”

As discussed in the Theoretical Framework in section 2., there is a level of “othering” that goes into portraying Muslim subjects in media, especially so, when operating in the frames of terrorism. The dichotomy that is constructed between the “West” and Islam has, to a great detail, affected the way women are perceived in terrorist organizations, especially when considered that “Islam is seen as not only incapable of but also *resistant* to modernity” (Mamdani 2005, 19). Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the references towards religion and the split between the “West” and the “East”. In many instances, abayas, niqabs, or hijabs, the traditional garments of Muslim women, are connected with oppression, with control over the women’s bodies as in 45 and 46. In 45, the Yazidi women “forced to wear black abayas” burned the garments after “tasting freedom” are contrasted with the ISIS women “shouting the terror groups slogans”. In 46, the woman had also been “forced to wear a niqab”, a “hateful garment” she is relieved to be rid of. Both examples narrate a sort of coercion of the garments, out of which the women will be freed from. Almost as if the garments themselves were the largest factor playing a part in their oppression.

(45) Defiant Isis women have been filmed after fleeing Baghouz shouting the terror group's slogans and justifying the enslavement, while not far away **Yazidi women have burned the black abayas they were forced to wear, after tasting freedom** for the first time in years. (*The Independent*, 11.3.2019)

(46) Twenty-year old Israa **had been sold as a sex slave by Isil and forced to wear a niqab**. As the group helped her **take off her hateful garment**, the **young woman's evident relief was all over face**, her smile getting wider and wider as it was set on fire. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13.3.2019)

The imagery in the texts mention the “black abayas” and the “black niqabs and robes” which have become, in a way, connected with terrorism. In 47, it is described how the two women “**do not look like Isis women any more**” as they have undressed their “obligatory” black attire. It is almost as if the traditional Islamic garments have become the “armor” of ISIS women which can be ‘rejected’ as an act of resistance to verify the dismissal of the organization’s ideology. There is also a distinction

between al-Hol and al-Roj, two²² of the camps holding ISIS refugees and affiliates. Al-Hol is the largest of all the camps described as “**an Isis city**” (*The Independent*, 4.10.2019) and “truly the most bizarre and **toxic place**” (telegraph.co.uk, 10.10.2019) with increasing levels of violence each day, whereas Roj is thought to be more civil, with deradicalization efforts enforced by the guards. Thus, there appears to be a difference in whether the “Isis women” are from al-Hol or al-Roj, as the former is connected with extremely high levels of violence, and the latter with deradicalization.

(47) On the outside, Kimberly and Maryam **do not look like Isis women any more**. In al-Hawl, where militant women police communal spaces, **everyone still wears the obligatory black niqab and robes**. But in **al-Roj**, Kimberly wears a burgundy cloak and a cream hat; Maryam is dressed in what looks like pastel “athleisure”, with chunky sunglasses perched on her head. **They both reject Isis, beg the forgiveness of their home countries, and are keen for the chance to be returned, prosecuted and given a second chance at life**. They point to their stories as evidence that “Isis women” should be judged individually. “We are all tarred **by the same terrible black brush**,” says Kimberly. (*The Guardian*, 27.11.2019)

It is troublesome to note that in the corpus, al-Hol retrieves 132 hits in total (including the optional written form Hawl), whereas al-Roj gains 22, although it seems that it is not necessarily known which camp holds most of the British citizen. As with any aspect of discourse, there is meaning with every decision made in creating news, for example, and if it happens that al-Hol is painted as the most hostile one holding the most violent supporters of ISIS, in addition to being the most discussed one in news media, it will give out the false idea of all women being at al-Hol, as well as all women being as violent as the news representation implies. In addition, if al-Hol is connected with violence, and the Islamic garments for veiling are connected to al-Hol, we start falsely connecting the burka, for example, with violence. Then, the burden of imagery is carried through the garments into the news reporting, for example as in 48a.

(48a) Watching Stacey Dooley’s report for Panorama from the **Al-Hawl refugee camp** in Syria, it was **horrifying to see thousands of foreign Isil brides wearing black shrouds, like a flock of malevolent crows**. Even **little girls**, Stacey was told, **are beaten if they don't wear the niqab**. (**Unbelievably, I've seen girls dressed like that in Islamic school playgrounds in the north of England.**) (*The Daily Telegraph*, 7.8.2019).

²² Altogether there are three camps discussed in the news, al-Hol, al-Roj (or Roj), and Ayn Issa, with al-Hol being the largest.

In Example 48a, we also see the anxiety surrounding veiling in the context of Britain. There is a straight connection from the “shrouds” these “malevolent crows” are wearing to “dress[ing] like that” “in the north of England”. If we, additionally, take into account the phrasing *even little girls are beaten if they don’t wear the niqab* connected to the girls wearing them in England, it raises the age-old, scandalous concern of involuntary veiling: have they been forced into these “black shrouds”? Furthermore, the dichotomy of the “West” and the “Other” is highlighted even further as the article in 48a continues in 48b:

(48b) On Twitter, 17-year-old Soutiam Goodarzi commented: “Some women are forced into prisons, **raped, beaten and worse for ditching the hijab**... I was forced into the hijab when I was six. To then see **the country which granted me freedom** engage in this, specially after three women were sentenced to prison in Iran, is heartbreaking.” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 7.8.2019)

It is suggested that Britain, where Islam is not the majority religion and people do not wear the burka, ‘grants freedom’ for these women, thus it would be baffling to see women voluntarily dressing in these garments, in a sense, abandoning their “freedom” for the ‘ISIS armor’. This is, unfortunately, not a new phenomenon, since “Before the **niqab-clad Isis woman became visual shorthand for barbarism, niqab-clad Iranian woman inhabited that space**. (*The Observer*, 6.10.2019). It would be even more baffling to then leave Britain, the land of “freedom”, for Syria’s seeming oppression.

There are other instances where the “West” is referred to as being on the forefront of civilization, creating a scenario where the women who have ‘decided to leave’ Britain are seen as leaving the Western values behind them, too. As seen in Example 49:

(49) Having lost two infants while living in the caliphate, and now reduced to tending a newborn in a Syrian refugee camp, Begum could have served **as an authentic warning to other impressionable young Britons** of the perils of heeding the call of **ideologically perverted groups**. She might have been **a poster girl for British decency** and dogged determination to **do the right thing for its own people**. . . . But there are others **who saw the light**, not least Tania Joya, who grew up in Harrow, northwest London. Joya married an American Muslim convert who became a leading Isis militant. **Having escaped Syria** six years ago, she now lives in Texas with her second husband and helps other former Isis wives and jihadists. She recently called for Britain to allow Shamima Begum to **return in order to “rehabilitate her and teach her about secular humanism and western principles”**. (*The Independent*, 19.2.2019)

Return to the “Western” civilization is discussed as “seeing the light”, and the people who have returned are seen as valuable actors in efforts of deradicalization to stop others from answering “the call of the ideologically perverted groups”. Furthermore, it could be assumed that it is exactly this abandonment of the “western principles” and the decision to join the “ideologically perverted groups” that has urged the “UK government” to refuse bringing “any of its citizens back from Syria, and has instead taken measures, such as removing citizenship, to prevent their return whenever possible.” (14.3.2019 *The Independent*). However, if so, it is interesting that there appears a resistance to the measures taken, calling for the government to adhere to these very values they hold high in standard (50):

(50) It is **those western principles** of secular humanism that are **called into question** when **European nationals are deprived of their citizenship or blocked from returning home** to face the consequences of their actions. (*The Independent*, 19.2.2019)

There exists a great deal of anxiety surrounding the “veils” and in many instances they are connected with the oppression of women, but also with the violence and uncivilized principles that is perceived to control the ISIS ideology. Sadly, it is not just connected to ISIS, but the mental imagery reaches all over Islam, as well. Nevertheless, despite there being a connection with violence and Islam in contrast to the “civilized West”, we do receive a large amount of reporting that emphasize the “failing” of these very values by Britain itself as seen in the subsections of 4.1 (especially 4.1.1). Thus, in the aftermath of the caliphate, Britain does not seem to be able to adhere to the role it has previously casted upon itself.

5. DISCUSSION

After the analysis, it is time for us to turn towards creating a holistic picture of the results of this study. This section presents the results of the analysis in a more cohesive manner, so that they are discussed together to reveal differences and similarities, as well as connections between the different categories and themes. The research problem that motivated the writing of this study was the discursive construction of the specific identities of *ISIS bride/brides*, *ISIS mother/mothers*, *ISIS wife/wives*, and *ISIS woman/women*²³ and their representations in British broadsheet media. The research problem was divided into three research questions:

1. *What are the representations of “ISIS brides”, “ISIS mothers”, “ISIS wives” and “ISIS women” like? Should there be any differences, what is the nature of these differences?*
2. *How do the findings of this study compare to the findings of previous studies?*
3. *What frames can be identified from the media texts in question?*

The first research question was concerned with the differences in representation, which was studied through a corpus-based analysis of the noun phrases in question. Each noun phrase was approached as their own separate query strings which were analyzed categorically in subsections of 4.1, so that the categories were as follows: *bride/brides*, *mother/mothers*, *wife/wives* and *woman/women*. Based on the categorical analysis, it became clear that the most frequent noun phrase used in British media is *ISIS/ISIL bride*, echoing the familiar “Jihadi Bride” that has been extensively studied in feminist, gender-focused terrorism research due to its broad usage. The reason why *ISIS bride* distinctly stands out from the rest is the fact that much of the news reporting is focused on one specific *ISIS bride*: Shamima Begum. The corpus is filled with mentions of Begum in several different articles, and it is evident that she has now become *the* ISIS bride in Britain. Two of the categories revealed to prefer the singular form, *bride* and *mother*, so that the singular forms of these categories collected more hits in the corpus than their plural forms. As with the category *bride/brides*, Begum’s name kept appearing in the category of *mother/mothers* as well. In fact, I assume that it is Begum’s

²³ For the sake of clarity, this section will use “ISIS” when referring to the results of the analysis.

role as “*the* ISIS bride” or “*the* ISIS mother” that in part explains why the brides and mothers are mostly discussed in singular forms. To continue with the category *bride/brides*, it was interesting to note that the category showed elements of transformability, so that the status of “ISIS bride” was not fixed, but something one achieves through *leaving* Britain in order to *become* an ISIS/ISIL bride, or something that is lost when the will to return is communicated, so that one becomes a *former* ISIS bride. This process, however, was not elaborated in any way. This reflects what Azeez wrote in their study: “The processes (if any) that systematically turn ‘women’ into ‘Jihadi Brides’ are glossed over and the reader is expected to believe in an almost instantaneous transformation from one entity to another.” (2019, 127). Furthermore, the category *bride/brides* signaled multiple references to the ages of these “brides”, emphasizing the fact that when they left Britain, they were young, *teenage schoolgirls*, so much so that they still are young girls who should be granted amnesty on the grounds that they still are *teenage*. This viewpoint was strengthened with the narratives of ISIS *grooming* these girls so that the blame is eventually lifted from these *runaway ISIS brides* who have fallen victim on ISIS’ predatory ideology. Interestingly, although, these girls had become *former* brides and they were are and still are teenagers, they are colored with the “dog-whistle references” (6) to the organization they have been a part of. In a way, the “stain” or the “indicator” of being involved with the organization follows these women even after they have declared their will to return to the UK, so much so that it is extremely challenging to begin from a clean slate after they have become known as “ISIS brides”.

As for the category *mother/mothers*, it highlights the very traditional role of what women are perceived to hold in terrorist organizations, so that they are indeed mothers, and the discussion around them is connected to their children much like Gentry and Sjoberg have theorized (see section 2.4). Gentry and Sjoberg’s “mother narrative” fluctuates from the nurturing mother, who provides the backbone for the organization, to the vengeful mother, for whom revenge is the motivating factor behind her actions. In this specific context, the mothers are not vengeful, but not necessarily nurturing either as Examples 15, 16, and 17 signaled. The mothers are “bad” mothers since they had either

brought their children to conflict area, or because they had left for Syria in the first place and given birth to their children there. Nevertheless, even as failed parents, they still remained within the realms of the stereotypical representations of femininity, as they were not pictured as violent nor described as being involved with any terrorist activity, other than birthing children under the caliphate. However, interestingly, it was not only these women who had failed. In many cases, it was the British government who had failed to protect its citizens, even the most vulnerable ones: the newborn babies and young children. In addition, when looked at the occurrences of the noun *child*, it was found that not only were the children of these *ISIS mothers* abandoned, but it was also Begum herself who had been *groomed as a child* and now was receiving no assistance in returning to the UK. The “groomed as a child” narrative emphasizes the lack of responsibility on behalf of these *mothers*, suggesting that much like the *runaway brides*, these women had also been young and ignorant when joining ISIS and that should now qualify them for government mercy or at least assistance, but the government has failed them.

Different from the brides and the mothers, the *wife/wives* and *woman/women* are portrayed in a surprisingly violent and “active” manner, while still adhering to the normative gender structures of societies. The *wives* and *women* are most often discussed in the plural form, so that there exists collective identities of the *wives* and *women*. Especially the wives are believed to be an intrinsic part of ISIS, carrying almost if not as much blame as the men who conduct the most amount of fighting. The *wives* are seen as confidants for the men of ISIS, holding a very traditional position supporting their husbands, but however, are not left without blame in this scenario. They are perceived as equally capable of violence and equally as “enthralled” by the group’s ideology. The *wives* are the ones who have stayed loyal to the organization even upon its fall, as they are among the “last holdouts of the ISIS caliphate” (*The Independent*, 9.12.2019), who have shown “little sign of abandoning the group” (*ibid.*). Just like with *brides* and *mothers*, there is an individual story of an *ISIS wife*, Umm Sayyaf (see 24, 25), however, she is only brought up in two articles. In these articles, Umm Sayyaf’s own

narrative runs alongside a different narrative, a rather violent one that paints her as the most “important” of the wives. Especially the treatment of the Yazidi women is brought up in connection to the *wives*. This juxtaposition highlights the cruelty of the acts committed by these *wives* as they include the worst possible crimes that could be done to women overseen by women in the ISIS houses: the *wives*. The *wives*, then, are closest to the “monsters” of Gentry and Sjoberg’s “monster narrative” (2007). Umm Sayyaf’s representation could be read in contrast to Begum’s, when many of the articles emphasize Begum’s young age and her being *groomed* that affected her going to Syria and there is no “other” bride against which Begum’s acts are reflected on. In fact, the category of *wife/wives* lacks collocates that would underline the youth of these women, and instead highlights how they have arrived with their husbands “from abroad” (23). The *wives* are not young nor vulnerable, and that might in fact be what is causing the accuses: as they have not been teenagers when they have left their countries of origin, they are seemingly held to a higher levels of agency in their decisions to travel to Syria. And as they are not considered young or teenager anymore, they do not elicit sympathy from the press and consequently, from the public in a similar manner the young *runaway brides* or *schoolgirls* do. This is even though it is not known whether the wives have arrived to willingly or as part of human trafficking, for example, as cases are not addressed individually. The *wives* also lack references to Britishness, and therefore it is an extremely fascinating to note just how violent the *wives* are made out to be.

If, for a moment, we turn towards the category of *woman/women*, we note that similar patterns are visible there as well, but with lower levels of underlined violence. They are still explained to be a part of the “fabric of ISIS extremism” (38) and multiple studies are referenced when discussing the *women* to explain that the women pose just as much a threat as the men. The collocate *young*, is again used to explain why these *women* have left for Syria and this polarization between the *vulnerable girls* and the very aware and radicalized girls from these studies clash. Just like with the *wives*, these *women* have been *girls*, but they are not anymore. If we consider the individual story from the category of *woman/women*, Hoda Muthana, we see that she is explained to have been young as she left,

but nowadays she is already a *woman* who is blamed for her actions. Even more so when considered that the age she left the US, 19, is the same age Begum is now as she still is a *bride*, a teenager to be helped unlike Muthana. Furthermore, these *women* are portrayed as having become even more dangerous after the fall of the caliphate, so that the ISIS ideology lives on in them. Thus, the narrative of these women appears to be stating that although they might have been young when they left, they are now to be feared. What adds to this level of fear is the describing of what an *ISIS woman* looks like when dressed in the “black shrouds” (discussed in 4.2). When we add the fear of veiling, the literal idea of hiding something, with the intensified levels of radicalization, we have an extremely strong imagery of a person who is to be feared, someone who needs to be separated from the British or Western “we” in contrast to this ISIS “Other”. Nevertheless, although portrayed to have levels of agency, these women are still tightly linked to their husbands and to the “crimes of their husbands”, so that whatever the case might be, full levels of agency are not granted to them as ISIS is seen as an inherently masculine organization.

What is happening to the *wives* and *women*, then, is the creation of collective relational identities. They have received the identity of being “ISIS something”, not by ascribing it to themselves, but by the media. Due to the asymmetrical power relation between the media and the person represented, the women have little power over their own narrative. Even in cases where we have individual interviews, they are still conducted and complemented by additions from journalists and editors. There is no way the *women* and *wives*, for example, could “defend” for themselves since they lack the platform for it. It needs to be noted, too, that although they appear to be grouped into one, they do exist as separate groups of *wives* and *women*, and there is a gradual difference between these categories. Whereas the *wives* have supposedly been “bad” from the moment they arrived, and they are simply continuing on the path of terrorism, the *women* might have been young upon departure, but have now been enraptured by the violent ideology of the organization. It also needs to be noted that there appears this ambiguous group of “foreign” wives and women”, as already mentioned when discussing the *wives*. When looking at the dichotomy of British versus foreigner, it can be seen that

it is rarer that it would be *specifically* the British *wives* or *women* who would have committed acts of violence but more often it is linked to the aspect of *foreignness*, therefore there exists quite a literal distinction of and a gap between the ideals of “Britishness” and the “Other” that here is the Muslim women of ISIS.

All in all, we can recognize the following representations that surround these categories: The young, innocent *ISIS bride* who has joined the organization as a result of grooming; The *ISIS mother*, a non-violent figure who is not discussed apart from her children; The *ISIS wives* who have been an essential part of the organization, even participating in violence; and the *ISIS women* who might have been young when joining ISIS, but are now radicalized beyond rehabilitation and treasuring the ISIS ideology. The infantilized, young and naïve *ISIS bride* has joined ISIS after “being groomed” into the organization cannot be held accountable for her mistakes. It must be kept in mind that much of the material in the corpus is focused on Begum, but as will be discussed when addressing research question number two, we see that there is much parallel between this study and the findings of previous studies. Moving on to the *ISIS mother*, who carries the traditional role of motherhood in the organization, providing a backbone, in a way, that guarantees the continuity of ISIS. There appears a sense of “failure” on part of these mothers and they are “bad” mothers as they have dragged their children to Syria, but nevertheless, the decision to join ISIS is not explained through the vengeful mother narrative, but rather through the vulnerability of the young women who have become groomed as children themselves. Again, it must be kept in mind that much of the reporting was focused on Begum and her situation. The *ISIS wives* are a collective group of violent ISIS supporters, who had a significant role in the crimes their husbands committed, so that they almost reach levels of non-relationship related motivation and agency. The *wives* should be feared and detained. Then finally, we have the *ISIS women* who have been claimed to be young and naïve when joining ISIS, but they are now grown up, so that they are perceived as ever more radicalized after the fall of the caliphate, and therefore are not retrieved from the holding camps in Syria. These findings align with Mamdani’s (2005) distinction between and Martini’s (2018) findings of the “good Muslim” and the “bad Muslim”, too. As we

keep in mind that a “good Muslim” is someone who positions themselves in unison with “Us” against the dangerous “Others” (Mamdani) and keeps religious signals within the realms of privacy (Martini), women would naturally belong to the “good Muslims” category as they are stereotypically those who stay at home. All of the women in question in this study have deserted the Western “Us” in order to join the Muslim “Other”, and would automatically be in the “bad Muslim category. However, as we look closer into these representations, we see that the *ISIS bride* and *ISIS mother* are the ones who have stayed to the realms of privacy, edging closer to the “good Muslim” definition, whereas the *ISIS wives* and *ISIS women* are portrayed in religious attire partaking in violent activities becoming extremely “bad Muslims”.

The second research question addressed the possible differences of representations between this study and previous studies. This is, undoubtedly, a slightly challenging question to answer as there has not been an entirely similar study to this one in question. The specific categories of *mother/mothers*, *woman/women*, and *wife/wives* have not been as intensively studied as the *bride/brides* category, due to the fact that many studies have focused on the Jihadi Bride/Foreign Fighter dichotomy. However, some comparisons can be made between previous findings and the findings of this study. Firstly, it has been theorized that women in the realms of violence have been recognized first and foremost through their gender (see e.g. Gentry & Sjoberg 2007, 2011), and that hypothesis holds true in this study as well. The actions of these women are deeply connected to their positions as brides, mothers, women, and wives, who have left Britain in order either to “get married” or to follow their husbands. The category of *woman/women* included suggestions that these women were most likely motivated by a variety of factors aside from marriage, however, there still exists a strong unwillingness to cast these women as completely individually motivated actors in terrorism. Secondly, the representations of the *brides* and *mothers* echo what Martini found in their study (2018). The references to the age of these female subjects highlighting their vulnerability and youngness depict these women as naïve, leading to the erasure of any political commitments “that may have driven them to join ISIS”, constructing “a terrorist that is neither dangerous nor violent” (2018, 465-

466). Furthermore, in Martini's study, it was found that the representations included the idea of "failures" as mothers, which was evident in this study as well. The "failures as mothers" echoes Gentry and Sjoberg's theorizations, too, as already mentioned above. What was different between Martini's study and this one, however, is the fact that in this study, there was apparent disappointment towards the British government, and the "failures as mothers" narrative ran alongside the "failures of the government" narrative, but only when the "younger" categories were in question. As for the "older" categories of *wife/wives* and *woman/women*, there was much more apparent agency behind the decision of joining and staying with ISIS. Thirdly, we are able to see personal stories of these women lifted to the forefront in reporting. Each category has an individual who becomes the representative for that group, and whose personal life is dissected in the articles. Contrary to Azeez's (2019) findings on individual brides being the most violent, we now see two *groups* of violent women, the *wives* and *women*. There are individual stories among these two categories, however, it is now women or wives as a collective group who commit acts of violence instead of focusing on *specific* individual actors committing these crimes. In addition, as it has previously been a popular storyline to have these women "controlled by the men" or to present "women in need of saving from these men", there is a visible shift into something that needs to be feared. As the *wives* and *women* are grouped into one under the violence, we begin to perceive them as a collective "Other" that creates a threat for "us". Considering the previous, we can conclude that perhaps the longevity of the crisis and the fall of the caliphate has awakened anxieties of having these large groups of *ISIS wives* and *ISIS women* finally return home.

Moving on to the final research question of this study, the remaining part of the discussion will revolve around aspects of news framing. The "big questions" around terrorism news framing in this study were the following: Does the news framing follow episodic or thematic framing, and can we see signals of "domestic homegrown terrorism" framing that, according to Brinson and Stohl (2012), should activate stronger levels of anxiety towards terrorism and consequently these women? The news pieces in general show quite a traditional approach to framing this specific phenomenon in

question. Although we can see attempts of adopting a more thematic way of framing, especially with the category of *women* where we see discussions on their motivations of joining ISIS outside of the realms of marriage, the reporting still remains rather episodic, and much focus is placed on the latest developments and government replies and statements (Traugott & Brader in Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 195). Much of the news reportage revolves around individuals, so that we receive stories of a few individual women who have joined ISIS, and especially the categories of *bride* and *mothers* emphasize Begum's story and the developments in her case, and majority of the data include mentions of Begum in some way (range of mentions 174 throughout the articles). Other individual stories of women affiliated with ISIS we hear are those of Hoda Muthana and Umm Sayyaf. The reason behind these individual stories can be found in episodic framing: episodic framing tends to cause the placement of blame on individuals as the larger background is left out of the news. Therefore, the blame thus falls on these individuals, instead of aiming to find the root causes behind their radicalization. Begum herself has been quoted saying that she "regrets speaking to the media and wishes she had kept a low profile" (*The Independent*, 3.3.2019) as it resulted in the publicity of her case and the consequential stripping of her citizenship (*ibid.*). Muthana has likewise been denied entry back into the United states (*The Independent*, 21.2.2019), and Umm Sayyaf is facing a death penalty as a result of joining ISIS (*The Guardian*, 31.5.2019). What also speaks towards the lack of understanding on the complexity of the situation is the fact that many of the *ISIS women* are being reported to being sentenced without proper investigation (section 4.1.4), and are deprived of their right to fair trial. Consequently, it is not only these women who will suffer from this situation but their children, too, as they are "bearing the brunt of the misery" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 1.3.2019). In this manner, it can be perceived that the "press may fail to serve the needs of citizens as a whole" (Traugott & Brader 2003, 195) as we are not provided with enough understanding of the phenomenon as a whole, but rather with glimpses into individual stories that revolve around specific issues. To elaborate on the categories of *wife/wives* and *woman/women*, we can see attempts at thematic framing as previously

mentioned. The patterns of thematic framing in the categories of *wife/wives* and *woman/women*, especially with *women*, tell a holistic story of ideologically motivated “girls” who have joined ISIS, not (only) because they have been groomed schoolgirls, but because they have been intrigued and motivated by the organizations agenda. Now, as they have stayed with ISIS, the ideology sits in so tight that they are perceived as a continuum for the ISIS ideology. Nevertheless, after the thematic, detailed background information, the press quickly fall back into the episodic framing patterns where the news report the “latest developments” of what has happened on the different camps, especially on the violent al-Hol camp. In this manner, the press ceases to present the reader with thematically organized information. What are left of this episodic framing, then, are groups of *ISIS wives* and *ISIS women*, seemingly radicalized beyond rehabilitation with increasing levels of violence.

What is alarming to note, is the way that these two aforementioned categories are constructed as being the “Other” against the “West”, prevalent especially through the collocates of *British* and *foreign*, and the aspects of veiling as discussed in 4.2. Not only has veiling become a signal of oppression towards women, but I argue that it has become a strong mental imagery that carries with it the implications of violence and terror (c.f. Martini 2018) and does no longer only cover those who are “weak” and “oppressed” but those who are dangerous in their “ISIS women armor”. Furthermore, al-Hol has become the “place of violence” that increases the anxieties surrounding these women, creating another strong, violent mental imagery that travels through media from Syria to the West. It is, additionally, no surprise that the adjective *foreign* resembles something that is exotic, unknown, something unfamiliar, so by writing about these *foreign women* in their “black shrouds” inhabiting the “toxic” camps in Syria we frame the individuals of the camps as being a mass of something *foreign*, something that is far away and fits into the “international terrorism” frame (Brinson & Stohl 2012). Yet, this “mass of foreign” inevitably includes the estimated 20 British female citizens inhabiting the camps of al-Hol, al-Roj and Ain Issa (e.g. *The Independent*, 19.2.2019), and while simultaneously receiving information about these *foreign women* and *British women*, one begins to understand that this *foreign* covers the British, too, activating the “domestic homegrown terrorism” frame.

As it is very likely that these women might return to Britain, the “domestic homegrown terrorist” who has potentially provable ties to “international terrorism” ignites the anxieties of having the terrorists close and “within”. These fears are encapsulated in the anxieties over the veils these women wear, their *foreignness*, and their potential dangerousness that reaches (and possibly even exceeds now that the caliphate has fallen) that of the men of ISIS. Such a construction of threat is a multifaceted one, and it is useful to acknowledge that the way Islam has been portrayed in the “West” plays a part in this particular case as well. As Norris, Kern, and Just (2003, 4-5) have explained, the conventional frames are powerful tools for organizing information about new events and information. Placing those anxieties on these “ISIS women” and “ISIS wives” is supported by Nohrstedt’s theorizations on communicating threats and the pitfalls thereof. In the discursive process of constructing fear (Nohrstedt 2010), these subjects seen as threatening the collective “Us” are constructed as “the Other” through the construction of a special “ISIS” identity. Therefore, while it is true that there is no “one story of Isis women, but many separate stories” (*The Observer*, 6.10.2019) and there exists differences in the representations of these women according to the noun phrases that best suit them, the aspects of framing affect the way that these representations are understood in the West. Especially so, when they are read in the frames of “Islam versus the West”. This affects the way the “good Muslims” of this study do not in reality appear as good, as they have violated the fundamental values of being good: leaving the “West” behind in order to stand along the “Others”. Additionally, they are women who have deserted the “freedom” of the “West” for a life in the oppression of ISIS.

It is obvious that Britain lacks efforts to repatriate and rehabilitate these women and children, and societies lack measures to “battle” terrorism that thematic framing would support, so the news reporting adheres to episodic framing. Episodic framing, then, at worst leads to strict “one-size-fits-all” solutions (*The Independent*, 28.8.2019) to extremely complex issues. The reporting prevalent in the data continues to constantly reconstruct the concept of infantilized subjects who cannot be held responsible for their own actions, or then creates a collective group of women and wives who are far beyond rehabilitation. No matter which line of representation the news on these women would follow,

they are still considered as a threat to the collective “Us” in Britain (or the “West” if taken to broader frames) who are then left without government assistance. In addition, although there exist individual stories of these women, the harm these overemphasized individual stories have is the way they work as a framework for all the others in the same category, too. The inability to see past that one person, in a way, seeing the forest from the trees, blurs our understanding of the whole phenomenon. The same, of course, works vice versa: if one is perceived to be part of a dangerous group of “ISIS women”, it is extremely hard to gain an individual assessment in cases where human trafficking and coercion have been involved.

This study has revealed new information on the representations of women affiliated with ISIS, and addressed terminology that has not been previously studied. It has detected new patterns and directions in the portrayals of female terrorist that have taken form after the fall of the caliphate now that the possible return of members of ISIS has actualized. The study aimed to shed light on the creation of a threat in the middle of a humanitarian crisis in Syria that can increase critical understanding and assessment when faced with the biased news media reporting. As the timespan of the study was only a year and the sources strictly limited, it must be kept in mind that the results are tentative until broader and more holistic studies have been conducted, but the results of this study can act as guiding principles for future research. That said, the choices made in limiting the timespan and sources were conscious ones in order to truly pay close attention to the semantic differences in a brand-new political situation. Ideally, the corpus would have been larger, but it was strictly decided that only the data available on Nexis Uni with the established data collection principles were used in order to avoid cherry-picking articles from other online sources that would have extended the corpus, but would have also affected the biasedness of the corpus. In addition, as the selection of newspaper articles was not fully balanced, one cannot draw conclusions on single newspaper patterns or political leanings, but the focus was on the British media on a more general level and not on single news media outlets.

The study can be reproduced as long as one has access to Nexis Uni, precisely follows the limitations set for the collection and “cleaning” of data, and has the required corpus tools available. It must be noted, however, that although every attempt was made to remain as objective as possible and although CDA is especially suitable for this type of research, full subjectivity can never be guaranteed with it. Therefore, it cannot be stated that another researcher would arrive at the *exact* same conclusions as the current one. Text excerpts were attached to offer more validity for the claims made, and each reader can make their own interpretations based on the extracts provided. The present study is by no means a perfect one, nor does it claim to be, but it certainly has revealed new elements that demonstrate the need for further research.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the discursive construction of news media representations of women affiliated with ISIS between February 2019 and February 2020. The aim of this thesis is to outline the representations of the women situated on the refugee and detention camps in Syria, holding both refugees of the ISIS caliphate as well as ISIS family members. As the focus of many previous studies has been on the specific term “Jihadi Bride/Brides”, this thesis studied the mentions currently peppering the news, *ISIS bride/brides*, *ISIS mother/mothers*, *ISIS wife/wives*, and *ISIS woman/women*, as they have not been individually studied in previous literature. To complete this task, a specialized corpus was comprised of four British media outlets accessed through Nexis Uni. The study employed a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods as the study was conducted as a corpus-based critical discourse analysis studying media discourse with the help of framing theory. The corpus tool used was AntConc version 3.5.8. The analysis was conducted in two parts. The first part was divided into the study of the categories *bride/brides*, *mother/mothers*, *wife/wives*, and *woman/women*, aiming at revealing the similarities and differences in the representations behind these terms. The first section (4.1) answered specifically to the research questions 1 and 2, which were the following:

1. *What are the representations of “ISIS brides”, “ISIS mothers”, “ISIS wives” and “ISIS women” like? Should there be any differences, what is the nature of these differences?*
2. *How do the findings of this study compare to the findings of previous studies?*

The first part of analysis employed both corpus methods as guiding principles for the complete methods of critical discourse analysis. The second part of analysis was focused on the processes of “othering” threats, meaning the “othering” of Muslim women in this context. The second part of analysis answered to research question number 3:

3. *What frames can be identified from the media texts in question?*

Of course, the first part of analysis helped in answering this question as well. Similar methods were used in the second part of the analysis.

The study revealed that although there is some overlap between the terms, there indeed exist differences between these four categorical divisions. Whereas the *bride/brides* and *mother/mothers* were discussed in singular form, mostly due to the popularity of Shamima Begum's case in Britain, the *wife/wives* and *woman/women* were referred to in the plural forms. Additionally, the *bride/brides* category showed signals that fit the findings of previous studies, as the *brides* were discussed in a manner that infantilized them and elicited sympathy from the reader in order to blur the process of one "becoming" an ISIS bride. The *mother/mothers* category placed these women within the realms of gender stereotypic positions of society, emphasizing the natural aspect of motherhood. The mothers were neither just "vengeful" nor "nurturing" mothers, but inevitably they were "bad" mothers who had brought their children to conflict areas. Surprisingly, however, in many instances the role of government was brought up, and the "failure" of the government to protect these mothers and their children was brought up alongside the narrative of the "failing" mother. The category of *wife/wives* turned out to portray the most faithful and violent individuals in the female population of ISIS, as they still, even after the caliphate, remained loyal to the organization's ideology. Similarly, the *woman/women* category that is seemingly the most unbiased one showed signals of women who were as motivated by the ISIS ideology when joining the organization and were as dangerous as the men. This category included references to the ages of these *women*, however, unlike with the category of *bride/brides*, their youth upon departure was not an applicable explanation anymore, and the "groomed as a child" narrative was not perceived as a legitimate one. Especially so, when the studies on the motivations of these women were reported alongside regular news coverage. One common aspect that combined all of the four categories was the association of the spouses or possible spouses to these women, and although the crimes and violence committed by these *women* and *wives* were brought up, they were still the crimes and violence of their husbands, so that it was nearly impossible to imagine these women getting involved with ISIS without their husbands or the potential husbands. The framing patterns followed the popular scheme of episodic framing focusing on the newest developments in the crisis and on the camps, paying attention to many individual stories of females in the

realms of violence. In addition, the categories of *women* and *wives* were especially constructed into a group of *foreign* women, creating a possible threat of “foreign” travelling back to Britain. In this manner, the “Other” and “international terrorism” created anxieties over the safety of the collective “Us” in Britain, and the stories from the camps are inevitably read in the “Islam versus the West” frame, in which all the women eventually are “bad Muslims” as they have joined ISIS, although they might have been “good women” according to their representations, leading to cautions surrounding their possible returns.

There is an abundance of parts that could be expanded in future research. Indeed, there are many collocates and many aspects that could have been studied in this specific study as well. Explanations were given for the choosing of particular collocates for closer inspection, but it is certain that many others could have been studied further, but that would have not been possible within the realms of this thesis. For future research, for instance, a similar study to Brinson and Stohl’s attitudinal study (2012) could be conducted using the elements of this study, so that readers would receive narratives of all four categories, after which it could be measured which causes the most fears and anxieties. Furthermore, it would be extremely beneficial to study the differences between this so-called broadsheet media and the tabloids in order to see whether the hypothesis on their scandalous nature referred to in section 3.1 is correct and if so, to what extent. Another distinction that could be looked at with the help of a larger corpus would be the effect of political commitments on the reporting. This would have been an interesting aspect in this study as well, but the corpus should have been broader and the papers more varied in order to make provable generalizations on political affiliations. In addition, it would be interesting to see a similar study of all male-specific terms in comparison to the female-specific terms of this study to see how different the reporting between these terms are and could there be similar patterns visible. Furthermore, it is of special interest for the researcher to see how the situation has changed for both the women and children in a year’s or two’s time, and whether there has been a change in reporting or a shift in the representation as the crisis continues in Syria. As

already noted in the analysis and discussion sections of this study, academic research on female participation and motivation has started to filter into the common consciousness of news media, and it will be extremely interesting to see the direction future reporting will develop into.

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