Framing Kurdish Female Fighters

A qualitative content analysis of media representations of female fighters of Kobane in Arabic, Kurdish and Russian Media

By: Fereshteh Mohammadi

Supervisor: Urban Larssen
Södertörn University | School of Social Sciences
Master’s Dissertation 15 credits
Journalism | Spring Semester 2019
International Master’s Program in Journalism
Abstract

With the uprising of the Arab Spring in Syria in 2011, a myriad of news articles covering Syrian people's protests were published in the international media. However, it was after the Islamic State’s (IS) attacks on Syria and accordingly, Rojava region – the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, de facto Autonomous Region – in 2014, that the region became the attention center of the international media. A considerable number of academic articles have analyzed the representations of the Kurdish female fighters in the Western media in different angles, such as the framing of the female fighters, their motivations, their roles in the war etc. There may exist a limited number of academic papers analyzing the Kurdish female fighters from the non-Western media perspective which might present a different picture from that of Western media analysis. Applying framing theory in combination with a qualitative content analysis approach, this study is intended to explore the Kurdish female fighters’ framing in Arabic, Kurdish and Russian media, namely Al-Jazeera, ANF and RT, respectively. Moreover, orientalism theory, feminist theory on militarization and war, and war and peace journalism theory are implied to investigate the framing of the Kurdish female fighters in the three media.

Keywords: Kurdish female fighters, Kobane, IS, Arabic media, Kurdish media, Russian media, media framing, orientalism, feminist theory on militarization and war, war and peace journalism theory.
Special thanks to Urban for supporting me in this memorable journey.

To Farzad
**List of Abbreviations and Kurdish Terms**

ISIS/IS - Islamic State of Iraq and Sham/ Islamic State

YPG - Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)

YPJ - Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women’s Protection Units)

PKK - Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers’ Party)

PYD - Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)

Rojava- Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, de facto Autonomous Region

Kobane - Kurdish town on the Turkish-Syrian border in the Kurdish region of Northern Syria
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ................................................. 6  
2. Aim and Research Questions ........................... 8  
3. Background ................................................... 9  
4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework .... 12  
   4.1 Framing Theory ........................................ 12  
   4.2 Orientalism Theory .................................... 15  
   4.3 Feminist theory on Militarization and War ........ 18  
   4.4 War and Peace Journalism Theory .................. 19  
5. Methods and Methodology ............................... 22  
   5.1 Qualitative content analysis ......................... 22  
   5.2 Sampling ............................................... 23  
   5.3 Data Collection ....................................... 25  
   5.4 Choices of Articles ................................... 28  
   5.5 Creating a Framebook ................................ 29  
   5.6 Methodological Discussion .......................... 32  
6. Results and Analysis .................................... 33  
   6.1 Qualitative Content Analysis of Al-Jazeera .... 33  
   6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis of ANF ............... 36  
   6.3 Qualitative Content Analysis of RT ................ 41  
7. Discussion and Conclusion ............................... 45  
   7.1 Conclusion ............................................. 48  
Reference List ................................................. 51
1. Introduction

After IS attacked Syria and subsequently the city of Kobane in 2014 (CNN, 2019; Toivanen and Baser, 2016; BBC, 2014), the region received international media interest. Kurdish female fighters could be found on the headlines of the globally known media outlets such as BBC, CNN, Aljazeera and so on. Various terms have been utilized to describe the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane in news articles worldwide (see e.g. BBC, 2014). Meanwhile, some academic articles (e.g. Dirik 2015; Buffon & Allison 2016; Duzgun 2016; Kollarova 2016; Shahvisi 2018) have analyzed the way the media has depicted the Kurdish female fighters. Western global media such as BBC, CNN, and domestic media such as Guardian, Independent, Daily Mail and Le Parisien have been analyzed to investigate the media framing of the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane in the crisis against IS (Toivanen and Baser, 2016). The results of these analyses of the Western media framing indicate that media briefly and with little nuance has covered the reality behind Kurdish female fighters’ resistance, and instead contribute to a slightly stereotypical framing (Shahvisi, 2018).

Despite the fact that the Kurdish female fighters have attracted the global and international media interest during recent years, their agency is downplayed in the Western media (Shahvisi, 2018). This goes for the western media; it is predominantly western media that have been analyzed in the available literature. But the central question in this thesis is, how do non-Western media represent Kurdish female fighters? Consequently, I will examine the way the Kurdish female fighters have been framed in the three mainstream media in the Middle-East and Eurasia, namely ANF – Firat News Agency –, Al-Jazeera and RT – Russia Today –. ANF is known as a pro-Kurdish media outlet mostly covering the issues within the Middle-East and specifically the Kurds (BBC, 2015; CNN, 2013). The globally known Aljazeera is the Qatari media outlet which produces news in English and RT, former Russia Today, is a Russian news channel which reports on the significant worldwide issues (Mediabias, 2016).

For qualitative content analysis of the news articles in Al Jazeera, ANF and RT, the framing theory has been implemented to analyze the frames and themes whereby the Kurdish
female fighters have been depicted during the last nine years. Also, orientalism theory is benefitted to analyze the three media framing of the women.

It is assumed that since ANF is known as a pro-Kurdish and pro-PKK media outlet, it is expected that its media representation of Kurdish female fighters is different from those of Al-Jazeera and RT which have diverse political and strategic relations with the Kurds. Nevertheless, the thesis assumes that it is interesting and relevant to analyze the framing of ANF given the reach this media have towards a Kurdish audience, and to compare its framing with other non-western media.

The siege of Kobane happened in mid-September 2014 and continued till late-January 2015 (BBC, 2019). However, the focus of the thesis is from the beginning of the Syrian Civil War to 2014, which started in 2011 and resulted in some changes in the governing system of Rojava – the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, de facto Autonomous Region – (Sary, 2016). The next timespan is from IS attacks on Kobane in mid-September 2014, which destroyed the city and resulted in fleeing the civilians to Turkey and Iraq (BBC, 2019). The siege of Kobane continued to the 26th of January 2015 when the YPG and YPJ with the help of PKK defeated IS and took back the control of the city (Sary, 2016). And lastly, the news articles published on the issue of the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane from February 2015 to April 2019 are analyzed.
2. Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyse the framing of the Kurdish female fighters in Al-Jazeera, ANF and RT during a nine-year-period, from 2011 to 2019. The qualitative content analysis includes randomly choosing news articles and identifying the most prevalent terms whereby the Kurdish female fighters have been described in Al-Jazeera, ANF and RT. The thesis adopts framing theory to identify the prevalent messages within the news articles. By identifying the frames utilized by the three media outlets, I analyze the views these frames hold towards the Kurdish female fighters. Below is the research question that guides this study:

RQ. How are the female fighters of Kobane represented in the Arabic, Kurdish and Russian media before, during and after the war against ISIS?

The research question will be answered by applying the four theories, namely framing, orientalism, feminist theory on militarization and war, and war and peace journalism theory, in combination with qualitative content analysis approach which is the most appropriate approach for the aim of the thesis.
3. Background

The Syrian Civil War began with a “pro-democracy demonstrations” wave of protests in 26 January 2011, and intensified to a “consolidated uprising” on 15 March in the same year (Can, 2017. P. 179). Resulting in 9000 casualties until 2012, the Syrian conflict is known as the “bloodiest conflict of the Arab Spring” (Bhardwaj, 2012. P. 84). Also, it became “the most socially mediated civil conflict in history” (Lynch and Freelon and Aday, 2014). The Syrian people protested against Bashar Al-Assad Regime – Syria's president since 2000 – (CNN, 2019). After eight years, it is still an ongoing war (CNN, 2019) since Assad has again gained control over the country by the support of his allies such as Russia. From the beginning of the war in 2011, it “escalated into a full-scale war” amongst Assad forces, Kurdish forces, ISIS, and other opposition sides such as Jaish Al Fatah (CNN, 2019; CFR 2019). Based on UN report, an estimation of 6.5 million people have fled Syria and over 6 million have been displaced inside the country till January 2019 (Operational Report, 2019).

In the midst of the Syrian crisis beginning in 2011, the Kurdish people living in Rojava also protested against the Syrian oppressive regime and requested an autonomous free land for Kurds (The Times, 2019; France 24, 2019). Kurds are an ethnic group spread in four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey (Tejel, 2009). The Kurdish population living in Syria is estimated around 1.6 millions. They have been oppressed from living their fundamental rights from educating by Kurdish language to wearing Kurdish clothes in public for decades (Tejel, 2009). The Syrian Kurds self-organized from the beginning of the war, and after defeating struggles against pro-Syrian forces, established their governing institutions in Rojava which were ideologically led based on Abdullah Ocalan’s teachings (Shahvisi, 2018). Abdullah Ocalan is a political representative of a great number of Kurds living in the four countries (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012). He has been imprisoned since 1999 by the Turkish government and jailed in an isolated island in Turkey, named Imrali (Tejel, 2009). Following Ocalan’s ideology, the Kurdish forces gained control over the Kurdish cities in Syria such as Qamishli and Efrin in 2012 (BBC, 2019). Two years later, in mid-September 2014, the Kurdish-populated city of Kobane, in Rojava, was attacked by IS. Thousands of civilians were killed, displaced and over 130,000
people fled to Turkey (BBC, 2019). The siege of Kobane lasted for four months until 26 January 2015 and caused in a great number of casualties and destroyed the whole city (BBC, 2019). Meantime, the battle for Kobane against IS gained international media interest and was hugely covered by the well known media such as CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera. In this war, YPJ – Women’ Defense Units – alongside YPG – People’s Defense Units – resisted the IS attacks and influenced the process of the war. The Western media has reported stories on the women fighters’ appearance, motivations and fate during and after the war against IS (BBC, 2014; BBC, 2016; Telegraph, 2016). Some scholars have analyzed the Western media representations of the Kurdish women fighters and note that the Western media has simplified the women’s agency in their news (e.g. Shahvisi, 2018; Dirik 2015). Kurdish women have been influenced by Ocalan’s thoughts and have been self-organized under the name of YPJ, to defend and liberate themselves from the oppressive Syrian regime and patriarchal system within Kurdish society. The founding of YPJ was declared in 15 March 2013 aiming at changing the society’s perception of women (ANF, 2019). One way of moving towards a more nuanced explanation of YPJ foundation as well as understanding of the grounds on which the women base their identification with taking part in the struggle and war, is to turn to a cluster of thoughts composed under the term jineology discussed by Ocalan. In the Kurdish language, jin means woman, and jineology, also known as “the science of woman” (Alis, 2012. p.44), is a notion which has been applied in the Kurdish society of Kobane for years before ISIS attacked the region. Now, I am aware that for many scholars, intellectuals and politicians, Ocalan is a highly political figure whose writings may be regarded as propaganda (see e.g. Bruinessen, 2000). For the concerns of this thesis, however, the writings and theorizing of Ocalan is relevant due to the status he has in the culture in question, and due to the fact that he is often referred to in the narratives of the women that figures as the central object of study, both by the women fighters and in journalistic account of them.

Certainly, issues such as child soldier and/or suicide bombing are some of the problematic actions within women’s organizations during the recent years. This fact puts the ideology of Ocalan in a more problematic perspective, regardless of whether these are actions sanctioned by Ocalan himself or not. According to Human Rights Watch in 2015, for example, although YPG, the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, signed a commitment
not to recruit soldiers under the age of 18, this group and YPJ has not been completely successful in doing so (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, jineology is amongst the values regarded by YPG and YPJ in their teachings and organization. Considering this, I will refer to jineology later in the Discussion and Conclusion section of the thesis.
4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, a combination of the theories applied in the analysis part of this thesis and the relevant literature regarding the Kurdish female fighters is presented. The theories employed for the analysis include framing theory, orientalism, feminist theory on militarization and war, war and peace journalism theory. In the following paragraphs, the theories and the related literature will be discussed.

4.1 Framing Theory

One of the most applicable theories in media studies, and specifically journalism is framing theory. Journalistic frames are constructed based upon the scholars or journalists’ interpretations of a phenomenon (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015). In other words, they survey and recognize the existing essences in a “perceived reality” (Entman, 1993, p. 52), and categorize them in concrete terms which are known as frames. Thus, in order to simplify the understanding of the reality for the audience, journalists use frames. Entman (1993) holds that “Framing essentially involves selection and salience” (p.52). In fact, frames could help to convey the message of a very dominant aspect or aspects of an issue happened elsewhere. However, some aspects of the reality would be “highlighted” (Entman, 1993) and some “left out” (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015, p. 424).

As Entman (1993, p. 52) illuminated, “to frame” means picking some facets of reality and generating them as more “salient” in a “communicative text”. Entman’s idea (1993) was in accordance with what Gasmon (1992 cited in Entman, 1993, p. 52) noted about the frames’ functions, that frames “diagnose, evaluate and prescribe”. Entman (1993, p. 52) propounded four purposes embedded in framing, namely “problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Hereby, journalists could adopt frames as tools to categorize the eminent features of reality and connate the determined perception/information to the audience.

Content analysis is the approach operated to scrutinize the framing of Kurdish female fighters of Kobane in the Russian and Middle-Eastern media which will be thoroughly argued in
the following chapters. Based on Entman’s (1993) ideology on framing theory, content analysis transfers further authentic data on “media messages” in alignment with “framing paradigm”. In other words, framing authorizes evaluating the communicative texts and probably brings about more accurate information in investigating the texts surveyed by content analysis approach.

Acknowledging the literature written upon framing theory, Toivanen and Baser (2016) evaluated French and British media framing of Kurdish women in the battlefield against IS in 2014. Using Framing theory as the thesis’ main theory, they surveyed how female combatants of Kobane have been demonstrated in French and British media. In the very beginning of the article, they delivered a comprehensive background to the Kurdish region of northern-Syria so-called Rojava and the army forces protecting and governing the Kurdish region of northern Syria such as PYD, YPG and YPJ. Also, in spite of Turkey’s efforts to block their access to Rojava, the PKK’s influential role in the war is discussed.

Toivanen and Baser (2016) generated four frames whereby the Kurdish female combatants have been depicted in the national media of the two countries. First, struggle for the equality/emancipation/liberation frame introduces women striving for attaining their ideological values such as equality and liberty. Second, the personal/emotional motivations highlight women’s personal reasons for fighting on the battlefield against IS such as losing their family members in the war against IS and wishing to take revenge from them. The third introduced frame is physical appearance which mainly focuses on women’s feminine features such as their beautiful faces or dressing. The fourth frame is exceptionalism which refers to women as extraordinary individuals who are considered as tougher than men (Toivanen and Baser, 2016, p. 12).

As French media adopted struggle for equality/emancipation/liberation frame, Toivanen and Baser (2016) conclude that the British media were more focused on personal/emotional motivations and exceptionalism frames. The way the British media has covered female fighters originates from a victimhood narrative. It refers to women’s motivations for engaging in the battlefield as losing their family members, escaping rape and enslavement by IS, taking revenge and etc. While the French media emphasizes their participation in the war for their ideological values.
Another issue brought up by Toivanen and Baser (2016) is that the female battalions were contesting the Orientalist image of Middle-Eastern women by doing men’s jobs, which was fighting in the frontlines in the battlefield. As Toivanen and Baser (2016) suggest, Western audiences have been fascinated by what they have been reading in the news spread about the female battalion fighting against IS, who have been known as ‘evil’ universally. However, the female combatants broke and weakened the image of IS in the world for what they did to them. IS held an ideology believing that if they are killed by the hands of a woman, they will not go to heaven. That is why IS avoided nearing females holding guns in their hands (Toivanen and Baser, 2016).

Yet another issue is that since PKK is listed as a terrorist organization by the US and EU, YPJ and PKK affiliation was commented by Toivanen and Baser. They mentioned this connection between YPJ and PKK has not been a reason for media to consider YPJ combatants as terrorists. However, they have been framed in a glorifying sense that they fought to rescue their land and liberty by risking their lives, which is not the whole reality of these women. It is media that decide how it should depict the Kurdish female combatants and which aspects of their resistance should be portrayed for the audience. One could understand that the media framing of this issue has not been objective and it varies from the British to French media and vice versa.

Shahvisi (2018) mentions some of the views towards the Kurds spread in the Western media by exemplifying each. “Commodification”, “objectification”, “orientalism” and “stereotyping” are amongst the views which the Western media have represented Kurdish women whereby. She criticizes the Western media for depoliticizing the Kurdish women’s fights against ISIS, although their pictorial has been completely political as active soldiers in armies. She further blames the Western media that have aimed at presenting Kurdish women and their motivations for fighting as they wish to reach the Western women’s feminist views and life conditions. In fact, Kurdish women criticize the Western feminism for its limitations on liberation of women (Shahvisi, 2018. P. 6). Another reason brought up by Shahvisi (2018) to not recovering the existing reality in Rojava Revolution and Kurdish women’s movement is that
Democratic Confederalism is closely associated with Marxism, and accordingly, it would not be pleased to “popularize the Kurdish cause” in Western contexts.

Moreover, Shahvisi (2018) highlights some elements including “Gender, secularity, phenotype, statelessness and poverty” which could have been the “Western powers’” potential reasons not to feel insecure towards high presentation of Kurdish women fighters in their media. To elaborate more on these terms, the gender role of these combatants as “woman” has been considered as “un-threatening” to the Western view. Secondly, the YPJ has been a “secular organization” which is in alliance with Western values, positioning against the so-called ISIS “terrorist” organization. Thirdly, Western journalists have been “keen” on highlighting that the Kurds are “pale-skinned and light-eyed” referring to the usual “regional phenotypes”. Next, the Kurds have been stateless throughout the history and their statelessness has made the Western powers to assume that they do not have such power to resist against them and their values. And lastly, the Kurdish people have been living in poverty in four parts of Kurdistan and their poverty has made them “disempowered” in the eyes of the West. Shahvisi assumes these “threat-reducing factors” have encouraged the Western media to represent Kurdish women combatants in favorable and positive ways.

4.2 Orientalism Theory

Having thus established framing theory in addition to reviewing the relevant literature, let me now turn to a couple of theories that could be used to analyze the framing of the Kurdish women fighters in media. In what follows, I account for what orientalism is and how it is related to framing theory. I also bring up examples of studies involving orientalism theory in their analyses and point to the relevance to the topics of this thesis. Scholars and historians benefit orientalism theory to conduct research on analyzing the East that presumably includes Asia, North Africa and the Middle-East and so on (Said, 2003). The most prominent scholar in orientalism theory is Edward Said, whose work forms the basis much of this theory. Said (1978, p. 4) assumes that there is neither “Orient” nor “Occident” as a “fact” in nature. Instead, these terms are “man-made”, and both have their own “history, tradition of thought, imagery and
vocabulary” that bring about their existence and reality in the world. In fact, both “Orient” and “Occident” “support and reflect each other to an extent” (Said, 1978, p. 5).

Said asserts that Western scholars have devoted close attention to the East and Eastern studies which have had implications on their worldview towards the East implying that Eastern people are in need of the Westerners’ assistance and guidance. In other words, he claims that the Westerners consider themselves superior to their counterparts in the East. In the thesis, orientalism theory is applied for investigating the potential influence it has had on the globally known media representations of Kurdish female fighters who are geographically located in the Middle-East and religiously known as Muslims, which are in the core of orientalism studies.

Reviewing the previous literature, Szanto (2016) conducted a study on the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane representations in the local and global media. She bases her survey on Mohja Kahf’s (2000 cited in Szanto, 2016, p.307) typology of Muslim and Arab women. Kahf categorized Middle-Eastern women as “victims”, “escapees” and “pawns of patriarchy and male power”. She believes that these biased categories have ignored the “satisfying relationships” women have with men, in addition to avoiding the “socioeconomic” situations of females engaging in warfare. Szanto admits this limited categorization befits the subject of analyzing the media representation of Kurdish female fighters.

Szanto (2016) likewise, stated that due to the orientalist representation of Middle-Eastern women in Western societies, the Westerners would celebrate them if they did any heroic action individually or in groups together. During the Syrian uprising in 2011, women’s protests became internationally recognized as the heroine of a “new era” (Szanto, 2016, p. 308). Later in 2014, after IS attacked Kobane, the Kurdish female fighters were portrayed in the headlines on the front page of news articles globally. There were both similarities and differences between the media representation of women protesters of 2011 and female fighters of 2014. They both were depicted as escapees, but the first group was protesting against the dictatorship of the Syrian government and the latter fought against “subjugation of male Islamists” (Szanto, 2016, p. 308).

Szanto reveals the fact that international media do not differentiate between the female fighters of different parts of “greater Kurdistan” (Szanto, 2016, p. 309) - Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey -. However, the female fighters of Iraqi Kurdistan have received less recognition in the
international media. She problematizes the ignorance of socioeconomic situations of female fighters’ representation in the international media. As she suggested, the women coming from poorer families have been more willing to join the army forces than their counterparts in richer families, and Syrian Kurds are poorer than other parts of greater Kurdistan. Moreover, she refers to an article (Dirik, 2014 cited in Szanto, 2016, p.309), which criticizes the exceptional role media gave to Kurdish female fighters of Kobane rather than the rest of the women in the other parts of greater Kurdistan.

Also, Szanto (2016) argues that the notion of the “Middle-Eastern women in need of liberation” (Szanto, 2016, p. 310) is not only a result of orientalist images, but also the Syrian government’s trials by setting “role models” (Szanto, 2016, p. 311) for women has had implications on their international representation. By “role models”, Szanto refers to wealthy and educated women such as Asma al-Assad, Syria president’s wife and Bouthaina, a politician and academic with high profile in Syria. Also, some patriotic singers who have been shown in Syrian TV channels are amongst top role models for women in Syria, most of whom are educated and wealthy.

Kollarova (2016) has explained the orientalism picture of Muslim women in the eyes of their sisters in the West. This picture has affected their media representation during the years. As she claims, the Muslim women have been depicted conveying the message they always need their sisters’ help from the West because Westerns are “emancipated and strong” (Kollarova, 2016, p. 143). On the other hand, the Orientalist picture of Muslim women is “veiled and passive ghosts who are historically oppressed and even brainwashed with men and Islam” (Kollarova, 2016, p. 143).

However, Kollarova (2016) reveals that after the protests broke out in Iraq, Libya and Syria and subsequently, the attacks started by IS on Yazidi women and later, in other Kurdish regions of Syria, the media was fascinated by seeing the brave and “badass” (Kollarova, 2016, p. 144) women who take weapons and fight against the most brutal terrorists, IS. In the contrary, the Western women joining IS known as “Jihadist brides” (Kollarova, 2016, p. 144), are presented as ghosts and veiled in burqa, who do not have an agency in the media.
One of the key points that Kollarova (2016) refers to, is the simplified picture of Kurdish female fighters in the media. Considering them as heroines or extraordinary women who fight bravely against their cultural oppressions and at the same time, IS, is not enough for knowing them and what and why they have done. In other words, the Kurdish female fighters are misrepresented without fully mentioning their agency and ideology.

The contradictory representation of Kurdish female fighters in the Western media before and after the IS attacks, is another key point in Kollarova’s (2016) article. The Western media without fully describing their agency and deeper motivation to fight for emancipation as well as independence, leaves an empty space of introducing the real Kurds and their agency for the rest of the world. Simplification of the stories about the Kurds is one of the crucial issues which the Western world has left without any explanation. Although it has been said that the Kurdish female fighters’ acts have been a crucial step for changing the usual orientalist picture of Muslim women in the Middle-East, their shift from the terrorists to free women is not a “challenging orientalist power politics” (Kollarova, 2016, p. 148).

With regard to the above explanations, I find orientalism theory relevant to my study and will utilize it in analyzing news articles.

4.3 Feminist theory on Militarization and War

Now that the three basic theories of the thesis have been explained, it is time for briefly discussing the next three theories which are to some extent relevant to the aims of the thesis. Feminist theory, as its name suggests, strives for achieving equal rights in society whereby females could have the same equal space and right as the males. Regarding the notion that feminist theory came to existence after the feminist movement, Disch and Hawkesworth (2016) note that “Feminism would not exist as a theoretical endeavor without the political struggles for women’s empowerment that have emerged in all regions of the world”. By that, they highlight the importance of the political attempts happened throughout the world to bring about changes in women’s lives. One of the several links such as anthropology, communication, politics and diaspora, to feminist theory, is militarization and war. Ferguson and Naylor (2016) divide the military into two separate types as state armies and armed resistance movements such as
guerillas. According to Ferguson and Naylor (2016), state armies are often aimed at supporting and maintaining the colonial values while armed resistance movements challenge the colonial deals and more women are likely to join them in comparison to state armies. One of the reasons for more engagement of women in the second group, is that women wish to struggle for society’s rights and welcome fighting for revolutions. However, the state armies are forcibly fighting for “protection or revenge”. One of the ideas brought up by Ferguson and Naylor (2016) is that they believe the guerilla forces push back women after winning the struggle or revolution in order to “normalize” the society by oppressing them again by “subordinate domestic roles” (Ferguson and Naylor, 2016. P. 514). To clarify this idea, they note that “[r]ebel women in postconflict situations may be feared as hyperviolent or scorned as damaged goods in some civilian contexts”. However, they later comment that the opposite idea also exists, and women “may be honored as veterans of the revolution and at least some of them recruited into positions of leadership in the postconflict society” in some cases after the revolution. Thus, we can conclude that more women are likely to voluntarily engage in guerilla forces rather than state forces because they believe that they can fight for bringing change in the society and in their lives as well. Although they may be active and influential participants in guerilla forces, they may be oppressed by the revolution which they have been involved in and fought for. At the end of the thesis, I will get back to this theory, while analyzing the news articles in Discussion of Results.

4.4 War and Peace Journalism Theory

As the name of the theory suggests, war and peace journalism refers to diverse principles that media/media actors follow to report an issue in the modern world where the threats are escalating from “global war on terror” to” global warming and climate change” (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014). In their book, Nohrstedt and Ottosen (2014) claim that due to the existence and intensification of such problems, the human being is experiencing a “historical change: from risk society to threat society” (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014. P. 65). That is why journalism should employ new modes of reporting in order not to spread higher levels of fear to the society which is so called “culture of fear”. Regarding the importance of media, they note that:
“The theory of threat society focuses on the importance of media as facilitators of otherism, that is, a politicized construction of dangers and risks in such a form that a certain group, ethnic or other, is defined as a threat per se” (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014. P. 70)

Nohrstedt and Ottosen (2014) comment that peace journalism is counted as an alternative to the traditional and uncritical war journalism which focuses only on the enemy as the devil part of a conflict. Peace journalism considers an intentional or unintentional role for media actors in times of crisis thereby the media itself can become propaganda against peace processes. The alternative options within peace journalism are introduced by Galtung (2002), which are: “solution-oriented, people-oriented and truth-oriented”. Solution-oriented means focusing on the potential resolutions in the conflict and war times building peace instead of threat, danger and fear. By people-oriented, he suggests that the media should give voice to the “voiceless”, who are victims of the war, the civilians who are losing their lives in wars. Truth-oriented means paying attention to the all sides of the conflict and hearing them, instead of “propaganda as a means of continuing the war” (Galtung, 2002, cited in Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014. P. 86).

Peace journalism can be understood as a “responsible and consciousness” mode of reporting which aims at “peacemaking, peacekeeping and changing” the media, media actors and audiences’ perspectives on peace and conflict zones and times (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014. P. 87)

On the other hand, based on Galtung (2002), war journalism mostly has concentrated on four other points: violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented, and victory-oriented. This approach is associated with the notion of “zero-sum game” where the focus is on one part’s win, and the failure of the other part. It is explained as good-bad, white-black and evil-angel sense making of the sides of a conflict or war. In fact, war journalism can be seen as a means of spreading “simple descriptions, sports-like situations” and also a means, which is not interested in peace building (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014).

Shinar (2007) suggests some principles for peace journalists which they can turn their focus on in times of conflict reporting. She offers discovering “backgrounds and contexts” of conflicts, presenting real and true information about all parts involved, and “portray conflict in
realistic terms” to the audience. Also, “giving voice” to all opposing sides and devoting space to the “post-war developments” rather than telling some “regular” stories of war, are the other suggestions he recommended (Shinar, 2007, cited in Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014. P. 87).

Since the aim of this thesis is to survey the framing of the women fighters, I find war and peace journalism theory relevant to the analysis. Because concepts brought up by journalists, frames they employ to convey messages, and the points they focus on in reporting, can be understood as peace journalism oriented or war journalism oriented.
5. Methods and Methodology

In examining the depiction of female fighters of Kobane framing in the Russian and Middle-Eastern media, the thesis utilized a qualitative content analysis approach which will be thoroughly discussed in the section that follows.

5.1 Qualitative content analysis

In order to analyze the framing of the Kurdish female combatants of Kobane in the three mainstream media, qualitative content analysis approach will be employed. The qualitative content analysis, is also referred to as qualitative document or media analysis (Altheide, 2000). This approach is amongst the most prevailing approaches (Bryman, 2012) to analyze “all sort of recorded communication” (Mayring, 2000. p.2). It seeks to identify the “underlying themes” within the analyzed materials through the process of investigation. According to Bryman (2012), the identification and construction of “extracted themes” are not fully described but would be clarified by a brief explanation or “quotation” from the communicative text. Altheide (2000) makes a distinction between the “traditional quantitative content analysis”, and suggested by him, “ethnographic content analysis” (Bryman, 2012) called ECA which consistently is “interpretive”:

“Qualitative document analysis is similar to all qualitative methodology in that the main emphasis is on discovery and description, including search for underlying meanings, patterns, and processes, rather than mere quantity or numerical relationships between two or more variables” (Altheide, 2000. P. 290).

Obviously, the aim of qualitative content analysis is to discover the uncovered meanings, themes and frames within the articles spread by the daily media, and how the “events” or issues happening in real life are presented to the audience, which he mentions as “media logic” (Altheide, 2000. P. 6). Qualitative content analysis embodies the notion that how every event and issue is “framed” and displayed to the reader, so the reader could construe the message in different ways (Altheide, 2000; Mayring, 2000; Bryman, 2012). For conducting qualitative
content analysis, Altheide (2000) introduces some steps that should be accomplished by the researchers:

- Generating a research question;
- Awareness of the data source;
- Familiarity of 6-10 documents;
- Creating a number of variables/categories to “guide data collection” and producing an agenda;
- Assessing the agenda by adding more data from other documents;
- Reviewing and developing the agenda by further items and clarify it.

Analyzing communicative texts is crucial due to the implications these texts have on audiences and more generally, the society. For so doing, the researcher should seek the “certain issues, words, themes and frames over a period of time, across different issues, and across different news media” (Altheide, 2000. P. 292). Qualitative content analysis in accordance with “coding approaches” are applied for surveying the undisclosed themes employed in the qualitative documents (Bryman, 20012).

The qualitative content analysis method will be applied in the thesis which aims at searching for the most repeated and constructed frames spread by the three news outlets during a period of nine years. The content analysis section mainly focuses on the investigation of the words, terms, themes and frames which convey special messages to the audience and shape their perception toward the existing reality of the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane. In fact, the author aims at analyzing the way the Kurdish female fighters are framed and represented to the readers. Although there exists different forms of content analysis that are not qualitative, this study adopted the qualitative content analysis approach which seems suitable since its purpose is to check the frames whereby Kurdish female fighters are depicted through the news media.

5.2 Sampling

The research is based on the sampling in three internationally recognized media outlets produced in English, namely: RT (formerly called Russia Today), Al-Jazeera and ANF (Firat News Agency). RT and Al-Jazeera call themselves as global TV news channels, and the latter
produces news in 8 languages for the international community. For collecting news articles, the online version of the three news sources are considered for the accessibility and feasibility of the language as well as the availability of the archives on the Internet.

Critiques consider RT as a “Propaganda” for the “Russian government” (CBS News, 2005) and its “foreign policy” (Columbia Journalism Review, 2010). Based on RT website, it produces and spreads news with a “Russian viewpoint on major global events” (RT). Al-Jazeera has been acknowledged as the “state media” (Gulf News, 2011) run by the Qatari government to follow its “political interests”. Based on Mediabias’s (2016) fact-checking, Al-Jazeera is politically seen as the left-centered news outlet which has a slight to moderate liberal bias. Mediabias is a website where one can find information about the quality of the news sources around the globe, giving detailed facts about the news outlets’ political stances, the usage of loaded words, matching headlines with stories, and also the accuracy of sourcing in the news stories (Mediabias). According to CNN (2013) and BBC (2013), ANF is a PKK-affiliated, pro-Kurdish and pro-PKK media outlet spreading news on the Middle-East issues and specifically the Kurds.

The thesis follows three time spans for finding and analyzing the articles. By the uprising of the Arab Spring in the Middle-East and specifically in Syria, 2011, the Syrian crisis began as a civil war across the country. It was in 2012 when Democratic Union Party (PYD) took control of Northern Syria, so-called Rojava. These series of events made Syria and especially the Kurds on the top of the news headlines worldwide.

From 2011 to 2014 is the first time-span whereby I check the frequency coverage of the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane in news sources. Afterwards, the period from mid-September 2014 to January of 2015 news stories is analyzed as the peak of the war between Kobane and IS. Finally, the third time-span ranges from 2015 to 2019 in which I will go through the details of news stories to analyze the frames whereby the women have been depicted in the media.
5.3 Data Collection

Considering the information regarding the three media and the time-span of the research mentioned in the Sampling section, this section focuses on collecting the material for qualitative content analysis. The aim of this section is to detect the frames whereby the Kurdish female combatants have been depicted in Aljazeera, ANF and RT. To start collecting data, a quick search on the term “Kobane/Kobani women” in ANF between 2011 and 2019, provided 912 hits. The same search conducted in Al-Jazeera and RT provided 17 and 33 hits, respectively (see Table 1). Despite the fact that the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane attained international recognition and interest, there are few articles written about them during nine years in the two latter mainstream media.

Table 1: the number of articles published on the issue between 2011 and 16th April, 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Kobane/Kobani</th>
<th>Kobane/Kobani women</th>
<th>The oldest general news</th>
<th>The newest general news</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>2715</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>30 Sep 2012</td>
<td>15 Apr 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22 Sep 2014</td>
<td>23 March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9 Aug 2013</td>
<td>28 Feb 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next step and further research, the search terms for the female fighters of Kobane expanded to:

**Key terms**

Kobane female fighters/combatants/guerrilla/militant/terrorists

Kobane women fighters/combatants/guerrilla/militant/terrorists

Kurdish female fighters/combatants/guerrilla/militant/terrorists

Kurdish women fighters/combatants/guerrilla/militant/terrorists

YPJ/YPG
Timeframe

January 2011 - September 2014 (Beginning and during the Syrian Civil War)

September 2014 - February 2015 (The siege of Kobane)

February 2015 - March 2019 (The Post-war of Kobane)

The quantity of the news articles published in the three media by the above key terms has been searched and collected in a series of tables under the name of table 2. As shown below, ANF includes all of the key terms and has published news on each of them; however, the frequency of the publication on diverse key terms is different. On the other hand, Aljazeera and RT have been limited to general search terms such as Kobane women fighters or Kurdish women fighters, and there are no news articles published on Kobane female combatants, or Kobane female guerilla in neither of them.

Table 2.1 The number of articles published on the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane by diverse key terms in the three media outlets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Aljazeera</th>
<th>ANF</th>
<th>RT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kobane female fighters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane female combatants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane female guerilla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane female militant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane female terrorist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane women fighters</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane women combatants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane women guerilla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane women militant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane women terrorist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Aljazeera</th>
<th>ANF</th>
<th>RT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish female fighters</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish female combatants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish female guerilla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish female militant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish female terrorists</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish women fighters</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish women combatants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish women guerilla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish women militant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish women terrorists</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Aljazeera</th>
<th>ANF</th>
<th>RT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YPJ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2075</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPG</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>3571</td>
<td>+300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| In Total | 710 | 6998 | 906 |

Regarding the scope of the thesis, as shown above, the total number of news articles published on the issue is a large account and the research needs to be narrowed down to make the qualitative content analysis possible. Thus, the most repeated key terms in each of the three tables have been selected for further research. Kobane women fighters, Kurdish women fighters and YPJ are repeated mostly in the three news media outlets.
Table 3. The total number of news articles during the whole 9-year-period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News media</th>
<th>Kobane women fighters</th>
<th>Kurdish women fighters</th>
<th>YPJ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>2075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Jazeera</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Choices of Articles

I aimed at choosing one news article by each key term and in each time-span. In so doing, it was expected to collect a combination of 27 articles in total for analysis.

At first, I checked the total number of news articles in each time span. In this step, I totalized the three keywords together. For example, in ANF, Kobane women fighters and Kurdish women fighters and YPJ together produced 77 news articles during 2011 to 2014. The same procedure is followed for each timespan. (see table 4)

Table 4. The number of news articles found in the three media in each time span

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>2476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For reaching 27 articles, I divided each number into two and read the first, the middle and the last resulted article in each media. For example, I divide 30 (Al-Jazeera, during 2011 to 2014) to two, it equaled 15. So, I studied the first, fifteenth, and thirtieth news articles thoroughly. Then, I selected the relevant ones based on the criteria related to the issue of the Kurdish female fighters.
In the first step, the number of relevant articles collected in RT and Al-Jazeera were not as expected due to the limited number of the related news. Thus, I expanded the materials for analysis by choosing one news article before and after the irrelevant news articles hoping to find the relevant news. For example, the articles number 2, 14, 16, 29 in the previous example regarding Al-Jazeera 2011 to 2014 were studied. This expansion was used for RT and Al-Jazeera because the number of news found on ANF was nine and adequate for the aim of the thesis. After doing so, the total number of 17 news articles were collected in the three media, nine in ANF, four in Al-Jazeera and four in RT. It should be considered that the quantity of the chosen news articles for analysis in the three media are not equal. It happened due to the limited number of relevant news articles in Al-Jazeera and RT. So, I decided to survey my study with analysing 4 news articles in each Al-Jazeera and RT, and 9 in ANF.

In the next step, I will thoroughly read the news articles in details in order to find the most repeated and mentioned themes related to the Kurdish female fighters for setting the frames for analysis.

5.5 Creating a Framebook

Having collected the number of news related to the Kurdish female fighters in the three media outlets and the three time-spans, and narrowing down the frequency of the women’s representations by limiting search terms in the three respective media, I will investigate the most repeated key terms, words, aspects and themes related to the Kurdish female fighters within the 17 news articles in this step.

The frames will be constructed after surveying the news articles through inductive approach. Moreover, another distinction that will be considered is the way fighters speak, describe and introduce themselves to the audience, and the way media/journalists/reporters have represented them to the reader. Due to the existing distinctions between these two groups of representatives in the news articles, I surveyed the news articles considering both representatives; the fighters and the reporters’ words regarding the Kurdish female fighters.

After studying the 17 selected articles for framing analysis, I found some words and terms that could go under one framing category such as ideology, resistance and freedom. In
order not to confuse the readers with several frames, the analysis section will be conducted on six frames within news articles, namely Ocalan’s effect, defenders, martyrs, terrorists, body and age, which will be described in the following paragraphs.

The first category is named Ocalan’s effect which points at the thoughts and ideologies spread by Ocalan and his writings. Considering his ideas, words such as resistance, freedom, military/political/ideological training/academy, revolution, coexistence and equal rights have been organized in the overall category. Later in the analysis section, the reader will notice all these words and terms mentioned in relation to the Kurdish female fighters and their political organization.

The second constructed frame is called “defenders” mentioning the role the Kurdish female fighters have played during wartime. Some articles have remarked the women as soldiers, some as protectors and defenders. ‘Defenders’ seem to be the most appropriate name to call the Kurdish female fighters as their organization is called Women’s Defense Units, YPJ. Words such as protect, defend, land and people are believed to fall under this category to facilitate the analysis.

Moreover, “martyrs” and “terrorists” are the next two constructed frames that have been used regarding Kurdish female fighters. In Islam sacrificing life for the sake of defending the homeland and being fearless to die is related to the concept of martyrdom (Abdel-Khalek, 2004). So, I set the “martyrs” frame regarding this concept. On the other hand, terrorism, prosecution and violence against IS/jihadists are the terms that will be considered as the “terrorists” frame.

Fifthly, “body” frame refers to the description of the female fighters both in terms of their health and physical appearance. Words such as injured, killed, motionless, and also hair color and clothes are presented in ‘body’ frame.

Lastly, there were two other repeated terms regarding the women that described their “age” and also the “volunteer” model of their participation in the war. However, the former has been repeated more than their volunteering, so, I decided to focus on the age framing of Kurdish female fighters and conduct the analysis accordingly.

Table 5. The framing categories and the frequency of frames within 17 news articles.
In table 5, the framing categories and their frequency in the news articles have been represented. Obviously, the most repeated frame in the 17 articles is the teachings of Ocalan, and his influence on the fighters. In fact, all of the terms related to Ocalan, the Rojava Revolution and also the Women’s Defense Units (YPJ) has been considered in the first category. Also, the role the Kurdish female fighters have played in the war against the Syrian oppressive regime and Kurdish patriarchal society, as well as ISIS, as they call themselves, has been defenders. That is why they have organized the women’s organization under the name of Women’s Defense Units. However, some of the news articles in Western and non-Western media have translated YPJ (Yêkîneyên Parastina Jin) as Women’s Protection Unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing Category</th>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Frequency in the News Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ocalan’s effect</td>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendship/sisterhood</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military/political/ideological training/academy/organization</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom/women’s liberation movement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality/coexistence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defenders</td>
<td>Defence/protection</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warrior/soldier</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land/country</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martyrs</td>
<td>Martyr</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fearless/not scared</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacrificing life/ Fighting till death</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorists</td>
<td>Terrorist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence against enemy/ISIS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health/injured/killed/beheaded</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Underage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teenager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now that frames have been abstracted and constructed in this chapter, the framing of the Kurdish female fighters in the three media will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

5.6 Methodological Discussion

In the time of writing this thesis, there exists limited literature on analyzing the Kurdish female fighters’ representations in Al-Jazeera, ANF and RT. Since the thesis is considered as a starting point, generalizing is not recommended. Nonetheless, it can provoke some thoughts for further research.

One of the issues I faced doing my research, was finding the most repeated key terms which the Kurdish female fighters have been referred to in the three media. The chosen keywords should have been mutual in the three media, so that materials for the analysis could be gathered searching for some specific keywords. I determined twenty-two key words whereby the Kurdish female fighters have been referred to in the media. Then, I limited my research to three key terms which seem to be the most repeated key terms in the three media.

The following issue was the number of articles found in the three media. As I mentioned earlier, I aimed at finding and analyzing nine articles in each media so I could have 27 articles finally. However, the number of found articles related to the Kurdish female fighters decreased to 17 due to the less relevant articles in Al-Jazeera and RT. It was challenging to find relevant articles. When I searched in the search engine of each news media’s website, a great number of results were produced, but when I chose the articles and read them, there were no sentences talking about the Kurdish female fighters. That made my choices of articles a bit challenging.

In the beginning of doing my research, I thought to use the previous frames existing in the previous literature. In this sense, my thesis would have been done deductively. But after studying the 17 news articles, I discovered that the previous frames are not applicable in my thesis. The existing analysis on the Kurdish female fighters’ framing in the Western media showed that those scholars have found distinctive frames such as victims, heroines, exceptionalism and warriors (see e.g. Toivanen and Baser 2016). Some of these terms exist in my thesis, but not as an independent frame. They have been considered under greater categories of frames which are fully explained in the section 5.4.
6. Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the results from my qualitative content analysis of the Kurdish female fighters framing in Al-Jazeera, ANF, and RT, based on 17 articles. This includes summarizing the news which has been studied, applying the frames established in the previous section, identifying framing patterns and pursuing analysis. A fuller discussion of the results follow in the subsequent chapter “Discussion and Conclusion”.

6.1 Qualitative Content Analysis of Al-Jazeera

2014-2015

Data collection showed that the Kurdish female fighters framing during the peak of the war against ISIS in the late 2014 in Al-Jazeera has been focused on the age of the female fighters, their body description as well as their role as defenders. In an article published on 4 Nov 2014, the reporter has referred to the injured fighters who stay in the “house of wounded” , “where injured YPG/YPJ fighters released from hospital stay until they have fully recovered” (Al-Jazeera). As the article continues, the reporter mentions a female fighter who has laid down “motionless” watching TV news. However, after talking to the “motionless” fighter, she notes “[o]f course I will go back to the front line. I want to take revenge for all the fallen martyrs and to defend our homeland”. The importance of the “martyrs” and their sacrifices is obvious in the words of the fighters as we will see in the following paragraphs as well. The 20-year-old female fighter notes that, ”Ocalan's thoughts gave me the will to fight for my home country”. Another contradictory image given in this article is that, earlier in the article Ocalan has been mentioned as “the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) whose image adorns checkpoints, bases and front lines across the region..”. This shows his influential character in the region, and later, it is followed by describing YPG/YPJ as an “offshoot of the PKK”, which is listed as a terrorist organization by the US and EU. Although Ocalan’s effect frame was mentioned two times in the article, he and his activities had been described in two contradictory senses considering the terms employed by the reporter as well as the female fighter. For example, The Kurdish female combatant, regarding her participation in the YPJ says, "I don't
know what else I would have done if I hadn't joined the YPJ. My family raises their head in pride that someone from their family is fighting for and representing their country”. Fighting for her homeland and also, the way she can represent her country by defending it through struggles is supported by her family as she explains. However, the reporter of the article describes her health condition as “[w]ith burns covering the right side of her body, Isterik says she also lost hearing in her right ear”. This is how a combination of five frames, namely “body, defenders, martyrs, terrorist and Ocalan’s effect” could be found within this news article.

In another article published on 13 Dec 2014, the “age” frame is frequently repeated in the most of the lines of the article. Employing “underaged, teenage, and under 18” terms repeatedly, the article criticizes the YPJ/YPG committee for accepting underaged female fighters and letting them fight in the battlefield. Although YPG “issued a military order prohibiting the recruitment of people under the age of 18”, the reporter of the article claims that the Kurdish military “is filled with more than 20 teenage members of the YPJ, the female branch of the YPG”. The reporter describes the female fighters employing “body” and “age” frame”, as “[w]earing military uniforms and holding Kalashnikov rifles, the girls - all under 18 - say they are ready to take on ISIL”. A teenage fighter claims that “I came here because armed terrorists are trying to take over our land. Our land is our honor. Many martyrs [have] died trying to protect it”. That is how the reporter’s “age and body” frames and the fighter’s “martyrs and defenders” frames have been differently applied to describe the issue of the Kurdish female fighters’ participation and motivation to engage in the conflict. Later in the article, the reporter brings some information about the daily life of female fighters and their organization’s plans as follows:

“Dilocan's day begins at 5:30am with sports such as volleyball or karate, but the rest of the day is spent alternating between military and political training. The girls learn how to use light weapons, including handguns and Kalashnikovs, and they study the teachings of Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party leader” (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

The article has briefly mentioned the female fighters’ political agency and military preparation through these lines. Another frame that materializes in the articles is “martyrs” frame as another female fighter says “no matter how old I am, I'm ready. I'm not scared of going to the
frontline”. In spite of the female fighters’ youth and not having YPG/YPJ permission to go to the frontlines, they claim that they are not scared to fight in the battlefield.

2015-2019

September 2017 seems to have been an important time in Syrian Kurdistan since the Kurdish-led authorities of Northern Syria had organized an election to establish new governing foundations for the autonomous Syrian Kurdistan. Through an article published in 22 Sep 2017, “Ocalan’s effect” frame has been covered within some lines in the middle of the article. One of the Syrian Kurds says, "[w]e have strength, will, an army - everything, thanks to God, the YPG and the YPJ, ...... referring to the all-female militia affiliated to the YPG whose flag was flying at the polling station”. As citizens had gathered to vote in the regional election, they suggest that they see their power in YPG/YPJ to support them and lead the society in a way that “all ethnic and religious groups in northern Syria” could live together. In an explanation of the political structures existing in Northern Syria, the article refers to Ocalan teachings as follows:

“The political structures expected to emerge from the process are inspired by the ideas of Abdullah Ocalan, head of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), who is in jail in Turkey for leading a three-decade rebellion” (Al-Jazeera, 2017).

Another article published on 3 Feb 2018 reported the issue of the mutilation and filming of a Kurdish female fighter’s body by the Free Syrian Army. The article initially introduces the female fighter as “Barin Kobani is believed to have been a member of the all-female Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ)”. And later FSA is described as “The Free Syrian Army has been fighting alongside Turkish troops in an operation against the Syrian Kurdish armed group YPG in the Syrian enclave of Afrin”. Explaining about removal of the female fighter’s clothes and mutilation of parts of her body in the film, the role of “body” frame is obvious within the article. Moreover, without talking about YPG/YPJ, and their political agency and motivation behind struggles within the oppressive regimes of Syria and Turkey and also their struggle with IS, the article’s finishing lines state that “Turkey considers the YPG a "terrorist" group”. As we
see, the “Ocalan’ effect, body and terrorist” frames have been employed for representing the Kurdish female fighters in the articles during 2015-2019 in Al-Jazeera.

6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis of ANF

2011-2014

An article published on 23 Dec 2013 in ANF specifically describes a prominent human rights lawyer’s trip to Rojava. Ms. Margaret Owen is introduced as the director of Widows’ for Peace and Democracy (WPD) and a founder member of Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), and a Kurdish people supporter. She has traveled to Rojava for a “fact-finding mission”. In this article, the concept of defending the role of the Kurdish women fighters is repeatedly mentioned both in the words given by Ms. Owen and the reporter. In the beginning lines of the article, the reporter claims that “Women have been particularly active as frontline fighters in the struggle against both regime forces and armed al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the region…”. In the next paragraphs, Ms. Owen identifies the women “... as incredibly brave and innovative defenders and providers of essential services....”. As we see, both the reporter and Ms. Owen’s words are aligned in the way they talk about the Kurdish women battalion. Also, the concepts related to the Ocalan ideology are found within the article. In the middle of the article, the reporter relates the Kurdish women efforts to establishing an autonomous Kurdish region:

“The active role women have played in securing peace and self-rule in the Kurdish regions has been largely ignored by the ‘official’ Western-backed opposition in the Syrian conflict, in part because calls for Kurdish rights and autonomy in a post-Assad Syria”.

Neither the reporter nor Ms. Owen have not obviously mentioned the ideology which rules in the Kurdish region of Syria.

The other article published two days after 25 Sep 2013, refers mainly to the women fighters’ “defending” role, as well as their political and military engagement which are considered as “Ocalan’s effect” in this thesis. In an article titled “women in Efrin”, the reporter brings the proportion of women who are active in safety services stating, “[w]omen in West
Kurdistan also have a remarkable part in public security and safety, making up 70 percent of the Revolutionary Youth's Movement and managing their own public order unit in the city”. In the last paragraph, the reporter points at women fighters as follows:

“Their role in the protection of West Kurdistan is also of importance, militants of the West Kurdistan Women's Defense Units (YPJ) alongside People's Defense Units (YPG) are taking place at all fronts in the fight against armed gang groups”.

So, we can conclude that the two main frames within this article are “defenders and Ocalan’s effect”.

On 25th of Dec 2013, “the Rojava Revolution in 2013: the success of the YPG” was published on ANF. As the title suggests, the article primarily focuses on the achievements of the YPG and YPJ and one of its chapters is specifically dedicated to YPJ under the headline “the formation of the Women’s Defence Units (YPJ) was announced”. In one paragraph, it gives a brief explanation of founding YPJ in Rojava. The reporter notes that women have been active in YPG at first, and later they decided to establish their own organization. It also points at the name of one of the “training camps for women under the name of “Martyr Şîhan Defense Academies””, in which it uses a combination of “martyr”, “defence” and “academy”, which all together are amongst the important concepts related to Rojava Revolution and Ocalan’s ideals. In the first chapter, the reporter talks about the cities, towns and villages that have been liberated by YPG. It also refers to the women’s organizations in the region as follows:

“It also provided a space for the political organization of women in the area of defense: five female brigades were formed and the resistance they exhibited and the victories they achieved had a significant effect in the regional and international arena”.

Again the defending and resisting concepts have depicted the women participating in the wars for cleansing the region from gangs. As mentioned above, it is a long article that discusses the victories of YPG and YPJ hand in hand in 2013. Employing words such as “push back”, “repulse” and “respond attacks”, the article used “defense” as the most repeated concept.
reporter emphasizes that the YPG and YPJ fighters have not started the wars; however, they have only been defending the cities and people by responding to the enemies’ attacks.

2014-2015

In the 8th day of IS attacking Kobane, 23 Sep 2014, an article was published on ANF entitled “Enver Muslim: we will step up Kobane resistance” which mainly talks about the Kobane people’s resistance against IS. Enver Muslim has been the prime minister of Kobane canton in that time, and in this article he emphasizes the resistance which all the people of all ages has shown for defeating IS. He even denies that people have fled from Kobane and reiterates that “the people are at the front fighting together with YPG and YPJ fighters against the attacks of ISIS”. Obviously, the main theme of the article is “resistance” which originates from Ocalan’s teachings and the Syrian Kurds’ motto “resistance if life”. According to Ocalan’s ideology, they believe that resistance is the key to success in the liberation of the society. Throughout the article, Mr. Muslim frequently refers to people, the youth and women’s “resistance” and admits that their resistance will result in winning the war.

An article titled “15 young women join YPJ ranks” was published on 5 Dec 2014. As the title represents, it is about 15 women who join YPJ ranks after completing one month “military training”. The reporter claims that “the trainees were provided with military, ideological and self-defense training based on the sense of democratic nation building and free individuality”. The reporter also refers to the speech given by a YPJ commander - Adar Servin - in the day of the military ceremony held for the 15 trainees. She asserts that women have gained the stance whereby they can “lead the Revolution in Rojava”. Since it is clear that what ideologies are behind YPJ, it is likely to conclude that the concepts of jineology and democratic confederalism have been amongst the teachings given to the trainees. Besides, the concept of resistance is also mentioned in the words of Ms. Servin which stresses the “Ocalan’s effect”. She admits that “the YPG/YPJ forces and the Kurdish people are writing an epic of resistance and bravery with the struggle ... “. Thus, the whole article is focused on “Ocalan’s effect” frame by highlighting the concepts related to it.
Five days later in the same year and month, an article titled “YPG/YPJ offensives against ISIS continue” is published on ANF, that reviews the responding attacks by YPG and YPJ in some cities in Rojava. The article exclusively brings information about the attacks between the two sides, Kurdish forces and ISIS. Since ISIS had taken some Kurdish cities in Rojava under control, the Kurdish forces aimed at taking the cities back and cleansing the regions from remaining enemies. In this sense, the only frame within the article is “defenders” that shows the Kurdish forces are struggling for taking their land back from the hands of the enemy, namely IS. Some examples of these attacks in the article are: “YPG/YPJ attacks and offensives against positions occupied by the ISIS are continuing”; in the city of Kobane: “On the eastern front, YPG/YPJ fighters launched two offensives…”; or in the city of Serekaniye: “One other offensive by YPG/J targeted the ISIS groups…”. This is the way the reporter informs the readers about the latest attacks by YPG/YPJ on IS remaining strongholds in the region.

2015-2019

In an interview with ANF, an Executive Council Committee Member of PKK argues about the Kurdish people’s new phase of struggle. In 19 Dec 2015, he claims that the Kurdish people’s resistance is the same as it was in the 1920's when they were struggling against the Turkish state because of their will for free living. The Kurdish movement along with its progress and challenges is the main discussion within the article. He does not specifically talk about the Kurdish female fighters in this long article. He points at one of the so called female martyrs in Rojava. The interviewee asserts “the voice of Kurdish youth in Kobanê, which resonated all around the globe in the person of Arin Mirkan…”. Arin Mirkan carried a suicide bomb attack against IS terrorists (Staal, 2015. P. 15) and is of high respect in the Syrian Kurdish society (Toivanen and Baser, 2016. P. 305; Deutsche Welle, 2017).

In a long article published on 4 April 2019, ANF has conducted an interview with the YPJ’s spokesperson, Nesrin Abdullah. As the title of the article suggests, “six years of YPJ: growing and changing society” which is specifically about YPJ, its history and foundation, developments, challenges and goals. The terms related to the “Ocalan’s effect” are frequently repeated throughout the article such as: strategic role, politically organizing, revolution, women’s
academies, military and academic training, which all of them referred to women joining YPJ. For instance, in the beginning lines of the article, MS. Abdullah comments that “Women play a strategic role in the freedom and independence of peoples and in the peace and justice of society”. Or later, she says that “women's defenders play a leading role in this revolution”, employing both “Ocalan’s effect” and “defenders” frames. She also specifically refers to Ocalan as “he has spent years educating the women's liberation ideology in the population”, and his major influence on the women and the society. Regarding the foundation of YPJ, she notes that it has been constructed and organized on “scientific basis” for which “the history of women worldwide and Kurdish women has been researched and interpreted”. After realizing that they need to establish a self-defense unit for women, they discovered that such a unit requires “ideology” which led to “women’s liberation ideology”. Training and educating women have started since the very beginning of the YPJ’s foundation which was declared on 4 April 2013. She asserts that:

“At our 2013 conference, we decided to set up military academies. We have seen the need for both ideological and military training. There were already academies before, but they were mixed. We wanted to start our own women's academies”.

She clearly discusses the organization of the YPJ and its ideological and political basis which has existed since 2013. The next repeated concepts in the article are “defense” and “martyrs” equally. She claims that “since 2012, the YPJ has been involved in defense in all areas”, describing their struggles with the Syrian regime, IS, Al-Nusra, Turkish state and other Islamic groups attacking the region. She refers to the women engaging in the war as “numerous women from Rojava joined the liberation struggle and many of them have fallen martyrs”. Thus, a combination of “Ocalan’s effect”, “defenders” and “martyrs” exists within this article published in late 2019.

Later on 23 April 2019, a short article is published under the title of “the Munich court acquits activist in PYD case”. In the beginning of the article, it is stated that a German court has stopped prosecuting the German and Kurdish activists who had carried “photographs of Kurdish People’s Leader Abdullah Ocalan and PYD/YPG/YPJ flags” in a march protesting against the
invasion of Afrin by the Turkish state and its allies. In the same article it is mentioned that a filmmaker named Uli Bez was acquitted after the German court questioned her because of “posting a YPJ flag on her Facebook account”. The court noted that “posting a YPJ flag was not proven to have a connection with the banned organization PKK”. Since PKK is on the list of terrorist organizations in the EU and the USA, we could consider the only frame within this article as “terrorists”.

6.3 Qualitative Content Analysis of RT

2014-2015

The headline of an article published on 7th Oct 2014 in RT begins with one of Ocalan’s teachings regarding the equality of a human concept called “haval”. However, later in this article, the reporter has written this motto wrongly as “hava” which is not the only mistake in this article. In the beginning lines, the reporter has wrongly introduced “the female battalion fighting IS” under the name of YPG instead of YPJ. These kinds of mistakes are more frequent in RT as compared to Al-Jazeera. In the following lines, the article mentions one of the responsibilities of Kurdish women which is occupying the lookout post to “monitor all IS activities in Iraq and Syria”. Their activities during wartime challenge the orientalist picture of Middle-Eastern women which has been discussed earlier in the thesis. One of the women, Rosarine, has told RT that “The first time I fired I was scared, but my love for my country was bigger than my fear”. The women are thus framed as driven by a strong motivation to defend their homeland. The article mentioned that Kurdish women fighters received full support of their families due to their battle “to protect the Kurdish land and its people”. As RT claims, “many” of the female battalion “... will remain soldiers after the war with IS is over as the battle for an independent Kurdish state, Kurdistan, is underway.

Another article titled “Dead or alive? Fate of iconic Kurdish female fighter ‘beheaded by ISIS’ wrapped in mystery” was published on 29 Oct 2014 on RT. The “body” frame has been used in the title of the article by the term “beheaded”. The article discusses one of the Kurdish female fighter’s whereabouts and wonders whether she is alive or not as IS earlier published a photo that IS jihadists had claimed that they have beheaded the woman, named Rehana. She had
become the international media sensation because it was spread that she “has killed more than 100 IS terrorists in Kobani”. The frame of “body” is frequently repeated throughout the article by words such as, “beheaded”, “executed” and “woman’s severed head”. Moreover, in the ending lines of the article, the reporter introduces her as “Rehana is one of several hundred women fighting in an Independent Women's Battalion known as the YPJ, fighting for the Kurdish Peshmerga militia”. The reporter identifies YPJ as an Independent Women’s battalion instead of using the real name “women’s defense units”. Moreover, the Kurdish peshmerga militia is the military force of Iraqi Kurdistan not Syria; in the meantime, YPJ and Peshmerga are two different units with different ideologies. Although “defenders” frame has been applied in this article, its explanation includes errors which could misinform the audience.

2015-2019

“British woman fighting against ISIS in Syria says MI5 targeting her family” is the title of an article produced on 27 March 2017. It specifically talks about a British female who had joined the YPJ and after a while she claims:

“her mother, father, stepfather and sister have been visited by counterterrorism police at their homes in Prescot and Chorley. Their laptops and phones were confiscated and have still not been returned, a month after they were seized” by MI5 - the United Kingdom’s Security Service -.

Kimberley Taylor, 27, the British female fighter had become “part of the Rojava Revolution” in Syrian Kurdistan. She has claimed that she “would die for this”. Describing that this fight “…is for the whole world, for humanity and all oppressed people, everywhere”. She has interpreted the actions done by the “British establishment” as “This is not about controlling terrorist threats, this is about frightening people who want to change for the world and Britain, too.” The British female fighter’s words conveys the “Ocalan’s effect and martyrs” frames. Some of the examples for the two frames are fighting for humanity, changing the world, and dying for her goal. She
claimed that struggling against oppressive systems was crucial to her. That is why she wanted to risk her life by joining the conflict.

However, the reporter in this article claims that “The Metropolitan Police has warned that anyone who travels to Syria to fight could be arrested and questioned when they return”. As we see here, two contradictory frames exist in the fighters and reporter’s words, “Ocalan’s effect, martyrs and terrorists” frames that each conveys different senses and meanings of the existing reality related to the Rojava Revolution. The fighter’s words could be understood as she is fighting for a meaningful and valuable goal which is worth sacrificing her life for, but the words related to the British security Service conveys the message of labelling the participants of the war in Syria as terrorists who will be questioned and prosecuted by the British security agency (RT).

The next selected article reported on 19 March 2018 on RT is dedicated to a British woman who had joined YPJ and had been killed in an operation carried out by Turkey in Afrin. She has been described as “adamant, determined and idealistic” by her father. It has been claimed that she “is the first British woman to have died in Syria fighting with YPG/YPJ forces”. Both her father and a YPJ source noted that she “…even dyed her blonde hair black so as to appear less conspicuous as a westerner”. Describing her appearance and what changes she had made to her hair color, the “body” frame is repeated two times in the article. A combination of “defenders” frame, “martyrs” and “Ocalan’s effect” frames could be found in the words of her father as well as the YPJ commander, Nasrin Abdullah:

“[Campbell’s] martyrdom is a great loss to us because with her international soul, her revolutionary spirit, which demonstrated the power of women, she expressed her will in all her actions… On behalf of the Women’s Defense Units YPJ, we express our deepest condolences to [her] family and we promise to follow the path she took up. We will represent her in the entirety of our struggles” (Nasrin Abdullah).

Also, her father, Dirk Campbell has said:
“Anna .... wanted to create a better world. She wasn’t fighting when she died, she was engaged in a defensive action against the Turkish incursion... she had dedicated her life to the fight against “unjust power and privilege”.

These words are understood as “Ocalan’s effect” frame considering the YPJ and its ideological teachings besides military training to the fighters. However, the very last sentence of the article finishes with the “terrorists” frame. “Other Britons who left the UK to take up arms against ISIS have been arrested on terrorism charges upon their return”. The considerable distinction between the words given by reporters/news outlets and the words given by the female fighters/their family members frames them and their participation in the war against IS differently, which will be discussed in the following chapter, Discussion and Conclusion.

The analysis of the three media outlets shows that each of the media has materialized a frequency of diverse frames in their news regarding the issue of the Kurdish female fighters. To sum up, Al-Jazeera has employed “martyrs” and “body” frames, and also more often utilized “terrorists” frame to compare with the two other media. On the other hand, in ANF, the pro-Kurdish media, the Kurdish women fighters have been represented by the “Ocalan’s effect”, “martyrs” and “defenders” frames that are related to their own agency and ideology as well. Lastly, “Ocalan’s effect” and “defenders” frames are found within the news articles published on RT as investigated. Now a more thorough analysis and discussion is presented in the next chapter, Discussion and Conclusion.
7. Discussion and Conclusion

Having analyzed the news articles in the three media, 4 in Al-Jazeera, 4 in RT and 9 in ANF; with defining frames utilized to describe the Kurdish women fighters, it is time to discuss the findings of the analysis. The research question of the thesis is: “how are the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane framed in the Arabic, Kurdish and Russian media before, during and after the war against IS”.

One of the findings through the analysis revealed that in addition to the reporters/media actors, there were other voices in the news articles that represented the Kurdish women fighters through their speeches, interviews and words. They mainly included fighters/YPJ ranks, citizens of Rojava, family members of the women fighters, a human rights lawyer and representatives of a German court. In order to organize the findings in a comprehensive manner, I decided to set two main groups of representatives, namely fighters and reporters. In so doing, fighters, YPJ rank, citizens of Rojava and family members of fighters will be categorized as the “fighters”. On the other hand, reporters, human rights lawyer and the German court are considered as the “reporters” group. The notion that the human rights lawyer and the German court both are from the Western world, and to see whether they hold orientalist views towards women fighters or not, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

One of the frames within 17 articles is “Ocalan’s effect”. Discussed earlier in the Framebook section, the “Ocalan’s effect” mainly refers to the teachings and beliefs written or taught by Ocalan during recent years, and also his effects on the people of the region. The frames of “Ocalan’s effect”, “defenders” and “martyrs” and all other relevant concepts such as resistance, revolution and coexistence which are described in the Creating a Framebook section of the thesis, are related to the values advocated by Ocalan including jineology. In this sense, the words by Ms. Owen, the human rights lawyer interviewed on ANF, “No Women No Peace”, is related to Ocalan’s ideas on establishing a free society. “taking revenge for all fallen martyrs” and “our land is our honor” (Al-Jazeera), to “scientific basis” for the foundation of YPJ and “military and academic training” of women (ANF), to “I would die for this” and “fight against
unjust power” (RT) are all referring to the principles and values existing in YPJ, their agency, and their academies which follow jineology for creating a democratic society.

When it comes to women’s participation in war, revolution or resistance armies, ANF suggests that 70 percent of women in Rojava are engaged in “public security” service and “Revolutionary Youth’s Movement”. This notion corresponds with what Ferguson and Naylor (2016) claim, regarding feminist theory on war and militarization, that women come out in several studies as more willing to participate in revolutionary struggles, challenging colonial arrangements, and fighting for human rights. As Ms. Abdullah in one of the articles in ANF comments on the engagement of Kurdish women in struggles before the foundation of YPJ, and later organization of YPJ with searching for an ideology, one of the mentioned aspects of feminist theory on war and militarization in the Theory section can be found. Disch and Hawkesworth (2016) refer to feminist theory and note that “feminism would not exist without political struggles for women’s empowerment”. From the perspective of M.s Abdullah, that is what YPJ has also experienced when they first struggled and later organized themselves in an ideological unit called YPJ (ANF).

Ms Owen further claims in the aforementioned article that “[m]y visit will focus in principle on the women and girls, both as victims of the conflict and in need of urgent humanitarian aid…”. She later adds that she will search for ways whereby Kurdish women can access “constructively the various international UN human rights mechanisms”. Ms Owen is depicted, quoted and thus represented in a way that has a degree of orientalism in it, in the sense that as Said (1978) claims Westerners believe that people in the East are in need of receiving help from their counterparts in the West (see also Kollarova, 2016). Moreover, we can consider the “body” frame carrying an orientalist view due to mentioning of “beheaded” or “injured bodies” of women fighters. This notion mainly refers to the “victimized” representations of the women by employing terms such as a “motionless” fighter, staying in “the house of wounded” to recovery, “mutilated” female Kurdish fighter (Al-Jazeera), or “beheaded by IS” (RT). The concepts related to “body” are found within Al-Jazeera and RT six times. On the other hand, both Ocalan’s teachings and feminist theory on militarization and war are aimed at challenging the traditional roles given to women as “victims or peacekeepers”, and also challenging the
“colonial” deals (feminist theory on militarization and war) which are aligned to orientalist views (Said, 1978). The Kurdish women’s participating in the frontlines fighting (Al-Jazeera), attending military and political training academies (ANF), occupying lookout post to “monitor IS activities in Iraq and Syria” indicate that these orientalist views are not necessarily true.

Turning to war and peace journalism aspects in the news articles, peace journalism will be presented first followed by war journalism aspects in the second paragraph. Some of the views of peace journalism such as peacemaking and changing society, giving voice to the voiceless, and post-war developments’ stories can be found in the media analyzed (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014). For example, reporters’ interviews with citizens of Rojava, family members of the martyrs and fighters’ themselves could be found in the three media. Giving voice to all parts of the conflict seems to be impossible in the case of IS, because they did not welcome journalists and reporters and even have executed some foreign journalists in regions under their control (see e.g. CNN, 2014). But giving voice to YPJ and Kurdish fighters appeared in the three media for instance "[w]e have strength, will, an army - everything, thanks to God, the YPG and the YPJ” (a Rojava citizen on Al-Jazeera), “the YPG/YPJ forces and the Kurdish people are writing an epic of resistance and bravery with the struggle ... ” (a YPJ commander on ANF), “...is for the whole world, for humanity and all oppressed people, everywhere” (a YPJ fighter on RT). These examples point at “giving voice to voiceless” and “people-oriented” potentials of peace journalism. Also, the article on ANF titled “Six years of YPJ” mainly discusses the way that YPJ has evolved during recent years. The challenges and limitations they have faced followed by engaging in struggles and establishing their own units, changes they have made on the mentality of both men and women, and developments they have achieved during these years. These aspects can be understood as solution-oriented, truth-oriented, changing, discovering backgrounds and contexts of war, and post-war developments telling, which are amongst the ideas on peace journalism.

On the other hand, war journalism aspects are also visible in some of the news articles. If we consider terrorism as a concept related to war journalism as a means of focusing on the enemy as evil, or propaganda-oriented, we can refer to some statements in the news articles as war journalism reporting. For example, Al-jazeera notes that PKK is on the list of terrorist
organizations, and then describes YPG/YPJ as an “offshoot of the PKK”. In another article, Al-Jazeera notes that "Turkey considers the YPG a "terrorist" group". In both articles, the reporter points at YPG/YPJ as terrorist organizations. By employing the concept of “terrorism”, the media consider a certain group - YPJ - as a “threat” to society (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2014, P. 70).

The notion of “selection” and “salience” in framing (Entman, 1993) applies in Al-Jazeera news articles which have focused on the age of the female fighters. One of the articles is only centered on the age of the female fighters. Al-Jazeera has conducted interviews with “teenager” girls who indicate that it is not important for them how old they are, they are “ready to go to the frontlines”. As mentioned in the war and peace journalism theory section, “simple descriptions” is one of the aspects of war journalism. Al-Jazeera simply has criticized YPG for accepting “young” girls without covering their reasons for engaging in the battlefield, their family background and their socio-economic conditions which may have affected their decisions to engage in the war.

It should be considered that the presented discussion of the results is not a comparative analysis of the news articles within the three media. The reason is that the number of the articles found in the three media are not equal and the number of ANF articles analysed is two times more than the articles found in Al-Jazeera and RT. So, I can not refer to my analysis as a comparative study. However, the fact that enough relevant news articles in Al-Jazeera and RT during the decided timespan could not be found is a finding in itself. As shown in several reports and media accounts, Qatar and Russia both were politically engaged in the war of Kobane against IS (see e.g. Middle East Policy Council, 2017; Council on Foreign Relations, 2019; Time, 2015). However, there seems to be limited coverage of the Kurdish female fighters in the two countries’ internationally recognized media, Al-Jazeera and RT.

7.1 Conclusion

To sum up, after IS attacks on Syria and subsequently, Rojava region in 2014, the issue of the Kurdish female fighters gained international media interest. Most of the well-known Western media such as BBC, CNN, the Washington Post and Reuters covered these women.
Subsequently, some of the scholars such as Shahvisi (2018) and Toivanen and Baser (2016) analyzed the ways the Kurdish women battalion have been represented in the Western media. The non-Western media also represented these women to some extent but there is a limited literature on analyzing non-Western representation in comparison with the Western ones. This thesis is a contribution to this issue by answering the research question: “how are the Kurdish female fighters of Kobane framed in Arabic, Kurdish and Russian media before, during and after the war against ISIS?”.

Turning to the findings of the thesis, having created my frames inductively, by exploring approximately 70 articles, I qualitatively studied 17 articles, 4 in Al-Jazeera, 9 in ANF and 4 in RT. I found results showing that Al-Jazeera and RT represented the Kurdish women fighters in less numbers than ANF and this caused my analysis not to be conducted by an equal number of news articles in each of the three media. As we can see, the total number of the Kurdish women fighters’ representations with 22 diverse key words in Al Jazeera and RT were 415 and +300 (the way RT shows the total number of articles on its website) news articles respectively during a nine-year-period. The two international media represented these women with more simple descriptions rather than mentioning their agency and ideological reasons for engaging in struggles. Orientalist views such as defining women as victims or weak bodies in war can be found in Al-Jazeera and RT, by referring to the injured or beheaded women fighters by IS. Moreover, challenging the traditional and patriarchal views given to women by creating women’s own self-defense unit in some cases has been framed as terrorist-acts in Al-Jazeera and RT.

On the other hand, ANF devoted 6998 articles to the issues related to the Kurdish female fighters till the day of doing this research, and framed the women fighters by means of other aspects such as their foundation, history, developments, trainings etc. As stated, the larger number of published articles is due to the pro-Kurdish character of ANF as a media outlet. Nevertheless, given the material analysed in this thesis, ANF has to a larger extent shown interest in women’s empowerment-acts such as self-organization and self-liberation. Also, peace journalism aspects are explicit in ANF reporting and has made ANF news articles more variant.
The three media had a clear point in common regarding peace journalism which was “giving voice to voiceless”, and in almost all of the news articles, there were interviews conducted with the women fighters.
Reference List


Telegraph News, 2016. *The bravery of the Kurds has been ignored by the West for too long*. [online] Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/30/the-bravery-of-the-kurds-has-been-ignored-by-the-west-for-too-long/> [Accessed 1 June 2019].

