**A Two Front Battle  
*A feminist perspective on the Dutch discourse on the two folded battle of the Kurdish Women’s Movement***

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**Summary**

For decades the Kurdish Women’s Movement, like many other Kurdish resistance movements, was perceived as a terrorist organization by western countries. The nation of Kurdistan is not acknowledged by sovereign states and the Kurdish resistance movements battle in order be acknowledged as a state. Many Kurdish women have enlisted in the Kurdish women’s army and alongside men they battle for an acknowledged nation.   
 Since the emergence of the Islamic State in the Middle East, the battle for an acknowledged Kurdistan is not the only priority of the Kurdish movements. The Kurdish armies are namely battling the extremist organization in an armed conflict. And so are the Kurdish female combatants.   
 Many western media have been covering the story of the Kurdish women. They are perceived as amazons of the free world and are deemed as heroines in the media. The media coverage of this battle has thus changed. Therefore the following question will be central in this thesis: : To what extent are (online) media discourses in the Netherlands about the Kurdish Women’s Movement’s combatants, informed by orientalist and ethnocentric ideas about female emancipation within the Islam?  
 The coverage of the battle of the Kurdish women by Dutch media is analyzed by conducting a discourse analysis on five Dutch media articles. From these articles it became clear that the Dutch public needed a counter story which could counter the perceived barbaric actions of the Islamic State. This counter story was found in the stories of the Kurdish female combatants.   
 The Kurdish female combatants are indeed battling the Islamic State, but are also problematizing the notion of patriarchy in the society in which they live. The concepts of feminism and emancipation are used as a tool by Dutch media in order to create a western understanding of the motivations of the female Kurdish combatants. The Kurdish female combatants can namely be placed in the category of the Other. Before their battle they were perceived as a group which was outside of modernity, but since they are fighting against the Islamic State they are perceived as bearers of western values.   
 The discourse about the Kurdish female combatants which is created by the Dutch media is one of western valued feminism, emancipation and agency. It is however often forgotten that the Kurdish women have a feminism of their own they do not need the ethnocentric notion of feminism in order to create a feminist state of their own.

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**Introduction**

In November 2014 I attended the Remote Control Conference at Utrecht University. During this conference the artist Jonas Staal presented the creative and political project the New World Summit. This project focuses on giving voice to excluded organizations in ‘alternative parliaments’. The New World Summit “opposes the misuse of the concept of democracy for expansionist, military and colonial gains to which the organization refers as “democratism” (New World Summit 2015).” In other words, democracy is often perceived as one of the most ideal governmental ideologies, but the New World Summit questions this.   
 One of the organizations which were presented at the conference was the alternative parliament of the Kurdish Women’s Movement. Staal explained how these women are fighting for an acknowledged Kurdistan, like many male Kurds. But the Kurdish Women’s Movement distinguishes itself from the ‘mainstream’ Kurdish movements, because they also problematize the patriarchal society in which they live. The members of the Kurdish Women’s Movement want an equal and less patriarchal society, in which gender equality is provided (Staal, 2014).   
 In order to understand where the Kurdish Women’s Movement has its origins, it is important to explain the Kurdish question. Kurdistan is known as the biggest stateless ‘nation’ in the world (Afsin, 2015). The Kurdish community is widespread among different countries, namely Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey (Van Bruinessen 1999). It has no country of its own, but is shattered amongst different nations. The nation of Kurdistan is not acknowledged by other sovereign nations. On the website of the PKK, a Kurdish resistance movement it is stated that since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds needed to struggle for their right to exist (Afsin 2015).  
 The fact that the Kurdish community was and is never acknowledged means that they have no recognized national identity (Afsin, 2015). On the website of the PKK, the Kurdish resistance army (<http://www.pkkonline.com>) the following is stated: “In Kurdistan to be Kurdish was banned, to be Kurdish was made to be a source of shame. (Afsin 2015).” According to the website of the Kurdish organization many members of the Kurdish community did not accept this fate and they resisted the oppressing powers that did not acknowledge their existence.   
 Not only men resisted the oppression and prosecution of their community, many women did too. Therefore women’s movements emerged to fight for the acknowledgment of their nation. It is important to notice here that there is not one Kurdish Women’s Movement, but there are many. These movements however do have overarching ideals for which they are fighting. The following ideals are foundational for the Women’s Liberation Movements: patriotism,the principle of free thought and free will, a sharing of life based on freedom and the principle of organization, the principle of resistance (Afsin, 2015). The Kurdish women are not only battling for an acknowledged Kurdistan, they are also aiming for a gender equal Kurdistan in which women have the same rights as men.   
 Since the emergence of the Islamic State in the Middle East, the ideal of the Kurdish Women’s Movement to create a gender equal Kurdistan is threatened. The rise of the Islamic State has endangered the stability in the Middle East and again the Kurds are prosecuted. The organization does not recognize the Kurdish community as a ‘real’ or ‘pure’ Islamic community and therefore they are not allowed to live in the territory of the Islamic State (Rashid 2015, 1). In the Dutch media it is claimed that the Kurdish Women’s Movement and other Kurdish armies have decided to battle against the Islamic State and resist their will by fighting them on the battlefields (Hofman, 2014).   
 The story of female Kurdish combatants has interested many western media as well. Many articles were written about the organization and the female warriors are portrayed as emancipated free women, who fight against the biggest “monster” that the Islam has ever provided (Bahara, 2015).   
 It is however often neglected by western media that the Kurdish Women’s Movement has a history of its own. This history is not covered by western media. Especially western media perceived Kurdish movements, like the Kurdish Women’s Movement, as terrorist organizations which threatened the western ideals of democracy. I believe that ever since the rise of IS the discourse about these movements seems to have changed. The struggles of the Kurdish movements have been addressed by the western media in order to critique the Islam. Therefore I am interested in investigating the following research question in this thesis:

To what extent are (online) media discourses in the Netherlands about the Kurdish Women’s Movement’s combatants, informed by orientalist and ethnocentric ideas about female emancipation within the Islam?

In order to do a thorough analysis of the representation of the Kurdish female combatants in western media, I will focus on the current coverage of the battle of the Kurdish women in the Dutch (online) media. The decision to analyze Dutch media articles will be elaborately explained in the chapter methodology. The following sub-questions will guide my analysis and will divide my thesis into chapters.

* Who are the Kurdish female warriors and what are their goals?
* How do Dutch media represent the Kurdish female combatants?
* What is ethnocentrism and to what extent is it linked to the question of the female Kurdish warriors?
* How can ethnocentrism be related to the notion of emancipation?

The aim of this analysis is to create a better understanding of the implications of the Dutch media discourse on the Kurdish female warriors. Therefore it is important to map the change of discourse that has occurred in the past few years about the Kurdish Women’s Movement, with regards to the western ideals about democracy and values.   
 In order to answer the research question it is important to understand the historical background of the Kurdish question and the Kurdish Women’s Movement. This historical background will be provided in the next chapter ‘Struggle for Existence’. The position of this research within the current scientific debate will be elaborated upon in the chapter ‘Theoretical Framework’. Within the following chapter ‘Methodology’, it will be explained how the research in this thesis is conducted. In the following four chapters the analysis of the Dutch media articles will be conducted.

**The struggle for existence**

***The Kurdish Question***

On the website of one of the Kurdish resistance movements, the PKK (<http://www.pkkonline.com>), Kurdistan is described as the biggest stateless nation in the world. The Kurds and their nation have a history of struggling for their existence (Afsin 2015).  
 For centuries the Kurds have been persecuted by governments that did not want them to belong to their communities. In order to understand how this persecution has taken place, it is important to understand the history of the Kurds since the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The empire emerged in 1453, with the conquest of Constantinople. The Ottoman Turks had conquered the area and consolidated their power by expanding their territories and by creating alliances (Noble et al. 2011, 312). The Ottoman Empire had an enormous amount of land; it covered three continents from Croatia to Egypt and Iraq (Noble et al. 2011, 312). The Kurdish community lived in the regions of the Ottoman Empire. It was widespread under the countries which were conquered by the Ottoman troupes. The Kurdish community is spread over four countries, namely Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran (Van Bruinessen 1999).   
 During its existence the Ottoman Empire grew more and more strength. The power of the Ottoman Turks was based on several factors. The first was the loyalty and efficiency of the Sultan’s troops, named the Janissaries. These troops existed out of Christians who were forced to convert to the Islam and were trained in Turkish language and customs. They did not belong to the Christian community anymore, but were also outsiders in the Muslim community. Therefore their only way of integrating into the society was to stay loyal to the sultan (Noble et al. 2011, 312).   
 One of the other factors which created a stable and powerful Ottoman Empire was the fact that the community was founded on a Millet-system, in which religious freedom was entitled. In ‘mainstream’ history it is perceived that the Millet-system of the Ottoman Empire provided all non-Muslim Millets of religious freedom and that they were given the chance to create a community (Mojab 2003, 21). It is thus often assumed that the Kurds in the Ottoman Empire thus had a relatively safe life.   
 Even though the Millet-system created a relatively safe environment for the Kurds, the persecution of the community already started. According to Sharhzad Mojab the ideal of a pluralistic and tolerant society has been a mainstream history myth. She argues:

If we look at the history of the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of the Armenian and Assyrian Christians and even Muslim Kurds, the claim about the pluralism of the Ottoman Empire is nothing more than an invention (Mojab 2003, 21).

According to Mojab the Ottoman Empire has massacred multiple ethnic and religious groups in massive genocides. One of these communities is the Kurdish community. Even in the perceived pluralistic system of the Ottoman Empire the Kurds were not safe (Mojab 2003, 21).   
 This already early persecution of the Kurdish community set the tone for many genocides and conflicts that would be conducted in the future. According to Martin van Bruinessen, all states in which the Kurds live, have known their conflicts with the Kurdish community. All these conflicts were perceived as ethnic conflicts, but van Bruinessen argues that the Kurds are not battling against other ethnic groups, they are fighting the persecution that has been inflicted upon them by nation states which do not acknowledge them (Van Bruinessen 1999). The Kurdish question is thus not predominantly an ethnic one, but moreover it must be perceived as a political struggle in which the Kurds oppose nation states.   
 In the contemporary history the Kurdish community was persecuted in horrendous ways by the nation states which not acknowledged them. The persecution of the Kurds did not stop after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, as Sharhzad Mojab argues the massacres and genocides were conducted to the Kurdish community on a large scale until at least 1988 (Mojab 2003, 21).   
 The constant oppression of the Kurds by nation states provoked resistance from the Kurdish community. One of the most famous Kurdish resistance organizations was founded in 1978 in Turkey, and is known as the PKK. The Kurds were ready to resist the oppressing governments. On the website of the PKK, PKK-online the following is stated about how the Kurds reacted to the constant negation of their existence.

This led to a struggle for existence, while existing. It is for this reason that only to be born in the midst of this history forces upon you a constant mode of resistance in which great sacrifices are made (Afsin 2015).

Thus the Kurds have a history of a constant struggle for existence. The organization wanted to fight enemies from outside, i.e. nation states, but also battled against enemies from within, i.e. Kurds who collaborated with the government (Van Bruinessen 1999). The PKK used violent actions in order to receive acknowledgement for their existence. They organized themselves in armed militias and conducted a guerilla war against enemies from outside and enemies from within (Van Bruinessen 1999). A consequence of the Kurdish battle against nation states and its other enemies, was that the Kurds were and even are perceived as enemies of the state, in other words as terrorists (Van Bruinessen 1999).   
 This position of the Kurdish resistance movement is elaborately explained on the website of the PKK. According to the PKK-online the movement was perceived as: “the most violent terrorist organization in the world (Özcan 2006, 8).” The resistance of the Kurdish community is perceived as an illegitimate pursuit for independence and acknowledgement.   
 The Kurdish question proves to be a complex one. Since the start of the 15th century the Kurds have struggled for their existence. The struggle however did not only stay within the parameters of ‘The Kurds against the State”. Within the community another group called for acknowledgment, namely the Kurdish women.

***The Rise and Existence of the Kurdish Women’s Movement***

During the genocidal campaigns of nation states against the Kurds, women were often victims of rape, murder and as Mojab uses the word, of ‘gendercide’ (Mobjab 2003, 21).The women were attacked, because of their ethnicity, but their gender made them even more vulnerable for gender related violence, like stated above.   
 The conflicts between the Kurds and nation states unleashed more violence against women. Therefore the resistance against this form of violence grew. Kurdish Women’s Movements aimed to protect the rights of the Kurdish women within these conflicts (Mojab 2003, 24). But according to Turkish theorist Ömer Çaha Kurdish women experience a dual oppression which is based on their gender as well as on their ethnicity (Çaha 2011, 435). Therefore there was a need for a different form of feminism than there existed in the West, one which also accounted for the ethnic oppression. In the 1980’s several Kurdish Women’s Movements “evolved into an ethnic-based feminist movement (Çaha 2011, 435).”  
 The call for a more ethnic-based feminism was not surprising. Many Kurdish women have experienced the oppression from nation states and the negation of their existence as Kurds. In the fight for acknowledgement of the state of Kurdistan, the women of Kurdistan stand hand in hand with their male community members. They all have the same goal, namely a united, but moreover acknowledged Kurdistan. Kurdish women were even allowed to fight in militias and were able to participate within the guerilla war of the PKK (Mojab 1997, 69). The fact that the Kurdish women were and are allowed to participate in the battle against nation states was challenging the traditional gender roles (Mojab 1997, 69), but it does not mean that they are freed from patriarchy. **Initially it seems like the Kurdish women are equal to Kurdish men and that they live in a gender equal (not acknowledged) state. According to Mojab, this again is a myth. She argues that many Kurdish nationalists deny the oppression of Kurdish women. They claim that ‘their’ women enjoy more freedom than the women of neighboring countries. Mojab reacts by arguing:**

**This myth of the exceptionalism of Kurdish women legitimates the universal nationalist claim that the nation’s unity should not be jeopardized by internal conflicts based on gender and class (Mojab 2000, 89).**

**The notion that Kurdish women are oppressed by patriarchal cultural practices is thus neglected by Kurdish nationalists. The quote makes clear that the denying of gender-based issues is done in order to create consensus within the Kurdish community. In other words: all Kurds have to fight the same battle, namely the one to be acknowledged as a nation. But denying that there are no internal conflicts based on gender and class does not mean that they are not present in the Kurdish community.** The Kurdish women also have to handle oppression within their own community, for example honor-killings, sexual abuse and the inequality between women and men (Çaha 2011, 438).   
 The Kurdish community is known as a highly patriarchal community in which men decide what women can or cannot do (Çaha 2011, 438). According to Çaha, however, the struggle for a national acknowledgement of Kurdistan has led many women to the political realm. They have started to get involved with activist movements and entered political parties. Many women, who were first bound to the private sphere of the house, were now allowed into the political sphere and Kurdish ‘governments’ allowed women in their parties. This active participation in the political movement of the acknowledgment of the Kurds, eventually gave women the opportunity to organize themselves in feminist movements (Çaha 2011, 438). The battle of the Kurdish community for an acknowledged Kurdistan thus allowed women to escape the yoke of patriarchy.   
 The Kurdish Women’s Movements started to evolve in well organized organizations. According to the PKK-online the movements all have overarching principles which are foundational for their battle, namely patriotism, **the principle of free thought and free will, a sharing of life based on freedom and the principle of organization and the principle of resistance (Afsin 2015).   
Kurdish women do not only resist the stance of patriarchy, but they also resist the nation states which are not acknowledging them. Therefore many women have taken up arms in militias to fight the notion of statelessness. The history of the Kurdish women’s army is therefore long. Many women have fought since the 1960’s in rural areas in Iraq and Iran, but their participation in the conflict was never really acknowledged (Mojab 1997, 69). Only since the late 1980’s the contribution of female warriors to the battle of the Kurds was acknowledged (Mojab 1997, 69).  
 The acknowledgment of the Kurdish women as soldiers has gained more interest of western media since the Islamic State has conquered much land in the Middle East. The organization has met a great counter force from the Kurdish armies, like the Kurdish women’s army.   
 The most important victory of the Kurdish women is the battle of Kobani. The attention of the Islamic State was drawn to the Kurdish city of Kobani. In the first instance it seemed like the Islamic State was able to conquer the city. But for the first time in their battle the Islamic State battled against an equal enemy, namely the Kurds amongst many whom women (Cockburn 2014). Eventually the Kurds conquered their own city and the stories of the Kurdish female soldiers were often covered in western media (Bahara 2015).   
 From the battle of Kobani it became clear that the women of Kurdistan did no longer have a helping hand role (Hegasy and Dennerlein 2012, 1). They have become full soldiers who contribute to the battle against the Islamic State. The battle of the Kurdish women is thus not only one of national acknowledgment, but also one against patriarchy and with the battle of Kobani the Kurdish women seem to have succeeded in both ways. They are perceived as real soldiers by their male colleagues and have brought the Islamic State to a temporal standstill.  
 It is however highly interesting to notice how the discourse about the Kurdish resistance organizations seemed to have changed throughout the past year. Where the soldiers of the resistance army were first perceived as terrorists, they seem to be perceived as heroes. The question what discourse is dominant in the present media coverage of the battle of the Kurdish women is researched in this thesis.   
 In the next chapter it will be explained how the current question of the Kurdish female combatants can be placed within current scientific debates.**

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical tradition that frames this research is postcolonial theory. In 1978 Edward Said published his pivotal work *Orientalism.* This book proved to be foundational for postcolonial theory. In the preface of the 25th edition of the book Edward Said argues the following: “*Orientalism* once again raises the question whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the Orient since Napoleon’s entry into Egypt two centuries ago (Said 1994, xxi).” This quote exemplifies Saids notion that Orientalism and therefore western domination over the world, has never ended with the decolonization. It always remained in western ways of producing knowledge about the Orient and the Other.   
 The relation between the Kurdish question and Saids notion of Orientalism can be found in the way in which the Kurds are perceived by as well western states as Middle Eastern states. The Kurds were perceived as the community which needed to be colonized and therefore needed to be oppressed by other, better nations (Noble 2011, 312). The Kurds were thus the community which was perceived as the one which needed to be dominated. In the eyes of western nations the Kurds belong to the oriental Muslim other and according to mainstream Muslim communities, the Kurds are impure Muslims which do not belong to their community (Rashid 2015, 1).   
 It is important to understand what Said refers to when he addresses the notion of the Orient. He argues that he does not have a definite answer to this question, because there is no ‘real’ Orient to argue for (Said 1994, xix). Postcolonial theorist Robert Young argues that the conventional notion of the Other can be explained as followed: “People regarded as being outside modernity, or outside the West, are still frequently described and categorized in terms of the concept and the term of the Other (Young 2012, 26).” Every person who is thus perceived as non-modern can be placed within the discourse of otherness. Within Said’s understanding it can be stated that the Muslim world has become the Orient ever since the 1980’s. He argues:

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardedness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find (Said 1994, xix).

In other words Muslims have become the Oriental Other. The West has proclaimed that Muslims are different, and most of all more backward than itself.   
 The notion of Orientalism is related to the topic of this thesis, because it will be researched how the Kurdish women are portrayed within western, i.e. Dutch media. The manner in which Dutch media engage with the position of the Kurdish women in battle against the Islamic State has a pivotal role in this thesis. The understanding of postcolonial knowledge production is relevant in this thesis, because the debates about the Kurdish community as a whole, but also about the Kurdish women specifically are informed by discourses about the Islam and moreover about the position of them as the Other.   
 Besides Orientalism the notion of ethnocentrism has a central place within this research. Theorist Walter Williams argues that ethnocentrism is central to western thought. The concept entails the idea that certain, mostly western values are projected upon other cultures. Williams claims that the West structures the world into paired opposites, like good versus evil, male versus female, white versus black and civilized versus savage (Williams 1987, 135). According to Williams western thought is often inflicted with the notion of us against them. The “us” is good, male, white and civilized, but the “them” is evil, female, black and savage. Westerners project certain cultural bounded values and thoughts on cultures which are different than western cultures and derive assumptions from it (Williams 1987, 135). Western countries thus project their values on non-western cultures, therefore they are often perceived as less, savage or misogynist. The way in which the perception of the West about the Rest is shaped, is thus informed by its own cultural values (Williams 1987, 135).   
 The complex issue of the western perception of the female Kurdish combatants that will be addressed in this research does not only reflect upon the postcolonial issues which affect the coverage of the Kurdish women’s question. The notion of gender is pivotal in this thesis.  
 The representation of Muslim, i.e. oriental women has an ambivalent position in western thought. Theorist Abu-Lughod elaborates on how western media have been covering the story of ‘the Muslim women’. According to her these women were always seen as a singular category. She argues that the Muslim woman is often perceived as the representation of the pitfalls of the Muslim culture (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). So if the West would understand the problems of the Muslim women, they would also be able to understand the problems of the Muslim world as such. The Muslim women thus became exemplary of the pitfalls of the Muslim traditions.  
 There is thus a specific idea about Muslim women as victims of their patriarchal society in western thought. Therefore the concept of female warriors has proved to be a complex one, especially in relation to the Middle East. Sandra Ponzanesi however gives a thorough analysis of the role of gender in (post-)colonial conflict zones in the book *Gender, Globalization and Violence.* According to Sandra Ponzanesi it is often forgotten that racialized and gendered bodies play crucial roles in (post)-colonial conflicts (Ponzanesi 2014, 1). The assumption is that men fight and die and women have pacifist roles (Ponzanesi 2014, 1-2). Women, like the Kurdish women, are thus automatically given the role of pacifist and therefore peaceful actors. Western discourses about war do not involve women, because they are not supposed to have characteristics which are related to war (Ponzanesi 2014, 82).   
 Ponzanesi argues that women have been involved in freedom or terrorist movements for centuries (Ponzanesi 2014, 2). The historical perception that women are thus peaceful pacifists does not fit the actual participation of women in war. Ponzanesi argues:

The political goals of the group often determine the shape of women’s involvement. In the specialist utopian groups, feminism is high on the agenda as is the emancipation of all subdued groups within society (Ponzanesi 2014, 2).

It has been assumed for long that female combatants do not have political or ideological goals to pursue in war. But as it is argued by Ponzanesi, female warriors do organize themselves in political or utopian groups.   
 One aspect of Ponzanesi’s research about female suicide bombers is particularly interesting for the case of the Kurdish female warriors. Namely the notion that female combatants or suicide bombers are perceived to act through personal rather than political motivations (Ponzanesi 2014, 82). Women are thus perceived as emotional actors and not as political agents. Women only commit suicidal attacks, because they have endured traumatic events and not like men, because they are empowered by political ideology. This notion does not only reaffirm patriarchal and colonizing patterns (Ponzanesi 2014, 82), but there is also a deeper, political tradition behind this:

This has not only to do with the assumption of women as creators and protectors of life, and therefore as nurturers rather than murderers and killers, but also with the uneasy overturning of the private and public sphere, with women suddenly coming upstage and disrupting many of the expectations and stereotypes about their roles in the family and society at large and as symbolic models of the nation (Ponzanesi 2014, 82).

The notion that women are taking up arms and become active participants of war and death is thus not only problematic for their assumed roles of bearers of life. It is also problematic in relation to traditional gender roles. Women were for long perceived to belong to the private sphere and men to the public sphere, in which war took place (Arneil 1999, 43). The notion that women are taking an active part in war does not coincide with the traditional role patterns of men and women. The fact that they act like warriors does not fit the discourse that is set around them.  
 The Kurdish female warriors are challenging this traditional notion of women as passive actors in time of war. They are battling the extremist Islamic State, but they are also fighting patriarchal notions which place them in the discourse of submissive, passive agents. But not only patriarchal Muslim discourses place these women in the role of submissive agents, so do western media discourses. This is also addressed by feminist Saba Mahmood. She argues that non-western women do not endorse western principles of womanhood. They do not fulfill the expectations that are sketched about women therefore theorists try to explain the motivations of these women. These theorists however use an ethnocentric gaze with cultural assumptions to explain agency of Muslim women (Mahmood 2001, 203).   
 Eva Midden and Sandra Ponzanesi endorse the notion that agency is influenced by cultural assumptions. According to them there exist multiple versions of agency and they follow Saba Mahmood in arguing that agency depends on historical, political and social contexts (Midden and Ponzanesi 2013, 199). There is thus not one form of ‘pure’ agency. By acknowledging these different versions of agency, one will create a better understanding of the concept.   
 Agency is thus a concept which entails different understandings. But the understanding of Saba Mahmood and Rosi Braidotti are somewhat related to each other. Mahmood argues that agency is not per se a synonym for resistance, but: “but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create (Mahmood 2001, 203).” In other words agency, thus not always entail active resistance, but also can be found within relations of subordination in which women find themselves comfortable. Rosi Braidotti adds that political subjectivity is not always about producing a radical counter-subjectivity, but it can also be practiced by negotiating with dominant norms within daily practices (Midden and Ponzanesi 2013, 199).   
 Agency is thus not predominantly about resisting dominant norms by force, but precisely by changing ‘daily’, subordinating practices. This notion of agency however does not coincide with the image that is sketched about the Kurdish female combatants. Western media have put the Kurdish women in the discourse of ‘agency as resistance’. But the Kurdish women are challenging traditional gender roles, like the passive role of women in war, by changing daily practices within their Kurdish community. The Kurdish women thus show ‘Braditioan’ agency by negotiating the oppressive traditions that have put them in the position of passive actors. They are indeed active agents as soldiers, but they are also challenging normative practices within the patriarchal Kurdish society by claiming their place in the public space. As Mahmood has explained:

Agency […] is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective) (Mahmood 2001, 206).

The Kurdish women are realizing their own interest by challenging and playing with the weight of costum, tradition and transcendental will that is subordinating them for centuries. They are using the existing situation with the Islamic State to create a better position for themselves as women, but also for their Kurdish community as such.   
 The role of women in the Kurdish battle thus adds an even more complex notion to the Kurdish question. The theoretical framework that is presented in this chapter creates an understanding of the role of Orientalism within the representation of the Kurdish female combatants within Dutch media discourses. Orientalist strategies have provided a certain framework about Muslim women in which agency is only acknowledged as a form of resistance, but it is often forgotten that Muslim women have a history of their own, which is also inflicted by ideology. The concepts of female fighters within the Kurdish army is hardly debated, therefore I decided to use Sandra Ponzanesi’s notion of female suicide bombers and their perception in order to create a thorough framework about female fighters, with a Muslim background. It is however important to note that the battle of the Kurdish women against the Islamic State, is not only a war against extremism, it is also a war of recognition and one against patriarchy.  
 In the next chapter it will be explained how the analysis of the representation of the Kurdish female warriors within Dutch media discourses will be conducted.

**Methodology**

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how Dutch media represent female Kurdish warriors in different ways in order to make them fit certain, existing and arguably ethnocentric discourses. The experiences of the Kurdish women are described and written down by western journalists. The discourse that they use will be analyzed in order to show how the battle of the Kurdish female warriors is represented in Dutch media.   
 In order to understand what kind of research will be conducted in this thesis, it is important to elaborate on the sample that will be researched. The method of discourse analysis will be conducted in order to analyze the sample and I will elaborate on this methodology further in this chapter. First I will explain how the selection of data from articles of Dutch (online) media came about.   
 To be able to do a thorough discourse analysis, the focus of this research will be on the Dutch media coverage of the battle which the Kurdish women fight. The choice for the Dutch discourse was made, because it represents a small part of the western discourse that exists about the Kurdish female warriors. But moreover the choice for the Dutch discourse was made, because it was necessary to narrow the analysis of ‘western’ discourses down. In order to do a thorough analysis, it was desirable to create a relatively small sample.   
 The selection of the articles was created by using the Dutch newspaper bank *LexisNexis* and by conducting a thorough research on the internet. In order to do a relevant research I decided to search for articles which were written between January 2014 and April 2015. The search engine gave me the option to select several newspapers, but I chose not to use this option. I was curious about the options that were given to me.  
 It appeared in the past year, that the battle of the female Kurdish combatants has received more interest in the media. This also became clear during my search on the newspaper bank *LexisNexis*. From my search on the search engine it became clear that in the past few months many articles were written about the battle of the Kurds against the ‘terrorist’ organization of the Islamic State (LexisNexis). The amount of articles that came out of a search, after for example using the term ‘Koerdische Vrouwen’, was 1000 articles. When I for example searched for ‘Vrouwen tegen IS’, 993 hits were found. This however does not mean that all articles were related to the topic, some only mentioned the word ‘vrouwen’ (LexisNexis).   
 The battle against the Islamic State is a so-called ‘hot topic’ currently and therefore there are several articles written about the subject. There were also several articles written about the specific battle of the Kurdish Women’s Movement against the Islamic State. I decided I wanted to make a selection of five articles which occurred in newspapers or online. Which articles were added to the selection, will be explained later. I chose to make a selection of this amount of articles, because they were all longer articles which I wanted to analyze in depth. When I would choose to use more articles, my analysis would be less elaborate than it is now. I wanted to conduct an elaborate analysis, because I ought it important to create a thorough understanding of the Dutch media discourse about the female Kurdish combatants. When I would analyze a big sample, the analysis would only be superficial and not in depth, because I would not be able to go into the discourse that is used.   
 Eventually I selected the articles on *LexisNexis* by searching with several keywords. I used: “Koerdisch vrouwenleger”, “Koerdische vrouwelijke strijders”, “Vrouwen tegen IS”, “Vrouwen angst IS”, “Vrouwelijke Peshmerga”, and several more. I decided to use these keywords, because I was more likely to be able to find more elaborate articles when I used these specific terms. The names of opinion articles are likely longer than those of ‘short’ news articles. I found four relevant articles via this search engine.  
 I selected these articles on their title, content, date and word count. The title and key words which the authors conducted were displayed in relevant order. Therefore I knew that these articles could give me useful information. After I did this broad, first selection I chose some articles to read and to judge the content on relevance. Some articles proved to be irrelevant or ‘useless’, because they were too short. In order to do a thorough analysis it was important that the articles that I would select were opinion articles. These articles are mostly long articles and therefore I did not select articles which were shorter than 900 words. The date on which the articles were written was also important, because I decided to focus on the past year (2014-2015). I selected this timeframe, because it was important to choose a limited period for this research, because it would be too broad otherwise. Within this timeframe the conflict between the Kurds and the Islamic State also resulted into clashes. The timeframe thus provides enough information. There were significantly more articles to be found about the Kurdish women’s army within this timeframe. I do not have a clear explanation for this, but hypothetically speaking it could be related to the battle of Kobani. This battle was mainly fought by the Kurdish women and it was seen as the biggest triumph against the Islamic State. I also wanted to research what knowledge was produced in this past year.   
 Eventually I created a selection of four articles via *LexisNexis* based on their relevance, content and the period in which they were written. The articles focus on the topic of the Kurdish women. The first article was found in *De Groene Amsterdammer* and is called “Niets dan revolutie: Rojava: een radical Koerdische democratie” (Geerdink 2015). This article focuses on the feminist battle that the women are fighting against patriarchy and how they entered the battle against the ‘new’ threat IS. The second article that was found is “Glossy als verzet” in *Het Parool* (Kessel 2015)*.* This article focuses upon the emergence of a Kurdish, feminist glossy which changed its focus since the battle of the Kurdish women against IS has started. They cover the stories of female Kurdish soldiers. The third article I selected was found in *De Volkskrant* and is titled “Sterke vrouwen zijn de schrik van de jihadisten” (Groen 2015). This article tells the story of female peshmerga (Kurdish soldiers) and their changing position within the army. The last article that I found via *LexisNexis* is called “Medya Osman Murad 1987 – 30 januari 2015; Het einde” (Bahara 2015). This article was also placed in the *Groene Amsterdammer.* The author of this article focuses on the story of the Kurdish ‘poster girl’ and fighter Medya Osman Murad. She was killed during battle and the author reflects on the notion that the female Kurdish fighters are used in a propaganda war.   
 During the process of selection via LexisNexis, I noticed that aspect of feminism was explicitly missing in the articles that I had found. A few months ago I read an article about this topic and via the internet I found it again. This article ignited my idea for my research. It was placed on the website called *De Correspondent.* This website aims to contextualize the daily news and to provide a broader perspective on the events in the world (De Correspondent). The article is titled: “Hoe de strijd tegen IS de Koerdische vrouw emancipeert” (Hofman 2014). The author writes about the notion that western media portray the Kurdish female warriors as glamorous amazons, but forget the deeper, feminist meaning behind their battle (Hofman, 2014). The use of internet in this selection also made a valuable contribution to my research, because more and more articles are published online. It is thus a new source of bringing knowledge to people. With this article the sample for this research was completed and I decided not to do a further search on the internet.   
 I have made this selection with great care, but it is important to notice however, that many Dutch newspapers write about the battle against the Islamic State on a daily basis. I am aware of the fact that it is just a small representation of the coverage of the topic, but in this way I am capable of doing a thorough analysis. The value of this research increases, because by doing an elaborate research on a small sample I will be able to do an in depth analysis of the discourses that are presented in the articles. When I would use a large selection of articles in this research I would only be able to analyze the articles in a superficial way. This selection was thus based upon the idea that I wanted to focus on more elaborate articles that I can analyze in depth.   
 The analysis will be conducted by doing a close reading of the articles that were selected. During this analysis several questions will be asked. The following questions will guide the analysis of the discourse of the Dutch media about the battle of the Kurdish Women’s Movement.

* What reasons do Dutch media describe for the Kurdish women to participate in the battle against IS?
* How are the tasks of these women described by the Dutch media?
* Do Dutch media pay attention to the feminist motivations of the Kurdish women?

The analysis of the data can create an insight in the way in which Dutch newspapers create a discourse about the Kurdish female warriors. I am aware of the fact that the articles that I will analyze are just part of a small selection. This however does not mean that the analysis that will be conducted is useless. The analysis of the Dutch articles can create an understanding of how knowledge is produced about these women and how this knowledge is still or is no longer inflicted in postcolonial power structures.   
 In the previous paragraphs it became clear that the methodology of this research is discourse analysis. In the following part of this chapter I will elaborate on this methodology. Therefore I will address the French philosopher Michel Foucault who is known for his critical theories about discourses and power.   
 Foucault explains that discourses and thus language are always inflicted in power relations. The way in which knowledge is produced about the subject, i.e. the female Kurdish warriors in this case, is implicitly linked to power. He explains:

While the human subject is placed in relations of production and signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex (Foucault 1983, 209).

The way in which knowledge is produced is thus never innocent and always has consequences for power relations. Knowledge is thus never neutral.   
 The notion of power inflicted knowledge is also supported by theorists Frost and Elichaoff. According to them it is important to understand how realities are constructed through certain productions of knowledge. This can be done by conducting discourse analysis. They explain that discourse analysis observes cultural and societal influences on subjective experiences (Frost and Elichaoff 2014, 46). By using discourse analysis, researchers are able to gain insight to how certain experiences are constructed by language (Frost and Elichaoff 2014, 46). In this research this means that the production of knowledge about the Kurdish female combatants is researched.   
 Within this methodology of discourse analysis much attention is paid to the effect of the construction of a discourse, i.e. the question: what do discourses do? Frost and Elichaoff argue:

Attention is paid to the selection of words and phrases used by the narrator as well as to the way meaning is given to the concepts it constructs. It is assumed that descriptions of experiences and events are designed by the narrator to accomplish actions, such as to persuade or to argue (Frost and Elichaoff 2014, 47).

Discourse is thus used to persuade the public into action, or to argue for a certain idea. It is thus clear that discourses are automatically means that it is inflicted in power structures. This notion is also endorsed by Eva Midden. She follows Norman Fairloughs notion of discourse when she argues that discourse is a social practice which is determined by social structures (Midden 2010, 124). This relates to Foucault’s notion that knowledge and thus discourses are always already inflicted in power structures. The case of the Kurdish female combatants will be analyzed with this in mind. In this research it will be argued how certain ethnocentric discourses create knowledge about the experiences of the Kurdish female combatants.   
 In the case of the female Kurdish warriors there are thus also many power structures at stake. As it has become clear in the theoretical framework of this thesis, postcolonial power structures influence the knowledge that the West has about the Orient. The knowledge about the Kurdish Women’s Movement and its combatant is thus also influenced by these power structures. Like every power structure that exists, postcolonial power structures are captured in a certain discourse. This is explained by Stuart Hall in *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power* how Europe uses discourses in order to ‘describe and represent the *difference* between itself and the ‘others’ (Hall 2006, 165).” Discourse in this sense is thus a way of representing the West in opposite to the Rest (Hall 2006, 167). They always produce knowledge and therefore also certain assumptions of difference. Discourse is thus a strategy which is used in order to emphasize the difference between the West and the Rest, according to Hall. During the encounter of another world or discourse, the West always uses its own culture, practices, values and especially language to represent the Other (Hall 2006, 167).   
The problem however is that the western discourse is often perceived as the truth (Hall 2006, 169). It is however forgotten that the West portrays its own values and truths on different cultures.   
 In the following chapters which form the analysis of this thesis, I will conduct a discourse analysis of the selected sample. The first chapter will focus on the engagement of the Dutch media with the battle of the Kurdish female combatants. The second chapter will elaborate on the representation of the Kurdish female warriors by the Dutch media. The third and fourth chapter will elaborate on the notion of ethnocentrism in relation to emancipation.

**Covering the most marginal story**

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) is recognized as the biggest threat to stability in the Middle East and the Muslim world in the modern era (Rashid 2015, 1). The Islamic State seems to attract more and more young Muslims from over the world. The unstable situation in the Middle Eastern region has deteriorated since the rise of the Islamic State. The aim of this organization is, unlike it is often portrayed in western media, not to conquer the Western world, but to ensure its power in the Middle East (Rashid 2015, 1). The Islamic State wants to consolidate its rule in the region, because they believe they must first win territory in the Middle East before they can expand to the rest of the world (Rashid 2015, 1).   
 In order to create a solid rule in the region, the Islamic State ignited a civil war in the Middle East. Ethnic minorities such as the Yezedi’s, Christians, Jews, Druze’s and Kurds are prosecuted by the Islamic State and do not have the right to exist according to the Islamic State (Rashid 2015, 1).These ethnic minorities have been persecuted by the organization, because of its will to create a pure Islamic State. According to theorist Ahmed Rashid this subordination of ethnic minorities, and especially women within it, has taken genocidal forms (Rashid 2015, 2).   
 The expansion of the Islamic State is thus currently primarily bound to the African continent, but in the past four years the emergence of the organization has caught the interest of many western nations. The growing strength of the Islamic State is often perceived as a threat to the ‘western way of living’ and is covered in many media (Bahara, Hofman, Geerdink, Groen and Kessel).   
 According to media theorists Zohar Kampf and Tamar Liebes, the way in which the West covers violent conflicts has changed dramatically. They argue that western media have taken a different perspective on the coverage of war in which marginal figures, even ‘enemies’, are given a voice.

The changes in media coverage of war and terror, and indeed how wars are fought, foreground new characters who, up to now, were seen as marginal or, rather, illegitimate (Kampf and Liebes 2013,1).

Western media thus have become more interested in the less mainstream events that happen in conflict zones, and are now focusing more upon subordinate stories in order to create a complete story. The representation of these marginal voices can be related to the way in which the Dutch media covers the battle of the Kurds against the Islamic State. But the so-called counter stories are increasingly presented to the Dutch public, for example the stories of the female combatants of Kurdistan (Hofman, Bahara, Groen, Kessel and Geerdink).   
 As it has become clear earlier western, non-Middle Eastern countries, like the Netherlands view the rise and the expansion of the Islamic State in the Middle East not only as a local problem, but moreover they perceive it as a threat to the western, democratic lifestyle. According to theorist Yosef Jarabeen the issue has become a geopolitical problem (Jarabeen 2015, 52). The situation in the Middle Eastern region has its effects on the geopolitical settings in the world, but moreover the Islamic State is attacking perceived western values.  
 Therefore the stories of marginal groups who battle against the Islamic State are especially interesting to western media such as Dutch media. The fact that marginal groups take up their arms and resist the extremist notions of the organization almost proves that the West has an ally in the Middle East. In this way the public moral is boosted (Kampf and Liebes 2013, 3). The Kurds and especially the Kurdish Women’s Movement are interesting resisting powers to the Dutch media.   
 Many have been resisting the rise of the Islamic State, but the Kurds have been one of the greatest threats for the organization. The Kurds are perceived an enemy by the Islamic State, because they are not acknowledged as pure Muslims by the extremist organization (Celso 2015, 254). The Islamic State is thus threatening the existence of the Kurds.   
 The stories of the Kurdish resistance armies, which fight against the Islamic State, are valued highly by western media. As the data that is analyzed in this thesis shows, the voices of the female combatants of these armies are seen as marginal and oppressed and are therefore interesting for western media (Bahara 2015). The question that rises however is how do Dutch media engage with the stories of the female Kurdish warriors?   
 As it has been argued by Sandra Ponzanesi, female combatants are often a forgotten category in war. Especially Muslim women seem to be neglected in discourses about war, because they are often only seen as victims and not as soldiers or as non-pacifist agents (Ponzanesi 2014, 82). But as Sandra Ponzanesi argues women are not only docile pacifists, they are also agents of change when it comes to war. They often are not acknowledged as such, but women do have important roles as for example combatants in wartime (Ponzanesi 2014, 82). The battle of the Kurdish women against the Islamic State shows how women are claiming their space in times of conflict.   
 The battle against the Islamic State however requires a new perspective on the media coverage of women in warfare. The Kurdish female combatants cannot be perceived as victims and therefore western media need to tell a different story. The strategy of western media is to report marginal voices. The marginal voices in this case, the ones of the Kurdish women, however are not stuck in their position as the oppressed. The Kurdish female combatants have taken up their arms and decided to battle the oppression that was and is imposed on them. The women are starting to step out of the shadows of their position as oppressed and marginal figures.   
 This process of taken up arms and reclaiming their voice is covered in several Dutch media. In the article “How the battle against IS emancipates the Kurdish woman (Hoe de strijd tegen IS de Koerdische vrouw emancipeert)”, journalist Lennart Hofman explains:

Kurdish warriors fight in Syria and Northern-Iraq against IS. Many of these warriors are female. In Syria where the Kurds battle for a radical left state, more than 35 percent of the warriors is female, which equates to approximately fifteen thousand female warriors (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

The Kurdish women’s army is thus perceived as an organization which has a fair amount of soldiers. Even though the female soldiers represent a significant part of the Kurdish resistance movements, they are not fully perceived as members of the Kurdish army. This is shown in the following data:

Although the Kurds have a long history of female warriors, men still define the daily lives of women – when she is allowed to leave the house, who she marries. In addition to this, honor killings are happening on a regular basis and the biggest political party in Northern-Iraq, the KDP, is against the involvement of women in war (Hofman 2014, Translation J.S.).

Only from this small part of the article of Lennart Hofman it becomes apparent that the involvement of female warriors in the battle against the Islamic state is not considered to be self-evident. The women in the Kurdish army are thus representing the marginal voice in the Dutch media. Moreover the active involvement of women in war is perceived as an act against cultural practices. This notion is also supported by several other journalists, for example in Marieke Kessel’s article “Glossy as resistance (Glossy als verzet)”, it is argued that:

For many female warriors, from whom many are from the rural areas, to join the army was the only chance on a life for their own. They often subscribe against the will of their fathers and brothers (Kessel 2015, translation J.S.).

From this piece of data it becomes clear that the cultural practices which provide the oppression of women, can act as a motivation for the female combatants to enter the battle against the Islamic State. The Kurdish women oppose the existing discourse that is set around their role in society. They are demanding their voices back and the journalists in the data selection give these women their voice back in their articles.   
 The Kurdish women are clearly fighting a battle that was not meant to be fought by them, according to the journalist Lennart Hofman. Their involvement in the war is opposed by as well the patriarchal politics of their home countries, as well as by the patriarchal society and culture in which they live. From the quotes it has become clear that the female soldiers are actually not allowed to fight by their male family members and moreover not by the male orientated politics of their home countries.   
 The battle of the Kurdish women is not confined to the limits of the conflict in the Middle Eastern region. The women are problematizing practices of oppression by fighting not only against the Islamic State, but by also battling the prejudices that they are encountering as women. This notion is supported by the data that I have collected from the Dutch journalist Hassan Bahara. In his article “Medya Osman Murad – 1987 – 30 January 2015; the End (Medya Osman Murad – 1987 – 30 januari 2015; Het einde), he writes about the battle of Kobani in which the Kurdish women proved to be great soldiers. He argues:

They did not only do this (fighting) to put IS-hurdles to a standstill. Their commitment was also a feminist battle for equality. Murad expressed the broadly shared conviction in an interview with a Kurdish television channel. “We women are reborn. The ignorance and prejudices are no longer possible. We have shown our determination in the battle for our nation. Women are leading the battle (Bahara 2015, translation J.S.).

From this quote it becomes clear that the battle of the Kurdish women is more than just a battle against an extremist organization. The stories on these women are elaborating on the marginal position that the women have in the Kurdish society as a whole.   
 But how are the stories on the Kurdish women important for the Dutch media. The possible answer lies in the data which is collected from journalist Hassan Bahara. According to him the Dutch need a positive story to counter the barbaric actions of the Islamic State (Bahara 2015). He argues:

There was a need for a counterargument against the murderous, plundering and raping jihadists of IS. Enter the brave women of the Kurdish military forces. With their armed resistance they proved to be the living – feminist – prove that not everything in the Middle East is a hopeless prey for the misogynist and medieval Islamic State (Bahara 2015, translation J.S.).

From this data it appears that several Dutch media are presenting a counter story to its public. The public is in need of a good, moral story in order to oppose the horrific stories that are often told about the situation in the Middle East. It is interesting to notice however that the notion of feminism is recurring in the data that is analyzed in this thesis. This will be elaborated upon later in this analysis.  
 The aim of this chapter was to elaborate upon the engagement of Dutch media with the battle of the Kurdish female combatants. From the selected data it appears that the battle of the Kurdish women against the Islamic State is not the only battle which is covered in the Dutch articles. The journalists also pay attention to the double bound battle that needs to be fought by these women. They are not only fighting the ‘barbaric’ jihadists, they are also fighting the oppressive nature of the nation and culture in which they are living (Hofman, Kessel, Bahara, Groen, Geerdink).   
 It is interesting to notice that the Dutch media thus do engage with the battle of the Kurdish women against the Islamic State, but they also use the strategy of reporting the marginal voice, which is explained by Kampf and Liebes. The Dutch media are covering the most marginal story of all, namely the one of the oppressed Kurds to show that the Middle East is not lost. But moreover the story of the multiple oppressed and silenced Kurdish female warriors who fight to become free citizens in a nation without the Islamic State as well as without patriarchy. How the Dutch media engage with the double bound battle of the Kurdish women will be analyzed in the following chapters.

**Amazons of the Free World**

In the previous chapter it was shown that Dutch media do engage with the battles of the Kurdish female warriors. The question however remains how these media are presenting the marginal story of the female soldiers? In other words, what discourse is produced about the Kurdish female warriors by Dutch media?   
 For centuries there exists a certain discourse about the Middle East and its position as the “Orient”. The oriental woman, in other words the Muslim woman, has been portrayed as the immanent victim. As Saba Mahmood argues the discourse that has been constructed about Muslim women is one of shackled and oppressed women who do not have any agency. They are seen as victims of the patriarchal society in which they live (Mahmood 2001, 205). This notion of victimhood was and still is also inflicted upon the Kurdish women. In his article journalist Lennart Hofman speaks about the period before the ‘emancipation of the Kurdish women’. He argues:

Before the Kurds seized power in the parts of Syria in which they lived, the nineteen year old Gulestan never heard of women’s rights. Her freedom depended on the mood of her father and brothers, who what she calls drew a ‘red line’ to where her freedom reached (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

From this quote it becomes clear that he, as the producer of the discourse, again puts the Muslim women in the corner of victimhood. It appears that Kurdish women were, like many other Muslim women, shackled by the interests of men. Hofman portrays them as victims of the patriarchal whims of their male family members.   
 That Muslim, i.e. oriental women are thus often perceived as victims, is also supported by feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. But she adds that the western discourse which is constructed about these women is also constructing assumptions. She argues that the reality of a third world, i.e. oriental woman, is shaped by historical and cultural contexts which put her always already in the box of the singular third-world woman. This singular third-world woman is: “an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse (Mohanty 1988, 51).” The oriental woman is thus an invention of western thinking and cannot exist without it. This position of the oriental woman and in this case the Kurdish woman is also present in the data that is analyzed for this thesis. For example the article of Marieke Kessel about the Kurdish women’s glossy Zhin. The discourse that is used in this article almost implicates the position of Muslim women as singular third-world women. In the article the following is argued:

If a woman commits suicide, the news articles express admiration. In many cases she saves the honor of the family. After a rape the question if the hymen is still intact is central. Not her personal agony. Or the search for the perpetrators (Kessel 2015, translation J.S.).

In the article Kessel focuses upon the fact that the glossy has the revolutionary task to free Kurdish women from the yoke of patriarchy and misogynist practices. The discourse in which she represents the Kurdish women however does not create the notion of Kurdish women as battlers for a gender equal society moreover the women are represented as victims of patriarchy. They are women we need to pity, because they are authorized to exist within the discourses of pity by western humanist discourse.   
 It is impossible to ignore that there indeed is a complex gendered issue within the Kurdish or Muslim community, but what is striking from this quote is how the Kurdish women is presented as a victim of her society, who is deprived of agency. This representation of the oriental women is also supported by Sandra Ponzanesi. She argues that the oriental woman seems to be without agency and that this discourse dominates the debate about these women (Ponzanesi 2014, 83). The western discourse about the oriental woman is informed by singular practices and thoughts about the position of, in this case, Muslim women. They are only victims and cannot resist the extremist forces that threat them.   
 The image of the singular third-world woman is presented in many of the data that is analyzed in this thesis. But the position of the Kurdish woman as a victim is also used as a strategy to explain the motivations of these women to fight. The fact that they are perceived as victims also made them agents. This image also appears in the discourses from the data that are analyzed in this thesis. In the analyzed article of Lennart Hofman he argues:

In western media women like Selgan are often portrayed as glamorous amazons who fearlessly fight for the existence of their people. But there is a whole different truth behind this stereotype. A truth in which women claim their new and leading role in society in order to be freed from patriarchy (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

The discourse that is presented here is that the battle against the Islamic State enables Kurdish women to emancipate themselves in the patriarchal society. The journalist argues that the Kurdish women have become ideological actors who literally have become armed, resisting agents. From the discourse that is thus constructed about the Kurdish female combatants by Lennart Hofman is appears that they have agency.   
 This discourse about the feminist, fighting Kurdish women has become leading in the Dutch articles that are analyzed in this thesis. In her article: “Strong women are scaring Jihadists (Sterke vrouwen zijn de schrik van Jihadisten)”, Janny Groen speaks to several Kurdish female warriors. They tell her their stories of oppression and resistance. One of these women explains:

Everywhere I came, I spoke to the women. I talked about equal rights. This ensured the women. They told their husbands: if you do not want to change, we will enlist with the Peshmerga (Groen 2015, translation J.S.)

The woman in this particular case wanted to enrich other Kurdish women with her ideological arguments. She wanted to free the oppressed women, not only from the fundamental Jihadists who she fights, but also from their own husbands who oppress their wives in their own homes (Groen 2015). The discourse that is constructed in this particular article creates the notion that women have opposed the patriarchal structures which are oppressing them. Again the notion of agency is implicitly mentioned.   
 The story that is told about the Kurdish women is thus one of agency. The women want freedom, in multiple ways. The discourse that has been presented about the Kurdish female combatants in analyzed data does not seem to fit the image of female combatants as it was portrayed by Sandra Ponzanesi in the chapter ‘Theoretical Framework’. As it has been argued before, female combatants were often seen as emotional actors. But these Kurdish combatants are portrayed as the saviors of western values. This also becomes apparent from the data. In the article of journalist Lennart Hofman one of the interviewed women argues:

I cannot sit still when I see what they (Islamic State) do: cut heads off, kill children, sell women. That gives me the strength to fight them. Especially as a woman. We show the world that we fight where they stand for. Their philosophy. The way in which they perceive women (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

The journalist portrays the women as perceived guardians of liberated womanhood and moreover they prove that the Middle East is not as barbaric as the Islamic State, as it was claimed by journalist Bahara before. This can clarify why the Kurdish women are perceived as agents of change and not as emotional angels of death, like many other female combatants and suicide bombers as described by Sandra Ponzanesi (Ponzanesi 2014, 82).   
 Ponzanesi explains how the emergence of female suicide bombers and female combatants is perceived as a shocking social phenomenon by as well the Western as the Arab world. The women are therefore often portrayed in stereotypes of “either martyrs, heroes, and angels of death or monsters and terrorists (Ponzanesi 2014, 85). The fact that the West and the Arab world are shocked about the actions of these women shows how the role of women in armed struggles is not perceived as ‘normal’ within normative gender settings (Ponzanesi 2014, 85). These actions are especially perceived as shocking when they are aimed at western goals.   
 The fact that the Kurdish women are thus battling ‘with’ the West and not against it, creates a different perception of their actions. From the data it becomes clear that the female soldiers of Kurdistan are no longer perceived as monsters or terrorists they have become “amazons of the free world (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.)” The discourse which is created about the Kurdish female combatants appears to create a bigger dichotomy between the bad ‘Muslims’, namely the Islamic State and patriarchal Muslims, and the ‘good’ Muslims namely the Kurdish female combatants which are allegedly influenced by western values such as emancipation. The discourse that is produced about the Kurdish female fighters thus seems to be informed by orientalist structures. The Kurdish women are perceived as women who have gained agency by fighting for western values of freedom and emancipation.   
 In the article of Marieke Kessel it is argued that the battle of the Kurdish female warriors is much more complex than it is often perceived. The following is argued:

‘We fight on two fronts’ states the quote of a female commander on the cover. She tells how she fights against IS ánd for equal rights. In the west the image is apparent that the women evidently are fighting alongside men at the frontline, in reality this is much more nuanced (Kessel 2015, translation J.S.).

From this quote it appears that the position of female soldiers is not as clear as it is often portrayed in western discourses. One of the female soldiers was interviewed by Dutch journalist Janny Groen, the interview appeared in the article “Strong women are scaring Jihadists (Sterke vrouwen zijn de schrik van Jihadisten)”. The female soldier explains how the role of female combatants was first a symbolical one. “We were allowed to carry guns, but had no idea how to use them (Groen 2015).” The place of the Kurdish female warriors is thus much more nuanced and complex than it is often portrayed by Dutch media.  
 From the analyzed data it appears that the battle of the Kurdish women against patriarchy has taken an important place in the covering of the battle of the Kurdish women in western media. The Kurdish women are battling against the extremist Islamic State, but they also fight patriarchy in their own society. In the Dutch media discourses however it appeared that the discourse that is constructed about these women seems to focus more on their status as feminists and not per se on their status as soldiers.

**Emancipated under western eyes**

The Dutch media coverage of the battle of the Kurdish female warriors focuses thus not solely on their battle against the Islamic State, but also emphasizes the role of feminism within their battle. How does this happen and what does this tell about the relationship between ethnocentrism and the Dutch media discourse that is constructed about the Kurdish female combatants?   
 As it was discussed in the previous chapter, it is remarkable that the Kurdish women are perceived as freedom fighters and not like other non-western female combatants, as emotional actors who do not fit the western discourse of women as bearers of life and not of death. Theorist Fadwa El Guindi argues in her article “Veiling Resistance” how Muslim women for long have been neglected in discourses of resistance. She argues that Muslim women have an ‘own’ history of resisting in which they oppose questions of emancipation and oppression (El Guindi 1999, 591). It appears however that this history is not part of the western and thus Dutch discourses (El Guindi 1999, 591). The fact that Muslim women show resistance is often neglected in western media discourses.   
 From one of the news articles which are analyzed as data in this thesis it becomes apparent that the battle of the Kurdish female combatants is perceived differently. Journalist Hassan Bahara argues how the Kurdish women are used as ‘pawns in a propaganda war by western media’ (Bahara 2015). The fact that the women fight alongside with men against the so-called biggest threat to civilization, creates the notion of morality (Bahara 2015). According to the journalist the Kurdish women fight in order to preserve, assumed western values, like feminism and fight against so-called non-western values like fundamentalism and barbarism (Bahara 2015).   
 It thus appears that western and therefore, Dutch journalists are projecting western values in the media coverage on the Kurdish female warriors. The question that rises is to what extent ethnocentrism is part of this media coverage. The western discourse on emancipation takes an important role in the coverage of the Kurdish women and therefore the focus of this chapter will be on the representation of the feminist motivations of the Kurdish female combatants.   
 In order to understand what a western discourse on emancipation entails, it is important to explain how western feminism has covered the notion of non-western feminism. Feminism was long understood as a white and western practice. Feminist scholar Astrid Henry argues that in the history of feminism, it is often perceived that the first priority of women was to battle against sexism and that only later in the development of the movement the axes of race, religion and ethnicity became important (Henry 2004, 155). In Third Wave of feminism there came an emphasis on the differences between women. In early stages of the movement, difference was not neglected at all, but there was less emphasis on the axes of difference between women. This notion is also endorsed by theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty. She argues that feminism, like many other sciences, does not produce innocent knowledge. She explains:

It is also a directly political and discursive practice as it is purposeful and ideological […] Thus, feminist scholarly practice exist within relations of power – relations which they counter, redefine or even implicitly support (Mohanty 1988, 50).

Feminism is thus an ideology which is not ‘safe’ from ethnocentrism. Feminist scholarship as well as feminism as an ideological movement, has not been able to escape power structures. The ideology itself also produces power structures. Such as Fadwa El Guindi argues, the culture of feminism itself is often overlooked in its discourse (El Guindi 1999, 591).   
 Writers, scholars and journalists perceive the experiences of the oriental woman with their own cultural norms and values. Therefore the voice of the oriental woman is often clouded by the voice of the person who represents them (Ponzanesi 2007, 101). It can thus be argued that the feminist discourse that is used by (many) western feminist scholars in order to represent the oriental woman often seems to be informed by ethnocentric notions.   
 The Kurdish women in this case are represented by Dutch journalists. The production of knowledge of the Dutch journalists about the Kurdish women is always already informed by their own position. The Dutch journalists are representing Muslim feminists and the discourse that is produced about this form of feminism is important to understand, because it tells a lot about the ethnocentric understanding of the emancipation of Muslim women, like the Kurdish female combatants. At first it is important to understand what Muslim feminism entails in relation to western discourses.   
 Feminist scholar Fadwa El Guindi argues the following about Muslim feminism:

It put on center stage the colonial narrative of women, in which the veil and the treatment of women epitomized Islamic inferiority and entered the colonial agenda of appropriation of resources and culture into mainstream Arabic discourse and programs of reform. The opposition it generated similarly marks ‘the emergence of an Arabic narrative developed in resistance to the colonial narrative. This narrative of resistance appropriated, in order to negate them, the symbolic terms of the originating narrative (El Guindi 1999, 595).

The narrative of Muslim feminism is thus not only a narrative of improving equality, but also one of opposing colonialism and its existing effects on Muslim women. According to El Guindi women were often negated within this discourse.  
 This notion is endorsed in one of the articles which were selected, namely the article of journalist Hassan Bahara. He does not argue that Muslim women are negated in the current discourse about Muslims feminism, but he is arguing that they are now used in order to fulfill the western ideology of emancipation. From this analyzed data it becomes clear that the Kurdish female combatants are used in order to create a sharper division between the ‘good’ West and the ‘evil’ Islamic State. He argues in his article:

In order to defeat the jihadists in the media the Kurdish military forces emphatically pushed their female warriors forward. They were the buffer of civilization against the barbarism of IS (Bahara 2015, translation J.S.).

According to Bahara the female soldiers are used in a propaganda war. He argues: “De continues media attention made the propaganda-war almost as important as the battle on the ground (Bahara 2015).”   
 According to the journalist Hassan Bahara the feminism of the Kurdish female combatants is seen as a great opportunity to engage with western media, and these media are gratefully covering their marginal the story. He explains that many Dutch and other western media have taken up the story of female commander Medya Osman Murad. Bahara argues that the commander is portrayed as the poster girl from the Kurdish women’s army. She became famous when she was interviewed after the battle of Kobani and told the world that women are leading the war. According to Bahara, Medya Osman Murad became the poster girl of the counter story (Bahara 2015). In other words she became the personalization of the western values that are defended in the battle against the Islamic State.   
 From the data it thus appears that Kurdish women have become bearers of western values. This is also endorsed in another article from the selected data. In the article of Frederieke Geerdink titled “Nothing more than revolution; Rojava: a democratic Kurdish democracy (Niets dan de revolutie; Rojava: een Koerdische democratie)”, it is argued how the Kurdish region Rovaja has become an example of a feminist state. It is analyzed how women are taking their space in the politics of the Kurdish mini-state of Rojava. The Kurdish administration created a social contract, which can be understood as a constitution, in which gender equality is secured (Geerdink 2015). Geerdink creates the notion that the Kurdish ideology of gender equality is put into practice in this small, almost sample state of Kurdistan. The administration also appointed a minister of women’s issues. This position is explained by Geerdink:

The minister of women’s issues for example (‘only of women’s issues, and not also for children or family’, she tells me before the interview started), Amena Oman, does not only pursue laws which strengthen the position of women, she also educates citizens and she even takes action to protect the lives of women (Geerdink 2015, translation J.S.).

In this quote the journalist Geerdink is arguing that the Kurdish community is a well organized, but moreover feminist community. Geerdink emphasizes the fact that there is a minister of (only) women’s issues and the perceived ‘good’ work that she does. The Kurds are again on the side of the ‘good’ Muslims, the ones which are most alike westerners. This creates the opportunity for western media to show that the Middle East is not, as the ethnocentric view often portrays, as misogynist as it is often perceived. They are providing the marginal, counter story with an ethnocentric and western perspective. This relates to the notion of Orientalism of Edward Said as it has been explained in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Said explains how Muslims are now perceived as the Oriental other, because they are perceived as backward and moreover because of their perceived “abrogation of women’s rights (Said 1994, xix).” The perceived notion that the Kurdish women are not like the so-called ‘backward’ Muslims gives journalists the chance to show their public that the Middle East is not lost yet.  
 This renewed position of the Kurds as bearers of western values is highly interesting, because the Kurdish (female) combatants were long perceived as terrorists. Western media portrayed the Kurds as a murderous and nationalist community, which did not fear to violence against the nations which were not acknowledging them. The violence that the organization used was perceived as a threat to the countries which negated their existence (Van Bruinessen 1999). Like their fellow male soldiers, the Kurdish female combatants were long perceived as terrorists, but ever since they have started to fight the ideology of the Islamic State, and are thus protecting western values they are seen as bearers and protectors of freedom. I would argue that their position as the oriental Other has changed into a position of the Oriental self. The discourse that is produced about the Kurdish female warriors is one of opposing oppressing forces from within their own community. They were pitiful women, but ever since they have taken up arms, they have become agents of change. The women have become the personalization of western values and are therefore perceived as less different from westerners than the barbaric Muslims of the Islamic State or the patriarchal males in their own society. The Kurdish female warriors have entered the discourse of emancipation in the Dutch media which were covered here and they are represented as the bearers of the ‘good’ western value of feminism.

**The Ethnocentric Gaze**

In western discourses about the Orient and the Other there exists a pivotal role for gender and emancipation. As it has become clear from the data-analysis in the previous chapter, emancipation almost functions as a tool to provide a western discourse on non-western societies (Bahara 2015). In other words emancipation has become a tool to prove that the Rest, in this case the Middle East, has not yet engaged with the same norms and values as the western world. The Middle Eastern region is not perceived as an emancipated region. The following question arises: to what extent can ethnocentrism be related to the western discourse about the concept of emancipation of the Kurdish female combatants?   
 The Kurdish woman has an even more striking place in the story of the marginal Kurdish community. In ethnocentric perspectives Muslim women are often perceived as a marginal group who needs to be saved. As it has been explained in the theoretical framework there exists a colonial rhetoric on Muslim women in which she is the victim who only can be saved by western values (Abu-Lughod 2002, 783).   
 This notion can also be supported by the data that is analyzed in this thesis. In the article of Marieke Kessel, in which she elaborates on the function of a glossy as a tool of resistance, the Kurdish women are represented as victims who finally stand up against the patriarchal practices which have oppressed them for centuries. In the following quote it will become clear that the strategy to show that Kurdish women are victims of the pitfalls of the cultural practices from the Islam is by framing them as victims from the real Other Muslims, namely the Islamic State as well as their own patriarchal society.

Honor. It is a pivotal notion in Kurdish Northern-Iraq. With their behavior women are responsible for the honor of their whole family. The choice of clothing can harm the honor and brothers, cousins and fathers are justified to get into action. In the best case often a – physical – reprimand, in the worst case with murder (Kessel 2015, translation J.S.).

In this quote the practice of honor killing is used in order to explain how the Kurdish women are suffering under the patriarchal yoke of their society. The journalist Kessel is thus arguing that the Kurdish women are victims of their own culture. They are the ones which are victimized by patriarchal practices and as it has become clear earlier, they are now battling these patriarchal notions.   
By creating this notion of the Muslim women, again, as a victim of her patriarchal society, the West has neglected its own share in the complex situation of the Middle East. Abu-Lughod explains that the West itself, and especially the United States, has an important role in the cultural framing of the Middle East. But by focusing on the neglect and oppression of women by their own husbands and thus by their own, ‘barbaric’ society, the West is freed from its own political and historical errors. Instead of focusing on historical and political explanations, the Middle Eastern questions were understood in religio-cultural ones (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). Abu-Lughod explains the following:

Instead of questions that might lead to the exploration of global interconnections, we were offered ones that worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres. […] Cultures in which First Ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around in burqas (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

It thus becomes clear that the rhetoric that is posed by the western media does create an image of the Muslim world and especially of the Muslim women as a dependent victim who is waiting to be saved. The position of the Kurdish female combatants however opposes this image. As it has become clear from the analyzed data these women were indeed victims, but they have now seen the ‘light’ and have started to oppose the wrongdoings of their societies. They have become amazons of the free world (Hofman 2014). The western discourse that existed about them is thus no longer fitting the current representation of the Kurdish female combatants. The discourse on the Kurdish women is no longer one of victimhood, but is now one of agency. But this agency is still a form of agency which is inflicted by western values. The Kurdish women want to safe themselves, because they have engaged with the western value of feminism.   
 The analyzed data of this thesis also shows this practice. For example journalist Lennart Hofman interviewed several female combatants who argue that they have been oppressed by their male family members. The article starts with the following anecdote:

When Selgan left her parental home to join the rebels of the YPG, her brother bawled at her sister: ‘What does she think of herself? Women who fight? She disgraces the family!’ (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

The journalist focuses on the opinion of her brother and keeps arguing that the Kurdish female warriors are constantly opposed by their male family members. His article ends with another quote from the same female warrior. She has been problematizing the opinions of her father and brother by battling the Islamic State, but even though she has taken agency the journalist is still emphasizing the role of patriarchy within the Kurdish society. The article ends with:

My father was married with two wives, my mother suffered immensely. Her whole life she said: ‘If I would have your age I would never live in this house. Than I would have become a revolutionary and I would fight for my country’. But she never could. […] My brother is still angry. Very angry. But it was my choice to stand up, and that was the right one. This is the reality right now. We are free. Now we can do everything (Hofman 2014, translation J.S.).

The Kurdish combatants are thus portrayed as women who have finally taken agency. They have opposed their father and brothers and therefore they have resisted patriarchy.   
 There are forces which resist the Islamic State, such as the Kurdish Women’s Movement and they are perceived as amazons of the free world. Throughout this analysis it has been argued that these women are also used as a political tool to provide a counter story. This story however has been told from a western perspective, in which feminism has become the red thread of showing that there still are ‘good’, i.e. ‘western’ values in the Middle East.   
 The West for long perceived the non-western and in this case, the Islamic world, as uncivilized and moreover as misogynist society. Therefore Muslim women were seen as oppressed and submissive parts of society who did not have the same feminist or emancipated values as their ‘sisters’ in the western world. According to Shahrzad Mojab this image is not totally false. She argues that many non-western women were not in the position to challenge patriarchy and the sexual division of their society. They often did not have the tools to oppose their situation (Mojab 1997, 68). But this does not mean that Muslim women do not have a history of resisting patriarchy (Mojab 1997, 68).   
 This history however is often neglected by many journalists, but they are addressing the future of the Kurdish community. Journalist Lennart Hofman for example placed this quote in his article: “We break through walls which will never be rebuilt (Hofmann 2014, translation J.S.).” The motivations of the Kurdish women to fight the Islamic State are not ignited by one simple spark. These women have battled against patriarchy for decades, they have gained more rights and will not give them away easily (Hofman 2014, Bahara 2015). In their articles the Dutch journalists thus create the notion of a sustainable feminism in the Middle Eastern region. The women are represented in this Dutch media discourse as steady agents of change.   
 It seems like feminist concepts and values like agency, emancipation and freedom are only part of the discourse that is produced about the Kurdish women, by focusing on the patriarchal practices which were opposed to them. The fact that the Kurdish women have resisted them makes them interesting for the covering of the marginal story. I would argue that the Dutch journalists are creating an image of the Kurdish female warriors which relates to the stated values of feminism, in a negative or denying way. The Kurdish women are now fighting against the Islamic State, because they want to be free, because they want to have agency and because they want to be emancipated. It is thus assumed and thus constructed that these women do not already have access to these values. Therefore the positive, marginal story of the Kurdish female warriors immediately becomes one of victimhood and moreover one of savior. Only this time the Muslim woman is saving herself. As it appeared from the analyzed data the Kurdish female combatants often have an ambivalent position within the Dutch media. On the one hand they are represented as victims of their patriarchal society, but on the other hand they are portrayed as saviors, because they oppose these patriarchal structures in their society.   
 It is often neglected by western media that these women do not need western support, values or alliances. They safe themselves, by handling a rifle and talking about politics, values and morals. They fight an extremist community, and they fight patriarchy, but they do it in their own historicized and cultural way, they do not copy western feminism, but have a feminism of their own.   
 The female Kurdish combatants thus have an interesting position in the coverage of Dutch media. On the one hand they are portrayed as victims of their society, but at the other hand they are presented as the opponents of these oppressing structures and the protectors of western values. They are perceived as agents of change. But it has become clear from this chapter that the Kurdish female combatants are put in the western discourse of feminism. The Dutch media neglect the notion that the Muslim women, i.e. oriental women can have a feminism of their own.

**Conclusion**

In this thesis I have analyzed the production of Dutch media discourses about the battle of the Kurdish female combatants against the extremist Islamic State. I wanted to create an understanding of the representation of Kurdish female warriors within western media and the power structures which constructed the existing discourse.  
 In order to create a better understanding of the implications of the battle of the Kurdish women against the Islamic State, it was decided to conduct a discourse analysis of Dutch media articles in order to answer the following research question:

To what extent are (online) media discourses in the Netherlands about the Kurdish Women’s Movement’s combatants, informed by orientalist and ethnocentric ideas about female emancipation within the Islam?

The selection of the articles was based on several factors. The articles needed to be opinionated articles of a certain length and another criterion was that they needed to be written within the timeframe of 2014-2015. The final selection consisted of five articles which occurred in Dutch media.   
 The analysis of these articles does not give a representation of the consensus of the entire Dutch media, but it gives an insight in a small, carefully chosen selection. The sample that has been analyzed is thus indeed small, but the research that is conducted is a qualitive research. The size of the data also creates the opportunity to get in depth to the discourse that is presented by the Dutch media.  
 Several scientific debates are important for the answering of this the research question of this thesis. The notion of Orientalism is pivotal in the understanding of the position of the Kurdish female combatants. As Edward Said has argued, the current global power structures are still informed by imperialist notions. There is thus the division between the West and the Rest. This notion of Orientalism also implicitly affects the way in which the Kurdish female combatants are perceived by western media. The Kurdish women are namely seen as Muslim, thus Other women, who have taken up western notions in order to battle the uncivilized notion of the oppression of women.   
 The notion of ethnocentrism was also important in understanding the position of this research. The Dutch journalists are namely affected by their own cultural understandings and values and are always already implying them on the position of the Kurdish women. This became clear in the analysis of the article “Veiling Resistance” of Abu-Lughod. She argues that the West, and thus also western media, often neglect that Muslim women have a history of feminism of their own. They do not simply copy western feminism, but are battling a historicized and contextualized fight.   
 The notion of female warriors however does not have a long scientific tradition. Theorist Sandra Ponzanesi however has provided a theoretical notion which is became pivotal in this thesis. She argued how the position of (Muslim) female combatants or suicide bombers was perceived differently than the position of male combatants. Women are namely perceived as bearers of life and not as ‘angels of death’. Female combatants do not fit the discourse that is provided about them. This notion was very important for this thesis, because the Kurdish female combatants do not seem to fit this notion. There position as combatants is indeed perceived as peculiar in their own society, but western journalists perceive the female Kurdish warriors as ‘amazons of the free world’.   
 The Kurdish female combatants are also part of a discourse on agency. Agency according to Rosi Braidotti is not only about active (armed) resistance, but moreover about acting against dominant daily practices and changing those. The Kurdish women in this case are indeed actively resisting the Islamic State by taking up arms and fighting them, but they are also battling dominant daily practices in their own society, namely patriarchy. The Kurdish female combatants are thus fighting a double bound battle.   
 Throughout the first chapter of the analysis it became clear that marginal stories of Muslim women who have become victims of their patriarchal and extremist religious societies have been brought to the western audiences for years. But there has been a shift in the media coverage of conflicts and wars. This shift entails the covering of marginal counter stories, for example telling the story of the enemy. Dutch media also have been applying this strategy in the covering of the global battle against the Islamic State. The Dutch media are not only covering the stories of Islamic State soldiers, they are providing a counter story, in which the Kurdish female combatants take up a pivotal role. The female soldiers have become bearers of light in dark ages.   
 This however was not always the case. The history of the Kurds as a community is one of fighting for an acknowledged existence. For decades the Kurdish armies, including the Kurdish women’s army, were perceived as terrorist organizations which threatened the western hemisphere. Ever since the Kurds battle against the Islamic State, this perception of the community as a terrorist group has changed.

Western discourse on the Kurdish women’s army has changed. The Kurdish women are not longer terrorists, but have become agents of change. They are battling the Islamic State as women and are portraying western values. The notion of feminism takes an important role in this.   
 The Kurdish women are perceived to fight a two front battle, namely one against the Islamic State and one against patriarchy and misogynist oppression in their own society. The Kurdish female combatants have thus become fighters of free, western and feminist values. The Dutch media which were analyzed in this thesis predominantly focus their coverage of the battle of the Kurdish women, on their ideological motivations.   
 The question remained however, why this coverage of the Kurdish feminism is interesting for the Dutch reporters. In answering this question ethnocentrism becomes relevant. The coverage of the battle of the Kurdish female combatants is namely influenced by postcolonial power structures. The Kurdish women were for long perceived as victims of their own society in which patriarchy was dominant. The knowledge and discourse which was provided about the Kurdish women was for long one of victimhood and obedience. This did not relate to western values of equality and feminism. The Kurdish women thus needed savior from their dominant husbands.   
 This discourse however is endorsed by the story that is covered about them now. The Kurdish women however did not need western forces to change their position in society, they only needed western values. This notion of western values is highly important in the coverage of their battle against the Islamic State. The Kurdish women are namely using western values of feminism, against the extremist organization. This was a welcome counter story for the Dutch and other western media. It thus becomes clear that the stories of the Kurdish women are interesting to cover for Dutch media, because they fight patriarchy according to western norms. There is however no attention paid to the notion of feminism in the Muslim context.   
 The western perspective on feminism creates an ethnocentric understanding of non-western feminism, like in the case of the Kurdish female warriors. These women are namely fighting a battle which is happening in its own context. This battle cannot be analyzed or covered with the cultural values of the West. Ethnocentrism is therefore a pitfall which is blurring the understanding of the motivations and goals of the Kurdish female warriors. This also becomes apparent in the articles which were analyzed in this thesis. Many Kurdish women do have different understandings of feminism, than western women. Moreover their feminism has a history of its own and they do not need western perspectives on their lives.   
The articles about the female Kurdish warriors have shown the oblivious, neglect of the history of the Kurdish Women’s Movement.   
 Eventually it becomes clear that the Dutch media creates an ethnocentric ideal out of the soldiers of the Kurdish women’s army. They have become poster girls of the idealist, western battle that is fought against the Islamic State. But as one of the female combatants argues:

‘Normally journalists ask me to pose with my gun. But for me this is about much more than the killing. We change the society,’ she said softly (Hofman 2014).

The women of Kurdistan thus have a much bigger aim, than only fighting the Islamic State or only battling against patriarchy. They want to break down walls which were built for centuries. The western world has to understand that this is a battle which has been fought for years and has its own history. It is not a battle which is ignited by western values, it is a battle which has been sparked by the Kurdish women themselves and it needs to be fought by them. These women have a feminism of their own.

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