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**Trafficked into War.**

** Investigating the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, how do women and girls continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking and systematic rape in periods of armed conflict and civil unrest?**

(Fight Slavery Now, 2012)

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**Abstract**

Regarded as one of the ‘great human rights issues of our time’, human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and girls, continues to capture the attention of politicians, non-governmental organisations, feminists, activists and the general public. Promulgated by global geopolitical instability and the humanitarian crises in Syria and Iraq, alarming rates of trafficked women and girls have occurred with little opposition, alerting us to the dangers of not reacting to, nor understanding the problem at hand. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues to commit monstrous crimes against women and girls, by means of trafficking, enslavement and sexual exploitation. By challenging the patriarchal assumption that men are the dominant victims of warfare, feminist research has attempted to explore the disproportional effects of conflict on women. This paper seeks to further the gendered perspective, guided by postcolonialism and conflict studies to better understand the full extent of women’s subjugation during war and peace. Focussing on hypermasculine discourse and the lack of attention paid to women’s agency allows a broader understanding of women’s wartime struggles beyond just the physical and statistical ‘realities’ of trafficking and gender-based violence. In attempting to ‘fill the gaps’ at the junctures of the theoretical disciplines, this thesis aims to illuminate the urgent need to widen and intensify our scholarly understanding of wartime gender inequalities.

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**Introduction**

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Elie Wiesel’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (1986).

“To reintegrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the ‘world’ is divided, administrated, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeon-holes, by which ‘we’ are ‘human’ and ‘they’ are not.”

Edward Said (2001: 26).

**Trafficked into War: The Human Trafficking Industry**

Human trafficking is an illegal industry and inhumane system that entails the subordination and exploitation of people. Recognised as pervasive in every country and corner of the world, trafficking, slavery[[1]](#footnote-2) and serfdom have been large-scale global enterprises for centuries, as common historical practices well before the trans-Atlantic slave trade that operated between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries[[2]](#footnote-3). In spite of calls for a ‘free world’ and a subsequent abolition of colonial slavery, human trafficking and slavery-like practices still persist in today’s ‘modern’ world[[3]](#footnote-4). Human trafficking and modern-day slavery have become ‘hot-topics’ among political circles today. The newly-elected British Prime Minister, Theresa May, vowed to make it her mission to help rid the world of this ‘barbaric evil’, denouncing it as the great human rights issue of our time (BBC News, 2016a). In the quest to fight this despicable ‘global industry’, significant difficulties arise in identifying those affected by trafficking, as well as the perpetrators who proliferate it. Whilst it is impossible to define a ‘typical’ trafficking ‘victim’, victimhood is recognised to be most prevalent among the most vulnerable[[4]](#footnote-5) minorities and socially-excluded groups (BBC News, 2016a). Many victims believe they are escaping poverty, limited opportunities at home, shortfalls in education, unstable social and political conditions, or war. However, their ‘slave masters’ are usually out to make financial gain, ‘luring their prey’ with unfulfilled promises of a better life (BBC News, 2016a). In today’s tense political climate, war has become a significant driver of people wishing to flee their native lands, forcing the civilians who live in war-torn environments into ‘high-risk’ situations as new ‘opportunities’ arise for illegal trafficking. As state institutions, border controls, and ‘the rule of law’ collapse, conflict zones become popular destinations for sex trafficking and other forms of human exploitation. Organised criminals take advantage of chaotic conditions, conscious that chances of detection are minimal. This is no different to the current armed conflict and civil unrest occurring in present-day Syria and Iraq by the terrorist organisation the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (hereby referred by the acronym ISIL[[5]](#footnote-6)).

ISIL is a prominent Salafist, jihadist[[6]](#footnote-7) militant group that burst onto the international and geopolitical radar in August 2014. As United States (US) forces withdrew from military operations in Iraq in 2011, a ‘power vacuum’ formed in great swathes of Iraqi territory, intensifying sectarian unrest that had been brewing long before US occupation. Furthermore, the neighbouring Syrian civil war, and the marginalisation of Iraqi Sunni Arabs by the sectarian government of Nouri al-Maliki, gifted ISIL the opportunity to snatch a vast portion of land from both nations, over which it claims to have military, religious and political authority (Clarke, 2015: 17). ISIL took advantage of chaotic and unstable political conditions as a way to gain wealth, socio-economic and political status, arms and recruits, in order to construct itself in the Middle East and the West as a tangible threat to global security. ISIL is a progeny of al-Qaeda[[7]](#footnote-8), although their affiliations collapsed due to a divergence in ideology and strategy[[8]](#footnote-9). With the death of al-Qaeda’s charismatic leader Osama bin Laden in 2011, al-Qaeda struggled to remain relevant, losing its ground to ISIL in the battle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of aspiring jihadists throughout the Islamic and Western world (Clarke, 2015: 17). ISIL’s notoriety comes as a result of their explicit, varied criminal operations, ranging from executions, oil thefts, bank robberies, extortion, kidnappings, smuggling and human trafficking. These ‘extremist’ activities have allowed ISIL to separate from other jihadist groups financially, with some estimates putting ISIL’s monthly income at US $56 million (Clarke, 2015; WITW, 2016). ISIL continues to model its organisation on its reputation for exploitation[[9]](#footnote-10) and violent means, funding their ideological aims through black market smuggling and human trafficking, supporting the establishment and expansion of its caliphate[[10]](#footnote-11) in Iraq and Syria. This thesis owes its focus on the contemporary case of ISIL to the group’s hyperbolic magnification by media[[11]](#footnote-12) sensationalism and political opportunism, which focuses on their terrorist activities and the subsequent propulsion of one of the biggest refugee crises Europe has ever been confronted with. Although the militant group is regularly featured in popular discourse, there is a lack of credible data and scholarly research on ISIL’s practices of trafficking women and girls[[12]](#footnote-13).

This research focuses on trafficked and ‘recruited’ women and girls due to the overwhelming evidence that females appear to be the predominant casualties of ISIL’s gender-based[[13]](#footnote-14) war crimes. Contrary to the stereotypes about war deaths that exclusively feature male combatants, women and children account for a “high proportion of civilian casualties and war refugees, and are additionally more prone to be the victims of rape in war” (Ponzanesi, 2014: 2). These specific gender-based violations are displayed in ISIL’s insurgency. Their illegal trafficking of Yazidi[[14]](#footnote-15) women and girls, and ‘recruitment’ of young girls from the West to join the caliphate as jihadi brides in Syria and Iraq are just two high-profile examples of their gendered crimes. These two cases caught my attention due to the overt nature of ISIL’s trafficking practices: illustrating, boasting and encouraging trafficking and enslavement via video sharing platforms, magazines, propaganda and on social media, as a recruitment tool to entice men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex before marriage is taboo, to join ISIL. (Callimachi, 2015). Each chapter attempts to analyse women’s socio-economic disadvantage and weak status to emphasise hierarchical and patriarchal holds over women, while urging and lobbying for change and equality in all aspects of society in times of peace and upheaval.

As will become clear throughout the thesis, despite ISIL’s relative ‘adolescence’ as an extremist organisation, their trafficking practices echo common wartime practices that disproportionally affect women and girls. Historically, armed conflicts generate a demand for trafficking for prostitution, as organised criminal groups and troops take advantage of chaotic conditions in which trafficking rates flourish. Taking a gendered lens[[15]](#footnote-16), I aim to make sense of this current, complex, yet insufficiently-researched phenomenon, by highlighting the female bodies and voices silenced in contemporary discourse and by ISIL themselves. Through a strong anchoring in feminist critique, I aim to challenge assumptions that women are absent from war because of ‘traditional’ and ‘natural’ links between women and pacifism, refuting gendered assumptions based on feminised qualities of caring, nurturing, mourning and empathy (Ponzanesi, 2014: 1). The focus of my analysis is to reveal the patterns and relationships in the trafficking of women and girls by the military and terrorist organisations to help understand the gendering of violence in order to reflect the large patriarchal disparity between men and women in times of conflict and peace.

**Research Question**

Keeping the focus on wartime sex trafficking, my research investigates how women and girls’ defencelessness to trafficking increases amid periods of violent conflict. The main critical research question is: ‘Investigating the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, how do women and girls continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking and systematic rape in periods of armed conflict and civil unrest?’ This question has been formulated to guide my analysis along with ­a series of sub-questions. Despite the inability to provide succinct answers, I pose the following sub-questions: Through the criminal act of trafficking, how is ISIL using the female body as a weapon of rape, war and genocide? In the politics of representation (Hall, 1997), how has mainstream media discourse developed its framing of Islamic fundamentalism? Or are Orientalist[[16]](#footnote-17) patters reiterated, recycling a familiar colonial fantasy of the barbaric and inherently violent Islamic male? Can popular discourse speak of a recognition and progress in the presentation of female agency[[17]](#footnote-18), emancipation and visibility in conflict zones, or is there a repetition in gendered representations and stereotypes? More generally, how does ISIL’s trafficking of women and girls uncover complicated power relations, which reiterate Eurocentric homogenous biases and patriarchal stereotypes about gender, sexuality, race and the subaltern? These sub-questions, among others, recur throughout the remainder of this paper in order to contextualise and substantiate the ‘answers’ to the title question provided.

**Chapter Structure**

This thesis is divided into three chapters, of which two are in-depth case studies engaging with the topic of ISIL’s sexual trafficking of women and girls. *Chapter I*, entitled ‘The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons’, provides a necessary theoretical, methodological and judicial understanding of ‘trafficking in persons’ and women. Presenting international UN protocol provides an instrumental entry point on what ‘constitutes’ trafficking, while conveying the intrinsic link of wartime sex trafficking. A close investigation follows on how systematic wartime rape leads to an influx of sex trafficking in these chaotic and lawless conditions, examining who the perpetrators are (the military/militants), and how women are regarded as the ‘booty’ and ‘spoils’ of war. This bridges the gap between the key themes of institutionalised rape and trafficking.

*Chapter II*, entitled ‘Sold and Raped: The Trafficking of Yazidi Women and Girls’ commences my case study of ISIL’s overt sex trafficking ring. I begin by introducing the Yazidis and examining the sectarian division and genocide produced by ISIL that significantly impacts on this religious minority. By demonstrating how women and girls are positioned in ISIL’s war crimes, this chapter examines the sexual enslavement of the Yazidi ‘spoils of war,’ which ISIL proudly glorify on video and social media platforms. Elaborating on ISIL’s theology of trafficking, I call upon my critical feminist lens developed over the MA1 Gender Studies programme to scrutinise how this old phenomenon is now a normalised ‘facet’ of conflict and effective weapon of fear, terror and war against women. At the opposite end of the trafficking spectrum relative to the Yazidi case, *Chapter* *III* employs discursive media content analysis to investigate the ‘recruitment’ of Western girls who are trafficked with the intent of being jihadi brides in ISIL-held territories. It is well-documented that ISIL is actively kidnapping, trafficking and enslaving Yazidi women, however, less attention has been paid to these the phenomenon of ISIL-bound, foreign female ‘recruits’. Despite voluntary recruitment, these girls are considered victims of trafficking under UN protocol, as they are considered too young to provide adult consent (Binetti, 2015). Although recruits under the age of eighteen should in theory fall under the ‘protection’ of international definitions of ‘trafficked persons’, most mainstream media presentations of these young female recruit’s focus on psychological factors and reasoning, rather than on a political framework. Through critical discourse analysis, I explore how the mainstream media is re/creating gendered binaries of men/active and female/passive (Mulvey, 1999). Denoting how the media is feeding into gendered and Orientalist cultural biases that alludes to the female as a ‘passive’ weak vessel of the (Islamic) male Other. Taking a critical postcolonial and gender perspective, this chapter explores how the East-West dichotomy generates a ‘*us* versus *them’, ‘West* versus *Islam’* and, *‘Occident* versus *Orient’* binary narrative, which feeds intoa distorted view of women and Islam. By highlighting certain trends of representation, reporting and grammatology, I endeavour to convey how certain media rubrics reinforce the heteropatriarchal, gendered nature of warfare while simultaneously minimising female agency.

The selection of these case studies was based on their ability to reveal and politicise the intrinsic relationship between conflict and the disproportional vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, exploitation and gender-based atrocities. My intervention will consist of my presentation of these two salient, yet under-researched cases. My intervention will further entail the call to address gaps in current academic and political research regarding ISIL’s inhumane activities. I will address key issues of agency, Otherness, and femininity, with regard to an emerging and dynamic world crisis, namely the trafficking of women and girls by the world's most powerful extremist group. I aim to highlight key feminist concerns that go beyond gender and into the realms of race, culture, class and sexuality by documenting the gender-based violence’s inflicted by ISIL, while unearthing subjugated knowledge to challenge basic structures and ideologies that oppress women. By employing a multi-disciplinary conflict, gender and postcolonial studies critical perspective, I aim to highlight how the female body is *still* being trafficked as ‘war booty’ that is systematically raped and exploited in combat today, in an effort to mobilise social change and justice.

**Methodology**

Due to the lack of credible and reliable data on the topic of wartime (sex) trafficking and on ISIL’s gender-based war crimes (Wölte, 2004), this feminist desk research takes an interpretive and textual strategy. This thesis is grounded on research and data obtained (predominantly from 2014[[18]](#footnote-19)) from non-governmental organisations, such as the UN, UNICEF, UNODC, UNIFEM, ESCAP and the ILO, to follow current information on ISIL’s trafficking operations. I conducted the feminist practice of textual content analyses across a range of media forms, to explore central issues that inform our understanding of gender and difference, as well as to produce research aimed at social action (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 234). To help examine the extent to which women’s concerns are researched and presented within academia and in mainstream media narratives, I employed critical discourse analysis to guide my research. This was based on the following five questions: *Themes*: What kind of knowledge is being produced? *Rules*: What can and cannot be said? *Speakers*: Who is speaking? *Objects*: Whom/What is being spoken about? *Authority*: How is truth being created? (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001). This qualitative approach permitted a more complex analysis of themes on a sub-textual level with the hope of bringing new insights to uncover hidden truths (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 238). At the same time this helped explore and develop a new understanding of the benefits of including alternative feminist practice within contemporary conflict and postcolonial dialogues surrounding combat, restoration and reconciliation.

I sought and conducted interviews with governmental experts[[19]](#footnote-20) to help bridge the under-researched nature on the current sexual exploitation of Yazidi women through a theoretical academic perspective. I conducted a telephone interview with a director[[20]](#footnote-21) at the Kurdistan Regional Government in the US, on ISIL’s trafficking and genocidal attack against the Yazidis. I had a clear research agenda and thus conducted a semi-structured interview, preparing a series of key open-ended questions[[21]](#footnote-22) in order to explore issues of trafficking. As a feminist researcher and interviewer I was concerned with issues of representation of the researched, while being mindful of my personal positioning on the topic as well as the ‘director’s’ position as a Kurdish feminist in the US and as a governmental figure (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 117). During the interview I was aware of my own research position as an Australian-British-European woman from a middle-class feminist and atheist background, careful not to interject any particular personal and research standpoints (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 114). Ensuring that I conducted reflexive research was vital to this interview and my overall feminist analysis in this thesis, as it allowed for myself to ‘account for personal biases’, since personal perspective can influence the research process and findings (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 3). Within efforts to maintain a neutral perspective, I utilised my MA1 Gender Studies research abilities in this interview, through my clear research agenda to get a fundamental understanding of Yazidi lives and those oppressed groups in ISIL-held territory, in order to help my reflectivity throughout the research process[[22]](#footnote-23). This interview was invaluable due to the interviewee’s background as an Iraqi Kurdish feminist, and due to their continuous work with Yazidis. This interview gave me insight into the mental health issues women and girls face during and post-enslavement, while providing a new Muslim feminist perspective on the topic.

**Taking a Conflict, Gendered and Postcolonial Lens**

My research mixed critical, historical and media analyses, entwining the epistemologies of conflict, gender and postcolonial studies[[23]](#footnote-24) to help shape and position this uncharted territory. It is imperative to call upon gender studies when discussing this topic of disproportional wartime inequality, to help track the development and changes of feminist engagement with issues of war, securitisation, and reconciliations (Ponzanesi, 2014: 3). As Sandra Ponzanesi states, although studies on war and terrorism are abundant, interestingly the intersection between a gendered and a postcolonial framework is lacking (Ponzanesi, 2014: 3). It was imperative in my research that I unearthed and documented the experiences of those bodies who are at greater risk of specific gender-based abuses in situations of war. Since gender studies is based on examining women’s silencing, subjugation and struggle in the public and private sphere, I employed this perspective to illustrate these gender-related inequalities, biases and violence. Engaging with feminist research provided a window into the social realities and experiences of trafficked women under the control of ISIL, while also illuminating certain gender-based stereotypes perpetuated in media discourse. It is important that I challenged the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women in periods of peace and war, in order to foster empowerment for these marginalised groups of women (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 4). Due to my utilisation of feminist research, I adopted the term ‘trafficking in women’ instead of the general term ‘human trafficking’ (except when defining the term in official legal protocol). This was not only because the vast majority of trafficked persons are women and girls, but because the words ‘human’ and ‘woman’ are not interchangeable, politicising the issue further. Adopting the term ‘human trafficking’ overlooks the dissymmetry of gender and power relations in trafficking (Andrijasevic, 2003: 251), and places trafficked women and their experiences in a subsidiary and invisible role.

I called upon postcolonial political and ideological discourse to address issues of “technological change and the subsequent structural inequalities, and also issues of ethnicity, race, national and religious identity in the age of globalisation” (Braidotti, 2003: 207). Postcolonialism refers to “forms of *representations*, *reading practices* and *values*” that can cross both physical and temporal borders between colonial rule and national independence, rather than limiting itself within the strict perimeter of the period ‘after colonialism’ (McLeod, 2000; Sriratana, 2016). Historical, cultural or geographical contexts are “more important than the question of whether or not abstract qualities or moral preoccupations can be universally applied to people of all times and places” (Sriratana, 2016: 1). This research specifically focused on the gendering and legacies of violence from a postcolonial perspective, with an analysis of each unique case study and ISIL’s vision of violence, including how present-day configurations of gender, race, nationality, class and sexuality inform ISIL’s actions of trafficking (Ponzanesi, 2014). Postcolonialism was integral to grounding this thesis as it helped to analyse and shift current political and (new) media theory, in order to see historical complexities and dualisms, while generating new oppositional thinking and dialogues rather than reproducing certain singular ‘truths’.

This research made a conflict studies case through a strong anchoring in a gendered and postcolonial critique, incorporating the disciplines in order to illuminate and discover women’s situations in conflict, history and subjectivity (Ponzanesi, 2012: 1). Since feminist research is orientated on the inventory and analysis of power relations between (and *within*) men and women (Buikema and Tuin, 2009: 2), this thesis aims to expose gendered and cultural stereotypes, and androcentric biases currently happening in and around ISIL’s war-related trafficking practices. I believe that the inclusion of suppressed voices of women in this male dominated canon will generate innovative data. Data used towards transforming future research is intended to create a new language of change and awareness, advancing gender equality in areas of public policy, judicial law and education in matters of war, in order to lobby for drastic change.

**Research Limitations**

In periods of peace and war it appears to be virtually impossible to find reliable statistics on the extent of trafficking in women (Wijers, 1999; UNODC, 2004; Aronowitz, 2009). This is intensified when law and order breaks down, as statistics fluctuate and become increasingly unreliable because of the difficulty in conducting systematic research in conflict zones, especially in the Middle East- and this is a major deficit for this desk research (Wijers, 1999: 19). Furthermore, the statistics and (lack of) information on trafficking and sex slavery also differs from country to country and region-to-region. Due to time limitations, extensive qualitative research has been omitted, including the possibility of following up on interviews with ISIL’s victims, field work, analyses of peacekeeping implementations, legal documentations and frameworks on human rights and women’s rights. Therefore, this research aims to illustrate the ‘trends’ as supposed to the ‘facts’ in the forms and extent of (sex) trafficking carried out by ISIL. Despite these limitations, I assert that my research can yield valuable information, calling attention to current gaps in ‘gendering’ conflict.

**Chapter I**

**Defining ‘Trafficking in Persons’ in Official Protocol**

**1.1 The ‘Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons’**

Due to the clandestine nature of ‘trafficking of persons’ a clear singular definition of ‘human trafficking’ has long been debated, producing a vast (and often confusing) array of definitions. Many criticise governmental bodies for failing to “comprehend the magnitude of incidents of trafficking that have occurred within their own geographical borders, or have simply lacked the wherewithal to combat human sex trafficking” (McCabe and Manian, 2009: 2). The United Nations (hereafter, the UN) has established a widely-accepted definition[[24]](#footnote-25) in the ‘Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons’. Reading:

“‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (UNODC, 2004: 42).

Trafficking occurs when a personis moved from one place to another. This may be within a country or across a border, by someone or an organised group, so that the individual can be taken into a situation for exploitative purposes (ILO, 2009). The issue of individual consent is vital: “[the] consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation … shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth [above] have been used” (UNODC, 2004: 43). The protocol stresses the range of abuses of freedom and exploitation trafficked bodies experience regardless of whether the individual has had prior knowledge and/or involvement in their trafficking.

The UN’s protocol stipulates that ‘trafficking in persons’ has three constituent elements in order for it to be legally recognised as ‘trafficking’:

1. The act (what is done): recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons;
2. The means (how it is done): threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim; and
3. The purpose (why it is done): for the purpose of exploitation, which includes forcing others into prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or similar practices and the removal of organs (UNODC, 2016a).

To ascertain whether a particular circumstance constitutes ‘trafficking in persons’, one element set above must occur. Crucially, the UN exerts special protection to children (any person under the age of eighteen and under full legal responsibility). If any ‘acts’ of recruitment, transportation or harbouring of a minor takes place, then the previously stated circumstances of (2) ‘the means’ and (3) ‘the purpose’ do not need to occur.

The UN’s International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimate almost 21 million people are victims of forced labour, and over 11 million are women and girls (ILO, 2016). Almost 19 million victims are exploited by private individuals or enterprises and over 2 million by the state or rebel groups, and of those exploited by individuals or enterprises, 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation (ILO, 2016). Trafficking women for sex slavery and forced prostitution is cited as an increasingly growing industry, becoming one of the most profitable illegal enterprises in the world[[25]](#footnote-26). As profits soar, sex trafficking has attracted both small-time criminals and sophisticated organised crime across the globe (Kara, 2009: 22). Although drug trafficking generates greater revenues, trafficked women are far more profitable because unlike a drug, “a human female does not have to be grown, cultivated, distilled, or packaged. Unlike a drug, a human female can be used by the customer again and again” (Kara, 2009: 5). The female and the female body become targeted, dehumanised and invaded by perpetrators, echoing traditional stereotypes that the female body starts from the waist down.

Women and children are consistently cited as the most common victims of human trafficking, mainly because of their lower social-economical positions[[26]](#footnote-27). Women and children become targets because of their perceived powerlessness, innocence, and inability to protect themselves, which makes them easier to ‘manipulate’ and ‘less able’ to claim their rights (Aronowitz, 2009: 37). The gender of a child heightens their risk of becoming targeted, as girls and young women are at a significantly higher risk than boys or young men. This has to do with certain traditional cultural practices, as girls in many societies are deemed less valuable. For example, the custom of early and arranged marriage of young girls is in some cultures viewed as a manner to relieve the poverty of her family as girls are viewed as an ‘economic liability’ “when the family must produce a dowry to the groom upon marriage” (Aronowitz, 2009: 38). It is important to note that a major difference in the ‘recruitment’ and trafficking of children is that traffickers in some cases negotiate with the parents for their child to be given away or sold, rather than being abducted (Aronowitz, 2009). There have also been cases of children who are eager to travel, gain new experiences, and support their families, and thereby willingly[[27]](#footnote-28) leave with their traffickers.

**1.2.1 Armed Conflict and Civil Unrest: A Driver of the Global and Regional Trafficking ‘Industry’**

There are numerous structural factors contributing to certain people and bodies becoming disproportionally vulnerable and ‘high-risk’ to sex trafficking. Numerous socio-economic factors are key explanatory elements into why trafficking still continues to prevail in the contemporary world. Issues including poverty, lack of sustainable livelihoods, structural inequities in society, gender discrimination, natural or constructed disasters and war and armed conflict, have contributed to the growth in trafficking of women and girls (ESCAP, 2003: 4). Both licit and illicit causes of migration can be heightened by unstable political conditions in countries of origin. Situations of conflict are regarded as a catalyst for people becoming trafficked and sold into war. A connection which has only recently been recognised as being inextricably linked (UNIFEM, 2002; Cameron and Newman, 2008). The majority of governmental and academic studies focus on trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, consequently resulting in a scarcity of systematic research and data on trafficking in periods of violent conflict (UNIFEM, 2002; Wölte, 2004). In periods of warfare, women and girls are often abducted and trafficked by government or rebel forces to be used as forced combatants, labourers, or sex slaves, particularly those who have become internally displaced or those forced out of the region as refugees. Women are often kidnapped and used as sexual slaves to service troops, as well as to cook, clean and service them from camp to camp (UNICEF, 2002: 20). As conflict persists, warlords profiting from on-going political and economic instability, as well as the disproportional vulnerability of women, fuel the sex trade and supply of women for illegal sex work across and within borders. As women and their bodies become ‘spoils’ of war, they become institutionally trafficked, raped and forced into servitude as a ‘reward’ for military troops and rebel militiamen.

**1.2.2 Spoils of War: Institutional Rape and Sex Work**

The relationship between war, rape and sex work (whether by coercion or not) has gained prominence in the media and representations of postcolonial conflict (Demmers, 2014: 27). Women (and their bodies) become trafficked, enslaved, raped and murdered, making the women who survive war no less the casualties of war (Ponzanesi, 2014: 3). The relationship between military troops and intersection gender-specific sexual violence[[28]](#footnote-29) is an old and well documented phenomenon[[29]](#footnote-30). In gendered, hypermasculine discourses of warfare there is an underlying attitude that sex is good for morale[[30]](#footnote-31). The relationship between rape and combat has become a wholly accepted trend, regarded as being a firm facet of combat. Radical feminists distinguish sexual violence and rape as a form of terrorism pervading in ‘our’ culture, a ‘deeply ingrained’ social practice that confers and reinforces the oppression of women in the military and society in general (Arrizón, 2014: 180). This is due to the blanket statements made that justify institutional rape of women by the military, arguing that sex (consensual or not) is fundamentally *needed* in order to keep morale high and to keep soldiers[[31]](#footnote-32) happy. This reflects a socially constructed permissive attitude that sex is a natural proclivity of men and ‘boys will be boys’. There has been a lack of historical accountability with consistent failure to punish the perpetrators over time because women are considered the property of men and part of the ‘victor’s war booty’ (Cook, 2006: 482). Systematic rape is often overlooked and regarded as a faction of warfare, ideologically normalised because most people believe it to be *just* that male soldiers raped for sexual release to satisfy their sexual appetites (Cook, 2006: 482). The military often declares their need for brothels and prostitution as a way of making sure women in the countries they are deployed to do not get raped, generating a need for women via means of trafficking (SMNTY, 2016a). Because sex is regarded as ‘good for morale’ and it is considered *heroic* to kill the (male) enemy during war, it must then be heroic to rape *their* women- transforming the penis into a weapon (Cook, 2006: 482). There is this perception and ‘truth’ that wartime rape and sex exploitation is warranted and vindicated, indeed *necessary* to satisfy soldiers who are ‘naturally’ masculine, ‘naturally’ violent and ‘naturally’ sexually vivacious in a (post) conflict context[[32]](#footnote-33).

Raping a woman humiliates not only her but also her male guardian, “exposing his inability to fulfil his duty to protect the women of his family. Thus, raping a woman in front of her parents or husband is common practice during war” (Cook, 2006: 482). Rape becomes not only psychologically traumatic for women, but also their families, making it a terrorising tactic of warfare against the enemy[[33]](#footnote-34). Women and girls become specific casualties of deliberate gender-based violence as an effective weapon and strategy of war[[34]](#footnote-35). Since combat relies on certain hierarchical notions of masculinity and femininity (and produces an exaggerated notion of hypermasculinity), warfare is seen as the ultimate test and expression of fearlessness and power which male soldiers identify with and internalise. Susan Brownmiller argues rape by a ‘conqueror’ is compelling evidence of the ‘conqueror’s status’ and a hallmark of masculine pride. Brownmiller views the possession of women as a “hallmark of masculine success. Rape by a conquering soldier destroys all remaining illusions of power and property for men of the defeated side” (Brownmiller, 1975: 38). The body of a raped woman becomes “a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor's trooping of the colours. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other” (Brownmiller, 1975: 38). The perpetuation and amplification of both sexual bravado and hypermasculinity in warfare is reflected in the thought processes of, ‘if I am about to put my life on the line, then I deserve unfettered access to women’s bodies’, reflecting the relationship between power and rape.

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) importantly notes that extreme violence faced by women and girls is directly related to the violence that exists in women’s lives during peacetime (UNIFEM, 2002). UNIFEM assert that, “throughout the world, women experience violence because they are women, and often because they do not have the same rights or autonomy that men do” (UNIFEM, 2002: 10). How women become sexually rationed and abused during times of peace and conflict suggests the world has not advanced since the dawn of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory (1949) which classifies women as nothing more than unequal second-class citizens (Beauvoir, 1988). Economic and political hierarchies combined with social gender dichotomies in times of peace have contributed to women having fewer political rights, inferior social status and less autonomy in the public/private sphere. These social structures result in certain women becoming subjected to gender-based persecution in times of warfare. These multiple patriarchal injustices that women face in these periods because of their gender, caste, ethnicity and sexuality, must be analysed, reported and defined to offer new opportunities for dialogue and restoration (Ponzanesi, 2014). The system which makes human rights violations legitimate and systematic must be analysed in order to understand and elucidate heteropatriarchal structures, which help to keep women in the position of ‘second-class citizens’.

**1.3 Concluding Chapter Remarks**

By calling on UN protocol and scholarly research, this chapter supports the notion that armed conflict exacerbates gender hierarchies, thus amplifying the disproportional vulnerability of women and girls becoming trafficked into war. The exploration of how systematic violence against women during periods of unrest will be further explored in the succeeding chapter on ISIL. This chapter has highlighted how trafficking women and girls is unmistakably a gender-based violation and war crime. This is an enormous human rights violation which is able to transpire and grow because of the chaotic conditions of lawlessness and weakening judicial systems that breed in warfare. Women need to be safely protected and free from both physical and emotional violence. For social change and gender equality to triumph, society must focus on these types of systematic oppressions and examine discursive frameworks on the issue of trafficking in women and sex slavery in order to generate a new dialogue. To transform discourse and policy surrounding institutional gender-based (sexual) violence, there must be an engagement with these complex struggles to expand the possibilities of women’s (and human) rights today. The following chapter commences with my case study into the radical Islamic fundamentalist group ISIL, and their sex trafficking of Yazidi women and girls. As set up in this chapter, I will underline how this longstanding tactic of warfare is not something ISIL are ‘shy’ about utilising, instead boasting of their misogynistic imprisonment of sex slaves. The subsequent chapter will convey how ISIL forces are using sex slaves as part of their genocidal tactics against the Yazidi religious minority, a great intersectional human rights and humanitarian aid concern.

**Chapter *II-* Case Study I**

**Sold and Raped: The Trafficking of Yazidi Women and Girls**

**2.1 An Introduction to the Yazidis**

During August 2014, ISIL appeared to shift its military strategy overnight. Moving their attention away from Baghdad to northern Iraq, attacking towns including Sinja[[35]](#footnote-36), as their extremist strategies increased politically and geographically. The militants began their merciless targeting of any ‘apostates’[[36]](#footnote-37) or any*body* they deemed improper, especially aiming at the Yazidi ethnic and religious group. ISIL captured an estimate 35,000 to 50,000 Yazidis, commencing ISIL’s committed genocidal[[37]](#footnote-38) attack on the Yazidis[[38]](#footnote-39) (Stern and Berger, 2015: 47). ISIL began destroying this tiny religious minority (who represent less than 1.5 percent of Iraq’s estimated population of 34 million) by means of murder, sexual slavery, gang rape, torture and humiliation (Callimachi, 2015; Wintour, 2016). ISIL began rounding up the men and women like cattle, gathering all the males older than ten years of age and shooting them, while reportedly raping girls as young as nine and selling women at slave markets (Wintour, 2016). Figures estimating the number of women and children abducted vary from 2,500 (Wintour, 2014), to 5,000 (Ismael, 2015), to 7,000 (Stern and Berger, 2015). Given the continuous inconsistency of data and spurious figures of gendered-based violations, it is difficult to determine which data sources are most reliable, thereby casting a shadow over current ‘authentic’ data collections and methodologies. Regardless of the exact fact and figures, society knows this phenomenon is currently occurring, and has reached alarming proportions.

The Yazidi population has become targets of ISIL’s sectarianism because of their ancient ‘apostate’ syncretic religion, which has an oral tradition that pulls from both Islam and Christianity. This positions the Yazidis as ‘devil worshipers’ who are not ‘People of the Book’ in the eyes of ISIL. The polytheist tradition places the Yazidis on the fringe of despised unbelievers, even more so than Christians and Jews who have some protections because they are ‘People of the Book’ (Callimachi, 2015). ISIL therefore asserts, there is no room for jizyah[[39]](#footnote-40) payment for the Yazidis (Dabiq, 2014: 15). The Yazidis are unable to freely practice their religion and conduct their usual lifestyles in ISIL-held territory, falling vulnerable to ISIL’s radical theology, methodology and genocidal attack. ISIL’s actions are based on a radical ideology[[40]](#footnote-41) drawn from a narrow interpretation of Sharia law[[41]](#footnote-42). It allows ISIL to lawfully traffic, enslave and/or kill Yazidi women and girls with impunity. As ISIL seized Yazidi land and killed the men in August 2014, female vulnerability disproportionally increased, exposing them to higher risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The disproportional social and economic vulnerability of Yazidi women, and the lack of an accountable justice system in ISIL-held regions, allows impunity to perpetrators as they continue their criminal activities. Consequently, the trafficking sex trade of Yazidis flourishes and goes largely unpunished still today. The female body once again becomes an ‘unavoidable’ victim of sexual violence in wartime, rationed out to provide sexual satisfaction to soldiers, something that is overtly justified by ISIL on numerous public platforms.

**2.2 The Justification of Saby: Taking Women Captured in War as Sex Slaves**

Early this year, the UN concluded that ISIL was, and continues to, commit genocide against the Yazidis, with a clear intent to destroy through murder, sexual slavery, rape, torture and humiliation (Wintour, 2016). ISIL have not been conspicuous in their crimes, publically pronouncing their enslavement, genocidal rape[[42]](#footnote-43) and gender-based violence[[43]](#footnote-44). Women and young girls have become an intrinsic feature in ISIL’s sectarian assault, which ISIL gladly confirm in online videos, manifestos, pamphlets, on social media and in their propaganda magazine Dabiq[[44]](#footnote-45). An article in the ninth issue of Dabiq, called ‘Slave-Girls or Prostitutes’ (May, 2015), presents ISIL’s theological and political justification for the actions of trafficking and slavery. The article confirms the then rumours of the enslavement of Yazidi women, while defending the practice of ‘saby’: taking women captured in war, including married women, as sex slaves, often after their husbands have been executed.

The article denotes that ISIL has developed a persistent infrastructure and a detailed bureaucracy of sex slavery (which is also accepted in ISIL-run Islamic courts) to establish a ‘holy’ slave trade to assist in the ‘holy war’. The article justifies trafficking women for saby through embedding religious scripture and the teachings of Muhammad, which “contains many divine wisdoms and religious benefits” (Dabiq, 2015: 45). The article boasts about enslaving the kāfir[[45]](#footnote-46): “we have indeed raided and captured the kāfirah (feminine for ‘infidel’) women, and drove them like sheep by the edge of the sword” (Dabiq, 2015: 46). The article repetitively asserts that those who are ‘lucky’ enough to acquire a slave-girl must show Allah gratitude “on the day the first slave-girl entered our home. Yes, we thanked our Lord for having let us live to the day we saw kufr humiliated and its banner destroyed” (Dabiq, 2015: 47). Interestingly, the sense of entitlement in the act of saby has become a recruitment tool to entice men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex before marriage is taboo and dating is forbidden (Callimachi, 2015). ISIL employs a corpus of religious scripture, lexicon and jurisprudence to justify its human rights violations as ibadah (worship and devolution to Allah), to encourage more male jihads to join their ‘utopic’ caliphate. This aspect of ‘recruitment’ reflects the stereotype that women’s bodies begin from the waist down, and that women were only made for sex.

ISIL utilise religious scripture to sanction slavery much in the same way specific Bible passages were used centuries earlier to support the slave trade in the US; reflecting a period of antiquity in which the religion was born (Callimachi, 2015). Many scholars of Islamic theology and the Muslim community itself, question whether Islam actually approves of slavery and disagree with ISIL’s interpretation of the Quran and the Hadith to justify human trafficking (Callimachi, 2015). Muslim scholars and theologians reject ISIL’s strict readings of religious traditions and scriptures as archaic and irrelevant in today’s world, while ISIL concurs that these principles *need* to be revived because it is what the Prophets practised (Callimachi, 2015; York, 2015: 22). Unsurprisingly, ISIL does not take kindly to any negative ‘press’ or ‘false rumours’ questioning its practice. Criticising ‘ramblers’ who dare extend their tongues with false accusations with the intent to disfigure “the great [sharia] ruling and pure prophetic [teachings of Muhammad] titled ‘saby’? After all this, saby becomes fornication and [taking a slave-girl as a concubine] becomes rape? If only we’d heard these falsehoods from the kuffār[[46]](#footnote-47) who are ignorant of our religion” (Dabiq, 2015: 45). ISIL counters all who regard their religious piety as abuse and sexual enslavement, leaving a message for all those who ignorantly allege that ISIL’s genocidal actions are ‘savage’:

“As for the slave-girl that was taken by the swords of men following the cheerful warrior (Muhammad), then her enslavement is in opposition to human rights and copulation with her is rape?! What is wrong with you? How do you make such a judgment? … Leave us alone with your burping” (Dabiq, 2015: 48-49).

This message comes as a particular response to Western media and ‘wicked scholars’ who condemn the violence inflicted on the Yazidi saby. ISIL legitimatises and promotes its program of (sex) trafficking because the Quran ‘condones’ it, wearing a medieval religious disguise to justify the group’s violent ideology and trafficking women into war. This official article communicates a radical rape theology, where slavery becomes an important institution for the group.

ISIL’s dehumanisation of Yazidi women and girls as sex objects in the name of Allah is one of the key forms of gender-based violence that feminists vehemently oppose, regardless of geopolitical context. The pervasiveness of unrestrained rape and systematic slavery inflicted by ISIL is not geopolitically located singularly in the Middle East (as examined in *Chapter I)*. Rape has become part of wartime culture, feeding into systematic ‘gendercide’, ‘gynocide’ and ‘femicide’ against women (Daly, 1978). Mary Daly claims, the violation of women in wartime is the “secret bond that binds the warriors together, energising them. … Yet the warriors always attempt to seal the ultimate victory by the actual rape, murder, and dismemberment of women” (Daly, 1978: 224). As Aaronette White and Shagun Rastogi write, feminists “do not believe any woman should be raped or abused, regardless of how misguided we perceive her ethnic, religious, or political beliefs” (White & Rastogi, 2014: 225). Feminist identify this form of sexual violence as a systematic failure to women, a key threat to women’s security (Hansen 2001, 59; Blanchard 2003), and part of a genocidal attack on women[[47]](#footnote-48) (Sjoberg, 2007: 3). Judith Gardam similarly claims the practice of sexual violence reinforces gender subordination, as “nowhere is women’s marginalisation more evident than in the attitude of the law of armed conflict to rape, an experience limited to women” (Gardam 1993: 358-9). Gardam asserts, “rape is never truly individual, but an integral part of the system ensuring the maintenance of the subordination of women” (Gardam 1993” 363-4). By trafficking and imprisoning women from Yazidi-held areas ISIL are marginalising and subordinating Yazidi women and girls, imprisoning them as part of their genocidal attack on the female community.

ISIL’s appropriation of Islam for the justification of rape as a form of worship, and dehumanising of women and girls as sex objects in the name of Islam has been criticised by feminist Imam Ani Zonneveld. Zonneveld chastises certain Muslim scholars and religious leaders who delegitimise ISIL, but fail to challenge similar misogynistic, intolerant, hateful and supremacist theology in their own institutions, communities and countries (Zonneveld, 2015). Zonneveld calls for gendered equality in *all* Islamic communities, extremist or not, “it is only when boys, girls, women and men can live with dignity, in safety and with freedom of conscience as the Qur’an demands” (Zonneveld, 2015). When gender egalitarianism is truly achieved it is only then a country can rightfully call itself ‘Islamic’ (Zonneveld, 2015). All communities (especially androcentric societies) must move towards gender equality, for the sake of emancipation of women in times of peace *and* war.

**2.3 A Day at the Market: Selling ‘War Booty’**

Women and girls in ISIL-held territory are being sold as ‘war booty’[[48]](#footnote-49) and/or concubines in slave markets around Mosul, Iraq and Raqqa, Syria, and on various social media platforms on the Internet. Slave markets have been established to sell new, used and abused spoils of war, as ISIL sees it a core tenet to provide sexual gratification to militants, while simultaneously humiliating the enemy. As highlighted, crimes against Yazidi women are in no way prohibited in ISIL’s war games, as the capturing of the enemy and their women is merely a reward (and goal) of combat. In October 2014, a video surfaced of a group of young jihadists excitedly discussing the buying, selling and the raping of their procured Yazidis. The video begins with a militant addressing the camera;

“Today is the slave market day. Today is the day where this verse applies: ‘Except with their wives and the (captives) whom their right hands possess, for (then) they are not to be blamed’. Today is distribution day, God willing. Each one takes his share”, commencing the bartering process (NYT, 2014).

The soldiers begin making their deals, “‘who wants to sell?’, ‘I want to sell!’ … ‘I’ll buy her for a pistol. The price [however] differs if she has blue eyes’” (NYT, 2014). As the dehumanising negotiations continue, the video mirrors what I imagine the trading floor at the New York Stock Exchange: a loud, male-dominated environment in which men incessantly talk over one another, fighting for the best deal, as the militants repeatedly shout ‘where’s my Yazidi girl?’

One solider offers a Glock pistol for a girl, while another man offers to pay five banknotes (estimate €150) depending on how she looks, her age and if she has green eyes (NYT, 2014; YouTube, 2014). One customer declares, “if she is 15 years old, I have to turn her around and check her teeth… What would I need her for if she has no teeth?” to which one man answers “then shoot her” (YouTube, 2014). The video disconcertingly denotes just how relaxed these soldiers appear to be. There is a jubilant atmosphere as the men unwind together on the sofa, appearing as if they have just got home from a long day in the office. The Yazidi women are reduced to commodities, their bodies haggled and traded, which the soldiers express no issue in. They gloat about their latest triumphant purchase of Halal meat and are seemingly untroubled by their black-market activities and gender subordination. These ‘infidels’ are, after all, regarded as Allah’s gift for their jihad. And once the fighters tire of their recent chew-toy, she will be back here at the market to be resold and/or killed, ‘God willing’.

Rape is a war crime, fact. However, ISIL’s actions demonstrate how rape is also a *toy* of war. ISIL are enslaving women and girls for the purpose of sex, using rape for their own fun and sadistic pleasure. There is an idea propelled by the military of revelling in the capturing of women and girls for their own hedonistic gratification. After all, rape is about power, control and violent excess, more than sex. Feminists regard rape as being fundamentally about power and control, representing the power struggles between men and women, and the ‘battle of the sexes’ (Manhart, 1974; Brownmiller, 1975). Mary Ann Manhart claims, “man is always uneasy and threatened by the possibility that woman will one day claim her full right to human existence, so he has found ways to enslave her. … and as a final proof of his power and her debasement as a possession, a thing, a chunk of meat, he has raped her” (Manhart, 1974: 215). Since patriarchy, as Adrienne Rich states, is the power of fathers[[49]](#footnote-50), a familial social, ideological, political system, which allows men to exert their ‘supremacy’ over women, rape is merely an extension of this power (Rich, 1995: 57). Rape becomes an effective tool of degradation which instils intimidation and fear, while also effectively preventing women’s economic mobility and effecting their everyday activities in times of peace and conflict, furthering the devastation caused by rape into other lived domains.

ISIL’s theology of rape echoes Susan Brownmiller’s claim that rape is nothing more or less “than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (Brownmiller, 1975: 15). Brownmiller regards the mechanism of rape as being part of a broader androcentric and patriarchal culture, and something that all men have the power of exerting over women. While Brownmiller sees rape as being ‘a normal’ part of life, Brownmiller places great emphasis on periods of armed conflict. Warfare is the ultimate time in which male patriarchs exert their dominance and ‘rights’ over the female dependent, which is reiterated by a hypermasculine socially constructed impression that women are ‘booty’, ‘spoils’ and ‘rewards’ of war. Echoing these ideological biases that ‘you see her, you capture her and you have your way with her,’ generates powerful notions that inspire fear in women, turning the penis into a fearful weapon.

**2.4 Concluding Chapter Remarks**

As law and order breaks down, ISIL’s appropriation of religious scripture to justify the systematic trafficking of Yazidi women has become a deeply enmeshed and justified core tenet of their practices. Videos, magazine articles and pamphlets from the group’s official communications, illuminate how the practice of saby and systematic rape is firmly a part of the group’s fearmongering tactics of war. Selling women into war is, as Brownmiller claims, is an unfortunate but inevitable by-product of “the necessary game called war. Women, by this reasoning, are simply regrettable victims- incidental, unavoidable casualties- like civilian victims of a bombing” (Brownmiller, 1975: 32). Sexual assault is exacerbated during times of conflict because in times of peace there is gender inequality and gender imbalances, and this is at the root of patriarchal impunity. Gender-based violations in times of conflict flourish irrespective of nationality, geographical location and/or race. Undoubtedly, if countries such as the Netherlands, United Kingdom or the US were in similar war-torn conditions, women would face these perpetual gender-based violations, because of entrenched patriarchal societal attitudes towards women, which become exacerbated when society, policy and justice systems are diminished in conflict zones.

In order to prevent the trafficking and sexual abuse of all women I believe society needs to address social and cultural inequality. Inequalities that have perpetuated globally in our political, cultural, social and economic lives in times of peace. Until wider society begins to truly accept women as equal partners in all functions of society, women will continue to be seen as toys and pieces of meat. After all, as Brownmiller declares:

“A world without rapists would be a world in which women moved freely without fear of men. That some men rape provides a sufficient threat to keep all women in a constant state of intimidation, forever conscious of the knowledge that the biological tool must be held in awe, for it may turn to weapon with sudden swiftness born of harmful intent. … Men who commit rape have served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas in the longest sustained battle the world has ever known” (Brownmiller, 1975: 209).

Society and the global community must be educated on the broad and deep consequences of sexual violence, for the future, for our daughters and for all women.

The following chapter will examine another (more ambiguous) case of ISIL’s trafficking: the ‘recruitment’ of girls under the age of eighteen to ISIL-held territory. This case study will employ the feminist practice of critical content analysis of mainstream Western media, analysing certain trends in discourse, which reinforces the heteropatriarchal gendered-nature of warfare, while minimising female political agency.

***Chapter III - Case Study II***

**The ‘Recruitment’ of Western Girls**

**3.1 Making the Muhaajirah: Traveling to the Lands of ISIL**

As explored, trafficking women and girls is an effectual tool that serves several purposes for terrorist organisations (Binetti, 2015). Although ISIL’s employment of this tactic has become clear in their practices against the Yazidis, less attention has been paid to ISIL’s ‘recruitment’ of young Western girls who should also be considered casualties of ‘entrapment’ and trafficking (Binetti, 2015). As discussed in *Chapter I*, the UN and the ILO say that circumstances of recruitment do not need to be considered for a minor if they have been subjected to trafficking, force, threats, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or abuse of power (ILO, 2009: 15). International law offers special treatment to those under the age of eighteen, who become ‘recruited’ (irrespective of consent) because children should enjoy their fundamental rights of: remaining with their family, going to school, playing as a carefree child should and being protected from (sexual) violence and exploitation (ILO, 2009). Therefore, ISIL’s recruitment of any (consenting) minor to travel to ISIL-held territory, unquestionably positions the recruited as a victim of trafficking.

Subsequently, when stories broke in 2014 of young Western girls[[50]](#footnote-51) leaving their homes for muhaajirah[[51]](#footnote-52), certain media outlets were quick to view this as a new weapon of war. A shocked popular discourse tried to grapple with understanding of why *anybody* would want to leave the ‘utopian West’; a world synonymous with liberty, democracy, and freedom, to a ‘dystopic’ conflict-zone and join a terrorist organisation known for its cruelties and misogynistic attitudes. Rhetoric soon began questioning, how *our* girls became recruited? Why *our* girls would want to join ISIL? And *who* is luring *our* women? Creating this paradox: how can any Western woman or girl, who enjoys such democratic equality, freedom, feminism and liberty before the law, join and support a group that actively promotes her own oppression? (Cottee, 2016). These questions and answers began an influx of misunderstandings in certain media discourse, which say more about the gendered stereotypes and biases than on this complex case of trafficking. Debates began to centre on re/constructing a gendered narrative that is ordered by sexual imbalance, split into men/active and female/passive (Mulvey, 1999: 837). Discourse began reducing any female agency[[52]](#footnote-53) to questions of personal character, re/creating this narrative of the ‘groomed’ and ‘lured’ Western girl ‘brainwashed’ by the barbaric Other (akin to how paedophiles gain the trust of their victims) (Said, 1994).

**3.2. He Made Her Do It: “she behaved as if she had been brainwashed”**

In April 2014, Samra Kesinovic, 17 years-old, and Sabina Selimovic, 15 years-old, voluntarily fled their homes in Vienna, Austria, to join the Islamist rebels leaving behind a message: “Don’t look for us. We will serve Allah and we will die for him” (Dearden, 2015). Soon after their arrival to Syria[[53]](#footnote-54), Kesinovic and Selimovic appeared on social networking sites posing with male jihads, wearing burkas and carrying Kalashnikovs. The Austrian police claims these images acted as ‘recruitment posters’ for other young girls around Europe, becoming the muses of ISIL’s propaganda campaign and the ‘jihadi poster girls’ (Hall, 2015). The girls who reportedly had a ‘seemingly’ normal European upbringing became dubbed ‘jihadi poster girls’: symbols of female susceptibility, manipulatively recruited to become encourage other European to make the *hijra[[54]](#footnote-55)*, denounced their ‘infidel’ identity and become jihadi brides.

There is considerable uncertainty about the whereabouts of the girls and about the details of their recruitment process. To full in the blanks, hyperbolic mainstream media discourse began generating a certain melodramatic plotline implying the girls were indoctrinated into recruitment by the Islamic male Other. It is reported that the girls were radicalised after attending a local mosque run by the radical Bosnian preacher Mirsad Omerovic, known by his Islamic name ‘Ebu Tejma’. According to the Daily Mail[[55]](#footnote-56), Tejma is allegedly responsible for the radicalisation of the young girls, as authorities say he “brainwashed them into joining the jihad” (Boyle/Daily Mail, 2014). Tejma, the ‘unemployed benefits claimant’ and the ‘terror mastermind’ who recruited the schoolgirls, allegedly trafficked over 160 other girls in his underground mosque (Rodgers/Daily Mail, 2014). In an interview with the girls’ headmaster Peter Slanar, Slanar reveals that before Kesinovic left for Syria she was impossible to get through, “she behaved as if she had been brainwashed**,**” reportedly affiliating herself with al-Qaeda ‘the good organisation’ (Paterson/The Independent[[56]](#footnote-57) 2014). In the politics of representation[[57]](#footnote-58), the media soon vilified the Islamic perpetrator, regarding Kesinovic and Selimovic as fatalities of ISIL’s barbarism; “Sabina and Samra were just two of dozens of European girls seduced into [ISIL’s] clutches, victims of the terrorists’ skill in selling their message to some in the free world” (New York Post, 2015). The media jumps on this ‘Othering’ bandwagon, re/constructing certain clichés of the inherently violent, extremist male Islamic Other, metaphorically conveying the longstanding tensions and dichotomies between ‘West’ and ‘East’.

Regardless of the lack of evidence, Tejma is predominantly constructed as the malicious Islamic Other who in this media sceptical brainwashed *our* innocent girls, due to certain cultural stereotypes against Islam. Laurence Davidson claims most Westerners see Muslims in a hostile binary, generating a tendency to portray Muslims as primitive and aggressive (Davidson, 2013: 56). There are racial myths that convey Muslims as barbaric and uncultured, sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery, who revel in acts of terrorism (Shaheen, 1984: 4). These colonial stereotypes propel the variety of textual forms in which the West has produced a codified knowledge about non-metropolitan cultures such as Islam (Andermahr, 1997: 28). This echoes Edward Said’s seminal text *Orientalism* (1978). Said argues that the West, in its 4,000-year history, has constructed the monolithic ‘East’ and its ‘Other’ citizens, through a “range of discursive practices which include cultural relations, scientific disciplines and the stereotypes and ideologies of Orientalism” (Andermahr, 1997: 28). Said criticisescontemporary biopolitical[[58]](#footnote-59) and structural non-political power[[59]](#footnote-60) that form a specific kind of ‘knowledge’ based on racist, imperialistic and ethnocentric dogmatic doctrine, which stems from the Western empire’s lack of knowledge, insight and ignorance to the cultures, civilians, localities and differences of the Orient. Said condemns the media for its “demeaning generalisation and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power allied with simplistic contempt of dissenters and ‘others,’” (Said, 2003: xii). Said analytically reveals the biases that permeate through certain mainstream media coverage and in popular discourse. The ‘expert’ knowledge and coverage of Kesinovic and Selimovic produces a melodramatic narrative that *our* girls were ‘seduced’ into *their* clutches of terrorism to help explain and comprehend why these minors journeyed to Syria. This re/presents basic myths and rhetoric [[60]](#footnote-61) that the Islamic male is inherently violent in nature, even willing to exploit and/or murder *our* children-behaviours that are regarded as facets of Oriental behaviour and of Islamic mysticism.

There are many racist and classist overtones in this conversation of Kesinovic and Selimovic’s ‘coercion’. Arguably the Western media and European governments want to punish those responsible for the recruitment and (sex) trafficking of *our* women, but not necessarily because these are gross human rights violations. Instead, they appear concerned because these girls are ‘middle-class’ white Europeans, and you simply cannot have a Muslim man touching and abusing *our* women. Again, feeding into numerous tensions between the West and the Islamic world. Importantly, the Western mainstream media are not neutral vehicles, often taking cues from governments and key actors who have a “vested interest in transmitting a certain narrative” (Midden, 2014: 247). Mainstream media transmit certain storylines, ultimately helping to legalities the subject through a technique known as the ‘politics of naming’, a theory which says “to name is to identify an object, to remove it from the unknown, and then assign to it a set of characteristics, motives, values and behaviours” (Midden, 2014: 246). Due to certain government ques, the politics of naming does not constitute a “balanced account of the available truth and thus leaves some (essential) aspects out of the picture” (Midden, 2014: 247). Revealing this recruitment story within this media spectacle, allows for images and euphemisms to be added to the girl’s recruitment. The mainstream media narrative does not go beyond formulaic presentation or questions surrounding Kesinovic and Selimovic’s recruitment, as the female when involved in ‘dramatic’ acts are turned into voices and passive victims. Listening to the comments their headmaster made on how their girls seemed ‘brainwashed’ into extremist ways of thinking due to the power of persuasion by savvy Islamic fundamentalist, is fruitless and counterproductive.

Since Eurocentrism has been dominant in creating dogmatic ideological hierarchies in knowledge production, voices have become mute. In the pitfalls of colonialism[[61]](#footnote-62) certain cultures and voices have been disregarded for not falling into Western ideals. Said concurs that the Orient’s (especially women and the Islamic Orient) social status is so reduced that they cannot speak, “[from] the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself” (Said, 2003: 283). Within media rubric, it is easier to justify the girl’s actions by falsely shifting the blame onto the Islamic male Oriental, because *he* is not a *true* human: creating this imagined distinction from one another that *they* are not quite as human as *we* are, *they* are Occidental. Kesinovic and Selimovic cannot be heard due to their reduced status that puts “them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert” (Said, 2003: 283). Gayatri Spivak’s essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) similarly attempts to deconstruct who speaks for ‘the Other/s’ and/or ‘S/subject’ and the inherent power dynamics at play in doing so. Spivak calls for the deconstruction of ‘ruling’ Western ideology and its ability to reproduce and manipulate certain historical and political narratives (Spivak, 1994: 68). Since media outlets have their own (political) cues, the true voices of Kesinovic and Selimovic are not truly allowed or broadcast, muting the voice of the subaltern[[62]](#footnote-63). Spivak criticises liberal and left-wing Western intellectuals[[63]](#footnote-64) that mistranslate and paradoxically silence the subaltern, “by claiming to represent and speak for their experience in the same way that the paternalist colonist silences the voice of the [female subaltern]” (Mukherjee, 2016: 68). Spivak claims in the context of colonial production, “the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, 1994: 83). Colonialism, imperialism and patriarchies ‘violent shutting’ of certain bodies and female voices form epistemic violence against women (Spivak, 1994: 102). Thus creating Kesinovic and Selimovic victims of this epistemic violence, more than of the ‘brainwashing’ tactics of Tejma. Since we cannot speak to Kesinovic and Selimovic we have to listen to the information and facts that the two girls have given, this being their letter.

**3.3.1 The Passive and Peaceful Female…?**

Despite Kesinovic and Selimovic leaving behind a clear letter to their parents denoting their piety to serve Allah, the media does not fairly convey any agency. The girls become traditionally placed in a gendered binary of subordination and subversion, diminishing any agency. The narrative of ‘brainwashing’ surrounding Kesinovic and Selimovic’s recruitment reflect not only Orientalist tendencies, but re/presents the common trope in perpetuating damaging gendered stereotypes. The media conveys the girls as coerced by the corruptible Islamic male, regardless of the lack of evidence. This narrative of coercion reiterates longstanding sexist ideologies of femininity in the public/private divide (especially women associated with terrorism), that women are nothing more than passive *tabula rasa* for men to indoctrinate. There is a gender-blind binary and bias that women can never speak for themselves, can never represent their emotions, presence, or history because a male other will always represent her and speak on her behalf (Said, 2003: 6). Feminists commonly take issue with certain framing that renders the female and the female body as a weak passive site with little or no agency (Spivak, 1994; McClintock, 2004; Ponzanesi, 2014; Arrizon, 2014). Women have long been engaged with extremist activities (Bloom, 2011), however popular discourse assumes that women are intrinsically peaceful nurturers and could not deliberately participate in extremism on their own accord. The media then fetishises females involved in terrorism by believing that there has to be something ‘unique’ with these women, rarely representing the female as an autonomous political individual.

As epitomised in the accounts of Kesinovic and Selimovic’s recruitment, female terrorism is represented within a particular (problematic) discourse that tends to present women as a dichotomy. As Ponzanesi argues, the female terrorist is “cut into two mutually exclusive halves; either ‘the woman’ or ‘the terrorist’ is emphasised, but never together” (Ponzanesi, 2014a: 10). Unlike their male counterpart, women rarely escape gender assumptions and stereotypes. When a woman is represented her culpability as an “empowered female employing traditional masculine means to achieve her goals very rarely emerges” (Brown, 2011: 214). Women and girls are archetypally deemed victims of warfare not perpetrators. So when we read, “Don’t look for us. We will serve Allah and we will die for him”, Kesinovic and Selimovic become muted because they challenge the traditional, natural link between women and pacifism, an assumption based on the feminised qualities of ‘caring, nurturing, mourning, and empathy’ (Ponzanesi, 2014a: 10). Kesinovic and Selimovic challenge the assumption that women are absent from war, disrupting their feminised expectations and disregard societal identities while altering paternalistic notions of ‘masculine’ insurgence.

**3.3.2 A Question of** **Agency**

Due to certain accepted societal myths ascribed to the female sex/gender (Beauvoir, 1988; Butler, 1986; MacKinnon, 1989), there is an underlying assumption that ‘he made her do it’ in Kesinovic and Selimovic’s recruitment. This generates a problematic, one-dimensional presentation of women’s agency and involvement in terrorism (Speckhard, 2015). The landscape of warfare is not exclusively male, and women’s involvement in terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Regardless of women’s covert or overt roles, Tejma is cited as being the fundamental cause behind Kesinovic and Selimovic motives because of his ‘Oriental Backwardness’ (Said, 2003: 7). Therefore, the two girls are left with little agency, as their motivations are either ignored or presented in patronising and limiting ways, while framing the girls in individual, rather than political terms. The media continues to propel archetypal Orientalist discourse or gender-blind binaries, which re/create this idea that Kesinovic and Selimovic lack any form of agency in their desires to join ISIL, a common and problematic rhetoric for many feminists (Braidotti, 2008; Mahmood, 2001; Midden, 2014; McClintock, 2004; McNay, 2000; Ponzanesi, 2014).

The relationship between gender and agency exhibits a patriarchal status-quo: female agency and the production of female subjectivity have a negative relationship, as women are typically placed in the ‘lacking’ and ‘passive’ gender-norms. There is an assumed universal ‘truth’ that women are naturally inferior. Therefore, women cannot escape this repressive hypothesis because of the monolithic concept of ‘lack’ embedded onto women, their bodies, actions and social status (McNay, 2000). Women are categorised with this negative paradigm of subjectification, as monolithic sexist preconceived notions are now seen as compulsory in the nature of the sex-gendered system (McNay, 2000: 3). Characterising Kesinovic and Selimovic as acting under false consciousness echoes these misogynistic attitudes that women remain outside of leadership in their organisations, rather they are pawns and ‘sacrificial lambs’ in insurgency (Schweitzer, 2006: 7). There is a negative paradigm of subjectification that does not extend autonomy to Kesinovic and Selimovic. Instead, the media adheres to the common societal trope that ascribes personal and psychological motivations “often concluding that these women were either ‘improper,’ ‘shamed,’ ‘undesirable,’ or not ‘redeemable’ within the traditional patriarchal order” (Ponzanesi, 2014b: 83). It is within these limited representations that Western scholars and mainstream media outlets tend not to recognise or read female agency.

Anthropologist Saba Mahmood sees the attachment of agency to progressive politics as problematic, arguing that many Western readings do not see agency as influenced by religion piety, as expressed in the case of Kesinovic and Selimovic. Mahmood interprets agency, not simply as a resistance to submission, but created through forms of piety. Mahmood argues that obedience to religious rules grants women autonomy and space for self-improvement (cited in Ponzanesi, 2014b: 89). To Mahmood, agency does not always need to be in opposition to male authority or “understood as the capacity to realise one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles” (Mahmood, 2001: 206). Rather, agency can be ‘docile’ and does not always have to be a huge act of resistance against (male) domination, nor does it necessarily imply women are apolitical and/or subordinate[[64]](#footnote-65). Instead of creating a hierarchy in resistant actions, there must be “a particular openness to exploring nonliberal traditions … and a willingness to revaluate one’s own views in light of the Other’s” (Mahmood, 2001: 225). The media must be aware of any assumption that all women universally strive for freedom, as these desires are specific to certain cultures and location. Popular discourse should make their tools of interpretation more neutral, so there can be an understanding of the choices that women like Kesinovic and Selimovic make in different cultures and locations without degrading any actions that do not fit liberal struggles.

Echoing Mahmood, Simon Cottee affirms that mainstream Western media’s binary explanation of female recruitment is too passive, because many Western women join or aspire to join ISIL because they *want* to (Cottee, 2016). Unlike the secular liberal democracies in which Kesinovic and Selimovic live, living in ISIL-held territory makes sense to them as it reflects their fundamental moral and political convictions (Cottee, 2016). Women and girls who voluntarily join ISIL *want* to live in an authentic Islamic state because they do not want to live in the West, for a multitude of reasons: “they do not want freedom, as understood by classical liberal scholars as negative freedom[[65]](#footnote-66) .... they do not want feminism. They want submission: to God’s will and his divine law” (Cottee, 2016). Religious piety should not and does not reduce women to expressing little or no agency. Rather, in certain cases it reflects the denouncement of secular Western liberalism and feminism. In order to understand the lives, experiences, and motivations of Kesinovic and Selimovic, mainstream Western media should not understand their actions as misguided feminism or failed equality (Ponzanesi, 2014b: 103). Rather, through contextualising Kesinovic and Selimovic’s voices in their alternative struggles for equality, the media will offer new ways of rethinking the relationship between religion and agency (Ponzanesi, 2014b: 104). Presenting Kesinovic and Selimovic as victims of ISIL’s coaxing techniques perpetuates damaging gendered binaries that position women as nothing more than weapons of male arsenal in the hypermasculine game of warfare, using typecasts of femininity against them. Analysing and challenging these biopolitical status-quos has been powerful for feminist theory because it offers a way to analyse deeply-entrenched aspects of gendered behaviour and patriarchal societal gender norms, while eschewing reference to pro-social sexual difference (McNaay, 2002). By broadening the prism though which female agency is seen, discourse can comprehend and acknowledge how different women exert agency into their lives.

**3.4 Constructing a Normative Narrative of ‘Victimhood’**

It is difficult to qualify and/or quantify women’s agency in their experiences of trafficking. This is largely due to overarching subordination and gender-based violations. In essence, this masks any discernible, explicit agency and thus nullifies any experiences of consensual cooperation or willingness. The only ‘visible’ forms of female agency in trafficking tend to occur during the ‘lead up’ to trafficking itself, often as a result of false promises of legitimate opportunities. Much like in the case of Kesinovic and Selimovic, research has found that women who are trafficked commonly consent initially, entering the trafficking chain ‘knowing’ they will work independently, for example as prostitutes, but who are then deprived of their basic human rights in conditions which are akin to slavery (Wijers & Lap-Chew, 1999: 33). Feminist scholar Rutvica Andrijasevic similarly uncovers that trafficked women regularly know about the nature of the work they are agreeing too, but are often unaware of the conditions and circumstances they will work under (Andrijasevic, 2003: 261). Andrijasevic argues that women enter trafficking as a ‘means to an end’ due to a lack of opportunities and prospects in their home situations. Trafficking is designed as a way to lead them out of poverty, family abuse and/or interrupted education, as a way to gain employment and financial independence (Andrijasevic, 2003: 262). Andrijasevic importantly notes that although a trafficked woman might find herself in slavery-like conditions[[66]](#footnote-67), “she might also be recruited without coercion and may or may not find herself in forced-labour conditions” (Andrijasevic, 2003: 252). Recruitment without coercion is key to the case of Kesinovic and Selimovic[[67]](#footnote-68), where my findings point in the same direction: that there is no tangible evidence of ‘coercion’, except in media assumptions.

Creating a hyperbolic rhetoric of vulnerability and coercion in the case of Kesinovic and Selimovic not only reinforces particular stereotypical patterns and disqualifies agency, it establishes a damaging ‘normative’ narrative of victimhood. Andrijasevic challenges notions of victimhood in cases of trafficking of women by rejecting a narrative where women are not, once again, represented as acting under false consciousness. Andrijasevic overtly protests gender-blind narratives that place women as a product and victim of men’s criminal doing, and instead works through and offers a nuanced reading of structural factors and social locations “that inform a desire and decision to move as well as influence the mode and means” by which these forces get acted out (Andrijasevic, 2010: 3). Placing an emphasis on criminal organisations and victimised women depoliticises the debate on migration and labour, while closing down possibilities for seeing the ways in which women’s assertion of agency plays out (Andrijasevic, 2010: 4). Discourse (and especially feminism) should not diminish women’s roles as ‘active migrants’ rather than ‘passive victims,’ in accounts and analysis of sex trafficking. Creating certain ‘normative’ image of victimised woman propels the idea that women are inheritably vulnerable and damaged, that can no longer recognise her “true interests and cannot be viewed as a subject who can speak for herself” (Andrijasevic, 2010: 4). This then re/enforces this common clichéd image and perception that trafficked women are nothing more than wounded woman, with no voice, and whose injured body speaks for her (Doezema, 2001).

Placing women within a binary category and with a passive ‘voice’ or as a ‘victim’ narrows these groups’ capability to make choices. This hyperbolic rhetoric commonly attached to women and girls is exhibited in media, through their ignorance of the girl’s motivations, free will and choice in traveling to Syria. In spite of Kesinovic and Selimovic’s revealed agency in entering their trafficking chain[[68]](#footnote-69), their actions are disqualified in order to generate a manipulation of ‘characters’ that produces a narrative which inscribes the (Other) women as victims of the violent (Orient) male (usually from their own patriarchal culture) (Andrijasevic, 2003: 263). This manipulation of characters (particularly implemented by mainstream media discourse and also feminism) aims to illustrate the horrendous ‘reality’ of trafficking by focusing “exclusively on male violence and exploitation of women” (Andrijasevic, 2003: 263). This only reinforces stereotypes and gendered binaries that women are powerless victims of violent foreign men, instead of looking at the social-economic and biopolitical powers that are pivotal factors in the trafficking of women and girls.

**3.5 Concluding Chapter Remarks**

This chapter has mapped threads of current dominant media tropes surrounding the narrative of ‘recruited’ Western girls by ISIL. Young female recruits like Kesinovic and Selimovic are triggering international alarm bells, as they subvert traditional patriarchal orders, challenging societal ideologies of hypermasculinity and warfare. In retaliation, Kesinovic and Selimovic are rarely framed in gender-neutral terms as the media holds their femininity against them. Claims that the girls were ‘brainwashed’ through radicalisation, refashions the perception that women always act under false consciousness’. Interpreting their actions in personalised and psychological terms as something not to be taken seriously, while furthermore alluding to ISIL as an unbreakable predator with the dangerous power of persuasion, detrimental to *our* girls. Kesinovic and Selimovic’s voluntary commitment to jihad and Allah becomes repacked into stereotypical gendered metaphors, representing how the female gender/sex is repeatedly understood as being part of designated agency and nothing more than a stealth weapon of male arsenal. Muting their agency takes us back to a time where women were simply meant to be beautiful and silenced.

The media’s limited representation of Kesinovic and Selimovic indicates their failed attempt at self-representation and their inability to truly speak (Spivak, 1992). The schoolgirls are ‘speaking’ outside of normal patriarchal channels which are not understood or supported, because the female subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 1992; Mukherjee, 2016: 66). This gender binary framework is precisely what Spivak criticises, denouncing universal singular ‘truth’ that popular Western discourse purports to obtain. How the media re/present the ‘beautiful’, seduced European schoolgirls as sacrificial lambs to Islamic terrorism, denotes the hierarchal networks of power and knowledge that the West so often exerts. It is these misguided dogmatic ‘authentic’ truths, which restrict Kesinovic and Selimovic from authentically representing and acting for her/themselves.

Scrutinising this case of media representation through a postcolonial and feminist critical perception, helps convey an overarching theme of my research: there is a position of privilege in the construction of dominant narratives, and we must importantly see what complexities (and bodies) need to be suppressed in order for these ideological universal ‘truths’ to take hold (Trakilović, 2013: 17). If the subaltern cannot speak, popular discourse must not give the subaltern voice, as you work against subalternity (Spivak, 1992: 46). Discourse needs to create a truly ‘authentic’ space for Kesinovic and Selimovic to speak no matter how complex this may be, instead of calling on sexist, racist, classist, nationalist and xenophobic stereotypes. Language is a powerful tool used for manipulation by the media and popular discourse, crucial for persuading readers and public opinion. The mainstream media should strive for authentic knowledge, accurate representation and political integrity when presenting these complex cases of trafficking and terrorism. The media should affirm Kesinovic and Selimovic’s agency, and rethinking about the new possibilities that they create and the alternative information they can offer to current discourse and even for feminism (Midden, 2014: 253; Braidotti, 2008a). There must be a forum for affirmative discourse, in order to re/consider, re/negotiate, re/create and understand new possibilities for women. Popular discourse should move away from reiterating and reconstructing deeply monolithic and pluralistic ways of thinking of women, religion and agency in mainstream Eurocentric discourse.

**Conclusion**

**Trafficked into War: From ? to !**

**Women and girls *are* disproportionately vulnerable to sex trafficking and systematic rape in periods of armed conflict!**

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads; “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (UN, 1948). Regardless of this declaration, trafficking of women and girls persists in the contemporary globalised world. Therefore, I conclude that there is no question (mark) that women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to being sex trafficked into war during armed conflict! ISIL are enacting their manifesto for sexual violence as conflict persists, because of the collapse of law and order in ISIL-held territory. Sadly, rape is now regarded as an ‘unfortunate’ but ‘normal’ feature of *all* conflicts, and it is incredibly desperate that women and girls are *still* being abducted, trafficked and abused.

In *Chapter I*, I focused on providing a theoretical, methodological and judicial overview of how sex trafficking during times of peace and warfare are based on similar factors and conditions that characterise trafficking in general (Wölte, 2004). *Chapter I* generated an understanding on the topic through exploring and defining UN protocol, exploring how trafficking disproportionally effects women and examining how armed conflict intensifies gender-based sex trafficking. This chapter conveyed how women and children account for a high portion of civilian casualties and war refugees and are therefore more likely to be the victims of rape in war, as the woman’s body becomes a battleground of gender-based violations (Ponzanesi, 2014: 2). By exhibiting how conflict zones historically fuel an illegal sex trade, I demonstrated how institutional trafficking generates systematic rape and sexual servitude as ‘reward’ for military troops. The connection between war, rape and sex work (whether coerced or not) is undeniable. Combat exaggerates hierarchical notions of masculinity and femininity intensifying the construction of women as hallmarks of masculine pride, possession and success (Brownmiller, 1975). I aimed to highlight that contrary to the stereotypes about war deaths, women and girls form the majority of casualties in war, and this is no different in the current armed conflict conducted by ISIL.

Throughout *Chapter II*, I elaborated on how analysing gender-based abuses of trafficking and wartime torture “uncovers complicated power relations”, often structured around present-day stereotypical ideas about gender, sexuality, race, nationality, class and sexuality (Quinan, 2014: 111). By taking the timely case of ISIL’s trafficking women and girls from the Yazidi and Western community, I engaged with and exposed ISIL’s theology of rape. What compelled me to conduct this research was how ISIL overtly favour an androcentric society, where women are trafficked into subservient roles, raped and tortured as a tactic of terror and genocide. While exploring the case of the Yazidi trafficking, I closely analysed ISIL’s ‘voice’ through their magazine Dabiq and online videos, which expose ISIL’s radical theology and the practice of ‘saby’. ISIL calls on religious scripture to sanction its systematic ‘gendercide’, ‘gynocide’ and ‘femicide’ (Daly, 1978). Calling on feminist theory, I suggest that this systematic gender subordination and marginalisation of women is a detrimental threat to women’s security (Hansen 2001; Blanchard 2003; Sjoberg, 2007; Gardam, 1993).

*Chapter III* takes on a more ambiguous case of trafficking, examining the ‘recruitment’ of Western girls to ISIL-held territory. Taking the interesting example of the Austrian ‘jihadi poster girls’, Samra Kesinovic (17 years-old) and Sabina Selimovic (15 years-old), I began analysing how popular discourses express shock at the idea these two European, middle-class girls would leave *our* democratic ‘utopian’ West, to enter a conflict zone controlled by a group synonymous with violence and the promotion of female oppression. Calling on postcolonial discourse and the ideologies of Said and Spivak, this chapter explored how certain mainstream media outlets re/constructed a certain gendered narrative of the passive schoolgirls, brainwashed by the Islamic male Other, as a way to understand the girl’s motives. By demonstrating how the mainstream media ignores Kesinovic and Selimovic’s voluntary and pious intentions, mainstream discourse began its politics of naming, by vilifying and villainising radical Bosnian preacher, Tejma, regardless of any evidence of his involvement in their recruitment. The media fell into the repetitive trap of diminishing the girl’s agency, while simultaneously rendering the female body as a passive sex object, ‘brainwashed’ by the barbaric Other/Orient (Said, 1994). By conducting a content media analyse, this thesis utilised feminist media research practices to highlight the ways in which mainstream media constructs and conserves dominant ideas of gender hierarchies (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 290). I therefore illustrated the trends in popular discourse that reinforce Orientalist, racial tendencies and the heteropatriarchal nature of warfare. Regardless of the fact that there is no evidence that Tejma indoctrinated the girls, in the melodramatic media sceptical, Western discourse re/fabricated the tale of coercion because discourse cannot allow the subaltern female to truly speak (Spivak,1992).

The narrative of passive, indoctrinated schoolgirls and Orientalist idioms conveys how certain colonial stereotypical (and discriminatory) epistemologies of taught universal ‘truths’ and ‘reality’ are not being contested and/or corrected. This case is grounded within the scriptures of Said and Spivak to help scrutinise the representation of Orientalist hegemonic binaries and the female subaltern, in order to enter, engage and expose colonial paradigms of knowledge, power and privilege. Calling on Said’s *Orientalism*, I similarly take issue with Western cultural stereotyping and Othering, criticising Eurocentric tendencies (especially in the media) to universalise non-Western bodies, cultures and societies. The works offered by postcolonial and anti-racist feminist thinkers like Spivak, has helped my research illuminate the “paradoxes, power dissymmetries and fragmentations of the historical context in the present” (Braidotti, 2003: 207). Spivak’s critique of colonialist and nationalist elitism, and its ignorance of voice, agency, autonomy and inclusion/exclusion of the subaltern Other, is key to this case study. Spivak’s epistemology was key to analysing questions of representation and colonial contractions of (female) Otherness, exploring whether or not Western media today challenges colonial legacies of universal singular ‘truth’ surrounding ISIL and their Islamic extremism. This allowed for this thesis’ achievement of discovering a conceptual space by breaking universalisms, learning to navigate a fluid, situational and relational mode of knowledge production, methodology and aesthetic strategies (Ponzanesi, 2012: 1).

**Concluding Remarks**

The lack of justice and judicial support perpetuates gender subordination and the systematic abuse against women and girls. These crimes need to be brought to justice and the perpetrators need to be held accountable in court. Otherwise, this sets a negative precedent for women and men all over the world. The seriousness of trafficking and the raping of women, girls and anybody should be communicated clearly. Continuing social norms in rape culture, violence against and the trafficking of women re/creates gender oppression, subordination and inequality that implies women’s bodies are merely pieces of meat. If society and discourse can be successful in educating and changing global attitude on sexual violence towards women in times of peace, then this will affect how men treat women and any vulnerable person in times of peace and war. We need to bring policy makers and the media together, to share the same goals of gender equality, especially the media who has a powerful influential voice in the public and private sphere. We must call upon different (gender) cohorts to demand women’s rights and accountability for gendered crimes against humanity. To ensure gender equality and equal rights, society, policy makers and the media must listen and represent women in the public and private sphere. This is not an individual problem, it is societal. We must all engage with each other for gender equality in times of peace and conflict.

This thesis has highlighted that the lack of research on this salient topic demonstrates the need for further research, judicial regulation and prosecution. Even though ISIL will soon collapse, gender-based violence will remain and perpetrators will persist throughout the world in different forms. I believe a crucial aspect in defeating these trends is through teaching gender equality and respect in times of peace. By highlighting these points, I further the call to include a more gendered perspective in Conflict Studies and conflict resolution, and in the policies it intends to inform.

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# Filmography

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1. Slavery: a “condition of bondage and servitude in which one person owns another, forcibly exacts labour and services from then, and excludes them from civil society” (Gregory, 2009: 687). Although slavery and trafficking are legally distinct, the two are intertwined. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Which involved the trafficking of eleven million Africans across thousands of miles to work as slaves on plantations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Contemporary economic globalisation and structures of Western capitalism depend on transnational flows of labour, the opening up of ‘free’ and ‘fair’ trade, and the opening of borders within the neoliberal market, and this has led to certain bodies becoming vulnerable to gender-based human rights violations and exploitation by corruption and crime. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Vulnerable in the sense of having low economic and social status, no male figure in the household, and thus inability to protect themselves in a society bolstered by criminal activities and failed justice systems that allows impunity to perpetrators- these major contributing factors make it easier for groups to manipulate and claim rights to vulnerable bodies, like women and children (Aronowitz, 2009).  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Referred to as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), or the Islamic State (IS) as the group now likes to be referred to as, dropping the Syria and Iraq to reflect its global claim of dominance (Clarke, 2015: 17-18). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. ‘Jihad’ is often translated as ‘holy war,’ but in a linguistic sense, the word ‘jihad’ means struggling or striving (Islamic Supreme Council, 2016). A ‘jihadist’ is, thus, one who engages in this struggle. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Al-Qaeda are a global jihadist militant Sunni Islamist organisation “best known for its audacious terror attacks against the West from the late 1990s through the mid-2000s” (Zelin, 2014: 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Due to the time restrain and limit in this thesis, I will not go in-depth with this. I will furthermore avoid any religious theoretical framing for the same reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The term ‘exploitation’ is used in this thesis to indicate violent coercion of unpaid work or sex services: “Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (UNODC, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Caliphate: An Islamic state led by a caliph, who is a political and religious leader and successor (caliph) to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. His power and authority is absolute. (Chandler, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. The term ‘mainstream media’ or ‘major media outlets’ in this thesis importantly means dominate Western media outlets, in counties such as the UK and US. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. While human trafficking affects a broader cross-section of the world’s population, I have chosen to focus exclusively on women and girls. This does not mean that trafficking and sex slavery-like practices do not occur to men and boys. However, the evidence overwhelmingly conveys that women and girls are the majority of the victim. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. The UN defines “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private” (UNIFEM, 2002: 10). Trafficking of women and girls during armed conflict and post-war conditions are widely viewed as a gender-based violation of basic human rights and a criminal ‘procedure’. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. In 2014 it came to light that ISIL kidnapped and trafficked thousands of Yazidi women and young girls from Iraq for sexploitation and slavery-like practices (an estimate of around 3,500 women and girls, but it is assumed that there are thousands more). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. A gendered lens is a hybrid framework for examining any area from a gendered perspective. This gendered or feminist lens is interested in researching built gender and cultural assumptions. This is aimed to theorise and use methodologies and methods that are non-sexist and develop research in a non-discriminative way against one gender (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007: 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Vaguely referring to citizens of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia (see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978). To be explored and defined further in *Chapter III* in the case study onISIL’s ‘recruitment’ of Western girls. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. While a singular definition of human agency is constantly under debate, I regard agency as the ability of “people to act, usually regarded as emerging from consciously held intentions” (Gregory, 2009: 347). The World Development Report focuses on five ‘expressions’ of agency: “women’s access to and control over resources; freedom of movement; freedom from the risk of violence; decision-making over family formation; and having voice in society” (Markham, 2013: 2). At the heart of many debates (including this thesis) are questions as to whether or not an individual has freedom to act, or whether individuals are constrained by structural forces. This definition is key to my findings in *Chapter III*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. 2014 is a paramount year when ISIL began to really enter international mainstream discourse. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Contacting organisations such as the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Kurdish Regional Government Representation in the London and in Washington D.C. When contacting these bodies, the majority of responses entailed an unwillingness to speak on the topic because of sensitivity and/or because of a lack of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Born in Iraq but raised in the US, the ‘director’ is known for their political activism in raising awareness on the Kurdish genocide and Muslim rights in the US. Due to the theme of this topic the ‘director’ requested to remain anonymous. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. I had some control of the direction the interview took. however, if an interesting point was made I would respond and probe unstructured questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. While the interview did provide interesting insights, there was little in the way of new information on the current situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. I call on the ideologies and discourse of postcolonialism after working as as Research Intern at the Postcolonial Studies Initiative during the MA1 internship. Working under Professor Sandra Ponzanesi taught me the importance of incorporating the two disciplines in order to illuminate and discover how postcolonialism engages with women’s situations in conflict, history, subjectivity, epistemology, and the political ramifications in instances where colonialism and postcolonialism are interconnected, overlapping, and/or interacting in times of conflict (Ponzanesi, 2012: 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. This definition encompasses most forms of human trafficking (whether it be trafficking for prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour, or organ trafficking), especially in instances when persons are exploited and ownership rights are intrinsically implemented on those bodies. Therefore, when refereeing to human trafficking or the trafficking of women and girls in this thesis, I utilise and employ this official UN definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. A private economy that generates US$ 150 billion in illegal profits per year (ILO, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. While there are many causes that have been attributed to the growth in trafficking in women and children, low economic and social status is the most commonly cited cause and effect. Other contributing factors include: poverty, lack of sustainable livelihoods, structural inequities in society, gender discrimination, war and armed conflict, and other forms of natural or constructed disasters. However, it is critical to understand that these factors are not in themselves the causes of trafficking; they merely exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalised and disadvantaged groups and render them increasingly more amenable to a variety of harms” (ESCAP, 2003: 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Something that will be closely examined in *Chapter III* case study into ISIL’s recruitment of girls from the West, and issues of agency. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Sexual violence is an act of a sexual nature “by force, or by threat of force or coercion. Rape is a form of sexual violence during which the body of a person is invaded, resulting in penetration … of any part of the body of the victim, with a sexual organ” (HRW, 2009). The destructive long-term physical, psychological and social effects of “sexual violence on the victims cannot be underestimated. The situation is particularly bad for girls, who are at risk of serious injuries after rape, and whose health is at risk if they get pregnant” (HRW, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Institutional wartime rape has long been documented: from the Viking era to European colonisation, where colonisers would rape and pillage women; to World War I and II; in former Yugoslavia alarming reports surfaced of gross sexual trafficking during the Bosnian War (1992–95) and Kosovo War (1996–99) by military troops and UN peacekeepers; in the Rwandan genocide (1994), the Hutu leaders ordered their troops to rape Tutsi women “as an integral part of their genocidal campaign” (Cook, 2006: 482); And more recently in the Iraq War, where the US army and allied forces enacted gross human rights violations against prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq(see The Guardian, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Since women began openly joining the military in the twentieth century, the reports of male soldiers raping female comrades has too become a problem (Cook, 2006: 482). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Even though some of those soldiers could be women and themselves victims of sexual violence, in modern day military examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. This ideology of wartime rape is currently being enacted by ISIL soldiers in Syria (something that will be explored in the imminent chapter). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. How there is this sense of triumph over men who fail to protect ‘their’ women, is something that will be analysed in this thesis in regard to ISIL’s genocidal rape against the Yazidi women and girls in *Chapter III*. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. While men do experience rape and sexual violence in wartime, “women are targeted in particular, often as a way to humiliate and defeat the men in the community” (Mertus and Benjamin 2000: 8). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. A small town in north-west Iraq, with a Yazidi stronghold. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Anybody who renounces religious beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. The UN claims that no other religious group present in ISIL-controlled areas “has been subjected to the destruction that the Yazidis have suffered” (Wintour, 2016). Although Iraq is not officially a part to the 1948 Genocide Convention, the exploits ISIL are committing is widely recognised as reflecting international law. The Genocide Convention prohibits killings and acts “committed with intent to destroy… a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (HRW, 2016b). This is something that barrister Amal Clooney, with the help of Yazidi trafficking victim Nadia Murad, will be fighting for the prosecution of ISIL’s crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court in The Hague. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. As well as Christian, Turkmen and Shabak religious and ethnic minorities, but ISIL’s attacked were directed far greater at the Yazidis. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. The payment and/or tax of the jizyah is for non-Muslims in Islamic states who do not submit to the rulings of Islam, Sharia and ISIL. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. ISIL practises a brand of Islam which has been described as ‘untamed Wahhabism,’ which “views the killing of those deemed unbelievers as a necessity to furthering its mission of purifying the community of the faithful” (Clarke, 2015: 403). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. An Islamic religious legal system derived from the Koran/Quran and the Hadith (the sayings of the prophet Muhammad). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. As Laura Sjoberg, asserts, it has only been recently where courts have begun to recognise that *rape* and *genocidal rape* are different war crimes; “rape is a crime against its victim and women generally, and genocidal rape is those things *used* as a weapon against an ethnic or national group, attacking racial purity, national pride, or both” (Sjoberg, 2007: 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. The gender-based violence against Yazidi women and girls includes: the practice of abducting women and girls and forcibly converting them to Islam and/or forcibly marrying them to ISIL members, the systematic rape and selling the women in ‘slave markets’, and the reported taking of the Yazidi children from their mothers to physically abusing their children, and forcing them to pray or take Islamic names, may be part of a genocide against Yazidis (HRW, 2016b). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. ISIL’s English-language magazine. Dabiq is the group’s most widely read online publications. In the fourth issue of Dabiq, ISIL asserts that the infidel Yazidi women should and *can* be enslaved in the name of Allah; “kill the mushrikīn [those practicing idolatry or polytheism] wherever you find them, and capture them, and besiege them” (Dabiq, 2014: 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Kāfir: Someone who does not believe in Allah, the content of Quran, or in Muḥammad, thus someone who will be punished in hell for eternity. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Kuffār: derogatory term for disbeliever or infidel. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. I do recognise that there is women-on-women violence and rape, and women assist in and do commit (sexual) violence in war and genocide; which also challenges gendered stereotypes, expectations and social characteristics that women possess an ‘inherently’ good and peaceful nature. However, for this thesis I am just focusing on ISIL male perpetuators, due to the overwhelming evidence that highlights the genocidal rape against the Yazidis is inflicted by predominantly by men. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. In November 2014, a report surfaced in the media (IraqiNews.com) obtaining the price list for Yazidi and Christian women and children, ranking and grading their price by age: 40 to 50-years-old sell for 50,000 dinars (€37), 30 to 40 sell for 75,000 dinars (€57), 20 to 30 sell for 100,000 dinars (€76), aged 10 to 20 sell for 150,000 dinars (€114), and children under 9-years-old go for 200,000 dinars (€151) (Webb & Rahman, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Adrienne Rich sees patriarchy as: “the power of fathers: a familial social, ideological, political system in which men … determine what part women should or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male” (Rich, 1995: 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. With the recent Western European examples being: twin sisters Zahra and Salma Halane, 16, who left their home Manchester, England in 2015; the three British pupils at the Bethnal Green Academy in east London, Amira Abase, 15, Shamima Begum, 15, and Kadiza Sultana, 16, who left in February 2015; and the two Austrian friends, Samra Kesinovic, 17, and Sabina Selimovic, 15 (who I focus closely on). While boys are being trafficked from countries such as the US, Canada and Australia, I choose to focus on girls from Western Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. A ‘muhaajirah’ isan immigrant, or a woman who travels to the lands controlled by ISIL (Al-Khansaa Brigade, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. The World Bank’s ‘World Development Report on Gender Equality ‘defines agency as “the ability to use endowments to take advantage of opportunities to achieve desired outcomes” (Markham, 2013: 2). The World Development Report focuses on five ‘expressions’ of agency: “women’s access to and control over resources; freedom of movement; freedom from the risk of violence; decision-making over family formation; and having voice in society” (Markham, 2013: 2). This ‘having voice in society’ is something that is questionable in regard to the Western medias representation of ISIL’s female recruits and their agency. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. The schoolgirls disappeared after travelling to the southern Turkish region of Adana, where their tracks were soon lost (later to be revealed that the girls walked across the Turkish-Syrian border) (Hall, 2015). Soon after their arrival, it surfaced that Kesinovic and Selimovic married Chechen ISIL fighters- suggesting that the two girls were recruited for the purposes of becoming Jihadi brides. Sadly, after six-months reports emerged of Kesinovic being beaten to death with a hammer after trying to escape the militant group, while Selimovic is still declared as missing (although both girls have been removed from Interpol’s missing list). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. *Hijra*: migration, emigration. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. The Daily Mail is Britain’s most read newspaper tabloid. The Daily Mail is often under criticism because of its racist, Islamophobic, anti-refugee and misogynistic articles. Although the Daily Mail tabloid is noted for being a ‘lowbrow’ news source, the fact that this newspaper reaches millions of reader’s coveys its power in influencing a vast amount of people. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. The Independent is a popular centrist British online and print newspaper. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. See Stuart Hall’s *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Michael Foucault coins the term ‘biopolitics’ to define a form of structured power and authority that is exercised through culture and society, where a sovereign has right and authority over citizens and humans lives. The individual is thus constructed through a complex and diverse techniques of biopower to control populations and achieve subjectivation, in order to produce a particular kind of life that benefits neoliberalism; modes of life that will be ultimately intensified, maximised and deepened for the State (see Foucault, 2008), [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Knowledge produced by scholars, the media and popular doctrinal belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. A racial stereotypical and ideology expressed and reprected in a speech by Sir Winston Churchill, “[t]he fact that in Mohammedan law every woman must belong to some man as his absolute property – either as a child, a wife, or a concubine – must delay the final extinction of slavery until the faith of Islam has ceased to be a great power among men” (Battersby, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Postcolonial theory and practice is about exploring these lost connections, and figuring out what actions are needed to undo these practices. There should not be these colonial structures of inclusion/exclusion, public/private in place, in order to move into a true ‘post’ colonial society. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Who is the ‘subaltern’? Spivak borrowed the concept from the neo-Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci, who “uses the term to mean both subordinate and non-hegemonic groups or classes” (Mukherjee, 2016: 67). Gramsci (writing about the Mussolini regime) refers to those “disaggregated groups of peasants … who had no cohesive social consciousness or politic program, and were therefore vulnerable to the ideas, culture and leadership of the state” (Mukherjee, 2016: 67). The subaltern therefore represents minorities who are oppressed and ostracised socially, politically and geographically from Western, imperialist and Eurocentric colonial hegemonic power and structures; creating cultural hegemony. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Especially criquing the claims of Gilles Deleuze and Michael Foucault on British colonialism in nineteenth-century India. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Mahmood also argues that aagency changes depending on social, political, and historical contexts, so therefore meanings of agency “should not be fixed beforehand or taken out of its social, religious, and political relations” (cited in Ponzanesi 2014b: 103). Western discourse is creating homogenous ideologies of freedom, equality, and agency, which leads to problematic assumptions about women that are not beneficial. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. The freedom to do what you want, so long as you do not harm others. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. Slavery-like conditions being violence and/or threat of violence, confiscation of legal documents, and the restriction of freedom of movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. While I am not suggesting that there are not aspects of vulnerability and violence in the the case of Kesinovic and Selimovic (and other cases of trafficking of women and girls), I am interested in the rhetoric of violence, coercion and grooming attached to their case of trafficking. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Once again, Kesinovic and Selimovic are minors and thus fall under legal protocol and protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)