University of Ottawa

Yemen's Feminine Civil War

Post-Colonial Feminist Critique of Racialized Female Insurgent Participation

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Introduction

During the Rwandan Genocide, an article called *"Not so Innocent: When Women become Killers"* was one of the first reports concerning female Hutu genocidaires (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 28). This article publicly scrutinised the phenomenon that women, particularly upper class, working women and mothers actively participated in the mass genocide of the Tutis people (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p.66). In contemporary events, the notion of the female political violence continues to permeate media sites and popular culture discourse. Recent examples include the rise of female ISIS supporters and combatants many of which have left North America and Europe to join the organization in Iraq and Syria. What does the female insurgent, terrorist, genocidaire war criminal all have in common? They are all incidences in which women are the perpetuators of said violence. This phenomenon at least in the 21rst century has challenged the assumption that war and armed conflict are exclusively hyper-masculinized, and women are exclusively the victim, the spectator or the prize in armed non-state conflict (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 2). While it is only in recent decades that female political violence has been the subject of study in International Relations, Security Studies and its Feminist counterparts; women have been participating in wars and intrastate conflicts throughout history in multiple roles. Women across the globe have historically engaged in various tasks that directly or indirectly aid violence as: nurses, comfort women, spies, fundraisers, recruitment officers, smugglers, combatants, hijackers and suicide bombers (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 5).

With the increased visibility of female political violence, there is also an interest into uncovering the socio-political implications for female insurgents as social actors on the international stage. Female perpetuators in non-state armed conflict continue to evoke sentiments

of curiosity due to their presence, which directly undermines the hyper-masculinized access to violence and aggression. The existence of female insurgents has provoked additional questions as to how women transform the nature of conflicts as political actors. For instance, the image of female insurgents contributes to challenging certain stereotypes, which perpetuate feminine and masculine tropes in violent conflict. In addition, the prominence of female insurgents illustrates new reflections on the concept of agency and rationality when interpreting why women may choose to join a rebel group and commit violence or conform to gendered specific roles within the rebel group. According to Sjoberg and Gentry (2015), women like men should be considered violent people (Gentry& Sjoberg, 2015). Like men, women also make choices to join armed conflict and participate for various reasons such as political gains, religious ideologies, personal grievances, and socio-economic incentives (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 4; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015). What is so captivating and yet strangely puzzling about women who perpetuate violence? This research project will demonstrate that the association of violent behaviours to women remains a curious case due to the gendered social norm that women are life-givers, passive, and perpetual peacemakers. As such, women who go against such norms as violent perpetuators are discursively represented as alienated, deviant and unorthodox in war and conflict.

Although female insurgents as a political group illustrates the intersections of gender and conflict , there remains a need for further examination into how the intersections of race, gender, religion and culture also influence the societal discourse on female insurgent particularly racialized female insurgents. Racialized women, particularly from the global south, have been represented to be passive, victimized or peacemakers of war and armed conflict (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 94). However, for racialized female insurgents, such narratives are grounded on the

constructs of the idealised female subject of the conceptual global south or the third world[1]. This research project will examine how underlying neo-orientalist presumptions further impact the ways in which racialized female insurgents are positioned and characterized in violent engagement.

This research project will begin with a short analytical overview of the literature on female insurgents and will present the significant contributions and theoretical gaps regarding "racialized" female insurgent literature. The overview will consist of the major understandings of why women join non-state violent groups, the roles that are ascribed to these women upon inclusion, including the role for violence and discursive representations. From this overview, I will present a post-colonial feminist critique of what these representations mean for racialized women with a case study on the Descendants of Zaiynab, an all-female insurgent group emerging from the current Yemen's civil war. This research project will end with a brief discussion on the limitations and key observations for the future academic work on female insurgent participation.

Key concepts: racialized female insurgent, agency, post-colonial feminist theory, political violence

Literature Review

Introduction

Female insurgents are an emerging phenomenon in the literature of armed conflicts particularly in the 21st century. Case studies on female insurgents illustrate theoretical archetypes

[1] According to Grovogui (2011), the global south is a conceptual framework, which represents the asymmetrical and geopolitical dynamics between former colonial powers and post-colonial states. The global south is a symbolic designation that captures the economic, political and cultural imprint of colonial legacies in international contemporary system. The concept does not define a particular cartography, rather this concept illustrates the post-coloniality of the international system (Grovogui, 2011).

in the study of armed conflicts. The aim of this research project is to analyze a particular case of female brigades in Yemen, who challenge particular models of female insurgents through a feminist post-colonial critique. This literature review is an overview on the study of female insurgents and will seek to highlight key arguments pertaining to their characterization as political actors in armed conflict.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, feminists of International Relations and Security have sought to re-evaluate and reconstruct how state security, war and conflict are analyzed through gender lens (Enloe, 2014; Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p.1). Gender lens provides a categorical framework that interprets how gendered norms and practices influence not only relations between men and women but also between the state, society and the international landscape (Detraz, 2012; Wibben, 2011). As such, several observations from these fields have concluded that war is profoundly gendered in the dichotomist experiences between men and women (Cohn, 2012, p. 23; Detraz, 2012, p. 15; Elshatian, 1987; Enloe, 2014). Men are said to be biologically inclined to war due to "natural" predispositions for aggression, obedience and ruthlessness (Ahall, 2012; Cohn, 2012, p. 23; Elshatain, 1985). Thus, men are often the most visible actors in armed conflict and are always the decision makers in the perpetuators of violence. Women, are associated with norms of femininity, in that, "they" are predominantly portrayed as the victims or the passive actor in war and armed conflict (Cohn, 2012, p. 23). Women are thus essentialized as being predisposed to feminine instincts and life-giving virtues such as maternal care, support and emotional labour (Ahall, 2012; Chinkin and Kaldor, 2013; Enloe, 1983, 2014; Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 148). Yet, part of the evolution in the literature has been to dispel these arguments. The evolution in the literature by authors SUCH AS have contributed to dispelling essentialist arguments that women as a generalized group are predisposed to peace and passivity,

as made evident by cases of female engagement in war as soldiers and combatants perpetuators (Moser & Clark, 2001; Runyan and Peterson, p. 142). Historically, women have always participated to some degree. There are examples of women supporting and even engaging in warfare from the Spartan age to support for imperial and world wars throughout the 20th century (Cohn, 2012; Elshtain, 1985; Runyan and Peterson, 2014, p. 142). In contemporary examples, women have also acted in violence, as is demonstrated in the research on female rebels, terrorists, insurgents and genocidaires (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 142).

However, these findings do not dispel the fact that women have also equally participated in peace and anti-war causes. Notable mobilizations include the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina or the Women in Black emerging from Israel (Moser & Clark, 2001). The phenomenon of women engaging and perpetuating violence is a conundrum because it goes against biological essentialist principles that women are naturally passive rather than aggressive. Feminist theory therefore helps to explore this conundrum for the study of female violence in International Relations as it relates to socially constructed norms of femininity and masculinity (Cohn, 2012; Elshtain, 1985; Fausto-sterling; 2005; p. 1493). As Fausto-sterling (2000) argues, the body is *sexed*, thus socially constructed though societal norms and behaviours attributed to biological differentiation (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Women who engage in violent actions in armed conflict essentially challenge what is understood as ideal femininity compared to male actors in conflict (Chinkin and Kaldor, 2013; Sjoberg, 2018; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). Evidently, much observations has been done on the particular gendered consequences that women may face in war as seen in sexual and gendered violence, refuge crises and internal displacements. Yet, while gendered violence in war and armed conflict is an indication of the deeply rooted systems of power and inequalities; that is not the complete experience of women

(Tickner, 2011). It is clear women do play active roles in war and conflict as agents of power and of influence (Alison, 2004; Sjoberg, 2018). However, what explains the phenomenon that captures the tensions when associating female actions capable of often-atrocious forms of violence?

In the existing literature, there are numerous case studies of *violent* female insurgent participation in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia (Parashar, 2014). Women have participated in nationalist campaigns: Algeria's civil war, Hamas, Ireland's IRA (Tazreena, 2004) or in the colonial independence warfare period: the 1960s-1990s Africa and Latin America (Cohn, 2012, p. 148; Kampwirth, 2003). Women were also involved in committing genocides and ethnic cleansing as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 158). They were deeply involved in ethno-nationalist conflicts like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka, among which was the infamous elite female battalion of suicide bombers (Moser & Clark, 2001, p. 21). Recent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria have also witnessed the rise of female rebels like the Kurdish female brigades. Thus, over the last two decades, tens of thousands of women and girls have taken up some form of political violence in at least 60 countries (Cohn, 2012, p. 149). Henshaw's (2013) table below illustrates visually the various types of insurgencies which have included women, circa 2006.

Movement	% Women
LTTE Black Tigers (Sri Lanka)	30-40%
Brigitte Rosse (Italy)	25%
Rote Armee Fraktion (W. Germany)	30%
Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) (Nepal)	30-50%
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Colombia)	30-45%
Sandinistas/FSLN (Nicaragua)	30%
Contras (Nicaragua)	7-15%
Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (El Salvador)	30%

(Eager 2008; Luciak 2001; McDermott 2002; BBC News 2004; Molyneux 1985;

Figure (1): Henshaw, 2013

For thinkers like Chinkin and Kaldor (2013), with the introduction of new wars; female participation in political violence has become more visible and prevalent (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013).

This literature review is an important first step when critically examining the case study analysis from a post-colonial feminist perspective. This section will commence with an overview on the major principles as to why women join insurgent groups and engage in violence. There is a debate regarding whether motives are gendered based and if so how such motives affects the capacity for women to willingly engage as perpetuators. This overview will further analyse the theoretical contributions on the evolution of roles for female insurgents in how such roles either challenge or reinforce expected gendered behaviours. Lastly, this overview will seek to highlight key arguments on the discursive representations of female insurgents in the analysis of narratives.

Motives: Why Join?

One of the primary questions that the literature attempts to explain is why women join non-state groups and engage in violent forms of mobilization. Evidently, it is reported that many women and young girls are *forcibly* recruited into rebel groups (Cohn, 2012). However, for this literature review, a particular focus will be on indicators of willing participation and recruitment. As there are numerous cases, some scholars have attempted to answer these questions through cross-national research on patterns of recruitment, individual profiles and goals for female involvement (Henshaw, 2016; Sjoberg & Wood, 2015). However, most research has been done on the study of male recruits based on the theoretical concepts of push and pull factors (Henshaw, 2016). These factors created by theorists like Gurr also propose the grievance and greed framework (Henshaw, 2016). Common push factors include economic, political grievances and the death of a loved one or family member in the conflict (Sjoberg & Wood, 2015). Common pull factors include ideological affiliation (ethnic, religious, national etc.), the perceived political legitimacy of the rebel group and incentives (financial, security, opportunities for political/military advancement) (Sjoberg & Wood, 2015). Feminist scholars have criticized such frameworks for the lack of gendered analysis and application (Henshaw, 2016). However, as Sjoberg and Wood (2015) reported, in their study highlighting instances of female violence in Chechnya, Palestine, and Rwanda, the drivers of engagement are often quite similar for both men and women (Henshaw 2016; Sjoberg & Wood, 2015, p. 49). They argue that women like men are capable of a wide range of violence within the rebel group for variety of reasons including for political strategy, ideological commitments and individual/socio-economic grievances (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p.3). Some variations based on gender can be attributed to gender-based systems of inequality, which produce factors like family obligations, and security from gendered based violence during conflict (Gentry& Sjoberg, 2015). There have been some studies

which target motives for women specifically (Eager, 2008; Gonzalez-Perez, 2008). However, they have also been critiqued for their small sample size in cross-national analysis (Henshaw, 2013, 2016; Thomas & Wood, 2007).

Studies done by Henshaw (2013, 2016), Parashar (2014) and Thomas and Wood (2007) have sought to remedy this with large-N sample comparative analysis to uncover patterns for motives and explain why women rebel and resort to violence (Henshaw, 2013, 2016; Parashar, 2014; Thomas & Wood, 2007). The comparative framework established key empirical hypotheses through the various case studies. These hypotheses include political motives, ethno-religious beliefs, human security and economic motives (Henshaw, 2013; Parashar, 2014). Theoretically, understanding motives is significant in the literature since they aid in debunking gendered myths regarding the reasons for women who engage in political violence (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Henshaw, 2013; Thomas and Wood, 2007). This framework is significant because many studies have attempted to answer the motive question by relying on gender-based stereotypes and assumptions (Sjoberg, 2018). For example, women were thought to have join insurgencies primarily for personal reasons: family members, the death of boyfriends or husbands, rather than for other reasons like political ideology, religious commitment or economic incentives and advancement (Thomas & Wood, 2007). As Sjoberg and Wood (2015) argue, such values reinforced certain stereotypes of the female insurgent as associated only to the private sphere of familial responsibilities and therefore only join for emotional rather than other political or rational motives (Ali, 2006; Sjoberg & Wood, 2015). Scholars like Henshaw (2013, 2016) have sought to deconstruct those gendered motives with a particular focus on group political ideology (Ahall, 2012; Henshaw, 2016; Thomas & Wood, 2007). In Henshaw's analysis, more women tend to join leftists or "redistribute ideology" groups i.e. in Latin America

because of economic grievances or for religious duty/ martyrdom and ethnic affiliation; more so than "personal or private" reasons as illustrated by Thomas and Wood (2007) (Ali, 2006; Henshaw, 2013, 2016; Thomas & Wood, 2007). Nevertheless, as Cohn (2012) argues, the reasons for engaging in political violence is complex and diverse (Cohn, 2012).

Scholars like Mazurana (2014) and Moser and Clark (2001) debate how conditions for protection can become so securitized to the point where the rebel lifestyle is portrayed as a realistic solution for women and girls in armed conflict (Mazurana, 2014; Moser & Clark, 2001). In certain cases, some women join violent mobilization for protection and for revenge against the circumstances of rape, torture, forced sterilization and slavery by state forces during periods of warfare (Cohn, 2012, p. 149). In another framework, women joining an insurgent group maybe the best possible solution to escape familial or communal violence i.e. female genital mutilation, child marriage, persecution against perceived sexual deviant behaviour from their communities and families like homosexual relations/behaviours. Thus, the construct of security is also attributed in various studies of female political violence because *in*security can emerge from the state and the home rather than just by the presence of armed conflict (Wibben, 2011). According to Allison (2004) feminists engaging within the field of security studies ask the questions of "whose" security is significant outside of the state security complex (Alison, 2004). These questions lead towards patterns for justification in violent radicalization according to the hypothesis of gendered *in*security for women and girls in armed conflict (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Coulter, 2008; Hudson et al 2009).

From the failed/fragile state typology, Gould & Agnich (2016) argues that a state's inability to guarantee security especially for women and young girls in armed conflict can perhaps be a root pull factor to join non-state organizations, which can provide that said

protection (Detraz, 2012, p. 8-9; Gould & Agnich, 2016; Hudson et al, 2009; Reardon & Hans, 2010). They argue that women's physical security lowers in failed/fragile states because of the rampant spread of violence in the absence of central authority, enforced law and high levels of militarization (Gould & Agnich, 2016; Parashar, 2014). Evidently, recruitment can become a means to negotiate one's security, even if that may be a prelude to forms of violence within the rebel group (Detraz, 2012; p. 11; Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 145). In MacKenzie (2009)'s case study of female combatants of Sierra Leone, she conceptualizes how security is not just a matter of discourse monopolized only by the state but is also negotiated through speech acts (MacKenzie, 2009). Security is no longer in the realm of high politics but also in the low politics domestic spheres when women engage in insecure conditions of violence (Hudson et al., 2009; MacKenzie, 2009).

Furthermore, other studies done for Latin American and African countries have explored the hypothesis that women may join insurgencies to escape systematic/societal oppression for the expectations of gender rights reform or emancipation post-conflict(Cohn, 2012 p. 149; Eisenstein, 2007; Parashar, 2014; Thomas & Wood, 2007). For example, in rebel groups in Columbia and Algeria, the hope of gender equality is a successful recruitment tactic for women to not only escape oppressive traditionalist standards but to also participate in reformist, utopian ideologies of rebel propaganda (Cohn, 2012 p. 149; Eisenstein, 2007; Parashar, 2014; Thomas & Wood, 2007). However, in Henshaw's cross-national study, political rights i.e. greater rights and advancement for women had no significant correlation to the rates of women joining non-state armed groups (Henshaw, 2016). In addition, Moser and Clark (2001) and Tareenza (2004) all suggest that women may not even be guaranteed equality and reform despite pledges from rebel groups or organizations (Moser & Clark, 2001, p. 21; Tareenza, 2004). For example, historic

case studies like Algeria and Columbia illustrate that engagement in warfare did not lead to reform of gendered systems of power and oppression due to cultural, religious or ethno-nationalist strongholds on gender relations (Eisenstein, 2007; Moser & Clark, 2001, p. 2; Tareenza, 2004).

Performance and Roles in Armed Conflict

The next significant theoretical question in the literature is what do female insurgents do in non-state armed groups? How do certain groups enable women to be engage in more combat or violent campaigns compared to others? These questions are thus a prelude to the hypothesis on the gendering of roles and performances as political actors (Butler, 1988). Roles and performances refer to the process of gendering selves to fit certain masculine or feminine expectations. It is the: "*process of doing rather than being"* (Butler, 1988; Cohn, 2012, p. 9). Various authors have focussed their analysis on what women actually do in the non-state armed groups, rebel and terrorist organizations. In Tareenza's (2004) work on liberalists guerilla movements in El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Iran and Algeria, she argues that as in state militarized organizations, non-state groups shouldn't be considered an evolutionary space for female combatants since they can just as well be sites which reproduce gender hierarchies and expectations for the division of labour (Tareenza, 2004). Even though women have more "liberal" roles as the fighters, combatants, commanders, spies, weapon dealers, recruiters, such roles may not always protect them from being expected to perform the majority of "camp follower" tasks like the cooking, child rearing and sexual services (Tarzeenza, 2004). Hence, women who join rebel groups may continue to be designated for feminine support related tasks rather than to be considered as actual agents of violence and rebellion (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 5). For example, El Salvador women within the FMLN, the Iranian women in the National

Revolutionary Army and even the Kurdish female combatants have actively participated in artillery combat while also supporting rebel groups through gendered forms of labour (Enloe, 1983; Goldstein, 2001; Thomas & Wood, 2017; Tazreena, 2004). For women, there does not appear to be clear division between expected and unexpected roles (Tareenza, 2004). Some groups like the LTTE may receive military training and do combat , while other groups like Al-Qaeda may allow women to engage in strictly support roles, depending on the group's political ideology regarding women (Cohn, 2012, p. 150). As such, non-state armed rebel groups can still be spaces, which adhere to hegemonic and militarized masculinity executed by an almost entire male leadership and in the distribution of tasks (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Detraz, 2012; p. 58; Enloe, 1983, 2014; Tareenza, 2004).

In the analysis of various female insurgent groups, Sjoberg and Wood (2015), illustrate that women may face severe backlash and threats from fellow male comrades or the leadership for behaving in ways in which are outside of the expected gender roles (Sjoberg & Wood, 2015, p.6). As Chinkin and Kaldor (2013) argue, the prevalence of new wars has indeed increased the importance of female participants as crucial actors. However, certain gender stereotypes and biases are not completely eradicated (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013). This is especially significant in the cases of gendered violence rape which remain prominent within insurgent rebel groups (Alison, 2004, Chinkin & Kaldor; 2013; MacKenzie, 2009). For example, Parashar (2014) studied the roles of women in the Kashmir conflict and Tamil armed insurgents of Sri Lanka (Parashar, 2014). She argues that despite women's evolved roles from mere support roles to combatants, they were largely excluded from the decision-making process of their fellow male counterparts and were still expected to "fulfill" their gendered duties while also preforming as drivers, messengers, cooks, reconnaissance, intelligence officer, and sex workers, etc. (Detraz,

2012, p. 58; Parashar, 2014). As in militaries, armed insurgent groups are also gendered institutions rooted in masculine and devalued feminine relations to function and attract support in armed conflict (Cohn, 2012, p. 30).

Parashar (2014), further cautions that ethno-cultural expectations on gender roles may not necessarily change just because women have more active roles (Parashar, 2014). Moreover, she also questions how such gender politics not only shapes the framework for women within rebel groups, but also how such politics can threaten established societal expectations for women and the seemingly more "radicalized" roles they performance as insurgent members. In her case studies, Parashar (2014) demonstrates this debate in how women commanders were not taken seriously by community leaders in rebel-controlled territories and had to resort to overt expressions of hyper-masculinized violence and ruthlessness in order to be respected and considered legitimate (Parashar, 2014). Thus, women's or female bodies carry those gendered expectations even though they maybe be considered emancipated in a rebel environment (Parashar, 2014). Therefore, there are specific tensions, when women are expected to fulfill those conventional gendered norms while simultaneously performing as combatants in highly militarized masculinized rebel spaces (Tazreena, 2004).

Thomas and Wood (2017), further explore these tensions in how a group's political ideology can play a role in determining the extent of women's participation (Thomas & Wood, 2017). In a cross-sectional analysis, Thomas and Wood (2007) illustrate that women are more likely to be recruited for violent engagement in particularly Marxist-left groups like those in Latin America, more so than in religious or nationalist groups (Ali, 2006; Kampwirth, 2003; Thomas & Wood, 2007). Marxists-left groups like the Zapatists or the FMLN tend to have ideologies which were more liberal and egalitarian towards women. For these groups, the views

on patriarchy and gender hierarchies were considered irrelevant to the more egalitarian and class political aspirations in rebel mobilization (Goldstein, 2001; Kampbirth, 2003; Thomas & Wood, 2007). As such, women in these groups are often expected to be less engaged in gendered tasks in contrast to more conservative fundamentalist groups like the Hamas, or Chechen factions in which traditional gender roles and divisions of labour were reinforced and preserved despite the inclusion of women (Ali, 2006; Thomas & Wood, 2007). While recently, fundamentalist groups like Al-Qaeda have considered the value of women as combatants and insurgents based on religious incentives for Jihad or "*mujahidaat*", they have also justified means to controlling women's performative roles to reduce the risk of emasculation by the presence of women in highly militarized and violent spaces (Sjoberg, 2018; Thomas & Wood, 2007; Ali, 2006).

Cohn (2012) and Coulter (1988) both argue for a feminist gender analysis in mapping out the complexities of how armed groups draw on, manipulate, and militarize masculine and feminine norms (Ali, 2006; Cohn, 2012, p. 146; Coulter, 1988). As such, the roles and expected performances for female insurgents is rather nuanced. Examples of this complexity is indicated in how certain women will monopolize on the dichotomy of perpetuator and victim to enforce gender systems of oppressions as a means to gain political leverage (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Coulter, 2008). There are cases of female insurgents who will commit sexual violence towards enemy/civilian men and women in order to maintain gendered hierarchical status within rebel groups (Bazz & Stern, 2009). In addition, whereas rape and sexual abuse are not uncommon in rebel organizations (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013). However, what has also been studied are cases in which female insurgents who would utilize their own sexuality in exchange for favours, protection and advancement in the rebel ranks (Cohn, 2012, p. 151; Henshaw, 2013). There are many examples of female combatants who play the role of wives, concubines and prostitutes

while also moving through the ranks to become an established leader or combatant (Henshaw, 2013). Evidently, the strategy of sexuality is debated in how it can be considered an example of female agency or a form of gendered oppression (Baaz & Stern, 2009). As such, these roles are performative in that women are expected to act out scripted narratives which can determine how they can engage in violence (Parashar, 2014). For example, when it comes to scripted but nuanced roles, many authors have focussed on female suicide bombers (Enloe, 2014; Cohn, 2012, p. 158). Female suicide bombers challenge gender expectations because of the association to v deadly consequences for the chosen woman and the targets (Ali, 2006; Goldstein, 2001). The first recorded suicide bomber was in 1985 when, Sana'a Mehaidli- member of the Syrian socialist national party, detonated near an Israeli military convoy (Ponzanesi, 2014). Since then, there have been waves of female suicide bombers including the assignation of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi in 1991 by a LTTE female suicide bomber (Ponzanesi, 2014). Female suicide bombers have become strategic actors, especially in traditionalist societies in which is considered taboo to publically search women and thereby permitting women to conceal bombs in their clothes, children carriages etc. (Cohn, 2012, p. 159; Marazauaa, 2014). Yet, it is through those gendered tropes of modesty and concealment, by which women have been able to carry out large-scale terrorist acts. According to Thomas and Wood (2007), female suicide bombers have become more prominent in even the most radically conservative Islamist groups (Thomas & Wood, 2007). Groups like the Hamas, and Al-Qaeda which originally did not accept women combatants, have now come to depend on them for political attraction and advantage (Ali, 2006). Thus, female insurgents can embody various roles and perform depending on the gender-based politics of a given rebel group (Parashar, 2014).

Narratives, Archetype and Agency

Within the literature on female insurgents, studies have attempted to illustrate how female insurgents are represented in media and in popular culture (Detraz, 2012, p. 101). For instance, western media has often portrayed female suicide bombers as demonized, fearful and unstable (Ali, 2006; Cohn, 2012, p. 162; Tazreena, 2004). For example, thinkers like Elshtain (1985) argue that war theorists would depict women as the beautiful soul caricature, which meant women were represented as in perpetual state of helpless and in constant protection (Elshtain, 1985). As the Elshtain (1985) states:

"Each characterization of women as peaceful and needing protection implies that there is a man or men responsible for providing the protection they need (Elshatin, 1985). The man or men who ought to provide protection are then set up as opposite of the man or men who are seen as a threat to the ''beautiful soul'' women. In other words, ''we'' are the ''enemies'' of IS because ''they'' threaten women and ''we'' need to protect them." (Elshtain, 1985).

Such characterizations are archetypes, which are a typologies or models created to portray such representations. As such, based on archetypes of the ideal female victim, women are never really the attackers or protector themselves (Elshtain, 1985, p. 101; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). These archetypes can be proactive in determining military action (Runyan & Peterson, 2014). For example, Runyan & Peterson (2014) argue that such archetypes were utilize influence the racialized and gendered narratives of the *womenandchildren* of Afghanistan and justify American military intervention against the Taliban regime (Laforteza, 2015; Runyan & Peterson, 2014; Sjoberg & Gentry 2007).

Scholars like Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) have sought to highlight how gendered war narratives diminishes the much-nuanced representation of female insurgents as merely simplistic

and superficial caricatures (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007). In their analysis of female agents of violence in Chechnya, Palestine and the former Yugoslavia, they argue that there are usually three overarching narratives associated to women: The mother, the monster, and the whore (Detraz, 2012, p.102; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

The maternal narrative is associated to maternal mobilization as in cases of anti-war causes or as a discourse to incite sympathy and vengeance for lost family members thus commending violent action. Women's political violence is consequently attributed to either the supportive nurturer or the vengeful women fuel by maternal and domestic rage against the consequences of armed conflict (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 72). The maternal/mother subject is driven by emotions and irrationality rather than for other factors like political incentives, ideology and socio-economic incentives (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 72). Such characterization plays into the outdated essentialist trope that women are irrational and men are rational and true political animals. The mother narrative highlights how women's engagement into the masculinized violent activity is therefore a perversion of the private domestic sphere of motherhood and as a wife which are : pinnacles of ideal feminine behaviour (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 72). The mother narrative not only highlights the gendered assumptions about what is appropriate female behavior but it also justifies a negative response when such norms are undermined as unnatural and taboo(Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 73). The maternal/mother subject is fairly non-threatening and does not challenge traditional western ideals of femininity. However, the female subject is still a terrorist, a revolutionary, a genocidaire or a war criminal. However, this identity doesn't really matter since the subject is already domesticated and therefore commended for being so especially in conservative traditionalist rebel groups (Elshatian 1987, p. 50; Gentry& Sjoberg, 2015, p. 74; Thomas and Wood, 2007). As a result, women who do commit violence are

dehumanize and *dewomanized* because they fail to be the ideal maternal/mother subject. For female insurgents, this narrative is imposed when they are expected to perform maternal-like roles or symbolize the rebel cause as the poster child for appraised virginal or motherly supporter (Ponzanesi, 2014; Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). For Sjoberg and Gentry (2007; 2015) it's the act of violence, which is the differential factor in the narrative (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015). However, the vengeful mother, though still maternal is also dangerously "disturbed". The subject is driven by rage because of maternal loss and or precarious socioeconomic situation for her family and household (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 75). For Ahall (2012), motherhood is fundamental to understanding female agency, due to the apparent contradictions between violence and feminine virtues (Ahall, 2012).

Secondly, the monster narrative implies that women's decision to join and engage in violence is vindictive or irrational and in extreme cases evidence of psychological un-wellness. Female violence is viewed as not only unnatural because it counters the representations of the female body capable to incite death and harm (Ahall, 2012). Such representations echoes the European historical role of medicinal practices to cure female's hysteria and psychological disorders as inherently a feminine distorted illness. In the first addition of their book, Sjoberg and Gentry looked at the gendered pathological deviancy imbedded within accounts of women violence (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 111). Once again, female insurgents are portrayed as the monster, which is not only dehumanizing but also *dewomanizing* due to the apparent contradictions to their life-giving status, like the capacity for pregnant women and mothers to also be female suicide bombers (Ali, 2006; Goldstein, 2001). The monster narrative is particularly interesting because it renders the subject abject, when women are the perpetuators or orchestrators of violence (Ahall, 2012; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Such narratives demonizes and vilifies women,

as was the case in the media reports of Rwandan genocidaires (Ahall, 2012; Ruyan & Peterson, 2014; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 28).

Lastly, the whore narrative is an indicator of how female sexual deviancy can become a form of currency for women to manipulate when engaging in violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). This is based on the historical phenomenon of women and children as camp followers in major world wars on the fronts i.e. comfort women of Korean and Japanese during World War Two (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 117). Female sexuality is weaponized to portray the female subject as deviant untrustworthy, or the femme fatale in violent outcomes (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 156). For example, female American soldiers were demonized for their roles in engaging in sexual violence in Abu Gharib. The shock value in the astonishment of these women's actions through media exposure worked particularly when reports surfaced on female soldiers who smeared fake menstrual blood over the prisoner's bodies or enforced self-masturbation as a form of torture (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 156). As Sjoberg and Gentry argue the erotomaniac whore narratives is a means to characterise women violence especially for women in middle eastern Islamic revel/terrorist groups. Female genocidaires and female war criminals Muslim or Arab have been portrayed sexualization since the 1960s (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 120). The underlying racism and sexualization undermines the agency based on cultural connotations of the femme fatale and the romanticization of modest religious garment for female insurgents (Ali, 2006; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 120).

These narratives diminish women participation in political violence and they fail to see women as rational agents when they don't fit the molds of idealised femininity (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015, p. 92). Narratives of violence associated to unnatural and barbaric representations through the media framework is also reflective of the narratives of war time storytelling. As

Sjoberg (2018) argues, these narratives produce simplistic characterizations of the "good" guys and the "bad guys" in armed conflict (Sjoberg, 2018). For example, the monster narrative is particularly salient for women who choose to join ISIS and engage in violent executions and bombings of civilian locations. Particularly through western media representations, female ISIS supporters become synonymous to constructs of evil and barbarism. Yet, representations of either female soldiers or combatants who engage to fight against ISIS like the Kurdish female brigades are repeatedly herald in direct foil to the bad female characters in media and popular culture (Sjoberg, 2018). As such, female narratives are utilised as weapons of the war in creating discourses for armed conflicts (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 157; Sjoberg, 2018). Nonetheless, thinkers like Ahall (2012) have criticized this categorization of narratives as too narrow against the nuances of political subjectivity and thereby also strip agency from women's own lived experiences and sense of representation (Ahall, 2012).

Each of these narratives in some ways, manipulates the female subject as indicated in the concept of agency in the literature (Ahall, 2012; Henshaw, 2013; Moser & Clark, 2001). In the following editions, Gentry and Sjoberg (2015) have argued how narratives characterises female perpetuators as less than human and thus less than woman (Gentry &Sjoberg, 2015, p. 26). They have argued against the ways in which western feminist theory in evaluating the applicability of these narratives has also contributed to the essentialist caricatures of women which further invisbilizes their agency (Moser & Clark, 2001). Human agency recognizes the role of social actors (Moser and Clark, 2001, p. 5). Social actors are socially constructed by environment and social relations (Moser and Clark, 2001, p. 5). However, some scholars have argued that the concept of agency itself is used to override women's experiences regardless of geo-political, cultural, socio, or even religious factors (Ahall, 2012; Auchter, 2012; Moser & Clark, 2001;

Parashar, 2014). To counter those arguments of essentialist narratives and archetypes, scholars MacKenzie (2009) and Coulter (1988) have championed engaging in-depth interviews of former female combatants in Columbia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda (Coulter, 2008; MacKenzie, 2009). In providing their own accounts, this methodological framework helped combat the overriding of these war narratives on female insurgents lived experiences rather than in speaking for them (Coulter, 2008; MacKenzie, 2009). Others, like Autcher (2012) have further argued that the Feminist Security field and International Relations should move even further away from the construct of agency as they question whether it actually exists in systems sustained by gender inequalities remain (Autcher, 2012; Parashar, 2014). Certain post-structuralists feminists completely disregard the term in that no real agency can exists anywhere if there are still systems of patriarchy, capitalism and heteronormativity through which armed conflict benefits from (Ahall, 2012; Auchter, 2012). This creates double standards as seen in cases where female ex-combatants who were once portrayed as active agents during war become simultaneously victims due to societal violence (Autcher, 2012; Moser & Clark, 2001). As in cases in El Salvador and Columbia, families and communities would ostracized female ex-combatants due to the lack of gendered focus in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs(Moser & Clark, 2001, p. 9).

Agency depends on the roles or the performance of these women which are deemed legitimate or illegitimate-but even that distinction can become nuanced (Sjoberg, 2018). For example, in certain case studies, women can utilize their sexuality to seek protection and thus willingly engage in prostitution inside rebel groups (Ahall, 2012). Therefore, agency and power go hand in hand depending on circumstances for female insurgents as political subjects (Ahall, 2012; Coulter, 1988). An example of this paradox is in the media representations of European

women who join ISIS. Through this phenomenon, certain discourses became more prevalent in assessing why and how certain groups of women and girls get to become radicalized. Evidently, these discourses included the constructs that women were lured, and manipulated by ISIS sympathizers and combatants. Evidently such discourses completely undermine the role of personal agency in individual radicalization (Sjoberg, 2018). As the act of leaving to go to Syria or Iraq is not considered legitimate, these women's actions and decisions therefore suddenly don't constitute a definition of agency according to liberal feminist theory (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 157). As such, Sjoberg (2018) argues that there is a constitutive relationship between gender, agency and political legitimacy (Sjoberg, 2018). Ahall (2012) argues that many of the literature contributions have used an action-based definition of agency linked to political subjectivity (how individuals act) rather than representations of agency liked to subject positions within *"discursive* practices" (Ahall, 2012). In observing British women in the war show "Blitz" Ahall (2012) proposes a different approach to conceptualizing agency (Ahall, 2012). Ahall (2012) argues that there needs to be a focus on discursive representations of female agency in political violence because they aid in conceptualising representations how gender, agency and political violence impact the everyday of violent female insurgents rather than the sensationalized snippets in media period and popular culture (Ahall, 2012). It is therefore not so much about how agency in female political violence is justified, but rather Ahall (2012) proposes to look at constructs of power get to be embedded in the ways in which female perpetuators are written as subjects/objects discursively (Ahall, 2012). Narrative and assumptions about what constitutes agency are interrelated which can create archetypes of female insurgents.

Conclusion

The overview of these studies illustrates the numerous examinations into the phenomenon of female insurgents. Through this short overview has tried to present the macro theoretical contributions. This section began with an overview of how the emergence of female insurgents in the literature has challenged essentialist arguments in the dichotomies of perpetuator and masculinity versus the victim and ideals of femininity in armed intrastate conflict. Furthermore, this section presented some theoretical debate to uncovering the motives for why women join rebel organizations and even engage in violent mobilization. Consequently, while it may be argued that there are no stark differences between men and women; other factors like group ideology and reformist or egalitarian expectations can shed some light into the complex plethora of responses as to why women rebel. Next, this overview has also described how roles are allocated and performed by female insurgents. It was demonstrated that despite the appearance of equality in certain groups, gender hierarchies can still be produced within rebel groups which points to the prevalence of gender-based violence and asymmetrical divisions of labour. Lastly, this overview has also sought to highlight key arguments on the discursive representations of female insurgents and the role of agency in the analysis of narratives. One significant finding from this conceptual theme is how the construct of narratives not only produce archetypes of female insurgents but also relates to how agency in a discursive approach is understood as either legitimate or illegitimate in violent mobilization.

This overview on the literature of female insurgents has incited further questions on the primary insight of narratives, which construct representational archetypes of female insurgents in political violence. Gender is also understood through other identity markers such as race, class, sexuality, religion, nationality (Runyan and Peterson, 2014, p. 2). As women are not monolithic,

female insurgents are also not monolithic as was made evident in the numerous cases across regions and states (Cohn, 2012; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). However, what are the implications for racialized female insurgents within the literature on gendered political violence? As Moser and Clark (2001) ague, feminist concerns with "otherness" has often ignored differences among women themselves based on the tendency to imagine the constructed "third world women" in western feminist literature on female insurgents (Autcher, 2012; Moser & Clark, 2001). For racialized female insurgents, such narratives are grounded on archetypal representations of the female subject in the conceptual global south or the third world. Thus, a particular point of further investigation is the ways in which the narratives of the global south female subject and thus the female insurgent. As such, this case study will seek to answer the question: *"How does the production of racialized and gendered archetypes impact the representations of female insurgents in contemporary political violence?"* Racialized women have played significant roles in colonial and post-colonial conflicts as: comfort women, spies, cooks, nannies, prostitutes, concubines, combatants and terrorists (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 2). Yet, racialized women, have historically represented the image of the passive victim or of the peacemakers of war and armed conflict (Ahall, 2012; Elshtain, 1985; Parashar, 2014). However, it is also evident that racialized women have also engaged in warfare contrary to traditional war narratives, which have marginalized or trivialized gendered experiences (Parashar, 2014). The next section will highlight the significance of post-colonial feminist theory as the chosen framework to examine the case study.

Theoretical Framework

Who is the Global South Female Subject?

McEwan (2001) argues that *post-colonialism theory* attempts to re-write the ways in which history and knowledge have hegemonically conceived the "third world" as an imaginative and spatial reality (McEwan, 2001). According to Edward Said, the term orientalism is a theoretical tool, which frames the dominated conceptual East in contrast to the construct of the West as the standard of white hegemonic masculinity, modernity and desirability (Einstein, 2004, p. 35; Lewis, 1996, p. 16). As such, the West is considered enlightened, the Orient is barbaric, if the west is civilized, the orient is primitive (Lewis, 1996). The orient is also characterized as irrational and exotic which secures the construct of the West as rational familial, moral and Christian (Lewis, 1996, p. 16). Critics have called out how the conceptual third world is frozen in time as is the construct of the third world woman (Mohanty, 1988). For example, the image of Africa within colonial origins is consistently understood as the perpetual "starving masses" which erased complex historic political and economic landscapes of an entire continent (Einstein, 2004, p. 30). This practice of othering the orient enables political, economic and cultural conquests for the benefit of the West as was illustrated in the literary writings of the East during the colonial era of conquests (Lewis, 1996).

Post-colonial feminist theory is a theoretical lens, which analyses the colonial and gendered production of identity, representation, knowledge and power (Spivak & Harasym, 1990; Trinh, 1989; Williams, & Chrisman, 1994). As such, the third world woman or global south female subject is the central concept in the embodiment of racialized women women outside of the western context (Banu Ozkazanc‐Pan, 2018). In the 1980s, Feminist studies into

the global south and the global south female subject was primarily from the vantage point of western feminists (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 13). Post-colonial feminists have criticized western feminists or western trained in speaking for and about the global south female subject in a process of othering and objectification of the subaltern (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). The early 1990s saw the emergence of black, post colonial and third wold feminists who challenged the western and whiteness vantage point, who spoke on behalf of these women from the conceptual global south. This period was the unsettlement of western hegemony in the production of feminist knowledge, which similarly erased the diverse historic political and economic landscapes of non-western women (Carby, 1983, p. 71; Ponzanesi, 2014, p.14). This theory, therefore challenges those practices in categorizing the female subject within the orientalist personification of post-colonial epistemology and the legacy of colonial powers in the production of racialized and gendered knowledge and power (McEwan, 2001; Spivak & Harasym, 1990, p. 114). As Foucault (1982) agues, power and knowledge mutually imply the other through discursive practices that reproduces the subject (Zine, 2006; Foucault, 1982). Based on this perspective, the global south female subject exists as an imagined object of western fascination but in an asymmetrical power dynamic. The subject is always *othered* by the western imagination through the processes of race and gender (Einstein, 2004, p. 62). Post-colonial feminist theory further rejects the patriarchal homogenization of women. While men of colour may be oppressed due to their race/colour, women of color are further alienated from ideal white femininity through intersectional structures of oppression and marginalization in the west and in the conceptual global south (Einstein, 2004, p. 62).

Post-colonial feminists like Mohanty, Spivak and Suleri have argued that though systems of patriarchal oppression exist; the experiences of the black, third world or global south female

subject positions them differently in contrast to white westernized feminism (McEwan, 2001). In her work, Mohanty (1988) called out the colonial practice of creating binary models of women as an a priori category between the image of the modernity, sexually free, independent white-centred female experience in contrast to women who are on the periphery of those intersecting racialized and gendered experiences (McEwan, 2001; Mohanty, 1988). As Mohanty (1988) points out, post-colonial women tend to be represented as monolithic in Feminist literature (Mohanty, 1988). This discursive colonization thereby erases the material and historical heterogeneity of of women in the conceptual global south or third world, which contributes to sustaining the structural and symbolic hierarchies in post-colonial landscape (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 90). According to Mohanty (1988), there are both material and ideological factors which creates the third world woman (Mohanty, 1988). For example, the global south female subject is often the victim of brown or black violence, the idealized peacemakers or the embodiment of a nation by which both racialized and white hegemonic masculinities seek to either protect or destroy (Ali, 2006; Mohanty, 1988; Sjoberg, 2018). The global south female subject is always described in relation to tropes of religious duty, familial obligations or as dependent and irrational caricatures (Ali, 2006; Mohanty, 1988; McEwan, 2001).

Few critical race and post-colonial theorists include the gendered historical experience from post-colonial experiences. In his book *Algeria Unveiled*, Frantz Fanon discusses how Algerian women experienced psychological and cultural militancy against colonial control over their gendered performativity (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 4). Thus, in Fannon's account of the revolutionary war, colonial women also played an important role in the armed struggle and their participation altered their feminized colonial bodies and identities, which in turn, challenged existing patriarchal systems inspired from colonial rule (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 4). The post-

colonial feminist framework argues that systems of power continue to exist across colonial legacies but more specifically as an oppressive measures in the experiences of non-western racialized women.

Such colonial legacies appear in how racialized female insurgents are represented. For female insurgents, guerilla soldiers, terrorists, they rarely if ever escape their gendered identity (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 10). Therefore, the acknowledgement of women's violence is examined as violent actions *as women* (Sjoberg and gentry, 2015). In addition to the issues of representation, knowledge and power; post-colonial feminist theory also seeks to understand the complexity of agency when the global female subject is portrayed as passive and victimized of social structures in the representational gaze of privileged western and western trained academics. The concept of agency especially in regards to female insurgents in the global south is complex in epistemology and field work (Sjoberg and Gentry, Mackenzei and Parashar). It is acknowledged that particular structural arrangements offer possibilities for resistance and change for some while recognizing that the same arrangement may be oppressive to others (McEwan, 2011; Spivak, 1988). What are the specific orientalist archetypes for gendered political violence in the conceptual global south? In political violence literature, racialized women are described to 1. Be too feminist or too unfeminine and thereby rejected by their communities, 2. Only engaged in violence because of male relations, 3. Only act in supporting roles, 4. Delusional and easily manipulated or 5. Any combination of the above (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 10). The racialized female insurgent is rarely if ever rational, reasonable or a political animal in armed conflict (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 10). As such, these orientalist archetypes enable the de-contextualization and the objectification of the global south female subject (Ahall, 2012l Parashar, 2014, p. 58;). A post-colonial feminist

critique is theoretical framework to investigate the discursive phenomenon of racialized female insurgents from the existing literature of female political violence.

Historical Context

Contemporary republic of Yemen was once divided into two states (Rabi, 2015, p. 17). The northern region, formerly the, "Arab Republic of Yemen" (ARY) hosts a Zaydism Shi'a minority and southern region, formerly known as the "Democratic Republic of Yemen" (DRY) was a socialist secular Arab state composed of majority Sunni Muslims (Dingli, 2013; Rabi, 2015, p. 66). The Yemen state is primarily a tribal system of which state centralization is fragmented. The colonial occupations by the Ottoman Empires and the United Kingdom in the south never really did consolidate fully a hegemonic rule over the northern regions (Rabi, 2015, p. 10). After the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, internal warfare lead to an independent northern Yemen (Rabi, 2015, p. 13). The British would leave the southern region and make way for a socialist regime in 1967. The Houthis, which emerged in the 1990s are a sub-clan, formerly led by a charismatic leader Hussein al-Houhti from the Zaydi Shiites or *Zaydiyyah* of northern Yemen. The Zaydis- Shiites are the minority within Shi'a Islam in the Islamic world. As such, this group differs in both doctrine and belief systems from Iran and Iraq where there is a greater concentration of Shi'a Muslims. After the end of the colonial period, the Zaydi monarchy controlled northern government of Yemen including the city, Taiz. Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who came to power after a series of coups in 1978 was himself a Zaydi-Houthi and would rule Yemen for the next 33 years. In this time, former President Saleh would help to establish the unification process of both states in May 1990 (Riphenburg, 2000). However, during the transitional years, the Houthis embraced a Zaydi revivalism and resistance to Saleh including other rival tribal clans (Rabi, 2015). The Houthis contested the unification process in

the 1990s as a threat of self-determination and sovereignty of the northern tribal clanship (Bleuca, 2015; Dingli, 2013). Consequently, Yemen also experienced a revival Islamization period pioneered by the Zaydi Shiites in Northern Yemen (Riphenburg, 2000; Yadav, 2010). This began with the Islah party- a coalition of tribal elites from the ruling parties of both north and south Yemen (Yadav, 2010). This party would win the national elections in 1993 and would begin implementing social conservative reforms to dismantle the secular republican state in the south (Yadav, 2010). The Yemen socialist party soon became obsolete during the unification transitional period (Yadav, 2010). Saleh also became the target of impeding frustrations regarding corruptions, nepotism and the Houthis were critical of Saleh's dependence on American and Saudi Arabian economic dependence (Bleuca, 2015; Dingli, 2013; Rabi, 2015).

Between 1994 and 2010; Saleh was under increased national scrutiny for limiting political freedoms, increased authoritarianism and reduced state economic regulation which would be a significant factor in increased youth unemployment and poverty (Lackner, 2014, p.9; Rabi, 2015).). These factors culminated into widespread frustrations across the country especially in the North (Lackner, 2014, p. 9). In 2004, the regime's relationship with the Houthis deteriorated when Saleh's forces killed Husein al Houthi. This initiated a rebellion and the commencement of six civil wars lasting until 2013 (Lackner, 2014, p. 9). Saleh opposed the Houthis mobilisation to restore Zaydi traditions by launching violent military campaigns against their armed rebel groups and their tribal alliances (Bleuca, 2015; Rabi, 2015). The Houthis were skilled in military combat and cited the Viet Cong and other resistance movements in Latin America as insurgency models (Bleuca, 2015). The Houthis have also been supported by Iranian military personnel and Lebanon's Hezbollah for military training and resources (Bleuca, 2015). Many tribal clans including the Houthis believed that the state was too involved into the political

affairs i.e. land, judicial, and social affairs, impeding upon tribal autonomy (Lackner, 2014, p.11; Rabi, 2015).

In 2011, mass demonstrations called the "change revolution" erupted in the streets of Yemen against the 33-year rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. The uprisings witnessed the mobilisation of youth, women, and members of opposition parties, and tribal leaders. Such unrests resulted in significant political instability, which enabled more pockets of resistance to form, especially in the north creating political vacuums for external groups like al-Qaeda and other tribal rival to seek control. The Houthis took the opportunity of a political instability to also protest in major cities and build stronger resistance networks with allied tribes (Bleuca, 2015; Rabi, 2015). However, they were primarily concerned with advancing their interests for the Zaydi community. A deal was brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council which granted Saleh immunity and transferred power to his Vice-President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2013 (Dingli, 2013). With a temporary ceasefire in 2013, the Houthi were invited into National Dialogues for statewide reforms. However, the Houthis did not trust President Hadi who is also Sunni Muslim (Rabbi, 2015). In addition, President Hadi had inherited a country warped by political instability, jihadist attacks, high corruption, tribal tensions, low socio-economic status, and a rising separatist movement in the south of Yemen (Rabi, 2015).

While in exile, Saleh, switched loyalties and began to cooperate with the Houthis in 2014 against Hadi. Between 2012-2015, the conflict escalated between the government forces led by President Hadi, the Houthis and other armed groups over power sharing arrangements across the fragmented regions of Yemen and their integration into the drafted constitution (Bleuca, 2015). However, in September 2014, the Houthis alongside allies loyal to Saleh captured *Saʿdah*, a northern city and several other villages during their military campaigns against the state military

and rival tribal leaders. Saleh was soon killed after it was discovered that he switched loyalties to Saudi Arabia. As a result, in January 2015, the Houthis seized parts of *Sana'a* , the capital city ultimately overthrowing Hadi's government (Bleuca, 2015). The rebel leaders dissolved parliament and established a revolutionary committee. Since 2015, the Houthis have established de-facto governance in the various northern strongholds (Bleuca, 2015). The Houthis have been accused of torturing and killing civilians, journalists, activists and any other dissenters in their regional strongholds. This civil war has also become an international proxy war when in March 2015; Saudi Arabia formed a collation with Bahrain, Egypt, Jordon, Kuwait, Morocco, Senegal, Sudan, the UAE with the support from the United States and the United Kingdom to initiate military action against the Houthi rebels at the request of President Hadi. Since 2011, the civil war has also contained one of the worst humanitarian crises due to multiple airstrikes and economic blockades (Dingli, 2013; Bleuca, 2015).

Women in Yemen

In the last thirteen consecutive years, Yemen has been ranked as one of the worst countries for gender equality and women's rights, despite suffrage being granted to Yemeni women more than 50 years ago (UNWomen, Yemen). Yemen is characterised primarily as a tribal societal organization which provides degrees of freedom to the various tribal clans to enforce moral and behavioural norms especially in regards to women' rights and social status (Lackner, 2014, p. 19). While the country is predominantly Islamic, the judicial systems and organizations ascribe to particular patriarchal structures and allows ultimate authority to male leaders and elder tribal leaders (Lackner, 2014, p. 21).

Yet, women's status has significantly fluctuated before and after unification (Molyneux, 1995; Obermeyer, 2017). Before May 1990, the north and south states had distinctive ideologies

regarding women status in relation to Islamic law and Yemeni culture (Moylneux, 1995). Social and judiciary systems in the former Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) i.e. North Yemen embodied a more conservative legislative approach toward family law and social organization through norms such as the practice of seclusion (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal 2012; Molyneux, 1995; Obermeyer, 2017). This practice, which began in northern Yemen dictated that women were not permitted to be in public spaces unless with male relative or accompaniment. Women were instructed to remain secluded in the privacy of their households, which also contained spaces specifically reserved for women's activities (Lackner, 2014). In the north, there was no enforceable national family law until 1979. As such, all legal matters related to the family and women were dealt by the established tribal clan leaders and elders, in the absence of a strong central state (Molyneux, 1995). The traditional patriarchal tribal systems enforced certain limitations to women participating in public sphere such as in employment and education, the protocols for marriage, reproductive rights gender segregation in public spaces (Moylneux, 1995; Riphenburg, 2000). In contrast, the socialist Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY) i.e. south of Yemen adopted a secular socialist constitution in 1970, which at the time was considered the most egalitarian in the Arab Islamic world (Moylneux, 1995). Women in the southern regions experienced a higher degree of political and civil liberties up until unification process in 1990 (Molyneux, 1995).

Throughout the 1990s, the Islamic revivalism pursued many reforms to limit women access to political rights and increased support for feminized fields of health, education and domestic responsibilities (Molyneux, 1995; Yadav, 2010). During the unification process, the gender libertarian structures of the south were displaced in favour of conservative Islamic laws and legal customs prevailing form the North (Molyneux, 1995; Obermeyer, 2017). Some scholars such as Riphenburg (2000) and Yadav (2010) argue that this Islamic revivalism period

was the beginning process for the changed dynamics towards women's status in Yemen (Riphenburg, 2000; Yadav, 2010). After the elections of 1993, the Islah party came in with multiple legal reforms regarding child marriage, polygamy, divorce and landownership (Yadav, 2010). The party stressed the need for women to achieve equality with men by protecting their roles in the home and enforcing traditional gender norms (Molyneux, 1995).

The literature on Yemeni women's movements is less saturated compared to other cases from the Middle East (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, 2012). However, women's activism has historically been present and has varied with greater activity in the southern regions compared to the northern tribes (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, 2012; Molyneux, 1995; Riphenburg, 1999). The 2011 uprisings, witnessed the rise of women's mobilization in hopes of reforming democratic rights for women against the authoritarian Saleh government (Lackner, 2014). During the 2013 national dialogue conference which was dedicated to the transitional regime period, many women's groups sought reforms to enforce female parliamentary quotas and to eradicate child marriage (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, 2012; Obermeyer, 2017). Women accounted for 28% of the membership of the 2013-2014 National Dialogue Conference (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, 2012). However, the Islamic movement in late 1990s also attracted large numbers of Houthi women in opposition to women's rights groups (Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, 2012). Yet, women's rights activists have blamed the hegemony of Yemen's highly patriarchal society for the increased female religious radicalization of the northern Zaydi regions (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 370).

The "Al-Zaynabiyat"

From this historical context emerged the all-female Houthis insurgents of Northern Yemen called: the Descendants of Zayinab i.e. "The Zeinabs" or the "Al-Zaynabiyat" (Parashar, 2014). They are a neo-conservative fundamentalist female group in support of the Houthis

insurgency. These female insurgents began to operate in Sa'dah in 2014, before parts of Sana'a was captured in September 2015 (Al Arabiya, 2017). Today, there are approximately 500 known female-trained militant combatants in the northern regions, a number that does not include supporters, spies and street patrollers (Al Arabiya, 2017). The Houthis female insurgents are thus composed of both combatants and non -combatants. This group is known for wearing the niq'ab and engaging in military parades in major cities of the Houthis stronghold. (Al Arabiya, 2017). As such, for the group, religious and northern cultural markers of identity are intimately related to their gender identity as a conservative all female insurgent group (Szanto, 2016; Parashar, 2014). For example, Houthi women have historically been more militant and pro violent culture as part of tribal identity despite the enforced norms and societal constraints imposed on them compared to southern Sunni women (Ahall, 2012).

The existence of this female insurgent group has inspired the following question: *"How does the production of racialized and gendered archetypes impact the representations of female insurgents in contemporary political violence?"*. I argue that the production of the racialized and gendered female archetypes are enforced by orientalist and colonial narratives which deny agency in the lived experiences of racialized female insurgents. However, groups like the Descendants of Zayinab decolonize these orientalist representations through their nuanced status within the rebel group and in the Yemeni political landscape. I will support these arguments through three significant observations and critiques in relation to the literature review.

Decolonizing Exoticism of Feminine Ideals: Aesthetics and Motherhood

Primarily, the descendants of Zayinab Houthi insurgents challenge the colonial narrative of exoticized feminine ideals to aesthetics and motherhood and their impact on the representations of racialized female insurgents (Ahall, 2012; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015). As

demonstrated in the literature, women do engaged in armed conflict, but are depoliticized due to the overt characterisation of their gendered identity as separate from their actions (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Unlike male insurgents, women are not permitted the same privileges to escape their gendered identity as political actors. This is due the association of the gendered expectations of femininity as uncharacterised by the capacity for violence and even death (Shekhawat, 2015; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015). As such, women engaging in these actions are portrayed as an anomaly and their motivations are gendered (Gentry& Sjoberg, 2015). What actually is produced is a hyper-visibility of feminine stereotypes of the female global south subject imposed on the female insurgent as a means to rationalize their existence and motivations within an armed conflict (Henshaw, 2013; 2016; Thomas & Wood, 2017). The colonial discourse of the global south female subject and then to the Muslim female insurgent has been the overt romanticising of physical aesthetic; the veil and the imposed traditionalist trope of motherhood. In this case, study, it is evident how these tropes depoliticise the political agency for these women; yet this female group demonstrates means of challenging such orientalist tropes in the engagement with the Houthi insurgency (Ahall, 2012; Mohanty, 1988).

A) Physical Aesthetic:

The colonial narrative of the feminine aesthetics is a consistent perpetuation of the romanticised global south female subject. Post-colonial feminist theorists have argued that this characterisation enables tropes of the female subject as not only ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, and domesticated, but also as exoticized and eroticised through the constructs in the western interpretation of the orient (Zine, 2006). The female global south subject is hypersexualised and passive to the patriarchal systems that seek to control their body and sexuality (Zine, 2006). This orientalist trope was the foundation of numerous literary collections

to characterise the conquests of foreign orient lands in the image of conquering the foreign female's body and sexuality (Lewis, 1996; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). As such, the global south female subject is and continues to be aesthetically exoticized and eroticized (Lewis, 1996; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). Such representations have likewise portrayed the archetype of the Muslim or Arab women through the political implications of the veil (Bilge, 2010; Lewis, 1996). Since the 19th century, the veil has symbolized for the west, the inferiority of muslin cultures but also a mythological barrier to the colonial sexual fantasy of conquest (Ali, 2006). This gendered islamophobia has re-vitalised orientalist representations of the backward, oppressed and politically immature woman in need of liberation against religious extremists and fundamentalist discourse in the narratives of Islamic womanhood (Bilge, 2010; Zine, 2006). The "veiled" woman has also been portrayed as the symbols for the othering of Muslim/ Arab female agency (Ali, 2006; Bildge, 2010; Said, 1978;Sehlikoglu, 2018). As Einstein (2004) states, the chador, the burqa, the khaki uniform or even the miniskirt symbolize the western/Islamic divide whereby women in the west are supposedly modern, democratic and free, while women in Islam are not (Ali, 2006; Einstein, 2004, p. 26; Israelsen, 2018). According to Edward Said (1979), Arabs and Muslims female subjects are construed as objects of desire i.e. the literary harem girls in the western literary imagination (Said, 1979; Zine, 2006). Gendered orientalism regained traction after 9/11 with the media portrayals of the victimized and exoticized tropes of the Arab or Muslim women against the racialized enemy: the Taliban, Al-Qaeda or ISIS (Zine, 2006). Such characterization are imposed upon the representations of racialized female insurgents.

The fascination of the west with non-western female insurgents has continuously fed the "exotic thrill" of racialized female aesthetics in political violence. Examples of this fascination are revealed in how western media glamorized Croatian women in the Balkan conflict when

they would wear high heels and bright red nail polish while also carrying AK47s or in fascination with the late Gadhafi's all female body guards when he travelled western countries (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 94). In addition, Wafa Idris, Palestinian's first suicide bomber, was constantly portrayed in Western media in full makeup, and with the constant remarks on her European-like traits (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 93). This sexualization morphed into constructing a narrative of Wafa that was completely devoid of the fact that her actions led to bloodshed for the sake of her political grievances regarding Israeli-Palestinian conflicts (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 93). Her representation in media reports, significantly accentuated her sexuality and femininity while simultaneously, depoliticizing her militancy and villainfication as culturally deviant (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 93). For the global south female insurgent, they play into the colonial fantasies of conquests when they are expected to be sexually available or desirable, rather than as actual violent insurgents. Muslim and Arab women have had to navigate the racialized, gendered tropes scripted unto their bodies and identities as many have engaged in political violence (Zine, 2006). The Muslim/ Arab veiled woman is in direct contrast to western or colonial hegemony, modernity and culture (Bildge, 2010; Yeğenoğlu, 1998).

In the post 9/11 era, there has also been a transformation of the veil to be a symbol of resistance and a threat to said western hegemony, modernity and culture (Bilge, 2010). For the West while, the veil has remained an unchanged symbol of repressions; in muslin cultures, the veil's functions and socio-political significance has varied (Bilge, 2010; Mohanty; 1988; Spivak, 1988). In the increased prominence of suicide bombers and radicalized insurgents, the veil once portrayed, as a site for repression in western consciousness has suddenly become a weapon for violence and Islamic terror. In this case, the colonial narrative has introduced the perspective of terror and danger against the hyper-sexualization of the Muslim female insurgent.

The Descendants of Zayinab are quite similar to other conservative female religious groups (Thomas wood). They are known for wearing the niqu'ab, a clear marker of their insurgent alliances to their religious fundamentalism and social status (Al Arabiya, 2017). Yet, these women are also members of the north Zaydi culture, where women's physical appearances are heavily monitored. It is a cultural practice for women to wear black outer garments including gloves and coats to cove their bodies and a veil that keep eyes unveiled in public sightings (Riphenburg, 2000). Southern women would wear lighter scarves covering hair and shoulders; while also adhering to the expectations of the veil in public (Riphenburg, 1999; 2000). In Yemen, the historical representation of women has consistently involved a stratified gender segregation whereas especially in the North, the religious and gender garments maintain distinct social status for men and women (Meneley, 2000). In the Houthi rebel group, the women who form their own brigades also follow a strict clothing policy as illustrated in images of unified modest dress during military campaigns and parades. In the northern region, where women are taught to be in a dress of conservatism in public spaces, they choosing to engage through modest highlights their willingness to distinguish themselves within the insurgent organization and promote loyalty in support of Houthi religious fundamentalism.

Figure (1): https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/armed-houthi-women-on-the-march-idUSRTSVY6W

For female Houthi insurgents, the niq'ab challenges the orientalist trope of the representation of the Arab/Muslim female insurgent (Ali, 2006). The veiled Houthi followers especially during public demonstrations creates a space in which they resist exoticism by politicizing their modest dress but also by enforcing ideals of gender appropriate clothing even as insurgents. As seen Figure 1, the veiled clothing is a politicised garment, a site for expressions of rebel engagement (Einstein, 2004, p. 170). These women politicize the wearing the niqu'ab in public which enforces their agency to their positioning amongst the rebels. These women, in engaging in the cultural and religious expectations of their bodies, challenge the simplified mythical archetype of the female Muslim insurgent (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Said, 1978; Thomas & Wood, 2007). According to Sherene Razack (2008) and Yasmin Jiwani (2006), colonial fantasies which embody this semi-mythical construct of the orient has essentialized Muslim femininities and masculinities as understood only through the caricatures of the "imperilled Muslim woman" and the "dangerous Muslim man" (Ali, 2006; Razack, 2008). The veil symbolizes a phallic interpretation for the conquest of the orient (Lewis, 1996). Some critical race and postcolonial theorists have argued that the westernized preoccupation with physical aesthetics of the racialized female subject is rooted in ways in which conquest was essentially a phallic curiosity for the "unclaimed" lands and peoples upon European discovery (Lewis & Mills, 2003). In this case study, the niq'ab is a symbol of religious garment but also of Houthi cultural ideology helps to deconstruct colonial narratives of hyper-sexualization creating barriers of clandestine political and social strategy as symbols of piety and modesty (Yeğenoğlu,

1998). The Descendants of Zayinab engage with the cultural and religious structures of their localised experiences through the veiled performance either in the streets or in training.

In addition, the veil is also advantageous for the protection of Muslim women even within the rebel groups (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 105). In the literature, the aesthetics of dress is a significant trope in the queering and feminization of female political violence and has been utilised for rebellion advancement (Magnet & Mason, 2014). For example, male terrorists in various cases have often chosen to dress in women's clothing or put on pregnancy prosthetics to avoid body searchers and facilitate the transportation of weapons, drugs and other forms of counterband finance insurrection (Magnet & Mason, 2014). The veiled garment can also be a form of protection against unwanted sexual attention and act like a carry on transportation of goods (Magnet & Mason, 2014). The descendants have like many other groups been known to carry their weapons and smuggle with a degree of ease, due to the taboo of strip-searching women in public stop sites between the urban and rural sites (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 105; Yeğenoğlu 1998). In addition, As Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998) argues that the veil from the niq'ab allows better advantage for the advancement of the rebel causes as they are can act and fulfill their tasks like raiding houses or attacking politicians without really being identified or seen (Al Arabiya, 2017; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). These women are able to resist the spectatorship and be undisclosed which perhaps increased the advantage of their engagement because no one really knows who's behind the veiled eyes. The descendants of Zayinab make their presence known though anonymity-veiled masks and thus able to publicly engaged while also remaining aesthetically clandestine during elaborate military campaigns (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 105). In addition, the military parades and formations also produce climate of insecurity for those who are opposed to the Houthi rebels through their performative actions for solidarity (MacKenzie,

2009). As explored previously, gendered seclusion is an important cultural norm especially in North Yemen. Therefore, it is peculiar that the Houthi would permit women to be active in the public audience during campaigns and protests. However, it is through such protests that these women create a culture for terror against any opposition when they carry their weapons and taunt anti-Houthis protestors, while in all black veiled uniform (Hudson et al, 2009; Kalyvas, 2006, p. 385).

The veil also represents an enforcement of gendered values of piety, purity, modesty and religiosity within the conservative militant group (Thomas & Wood, 2007). Thus, these women may gain respect and protection as they literally embody the Zaydi Islamic revivalism of the 1990s and may seek to protect that from what it appears foreign cultural invasions from the west (Einstein, 2004, p. 154, 170; Mohanty, 1988; Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 39). However, as was demonstrated by Frantz Fanon in the study of militant Algerian women, the aesthetics of dress can be appropriated to resist the implications of western male voyeurism (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 5; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). As such, the veil in post-colonial Algeria as an act of defiance against European norms of beauty in white femininity (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 5). In another example, the narrative of exoticism explored by Ruth Iyob (2000) in colonial Eretria further speaks to the appropriation of physical aesthetic by militant racialized women (Iyob, 2000). The representations of the female combatants called the *Tegalit* were illustrated through multiple artworks depicting the bodies of women as sites of resistance against Italian occupation (Iyob, 2000). Artworks included posters showing a bare-breasted Eritrean teenage girl and another of an exoticized woman portraying the liberation of Eretria (Iyob, 2000). For Yeğenoğlu (1998), the orient is a “fantasy built upon sexual difference” which inherently is a form of phallocentrism in the occupation of the subaltern women (Einstein, 2004, p. 75; Yeğenoğlu

1998). While such posters depict the female liberation, it also played into the archetype of the oversexed racialized woman. This sexualized occupation is further exacerbated when analysing the phenomena of racialized female insurgents. In this case, the descendants exhibit religious agency as a symbol of their emancipation within the rebel group (Bilge, 2010; Mahmood, 2005, p.16). Bilge (20120 argues that religious agency contrary to liberal feminist framework is better example of contextualised agency by which these women engage in the practices of seclusion and modesty as ideal representations of female supporters and fighters (Bilge, 2010). Hence, for this particular group, the aesthetic of dress is utilized against the hyper-sexualisation of their militant engagement and thus decolonizes orientalist portrays of their representation (Bilge 2010; Sehlikoglu, 2018).

b) Motherhood

Secondly, the colonial narrative of motherhood is an idealized orientalist narrative, which is imposed upon racialized female insurgent (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015). The global south female subject as not only oversexualised but also is ignorant, poor, uneducated and significantly domesticated (Zine, 2006). As such, the global south female subject is a product of highly oppressive patriarchal structures whereby the private sphere and the public sphere are distinct and do not overlap (Riphenburg, 1999).

In many rebel groups, the female insurgent is repeatedly expected to support the rebel group as the nurturer, comforter and provider to male counterparts (Tarzeenza, 2004). This is demonstrated similarly through the representations of the racialized female insurgent. The non-western female subject is seen as the traditionalist who adheres to strict gender roles, produced through the strong association to the domestic sphere (Ahall, 2012). This colonial trope emphasizes that the subject is never really rational nor politically capable when joining an

insurgent group or if so only does join in relation to a male relative (Henshaw, 2016; Thomas & Wood, 2007). The global south female subject is therefore duty bound to familial tides (Mohanty, 1988; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015). The association of women as life givers and maternal is embodied in the ways in which the shock value occurs when they become perpetuators of violence (Ali, 2006; Goldstein, 2001). Because of this trope, women's' roles as primary caregivers and household domestic labour overrides their capacity to be militant and violent (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015). For the racialized female insurgent, the motherhood trope supersedes their legitimacy and status in the ideational characterisation of the revered the sister, mother of the revolution (Ahall, 2012; Ponzanesi, 2014; Magnet & Mason, 2014). Mohanty (1988) has criticized feminist theories for limiting the post-colonial female subject as inherently tied to family, traditionalism and kinship obligations (Mohanty, 1988). This enables the construct of the female subject tied to family in positions of dependence as mothers and wives without sense of agency (Mohanty, 1988). However, in this case study, the motherhood trope is constructed in that it is politicised which serves at the militant benefit of the Descendants of Zayinab (Ahall, 2012 Sjoberg and Gentry, 2015).

In Yemen, the public realm defined as the highly masculinzed political space; whereas the private realm is defined by the affective relations where women interact with little to no political consequence to state and society (Riphenburg, 1999; 2000). Yet, in the north, the public and private are rarely contested (Yada, 2010). In Zaydi culture, women are to remain in the seclusion areas of the private homes. In the domestic home, women are the primary caregivers of children and the division between the public and the private is very stark-there is no intermixed (Riphenburg, 2000). When the Islah party came to power, there was an enforcement of more traditional roles and expectations on Yemeni women (Riphenburg, 2000). The family regained

status as the core of society, which had strong implications for gender relations in relation to patriarchy. Women were taught the importance of submission and obedience to elder males and leaders of their communities (Riphenburg, 2000). Since the early 1980s the growth of the conservative Islamic movement, has promoted gender segregation and a domestic destiny for women, whereby women are expected to be outside of the public realm (W, F. M, 2002). Yet, the descendants of Zayinab have upheld such norms while simultaneously structuring them down as active participants in the rebellion. Apart from dressing in the niq'ab, these women have also been known to bring their children to Houthi demonstrations and military campaigns (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). This characterisation of their groups creates a particular space of tension for what constitutes the public and the private sphere as a Houthi female supporter within conservative rebel group in a tribal society of Yemen. These military campaigns are a way to demonstrate support for the Houthis through the inclusion of the female insurgents' children. Such, images highlight the construct of the poster child for the commended female Houthi supporter who further adheres to the gendered expectations of motherhood by also being a teacher to her children and thus an example of loyalty and maternal zeal (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). During these demonstrations, it may appear as a shock to the western framework because of the visual portrayals of seeing women carry their children and weapons (Trump, Gcc, & Mena, 2017). This is because, westernized norms of maternity do not allow for the capacity for violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 27). Yet, through this example, such actions are exemplary ideals of motherhood within the insurgent rebel group.

As seen in figures 2 and 3, the symbolism of children depicts these women as life givers and mothers in the very feminine appropriate way (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Yet on the other hand, these "mothers" and "life givers" also carry deadly weapons and parade them publicly (Pasha-

Robinson, 2017). These two images don't seem to fit because of the anomaly created as women and feminine trope of passivity and the male as aggressive in conflict (Ahall, 2012). Yet, these women illustrate that such images do fit and are complementarian to their roles as primary care-givers and insurgents. However, it appears that child rearing within the insurgent socio-political manifesto and organization becomes emotional labour that the women must uphold in their multiple identities as female insurgents. Therefore, in bringing children to military parades, these women portray an embodiment of the female insurgents the ideational female counterpart for the political aspirations of a rebel groups (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Motherhood in this case is re-defined in the decolonization of their roles as mothers and insurgents (Pasha-Robinson, 2017; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, 2015).In this case, Houthis female insurgents embrace a different form of agency in choosing to embody the gendered nationalist appeal to liberation and duty through the taking up of their children as primary care takers and teachers. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate women carrying guns, rocket launchers and machine guns while also being the primary caregivers and agents of the home (Pasha-Robinson, 2017); Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). This illustrates the complex ways is in which these women interpret motherhood in relation to their duties to the rebel advancement the deeply held enclaves of rigid gendered roles in Houthis tribal society (Pasha-Robinson, 2017).

Figure (2): https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/armed-houthi-women-on-the-march-idUSRTSVY6W

In addition, during military parades, the women would chant against the multinational coalition forces led by the United States and Saudi Arabia (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Through these chants, they encourage their children to also chant and pledge to protect their homeland (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). In bringing their children, these women further embody the ideal of the perfect zealous mother and insurgents (Pasha-Robinson, 2017 Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). As such, motherhood embodies a maternalistic zeal of Houthi allegiances (Israelsen, 2018; Wood, 2003).

Figure (3) : http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/01/15/Yemen-s-Houthi-militia-begins-recruiting-female-fighters.html

"We will defend our country, till the last drop of our blood," a young girl at the parade tells al-Masirah news channel, while a woman participating in the ceremony says: "On one shoulder I carry my child and on the other shoulder I carry my weapon." [quotes taken fromhttp://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/01/15/Yemen-s-Houthi-militia-begins-recruiting-female-fighters.html]

Based on these images, the construct of the ideal feminine maternal female subject is an orientalist trope which does not consider the nuances ways in which gendered appropriate roles even from within an insurgent group can also serve to legitimize the female insurgent. As such, gendered roles and hierarchies are constantly present. For although these women are politically active, their primary responsibilities are to their household (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Yet, in this public area, these women also negotiate their motherhood as a political manifestation of their multiple roles within the Houthi rebellion. They demonstrate that their identities as mothers,

daughters and sisters are defined by the Houthi political goals and aspirations in the armed conflict (Ahall, 2012; Mohanty, 1988). Thus, these female insurgents decolonize the orientalist representations of aesthetic and motherhood associated to racialized female insurgents and re-politicize such tropes to secure their agency and status within the Houthi insurgency.

Critiques

There are certain theoretical critiques of both theoretical observations. Primarily, the implications of the physical aesthetics though presented to be decolonizing can also act to romanticise the female insurgent. Examples include the process by which women become the posterchild for western feminist perspective of emancipation (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 8). For both the feminine aesthetics and the motherhood, the portraits of the racialized female insurgent can also reinforce an exoticized image of perceived symbolic liberation within the rebel group (Shekhawat, 2015. p. 90). Female insurgents are repeatedly idolized as the daughters, mothers and sisters of the rebellion and thus depoliticised from the western colonial perspective (Ponzanesi, 2014; Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). This depoliticization can therefore rob female insurgents of their history and political agency (Mohanty, 1988). For example, Thani Modise, ANC Member of Parliament and former member of the ANC guerilla militias, criticized the romanticism of the lives of South African women combatants (Ponzanesi, 2014). In this context, posters were celebrated for depicting image of a liberated African woman with her baby in one hand and a rifle on the other hand (Ponzanesi, 2014). However, this trope is undermined by the orientalist ideal for femininity, which is associated to one's capacity to rear children and thereby relegated to the private home life (Mohanty, 1988). As such, for the Muslim female fighters, agency in how dress aesthetically can also be interpreted as a romanization of Islamic womanhood and religious piety, which may also have orientalist frameworks (Thomas & Wood,

2007). Therefore, the physique symbolism can also raise certain myths of the archetype female insurgent as the perfect Martyr, often depicted of the suicide bomber (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 90). In this case study, the niq'ab is a uniform, yet the niq'ab clearly shapes the definition of women's roles in how they are compelled to wear it when showcasing the rebel group in public display (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 90). For Meneley (2000), there needs to be more sophisticated critiques of the veil as representation for the passive veiled Muslim woman while also acknowledging the very real constraints which can be placed by extremist patriarchal groups (Said, 1978; 1993 Meneley, 2000). Nevertheless, racialized women, especially Arab or Muslim women, are often forced to wear their cultures, nations, and political allegiances onto their bodies and forms of dress (Ali, 2006; Einstein, 2004, p. 26). Zine (2008) further argues that Muslim women bodies tend to be scripted in service of either liberating or religious agendas (Zine, 2008). Both ideological views dismiss agency regarding narratives of Islamic womanhood. (Zine, 2008). During the war on terror, Muslim / Arab women were often the ones called upon to rally the rebels, boost moral and promote religious martyrdom within terrorist organizations (Zine, 2008). As such, women may not always be ale to freely choose to conform to those expectations and this may nuance the prominence of agency (Parashar, 2014, p. 48; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 93). Likewise, may also be expected to continue on gendered role tasks despite being "liberated" and this may include child care of fellow male counterparts, healing the wounding and the sick or providing sexual ; all of which have these maternal expectations within the rebel group (Parashar, 2014, p. 48; Tareenza, 2004). Despite the precarious conditions for women, these brigades remain "other within the other". For instance, the Descendants of Zayinab have been ostracised by women rights groups, and other tribal leader for their role in the radical indoctrination of their children and public displays of militancy (Ali,

2006; Parashar, 2014). While these women's militancy can be decolonized through aesthetics of beauty and motherhood, it is also an important critique of how gendered roles can also perpetuate the very orientalist tropes that are already being challenged from within the group (Ahall 2012; Magnet & Mason, 2014).

Decolonizing Female Insurgent Violence

Secondly, orientalist narratives further de-politicizes the representations of violent acts committed by racialized female insurgents (Auchter, 2012; Coulter, 2008). Carby (1983) argues that the third world woman is often perceived to be the victim of barbaric violence by racialized violent men (Carby, 1983; McEwan, 2001; Elshtain, 1985, p. 101; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015, p. 26). In Spivak's "*White Men saving Brown Women from Brown Men* (1988)", the female racialized subject is almost incapable of protecting themselves from the villainized non-western men and thus is in constant need of saving (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Spivak 1998). Such narratives as Spivak (1988) demonstrates, plays into the rescue mentality embedded within colonial powers relations with the Orient (Magnet & Mason, 2014, Sjoberg, 2018; Spivak, 1988). For example, it is repeatedly affirmed through media and popular discourse, that the female Muslim or Arab female subject is the victim of a perceived patriarchal Islamic oppression (Zine, 2006). These orientalist narratives reinforce portrayals of the global south female subject in a constant positioning to conquered, and liberated by the whitewashed "masculine" protector (Demmers 2014, p. 30). As a result, the social construction of the militarised masculine ideal perpetuates the othering and dehumanization of the racialized male i.e. the violent Arab terrorists or the ruthless Columbian drug lords (Demmers, 2014 p. 30; Sjoberg, 2018; Zine, 2006). Likewise, the female subject is perpetuating that colonial oriental norm that they are never really

the perpetuators but victims of systems dictated by racialized patriarchy (Elshtain, 1985, p. 101; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

However, such narratives have been challenged for their problematic assumptions by the prominence of racialized female violence. According to Carol Mann, the issue of female violence remains underdeveloped because of the gendered biological and sexual division of labour (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 27). This is grounded on what is considered appropriate or inappropriate societal behaviours: femininity is passive and peaceful versus the socially normalised aggressive masculinity as the personification of the license to kill (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 27). Female insurgents have equally engaged in violent and deadly acts, which thereby challenge the orientalist stereotype of the victimized racialized female subject in armed conflict. Nevertheless, female perpetuators are quickly categorized as anomalies as seen when they are more publicly scrutinized and vilified compared to their male counterparts (Shekhawat, 2015). Why racialized female insurgents considered an anomaly? Carol Mann argues that the masculine hegemony over armed aggression and the exclusive access to violence in non-western spaces enables an even more rigid intolerance to women who choose to act in the same violent ways (Ahall, 2012; Shekhawat, 2015). Racialized female insurgents challenge this by engaging in violence which threatens the positioning and status of westernized militarized masculinity (Auchter, 2012; McEwan, 2001; Trinh, 1989 Shekhawat, 2015, p. 30). As a result, global south female civilian murders, prison guards or guerilla fighters are perceived as being more immoral, cruel and vindictive" which results in the depoliticization and marginalization of their actions and agency (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 28). Violent racialized women are often ostracized because they are not deemed human nor feminine enough (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015).

Such repercussions are as Gentry and Sjoberg (2015) argue are rooted in a neo-orientalist perspective of the monster narratives (Gentry& Sjoberg, 2007; 2015. p. 98). For example, when reports began to circulate on female Rwandans who actively participated in the murder of family members, neighbors and friends, sentiments of disbelief, shock and curiosity were prominent especially within the western perspective (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 28). Such sentiments also accentuate on the implicit bias of these women as deviant and monstrous. As Mann argues, these negative responses were grounded on the essentialist notions of racialized female violence as whitewashed by orientalist representations (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 29). Within popular culture, this trope is revisited as an attempt to neutralizing the capacity of the subaltern women to act violently outside in the non-western periphery (Coulter, 2008). When the female global south insurgent engages in violence – their actions are accentuated through a westernized spectatorship of their violent acts as perverse or distorted, counter to the passive victimized racialized global south female subject (Ahall, 2012; Shekhawat, 2015, p.4). This racialized and gendered perversion has especially been a salient discourse in the representations of Muslim/Arab female suicide bombers, combatants and terrorists post 9/11.

Between September 2016 and January 20in 17, the Houthis began to allow women into the military parades in the northern cities, including the capital city of Sana'a. From this, demographic of insurgents also emerge trained female military combatants. Iranian and Hezbollah female military personnel have been training and recruiting these women for military formations and terrorist acts through the creation of all-female brigades (Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). The Houthis set up training camps for women recruits in multiple locations where women are taught how to handle, disassemble and assemble guns, rifles and machines guns (Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). The largest training camp for women recruits is currently in Dharma - a

provincial governorate (Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). The Houthis have also set up training locations in mosques, university campuses and public schools (Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). However, despite reports by Houthi leaders that there are on the ground female combatants, there have been few media reports of female causalities on the actual combat field of the civil war. Rather, media reports have focused on more localized and small-scale violence. Examples of localized and small-scale violence include the ways in which the Descendants of Zayinab are trained to raid residential areas and loot for jewellery and money to finance the insurgence and use for blackmail (Al Arabiya, 2017). Other terror-like actions include pursuing anti-Houthis politicians, journalists, human rights advocates and the violent suppression of peaceful protests and marches often by mothers and women rights groups (Al Arabiya, 2017; Israelsen, 2018). In addition, these women have planted mines and explosives and have done sit-ins in public areas to further demonstrate support for Houthi insurgency (Israelsen, 2018). These women also perform as travellers and smugglers across the northern highlands to finance the insurgency. These women therefore perform direct and indirect violent acts while also enforcing terror for the Houthi insurgency.

The ways in which the Descendants of Zayinab engage in political violence compels an observation into how they decolonize the orientalist trope of the racialized monstrous female insurgent (Coulter, 2008). Evidently, while these women may have symbolic power in their aesthetics and motherhood ideals, their acts as violent women deconstruct the archetype of the passive, peaceful female post-colonial subject and the spectatorship of gendered violence in armed conflict (Coulter, 2008; Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015). As in other cases of studying female combatants; the key role is understanding how women are capable of supporting violent actions by simultaneously performing their role as women but also as dangerous actions in highly

masculinized militarized spaces (Tareenza, 2004). These women train and fight like men and can become protectors and facilitators by also engaging in low level crimes or petty crimes through the raids, looting and attacking protestors (Al Arabiya, 2017). Yet, such actions in the public arena is uncharacteristic of the ideal Yemeni women confined to the home, who is obedient and who remains out of the public spectatorship. As such, despite the highly conservative values of the insurgent group; their actions are encouraged and expected. Furthermore, this spectatorship originating from western interpretation can embody combinations of disgust, confusion, and puzzlement because of the rigid associations of masculinity to violent actions and femininity to peace or life-giving/nurturing narratives (Coulter, 2008; Magnet & Mason, 2014). As a result, the violent racialized men and women are both transformed into threatening and dangerous entities (Magnet & Mason, 2014). As Carby (1983) argues, the third world woman is frequently perceived to perform as the victim of barbaric violence by racialized violent men (Carby, 1983; McEwan, 2001; Spivak, 1988). Demmers (2014) further argues there is nothing new about the cultural representations of non-western wars. However, this trope does not explain the emergence of these women as perpetuators through intimate or low-level forms of violence in an armed conflict (Demmers, 2014, p. 28; Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2010, p. 12; Kalyvas, 2006). According to Kalyvas (2006), the violence as described above is associated to small-scale domestic strategies of terror rather than actual combat (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 19). Break- ins, looting, harassment, and public assaults are all expressions of an intimate forms of violence terror and fear. Therefore, these women can carry out such acts in spaces already accessible to them i.e. the residential areas, public schools, market places – all of which traditionally do not allow insurgent men to penetrate due to strict gender seclusion norms (Kalyvas, 2006). Violence in civil war is therefore multifaceted, in that

there are*: "gray zones populated by those who partake in the process of violence in a variety of ways without, however, being directly involved in its outcome, as either perpetuators or victims"* (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 21). As such, from what can be deciphered from the media reports, it is plausible that there are few descendants of Zayinab who appear to be on the field as actual combatants. While that may be the case, it is also evident that these women may engage violently in indirect means by orchestrating terror acts as means of resistance (Al Arabiya, 2017). Therefore, while these women may not appear as the typical soldier or combatant on the field; their supporting actions and behind the scenes presence through low level forms of violence are just as significant in their agency (Mohanty, 1988; Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 90). The female Houthi supporter's violent actions threatened not only the enemy but also gendered hierarchies through their engagement with and in heavily militarized and masculinized spaces (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 11). The Descendants of Zayinab illustrate how racialized bodies are not necessarily objects to be raped or exploited, but rather, as equally capable of terror and violence in spaces allocated to their expected roles within the insurgency (Demmers, 2014. p. 27; Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 91).

In Parashar's (2014) observations about women in militant movements, she illustrates that contemporary non-state militants can further perpetuate wartime gender norms (Parashar, 2014, p. 48). The Descendants of Zayinab simultaneously embody and destabilize conventional gender hierarchies (Parashar, 2014, p. 48). These discourses make violent women a puzzling factor because they disrupt images of 'normal women' as peaceful and innocent (Parashar, 2014 p. 48). Consequently, Yemeni norms continue to abide by traditionalist representations of women, despite the apparent liberty given to female insurgents to engage in the supposedly exclusive male activity of armed violence (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). Although invoking traditional gender roles like motherhood and sexuality within highly patriarchal militant spaces

can be seen as liberating, these women negotiate new spaces for themselves and defend their place through their capacity to enact terror and fear which is uncharacteristic of the idealized Yemeni women (Parashar, 2014; Tareenza, 2004). As such, women rights groups and activists, particularly from the South, have called out the violent practices of Houthi female insurgents (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). In deconstructing the orientalist lens, violence and terror perpetuated by these women is thereby a political stance on their nationalist self-determination against a fear of westernization and influx of values which counters the Zaydi Shia religious and cultural identity (Bleuca, 2015; Dingli, 2013; Kalyvas, 2006, p.11). Therefore, actions committed by Houthi female insurgents are quickly perceived as deviant or unnatural "gender behaviour" when violent heinous acts are committed against other women who appear to aligned with western progressive values (Ahall, 2012; Coulter, 2008; McEwan, 2001).

Female on female violence is not particular new in conflict and wars as demonstrated in numerous incidents in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone etc. (Coulter, 2008; Bazz & Stern, 2009; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 29). For instance, female rape was committed by female members of the Revolutionary United Front during the Sierra Leone civil war (1991-2002) (Bazz & Stern, 2009; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 30). In this case study, the Houthi female brigades are known for actively engaging in the recruitment, training and policing of other women (Trump, Gcc, & Mena. 2017). Reports have indicated that since 2014, female non-state combatants from Iran, Lebanon and Syria have been sent to support and train the Houthi female brigades. This includes the ideological and emotional labour of indoctrination as well as training in combat skills. There have also been reports of the Houthis utilizing women to forcibly recruit young boys and girls between 10 and 17 years old into their armed military brigades (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2018). The women who recruit would appeal to families and provide financial and

security incentives to in exchange for their children (Middle East Eye, 2019). In addition, Houthi women have recruited from university female dormitories and village markets. Senior female recruits will target incarcerated women from government owned prisons (Middle East Eye, 2019; Trump, Gcc, & Mena, 2017). Based on such reports, it is perhaps politically advantageous to recruit women who have already been ostracised by Yemeni society due to perceived delinquency (thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, etc.) (Middle East Eye, 2019; Nacos, 2005). According to Nacos (2005), the image of the female insurgent or terrorist is portrayed as overtly masculinized in terms of their appearance or perceived sexuality (Nacos, 2005). These narratives help to solidify the construct that these female insurgents as not real women (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). The descendants of Zayinab are at once portrayed as the true daughters and mothers of the movement while also portrayed as de-feminized combatants especially as they include women who have been ostracised from their communities (Al Arabiya, 2017; Magnet & Mason, 2014; Nacos, 2005). Furthermore, in a society in which female police officers are still a rarity, these women intentionally disrupt gendered hierarchies while still maintaining expected gendered behaviours within the Houthi movement (Magnet & Mason, 2014; Parashar, 2014; TRTworld, 2017). This is evident especially in how Houthi female insurgents are called upon to enforce rigid gender norms as street patrollers and monitors in the urban districts and regions the Houthis occupy (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). Anti-Houthis Female demonstrators have been brutally attacked during protests in the streets and in various public spaces (Al Arabiya, 2017). Houthi female insurgents will often engage in arresting women whom they suspect are immoral i.e. those engaging in sex work, women rights activists and journalists, and lead them to containment and or torture by Houthi rebels. However, the female brigades themselves are perhaps known for raiding and terrorizing popular protests against Houthi-controlled areas,

including female protests by female activists, feminists and mothers (Al Arabiya, 2017; Bibbo, 2018). To stifle such protests, these women will emerge themselves into the crowds before repeatedly beating, assaulting and arresting the female protestors (Bibbo, 2018). Furthermore, these women have reportedly attacked female university dorms like the College of Sharia in Sana'a University where female student were reportedly beaten, chased down by electric rods, clubs and sticks by Houthi female insurgents (Bibbo, 2018). Many women report that they feel too threatened to walk the streets due to female patrols and so many go through social media to report the maltreatment many face from the Descendants of Zayinab (Bibbo, 2018). Although many Yemeni women live with daily terror of physical violence, such precarious situations are reinforced by the Houthi female insurgents to enforce conformity (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019; Einstein, 2004, p. 51). The orientalist narratives of the bad female Muslim versus the good female Muslim are at play because the Descendants of Zayinab routinely attack other women (activists, feminists, mothers) who arguably portray the western ideal of a liberated female subject (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). Despite the capacity for these women to engage violently towards other women; these acts are nuanced indicators of an emancipatory leeway allowed, by which these women contribute to the overall political goals of the Houthis (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015; Spivak, 1988; Zine, 2006). As such, these female insurgents have a diverse arsenal of violent strategies which are politicised as indicators of the rebel group's religious, gendered and societal goals within the insurgency. These women monopolize on various forms of gendered violence which thereby decolonize orientalist tropes for their capacity to incite terror as political racialized female insurgents.

Critiques

A primary theoretical critiques argues that while these women may enjoy a form of liberation as perpetuators of violence-this does not necessarily mean that they are completely immune from gendered based violence towards them (Alison, 2004, Chinkin & Kaldor; 2013; MacKenzie, 2009). Like many other groups, the Descendants of Zayinab may also experience both empowerment and victimization within the rebel group (MacKenzie, 2009; Shekhawat, 2015). Within the gendered dynamics regarding roles within rebel groups, women may not be allowed to fully embraced masculinized behaviours but may find some sort of emancipation through violent acts. This is crucial to understanding the complexity of group ideology when the overt violent women maybe a threat of emasculation for their male counterparts (Ali, 2006; Parashar, 2014; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 133; Sjoberg, 2018; Tareenza, 2004; Thomas & Wood, 2007). Therefore, sexual and other forms of gendered violence within the group is also a means to enforce that policing of women's agency and capacity despite a propagated emancipated front (Parashar, 2014; Shekhawat, 2015, p. 133). In this case study, the descendants of Zainyab are still expected to conform to the type of dress, roles and the forms of violence allocated to their group he agreed norms not too masculine or radical still wear modesty and not many are trained by Houthis leadership (Cohn, 2012, p. 150 Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Detraz, 2012; p. 58; Tareenza, 2004). These women maybe called to be more violent but are also expected to carry on feminine gender roles: healers, caretakers, sexual services in sustaining the insurgency (Cohn, 2012, p. 150; Tareenza, 2004). Therefore, such dichotomy of female insurgent experiences does not consider the real nuances of intersecting experiences of emancipation and actual gendered differential treatment (Shekhawat, 2015, p. 6). As such, for thinkers like McClintock who coined the term "designated agency", agency becomes a façade or a hoax when its permissible or granted by the highly patriarchal structures of insurgent groups who dictate the roles of its

female insurgents (Demmers, 2014, p. 89). Like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, the Houthis are not the first conservative group to recruit women for violent engagement (Ali, 2006). However, when gendered boundaries are pushed too far, male members may engage in sexual violence or other forms of oppression against female counterparts to combat a sense of emasculation derived from a sudden upheaval of cultural and societal norms and the presence of women in militarized spaces (Ali, 2006 Sjoberg, 2018; Tareenza, 2004; Thomas & Wood, 2007). Lastly, the indication for agency also comes into play in the decolonization of these women's violent actions. The Houthi insurgency alongside countless other examples may just as well capitalize on the inclusion of women for a) political legitimacy or b) to fill up the ranks due to the shortage of men (Ponzanesi, 2014 p. 5). Hence, although these women contribute to decolonization of gendered insurgent violence, it is also plausible that these women may be seen as political pawns in the material, ideological and political frontiers of rebel combat which in term challenges the assumptions that agency automatically exists when women are the primary perpetuators of violence (Ahall, 2012).

Decolonizing Gendered Insecurity

Lastly, the descendants of Zayinab challenge oriental narratives of insecurity which depoliticizes the ways in which racialized female insurgent negotiate their own sense of security (Detraz, 2012; p. 11; Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 145). Demmers (2014) argues that the portrayal of whole spaces in armed conflict as insecure carries certain orientalist representations of post-colonial states embedded by armed conflict as inherently fragile, lawless, instable and thereby incompetent according to the western standards (Auchter, 2012; Demmers, 2014; Hill, 2005; Hudson et al, 2009; MacKenzie, 2009). This has created images of insecurity due to incompetent governance especially in states where centralization is fragmented (Demmers, 2014,

p. 29; Hudson et al, 2009; Hill, 2005; MacKenzie, 2009). (Grovugu, 2011) further argues, that this insecurity conceptualisation is rooted in the deviant construct of the global south within the international systems (Grovogui, 2011). Within the international system, former colonial powers maintain an insistence on the decision making authority on what constitutes political morality in the asymmetrical dynamics with post-colonized states in which these armed conflicts are spectacularized in western media (Grovogui, 2011). The 20th century of armed conflict, genocides and intrastate wars has enabled a revived fictious dichotomy of uncivilised and civilised, totalitarian and authoritarian, democratic and non-democratic as sole determinates of stability and prosperity (Grovogui, 2011). Such polarizing dichotomies are entrenched in neo-orientalist tropes used to characterise wars and conflict outside of the western periphery (Demmers, 2014, p. 38; Foucault, 1982). This framing therefore implies the claiming of perceived morality and legitimacy standards of the subject (Demmers, 2014, p. 29; Foucault, 1982). As a result, *our* wars (western perspective) are rational, civil and *their* wars (in the Orient) are barbaric unrestrained, excessive, irrational and immoral (Demmers, 2014, p. 38). Since 9/11, the emerging world of the south become a threat to the western security (Demmers, 2014, p. 39; Kaldor, 2013).

In armed conflict, such orientalist tropes impact the representations of the global south female subject. While, women and young girls do face the brunt of gendered insecurity in sexual violence, human trafficking, food insecurity, sicknesses and displacements; the racialized female subject, almost exclusively is the victim and must rely on others for protection (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Coulter, 2008; Einstein, 2004, p. 75; Henshaw, 2013; Hudson et al 2009; Parashar, 2014; Wibben, 2011). The global female subject is never portrayed as resourceful, resilient, or adaptable to the high levels of insecurity (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak 1988). Based on this

framework, the archetype of the racialized female insurgent is positioned precariously as the subject entirely de-securitized (Alison, 2004; Hudson et al, 2009; Wibben, 2011).

For the racialized female insurgent, such colonial narratives are utilised in deciphering how to negotiate their own sense of protection by joining rebel groups (Detraz, 2012; p. 11; Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 145). For example, Parashar (2012) argues, in cases of insurgency in Columbia, Honduras, where the state cannot or is unwilling guarantee gendered protection, joining a rebel group may be a motivation for themselves and their families (Henshaw, 2013; Parashar, 2014; Wibben, 2011). Therefore, colonial narratives of the non-western state perpetuate the female insurgent as compelled to rely on others for protection against gendered insecurity (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013; Coulter, 2008; Hudson et al 2009.

According to international reports like Freedom House, Yemen is considered a fragile or a failing state (Reports Fund for Peace 2018; UN Women, 2019). Yemen has not successfully enjoyed political stability since the 1990 unification processes due to the regional divisions from tribal rivalries, terrorist organizations, failing state infrastructures and the involvement of foreign proxies (Lackner, 2014, p. 11). Yemen is also considered the poorest Arab country with the highest levels of poverty (Reports Fund for Peace 2018; UN Women, 2019. Twenty-two million inhabitants need immediate humanitarian aid (Reports Fund for Peace 2018; UN Women, 2019. Water and food insecurity have resulted in approximately 8 million inhabitants on the brink of famine and more than 1 million victims of cholera (Reports Fund for Peace 2018; UN Women, 2019). Based on UN Women reports, 76% of internally displaced persons (IDPS) are women and children (UN Women, 2019). Many Yemeni women have had to carry the responsibilities of the home, acting as caretakers of the sick, the wounded, children, and aging family members when men are in combat (Einstein, 2004, p. 152). Female Genital Mutilation continues to be tolerated,

child marriages have increased by 66% since 2012, there is female literacy rate especially in the rural areas, and poverty rates have disproportionately affected women (UN Women, 2019). International Feminist activists and women's groups from across the world have repeatedly called upon the international community to act rapidly on behalf of the precarious state of Yemeni women (Carter, 2018).

Feminists security studies has provided the theoretical indicators to question security as it relates to states but also to levels of insecurity for women (Hudson et al., 2009; MacKenzie, 2009). The descendants of Zayinab including the all-female specially trained combatants engage in practices to deconstruct the imagined spatial danger of the failed or fragile state and thus contribute to debunking such narratives in their militant agency (Demmers, 2014, p. 30; Gould & Agnich, 2016). Primarily, this is demonstrated in how female insecurity has created opportunities for real security within localized private spaces appropriated by and for the female insurgents (Alison, 2004; Sjoberg & Wood, 2015; Wibben, 2011). The Descendants of Zayinab are known for highly advanced organizational skills. Through establishing networks, women aid in smuggling weaponry and drugs to support the civil war (Alarabiya.net, 2017). However, it is through the establishment of such networks, such as house coordination units, that women connect with each other across the northern landscapes (Alarabiya.net, 2017). As such, through these relational ties, women's homes become points of transition for both male and female combatants, sympathisers, followers, victims and escapees of government torture prisons (Alarabiya.net, 2017). These networks thereby enable structures for protection and resources, which the state structurally cannot provide, nor be trusted to do so (Alarabiya.net, 2017). In the context in which male spaces are dominant in the public sphere (which is also the centre of human insecurity), female Houthi insurgents are also embracing those private domestic spaces to

create their own protection gendarmeries in areas without state (Demmers, 2014; p. 31). These women negotiate their own sense of security by invading the public perception of lawlessness and instability and deriving mechanisms to sustain and protect themselves from some of the perils Yemeni women face during the civil war (Demmers, 2014, p. 38; Reardon & Hans 2010). Thus, the construct of the imagined stateless or lawless space does not justify the orientalist representation of the passive female subject (Reardon& Hans 2010).

Furthermore, part of the conditions of this brigade is to engage in violent practices from within the domestic sphere (Meneley, 2000). In Yemen, gender seclusion are cultural and tribal norms, which confine women to the private domestic sphere (Meneley, 2000; Riphenburg, 2000). Life for women is centered around the home which produces the idealised feminine behaviours for marriage and child rearing. The home is also a site by which women interact with each other through formal and informal events (Riphenburg, 1999; 2000). As such, the private household also becomes a site for protection, resources and ideological teaching by which Houthi female insurgents hosts fellow insurgents (Meneley, 2000). Such practices highlight the gender segregation culture in northern tribes, but it also illuminates the advanced mechanisms of developing safe sites for women as a means of survival (Reardon& Hans 2010). From these examples, the orientalist construct of gendered insecurity is combatted subtly through the building of secure spaces at the domestic home-life, a space already designated to belong to women (Ponzanesi, 2014 p. 83). Such communities of connection within a stateless society combats Spivack's triad of the racialized and gendered victim, the racialized and patriarchal villain and the white masculine savior (Spivak, 1998; Williams, & Chrisman, 1994). However, this negotiation also allows them to engage in violent acts as agents (Auchter, 2012; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2015). These weaponized the use of segregation of the public and the private

spheres to serve as sites for the continuation of their militancy with the Houthi rebellion. This destabilization of conventional gender hierarchies in local spaces also creates tensions within societal norms.

Yet, although the Descendants of Zayinab continue to maintain the household and fulfill other expected gendered behaviours, they are also creating hubs of protection through the intricate networks for logistical and tactical strategy within the insurgency (Hudson et al., 2009; MacKenzie, 2009; Meneley, 2000). As such, Yadav (2010) argues, that possibility that women with as many multiple and complex identities may work in the further advancement of rebel groups goals as conforming to gendered norms as an indicator of agency (Yadav, 2010). Therefore, while it may appear contradictory in how the Houthi leaders enable the women to engage publicly in political protests and military campaigns; the use of private networks and private spaces is an example of a multilayered agency by which these women manipulate gendered norms towards supporting the insurgency (Yadav, 2010).

Figure (4): http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/09/07/Houthi-militias-recruiting-women-to-fight-.html

Furthermore, Parashar (2014) argues that since war and conflict can destabilize gender hierarchies, women can also negotiate their own social status within the insurgent group (Hudson et al, 2009; MacKenzie, 2009; Parashar, 2014). The Descendants of Zaiynab women also engage in gender norm breaking roles by enforcing pockets of governance and order. In Houthi regional strongholds, there are systems of authority created by the Houthi which ironically positions women in authoritative positions to enforce conformity and suppress dissenters (Bibbo, 2018). For example, there have been reports that the Houthis would remove female education officials, public servants, and replace them with their own female loyalists to enforce Houthi propaganda (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). Though the Houthis are inherently a patriarchal fundamentalist group, de-facto systems are established which include the manoeuvring of Houthi women in positions of authority and surveillance. Female patrols are often placed in the streets to enforce curfew and regulate other women's behavior during peak day hours (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). In this case, these women are deconstructing the image of what insecurity looks like in a fragile, failed state through pockets of law enforcing practices (Demmers, 2014, p. 31; Hudson et al, 2009; Reardon & Hans 2010; Gould & Agnich, 2016). Houthi female insurgents in city strongholds will monitor other women's attire in the streets and any behaviour immoral is to be reported back to Houthi officials. For example, in January 2015, the Houthis published a circular pertaining to women in the city of Amran (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). This circular banned women from going out following the Maghrib prayer, prohibiting them from bringing male bands or singers to their gatherings or parties or going beyond curfew in the streets (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019). What is significant is that these localised actions conducted by women express more explicit messages

that women can be regarded as actual actors and not merely political puppets to be instrumentalized in the civil war (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 25). This feminist perspective, validates how the low politics space i.e. the domestic as just as important within the macro discourse of violence (Enloe, 1983; p. 379). As such, the Descendants of Zaiynab challenge the orientalist tropes of insecurity through the securitization of the private sphere and in the creation of de-facto systems of governance as political actors in the insurgency.

Critiques

Some limitation to this post-colonial feminist critique include how such analysis may not permit more critical interpretations for how female negotiations of their security be in relation to the manifestation of the power struggles women may face from within the rebel group. For example, it is also important to look critically at how insurgent groups like the Houthis can entice women to join with promises of food, protection, and safety against the alternative survival in a fragile state (Gentry& Sjoberg, 2015). This form of exchange reinforces the precarious situations women may be forced to consider joining rebel group. Many western and western trained academics have expressed great difficulty in comprehending women's militancy within Islamic fundamentalist organizations whereby agency is nuanced when women may also be exploited rather than considered as agents in armed conflict (Yadav, 2010). In certain strongholds, the Houthis have also been reportedly to enforce gendered based violence and oppression against anti-Houthi female protestors and dissenters (Al Arabiya, 2017). So how do the leaders permit certain women to enjoy perceived liberties in the various roles and denounce other women? Regardless of whether these choices are indicators of real agency, such nuances in Houthi female actions encompasses a much larger discussion of their role in deconstructing the

orientalist representation of the female subject in a state of insecurity (Hudson et al, 2009; Parashar, 2014; Henshaw, 2013; Parashar, 2014).

Concluding Remarks

This research project paper has sought to engage in the critical examination of racialized female insurgents and the mapping of agency at the intersections of gender and race. This project began with an analytical overview of the literature on female political violence and insurgency. This review was an important first step to not only laying out the major contributions to the field; but it also served as a foundational roadmap to begin a critical examination of "racialized female insurgents" from a post-colonial feminist perspective. This literature review revealed that the conceptual frameworks surrounding female political violence in armed conflict are also heavily influenced by the intersections of gender, race, religion, culture class etc. From this, the following research question: *"How does the production of racialized and gendered archetypes impact the representations of female insurgents in contemporary political violence?"*. This research question was designed to create a critical dialogue between the literature review and the examinations of an actual case study, the Descendants of Zayinab, Houthi female insurgents, whereby racialized and gendered archetypes are reproduced and are also unchallenged. The Descendants of Zayinab was the chosen case study to help answer the research questions because of the multilayered effect of race, gender, and religion in which these women maneuver around to consolidate their identity within the armed conflict. The answers to this theoretical question are illustrated through three key observations on the study of this emerging group. Primarily, the Descendants of Zayinab challenge the orientalist representations of aesthetic and motherhood associated to racialized female insurgents and re-politicize such tropes to secure their agency and influence within the Houthi insurgency. Secondly, these

female insurgents have a diverse arsenal of violent strategies which are politicized as indicators of the rebel group's religious, gendered and societal goals within the insurgency. In the case study, women committed violent and terrorizing acts more specifically against other women. These women monopolize on various forms of gendered violence which thereby decolonize orientalist tropes for their capacity to incite terror as political racialized female insurgents. Lastly, these women challenge the orientalist tropes of insecurity through the securitization of the private sphere and in the creation of de-facto systems of governance as political actors in the insurgency. As such, members of this case study act within multiple tensions that include defying traditional and gendered expectations as women and as insurgents but while also appropriating such narratives to further propagate their own ideological, militant and political goals within the civil war. As a result, these women illustrate forms of agency, which challenges orientalist narrative of racialized female insurgent archetypes (Mahmood, 2005; Sehlikoglu, 2018). This case study has also illustrated how deeply embedded colonial narratives of the global south female subject are within the discourse on female insurgent participation outside of the western context. This research project was a means to highlight the repercussions of such narratives within the larger scope of the literature and in the examination of actual groups in contemporary violence.

In terms of limitations and suggestions for future research, this project was predominantly an analytical and theoretical critique of female insurgent literature. As such, the majority of research on the case study was through secondary resources, rather than primary resources. Qualitative research such as interviews could provide an enriching in-depth focus on the women's experiences regarding orientalist tropes impact on their militancy (MacKenzie, 2009). In addition, as this paper was centered on one case study, this project may benefit with a

robust comparative framework to see how two groups interact with orientalist tropes of the racialized female insurgent as they are imposed and consequently challenged. Hence, for future research, other cases perhaps from the Middle East region may enrich the theoretical discussion on the discursive representations of women and the implications for agency within the literature of female insurgent participation.

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