

Wife, Widow and Terrorist: A Feminist Critical Discourse
Analysis of the Framing of Women Who Undertake a Dual Role
in Terrorism in the British News Media

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Dedications:

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mum and Dad who put up with so many phone calls,
thank you for listening, helping and just being there when I needed it.

I would also like to my friends for their support in this process, the many cups of tea they
made and countless conversations about women terrorists they listened to.

Abstract:

Despite the growing involvement of women in terrorist organisations, there is a widespread acknowledgement that terrorism is experienced differently by women. News media representation has been acknowledged as a notable aspect of gendered difference; previous research has identified that women are disproportionately represented in news media representations of terrorism. Recognising the gender-bias of news media, this dissertation investigates the portrayal of women undertaking a dual role in the British news media. The notion of a dual role in terrorism, whereby women are expected to both ‘fight and foster’ (Gan et al., 2019, p.216), is an unexplored area of news media representations of women terrorists. To study news media framings of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism, this study employs a feminist critical discourse analysis. The analysis selected two cases studies of prominent British women who are depicted as having a dual role: Samantha Lewthwaite and the Bethnal Green trio (Shamima Begum, Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana). Using news media articles from *The Guardian* and *The Times*, the study interrogates the portrayal of agency and subjectivity in the news media representations of these women. The analysis revealed a gendered framing of the news media articles, demonstrating the reproduction of gender stereotypes and gendered power hierarchies in news media portrayals of the women. Through the frame, the news media articles were found to consistently deny the agency of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. Moreover, the analysis identified the deployment of discourses of gendered subjectivity to construct women as subordinate, non-subjects throughout news media portrayals. Taken together, the dissertation contends that the consistent use of gendered subjectivity enabled the systemic subversion of the women’s agency in undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

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List of Abbreviations:

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

FCDA – Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

ISIS – the Islamic State

1. Introduction:

The involvement of women in terrorism is well established, with estimates suggesting that women constitute between 10 and 15 percent of a terrorist organisation's membership (CTED, 2019, p.6). In June 2021, 13% of foreign terrorist fighters were identified to be women (COE-DAT, 2021, p.30). The significant percentage of women emigrating for the terrorist cause illustrates a manifest dedication and ideological commitment to terrorism amongst women. Accordingly, the availability of data confirming women's participation substantiates the necessity of studying women within the terrorist space. Addressing gender has begun with the recognition that terrorism is experienced differently by women and men (Phelan, 2020, p.360; Banks, 2019). This understanding has established the need to further incorporate a gender-sensitive analysis in the study of terrorism (Phelan, 2020, p.353).

Previous research has identified news media representations of terrorism as a particular aspect of gendered difference (Krona and Caskey, 2023; Nacos, 2005). For instance, Bloom (2007, p.100) asserts that attacks perpetrated by women generate eight times the amount of media coverage than attacks by men. Evidently, women are disproportionately represented in the news media, facing greater scrutiny for their involvement in terrorism. Understanding that the news media representation of terrorism is not neutral, this study sought to investigate how the British news media portrays women who undertake a dual role in terrorism. In the study, a dual role refers to the simultaneous performance of both domestic roles and active roles within terrorist organisations. Specifically, this dissertation considers the dual role in the context of jihadi terrorist movements, where traditional roles have restricted women to the domestic sphere. In the Islamic State (ISIS), bearing children is considered the most significant contribution that women can possibly offer (Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022, p.476), indicating a supportive role that conforms to traditional gender norms. On the other hand, research has suggested that

women do not only hold supportive roles, but are active fighters (Fullmer, Lipson Mizrahi, and Tomsich 2019; Spencer, 2016; Bloom, 2007). There is evidence that jihadist organisations have increasingly enlisted women as plotters, propagandists and attackers (Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022, p.463), signalling women's engagement in acts of terrorism. However, unlike their male counterparts, it is expected that jihadi women fighters remain compelled to raise their children (Gan et al., 2019, p.216). With such an expectation, many women thus perform a dual role within terrorist organisations.

In respect to the research question, two case studies were selected for analysis: Samantha Lewthwaite and the Bethnal Green trio. These cases were chosen as specific examples of prominent British women who are depicted as having undertaken a dual role in terrorism. Samantha Lewthwaite first appeared in the media as the widow of 7/7 bomber Jermaine Lindsay and has since been linked to Al-Shabaab (Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee 2018, p.282). Reports suggest that Lewthwaite has three or four children (BBC, 2013). In 2013, Interpol issued a red notice for her arrest for possessing explosives and conspiring to commit a felony (Interpol, 2025). Shamima Begum, Amira Abase and Kadiza Sultana, colloquially named the 'Bethnal Green trio', travelled to the Syria to join ISIS in February 2015 (Jackson, 2021, p.412). After their arrival, it was reported that the trio had married men in the organisation (Dodd, 2016). Analysing the British news media framing of the two case studies revealed that news media framing reproduced gender stereotypes and gendered hierarchies of power in the portrayal of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. With this recognition, this dissertation argues that there is a systemic subversion of agency in the portrayal of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism in the news media.

1.1 Methodology and Structure:

This research conducts a feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) of news media articles to examine the portrayal of women terrorists undertaking a dual role in terrorism. For Jackson (2019, p.1734), terrorism should be analysed in the realm of discourse as a terrorist act is constituted through the language and practices that interpret it, demonstrating that discourse analysis is a suitable method for this dissertation. Understanding language as an irreducible part of all aspects of social life (Fairclough, 2003, p.2), critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to both expose and criticise the connections between properties of texts and power relations (Fairclough, 1995, p.97). In this regard, van Dijk (2015, p.469) considers power to be central in CDA. Specifically, CDA studies how ‘discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power abuse (dominance)* in society’ (van Dijk, 2015, p.467). Essentially, CDA offers an exploration of the interaction of unequal structures of power in discourse. Extending this work, Lazar (2007, 2017) proposes FCDA to apply feminist theory to these analyses. From a feminist perspective, relations of power are fundamentally gendered. Critically, FCDA seeks to understand the complex workings of power in discourse that sustain hierarchical gendered social practices (Lazar, 2007, p.141). As such, FCDA enables an interrogation of the reproduction of unequal gendered relations of power in discourse structures. In this sense, FCDA directly aims to expose the entrenchment of gendered power hierarchies through discourse. Thus, a FCDA approach is necessary to examine how gendered power structures are reproduced and reinforced in the portrayal of women terrorists undertaking a dual role in terrorism in the British news media.

To conduct the analysis, news media articles representing Samantha Lewthwaite and the Bethnal Green trio were examined. As an ethical consideration, any children mentioned in relation to these women have been anonymised to not extent harm. For the basis of data

collection, news media articles were selected from two online UK news outlets, *The Guardian* and *The Times*. The decision to draw articles from two news media outlets controlled for comparability within outlets over time, accounting for editorial coherence despite specific editor changes. Based on previous electoral endorsements, the online edition of *The Guardian* is judged to have a leftist political leaning, whilst *The Times* is considered right leaning (Ponsford, 2024). Thus, in terms of political stance, the outlets selected represent either side of the British political spectrum, permitting a broad analysis of how the news media portrays women who undertake a dual role in terrorism. Articles were taken from a decade period from 2008 to 2018, primarily to restrict the dataset from interferences owing to the re-emergence of Shamima Begum in headlines since 2019, when her UK citizenship was stripped for national security reasons (BBC, 2024). To gather the sample, each outlet's website was directly accessed. These online databases were searched with the following key words: 'Samantha Lewthwaite', 'Bethnal Green trio', 'Shamima Begum', 'Amira Abase' and 'Kadiza Sultana'. Initially searches generated many results as the case studies were frequently footnoted within the wider topic of terrorism. As such, articles were screened for relevancy so that only articles portraying the women and their actions directly were included. The final data set comprised of eighty news articles.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two situates this research within the existing literature on women in terror and news media representations of terrorism. Chapter Three outlines the analytical framework adopted in this study, conceptualising agency and subjectivity. Chapter Four contextualises the analysis, demonstrating the overarching gendered framing of the news articles. Recognising this, Chapter Five discusses the portrayal of agency in the news articles, leading to Chapter Six which discusses the reproduction of gendered hierarchies of power within discourses of gendered subjectivity in the news media representations of the women.

Together, both the chapters demonstrate the systemic subversion of agency in news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

2. Literature Review:

This chapter reviews the existing literature in the field of gender and terrorism, contextualising my study within scholarship that has investigated the roles that women hold in terrorist organisations. Additionally, the chapter situates this dissertation within the relevant literature regarding the relationship between the media and terrorism, focusing on the gendered narratives that are deployed in media portrayals of terrorism.

2.1 Gender and Terrorism:

The existing scholarship has predominately analysed the specific roles undertaken by women in terrorism (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2019; Spencer, 2016). Bloom (2007, p.94) notes the historical involvement of women in political violence in a supportive manner, primarily expected to sustain insurgencies by giving birth and raising future fighters. The literature confirms that this expectation has persisted in contemporary terrorist groups; Spencer (2016, p.81) identifies the belief within the Islamic State (ISIS) that women exist solely to serve men as wives and birth the next generation of jihadi. Furthermore, in an analysis of ISIS recruitment propaganda, Termeer and Duyvesteyn (2022, p.476) found that appeals to nurturing roles significantly contributed to the recruitment of women, indicating that the role of women as mothers and wives is accepted to such an extent that it is manipulated in the recruitment techniques of terrorist organisations.

A considerable amount of literature has begun to identify a change to the roles undertaken by women in terrorism (Gan et al. 2019; Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022, p.477; Bloom and Lokmanoglu, 2020). It is reported that women are becoming key players in terrorist organisations (Bloom and Lokmanoglu, 2020, p.408). Analysing the roles held by women in ISIS, Spencer (2016, p.97) concludes that women's participation is evolving. Gan et al.'s

(2019) examination of the distinct shift of the roles of women in ISIS is pertinent; Gan et al. (2019, p.209) observed that women continue to perform traditional roles as mothers and wives but have increasingly adopted more active roles in the organisation, including recruitment and perpetrating violence as suicide bombers. Evidence of this shift of women from the domestic realm to the frontline is manifest. In a sample of terror attacks perpetrated between 2005 and 2016, 15% were perpetrated by women (Fullmer, Lipson Mizrahi, and Tomsich, 2019, p.274). Corroborating the change from traditional roles, Spencer (2016, p.90) proves that ideological supportive roles like recruitment supersedes the role of a jihadist wife for women in ISIS. Evidently, numerous studies within the existing literature reveal an evolving role of women in terrorist organisations.

However, these studies tend to assume that women hold one role or another, it is never suggested nor explored that women could be performing both. Postulating that more active jihadi women would remain expected to care for their children, Gan et al. (2019, p.216) conclude that their findings suggest a possible dual nature in the role that women play, whereby women both fight and foster. Other than this concluding remark, the notion of a dual role undertaken by women in terrorism remains to be addressed in the literature. Given that there is scant research on women who simultaneously perform traditional domestic roles and active roles like recruiting or perpetrating violence, my research aims to overcome this omission by selecting case-studies of women who undertake this dual role. Analysing the media framing of women undertaking a dual role aims to further understandings of gender-specific experiences in the sphere of terrorism and how these roles are specifically portrayed in the news media.

2.1b Victimisation or Vilification:

Despite the literature confirming changes in the roles held by women in terrorism, the existing scholarship tends to represent women as victims of male-instigated violence (Spencer, 2016, p.76). Bloom and Lokmanoglu (2020, p.400) problematise analyses of women's roles in terrorist organisations for the use of stereotypes to frame women along a spectrum as either a pawn or a victim. Acknowledging this spectrum suggests that even in assuming an active role, scholars consider women to remain manipulated. Moreover, Sjoberg, Cooke and Reiter Neal (2011, p.5) highlight the tendency to dismiss women terrorists, whereby a commitment to terrorism is explained through an impression that something bad happened to the woman. In these understandings, a woman is understood to have turned to terrorist violence because she was abused or raped. As such, the literature suggests an overwhelming tendency in terrorism studies to understand women terrorists in terms of victimisation.

For Banks (2019, p.182), explanations of the motivation behind terror acts demonstrate a fundamental gender difference. Motivation is rarely considered for male terrorists as their dedication to the cause is assumed; for women this assumption is withheld as they are viewed as victims of violence rather than perpetrators (ibid.). The differing explanations of men's and women's participation in terrorism indicate the existence of a gendered victim-perpetrator binary which has restricted women to considerations as victims. As women directly perpetrating terrorism disrupt the binary, scholars tend to explain women's motivations to restore the idea that women are victims. The existing scholarship confirms the existence of the binary; Jackson (2021, p.414) contends that politically violent women are cast either as vulnerable and helpless or as monstrous villains. Bloom (2011, p.4) affirms that women involved in terrorist violence are demonised more than men, implying a distinct vilification of women. When women do not conform with this binary, the literature shows that they're treated

separately. In their seminal book on women's violence, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, p.9) contend that women who commit acts of terrorism are not seen as terrorists, but as *women terrorists*. The separation of women from the mainstream discourse of terrorism occurs because by committing these acts, women act outside their proscribed gender role (ibid.). In this way, the behaviour of women terrorists is constructed as an abnormality and thus, considered in a subordinate manner; these women cannot be women. The relevant literature demonstrates a gendered dualistic understanding of women in terrorism, whereby women are both considered to be victims yet treated as exceptional for their involvement. This study draws on this dualistic conception as women who undertake a dual role in terrorism fall on both sides of the victim-perpetrator binary, disrupting the dualism, thus revealing a significant gap in the existing research on women in terrorism.

2.2 Media, Terrorism and the Portrayal of Women Terrorists:

The need for accurate news media representations of terrorism is well documented. Reporting on terrorism must be proportionate as overemphasising terror threats increases harm and can even advance terrorist objectives (White, 2020, p.x). Critically, as news frames both reflect and reinforce entrenched social norms, they impact the implementation of counterterrorism policies (Nacos, 2005, p.448). Manifestly, the existing literature highlights the long-term implications of news media portrayals of terrorism, affirming the significance of investigating media representations in the context of terrorism. With several scholars reporting that women generate more news media attention (Bloom and Lokmanoglu, 2020, p.409; Bloom, 2007, p.100), understanding the specific portrayals of women in terrorism is imperative.

A vast amount of literature has investigated the gendered narratives deployed in news media portrayals of terrorism. Comparing news media representations of two high-profile jihadi terrorists, Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1059) proved the gender differences in news coverage, highlighting the deployment of gendered media tropes of masculinity and femininity. The differential treatment of women terrorists in the media is established; Nacos (2005, p.446) identified the entrenchment of gender cliches in media portrayals of women terrorists. Moreover, Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1060) conclude that embedded gender stereotypes are intensified in the news coverage of both male and female jihadi terrorists. Previous research thus stresses the reproduction of harmful gendered stereotypes in news media depictions of women terrorists. Despite terrorist activity contradicting the stereotypical expectations held of women as pure, innocent and nonviolent, there is an extensive application of these stereotypes in the media coverage of women involved in terrorism (Sjoberg et al., 2011, p.4). In this way, there is an excessive reliance on expectations of femininity in news media portrayals. As such, the existing scholarship demonstrates a tendency to explain the actions of women terrorists through hegemonic constructions of femininity which diminish women to their proscribed gender role (Krona and Caskey, 2023, p.1055). Altogether, the literature reveals a highly gendered portrayal of women terrorists in the news media.

Specifically, the “jihadi bride” narrative used within the news media has received a lot of scholarly attention. Martini (2018, p.458) studies the media narratives that construct women joining ISIS as “jihadi brides”, finding that reports of these women are biased, describing the women through gender stereotypes which disseminate a particular knowledge about them. Identifying “jihadi bride” as a reductionist gendered trope, Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1059) contend that the use of the term in the media, demonstrates that gendered news framing continues to reinforce stereotypes. Furthermore, the ‘jihadi bride’ label assigns women with a

predetermined gender role (Martini, 2018, p.464). Importantly, analyses of the jihadi bride narrative have revealed that the news media deploy a victim/villain discourse in portrayals of women terrorists. Analysing the framing of “jihadi brides” in British newspapers, Jackson (2019, p.1745) declares that reporters iterated tropes that depict politically violent women as naïve, vulnerable victims, in an effort to understand the actions of these women. Critically, Jackson (2022, p.213), identifies two dominant constructions of “jihadi brides” in the news media: the vulnerable girl and the monstrous woman. As such, Jackson (2022, p.2) argues that a gendered dualism portrays women in terms of a monstrous/vulnerable binary. Recognising the deployment of this gendered dualism in news media portrayals of women terrorists is pertinent to this dissertation, especially given its operation in the journalistic framing of the Bethnal Green trio (Jackson, 2021), one of the case-studies analysed in this dissertation.

The research surrounding the “jihadi bride” narrative demonstrates the necessity of interrogating the gendered framing present in news media portrayals of women terrorists. Previous studies have not examined the representation of women who undertake a dual role in terror. Simultaneously, conforming to gender stereotypes in domesticated roles and unsettling such stereotypes by engaging in terrorism, these women interrupt the reductive dualistic stereotypes shown to be deployed in news media framings. Thus, this dissertation is an essential contribution, offering a more nuanced understanding of the gendered portrayals of women’s involvement in terrorism.

3. Analytical Framework:

In this chapter, the analytical framework adopted in this research is presented. First, the chapter outlines the concept of agency. Acknowledging the failure of liberal conceptions of agency, the framework uses a critical feminist approach to retheorise agency. Next, an intersectional approach to agency is examined to consider the multiple structures of power that constitute agentic subjects. Finally, the chapter moves beyond agency to discuss subjectivity. Feminist theory identifies the relegation of women as subordinate subjects and examines the role of discourse and language in reproducing this gendered hierarchy of subjectivity.

3.1 Agency:

Agency is a widely contested term, predominately understood as the capacity of an actor to intervene in the world in an independent manner (McNay, 2015, p.40). Traditionally, the concept of agency has been associated with liberal thought; Bilge (2010 p.12) contends that agency is a deeply liberal concept, in which an agent is considered as a rational, free-willed, choosing subject. However, this liberal conceptualisation of agency has been heavily critiqued; Auchter (2012, p.123) identifies ‘problematic foundationalist assumptions’ inherent to the liberal notion of agency indicating its unsuitability for this dissertation. Considering feminist scholarship can conceptualise agency more appropriately.

From a feminist perspective, the assumption of rationality within agency is particularly problematic. Davies (1991, p.44) explains that given their otherness to masculinity women are constituted as other to rational thought and thus, considered as irrational beings. In this sense, the rational agent central to a liberal understanding of agency is a masculinised individual. Thus, a feminist lens reveals agency to be gendered as the agentic subject traditionally excludes women deeming them irrational. Furthering the critique, feminist theory contends that women

have been constructed as subordinate non-agents (Auchter, 2012, p.122). Evidently, the liberal conceptualisation of agency is understood to deploy a gendered hierarchy that problematically depicts women as lacking agency; agency is not held equally between genders. For McNay (2015, p.39), given that certain groups have more agency than others, agency is inextricable from analyses of power. Thus, within feminism, there is a recognition agency is tied to structures of power. Critically, as women are deemed less agentic, gendered agency must be connected to patriarchal power structures. As such, a feminist conception of agency not only critiques the systemic construction of women as irrational and thus less agentic within the liberal conceptualisation of agency, but maintains that this is inseparable from power. For the feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) employed in this dissertation, this critique of the liberal conception of agency is imperative to question how women undertaking a dual role in terrorism are systemically depicted as less agentic in the news media. Conceptualising agency through a feminist lens enables an examination of how gendered power relations shape the portrayal of these women's agency.

It must be noted that the feminist critique levelled against the liberal conception of agency is limited. Importantly the feminist framework fails to problematise the liberal conceptualisation of rationality. The narrow consideration of rationality has meant that agency and the capacity to choose have been theorised in a restrictive manner. Mahmood (2006) challenges the assumptions surrounding agency in liberal feminist theory. For Mahmood (2006, p.39), feminism has equated women's agency with resistance to relations of domination. In this sense, for a woman to have agency, it must be expressed through acts of resistance against subordination. Furthermore, there is a concomitant assumption that freedom is a universal social ideal (ibid.). Hence, within feminism, it is posited that all women want to be free from the relations of subordination; those who don't are considered irrational. Consequently, the

notion of agency in feminist scholarship is shaped by an assumption of universalised liberal ideal of freedom so that agency is understood to manifest in resistance to oppression. As such, differing forms of agency are not conceived in the feminist conception. Thus, there is an argument that feminism must broaden its conception of agency beyond its inherent liberal assumptions. Understanding the limitation to the feminist conception of agency, this framework uses critical feminist theory to retheorise agency in a more suitable manner.

Through the critique of feminism's liberal assumptions, agency can be retheorised. Analysing the participation of women in the Egyptian mosque movement, Mahmood (2006, p.33) suggests extending the conceptualisation of agency beyond the notion of resistance. With the example of Muslim veiling, certain behaviours that may seem passive from a liberal feminist perspective, are understood as forms of agency but only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of enactment (Mahmood, 2006, p.42). In this sense, subordination can be the context for exercising agency. Here, agency is retheorised so that agency is not solely an act of resisting domination but is understood as a capacity for action enabled and created by historically specific relations of subordination (Mahmood, 2006, p.33-34). Thus, agency is understood to arise in the systems that subordinate certain people. This indicates that agency differs depending on the context and thus, must account for historical and social context. Critically, Mahmood (2006, p.34) argues that broadening the concept of agency is crucial to understanding ways of living and being whose logic does not conform with the liberal political ideal of freedom. Therefore, expanding the conception of agency crucially recognises forms of agency which have tended to be ignored in the restrictive liberal feminist conception. Since the terrorist space exceeds this scope of liberatory politics, the retheorisation of agency offered in this framework is pertinent for this dissertation. In the context of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism, predominately patriarchal power structures shape the

conditions in which agency is made possible. Therefore, the framework provides a more nuanced understanding of the agency of these women acknowledging that their actions are enabled by the patriarchal structures often presumed to constrain them in the terrorist space. Applying this to a FCDA examining the framing of these women permits an interrogation of the problematic and incomplete portrayal of agency in the British news media.

3.1b An Intersectional Approach to Agency:

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991, p.1242) to articulate how the experiences of violence against Black women are shaped by multiple dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. For Crenshaw (1991, p.1244), there are numerous ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the aspects of violence committed against women of colour. Here, Crenshaw outlines a framework that considers the interaction between multiple forms of discrimination on individual experience. Applying an intersectional approach to agency is essential for examining how different parts of an individual's identity impacts their agency. Primarily, the interrogation of power within the framework of intersectionality is applicable to the concept of agency. Bilge (2010, p.23) contends that with intersectionality offering a critical lens to analyse the articulation of power, an intersectional approach to agency questions the specific contexts from which distinct forms of agency arise. Hence, there is a recognition that agency is dependent on the interaction between multiple dimensions of an individual's identity. As such, agency is understood to be unique, both arising from and shaped by the intersection between multiple structures of power.

An intersectional approach to agency identifies the multiple structures of power that constitute agency. For Bilge (2010, p.23), intersectionality places the formation of agency within the

structures of race, class and gender that interact to reproduce power. As such, a conception of agency must consider the historicised structures of power that constitute agentic subjects (ibid.). Thus, applying an intersectional approach stresses the need to interrogate how the reproduction of multiple power structures works to deem certain individuals more agentic than others. In essence, considering intersectionality reaffirms the necessity of a context specific understanding of agency. Regarding an analysis of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism, an intersectional approach to agency recognises that a gender-based analysis alone is insufficient as multiple structures of power are at play in exercising agency. Critically, this necessitates an examination of the ways in which multiple power structures shape the portrayal of agency in the news media.

3.2 Subjectivity:

Whilst subjectivity is closely related to the concept of agency, the lack of subjectivity attributed to women has been explored within feminist theory independently. The feminist occupation with the self and subjectivity is often considered to begin from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, with the declaration, '[h]e is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other' (1949, p.26). Here, there is a recognition that women occupy a secondary position, relegated to the position of the Other. As such, women are considered non-subjects. Identifying women to represent an Other, Smith (2015, p.955) contends that women constitute subjects that occupy a subordinate role dictated by hegemonic narratives. Here, there is a suggestion that certain narratives construct women as lesser subjects. In this way, a feminist perspective on subjectivity acknowledges that becoming a subject is a historical process tied to existing social structures (Smith, 2015, p.955). Therefore, within feminism, subjectivity is tied to structures of power that determine certain narratives as hegemonic; subjectivity is inextricable from power.

A particular hegemonic narrative that has deemed women with less subjectivity has been the description of women in relation to men. de Beauvoir (1949, p.26) recognised this, contending that humanity is male so that man defines women in relation to himself; consequently, women are not considered autonomous beings. Thus, as women are constantly determined in relation to men, they are not their own subjects and have been constructed as inferior. Lakoff (1973, p.45) extends this, affirming that speech about women implies an object, whose social role is derived in relation to men. For instance, the description of a woman as X's 'wife' or 'girlfriend' demonstrates the pervasive identification of women in terms of the men they relate to (Lakoff, 1973, p.65). Rather than holding subjectivity, women are solely identified through the roles they undertake in relation to men. There is an implication that the identity of women is constructed through discourses denoting their relation to men. In this sense, language and discourse are central to subjectivity. Judith Butler's work on subject formation explores this; for Butler, the subject does not exist before discourse, instead it is formed as both an effect of and expressed through discourse (Smith, 2015, p.966). Here, subjectivity is argued to be constantly formed through discourse. There is a suggestion that particular discourses have dominated to relegate women to their relation to men rather than as subjects. With this recognition, feminist theory reveals the need to interrogate the role of discourse and language in shaping subjectivity.

Understanding that the construction of a subject occurs in discourse, Butler extends her theory, locating subject formation within structures of domination (Smith, 2015, p.966). Hence, there is an implication that structures of power are perpetuated and reproduced through discourse. In turn, subjectivity is a constant reproduction of these power relations. Feminist critical discourse

studies has examined the power relations established through discourse; it aims to reveal the ways in which gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are at work within discourse (Lazar, 2007, p.142). Critically, there is an acknowledgement that certain discourses sustain a patriarchal social order, reproducing systems of power that systematically disadvantage and exclude women (Lazar, 2007, p.145). Thus, there is a recognition that language and discourse reproduce gendered hierarchies of privilege. As a consequence, subjectivity remains gendered, constructed by the patriarchal power relations reproduced within discourse. As this dissertation undertakes a FCDA of the dual role undertaken by women in terrorism, it is critical to note that patriarchal power is reproduced in the discursive construction of subjectivity. Applying this recognition to an analysis of the framing of these women in British news media, enables an exploration of the ways in which gendered hierarchies of power have constructed women terrorists with less subjectivity.

This chapter has presented the analytical framework adopted within this dissertation outlining specific conceptions for understanding agency and subjectivity. Taken together, the framework necessitates a recognition of the reproduction of power structures in constructing both the agency and subjectivity of women terrorists undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

4. Gendered Framing:

This chapter discusses the overarching framing identified from the analysis of the news media articles. In accordance with the existing literature, both Lewthwaite and the Bethnal Green trio were consistently framed in gendered terms. In particular, reports were found to dismiss a participation in terrorism by adopting a misogynistic tone and emphasising the femininity of the women. With this gendered framing, undertaking a dual role was cast as exceptional and thus, the cases were sensationalised.

Across the news media articles, a gendered frame shaped the portrayal of the women. A common frame noted was the deliberate accentuation of femininity. In both the cases reports frequently included feminised items and activities that were irrelevant to the events. For instance, ‘underwear, makeup and an epilator’ (Dodd, 2015) appear in several articles listed as items that were considered essential by the Bethnal Green trio. Despite little relevancy to the story, these items serve to stress the femininity of the young women. By appearing before items like plane tickets, it is suggested that traditionally feminine items were deemed more fundamental in their decision to travel to the Islamic State. As such, the trio’s actions are constructed as less serious and are trivialised to readers. Similarly, one article discussing Lewthwaite declares ‘as well as bomb-making she appears to have been preoccupied with her personal appearance’ (Siddique, 2013). Alongside an engagement with terrorism, this unnecessarily highlights Lewthwaite’s fixation on her appearance to remind readers of her femininity. Critically, the lexical selection of ‘preoccupied’ constructs Lewthwaite as uncommitted, suggesting that her appearance is a priority, hindering a full commitment to terrorism. Evidently, both examples are highly gendered, aligning with traditional stereotypes that consider women to be obsessed with their appearance and beauty. In this way, the news media portrayals entrench gender stereotypes by emphasising physical expectations of

femininity. This framing downplays an involvement in terrorism, reinforcing a reductive narrative that suggests women are never as committed to terrorist ideals as men.

At times the gendered framing extended into a misogynistic tone. In an explanation of the trio's actions, one article quotes a counterterrorism expert saying "They've probably never had a boyfriend. They've got hormones all over the place" (Patterson, 2016). Here, a sexist narrative reduces the complexity of the events, as the trio are understood to be driven by hormonal impulsivity. This deeply gendered frame contains a misogynistic tone that diminishes the young woman, reproducing a gendered trope that suggests their actions were driven by a desire for a relationship. This narrative was also applied to Lewthwaite, most notably with the headline 'I just wanted to marry a Muslim and settle down' (The Times, 2012a), implying that Lewthwaite's desire to get married led to a transgression to terrorism. This misogynistic portrayal also features in articles reporting that Lewthwaite wrote a love poem for Osama bin Laden; for example, *The Times* writes 'In her *Ode to Osama*... [Lewthwaite] appears to declare her love for the late terrorist leader' (Starkey and Brown, 2013). The portrayal suggests that Lewthwaite's involvement in terrorism is the result of an obsessive fascination with bin Laden; she is devoted to him rather than a terrorist ideology. Therefore, in both cases the rationale behind an involvement in terrorism was dismissed by misogynistic assumptions that constructed the women as impulsive and infatuated with men. These are both harmful gender stereotypes the denote women as overly emotional. As such, by reproducing gender stereotypes, these narratives contributed to the wider gendered framing that dismissed their participation in terrorism.

In the analysis, it emerged that both the cases were sensationalised by the news media. Headlines such as 'Tips on being a model wife, by bomber's widow' (Gibbons, 2013), 'Snaps show family life of 'terror mother'' (Smith and Gadher, 2012) and 'Beheadings and a taste for chips: the life of British jihadist bride' (Gadher, 2015) purposefully created shock among readers. Contrasting the violence of terrorism with traditional gender roles, the women were made exceptional. By implying a contradiction between the two, the headlines suggest that the women have betrayed the expectations of these roles. In this way, a gendered frame reinforces gender norms that proscribe specific roles for women, which are constructed as incompatible with any participation in terrorism. Consequently, having a dual role in terrorism is portrayed as deviant. Hence, there is an argument that the perception of the women through their dual role has made the cases sensational. Portrayed as women who transgressed from accepted gender roles by undertaking a dual role in terrorism, these women received extensive coverage. Supporting this finding, Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1056) affirm that due to the shock value of women participating in terrorism, the media often employed the notion of motherhood to instil fear among readers. Evidently, for representations of women involved in terrorism, traditional gender roles are deliberately deployed to garner more media attention. As such, for both Lewthwaite and the trio, the perception of a dual role was constructed as an abnormality. Both women challenged stereotypical gender expectations and thus were sensationalised.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated the overarching gendered framing of news media portrayals of women who undertake a dual role. Recognising an extensive gendered frame, the analysis specifically interrogates the portrayal of agency and subjectivity within this frame, investigating the similarities and differences between cases and news media outlets.

5. Agency:

This chapter discusses how the agency of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism is portrayed in the news media. The analysis revealed that news media portrayals consistently reduced the agency of the women through media narratives specific to the perception of a dual role. Additionally, media narratives victimised the women, constructing them as passive in their radicalisation to terrorism, excluding their agency in the process. Finally, applying an intersectional lens revealed a difference in the portrayal of agency; whiteness deemed Lewthwaite more exceptional, attributing her with more agency than the Bethnal Green trio.

5.1a The Prospect of Marriage:

A common narrative deployed in the news media framing was an attempt to explain the motivations of these women by emphasising the prospect of marriage offered in terrorist organisations. This narrative appeared extensively in articles surrounding the Bethnal Green trio's decision to join the Islamic State (ISIS) and resulted in undermining their agency. Following the developments to the story, one article reported that the trio are 'intending to become jihadi brides' (Dodd, Topping and Gani, 2015). With this report, the media constructed a narrative which depicted marriage as the sole intention behind the trio's actions. The narrative was supported in multiple accounts with phrases such as '[Abase] pined for marriage' (Gadher, 2015b), insinuating that the trio held a committed determination to get married. By reiterating the trio's desire to get married, the articles employ a reductive narrative which simplifies the complexity of the decision to join ISIS. Within the narrative, all other motivations are disregarded to suggest that the trio only left because ISIS offered a way to make this desire attainable. Thus, by denying the complexity to the trio's actions, the narrative undermines the agency of the trio. Martini (2018, p.464) explains that as the decision to join ISIS is interpreted through a gender lens, there is a failure to consider women as complex actors, which constructs

them as non-agential subjects. There is an implication that attributing the trio's actions to the prospect of marriage, a deeply gendered narrative, news media articles reproduced gender norms to diminish agency.

Suggesting marriage as the trio's motivation reduced their agency in undertaking a dual role in terrorism. For instance, one article claims '[t]hey swapped A-level courses at Bethnal Green academy in London for life on the frontline and the prospect of marriage' (MacAskill, 2016). In this framing, undertaking a dual role is infantilised by equating it to A-level studies. This infantilisation reminds the readers of the trio's young age and thus, constructs them as naïve and innocent. As such, these portrayals stripped the agency of the young women, trivialising the dual role they hold. By emphasising their youth, discourses denied the trio full autonomy in their actions, suggesting that they were influenced. Readers are left to infer that the trio were influenced by the prospect of marriage. This framing reinforces the perception of naivety, denoting the young woman as irrational and infatuated with men. Thus, in a suggestion that the young women's capacity to act independently is influenced by a need for a relationship with men, gender subordination further infantilised the trio's actions. Compounded by their age, a discourse of infantilisation reproduced patriarchal narratives to diminish the agency of young women. Hence, foregrounding the prospect of marriage media narratives portrayed the Bethnal Green trio as non-agentic subjects when undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

Even when married, articles continued to suggest that the Bethnal Green trio lacked agency. Across both the news outlets, the young women were often portrayed as passive in their marriages. Articles claimed that the trio 'married men approved by Isis' (Dodd, 2016) and 'had husbands 'approved' for them' (Dodd and Khomami, 2015). The lexical repetition of

‘approved’, repeatedly constructs the trio as non-agentic, emphasising that ISIS made the decision. This finding corresponds with other representations of women’s agency in the news media. Bloom and Lokmanoglu (2020, p.400) contend that the news media perceives women’s agency in terrorism through a patriarchal lens, whereby men control power. In this argument, news media portrayals of women in terrorism reproduce patriarchal power structures with an assumption that men hold authority in the terrorist space. In this way, the entrenchment of patriarchal perspectives in the news media has neglected women’s agency. For the Bethnal Green trio, this neglect emerged in the portrayals of their marriages; constructing the trio as inferior to the masculinised authority of ISIS, reproduced the patriarchal notion that men hold power. As such, the analysis revealed that gendered power relations have systemically denied the agency of the trio in depictions of their marriage.

5.1b Maternal Failure:

For Lewthwaite, an emphasis on her failure as a mother undermined her agency in undertaking a dual role in terrorism. Claims like ‘[Lewthwaite] tried to juggle family life with a desire for jihad’ (Gadher and Amore, 2013) create a perception that Lewthwaite has failed to simultaneously perform her domesticated role as a mother and remain committed to active jihadism. As such, it is suggested that motherhood and jihadism are incompatible. In this narrative, motherhood limits Lewthwaite’s capacity to fully engage in terrorism, reducing Lewthwaite’s agency. Therefore, framing Lewthwaite through her dual role has portrayed her as less agentic than men in the terrorist space, confirming a gendered double standard as male terrorists are rarely judged for being a father in the media (Nacos, 2005, p.445).

News media portrayals further eroded Lewthwaite's agency through a focus on her divergence from traditional expectations of motherhood. An example manifests in a report that Lewthwaite is 'using her children as cover for her alleged terrorist activities' (Smith and Gadher, 2012). Here, news media discourse reproduced a gendered power hierarchy to judge Lewthwaite through traditional gender roles, so that her engagement in terrorism was considered deviant. It must be noted that articles depicting Lewthwaite as a deviant mother featured to a greater extent in *The Times*, with Lewthwaite's transgression receiving more condemnation. This indicates that traditional gender roles are further entrenched in the right-wing media. Critically, the insinuation that Lewthwaite exploited her own children to commit terrorism frames her actions as the ultimate betrayal of motherhood. As such, the framing vilifies Lewthwaite, suggesting that her dual role is a severely abnormal deviation from gender norms. The vilification of Lewthwaite's maternal failure is an example of Jackson's (2022, p.19) monstrous mother narrative, in which women are depicted as profoundly transgressing gendered expectations. Deploying this narrative denied Lewthwaite's agency, as monstrous women are not held responsible for their actions because their womanhood is considered defective (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p.37). In this way, constructing Lewthwaite as abnormal denied her capacity to make an independent, rational choice to commit violence (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, p.30); she was portrayed as a non-agentic subject.

In both the case studies news media portrayals denied women's agency in undertaking a dual role in terrorism. Deploying gendered narratives of marriage and motherhood, news media discourses were found to reproduce and reinforce a gendered hierarchy of social norms that undermined the agency of the women.

5.2 Passivity in Radicalisation:

Another frame that emerged across the case studies was the depiction of the women as passive in their radicalisation to terrorism. With this frame, news media portrayals restricted the agency of the women in this process. A prominent example of this framing appears in the phrase ‘lured by Isis’ see, for example, Dodd, Topping and Gani 2015. This phrase was repeatedly deployed in reports seeking to explain the Bethnal Green trio’s actions. The use of ‘lured’ invokes a sense of manipulation, insinuating that the trio were tricked into their decision to join ISIS. In this narrative, the trio are constructed as helpless, vulnerable victims of ISIS propaganda and thus, are passive. As the young women were ‘lured’, it is suggested that they did not exercise agency in their decision. Instead, their agency is conferred to ISIS. Therefore, by framing the trio as victims of manipulation, they were portrayed as non-agentic. The systematic use of verbs like ‘sucked in’, ‘groomed’ and ‘brainwashed’ supported the frame, further dismissing agency. As explored earlier, the trio’s age compounded the reduction of agency. Headlines like ‘[p]ointless death of a brainwashed teenage bride’ (Ellen, 2016) emphasised the young age of the trio, intensifying the perception that the trio were naïve and vulnerable. This strengthened the narrative, by suggesting to readers that their young age made them more susceptible to manipulation. As such, age exacerbated the framing, further undermining the portrayal of agency in radicalisation.

The framing was also applied to Lewthwaite’s radicalisation. For example, one article claims Lewthwaite was ‘radicalised by a terror kingpin in Yemen’ (Amoore and Gadher, 2013), dismissing her individual agency in the radicalisation process. In the narrative, Lewthwaite is constructed as passive in her own radicalisation, cast as a victim of a terrorist leader’s ability to exploit and manipulate; she is portrayed as non-agential. Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee (2018, p.294) observed that in order to comprehend Lewthwaite’s conversion to terrorism, news

frames ascribed her deviation to the manipulateness of Muslim men, nullifying her political aspirations. This finding is verified in this analysis; news media portrayals of Lewthwaite's radicalisation neglected her personal motivation and commitment to terrorist ideals, radically undermining individual agency. Another notable banalisation of Lewthwaite's radicalisation occurs in the suggestion that her conversion was prompted by past-trauma. Discussing Lewthwaite's conversion to Islam, one article declares 'teenage Lewthwaite was apparently traumatised by her parents' divorce' (Gilham, 2013). In this depiction, it is suggested that Lewthwaite's parents' divorce precipitated a personal crisis, leading her to Islam. In this way, Lewthwaite did not choose to convert, emotional distress forced her to. Highlighting Lewthwaite's vulnerability to past trauma, constructs her as a victim. As such, Lewthwaite is passive in her conversion, reducing her agency. Therefore, the analysis revealed the consistent deployment of a victimisation framing in news media portrayals of Lewthwaite's radicalisation; portrayals were committed to framing Lewthwaite as passive in her radicalisation, neglecting her agentic capacity.

In both cases, news media portrayals framed the women as victims in their radicalisation, reducing the agency of the women. This finding reveals that news media reproduced essentialist gendered assumptions about the involvement of women in political violence to deny their agency. Jackson (2019, p.1745) notes that entrenched stereotypes of politically violent women as naïve victims, who lack the ideological commitment presumed of radicalised men, erase the agency of women who join ISIS. In this sense, gender stereotypes have rationalised women's violence, creating an invariable assumption that women are always tricked and manipulated into violence. News media portrayals of the women's radicalisation were found to recite erroneous gendered discourses about the participation of women in political violence and thus eroded the women's agency in the radicalisation process. Critically, the determination to erase

the agency of the women demonstrates that the news media enshrined a liberal perspective of agency in the portrayals. Constructing the women as non-agentic, manipulated victims, fails to recognise the ‘specific relations of subordination’ (Mahmood, 2006, p.33-34) that enabled the women to exercise agency in their radicalisation. Thus, in a particular structure of meaning, the women did hold agency, yet the news articles did not portray this. Instead, by dismissing agency, narratives of victimisation offered a rationalisation of the women’s radicalisation, enabling readers to disregard the uncomfortable agency that the women did hold in their decision to engage with a terrorist organisation. Denying this agency, victimisation narratives maintained gendered power structures that neglect forms of agency beyond the notion of resistance.

5.3 Whiteness:

Despite noting a consistent reduction of agency in news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism, one difference did emerge. The racial identity of the women resulted in differing portrayals of agency. Throughout the news articles Lewthwaite was dubbed the ‘White Widow’, see, for example, Gadher 2015a. The use of this epithet deliberately stressed Lewthwaite’s white identity to readers, constructing whiteness as a core characteristic of her identity. Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee (2018, p.290) explain that the journalistic inclusion of Lewthwaite’s whiteness is deployed to distinguish her from other women terrorists, insinuating that white identity makes her unique. In this sense, Lewthwaite’s white identity made her exceptional, so that the construction of whiteness empowered Lewthwaite with a particular capacity for action in undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

Lewthwaite's greater agentic capacity is exemplified in articles that framed Lewthwaite as a commanding member of Al-Shabaab. For instance, reports suggested that Lewthwaite is 'suspected of masterminding a terrorist cell' (Hirsch, 2013) and 'regarded as a "serious player" and an alleged financier' (Gadher and Bagenal, 2012). In this framing, the indication that Lewthwaite controlled and managed terrorist activities portrays Lewthwaite as agentic in her leadership position. In these depictions, Lewthwaite was set apart from other women terrorists, exercising more agency in her involvement. In this way, although Lewthwaite's gender identity restricted her agency, her racial identity presented her with more agency than non-white women in terrorism. From an intersectional perspective, by privileging Lewthwaite's whiteness news media portrayals problematically reproduced a racial hierarchy, whereby whiteness attributed Lewthwaite more agency than non-white women terrorists like the Bethnal Green trio in the perception of a dual role. Evidently, multiple structures of power shape the portrayal of agency in the news media, indicating that exploring the interaction of these structures is a fruitful area for future research investigating news media portrayals of women in terrorism.

This chapter has demonstrated that news media articles reproduced gendered power structures to systemically deny the agency of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. The analysis revealed that incomplete portrayal of women's agency was shaped by multiple structures of power. As demonstrated in the next chapter, the erasure of women's agency was reinforced by discourses of gendered subjectivity deployed throughout the news media articles.

6. Subjectivity:

This chapter explores the portrayal of subjecthood in the news media, noting the deployment of discourses of gendered subjectivity. Constructed as non-subjects, discourse structures depicted the women as subordinate to men. As such, gendered hierarchies of power were reproduced in news media portrayals. Critically, the chapter shows that subjecthood influenced the portrayal of agency, to argue that discourses of gender subordination facilitated the denial of the women's agency in news media framing.

6.1a Schoolgirls:

A discursive pattern that emerged in the analysis was the description of the Bethnal Green trio as schoolgirls. This label was repeatedly used in headlines such as "Syria-bound' schoolgirls: East London mosque calls for worshippers' help' (Halliday et al., 2015). In these narratives, the trio's identity is reduced to the label, withholding personal subjectivity. This linguistic decision emphasises the youth and immaturity of the trio. Critically, this construction is gendered which produces a specific constrained subjectivity, deliberately framing the trio as and vulnerable and innocent. Determining the trio's subjecthood through the schoolgirl label reflects the establishment of gender norms in the news media. The use of the label reiterated traditional expectations of femininity onto the identity of the trio. Based upon gender expectations, the identification of the trio through the schoolgirl label reproduced existing gendered power relations which have systemically determined women as lesser subjects. In this case, the schoolgirl label demonstrates the operation of gendered hierarchies of power through the use of discourses of gendered subjectivity within the news media portrayal of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

The deployment of schoolgirl as a discourse of gender subjectivity dismissed agency. Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1055) state that the connotations of naivety and immaturity evoked in portrayals of Shamima Begum as a schoolgirl reinforced the narrative that she was non-agentic. Applying this recognition, the use of schoolgirl to depict the subjecthood of the Bethnal Green trio facilitated the news media framing of the trio as non-agentic subjects, as discussed in the previous chapter. In multiple *The Times* articles, this was compounded with the depiction of '[r]unaway schoolgirls', see, for example, Morris 2015. In these narratives, 'runaway' connotes naivety to suggest that the trio were misguided, further enabling a neglect of agency. Evidently, discourses of gendered subjectivity reinforced the subversion of agency in news media portrayals of the Bethnal Green trio.

6.1b Widow, Daughter, Bride:

Another discursive pattern of gendered subjectivity identified in the analysis was the identification of both the cases in relation to male subjects. For Lewthwaite, this was extensive, with readers consistently reminded that she was a widow. Rather than naming Lewthwaite herself, headlines repeatedly labelled her as the 'White Widow', see, for example, Addley and Hirsch 2013. Similarly, in many reports her personal identity was diminished to the 'widow of one of the July 7 bombers' (The Times, 2012b). Rather than acknowledging Lewthwaite's personal subjectivity, discourse structures reduced her identity to her status as a widow, framing her in terms of the actions of her late husband. Discourse portrayed Lewthwaite as a lesser subject. Thus, centring Lewthwaite's identity in association with her husband, news media articles reproduced established patriarchal considerations of women as non-subjects.

Even when Lewthwaite was not described in relation to her ex-husband, articles continued to stress her relation to men. Articles frequently described Lewthwaite as ‘the daughter of a former British army soldier’, see, for example, Laville and Ni Chonghaile 2012. Despite little relevancy, Lewthwaite’s identity remains derived from a male figure in her life. Emphasising her role as a daughter, Lewthwaite is constructed with less subjectivity than her father in this narrative, eradicating her personal identity. The fascination with Lewthwaite’s relationships with men in the news media (Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee, 2018, p.292), indicates that news media portrayals were determined to deny Lewthwaite’s subjectivity. By deploying gendered discourse structures Lewthwaite’s identity was continually diminished to frame her as a supportive character in narratives. Critically, the lack of subjectivity relegates Lewthwaite to a subordinate position to these men, perpetuating existing gendered power hierarchies that privilege men and consider women as inferior. As such, the repeated use of discourses of gender subordination in news media articles reproduced gendered hierarchies of power, privileging men to portray Lewthwaite with less subjectivity.

In news media articles representing the Bethnal Green trio, a telling discourse structure in the portrayal of subjectivity was the term “jihadi bride”. Labelling the trio as “jihadi brides” constructed them trio lesser subjects. The “jihadi bride” construction undermines the trio’s individual identity, as they are understood only in terms of their marital status to men. Moreover, reports such as ‘three British jihadi brides reported to be on the run’ (Halliday and Dodd, 2015) anonymised the trio through the label. The strategic decision to omit their names, fully denies the trio’s subjecthood in the events. Krona and Caskey (2023, p.1059) note that with the use of “jihadi bride”, women are constructed as a complement to men, diminished to the patriarchal gaze. Thus, as a discourse of gender subordination, the phrase reproduces patriarchal structures of domination to construct the trio as inferior subjects in the terrorist

space. Articles using the label attributed the trio with less subjectivity, implying to readers that the young women are subordinate to their jihadist husbands. Although both news media outlets used the label, the analysis discovered a more consistent use in *The Times*, indicating a greater tendency to consider the trio as subordinate, non-subjects in the news outlet. This finding suggests a further establishment of patriarchal power structures and notions of hegemonic masculinity in *The Times*, that were reproduced in the framing of women undertaking a dual role.

Critically, the deployment of “jihadi bride” contributed to undermining the trio’s agency in news media portrayals. Martini (2018, p.465) explains that as a “jihadi bride”, a women’s project becomes subordinated to a man’s agenda, denying her agency outside the frame of marriage (Martini, 2018, p.465). In this sense, with the women’s subjectivity constructed in relation to a man, her capacity for action also becomes attached to a man. Therefore, labelling the trio as “jihadi brides”, news media portrayals diminished their individual agency, conferring it to their husbands. This ignored the agency that the young women held outside their role as a wife and thus, denied agency in undertaking a dual role. Therefore, news media discourses of gendered subjectivity reinforce the incomplete portrayal of agency of the Bethnal Green trio.

In either case, feminine identities constructed the women as subordinate subjects in news media discourses. For Auer, Sutcliffe and Lee (2018, p.292) the accentuation of the gender identities of women terrorists in the news media erodes women’s agency in acts of terrorism. Hence, by emphasising Lewthwaite’s and the trio’s femininity, the persistent use of gendered subjectivity in the news media exacerbated the denial of agency in the news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. There is an implication that the reproduction of gendered

hierarchies of power within discursive structures reaffirmed the gendered assumptions and stereotypes that reduced the women's agency in the first place. In this sense, the construction of both Lewthwaite and the Bethnal Green trio as subordinate, lesser subjects constrained the women to traditional roles that align with the patriarchal subordinate position of women, helping dismiss their agency elsewhere. As such, these discursive structures provided rationality for the conception that women undertaking a dual role had a restricted agentic capacity by reproducing the notion of women's subordination in the terrorist space. Therefore, with the dismissal of women's agency consistently supported through discursive structures of gendered subjectivity and subordination, the analysis revealed the systemic subversion of agency in the news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

This chapter identified the use of discourses of gendered subjectivity in news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. Reproducing gendered hierarchies of power, the discourses constructed the women as subordinate, contributing to the denial of agency.

7. Conclusion:

The notion of women's dual role in terrorism is an unexplored area of analysis in studies of news media framing of women in terrorism. Conducting a feminist critical discourse analysis, this dissertation identified an overarching gendered framing of news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. The gendered framing was found to reproduce gender stereotypes and gendered power structures, aligning with previous research that has identified the amplification of entrenched gender stereotypes in news media representations of women terrorists (Krona and Caskey, 2023, p.1060). Recognising this gendered frame, the dissertation interrogated the portrayal of agency and subjectivity in the news media.

The analysis revealed that news media articles consistently reproduced essentialist gender stereotypes to reduce the agency of these women. Whilst previous studies have similarly problematised the gendered construction of women in terrorism as non-agential (Martini, 2018, p.464; Jackson, 2019, p. 1740), these studies are largely focused on news media representations of women in traditional roles in terrorist organisations. Thus, studies have not explored how the perception of a dual role in terrorism impacts the portrayal of women's agency. The analysis demonstrated that through gendered narratives related to marriage and motherhood, news media portrayals relied upon traditional expectations of femininity to deny the women's agency in undertaking a dual role. Furthermore, framing the women as victims, reinforced gender stereotypes of naivety to further erode the women's agency, suggesting manipulation in their decision to engage in terrorism in the first place. Across the news media articles, the analysis identified the use of discourses of gendered subjectivity which denoted less subjectivity. The construction of the women as subordinate through these discourses revealed the reproduction of gendered hierarchies of power in the portrayal of the subjecthood of the women. Critically, it was argued that discursive structures of gendered subjectivity facilitated the denial of the

women's agency by reaffirming the understanding that women are subordinate in the terrorist space. Given the consistent deployment of these structures, the dissertation contends that there is a systemic denial of women's agency in news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism.

A salient finding was that Lewthwaite's whiteness attributed her with more agency than the Bethnal Green trio. Thus, through an intersectional framework, the analysis revealed that multiple structures of power shaped the portrayal of agency. Future research should further investigate the interaction of power structures in news media portrayals of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism. An inherent limitation of this dissertation was the restriction to two case studies. As such, within future research, the use of multiple, varied case studies would offer a more nuanced insight of the gendered denial of women's agency and wider intersectional impacts.

The implications of this dissertation are significant. Predominately, it has illustrated the continued reproduction and reinforcement of gendered hierarchies of power in news media discourse. In the context of women in terrorism, this manifests in the reproduction of gender stereotypes to construct women as subordinate, non-agentic subjects. Nacos (2005, p.436) suggests that counterterrorism policy would be enriched by understanding the disparity between the news media's stereotypical women terrorist and actual gender roles in terrorist organisations. Thus, the findings of this dissertation are informative for future counterterrorist policy. Recognising the news media's systemic neglect of agency through the gendered framing of these women, necessitates an understanding and implementation of the full agentic capacity of women undertaking a dual role in terrorism in future policy.

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