Weapons of War? - Debating the Practice of Sexualized Violence Perpetrated by Islamist Terror Organizations
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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

BH – Boko Haram

CRSV – Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

IR – International Relations

IS – Islamic State

PT – Practice Theory

UN – United Nations

1. **Introduction**

Sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorist insurgencies is rampant. The Islamic State (IS), Boko Haram (BH), Al Qaeda, the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army, and Al Shabaab are among the most ferocious perpetrators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), openly displaying sexual brutality undeterred by counter-terrorism measures.[1] The UN Security Council identified sexualized violence by terrorists as a "disturbing trend" fundamentally threatening international peace and security.[2] Yet, despite such warnings, prevalent impunity and disregard for combating acts of sexualized violence by terrorist perpetrators made it attractive for the organizations, causing to it become a recurrent phenomenon. Capturing this trend, rape and abduction have even been treated as a

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[1] UN CTED, "Identifying and Exploring the Nexus between Human Trafficking, Terrorism, and Terrorism Financing," *United Nations* (2019): 4-32, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/identifying-and-exploring-nexus-between-human-trafficking-terrorism-and-terrorism-financing.
[2] UNSC, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," *United Nations*, March 23, 2015, 2, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_203.pdf.

potential new signature tactic of terrorism in which sexualized violence is being ascribed a defining character of terrorists' modus operandi.[3]

Indeed, the widespread implications of CRSV for victims, perpetrators, and communities have extended sexualized violence to function as an economic, socio-political, and ideological vehicle. As a result, human trafficking and sexual slavery have become critical economic assets to finance terrorist organizations.[4] In 2016, the IS made between 10 and 30 million dollars in revenue through ransom payments and the institutionalized sale of human beings on designated slave markets.[5] Gendered violence is, moreover, utilized to humiliate and terrorize not only the individual victims but also communities and the state into surrendering.[6] As an effective method for displaying control during territorial acquisition, Islamist terrorist insurgencies exploit the pre-existing socio-political and cultural taboos surrounding sexuality. While some women are sold into marriage with terrorists by their families to avoid the stigma of experiencing sexualized violence, others become outcasts of their communities after being exposed to sexual abuse.[7] This way, CRSV becomes a political bargaining tool in the hands of terrorists. Furthermore, sexualized violence has a strong ideological value for terrorist organizations to the extent that it becomes ingrained in the groups' norms and values.[8] Ideological claims are then used as justification, while the acts of sexualized violence increase attention, bolster the recruitment of new members, galvanize the existing ones, and ensure the group's survival through forced conversion, marriage, and impregnation.[9]

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[3] Jeffrey Kaplan, "The Fifth Wave: The New Tribalism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16 (2007): 546-562.

[4] Coman Kenny, Nikita Malik, "Trafficking Terror and Sexual Violence: Accountability for Human Trafficking and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence by Terrorist Groups under the Rome Statute," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 52, no.1 (2019): 47.

[5] Nikita Malik, "Trafficking Terror: How Modern Slavery and Sexual Violence Fund Terrorism," *Henry Jackson Society* (2017): 4, https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HJS-Trafficking-Terror-Report-web.pdf.

[6] Christiana E. Attah, "Boko Haram and Sexual Terrorism: The Conspiracy of Silence of the Nigerian Anti-Terrorism Laws," *African Human Rights Law Journal* (2016): 388.

[7] Temitope B. Oriola, "'Unwilling Cocoons': Boko Haram's War Against Women," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 2 (2017): 105-107.
Nadia Al-Dayel, Andrew Mumford, "ISIS and Their Use of Slavery," *ICCT*, January 27, 2020, https://icct.nl/publication/isis-and-their-use-of-slavery/.

[8] Aisha Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women': Explaining Jihadist Norm Change," *International Security* 44, no.1 (2019): 80-92.

[9] Malik, "Trafficking Terror," 17-21.

Despite its prevalence, sexualized violence by terrorists remains a silent struggle. CRSV is usually associated with gender and, therefore, falls into the same trap as many other gendered issues in which violence against women is disregarded as something ordinary.[10] Recognizing the depth and variety of terrorism and CRSV is, thus, another critical step in combatting gender-blindness in IR and international security. Terms used to describe and explain 'sexual terror,' however, have been utilized in a conflated manner.[11] The academic discourse has lumped the most central concepts of CRSV, sexualized violence as "a tactic of terrorism," and rape as a strategy, or "weapon of war," together, and distinct lines of explanation have been blurred. While all approaches attempt to clarify acts of sexualized violence, the interpretation of the source, the act, and the motivation differ. Conflating approaches to researching the use of sexual violence by terrorists exacerbate ambiguity about the issue and lead to generalizations and false assumptions. Therefore, it is necessary to first disentangle these concepts to avoid further confusion about previously applied terms and approaches.

The UN Security Council defines CRSV as "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other forms of sexualized violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys (…) linked directly or indirectly (…) to a conflict."[12] This comprehensive definition of CRSV is among the most used and coincides with the Rome Statute's interpretation that criminalizes these acts as crimes against humanity.[13] Despite its tremendous value for the persecution of perpetrators, the definition of CRSV falls short of providing explanations for and assessing the implications of the crimes committed. However, due to its thorough nature, the definition of CRSV will be continued to be used in the paper.

Oriola, "'Unwilling Cocoons'," 112.

[10] Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Women's September 11th: Rethinking the International Law of Conflict," *Harvard International Law Journal* 47, no.1 (2006): 3-9.
Nanna Lord-Mallam, Adejoh Sunday, "Terrorism and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Africa," *Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affair* 6, no.1 (2018): 86.

[11] See, for example: Ibid, 76-88; UNSG, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Reports of the United Nations Secretary-General," *United Nations*, July 27, 2020, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf.

[12] UNSC, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," 1.

[13] ICC, "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," July 17, 1998, 4, https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/add16852-aee9-4757-abe7-9cdc7cf02886/283503/romestatuteng1.pdf.

Attempting to fill the explanatory gap of sexualized violence, the "rape as a weapon of war" or "strategic rape" framework describes sexualized violence as an inevitable byproduct of warfare serving the strategic purpose of humiliating and terrifying the opponent into surrender.[14] The idea that wartime rape is perpetrated as a tactic by individual soldiers to fulfill larger strategic objectives has become the most influential explanation for mass rape during conflicts. Especially the use of sexualized violence for ethnic cleansing purposes, also referred to as "genocidal rape" during the civil wars in Rwanda and Bosnia, has given rise to the theory that has been heavily criticized since.[15] The trivialization of sexualized violence as an inevitable consequence of armed conflict has not only pushed the issue from a security concern to a "women's issue" but has also failed to acknowledge that there is no singular experience of sexualized violence.[16] Furthermore, declaring the inevitable nature of sexualized violence makes the atrocities committed an excusable action outside of the power of the individual actor and further exacerbates the impunity of perpetrators of CRSV.

Popularized by UN Resolutions 2242 and 2331, sexualized violence as a "tactic of terrorism" has amended the predominant rape as "a weapon of war" narrative. It argues that the use of CRSV by terrorist organizations is not coincidental but central to advancing their objectives.[17] Due to the proximity of the concept to the "strategic rape" framework, the points of critique, such as oversimplification, persist. Moreover, the terms "strategic" and "tactical" have been used to describe the frequency of violence, conflating repetition with the purposeful execution of sexualized violence.[18] In many cases where CRSV is claimed

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[14] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 31-38.

[15] Jonathan Gottschall, "Explaining Wartime Rape," *Journal of Sex Research* 41, no.2 (2004): 131-133.

[16] Aisling Swaine, "Beyond Strategic Rape and Between the Public and Private: Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict," *Human Rights Quarterly* 37, no.3 (2015): 759-761.
Kerry F. Crawford, *Wartime Sexual Violence: From Silence to Condemnation of a Weapon of War* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 27-29.

[17] Lauren Aarons, "From Weapon of War to Tactic of Terrorism – Dangerous New Ground in the Fight Against Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking," *Journal of Human Trafficking, Enslavement and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence no*. 2 (2020): 166-169.

[18] Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Conflict-related Sexual Violence and the Policy Implications of Recent Research," *International Review of the Red Cross* 96 (2014): 470.

to be a tactic, the conditions, social mechanisms, and broader implications contributing to committing sexualized violence are overlooked.[19]

Furthermore, terrorism studies to this day are entrapped by the lack of a universally agreed-on definition. The ever-changing meaning of the concept facilitated by its eventful history and subjective application led to various definitions by states, institutions, scholars, and other agents. In *Inside Terrorism,* Hoffman contrasted and criticized these various definition attempts, however, identifying key components of terrorism.[20] This thesis will, therefore, utilize Hoffman's characterization of terrorism as

> "ineluctably political in aims and motives; violent – or, equally important, threatens violence; designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; conducted either by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure […] or by individuals or a small collection of individuals directly influenced, motivated, or inspired by the ideological aims or example of some existent terrorist movement and/or its leaders; and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity."[21]

When pointing out the differences in the concepts of CRSV, rape as a "weapon of war," strategy, or "tactic of terrorism," it becomes clear that these various attempts explain sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorist actors. Like terrorism, there is no single, static, or isolated experience of sexualized violence.[22] However, the conflation of the concepts attempting to explain gendered violence obscures the peculiarities of the approaches, essentially facilitating oversimplification. The contested nature of terrorism exacerbates this. The existing concepts, moreover, seem inadequate to account for the variation of CRSV, its driving forces, and its long-term implications. This thesis is, therefore, looking for an alternative approach to explain sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorist actors.

The 'practice turn' in International Relations (IR) offers an alternative approach to the existing inadequate explanations for sexualized violence. Practice theory (PT) gained momentum in the social sciences in the early 2000s. It changed the focus from static

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[19] Ibid, 470.
[20] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 1-34.
[21] Ibid, 40.
[22] Swaine, "Beyond Strategic Rape," 785.

theorizing to the dynamic everyday enactment of theory ("doing and saying") as reoccurring practices. Despite the acknowledgment that everyday practices have been part of theorizing for a long time, the shifted focus has since been described as a 'practice turn' that also spilled over to the field of IR, where it fell onto fertile ground. The constructivist movement had argued for more attention to social construction, and the constant change IR has been subjected to since the end of the Cold War.[23] Born out of this school of thought, PT criticized the dichotomy in which international politics and agency are understood and argued for transcending the traditional levels of analysis.[24] With the existing explanations failing to grasp the dynamics and embeddedness of sexualized violence in their social context, PT offers the opportunity for another turn in understanding sexualized violence by terrorist perpetrators. The thesis, therefore, aims to investigate how the application of PT helps uncover patterns in the perpetration of sexualized violence by Islamist terrorist organizations using the cases of Boko Haram's (BH) targeting of Christian students after 2013 and the Islamic State's (IS) attack on the Yezidis beginning in 2014.

Firstly, the thesis will examine the focus of the current debates on explanations for terrorists' resorting to sexualized violence. Determining an overt focus on the instrumentality of sexualized violence, this paper will argue for approaching CRSV by terrorist groups as a practice. To illustrate a 'practice turn' in understanding sexualized violence, the approach will be applied to two cases of terrorist perpetrators of sexualized violence which the UN identified among the most ferocious perpetrators – the IS and BH. Lastly, by contrasting the two cases of sexualized violence as a practice, this thesis aims to investigate patterns of sexualized violence perpetrated by the two Islamist terrorist organizations.

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[23] Sarina Theys, "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *E-International Relations*, February 23, 2018, https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/#:~:text=Constructivism%E2%80%99s%20arrival%20in%20IR%20is%20often%20associated%20with,as%20realism%20and%20liberalism%20failed%20to%20account%20for..

[24] Christian Bueger, Frank Gadinger, *International Practice Theory: New Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 2-14.

Emanuel Adler, Vincent Pouliot, "International Practices," *International Theory* 3, no.1 (2011): 1-4.

2. <u>**Literature Review**</u>

In the debates surrounding CRSV, sexualized violence is usually understood as a weapon, tool, strategy, or tactic. Whether perpetrated to fulfill individual lust or as an orchestrated strategy for a specific purpose, its instrumentality remains at the core of the explanations for terrorist choice to perpetrate sexualized violence. This becomes evident in both major schools of thought in the debate attempting to explain sexualized violence by insurgents or terrorist organizations – opportunism and strategic or tactical reasoning.

Explaining sexualized violence with opportunism is closely linked to state collapse, the impunity that goes with it, a loss of control over armed forces, or a lack of social constraints. Cohen claimed that the frequency of rape perpetrated by insurgents is closely associated with the magnitude of state failure. She furthermore stated that the absence of law enforcement in collapsing states generates opportunities explained by a sense of impunity among perpetrators.[25] Related to both arguments of state collapse and impunity, Butler, Gluch, and Mitchell argued that women are more vulnerable to sexualized violence when there is an absence of accountability for elected officials. States with inadequate monitoring mechanisms, thus, tend to lack control over their security forces enabling individual agents to engage in sexualized violence.[26] This argument is further supported by Elisabeth Jean Wood, who investigated the relative absence of sexualized violence in some groups. She concluded that armed groups that maintain a strict regiment over their members and punish perpetrators of sexualized violence are less likely to be involved in CRSV.[27] Similarly, Baaz and Stern suggested that indiscipline and the breakdown of the commanders' chain of control within insurgent groups can lead to sexualized violence. However, they also noted that the absence of social constraints promotes opportunistic sexualized violence.[28] Wood further argues that these breakdowns of social mechanisms are

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[25] Dara Kay Cohen, "Explaining Rape during Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980-2009)," *American Political Science Review* 107, no.3 (2013): 470-476.

[26] Christopher K. Butler, Tali Gluch, Neil J. Mitchell, "Security Forces and Sexual Violence: A Cross-National Analysis of a Principal-Agent Argument," *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no.6 (2007): 669-680.

[27] Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?," *Politics & Society* 37, no.1 (2009): 152-153.

[28] Maria Eriksson Baaz, Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2013), 5-19.

usually associated with conflicts or displacement, allowing or even incentivizing individual actors to engage in sexual aggression without fearing social exclusion.[29]

The second major school of thought emphasizes the strategic and tactical component of sexualized violence for the perpetrators and sexualized violence as a choice. The debate is intrinsically influenced by the prevalent lack of distinction between the concepts of strategy and tactics and their classification. This issue has been brought forward in prior debates on the effectiveness of terrorism by Freedman, who also pointed out this weakness in the academic discourse.[30] Attempting to divide this second stream of thought would, thus, create superficial boundaries that do not always exist in the literature.

In 1975, as one of the first academics, Susan Brownmiller theorized that wartime rape should be considered inevitable due to the overarching strategic purpose of rape committed by soldiers. She proposed that raped women's bodies are territorial battlegrounds of warfare aiming to humiliate and weaken the men supposed to protect them.[31] Drawing upon Brownmiller's findings on wartime rape, several other authors restated the strategic nature of CRSV to explain the contemporary issue of terrorist perpetrators of sexualized violence. Kaufman and Williams, who share Brownmiller's view on the strategic humiliation of communities through sexualized violence, warned that "sexual violence can be a central instrument of terror" through the heavy symbolism that the act carries.[32] Dahham and Mackenzie also refer to gendered violence as a "tool" or "weapon" to intimidate and destroy the enemy society. While Dahham attributes this to breaking social-cultural and religious taboos surrounding sexuality, Mackenzie describes it as creating disorder through violating legal and patriarchal norms.[33] Furthermore, Attah noted that terrorists, such as BH, are aware of the effectiveness of sexualized violence "as a weapon of

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[29] Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Variation in Sexual Violence during War," *Politics & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 321-323.

[30] Lawrence Freedman, "Terrorism as a Strategy," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007): 336.

[31] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will,* 17-38.

[32] Joyce P. Kaufman, Kristen P. Williams, *Women and War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 38-40.

[33] Zainab Waheed Dahham, "Responsibility of Armed Groups for Sexual Violence Against Women During Internal Armed Conflicts: The Case of Iraq," *IAFOR*, 2017, https://iafor.org/journal/iafor-journal-of-the-social-sciences/volume-2-issue-1/article-2/.
Megan Mackenzie, "Securitizing Sex? Towards a Theory of the Utility of Wartime Sexual Violence," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, no.2 (2010): 202-203.

terror."[34] Knowing that there will be no legal repercussions due to juridical loopholes makes sexualized violence a cheap but effective method.[35] CRSV can also be used to control the population and deter the victims from resistance and other actors from interfering, as claimed by Aubert. In her study of the IS' use of sexualized violence against the Yezidis, she suggested that CRSV is a strategic choice of terror rather than a result of individual lust.[36]

Scholars, furthermore, argue that the CRSV of terrorist actors is a result of past and ongoing socialization within patriarchal structures and a gendered legacy of warfare. In these conditions, CRSV is understood as an instrument and an opportunity to assert misogynist dominance over victims. Therefore, the explanation of socialization cannot be concludingly detached from the opportunism argument.

Researching jihadists' normative change regarding sexualized violence, Ahmad found that groups like Al Qaeda and the IS continuously refer to the sexualized violence committed in Abu Ghraib prison as justification.[37] Ahram explained this phenomenon as caused by the inherent embeddedness of sexualized violence in the state-building legacy of the Middle East. He argued that the sexualized violence perpetrated by the Ba'athist regimes in Iraq and Syria had normalized this tactic to express domination over opposition groups. Terrorists growing up in this climate have, thus, internalized the use of sexualized violence as an acceptable political tool of oppression.[38] Moreover, as Kenny and Malik claimed, gender-based violence incentivizes the new recruits' mobilization. The promise of access to sex slaves and wives motivates "economically marginalized men seeking status [and] power" to join terrorist groups such as the IS.[39] Asal and Nagel asserted that even in the cases of forced recruitment into insurgent groups, sexualized violence serves as a galvanizing socialization measure. Perpetrating sexualized violence in a group setting becomes a display of masculinity, increasing mutual respect and creating ties.[40] This finding is also supported by

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[34] Attah, "Boko Haram and Sexual Terrorism," 388.

[35] Ibid, 388.

[36] Beatrice Aubert, "ISIS' Use of Sexual Violence as a Strategy of Terrorism in Iraq," *E-International Relations*, July 27, 2021, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/07/27/isis-use-of-sexual-violence-as-a-strategy-of-terrorism-in-iraq/.

[37] Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 112.

[38] Ariel I. Ahram, "Sexual Violence, Competitive State Building and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *Journal of Interventions and Statebuilding* 13, no.2 (2019): 185-188.

[39] Kenny, Malik, "Trafficking Terror and Sexual Violence," 48.

[40] Victor Asal, Robert U. Nagel, "Control over Bodies and Territories: Insurgent Territorial Control and Sexual Violence," *Security Studies* 30, no.1 (2021): 142-145.

Cohen, who declared that combatant socialization is the best explanation for CRSV. Using evidence from the Sierra Leone Civil War, Cohen claims that gang rape was utilized to generate internal cohesion as new recruits joined the group.[41]

According to Kaya, the IS' use of CRSV should be understood as an "extreme form of pre-existing patriarchal practices" that merely continues everyday gendered violence.[42] Terrorist organizations exploit taboos around sexuality to destroy the social fabric of minority communities.[43] Buba refers to this as the "social murder" of rape victims since, in many communities, women's value continues to be closely tied to their virginity. Therefore, becoming a victim of sexualized violence results in stigmatization and social exclusion.[44] Abreau claims that this is rooted in Muslim cultural norms prioritizing the chastity of women and its protection. Controlling a women's uterus, thus, becomes synonymous with dominating territory, making it a strategy to effectively humiliate the men the women are associated with through sexualized violence.[45] Sjoberg and Peet also defend the argument of symbolic territory control through rape. They believe that embedded in the inherent masculinity of warfare, sexualized violence serves as a tactic to "attack (…) the property and pride of male/masculine enemies." However, Sjoberg and Peet also acknowledge that rape is not simply a "weapon of war" like tanks and bombs but also a way to understand the underlying gendered relations in warfare.[46]

The focus of the debates on the instrumentality of the act places sexualized violence in the means-end framework found in mainstream IR, which stresses the rationality and self-interest of the actors in their inherent pursuit of power. Regardless of whether sexualized violence is used to satisfy individual lust in opportunistic actions or becomes part of an overarching strategy or tactic, it remains understood as a method to achieve and maintain

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[41] Cohen, "Explaining Rape during Civil War," 463-475.

[42] Zeynep Kaya, "Iraq's Yazidis and ISIS: The Causes and Consequences of Sexual Violence in Conflict," *LSE Middle East Centre Report*, November 2019, 12, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102617/.

[43] Ibid, 11-12.

[44] Imrana A. Buba, "Terrorism and Rape in Nigeria: A Cry For Justice," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 4, no.11 (2015): 8-9.

[45] Veronica C. Abreau, "Women's Bodies as Battlefields in the Former Yugoslavia: An Argument for the Prosecution of Sexual Terrorism as Genocide and for the Recognition of Genocidal Sexual Terrorism as a Violation of Jus Cogens under International Law," *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law* 6, no. 1 (2005): 2-6.

[46] Laura Sjoberg, Jessica Peet, "A(nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no.2 (2011): 166-177.

power structures. This understanding, however, neglects and disperses other elements of CRSV unrelated to the power dimension.[47] Instead of understanding it as a result of human interaction and social construction, sexualized violence is reduced to the simplified implications of the act itself. Moreover, equating sexualized violence with a weapon or tactic, such as the choice to fire a bullet, takes away from human suffering. It objectifies women's bodily integrity and diminishes it to something being conquered or harmed rather than taking the long-term physical and psychological implications to the victims and their communities into account. There is, therefore, a need to find modes of explanation that move beyond the strategical purpose and instrumentality of sexualized violence to avoid oversimplification and the promotion of generalized assumptions.

3. **Practice Theory**

Understanding sexualized violence as a practice allows us to move beyond the instrumentality-centric approach to examine sexualized violence practice by terrorist actors. Practice theory (PT) in IR understands world politics "as structured by practices, which give meaning to international action, make possible strategic interaction, and are reproduced, changed, and reinforced by international action and interaction."[48] Consisting of performances, patterns, competence, background knowledge, and discursive elements, practices carry a particular social meaning understood, structured, and reiterated by the members of a "community of practice." *Performances* are generally conceived as the process of doing something. These performances must be reiterated regularly and exhibit *patterned* socially organized meanings to count as practice. The actors carrying out the practice must be *competent,* meaning that the performance has to be interpreted similarly and accepted through social recognition by an audience. Furthermore, "practice rests on *background knowledge*, which it embodies, enacts, and reifies all at once."[49] This could be, for example, through the knowledge of *discourse* or social realities. Discourse plays a particular role in

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[47] Paul Kirby, "How is Rape a Weapon of War? Feminist International Relations, Modes of Critical Explanation and the Study of Wartime Sexual Violence," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no.4 (2013): 807-808.
[48] Adler, Pouliot, "International Practices," 1.
[49] Ibid, 7.

giving meaning to practices and explaining actions and behavior that would otherwise be meaningless and arbitrary.[50]

Despite its applicability to many actions in the international political sphere, PT has rarely been used to explain and analyze sexualized violence.[51] However, PT's focus on the social and discursive construction of sexualized violence and its implications as a patterned action can help move beyond the instrumentality and oversimplification of sexualized violence by terrorist perpetrators. Sexualized violence in conflict is an inherently gendered issue caused and recreated through the social construction of femininity and masculinity. Its prevalence and reoccurrence throughout different eras, conflicts, and by different actors have made CRSV an everyday action. Not only is its enactment socially and culturally meaningful for the victims, perpetrators, and outside audience, but it has also become part of discourse through, for example, propaganda or official statements. It is, hence, rather apparent to consider sexualized violence as a practice as it can account for the gendered context in which sexualized violence is perpetrated.[52] Therefore, this thesis aims to offer an alternative explanation to the instrumentality approach by using PT to investigate patterns of sexualized violence perpetrated by Islamist terrorist organizations using the cases of BH and the IS.

4. **Methodology**

This thesis will use PT to examine the practice of sexualized violence by two Islamist terror organizations – the IS in Syria and Iraq and BH in Nigeria. They have been chosen for this research due to their overlapping variables in ideology and religion, which are associated with establishing these groups as a 'community of practice.' These organizations have continuously been identified and examined as terrorist perpetrators of sexualized violence, ensuring a profound base of existing research. They are similar in their fundamentalist ideology and operate in geographic locations marked by Islamic belief. The groups, however,

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[50] Ibid, 1-16.

[51] Notable exceptions: Laura Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Rape as a Practice of War: Toward a Typology of Political Violence," *Politics & Society* 46, no. 4 (2018): 513-537.

[52] Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists,* 151-156.

both perform in their respective complex social environment, potentially influencing the interpretation and enactment of 'shared practices.' According to the theory, these factors need to be considered as the practice's upbringing, social and cultural context, and (expected) consequences have an impact.

The first section will test the applicability of PT to the two cases. Adler and Pouliot, who have been at the forefront of the 'practice turn' in IR, have offered the most comprehensive approach to understanding practices in an international context. The thesis will, thus, utilize their outlined elements of a practice – performance, pattern, competence, background knowledge, and discourse – to determine whether the IS' and BH's use of sexualized violence amounts to a practice. A *performance* will be defined as a "process of doing something" and entails actions related to sexualized violence, including but not limited to rape, sexual assault, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy. The performances will then be analyzed for iterated behavior and meaning patterns. As patterns do not exist without performances, these two points will be combined in the analysis of the case studies. *Patterns* could, for example, be the repeated targeting of specific socio-religious or ethnic groups through common performances of sexualized violence and the mentioning of these practices in discourse. In addition, competent actions need to be recognized as meaningful and understood similarly by an audience to count. Therefore, discursive material produced by internal or external audiences will be utilized to verify the performance's impact and underlying meaning and symbolism. Furthermore, this discursive meaning of the performance is closely related to the background knowledge of the agent, victim, and audience.[53] Since socio-cultural knowledge is not a singular experience that can be assumed for every group member, background knowledge will be analyzed through sources of the relationship between perpetrator and victim preceding the acts of sexualized violence. Primary discursive material will subsequently be used to substantiate the relevance of their patterned performance and intra-group recognition of these publications.

The information needed to verify the actions as socially meaningful practices will be drawn partially from secondary sources researching the groups and their discourses and from primary sources published during the assembling of evidence of the perpetration of sexualized violence commencing in 2014 for the IS and 2013 for BH, such as propaganda or

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[53] Adler, Pouliot, "International Practices," 6-7.

official statements published by the terror organizations themselves. However, since primary sources usually only present a limited insight that the terrorist groups have chosen, it remains paramount to critically assess and verify them with external sources. They are, nonetheless, a valuable resource for analyzing the discursive structures around the use of sexualized violence.

In the second section of the thesis, the findings of the case studies on the IS and BH will be compared and contrasted according to PT's elements of background knowledge, patterned performance, and competence, including discursive material. Comparing the analyses reveals similarities and differences between the cases while also establishing common patterns followed by these two terrorist perpetrators of sexualized violence. This approach makes it possible to paint a more holistic picture of systematic sexualized violence and to show connections between the actors' methodic choices, discourse structure, and the impact of their actions. The results will, moreover, be used to substantiate the feasibility of adopting practice-based explanations of sexualized violence.

It is imperative to understand that defining the acts of sexualized violence as a practice does not take away from the agency of the perpetrators involved. The choice to commit these acts of brutality is influenced by practices but not determined by them. Meaning that agency and responsibility are not detached from the perpetrator through the explanation of their conduct as practice. PT is, therefore, not used to excuse or minimize the atrocious acts of sexualized violence but rather to identify patterns to help understand the construction of the issue.

5. **Section I: Case Studies**

5.1. **Boko Haram**

Boko Haram (BH) is a Sunni Salafi terrorist organization and insurgency that arose in Northeast Nigeria as a radical movement under preacher Mohammed Yusuf. The movement was founded in 2002 and turned violent in 2009 when BH members began clashing with Nigerian security forces, subsequently leading to the killing of Yusuf. Under Yusuf's successor

Abubaker Shekau, BH escalated its extremist attacks against *kufr* (non-believer) government forces and civilians such as Christians or moderate Muslims utilizing bombs, armed raids, and abductions.[54] From 2013 on, BH's use of violence became increasingly gendered. Members began targeting Christian women and girls to abduct and sell into forced marriage with fellow fighters, in which more sexualized violence ensued. This practice gained notoriety in April 2014 when the jihadists succeeded in kidnapping 276 female students from the school dormitories in Chibok, sparking international outrage.[55] In 2016, the organization split into two factions due to internal controversy on affiliation with the IS – BH under Shekau and the Islamic State-West Africa Province (ISWAP).[56] However, the BH insurgency remains active under its current leader Bakura Moda who took over Shekau's position after his death in June 2021.[57]

5.1.1. Background Knowledge

BH's targeting of Christians is deeply rooted in the history of ethno-religious conflict within Nigeria. Under British colonial control, the predominantly Muslim North of the country was allowed to keep its traditional Islamic leadership, while the Christian South was under the direct control of the British authorities. The colonial administration, thus, exacerbated the political competition and power struggle during the state formation after Nigeria's independence in 1960. Moreover, the concurrent rise of identity politics intermeddling tribal and religious affiliation sufficed to lay the grounds for the inter-religious violence still present today.[58]

When Yusuf founded BH in the early 2000s, the conflict began spiraling, with rival Christian and Muslim gangs engaging in retaliatory church and mosque burnings, riots, and

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[54] Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 103-108.

[55] Ibid, 106-108.

[56] Pablo Guzman Lizardo, "The Complex Relationship Between Nigeria, Boko Haram, and ISWAP," *McGill Journal of Political Studies*, April 3, 2020, https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2020/04/03/the-complex-relationship-between-nigeria-boko-haram-and-iswap/.

[57] Henry Ojelu, "Boko Haram Confirms Shekau's Death," *Vanguard*, June 18, 2021, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/boko-haram-confirms-shekaus-death/.

[58] Benjamin S. Eveslage, "Clarifying Boko Haram's Transnational Intentions, Using Content Analysis of Public Statements in 2012," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no.5 (2013): 48-49.

village raids, claiming hundreds of lives. Since the central government failed to stop the violence, BH began engaging in violent confrontations with government forces on the grounds of protecting Muslims. In 2009 the government captured and executed Yusuf, causing the further radicalization of the jihadist movement blaming all "unbelievers" for the death of Yusuf.[59] When in 2010, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, became Nigeria's president, BH's jihadist ambitions intensified. Perceiving themselves as victims of Christian oppression, BH began attacking churches and bombed Christmas Eve services, to which the Nigerian government responded with even more repression.[60]

The group's rhetoric reflected BH's hostile stance towards Christians. Announcing intense attacks on those choosing to remain, a BH spokesperson warned all Christians to leave the North of Nigeria within three days in early 2012.[61] In a video published around the same time, Shekau claimed, "we hardly touch anybody except security personnel and Christians," accusing that "Christians cheated and killed us to the extent of eating our flesh like cannibals."[62] The spread of these messages not only consolidated inter-religious hatred but also legitimized the future actions of BH members against adherents of Christianity.

Similarly, cultural and gender norms predominant in Nigeria become visible in BH's ideological practices. Unequal treatment and gender-based abuse are deeply entrenched in the social realities in Nigeria and even more in the North.[63] Female genital mutilation, widowhood practices, and forced marriage are still widespread and ingrained in Nigerian traditions.[64] Embedded in this socio-cultural climate surrounding gender and sexuality, BH's radical vision of the role of women serves as a continuation of pre-existing ideas.[65] In Sunni Salafism, womanhood is perceived as inferior to men and equaled with subjugation and

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[59] Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 103-105.

[60] Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 152-156.

[61] Tim Lister, "Islamist Militants Warn Christians to Leave North Within 3 Days," *CNN*, January 2, 2012, https://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/02/world/africa/nigeria-sectarian-divisions/index.html.

[62] Sahara Reporters, "Video: Boko Haram leader 'Imam Abubaker Shekau' Message to President Jonathan," January 12, 2012, https://saharareporters.com/2012/01/12/video-boko-haram-leader-imam-abubakar-shekau-message-president-jonathan.

[63] Titilope F. Ajayi, "Women, Internal Displacement and the Boko Haram Conflict: Broadening the Debate," *African Security* 13, no.2 (2020): 182.

[64] Jacob Zenn, Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no.1 (2014): 47.

[65] Ajayi, "Women, Internal Displacement and the Boko Haram Conflict," 182.

victimhood. Female sexuality is deemed dangerous to the fortitude of Muslims and, hence, needs to be broken or restrained to avert its peril.[66] BH, furthermore, believes that girls and young women are not supposed to be educated after a certain age. In a 2014 video, Shekau demanded that, like the prophet's wife, Aisha, girls past nine should be married rather than in school. School visits and especially Western education are, thus, seen as sinful and "a violation of their role as women."[67]

5.1.2. Patterned Performance

This background knowledge of BH members has been reflected in the continuous performances of sexualized violence since 2013. Reacting to government forces detaining BH-affiliated women in early 2012, group members began carrying out multiple abduction campaigns taking young girls and women hostage to their hideouts in nearby forests.[68] Especially students and Christians seemed to be targeted by fighters. Women and girls were subsequently forced to convert and marry BH members, after which the marriage was consummated against their will. However, in many cases, acts of rape even took place before the wedding ceremony. Many accounts of rape resulted in involuntary pregnancy.[69]

The first case of BH abducting multiple women occurred in May 2013, when around 200 fighters kidnapped 12 Christian women from police barracks while raiding Bama, a town in Northeast Nigeria.[70] Eyewitnesses reported that the attack seemed well-planned infiltrating nearby towns to build a presence and bringing armored vehicles and motorcycles adapting to the inaccessibility of the terrain.[71]

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[66] Atta Barkindo, Benjamin T. Gudaku, Caroline K. Wesley, "Our Bodies, Their Battle Ground: Boko Haram and Gender Based Violence Against Christian Women and Children in North-East Nigeria Since 1999," *NPVRN Working Paper* 1 (November 2013): 9-16.
[67] Mia Bloom, Hilary Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram's Terror," *Prism* 6, no.1 (2016): 114-115.
[68] Zenn, Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," 47-48.
[69] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp': Boko Haram Violence Against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria," October 2014, 16-35, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/27/those-terrible-weeks-their-camp/boko-haram-violence-against-women-and-girls.
[70] Ibid, 19.
[71] BBC, "Boko Haram Timeline: From Preachers to Slave Raiders," May 15, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22538888.

However, 2014 marked a new high of gendered violence by BH. In February, they kidnapped 20 female college students from Kondunga. Two months later, on April 14, 2014, BH abducted 276 predominantly Christian girls from their dormitories at the Chibok Secondary School – the attack they became known for internationally. BH members assembled the women to either load them onto vehicles or force them to walk to their nearby Sambisa forest camp. Most Chibok students were then forcefully converted to Islam and married off to BH fighters, often resulting in pregnancy.[72] Despite numerous attempts to free the young women and their children, over 100 are still missing.[73]

Following the Chibok incident, the number of BH's abductions of women and girls increased, seemingly motivated by the attention generated through a single attack. In the following weeks, BH started an abduction campaign seizing over 100 women and children.[74] In October 2014, they kidnapped 60 more women from two Northeastern towns. Elders of the communities later claimed they took them explicitly to marry them off, even leaving behind a bride price.[75] In February 2018, BH again succeeded in a large-scale attack abducting 110 girls from a Dapchi school. Most girls were released several weeks later, reasoned with their Muslim beliefs. However, the only Christian girl Leah Sharibu refused to convert and remains in captivity to this day.[76]

Leah Sharibu is not the sole case of discriminate targeting of Christians by BH. In another testimony of a woman sexually abused by BH members in August 2013, she describes the systematic separation of Christian and Muslim girls during these raids. While Muslim girls were released, Christian women were raped and then taken away.[77] This practice of singling out Christian women and girls for sexual abuse and abduction has also been testified by several other witnesses claiming that they were usually forced to convert

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[72] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 21-35.
[73] #BringBackOurGirls, "#BringBackOurGirls Welcomes Return of 3 #Chibok Girls," August 16, 2021, https://bringbackourgirls.ng/bringbackourgirls-welcomes-return-of-3-chibokgirls/.
[74] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 23-25.
[75] David Smith, "Sixty More Women and Girls Reported Kidnapped in Nigeria," *The Guardian*, October 23, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/23/boko-haram-abductions-bus-station-blast-truce-nigeria.
[76] BBC, "Nigeria Dapchi Abductions: Schoolgirls Finally Home," March 25, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43535872.
Leah Foundation, "Who is Leah Sharibu?," accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.leah-foundation.org/leah-s-story.
[77] Barkindo, Gudaku, Wesley, "Our Bodies, Their Battle Ground," 25.

and marry fighters afterward.[78] One girl reported that the BH commander "made us recite some words in Arabic after him, handed us new veils, and declared we were now married."[79] Following these ceremonies, many women endured repeated rape and sexualized violence through their "husbands."[80] As a result of the ongoing abuse, many freed women and girls return home involuntarily pregnant, carrying their abusers' children.[81]

5.1.3. Competence

These acts of abduction and sexualized violence have usually been accompanied by videos of BH's then-leader, Shekau. Before their abduction campaign began, Shekau warned the Nigerian government in early 2012 of the wide-ranging consequences the detention of the wives and children of multiple BH commanders would have. In an initial video, Shekau illustrated their wish for revenge against the government he equaled with Christians, declaring that "without provocation, you slaughtered us and took our wives and humiliated us."[82] Subsequent publications on YouTube further manifested their grievances accusing the government of conducting acts of sexualized violence against the detained women. In a September 2012 video, Shekau stated:

> "Right now as I talk this week, there are up to seven women that are held captive. No one knows where they are and no one knows what is being done to them. You Muslims know what the nonbelievers who are against Allah do to women… I swear by God… Some are being stripped naked, another is used as a sex toy."[83]

Ending the video, Shekau warned, "since you are now holding our women, just wait and see what will happen to your own women… to your own wives according to Sharia

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[78] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 27-32.
[79] Ibid, 32.
[80] Amnesty International, "'Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter and Kill': Boko Haram's Reign of Terror in North-East Africa," April 14, 2015, 62-64, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1360/2015/en/.
[81] UNFPA, "Hundreds Freed From Boko Haram Require Medical Care, Counselling," May 6, 2015, https://www.unfpa.org/news/hundreds-freed-boko-haram-require-medical-care-counselling.
[82] Sahara Reporters, "Video: Boko Haram leader 'Imam Abubaker Shekau'."
[83] Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 105.

law."[84] This video sent a clear message to not only members of BH but also the government and civilians that acts inspired by those of the government security forces are permitted and will eventually follow suit.

After this initial warning, BH usually published YouTube videos to react to previous kidnappings reiterating this position and threatening further action if their wives and children were not released. For example, within a week after the Bama abduction in May 2013, BH published a video claiming responsibility for the attacks. There Shekau declares that "no-one in this country will enjoy his women and children" as long as their wives and children are not released.[85] With these statements, he justified the organization's intention as merely a reaction to the perceived injustice done to them and stimulated further attacks in the future.

Shekau's video statements further escalated with the abduction of the Chibok girls in April 2014. Realizing the symbolism and attention-generating potential the attack had, BH published another YouTube video on May 5. Calling the abduction of the predominantly Christian students "a jihad war against Christians and Christianity" and " a war against Western education," Shekau as leader of BH, signaled acquiescence with the chosen targets and the means used.[86] Furthermore, legitimizing their actions with the story of Muhammed enslaving people during the Badr war and marrying his wife Aisha at age nine, Shekau disclosed about the future of the Chibok girls:

> "They should go and marry. I am the one that captured your girls, and I will sell them in
> the market. (…) I am selling the girls like Allah said until we soak the ground of Nigeria
> with [the blood of] infidels and so-called Muslims contradicting Islam."[87]

In this "message to Muslims," Shekau clarified BH's intention behind the abductions being the conversion of the girls to Islam and subsequent sale to their future husbands.[88] In another video published shortly after, this stance is also reiterated by Shekau, directly

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[84] Zenn, Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," 48.
[85] BBC, "Boko Haram Releases Hostage Video," May 13, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22510765.
[86] Katherine Baffour, "Boko Haram Leader Abubaker Shekau's Latest Speech," *Legit*, May 7, 2014, https://www.legit.ng/65903.html.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

addressing female students and asking them to leave schools and return to their homes filling the role BH deems appropriate for them. He again warned that "in Islam, it is allowed to take infidel women as slaves and in due course we will start taking women away and sell in the market."[89] These words did not remain empty threats, which became visible through an uptick in abductions the weeks after. To this day, BH recognizes the powerful symbolism the abduction of the Chibok girls carries. As recent as 2018 a video published claims to show the girls in burqas. They are usually either utilized as a political bargain or as fully veiled model wives who converted to Islam and now live in "their marital homes," showing off the power of the organization's ideology.[90]

While BH's campaign against women and girls remained largely unnoticed in its early stages, the abduction of the Chibok girls sparked international outrage. Within days the #BringBackOurGirls movement trended on social media worldwide. Asking for BH to release the girls and advocating for girls' right to education, prominent activists like Michelle Obama shared the hashtag online.[91] Helping the case of the Chibok girls, gendered violence by Islamist perpetrators or within countries coined by Islam received increased attention around 2014 due to cases of grave assault on female education in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria.[92] Recognizing this dangerous trend, the US and the UK offered to send military aid through drones, intelligence, and air operations, attempting to locate the students in the opaque forest terrain in Northern Nigeria.[93] Furthermore, with the help of

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[89] Naija Gists, "Transcript of Boko Haram New Video: Shekau Threatens Obama & Jonathan," *NaijaGists.com*, May 7, 2014, https://naijagists.com/transcript-of-boko-haram-new-video-shekau-orders-muslims-to-kill-with-knife/.

[90] Aminu Abubaker, "Boko Haram Calls Ceasefire, Talks Claims 'Lies' and Says Abducted Girls Married Off," *GMA News Online*, November 1, 2014, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/world/386202/boko-haram-calls-ceasefire-talks-claims-lies-and-says-abducted-girls-married-off/story/.
Dionne Searcey, "Boko Haram Video Is Said To Show Captured Girls From Chibok," *New York Times*, January 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/15/world/africa/boko-haram-chibok-girls-video.html.

[91] Michelle Obama (@FLOTUS44), "Our Prayers Are With the Missing Nigerian Girls and Their Families," *Twitter*, May 7, 2014, https://twitter.com/FLOTUS44/status/464148654354628608?s=20&t=SDEzt0UOCvLNm_GJr8IgcQ.
Bloom, Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords," 105.

[92] John Campbell, "Western Media and Distortion of Nigeria's Chibok Kidnapping," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 21, 2021, https://www.cfr.org/blog/western-media-and-distortion-nigerias-chibok-kidnapping.

[93] Bloom, Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords," 105-106.

the UN, local businesses, and the African Development Bank, the Nigerian government introduced the Safe School Initiative, proofing schools against further kidnappings to end BH's assaults which deter girls from school.[94]

However, the kidnappings did not only cause outrage but also support for BH. The abduction of the Chibok girls showed the effectiveness of gendered violence in garnering attention and spreading their message to insurgents and terrorists.[95] Just four months later, the IS began its campaign against Mount Sinjar. In their subsequent publication of their magazine Dabiq they referred to BH as a successful example and potential inspiration for enslaving women and girls.[96] They, furthermore, expanded on Shekau's religious justifications for abducting and sexually abusing Yezidis and, thus, acknowledged the competence of Shekau's explanation.[97]

5.1.4. Conclusion

BH's ideology is deeply embedded in historically conditioned inter-religious conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, as well as the organization's misogynist understanding of the role of women. Their continuous targeting of Christian female students following the detainment of affiliated women and their children results from this knowledge. Being brought up in a social climate of misogyny and ethno-religious tensions, thus, impacted BH's choice to perpetrate sexualized violence to unleash hatred and perform punishments – a finding substantiating previous claims on the impact of socialization on terrorist acts.

Katie McQue, "Nigeria Rejected British Offer to Rescue Seized Chibok Schoolgirls," *The Guardian*, March 4, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/04/nigeria-declined-uk-offer-to-rescue-chibok-girls.

[94] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camps," 41.

[95] Bloom, Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Sowrds," 106.

[96] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery: Before the Hour," *Dabiq* 4, October 11, 2014, 15, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2015/02/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-422.pdf.

[97] Islamic State, "Slave Girls or Prostitutes?," *Dabiq* 9, May 21, 2015, 44-45, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2015/05/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-9e280b3.pdf.

Since 2013, BH has shown a pattern of abduction, forced conversion to Islam, subsequent forced marriage with fighters, and sexual abuse associated with this process. The kidnappings increasingly picked up steam after the Chibok abduction in 2014. These attacks were usually accompanied by YouTube videos claiming responsibility, threatening (further) attacks, justifying their actions, or utilizing the abductees' fate to demonstrate power and ideological strength. Recognizing the symbolism and potential to generate international attention through abductions, BH continuously referred to prominent cases ridiculing the victims, the Nigerian government, and international audiences in those videos. Some cases, such as the Chibok abduction, have sparked intense international outrage and media coverage. However, the internationalization of the conflict also stimulated replications by other Islamists who acknowledged the raids as justified actions. Discourses, therefore, played a decisive factor in BH's decision and continuation of perpetrating sexualized violence and cannot be detached from the action itself.

The application of PT on BH illustrated the need for a multi-dimensional analysis of sexualized violence. Rather than attempting to understand the action itself, which tends to push the focus on the instrumentality, the analysis of BH's sexualized violence as a practice benefits from incorporating the knowledge and discourses motivating and reinforcing reiterated actions. Unlike what has been presented in academic debates before, the BH case illuminated that sexualized violence does not represent an inevitable byproduct of conflict but is instead a choice made in the social context in which it is performed.

5.2. Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS), also called Daesh, is a Sunni terrorist organization that, under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, controlled a large territory in Syria and Iraq from 2014 until its demise in 2019. Under his command, members committed extensive violent actions and crimes and often systematically targeted minorities. When attacking these social groups, the IS designated particular methods to execute or punish them for their perceived offenses. Starting with a raid on the Sinjar region in August 2014, the IS exhibited a specific pattern of gendered and sexualized violence diverting from previous actions. From then on, the Yezidi community was extraordinarily harshly and regularly targeted through these forms of

violence, including abduction, sexual slavery, rape, forced marriage, and other forms of abuse.[98] The frequency and brutality of documented cases of sexualized violence in Iraq increased exponentially during this period.[99] After al-Baghdadi's death in 2019, the IS has since lost another leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, in early 2022. However, their leader's deaths and territorial demise have not dismantled the terror network. The IS continues to carry out attacks as an underground insurgency in the Middle East and has inspired multiple violent branches around the globe.[100]

5.2.1. Background Knowledge

Looking at the discourses published by the IS, the persecution of and sexualized violence towards Yezidis are usually justified with two narratives – the "devil-worshipping" religion and the IS' misogynist perception of the right to taking *kufr* women as 'spoils of war' (*sabaya*). To understand the role of the Yezidi women in the eyes of IS fighters, it is, thus, necessary to examine these perceptions from a historical and discursive perspective to determine the background knowledge preceding the attacks.

The Yezidis are a minority traditionally living in the Sinjar region in Iraq.[101] The community of around half a million followers adheres to a religion rooted in Zoroastrianism, which worships the angel Melek Taus, also known as the "Peacock Angel." Due to their religious affiliation, Yezidis have historically been marginalized and targeted as "non-believers" or "devil worshippers." The stories of past persecution campaigns, or *firmans* as the Yezidis call them, are passed on through oral narration. They have, therefore, contributed fundamentally to the identity-building and self-perception of the community.

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[98] Mara Redlich Revkin, Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no.2 (2021): 2-6.

[99] Al-Amal Association, Impunity Watch, PAX, "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Iraq 2003-2018: A Mapping Report," May 2020, 38, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-iraq-2013-2018-mapping-report-enar.

[100] Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Islamic State Has Become a Resilient Insurgency," *Foreign Policy*, February 7, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/07/qurayshi-death-leader-islamic-state-current-strength/.

[101] Aubert, "ISIS' Use of Sexual Violence."

This has led to the community choosing to remain segregated from members of other faiths, fearing more *firmans* to come.[102]

Indeed, the Yezidis had experienced previous acts of systematic violence and discrimination from the Ottomans, under British mandate, and by the Kurds and Iraqi authorities. These persecutions were usually based on and legitimized by the rejection of the Yezidi faith combined with the enforcement of religious and political goals by the rulers at the time. For example, an Ottoman Pasha under Sultan Abdulhamid attempted to force Yezidis to convert to Islam in the 19th century. When the Yezidis refused to give up their religion and assimilate, he punished them by taking the women and forcefully marrying them to Ottoman soldiers.[103]

Therefore, joining the ranks of previous ruling powers, the IS chose to follow the way paved by history, maltreating and sexually exploiting the Yezidi community justified through a religion-based narrative. Just days before the raid on Sinjar, the IS published an article on the acceptable punishment for those who do not accept the Sunni faith. In this article, the IS claims that these actions vindicate "spilling their blood, taking their wealth, and enslaving their women and children."[104] The Yezidis, whom the IS deemed "devil worshippers," "kufr," or "mushrik" (polytheist), had refused to convert to Sunni Islam. Thus, during the build-up of the attack on Mount Sinjar, IS fighters saw it as their duty to enforce Allah's will by killing the men and capturing the women in alliance with these preexisting narratives.[105]

Moreover, the IS has an inherently gendered and misogynist understanding of the role of women. In publications before the raid on Mount Sinjar, the IS seldomly referred to women. If mentioned, they were declared "foolish" or without a voice, thus, implying their subservient role.[106] In 2014, the IS still emphasized the traditional understanding of women's

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[102] Ibid.

Zeynep Kaya, "Sexual Violence, Identity, and Gender," *Conflict, Security & Development* 20, no.5 (2020): 637.

[103] Ibid, 636-640.

[104] Islamic State, "The Flood of the Mubahalah," *Dabiq* 2, July 27, 2014, 26, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2014/07/islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-2e280b3.pdf.

[105] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 15-17.

[106] Islamic State, "The Concept of Imamah," *Dabiq* 1, July 5, 2014, 21-22, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2014/07/islamic-state-22dc481biq-magazine-122.pdf.

roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers.[107] Hence, the Yezidi women abducted by the IS during the weeks of attacks on Sinjar were usually understood along similar lines. However, unlike other women in the IS, they had to serve their "masters" as *sabaya* and were forced to bear more children for the "Caliphate."[108] This understanding combines a misogynistic interpretation of the Yezidi women as human incubators for a new generation of fighters with the depreciation of the Yezidi faith to "devil worshippers" – a narrative ingrained into the fighters' ideological knowledge before the attack of Mount Sinjar.

5.2.2. Patterned Performance

When the IS attacked the Sinjar region in early August 2014, the Yezidis' concerns of another *firman* became a brutal reality. Within a few days, around 5000 Yezidi men were executed. In addition, an estimated 7000 women and girls were abducted after refusing to convert to Sunni Islam.[109] In interviews, multiple Yezidi survivors described that the abduction of the Yezidi women appeared to be preplanned, mentioning that "right away, the fighters separated the men from the women."[110] The women were then forced to enter trucks, buses, or cars to transport the abductees to vacated prisons, municipality buildings, and former schools. There they were herded until sold, gifted to fighters as payments, abused, or killed.[111] Until this day, no IS documents of the planning process before the attack on the Sinjar region were publicized. However, the systematic nature and reoccurring pattern in which the IS fighters abducted the Yezidi girls and women suggests it was likely a well-planned attack instead of coincidental individual cases of kidnapping.[112]

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[107] Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, "ISIS and the Allure of Traditional Gender Roles," *Women & Criminal Justice* (2021): 4-5.
[108] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 15-17.
[109] Aubert, "ISIS' Use of Sexual Violence."
[110] Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape," April 14, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/14/iraq-isis-escapees-describe-systematic-rape#:~:text=Human%20Rights%20Watch%20documented%20a%20system%20of%20organized,Iraqi%20Kurdistan%20need%20psychosocial%20support%20and%20other%20assistance.

After being abducted and brought to prisons or IS bases across Syria and Iraq, most of the women were sold on markets called *souk sabaya*. There they were purchased by fighters or IS affiliates in auctions after being inspected and registered. Prices for which they were sold off depended on age, beauty, number of children, and marital status. In processes survivors of sexual slavery later described as similar to cattle auctions, women and girls were marketed to potential buyers.[113]

In the hands of the IS fighters, Yezidi women and girls had to endure ongoing acts of sexualized violence. While some were forcefully married to fighters who subsequently raped "their wives," others were held captive as slaves who also had to expect accounts of sexualized violence. These acts ranged from sexual assault to gang rape, being beaten, handcuffed, and tormented through electric shocks.[114] If a woman or girl refused to comply with the wishes of their "owner" or resisted the daily reoccurring rape, they were beaten severely or threatened with further sexual torture. Survivors later reported that they were resold multiple times throughout their captivity, where this treatment was repeated.[115] Cruel acts of sexualized violence were, thus, no stand-alone incidents but a repeated pattern of brutality in IS captivity.

5.2.3. Competence

The meaning of these reiterated acts of sexualized violence performed by IS fighters was not only understood in its ranks but also recognized as competent. Shortly after the attacks on the Sinjar region, it became known that the IS had erected a bureaucratic structure commanding and organizing the enslavement of Yezidi women. Two administrative instruments, the "Department of Slaves" and the "Research and Fatwa Department," were entrusted with publishing economic and religious guidelines on and coordinating the slave

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[113] UN Human Rights Council, "'They Came to Destroy': ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis," *United Nations*, June 15, 2016, 12-14, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf.

[114] Global Justice Center, "Daesh's Gender-Based Crimes Against Yazidi Women and Girls Include Genocide," accessed August 14, 2022, 2-3, https://globaljusticecenter.net/files/CounterTerrorismTalkingPoints.4.7.2016.pdf.

[115] UN Human Rights Council, "'They Came to Destroy'," 9-15.

trade.[116] In a pamphlet distributed in October 2014, the "Research and Fatwa Department" officialized sexual slavery. The pamphlet explained that selling *sabaya* is permissible as "they are merely property, which can be disposed of."[117] Answering 27 questions on the Shari'a groundwork of buying, selling, raping, kissing, marrying, and impregnating a *sabaya*, the handout laid a vital foundation for standardizing the sexualized violence against Yezidi women.[118] In November 2014, the "Department of Slaves" disseminated a price list for Yezidi slaves sold on the *souk sabaya* to counter decreasing prices. According to this list, underage girls were most valuable and had to be sold for between USD 135 to USD 180 during auctions.[119] This institutionalization of sexual slavery through administrative organs resulted in similarly patterned experiences of sexual abuse of Yezidi women and girls at the hand of the IS fighters.

Moreover, in the fourth issue of the propaganda magazine Dabiq published two months after the initial attack on the Sinjar region, the assault on the Yezidis was justified by religious sources. Citing Qur'anic verses, the Dabiq article alleges that it had been the IS' duty to "kill the mushrikīn wherever you find them, and capture them, and besiege them, and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush."[120] This means the Yezidis would be killed unless they were willing to convert. The Dabiq article, furthermore, recounts 14th-century Islamic scholar Ibn Rajab who declared:

> "It has been stated that the conquests of the lands of kufr multiply as well as enslavement, and thereby concubines increase in numbers, until the slave women give birth to their masters, this is because the child of the master has the status of the master [meaning he is a free man like his father], and thereby she has given birth to her master from this angle."[121]

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[116] Samar El-Masri, "Prosecuting ISIS for the sexual slavery of the Yezidi Women and Girls," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no.8 (2018): 1052-1053.

[117] Research and Fatwa Department of the Islamic State, "Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves," *MEMRI*, December 3, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20180808091537/https://www.memri.org/jttm/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-female-slaves.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Iraqi News, "ISIS Documents Sets Prices of Christian and Yezidi Slaves," November 3, 2014, http://www.iraqinews.com/features/exclusive-isis-document-sets-prices-christian-yazidi-slaves/.

[120] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 14.

[121] Ibid, 16.

Using Ibn Rajab's interpretation, the article implies that children resulting from the forced pregnancy of a Yezidi "concubine" would not be counted as Yezidis but instead of Sunni "status of the master." Yezidi women would, thus, remain lower in the hierarchy than their offspring, which the IS seemed fit to take part in future "holy wars" against other *kufr*. Despite the use of ideologically codified language, the Dabiq article conveys the validation of the attempt to prevent the continued existence of Yezidi identity by killing male Yezidis and forcing the female Yezidis into pregnancy with the IS fighters' children.[122]

The Yezidi community also understood the threat the genocidal character of the assault on the Sinjar region had for their community's survival. Yezidis were usually expulsed from the community after having sexual contact with non-Yezidis, including non-consensual accounts. However, this stance changed shortly after the IS' assault when the spiritual leader Baba Sheikh stated that all Yezidi men and women would be welcomed back into the community and acknowledged as victims. This groundbreaking change in religious procedure paved the way for the survivors' return to counteract the devastating effects the killing and abduction had on the survival of the Yezidi identity.[123]

Similarly, international audiences were horrified by reports from the Sinjar region acknowledging the devastating effects the IS attack had. Within a few days of the Mount Sinjar crisis, U.S.-President Obama authorized airstrikes to protect the Yezidis from the advancing IS forces. In a public speech, Obama justified his decision with the responsibility to "prevent a potential act of genocide" and the "systematic destruction of the entire Yezidi people."[124] The UN Security Council installed an investigative team that concluded that the IS' assault on the Yezidis constitutes a genocide in which sexualized violence played an exceptional role.[125] Despite the daunting effect the reports of the IS' Sinjar campaign had on the international community, a UN release disclosed rising numbers of fighters joining the IS'

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[122] United Nations, "A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yezidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL," August 2016, 8-18, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIReport12Aug2016_en.pdf.

[123] Kaya, "Iraq's Yazidis and ISIS," 13-18.

[124] Barack Obama, "Statement by the President," *The White House*, August 7, 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/07/statement-president.

[125] Edith M. Lederer, "UN Experts: Islamic State Committed Genocide Against Yazidis," *ABC News*, May 11, 2021, https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/experts-islamic-state-committed-genocide-yazidis-77611638.

ranks to an unprecedented extent after August 2014. Among those fighters were thousands of local Sunni volunteers and up to 15,000 foreign fighters.[126]

5.2.4. Conclusion

Joining a long history of persecution and abuse, the IS' genocidal sexualized violence against the Yezidis is no exception. It presents itself as a recurring pattern of abduction, rape, sexual slavery, sexual torture, and marriage that began in August 2014 with the invasion of the Iraqi Sinjar region. Paired with a hateful narrative depicting the Yezidis as "devil worshippers," the IS resorted to a misogynist understanding of women as sex slaves intended for reproduction. The attacks beginning in August 2014, followed highly organized patterns of abducting women and girls to central collection points while executing the men. The women were later distributed to slave markets where they were auctioned to IS fighters or affiliates who then repeatedly sexually abused them. Official publications and departments set up to supervise the Yezidi slave trade regulated, among other things, the price and the abuse permissible under Shari'a law. IS sources justified and advanced these actions with interpretations of religious sources arguing for a methodical eradication of the Yezidi identity. The brutality and proportions of the IS' actions alarmed the remaining Yezidi community and international actors, which have since declared the attacks on Sinjar a genocide. However, these actions did not deter local and foreign fighters from joining the IS' ranks to an unparalleled extent following the Sinjar campaign.

The IS case proves that not only the performance of sexualized violence itself demonstrates an act of terror that, in the case of the Yezidis, presents itself merely as a continuation of the *firmans*, but also its pattern. The practice of sexualized violence became recurrent enough to trigger an institutionalization within the IS accompanied by discourses of agents IS members considered highly competent. These powerful and very detailed

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[126] Spencer Ackerman, "Foreign Jihadists Flocking to Iraq and Syria on 'Unprecedented Scale'- UN," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/30/foreign-jihadist-iraq-syria-unprecedented-un-isis.
Mohammed Tawfeeq, Chelsea J. Carter, "Officials: ISIS Recruiting on the Rise in Sunni Areas of Iraq," *CNN*, August 11, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/09/world/meast/iraq-isis-recruit/index.html.

discourses moderating the systematic sexual slavery had an enormous impact on the repeated experiences of Yezidis. These institutions and their power within the IS have, nevertheless, not been discussed sufficiently yet in the context of sexualized violence. The analysis of the IS discourses, thus, benefitted from the structural approach suggested by PT, giving not only meaning to the performance but also the instructions and agents who pronounce them.

6. **Section II: Comparison**

Looking at the case studies of IS and BH, it becomes clear that the practice of sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorist organizations is neither singular nor extraordinary. The examined cases fulfill the elements specified by PT of background knowledge, patterned performance, and competence shown and even reinforced through discourse. However, how these requirements were satisfied is reflected in various nuances that do not allow for generalizations about acts of sexualized violence by terrorist perpetrators. Nonetheless, there is a visible continuum in the practice of sexualized violence in terrorism.

6.1. **Background Knowledge**

When looking at the background knowledge, it becomes clear that three common denominators present themselves in the build-up to the acts of sexualized violence – a history of hatred, the spread of defamatory narratives, and a religious patriarchal cultural background.

BH and the Christian population in Nigeria have engaged in retaliatory ethno-religious violence since the early 2000s. However, the history of Christian-Muslim bloodshed goes back to Nigeria's colonial administration.[127] Similarly, despite not having a history of conflict with the Yezidis, the IS continued to follow a path of anti-Yezidi sentiment and persecution

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[127] Eveslage, "Clarifying Boko Haram's Transnational Intentions," 48-49.
Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 103-105.

begun by imperialist rulers' involvement in religious identity politics under the Ottomans, the British, and even Iraqi rule.[128] Thus, BH's and the IS' respective targeting of a distinct social group is not coincidental but rather a product of previous long-term inter-group mistrust and hatred. In both cases, these historical antecedents linked to the in-group background knowledge give clues about the build-up of violence, ultimately unleashing in large-scale attacks of sexualized violence. Background knowledge and the discourses reinforcing the involved actors' knowledge can, therefore, explain why certain groups, such as the Yezidis and Christians, were targeted.

Furthermore, the organizations are similar in creating and spreading defamatory narratives about their victims, both before and during their violent campaigns. These were meant to degrade and objectify the women and girls becoming victims of sexualized violence. In 2012 in the context of rising political tensions, BH's leader Shekau accused Christians of betrayal to incite more violence against the proclaimed "unbelievers."[129] The IS denigrated the Yezidis using pre-existing religiously inclined narratives of "devil worshippers," "kufr," or "mushrik," referring to the Yezidis' refusal to embrace Sunni Islam.[130] These calumniations prevailed before, during, and after their campaign on Sinjar to stir prejudice and justify violence – behavior also observed in other contexts of war and genocide. It becomes evident that the IS and BH appropriated religious rhetoric adjusted to their respective region's context and social climate to forward a negative image of their future targets among their followers and sympathizers.

BH's and the IS' common allegiance to Sunni Salafism is also reflected in their misogynist understanding of the role of women preceding the acts of large-scale sexualized violence. In Nigeria's patriarchal society, BH spread an even more restrictive policy regarding women's and girls' positions in society. Girls were not supposed to go to schools but should rather accept their destiny as wives and mothers subservient to their men – an ideological belief BH brutally enforced.[131] In that regard, BH did not differ from the positions of the IS that similarly presented women as inferior to men. The notable absence of women in IS

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[128] Kaya, "Sexual Violence, Identity, and Gender," 636-640.
[129] Sahara Reporters, "Video: Boko Haram leader 'Imam Abubaker Shekau'."
Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 103-105.
[130] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 15-17.
[131] Bloom, Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords," 114-115.

publications reinforced their position as wives, mothers, and caregivers in the private sphere. This misogynist position preceding the acts of sexualized violence subsequently reflected upon the later treatment of the Yezidis as human incubators. By spreading misogynist narratives, BH and the IS utilized pre-existing patriarchal structures to create justification structures that later legitimized their actions.

6.2. **Patterned Performance**

Like the background knowledge, the patterns of the performances of sexualized violence show resemblances, yet, they are less pronounced. These main points of comparison can be categorized into two subdivisions. Firstly, the methods and patterns of gaining access to the victims and the subsequent enactment of sexualized violence and, secondly, the apparent motive for these performances.

The main similarity in the patterned performance of the attacks on the Yezidis and Christian students by BH and the IS consists of the well-planned large-scale abductions of women and girls to conduct sexualized violence. Instead of spontaneous on-site sexual assaults, both organizations resorted to abductions for long-term access to their female victims. For BH, these kidnappings appeared in waves spread over several years between 2013 and 2018.[132] However, the IS resorted to a single prolonged abduction campaign in Sinjar, lasting for several weeks in 2014.[133] Once captured, women and girls had differing experiences of sexualized violence, depending on the organization. In BH's control, most women were converted and forcefully married to fighters, after which the marriage was consummated against their will, often resulting in involuntary pregnancy.[134] In the IS, forced marriage was rather unusual. Instead, the Yezidi women and girls entered a system of institutionalized sale in which they had to endure involuntary pregnancy, sexual torture, and sexual slavery at the hands of individual fighters.[135] Thus, while the way the terrorist

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[132] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 1-25.
[133] OHCHR, UNAMI, "Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July – 10 September 2014," *OHCHR*, accessed August 12, 2022, 12-16, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf.
[134] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 16-35.
[135] UN Human Rights Council, "'They Came to Destroy'," 9-16.

organizations gained access to their victims is almost identical, the treatment of the kidnapped Christian and Yezidi women and girls in the hands of their terrorist abusers differed fundamentally.

The analyzed organizations both give clues about the motivations for their actions of sexualized violence reflected in their performance and the discourse surrounding it. BH's pattern of abducting and forcefully marrying their victims off to their fighters for reproduction and domestic work suggest a personal incentive for the terrorists. It, furthermore, promotes the idea of leading women back to their position of wife, mother, and caregiver, anchored in their religious beliefs. However, it also carries punitive elements intended to penalize female students for pursuing education, the Christian community for their refusal to convert, and the Nigerian government for detaining the wives and children of BH members.[136] The abductions and subsequent pattern of sexualized violence, thus, targeted not only the women and girls but also their religious communities and the government. The IS carried out similar multi-level punishments of not only the individual subjected to the sexualized violence but also the Yezidi community through the genocidal character of their actions. Justified by Yezidis' refusal to convert to Sunni Islam, sexual slavery humiliated and sexually objectified the victims and their community.[137] Therefore, the systematic sexualized violence of both terrorist organizations had a profound impact and not only victimized those directly targeted in the performances but also their social environment.

6.3. **Competence**

The application of the competence element proposed by PT on the cases of sexualized violence by the IS and BH reveals that the organizations publicly endorsed and acknowledged these actions. Once again, the recognition of competence followed a particular cross-group pattern on the publication style, the chosen justifications, and the external audiences' reactions.

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[136] Human Rights Watch, "'Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp'," 3-35.
[137] Kaya, "Sexual Violence, Identity, and Gender," 643-645.

BH's leader Shekau selected YouTube videos as the preferred method of publication. Unlike the IS, Shekau announced the intention to abduct and perform acts of sexualized violence in the videos long before the first kidnapping campaign began signaling the permission for these raids.[138] In later recordings, he posed with the Chibok girls to increase international attention. The IS publicized professionally produced written publications in the form of their magazine Dabiq, decrees, or guidelines. Like BH, these issuances detailed the fate of the Yezidis as *sabaya* and the intended obliteration of their culture in the process.[139] However, the IS never published images or accounts of individual Yezidis, effectively keeping them hidden. Therefore, the organizations differing in their chosen medium both threatened violence while publicly sharing the fate of the women and girls in their power.

In these publications, both BH and the IS used religious justifications for their actions. The IS resorted to a Shari'a framework in their guidelines on sexual slavery and referred to Qur'anic verses and jurisdictions on the enslavement of *kufr*.[140] The IS, thus, remained strictly within their ideological narrative to legitimize their actions among their members and sympathizers. In its early stages, BH explained its actions with the detainment of their wives and alleged sexual abuse by the Nigerian government.[141] In 2014, this argument blended with religious narratives of "a jihad war against Christians" and Mohammed's treatment of infidels and his marriage to Aisha.[142] At the peak of the groups' performances of sexualized violence in 2014, they, thus, both used similar powerful religious symbols to legitimize their actions to outsiders but, most importantly, to their members. They, moreover, instructed their members on competent practices. While Shekau laid the foundation for the abduction procedure and the subsequent forced marriage in his videos, the IS institutionalized the sexual abuse of the Yezidis from their price on the markets, permitted acts of violence, to the status of their offspring with fighters.[143]

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[138] BBC, "Boko Haram Releases Hostage Video."
Baffour, "Boko Haram Leader Abubaker Shekau's Latest Speech."
[139] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 16.
[140] Ibid, 14-17.
Research and Fatwa Department of the Islamic State, "Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves."
[141] Ahmad, "'We Have Captured Your Women'," 105.
[142] Baffour, "Boko Haram Leader Abubaker Shekau's Latest Speech."
[143] Ibid.
Research and Fatwa Department of the Islamic State, "Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves."

Lastly, both organizations received significant international attention after one large-scale attack. The attacks on the Chibok school and the Yezidis in Sinjar caused international outrage and culminated in military interventions. Moreover, both groups experienced positive reactions and acknowledgments from other terrorists. So referred the IS to BH's abductions of Christians as a successful example and itself experienced an unprecedented rise of new recruits in the months after initial reports of sexual slavery aired.[144] The reactions of the international audience, thus, almost showed no difference. However, while the IS' campaign against the Yezidis is widely classified as genocide, BH's abductions and abuses of Christian students are prescribed in the context of an ethno-religious conflict.[145]

6.4. Conclusion

Comparing and contrasting BH's and the IS' enforcement of sexualized violence reveals many similarities with relatively minor differences in all elements of PT. The application of PT, therefore, exposed an overarching pattern in the practice of sexualized violence. Already sharing many entrance requirements in religious belief, terrorist insurgency, and engagement in sexualized violence, the IS and BH were both products of their respective environment. The analysis of background knowledge, therefore, gives clues about their later choices of patterned performance and the acknowledgment of competence. Pre-existing conflicts and defamatory narratives of their prospective victims, paired with a misogynist understanding of women's roles, fundamentally influenced their later actions. These patterned performances were characterized by preceding abductions ensuring long-term access for the terrorist abusers to their victims. However, while BH chose to forcefully convert and marry most of the Christian students to their fighters, the Yezidi women and girls in the hand of the IS entered a system designed to maintain their rank as sexual slaves. In doing so, the organizations attempted to punish not only the victims individually for acting against the organizations' religious ideology but also extended the

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[144] Islamic State, "The Revival of Slavery," 15.
Islamic State, "Slave Girls or Prostitutes?," 44-45.
Ackerman, "Foreign Jihadists Flocking to Iraq and Syria on 'Unprecedented Scale'"- UN."
[145] Basil Ugorji, "Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Analysis and Resolution," *Journal of Living Together* 4-5, no.1 (2017): 185.
Lederer, "UN Experts: Islamic State Committed Genocide Against Yazidis."

suffering to their communities. The victimization, therefore, goes beyond the sexually abused women and girls and includes the collectively targeted social communities while the perpetrators benefitted either personally or financially. These performances were endorsed or even guided by the organizations' communication. BH's YouTube videos and the IS' written guidelines and articles shared the fate of the victims utilizing religious symbolism to frame their actions as a moral duty. Using religion as justification allowed the organizations to remain faithful to their ideological line to legitimize their actions to outsiders and, most notably, their members. International audiences unilaterally recognized the impact of both BH's attack on Christian students and the IS' campaign against the Yezidis, leading to military counter-terrorism offensives. However, it also redirected the focus of other terrorists on the attacks boosting recruitment numbers and reinforcing the acknowledgment of the actions. Sexualized violence, thus, has implicated different levels of interaction ranging from the perpetrator-victim relationship to their communities and even to international politics.

7. **Conclusion**

Sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorist organizations is a prevalent issue that has continuously been identified as a pressing issue and even a "disturbing trend" in international terrorism. However, the conflation of concepts explaining or defining sexual terror exacerbated by the issue of no universally agreed definition of terrorism blurs explanations of sexualized violence leading to wrongful assumptions and oversimplification, contributing to gender-blindness in IR.

When looking at the predominant debates, it becomes clear that there are two significant streams of explanation of sexualized violence in the hands of terrorist perpetrators – opportunism and strategic or tactical reasons. However, these debates do not differ in the instrumentality of their explanations referring to sexualized violence as a tool, weapon, strategy, or tactic. This wording puts sexualized violence at a means-end framework categorizing it merely as a method to achieve a particular goal while neglecting the act's social construction and the human factor. Rather than highlighting the consequences for the individual and their communities, this approach objectifies women and their bodily integrity to something being conquered or harmed. This thesis attempted to move beyond the

instrumentality lens by utilizing practice theory to examine sexualized violence. PT highlights the social construction of reiterated actions by looking at background knowledge, patterns, performances, competence, and the discursive support of these elements. The thesis, therefore, by using PT, aimed to investigate patterns of sexualized violence perpetrated by Islamist terrorist organizations using the cases of BH and the IS.

The first section of the thesis applied PT to the cases of BH's sexualized violence against female Christian students after 2013 and the IS' sexual slavery of Yezidi women and girls after 2014. Boko Haram's ideology and targeting of Christians have been deeply influenced by inter-group violence, and a misogynist understanding of women's role reflected in their systematic abductions of Christian school girls after 2013. In their hands, these girls had to experience forced conversion and subsequent marriage with BH members, rape, and involuntary pregnancies, which were accompanied by confession videos on YouTube. In these videos, the BH leader Shekau continuously used religious motives to justify sexualized violence and the symbolism the girls generated to demonstrate power and ideological strength, causing them to be acknowledged as an inspiration for jihadists in IS magazines. International audiences quickly contextualized the attacks within a prevalent assault on women's rights to education at the time.

In the second case, the IS began a campaign of sexual violence in August 2014, preceded by historical accounts of imperialist rulers' persecution of the Yezidis, slander, and a misogynistic interpretation of women in IS. The sexualized abuse of the Yezidi women was marked by a high institutionalization of systemic abduction, rape, sexual slavery, torture, an involuntary pregnancy. These patterned performances were guided by regulations and justified by publications circulated by IS magazines and authorities created explicitly for the sexual slavery of Yezidis. The exceptional brutality and systematic exploitation of the Yezidis caused fundamental cultural changes within their community to prevent the loss of their identity. The campaign, which was later declared a genocide, caused international outrage and joint military actions. However, it also increased the recruitment of foreign fighters joining the IS.

The comparison of the two cases in the second section of the thesis demonstrated that the practice of sexualized violence perpetrated by Islamist terrorist organizations is neither singular nor extraordinary. Instead, it presents itself as reoccurring pattern even

among different communities of practice, thus, indicating a continuum in the practice of sexualized violence. Despite differences in the emergence of the terrorist organizations and their socio-cultural environment, the organizations exhibited similar beliefs about the role of women and "non-believers," which culminated in sexualized abuse collectively targeting and punishing the individual victims and their communities through various methods of abuse. Moreover, analyzing sexualized violence as a practice highlights the social construction of sexualized abuse through background knowledge and the in- and out-group recognition of the meaning of the reiterated performance. By utilizing PT, the thesis argues for a more multi-dimensional analysis of sexualized violence, including previously neglected parameters of context, patterns, and discourses inciting and justifying the abuse. PT, thus, helps improve the understanding of the social construction and implications of sexualized violence of Islamist terrorists exceeding the act of violence itself.

Due to length constraints, this thesis focused solely on two in-depth case studies. Therefore, it is not suitable to establish universally valid generalizations since numerous more terrorist organizations engage in sexualized violence, such as Al Shabaab in Somalia and Al Qaeda. Future research should, therefore, apply PT to other cases to develop more thorough evidence about cross-group patterns, connections, and trends of CRSV. Moreover, sexualized violence remains a silent matter riddled with shame leading to many unreported cases. The thesis, therefore, chose to focus on large-scale and well-reported incidents of sexualized violence to conclude from. It should, nonetheless, not be assumed that the dark figures of sexualized violence perpetrated by terrorists are less significant or telling. Academia should, thus, continue to strive for a complete clarification and the removal of the stigma and silence surrounding sexualized violence to educate and learn from the experiences of the victims.

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