

The Effects of War on Women in Syria: A Feminist Analysis

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Abstract:

The Syrian war that began in 2011 has had devastating effects on the lives of millions of people. However, its effects on women's lives has generally been significantly different from its effects on men. In this paper, I look at the effects that the war has had on women and also at the ways that the media has portrayed Syrian women. I use feminist sociological theories to analyse both the effects of the war and the media portrayal of it. Three commonly highlighted issues faced by women to a greater extent since the war began are violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns. Through the lens of radical feminist theory, all three of these effects can be explained as being ultimately rooted in a social system of patriarchy. The war's effects on the lives of women are quite diverse, however, and women have responded to the war in many different ways. Unfortunately, the Western bias that exists in the media has largely failed to capture this and often only paints women in one particular light. Postcolonial and transnational feminist theories critique the Western bias that exists in both the dominant media discourse on Syrian women and also in the

framework of radical feminist theory. My own conclusions include the idea that that women's experiences of the Syrian war are quite diverse, and understanding these diverse experiences helps us have a more accurate view of the war's effects on women's lives.

Since 2011, Syria has been embroiled in a devastating war. President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian Government troops have been fighting against Rebel troops that formed after the 2011 uprising against the Syrian Government. Meanwhile, other militant groups – the Kurdish Army and the Islamic State – have also been involved in this war, as they have fought for their own territory within Syria. Nations outside of Syria have also involved themselves and fueled warfare even further; countries such as Russia and Iran have supported the Syrian Government, while countries such as Turkey and the United States have supported the Rebels.

The war in Syria has had devastating effects on the lives of millions of people. Since the war began, an estimated 500,000 people have lost their lives (World Vision, 2019). In addition, 5.6 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees and another 6.2 million Syrians are displaced within the country (World Vision, 2019). Due to this war, a total of 13.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance today (World Vision, 2019).

Although the majority of those who have been killed in this war are men, the destructive effects this war has had on Syrian women should not be ignored. This war's effects on women's lives have been significantly different from its effects on men, and it is these that this paper will be addressing.

In this paper, I will be sociologically analyzing the effects of war on Syrian women as they have been portrayed in news articles. I will use both

radical feminist theory and the postcolonial/transnational feminist approaches to do this. Through this paper, I show that radical feminist theory's claim that patriarchy in society is at the root of women's oppression is somewhat helpful in explaining the effects of the Syrian war on women's lives; however, I also show that postcolonial and transnational feminist theories expose and fill in some of radical feminist theory's blind spots. Specifically, I show that the postcolonial/transnational approaches help us see and understand the significant diversity that exists among women's experiences of the war.

I start this paper by explaining the feminist theoretical frameworks I will be working with: radical feminist theory and the postcolonial/transnational feminist approaches. I then highlight three effects of the Syrian war on women's lives that have been commonly discussed in the media: violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns. I then sociologically analyze these three effects using radical feminist theory. Following this, I critique the radical feminist approach using the postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches, and I then go on to analyze the media's presentation of the effects of war on Syrian women using postcolonial and transnational feminist theories.

Feminist Theoretical Approaches:

Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminist theory is one of many theoretical feminist approaches of looking at the social world. Although there is a significant degree of diversity among radical feminist ideas and radical feminists "appear to pride themselves on being notoriously difficult to define" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 70), there are

several key ideas that radical feminism subscribes to.

Probably the most important thing that radical feminist theory suggests is that gender inequality and women's oppression is due to a system of patriarchy. Unlike liberal feminist theory, which suggests that sexism (discrimination of women in thought and practice) is the major reason for women's oppression, radical feminist theory suggests that at the root of women's oppression is a social system where all social institutions are male dominated (D. Farough, personal communication, January 25, 2017). The radical feminist use of the term *patriarchy* "implies that all men actively subordinate women" (Whelehan, 1995, p. 80). Since men dominate all social institutions, all of societal life functions toward the interests of men, while women are conditioned "to exhibit male-serving behavior and to accept male-serving roles" (Donovan, 2001, p. 159). Radical feminists believe that in order to undo patriarchy, all women need to see themselves as part of a sisterhood with the common experience of oppression and should work together to create a revolution.

A key focus of radical feminist theory is on the gendered relations of reproduction. Focusing on this issue, radical feminism points out that women often do not have control over their own reproductive choices and sexuality (D. Farough, personal communication, January 30, 2017). Furthermore, women are subordinated due to the socially constructed idea that women ought to be the gender that is primarily involved in raising children. Related to radical feminist theory's focus on relations of reproduction is the emphasis that radical feminists place on issues such as violence against women, rape, the commodification of women, the sexual objectification of women, and how women are forced to present their bodies in ways that serve male interests (D. Farough, personal communication, January 30, 2017). All of these issues are seen as having their

roots in the patriarchal social system.

Two other key elements of radical feminism are the social construction of the sex/gender system and the social construction of heteronormativity. One branch of radical feminism, the radical libertarian feminists, completely rejects the connection between sex and gender. Radical libertarian feminists claim that “patriarchal society uses certain facts about male and female biology (chromosomes, anatomy, hormones) as the basis for constructing a set of masculine and feminine gender identities and behaviors that serve to empower men and disempower women” (Tong, 2009, p. 51). This group sees gender as entirely socially constructed and as constructed for the benefit of men.

Along with the social construction of the sex/gender system, radical feminist theory also suggests that heteronormativity is a social construct that caters to male interests. Heteronormativity can be understood as the societal view that “relationships both are, and should be, exclusively heterosexual” (Bendall, 2014, p. 260). A heteronormative society stigmatizes same-sex relationships and views them as deviant. According to radical feminist theory, compulsory heterosexuality benefits men’s sexual interests and inhibits women’s ability to love whomever they want to. Some radical feminists even claim that heterosexual sexual relations are generally “characterized by an ideology of sexual objectification...that supports male sexual violence against women” (Ferguson, as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 66).

Postcolonial and Transnational Feminist Theories

Postcolonial and transnational feminist theories are significantly different than radical feminist theory. These feminist approaches seek to provide frameworks

for understanding the gender injustices linked to globalization (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014). They suggest that the oppression women experience in one part of the world is often connected with what happens in another (Bunch, 1993, as cited in Tong, 2009). Postcolonial and transnational feminists share a commitment to core feminist values (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014), but they offer a significantly different approach to looking at women's oppression around the world than radical feminism does.

Although many similarities exist between postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches, they each have some differences as well. For postcolonial feminist theory, one of these key differences is its emphasis on the role that Western colonialism and imperialism have played in shaping our world today (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014). Postcolonial feminists claim that local practices in developing nations cannot be properly understood without looking at how economic and historical contexts have formed in connection to Western colonialism and imperialism. For instance, in India, the practice of *sati* (the burning of widows) should not simply be seen as a barbaric cultural practice, but rather should be analyzed by looking at British colonialism's influence (Narayan, 1997, as cited in Mann & Patterson, 2016).

Transnational feminist theory also acknowledges that globalization has in many ways negatively affected women's lives around the world, but a key emphasis of this theory is how globalization has "created the conditions for feminist solidarity across national borders" (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014, section 2.2.3). For transnational feminists, the concept of solidarity is notably different from the radical feminist idea of *sisterhood*. Mohanty (2003) defines solidarity "in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities" (p. 7). She says that "rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of

solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together” (p. 7). For transnational feminists, diversity and differences among women should be acknowledged and respected.

Another key component of transnational feminist theory is its use of intersectional analysis. However, transnational feminist theory criticizes American intersectionality theorists for rarely discussing their own privileged positions as citizens of a First World nation (Shohat, 1999, as cited in Mann & Patterson, 2016). Transnational feminist theory includes global location in its intersectional analysis.

Although much more could be said about postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches, for the purpose of this paper, I will be mainly focusing on one more key similarity of these two theories: their critique of the Western bias within traditional feminist thought. Postcolonial feminists and transnational feminists have both been outspoken on this issue. For example, postcolonial feminist Uma Narayan (1997) suggests that representations of “Third-World traditions” replicate a “colonialist stance” (as cited in Mann & Patterson, p. 515), and she “[criticizes] feminists for unwittingly adopting a Eurocentric perspective” (Parekh & Wilcox, 2014, section 2.2.1). Also, transnational feminists Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) suggest that earlier feminist frameworks “contain remnants of a ‘Euro-North-American-centric’ worldview where global power brokers at the core are portrayed as the movers and shakers of world history” (as cited in Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 483).

The Syrian War’s Effect on Women

I now turn to explain some of the key effects that the Syrian war has had on women’s lives. In reading news articles and other sources, I have found that the

Syrian war has had a wide range of effects on women. However, I choose to highlight three specific issues that are among the most commonly discussed in the media: violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns.

The first effect that I highlight is the excessive violence against women that has been present since this war began. Forms of violence that women have experienced include kidnappings, executions, rape and other sexual violence, torture, and enslavement (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016). Since the uprising, the Syrian Government forces have been a major perpetrator of the violence against women. Journalist Marie Forestier, based on over 70 interviews, suggests that rape has been by no means an isolated crime, but has been an integral part of the government's plan to counter the opposition (as cited in Syria Deeply, 2017). Her findings show that rapes have occurred in intelligence detention centres, during military operations and kidnappings, in between interrogations in prisons, and at checkpoints. Part of the reason why women have been targeted may be because in a society where masculinity is defined by one's ability to protect his family, sexually exploiting women can be used to humiliate men and undermine their masculinity (al-Hawat, 2016). The Syrian Government has clearly used violence against women as a tool for their own benefit.

In addition to the perpetration of violence against women coming from the government forces, there have also been high rates of domestic violence among refugee communities since this war began (Fuller, 2016). This may be because men who feel powerless try to re-assert their power by being violent toward women in their homes (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, as cited in Fuller, 2016). With the potential threat of violence coming from both inside and outside their homes, women are in a particularly vulnerable position.

A second effect that the Syrian war is having on women's lives is a high degree of commodification of women. One example of this is the high rates of marriage for financial reasons. In a news article from BBC, the story of a young woman named Kazal is shared (McLeod, 2013). At 18 years old, she was sold in marriage to a 50-year-old Saudi Arabian man who paid her family US \$3,100, and the marriage only lasted one week. Kazal's mother said in an interview that she felt like she had to sacrifice Kazal in order to care for the other members of the family. Sadly, stories like this are far from uncommon; the Representative of the United Nations Refugee Agency has said that he estimates that 500,000 Syrian refugees have turned to such measures, as "survival sex" becomes an option in desperate circumstances (as cited in McLeod, 2013). Many of these women who are sold for marriage and sex are also very young, as men may not even want a woman over 16 years old (Um Mazed, as cited in McLeod, 2013). Rates of child marriage have significantly risen since the war began; one example of this is a doubling of child marriages between 2011 and 2012 among Syrians in Jordan (Osman, 2016).

Another example of how women have become commodities during this war is their recruitment into military forces. Although the Western media may think that women's involvement in military forces is a good thing as this might suggest that traditional gender roles are eroding, the circumstances under which women soldiers are recruited remains largely unreported (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016). The Syrian Network for Human Rights (2015) documented that 69 women (including 34 women under the age of 18) were abducted and forced into recruitment by Kurdish militias (as cited in Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016). Such recruitment is a tactical approach used by different forces that draws on religious beliefs and social constructs in order to shame Muslim male fighters (as cited in Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016). For instance, women are recruited by

Kurdish militia to fight against the Islamic State due to the belief that being killed by a woman would deny a person a place in heaven (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016). In this example of recruitment into military forces, as well as in the example of child marriages and other marriages for financial reasons, the commodification of women is clearly seen.

A third and final effect is a rise in maternal health concerns. Out of all of those who are in need of humanitarian aid as a result of this war, about 5 million are women of reproductive age and 430,000 are pregnant (al- Hawat, 2016). Many of these women, however, do not have access to health care services. During the warfare, the Syrian Government forces have bombed 265 medical facilities and killed over 750 health care providers (Bradford, 2017), taking a huge toll on Syria's health care system. Outside of Syria, many women who are not registered as refugees do not have access to health services at all (al-Hawat, 2016). In Jordan, it is estimated that 45 percent of those living outside of refugee camps are unable to register and therefore, do not have access to health care services, while in Lebanon, health services are usually privately owned and often too expensive for refugees (al-Hawat, 2016). Due to all of this, women's access to necessary reproductive health services is limited (al-Hawat, 2016).

In addition, many women have been forced to give birth through risky cesarean sections (Bradford, 2017; al-Hawat, 2016). Reasons why women do this include the ability to have their babies at night when bombings are less likely to occur as well as to avoid travelling in insecure environments while in labor (Bradford, 2017; al-Hawat, 2016). In total, the United Nations Population Fund found that in 2014 alone, 200,000 unsafe births occurred (al-Hawat, 2016). The effects of the Syrian war on maternal health care have clearly been quite severe.

A Radical Feminist Analysis

I now analyze three commonly-discussed effects on Syrian women – violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns – using radical feminist theory. I start by focusing on the issue of violence against women.

To analyze the Syrian war's effect of violence against women, the radical feminist concept of patriarchy seems helpful in explaining this issue. I previously noted how the Syrian government has used rape as a political tool of repression. Looking at this through a radical feminist lens, a major reason why the government has been able to do this is because of male domination within Syrian society. Due to the male domination of all social institutions, everything in Syrian society tends to revolve around male interests. The Syrian Government is one of the many male-dominated institutions in Syria, and due to a lack of political power among women in the country, the government is not forced to cater to women's concerns.

Although the sexual exploitation of women that has been perpetrated by the Syrian Government could certainly be seen as a political device used by the powerful Syrian Government against powerless citizens, it could also be seen as a male political attack on females. Barbara Mehrhof and Pamela Kearon (1971) see rape in precisely this way. Speaking in the context of male-female relations, they say that rape is “an effective political device...it is a political act of *oppression*...exercised by members of a powerful class on members of a powerless class” (p. 80). Men, the dominant gender group in society, are able to use their position of power to further subordinate women, and sexual violence is one example of how men do this.

In sociologically analyzing violence against women in Syria, it seems that the radical feminist notion that gender is socially constructed is also relevant

here. I previously mentioned that the Syrian Government may sexually exploit women in order to humiliate the men of their families. I also noted that domestic violence rates may be higher since the war began because men who feel powerless try to re-assert their power by being violent toward women in their own homes. It seems that both of these connect to the masculine and feminine social constructs where Syrian men are supposed to be powerful, in control, and able to protect others, while women are supposed to be subordinate. Without these social constructs, perhaps men would not feel humiliated when they are unable to protect women, and perhaps they also would not feel the need to re-assert their power when they have a sense of powerlessness. These social constructs of gender within a patriarchy elevate men over women, and during the Syrian war, seem to have put women in an even more vulnerable position.

To analyze the Syrian war's second effect that I previously highlighted – the commodification of women – the radical feminist concepts of patriarchy, the social construction of gender, and the social construction of heteronormativity seem particularly helpful. In my description of the commodification of women, I showed two examples of how women have become commodities during the war: women have been sold for marriage and sex, and women have been recruited into military forces for tactical purposes. The first of these examples can be sociologically analyzed by looking at the social construction of heteronormativity within a patriarchy. As radical feminists suggest, in a patriarchy, women are made to be sex objects to serve male interests. Not only are women forced to present their bodies in sexualized ways, but moral notions around sexuality (who can have sex with whom) are also constructed, radical feminists claim, for the benefit of men. In Syrian society, lesbianism is illegal and heterosexuality is compulsory, and this could be seen as something that is due to male domination in society and men's desire to have control over

women's sexuality. Clearly, men *do* have control over women's sexuality in Syrian society, as men are able to purchase wives for sex if they have the money to do so.

The social construction of the sex/gender system seems particularly helpful for analyzing my second example of the commodification of women. I explained earlier that women in Syria have been recruited into armed forces (sometimes through abduction) for the tactical purpose of humiliating men. For instance, if a man is killed by a woman, this is seen as utterly shameful in Syrian society. Therefore, women prove to be particularly useful. Similar to what I said in analyzing the issue of violence against women, socially constructed ideas of gender play a crucial role in this example of women's commodification. If social constructions of gender did not exist in Syrian society like they do, and if it were not seen to be any more shameful to be killed by a woman than a man, then women would not be in the position of being recruited as useful commodities by armed forces. This can all be said to stem back to the social constructions of gender within a patriarchy, where masculinity is defined in terms of power over women.

To analyze a third effect that the Syrian war has had on women's lives – maternal health concerns – the radical feminist focus on relations of reproduction seems useful. It could be said that the reason why many pregnant Syrian women do not have access to health care services is because women are largely disregarded in a male-dominated society. However, I would like to focus my analysis of this third effect on women's lack of control over their own reproductive choices.

Although many women have been forced to give birth in unsafe circumstances, perhaps the bigger issue that needs to be analyzed is why so

many Syrian women are pregnant in the first place. It is likely that a major reason for this is that many of these women do not have access to contraceptives. Educating women about reproductive choices and making contraceptives available may not be a priority in a society that is dominated by males who want wives for sex and then expect these wives to raise the children that are born as a result of male-serving sexual encounters. Men, then, have control over the relations of reproduction. Furthermore, as I discussed earlier, many Syrian women are victims of rape. Perhaps a large number of the 430,000 pregnant women who are refugees became pregnant after an unwanted sexual encounter.

Radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (1970) argues that women's oppression is rooted in biology, and that women have been at the mercy of "menstruation, menopause, and 'female ills,' constant painful childbirth, wetnursing and care of infants all of which [has] made them dependent on males for survival" (as cited in Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 89). For Firestone, in order for women's liberation to occur, women will need ex-utero reproductive technologies for having children (Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 89). At this point, she suggests, genital differences will no longer culturally matter (Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 89). Firestone's views, although they may sound extreme, perhaps would enable women to have control over their reproductive lives. In Syria, where women generally do not have much control over their own reproductive choices, some drastic changes may need to happen in order for women to truly have agency to decide how many children they wish to raise. It seems unlikely that women who are refugees fleeing from Syria want to get pregnant and have children at this point in their lives. In a system of patriarchy where all of society revolves around male interests, women have little control. Men have power over women in terms of the relations of reproduction.

To sum up my radical feminist analysis, it seems that the radical feminist framework offers some helpful insights to explain the effects of war on Syrian women. From the radical feminist perspective, the three issues I highlighted – violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns – can ultimately be said to be rooted in the system of patriarchy.

A Critique from the Postcolonial/Transnational Feminist Lens

For radical feminists, all women are “sisters” who need to band together in order to work against their common experience of oppression. Historically, although radical feminism first took root in the Western world, it eventually began to focus on global concerns for women as well. One prominent writer who brought radical feminist ideas to the global context is Robin Morgan. In her introduction to *Sisterhood Is Global*, Morgan writes about the many difficulties that women experience all around the world. She finishes her introduction by saying that there is a “*common condition* which, despite variations in degree, is experienced by all human beings who are born female” (1984, as cited in Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 454). Morgan invites women around the world to recognize this common condition which they all experience.

Although Morgan’s approach seeks to make positive strides toward unifying women around the world, her approach, as well as radical feminist theory in general, can be critiqued for having a Western bias. For example, it may be a lot easier for someone like Morgan who lives in a privileged country to be able to speak of a “global sisterhood” than a woman living in an impoverished country who is struggling to survive and raise numerous children. Many women outside of the Western world, such as those affected by the Syrian war, may not think they have much in common with privileged women in the

West, and they would appreciate acknowledgement of differences (Mohanty, 2003, p. 7). Postcolonial feminist theory and transnational feminist theory are two feminist approaches that do acknowledge difference and diversity among women around the world. A significant claim of these theories is that a Western bias exists in traditional feminist thought.

Many examples of Western bias within feminist theory could be shown. In the context of reproductive issues, which I previously discussed using radical feminist theory, Tong (2009) suggests that First World assumptions of what is in the best interests of women do not necessarily apply to all women in the Third World (p. 219). She gives four useful examples of how women's interests in the Third World may be significantly different when it comes to their reproductive lives. First of all, she says that many women in the Third World want large families, even though caring for these children could limit their participation in the paid workforce. Some women may largely find their sense of self-worth in terms of being good mothers and have no desire to be anything different. Second, she suggests that it may not always be in women's best interests to use contraceptives – not if contraceptives are unsafe and women do not have access to follow-up medical care. Third, Tong says that easy access to sterilization may not be in women's best interests either (p. 220). She says that often, sterilizations are less than fully voluntary; for instance, in 1974, the Indian Government gave material goods to the poor in exchange for sterilizations (p. 221). Finally, Tong suggests that for many women, utilization of abortion services is also not viewed as a blessing. Abortions often take a toll on women's bodies and psyches. In addition, where sex-selective ultrasounds are available, it is far from uncommon for female fetuses to be aborted due to their sex (p. 222).

These four examples offer just a few reasons why Western feminist ideas – such as those which largely come out of radical feminism – can be called into

question, especially when working for the liberation of women around the globe. Women outside of the West may have some significantly different concerns than Western women. This is due to their different experiences in life and the different values by which they live. Mohanty's (2003) transnational feminist concept of solidarity, which involves working together while at the same time acknowledging differences is especially helpful for thinking about how women around the world should view each other and support each other.

It is my suggestion that both postcolonial feminist theory and transnational feminist theory offer helpful insights that both expose and fill in some of radical feminism's blind spots. These theories give Western feminists the ability to approach women's issues from a more balanced and less biased standpoint. However, not only do postcolonial and transnational feminist theories critique Western feminism, they also critique the Western bias that generally exists in all discourse from the West on non-Western women. It has been argued that a Western bias exists in the content of Western news sources on the effects of the Syrian war on women's lives. Drawing from the work of Katty Alhayek (2015), I now turn to one final analysis of the effects of war on Syrian women, analyzing news articles on this topic using postcolonial and transnational feminist theories.

Postcolonial/Transnational Feminist Analysis

In Katty Alhayek's (2015) article "“I must save my life and not risk my family's safety!": Untold Stories of Syrian Women Surviving War", she argues that the Western media has wrongly portrayed Syrian refugee women. At the start of her article, she mentions that Syrian women were actually a main segment of the 2011 Syrian Uprising, but that "their representations in the global and social media are dominated by an image of a powerless female Syrian refugee who is a

victim of her family's actions of selling daughters off for money" (p. 1). She says that through the dominant media portrayal, "Syrian refugee women are robbed of their agency and are constricted to a representation of a single faceless victim/woman" (p. 1). She says that this depiction of women is no different than the general discourse from the West that Arab women are "suppressed sexual objects by oppressive violent men and in need of saving" (p. 1). Using transnational feminist theory, Alhayek takes seriously the concept of women's agency and argues that in contrast to dominant media representations, there is "no single category" that all Syrian refugee women fit into (p. 1).

Through her article, Alhayek shows that the Western media has presented Syrian refugees as though they are all powerless victims, but that in reality, a significant degree of diversity exists among women's experiences. Her article highlights the stories of six different women who represent different marginalised groups based on intersections of "class, age, education, family status, and place of origin" (p. 2). The six women have had some significantly different experiences of the war and have coped with the war in very different ways. For example, one of Alhayek's interviewees left Syria illegally and went on to actively volunteer for humanitarian organizations, while the son and husband of another one of her interviewees were killed in 2012 and has since gone on to rebuild her life, working as a head of a household and challenging her traditional gender role.

The stories of the six women and Alhayek's other research show that no single category fits all Syrian refugees and that women's agency is manifested in various forms. In her conclusion, Alhayek suggests that "the dominant representations of Syrian refugee women invisibilise the political and economic relational issues as well as structural inequalities that impacted the ways Syrian women experience the process of becoming a refugee" (p. 25). She says that

“representations of Syrian refugee women are limited to only victims of forms of oppression by their ‘backward men’ with no visibility of forms of exploitation that blame, for example, policies of international organisations and corruption” (p. 25). In her concluding statement, Alhayek says that the dominant media portrayal of Syrian women “[robs them] of their agency and [makes invisible] the complexity and variety of... stories of struggling for freedom, suffering from violence and war, and resisting inequality and injustice” (p. 25).

Assuming Alhayek’s discourse analysis of Western media is accurate, it seems that Western journalists, although they are typically not sociologists, depict women in a biased way that leans toward a radical feminist understanding of women’s experiences of oppression. In analyzing these articles, radical feminist theory is particularly helpful because this theory highlights issues that are consistent with the issues that are highlighted in the news sources. Although I do believe that radical feminist theory is valuable in explaining issues like the effects of war that I previously highlighted – violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns – if Alhayek is right, these kinds of issues may be over reported in the Western media. Furthermore, radical feminist theory is far from sufficient in terms of being able to *fully* explain women’s oppression in Syrian society and *all* of the effects that the war has had on women’s lives.

Postcolonial and transnational feminist theories may help us more accurately understand the effects of war on Syrian women, or at least add another dimension to our understanding. These theories allow us to see how Syrian society is shaped by globalization, how the intersections of class, age, education, et cetera, mean that women’s experiences are quite significantly varied, and how women generally do have some agency in their lives even as a

subordinated gender group. Furthermore, as I emphasized earlier in this paper, and as Alhayek emphasizes in her article, postcolonial and transnational feminist theories allow us to escape from the Western bias.

Although I do not have space in this paper to further analyze more of the effects of the Syrian war on women's lives using postcolonial and transnational feminist theories, one more thing should be emphasized. Using postcolonial and transnational feminist theories (especially transnational feminist theory), we see that the effects of war on Syrian women should not be overgeneralized.

Although the war has affected women's lives in numerous ways, every woman in Syria has been affected somewhat differently. Syrian women's experiences do *not* neatly fit into a single category. Every woman affected by this war is a person with a unique story. Their stories should be included, heard, appreciated, and learned from.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a sociological analysis of the effects of war on Syrian women, using both radical feminist theory and postcolonial and transnational feminist theories. I first explained the key concepts of both radical feminist theory and the postcolonial/transnational feminist approaches. I then highlighted three effects that the Syrian war has had on women's lives that are commonly discussed in the media: violence against women, the commodification of women, and maternal health concerns. After this, I sociologically analyzed these effects using radical feminist theory. Through this analysis, I showed that all three of these effects could be said to have at their root cause a social system of patriarchy where all social institutions are male dominated.

Following this, I transitioned to critique the radical feminist approach using postcolonial feminist theory and transnational feminist theory. I first explored how these feminist approaches critique the Western bias that is prevalent in traditional feminist approaches, including the bias that exists in radical feminist theory. After this, drawing from Alhayek's article, I showed that postcolonial and transnational feminist theories also rightly critique the Western bias of the dominant media discourse on Syrian women. I suggested that the postcolonial and transnational feminist approaches are helpful in giving us a fuller understanding of the Syrian war's effects on women's lives.

In conclusion, radical feminist theory helps us see that the Syrian war's effects on women's lives can be explained by the patriarchal social system, where all social institutions are male dominated. However, radical feminist theory is blind to several issues which postcolonial and transnational feminist theories highlight. My suggestion, therefore, is that radical feminist theory and postcolonial and transnational feminist theories should be used in conjunction in order to best understand the Syrian war's effects on women's lives. Furthermore, for those who approach women's issues from a Western perspective, postcolonial and transnational feminist theories serve as helpful correctives. With regard to the effects of war on women in Syria, these theories help us see and understand the wide diversity that exists among women's experiences.

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