

How the Media Agenda Contributes to Cultivating Symbolic Annihilation and Gender-Based Stigmatization Frames for Syrian Refugee Women

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10291208

Abstract

The Syrian refugee crisis has been ongoing since 2011, with millions of people being forced to flee their homes due to the devastating war. This has resulted in one of the largest humanitarian crises of our time, with many refugees seeking a better life and safety in other countries. The issue of the Syrian refugee crisis has been a widely debated topic in media and politics, but the focus on the representation of Syrian refugee women in various media outlets is a concerning issue. Syrian refugee women have suffered from several social challenges in the host countries, including negative portrayals, stereotyping, and frames in the media. Not only do these negative portrayals perpetuate stereotypes, but they also marginalize an already vulnerable group, overlook the unique challenges and contributions of Syrian refugee women in the host communities, and contribute to the symbolic annihilation of Syrian refugee women. The media play a role in informing the public about what and how to think about a particular issue through the way or frame in which it is presented. This media framing process plays a significant role in presenting populist governments, symbolic elites, and a media agenda that aims to cultivate public opinion with certain ideas and impressions. Based on the theoretical understanding of media framing theory, this study presents how Syrian refugee women see their image represented in the media. A quantitative approach was used to collect the data by conducting focus group discussions with a number of Syrian refugees. The findings showed that there was a common insight among the participants that Syrian refugee women are framed negatively in a collective representation of humiliation and dehumanization. The participants see that the media representations of Syrian refugee women have often been reductive and stigmatizing in certain frames. Furthermore, their image in the media is not normalized or presented in a positive way that shows that every woman has an individual story. However, they see that the Syrian refugee woman's image is stigmatized in certain frames related to gender-based issues. Thus, this stigmatization is cultivated by repeated negative frames, mainly victimization and demonization ones.

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Keywords

Syrian refugee women, migration, Syrian crisis, SGBV, media framing, stigmatization, victimization, demonization, symbolic annihilation, negative representation, cultivation theory.

First submission: May 2023; Revised: May 2023, Accepted: September 2023

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Introduction

Wars, conflicts, and crises have great effects on individuals, especially vulnerable groups such as children and women. One of those crises and wars that caused great damage to its citizens was the Syrian civil war, which later turned into a global refugee crisis that struck many countries, especially the Middle East and Europe. Since they are frequently vilified as "illegal immigrants" and "economic migrants," the misery of the Syrian refugees endures (Kaye, 1994). Furthermore, one of the most significant consequences of that catastrophe, which is still ongoing, is the suffering of Syrian women. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2013) estimates that 1.7 million women and girls require services related to reproductive health. The pain of the Syrian woman or girl extended beyond the essential necessities that any refugee, male or female, requires, such as food, housing, money, education, and employment. Instead, the pain of the Syrian refugee woman far outweighed the gender-based abuse she had to deal with on a daily basis.

Numerous studies have demonstrated how the audience's function has evolved from "has been affected" to "has affected," due to social media's role in allowing users to express their thoughts as opposed to traditional media, where the individual is merely a receiver (Aldamen 2023d). Many media tools are used for a variety of purposes, including learning, education, work, business, information access, cultural and social interests, connecting with networks and families, forging friendships, picking up new skills, self-expression, conducting business, and locating employment (Aldamen 2023c).

The media has a significant obligation to draw attention to society's most pressing problems, such as those affecting women's lives and their rights (Aldamen, 2017); however, it should not enable violence against women, which has a negative impact on psychological health. Additionally, social media platforms have a significant impact on SGBV concerns. For this reason, the victims themselves, bystanders, or reporters of good intent may promptly share sexual assault and harassment reports.

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Many studies show how the role of social media has changed in many aspects such as crisis management, learning, and political polarization (Wazzan and Aldamen, 2023; Aldamen and Hacimic, 2023; and Mohammad and Aldamen, 2023). Social media has some features that are not present in other forms of media, including connectivity to external sources and references, participation, where users can comment and share thoughts, and openness because no one is going to judge you for your comment or opinion (Mishra, 2016, p. 59). All of these traits combine to provide an environment where victims may learn how to live with abuse without feeling stigmatized or alone.

Finding solutions to the issue's fundamental causes is more likely when there is a group of individuals with shared interests. Early marriage, forced marriage, polygamy, and dowry, according to reports from nine media sites, were the most prevalent SGBVs in the Syrian refugee camps, according to Özdemir, (2015). Parents' worry that their young girls may be sexually assaulted and raped in the camp, bringing shame to their family, is one of their justifications. For dowries or for protection, parents compel their daughters to wed. The perspectives of refugee women on gender and violence are frequently overlooked (Özdemir, 2015).

1. SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS IN MEDIA

Symbolic annihilation, according to Gurrieri, L. (2021), is a term used to describe the underrepresentation, trivialization, or distortion of particular groups in media representation. This phenomenon strengthens societal prejudices, reinforces stereotypes, and eventually marginalizes people or groups. In order to explain and maintain social disparities, Gerbner and Gross (1976) defined symbolic annihilation as the absence or underrepresentation of particular categories of individuals in the media depending on factors like sex, race, or sexual orientation. According to Tuchman (1978), symbolic annihilation has three negative repercussions for women: omission, contempt, and stigma. Additionally, it jeopardizes women's potential for full societal engagement. Symbolic annihilation, according to Merskin (1998, p. 335), is the process by which cultural production and media representation exclude, disregard, undervalue, or dwarf particular populations.

Media representations of symbolic annihilation offer a subliminal message about what it means to belong to a culturally respected group as opposed to an underprivileged group (or "outgroup"). It explains, if subtly, to individuals why particular groups are not represented in the media, and it tells them how to behave and how to dress (Klein & Shiffman, 2009), as is the case with the underrepresentation of successful Syrian women in society. The dissemination of undesirable and perhaps dangerous information to audiences has been attributed to the mainstream media. Others claim that the media perpetuates preconceptions about particular groups, while some worry that there is too much violence in the media. They not only present a negative and/or stereotyped image of those groups but also show how underrepresented they are (Klein & Shiffman, 2009).

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2. THE MEDIA'S IMAGE STIGMATIZATION OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN

Özdemir (2015) asserts that media coverage of SGBV in Syrian refugee camps is beneficial in a variety of ways. As a result, the SGBV in Syrian refugee camps may receive increased attention from the general public, NGOs, and governments. The public, NGOs, and governments will first become more knowledgeable about SGBV, its types and consequences, and the living conditions of survivors in camps if the subject receives media attention. The issue of vulnerable and defenseless refugee women will be more "visible" in the media. Second, despite the difficulties in gathering SGBV data, forced marriage, early marriage, pleasure marriage, forced prostitution, humiliation, domestic violence, etc. are still prevalent in Syrian refugee camps.

Some news organizations gave women a lot of attention, drawing attention to their suffering and urging the world community to take action (Haider et al., 2021). Narl et al. (2020) looked into how Turkish local and national media outlets portrayed the health of Syrian women and children who had immigrated to Turkey between 2013 and 2015. The study came to the conclusion that Syrian women are depicted in the media as a risk or threat, even though this is less prevalent and has detrimental effects on their integration. The more conflict the media fosters in the receiving culture, the more it portrays individuals in "separate" ways. Their social integration is impacted by how immigrants, particularly refugee women, are perceived as dangers. Because of the severe burden on the resources of the host nations, Syrian refugee women were frequently characterized negatively. There is a specific online perception of Syrian refugee women in the media since many

refugee women are shown as having families that push them to wed affluent Arab men in exchange for money (Alhayek, 2014).

Syrian activists used Facebook, YouTube, and other social media sites to begin the "campaign to protect Syrian women" known as "Refugees Not Captives" (RNC) in 2012. The following objectives were listed on the RNC's official Facebook page: First, inform the relatives of the girls about the risks associated with forced unions for financial gain. Reach out to young Arab people who might have good intentions and can be convinced to take political and societal action to outlaw such unions. Working with Arab women's and human rights organizations, prominent international intellectuals, and other parties in this area was a third objective.

When it comes to representing Syrian women and Arab men, the RNC campaign's vocabulary echoes elements of the Western hegemonic discourse that make eastern cultures vital. This process of self-orientation is what ultimately drives this discourse. Other foreign media representations focus the responsibility for forced marriages on Muslim culture and place an emphasis on individual-level conduct. Similar to the RNC's rhetoric, the global media's representations focused on the level of individual actions and blamed Muslim culture for forced marriages. When "Syrian refugee women" is searched on Google, the bulk of the results discuss Syrians forcing their daughters into marriage against their will or selling them for money. According to Alhayek (2014), the prevalent online portrayals reduced the suffering of Syrian refugee women to forced marriages for money and portrayed Syrian families as hunting for affluent Arab men to buy their daughters.

The media routinely depicts sexually attacked and physically abused Syrian refugee women as helpless victims of uncontrolled bad luck. Additionally, it demonstrates how Syrian women are coerced into prostitution, early marriage, childbearing, and tough childrearing. One of the most prevalent headline issues was forced prostitution. Other worries included early and forced marriages and honor murders. When describing the mistreatment of Syrian women, the media frequently employs phrases like "victimhood," "exploitation," "forced labor," "human trafficking," "alien atmosphere," "tragic," "impotence," "debauchery," and "sexual assault." Some news stories that portray sexual and physical attacks on Syrian women from the victim's point of view lead to moral judgments and emotional empathy at the victim's expense. Negative news stories, in contrast to negative framing, found nothing wrong with women being coerced into marriages. Instead, they depicted Syrian women as both beneficiaries and sources.

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Amores et al. (2020) examined 500 journalistic pictures published in ten digital news items in five Western European nations between 2013 and 2017. They discovered that refugee women were underrepresented in the sample photographs of individuals and that female refugees were more frequently connected with religious symbols than male refugees. Furthermore, female immigrants were frequently presented as male victims. Female refugees are cast in a passive and subordinate manner, and the so-called "symbolic extermination of women" results from the patronizing portrayal of women refugees as harmless, helpless, and obedient objects.

From a political and economic standpoint, each form of media has effectively revealed the terrible circumstances that young Syrian refugee girls find themselves in. They also examined the situation in Syria as well as its local and international repercussions. The creation and dissemination of recognizable images, news articles, letters to the editor, and caricatures of them expose the daily suffering and adversities that this socially vulnerable group had to face in various regions; in fact, several cases of rape, sexual harassment, and sexualized violence are covered and reported in the lives of these displaced teenagers. Caricatures of them also highlight the daily hardships and challenges that this socially disadvantaged minority faces in diverse places. Traffickers, misogynists, and other criminals have assaulted them at numerous checkpoints throughout their

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journey. It has been a challenging trip for them. They all have a similar story to tell, but it has been veiled by the psychological trauma, abusive exploitation, and suffering brought on by their country's civil conflict (Acim, 2017).

The victimization frame is expected to be relegated as much as possible and to have a greater impact on displaced women than on men because violence appears to be a predominantly masculine attribute (Amores et al., 2020; Fernández-Villanueva et al., 2009), particularly for women from conservative societies, as Roggeband and Vliegthart (2007, p. 531) state: “Women are portrayed as victims of a misogynistic religious society that requires them to be submissive and cover themselves in order to be valued. The headscarf is presented as either a sign of submission or as something that women may be forced to wear, either directly or indirectly”.

Syrian women are presented as victims in news reports concerning forced and early marriage due to their purportedly dismal circumstances, yet they are inferred to be a danger to Turkish family unity, with some publications indicating expanded separate rates in Turkish cities bordering Syria. The media portrays uprooted Syrian women who confront constrained marriages or additional companions as frantic. The normal storyteller may be a Syrian woman who needs to dwell in Turkey since she cannot return to her own nation (Narli et al., 2020).

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Syrian women are portrayed as victims in news reports of forced and early marriages because of their allegedly dire conditions, although they are also seen as a threat to Turkish family unity, with some publications claiming increased separation rates in Turkish cities bordering Syria. The media depicts displaced Syrian women who face limited marriages or extra partners as distressed. The typical narrator may be a Syrian woman who needs to live in Turkey since she cannot return to her own country (Narli et al., 2020). By exposing the social subject to forced imperceptibility, the demonization of social order implies submitting to the thinking of the 'other' (Civila et al., 2020). As a result, it is the process by which the "other" becomes culturally unacceptable and inferior, or hates ruthless paradigms, stereotypes, and clichés that involve discrimination, disrespect them morally and perceptually, and undermine their social identity, as well as the self-esteem that gives them their identity. Gray & Franck (2019) argued that the dichotomous framing of gender and vulnerability in media discourse, as well as the failure to recognize that all people seeking to cross into Europe are subject to risk, make it difficult to recognize the vulnerability of this mobile population. The focus of reporting on refugees has changed from female to male migrants, making it easier to infer the harmful character of refugees as a group. As a result, the prevalent imaginaries of interwoven (racialized, feminized) vulnerability and (racialized, masculinized) danger in which refugee bodies look as if they are at risk function as valid reactions to a situation that makes both male and female refugees insecure.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Media Framing and Agenda Setting

According to Goffman (1974), a frame is a specific expectation structure utilized by the media to make people more aware of social events at a certain time. The media portrays displaced people in four ways, whether they are migrants or refugees. According to Amores et al. (2020), the most unfavorable frames include being a possible burden or threat to the host society (Bansak et al., 2016; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Esses et al., 2008). The most passive frames, on the other hand, represent them as victims (which may be read favorably given their potential effect on viewers'

sentiments about refugees and immigrants) and are portrayed in a normalized manner (Castles & Miller, 2009; Van Gorp, 2005).

Because the media, in general, plays a role in portraying recipients' objectives and concerns, the refugees noted some themes that the media may have concentrated on and raised more than others. McCombs and Shaw (1972), who created the agenda-setting hypothesis in 1968 research, stressed that there is a relationship between the concerns prioritized by the media and the expanding public attention to these issues. Prioritization is the process of transferring emphasis and attention from the media agenda to the public agenda.

Populist governments and symbolic elites have a role in setting the media's agenda. Cervi et al. (2020) found that populist administrations and symbolic elites played a role in the development and replication of anti-immigrant discourse. Politicians are required to explain the situation when new immigrants arrive at the borders, and right-wing populism shares discursive tendencies, such as framing immigrants as "others" or "invaders". This creates, according to Wodak (2015), what is called a "victim- perpetrator reversal". Depending on Van Dijk, T. A. (1993), when the politicians, as symbolic elites, take a racist posture, this will be the primary source of the acquisition and replication of racial biases and beliefs. We can gain awareness of it when it is mirrored in the media, and then when the media helps to create bad views of those women through particular stigmatized frames.

Many studies have investigated the role of anti-immigration discourses on refugees and immigrant communities, for example (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2018; Bocskor, 2018; Norocel, 2010; Cap, 2006).

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3.2. Cultivation Theory and Repeated Exposure to Negative Messages –

Continuous, extensive, and cumulative exposure to media messages, according to cultivation theory, molds media audience perceptions (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Signorielli & Morgan, 1990). People's perceptions are changed by media through repeated exposure to certain information; hence, continuous exposure to poor portrayal or stigmatization of news or messages through media and social media may shape public opinion (Aldamen, 2023a). Media exposure, according to Paik and Comstock (1994) and Shrum et al. (1998), has a significant influence on people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. People who are exposed to media messages are more likely to be influenced by what they see, hear, or read than those who are not (Shrum et al., 1998; Singer et al., 1998). Heidenreich et al. (2019) examined national media discourses in Hungary, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Spain during the peak period of refugee arrivals in Europe. They found that the complexity and duration of the crisis created uncertainty, allowing mass media to shape citizens' understanding of the arrival of refugees. However, there were disparities in media framing due to geographic location or position as a receiving country.

As a result, the framing process by which the image of Syrian refugee women is presented, as well as repeated exposure to those frames, contribute to the development of the public's attitudes, expectations, and beliefs about reality based on what they are exposed to in various mediums such as television, cinema, news websites, and social media platforms. The study is conceptually based on elucidating the function of framing media messages through direct exposure to media messages connected to the depiction of a certain group, in this case refugee women, and its influence on molding the public's beliefs and attitudes about that group.

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURES

Some media frames indicate that refugee women are a homogeneous group of individuals. This framing process relates to the organization and presentation of the ideas, events, and issues to which the media gatekeeper provides access. Furthermore, how do such frames shape the audience's conceptions of reality? The study looks at the perspectives and insights of a sample of Syrian refugees in host countries, with Jordan hosting the second-highest number of refugees in the world. There are 90% Syrians in Jordan, amounting to 659,593 refugees (UNHCR, 2017). The same is true in Turkey, where the majority of refugees who stay after others have fled to Europe number more than 3.5 million (UNHCR, 2018).

Although there is a large body of research on the media depiction of refugee women, relatively few works focus on how refugee women perceive their image in the media and the frameworks in which that image is portrayed. This study fills a research vacuum by offering the perspectives of a sample of Syrian refugee women in Turkey and Jordan. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate how Syrian refugee women perceive their image in the media and to discuss the prevailing frames of the image of Syrian refugee women in the media. As well as discussing the main issues that dominate the image of Syrian women in social media or the roles that have been assigned to Syrian women and circulated through social media, Furthermore, how that presentation affects the audience's options in how they receive the message or organize the message's meaning

The analysis will be based on the framing theory's perception, which implies that media platforms display and communicate information to the audience. This influence on audience perceptions of news might be understood as a type of secondary agenda framing. It instructs the audience not only on what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also on how to think, which is what the general public should seek (Goffman, 1974). The study used a qualitative method, using focus group talks to acquire a deeper understanding of some of the participants' views, opinions, and attitudes toward the study's topics. In this study, the qualitative analysis technique was utilized to determine Syrian refugee women's views, insights, experiences, opinions, or values using qualitative data analysis. Data coding was one of the theme analysis procedures utilized for familiarization and development in the following sections.

Two focus group discussions were conducted in Arabic. The first focus group discussion is part of a wider study in Turkey and Jordan on the effects of social media on Syrian refugees, including a sample of both male and female participants on the main study's broad issue. Then, in the absence of the male participants, small focus group talks were held with the same female participants to study their viewpoints. Because the Syrian community is considered conservative, women frequently do not feel comfortable addressing these issues in the presence of men, and more clear and open insights on such a topic might be obtained in the absence of men.

The characteristics of the sample of the March 20th, 2018 focus group discussion in Amman, Jordan (male and female on the main topic of the positive and negative effects of social media in general) were: (n = 15), age group (22-48), marital status (single and married), education level from less than high school graduate to PhD student, and work status (working and not working). After that, a second focus group discussion on the media depiction of Syrian refugee women was held in Amman with just six female participants.

While the characteristics of the participants in the first focus group discussions (males and females) in Istanbul on April 20th, 2018 on the main topic of the positive and negative effects of social media in general were: (n =15), age group (21-43), marital status (single and married), education level from less than high school graduate to PhD student, and work status (working and not working), The second focus group discussion in Istanbul was conducted with just seven female participants, without the male participants, on the issue of media depictions of Syrian refugee women.

The theoretical and practical foundation of this study is based on many design constraints. However, the research was conducted in 2018. Because the settings of media platforms and their agendas vary over time, the same focus group discussions would generate different outcomes today and later. As a result, the outcomes in 2023 will be different. The current study primarily uses a qualitative approach. Thoughts from Syrian refugee women of various backgrounds, ages, statuses, and host countries may serve as a reference for future studies using quantitative methods. This study aimed to comprehend how these frames might influence public opinion from the viewpoint of refugee women and how they perceive their media representations. Future studies that concentrate on in- depth content and thematic analysis of certain media genres should be taken into consideration because the thoughts and perspectives of the sampled individuals do not, by themselves, indicate the precise influence that these frames have on the society in which they live.

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The participants in the conversations were questioned about the most commonly discussed concerns and subjects in the media that have addressed Syrian refugee women. As seen in Table 1, their responses focused mostly on subjects such as misery, aggression, mistreatment, extortion, torture, harassment, and other comparable issues. While Table 2 shows the most relevant extracts from the focus group talks that were transcribed.

Table 1. Main participants’ perspectives on the most mentioned topics and issues that were addressed on social media about Syrian refugee women

No	Main Mentioned Topics
1	Rape & detention in Syrian prisons
2	The suffering of women under the siege
3	Stories of honor killings have been spread in Europe
4	Women maltreatment in camps
5	Marrying young girls off to rich men in exchange for money
6	Issues of physical violence
7	Cases of harassment
8	The high illiteracy rate among women
9	Extortion, torture, & harassment in prisons by militants
10	Sexual exploitation in exchange for travel
11	Increasing divorce rates
12	Stories of women kidnapped in the Syrian city As-Suwayda
13	The suffering of women after the death of their husbands
14	The social standing of women who have been arrested
15	The exploitation of women physically through smuggling mafias

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Table 2. Main Participants’ Extracts during both of the FGDs

Main Extracts	Focus Group Discussions Details
<i>"In many contexts, they were not presented in a compassionate manner but in a contemptuous manner... When a Syrian woman's queue to receive her monthly salary is shown, the media addresses this situation as we have left our country and fled and came here to sit down and take aid and live dependent on others".</i>	(Extract 1, Istanbul, participant 11, female, 43, secondary school) (Extract from the first focus group [male and female]).
<i>"Through some reports on social media, Syrian women have been portrayed as prostitutes who have turned from a closed society to an open one"</i>	(Extract 2, Istanbul, participant 6, male, 27, high school graduate/not working) (Extract from the first focus group [male and female]).
<i>"Social media highlighted suffering of children who lost loved ones or needed help, and women who brought to the fore the suffering of women suffering from financial difficulties their livelihoods stopped"</i>	(Extract 3, Amman, participant 4, female, 29, bachelor's degree/not working) (Extract from the first focus group [male and female]).
<i>"Some individuals who were unaware of using social media took advantage of it, particularly weak women, as well as others who needed it to bring more aid and funding to international organizations"</i>	(Extract 4, Amman, participant 10, female, 48, PhD/working) (Extract from the first focus group [male and female]).
<i>"They focus on women who are weak and forced to get married because they are refugees"</i>	(Extract 5, Amman, participant 5, female, 34, less than high school graduate/not working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"They present some individual stories of successful Syrian refugee women, but the most humiliating stories are shown against Syrian women, such as marriage, many children, and the problems that occur between them and their husbands in Europe"</i>	(extract 6, Amman, participant 7, female, 20, married, less than high school graduate/working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"Many times, they show that Syrian women took advantage of their new life in secular western societies to file for divorce"</i>	(extract 7, Amman, participant 6, female, 25, high school graduate/working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"They focus on the fact that when Syrian women arrive in Europe and ask for a divorce, they try to show that the woman was imprisoned and took advantage of their new life in western societies to get divorced"</i>	(extract 8, Istanbul, participant 1, female, 31, PhD student) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"There is an exaggeration on the issue of marriage, as they portray the refugee woman as having come to marry older men who are married in exchange for money"</i>	(extract 9, Amman, participant 1, female, 30, single, PhD student) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"Depicting Syrian women that need money, and that is why they are forced to marry, and that a Syrian woman is a wife at a low price"</i>	(extract 10, Istanbul, participant 2, female, 21, single, undergraduate student) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"I heard about a campaign on social media under the title "refugees, not captives", rejecting practices that turn refugee women into a commodity under the pretext of marriage."</i>	(Extract 11, Amman, participant 4, female, 48, married, PhD student/working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only])
<i>"The marriage of Syrian women to Turks outside the legal framework as a "second wife" and the effects of the marriage"</i>	(extract 12, Istanbul, participant 4, female, 33, single, high school graduate, or not working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"Refugee women's poverty and irregular status make them easy targets for smugglers"</i>	(extract 13, Istanbul, participant 5, female, 33, married, bachelor's degree/working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only]).
<i>"The stories of some Syrian refugee women who have children living without their husbands and wish to cross to Europe, and that they have been subjected to blackmail and sexual harassment by some smugglers, who took advantage of their inability to pay the costs of the smuggling trip by air or their fear to file a complaint against them because of their illegal status."</i>	(Extract 14, Amman, participant 3, female, 32, bachelor's degree/working) (Extract from the second focus group [female only])

According to the discussions with the participants, the main issues and stories that have been addressed and focused on by social media regarding the issues of women were mainly stories focusing on the suffering of women under siege, rape, and detention in Syrian prisons; cases of harassment; sexual exploitation in exchange for livelihood; marrying young girls cheaply; issues of physical violence; stories of honor killings that have spread in Europe; and the stories of women kidnapped in the Syrian city of As- Suwayda.

Furthermore, they were also focusing on: the amendment of the personal status law in Syria a few years ago that introduced gender-based violence; the exploitation of women physically through smuggling mafias; some cases of maltreatment in camps; high divorce rates; the high illiteracy rate among women; the suffering of women after the death of their husbands; the exploitation of Syrian women by marrying husbands of Arab nationalities for trade; the social standing of women who have been arrested; widows; extortion and torture of women in prisons; and harassment by militants.

The data from the focus group discussions was also transcribed, and the most important extracts were coded and categorized into categories and dominant themes. There was a consensus among the participants regarding the focus on negative issues and topics related to women in the media. The mentioned news or topics are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Codes and Dominant Themes of the Topics repeated in Media related to SyrianRefugee Women in the Host Countries

Topics	Codes	Dominant Theme
The suffering of women under the siege	Suffering	Gender-based violence against Syrian women refugees
Rape and detention in Syrian prisons	Rape	
Cases of harassment	Harassment	
Sexual exploitation in exchange for travelling	Sexual exploitation	
Marrying young girls off to rich men in exchange of money	Enforcement to marriage	
Issues of physical violence	Physical violence	
Stories of honor killings that have been spread in Europe	Honor killings	
Stories of women kidnapped in the Syrian city As-Suwayda	Women kidnapping	
Exploitation of women physically through smuggling mafias	Women smuggling	
Women maltreatment in camps	Women maltreatment	
Increasing in divorce rates	Divorce	
The high illiteracy rate among women	Illiteracy rate	
The suffering of women after the death of their husbands	Suffering of widow women	
Social standing of women who have been arrested	Arrested women	
Extortion, torture, & harassment in prisons by militants	Extortion, torture, & harassment	

Source (Author)

Some participants claim that refugee women are exploited and portrayed as defenseless women seeking assistance. According to the participant in extract 1, this frame helped transmit an insulting impression of them in the host community. When the topic of Syrian refugee women traveling overseas and living in an open society is brought up, participants respond that their image is also branded with shame and prostitution (Extract 2).

During the conversation, participants pointed out that there were success stories that did not receive public exposure (Extract 6). She did not discuss these, instead focusing on the most embarrassing situations, such as early marriage (Extract 5), having numerous children, and the hardships that women and their spouses face in Europe. Furthermore,

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as mentioned in excerpts 3 and 4, the media contributed to the stigmatization of Syrian women by emphasizing negative elements rather than news of Syrian women who were successful or able to overcome problems. This bad social media representation of a Syrian woman illustrates the conservative Syrian society's reaction to news of raped prisoner women, such as what occurred to the female prisoner, and includes the same case excerpts. As indicated in excerpts 5 and 6, the family's behavior caused society harm. According to the participants' viewpoints, the media demonizes Syrian refugee women by portraying them when they arrive in Europe. They demand a divorce from patriarchal culture.

The debate revealed that the media portrays Syrian women as "deviating from the right path," as more of them continue to seek divorce once they arrive in Europe. As mentioned in passages 7 and 8, they took advantage of their new existence in secular western nations to apply for divorce. There is also a concentration on patriarchal power, which explains the quiet of Syrian refugee women and their acceptance of the current situation in their homeland. The notion of flaw, in general, determines the conduct of these women. As mentioned in extract 9, the media depicts the families of refugee ladies as they sell them by pushing them to marry old men seeking money. Furthermore, when they get help (Extract 10) or, as indicated in Extract 12, the media demonizes Syrian women as though they were snatching men to be second wives in Turkey. The most frequent types of SGBV among Syrian refugees are reported to be forced marriage, early marriage, dowry, and polygamy. Parents compel their daughters into marriage in return for a dowry, fearing that their young daughters may be raped and bring shame to their families. Women and girls face challenges as a result of patriarchal culture and masculinity (Özdemir 2015).

The participants learned about numerous ads, including the RNC effort, which focuses on photos of Syrian refugee women, such as excerpt 11. The RNC campaign and western media narratives minimize the voices of refugee women and activists who do not conform to the prevailing depiction of Muslim women, perpetuating the hegemonic orientalist portrayal of Syrian women (Alhayek, 2014). While the victimization frame is clearly used to portray refugee women as weak and vulnerable females who are sold by their families to rich older men seeking money, the demonization frame manifests itself in some societies, such as Turkish society, by portraying them as willing to marry a married man and be his second wife (Extract 11).

Furthermore, the participants expressed that the media portrays refugee women as victims, including portraying the woman as a weak person with children with whom her husband traveled, and in order to join him, she sought help from smugglers who exploited her sexually in order to enter Europe (extracts 13 and 14). When the general population learns what occurred to the victims, they acquire a sense of devaluation and regard them as dirty. This frequently results in victim stigmatization, leaving victims with no one to turn to for support and severely low self-esteem because of their ordeal.

The participants acknowledged that the media treats them collectively rather than individually and portrays them in stigmatized frames related to gender-based issues, primarily in two negative frames, which are victimization and demonization, as coded and categorized in Table 4.

Table 4. Codes & Dominant Themes that Prevail in the Extracts from FGDs

Extract	Codes	Dominant Theme
1	Not presented in a compassionate manner. Accepting assistance and relying on others	Victimization
2	Portrayed as prostitutes From a closed to an open society	Demonization
3	Suffering Financial difficulties In need of livelihoods	Victimization
4	More aid Funding & international organization	Victimization
5	Weak Forced marriage	Victimization
6	Most are humiliating stories Problems between parents who took refuge in Europe	Stigmatization
7	Taking advantage of new life in secular western societies	Demonization
8	Women were imprisoned They asked for a divorce in Europe	Demonization
9	Women marry for money	Demonization
10	Wife at a low price	Victimization
11	Campaign to defend women from early marriage	Victimization
12	Syrian women steal Turk men as second wives.	Demonization
13	Poverty among women Dealing with smugglers	Victimization Demonization
14	Blackmail and sexual harassment Unable to complain since their status is illegal.	Victimization

The participants feel that the majority of news about Syrian women uploaded and shared on social media is unfavorable. None of the attendees highlighted any success stories or the positive effects of Syrian women overcoming adversity, including normalization. Syrian women's presence on social media, for example, has affected conservative Syrian society's attitude toward accounts of raped female detainees and what happened to them.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

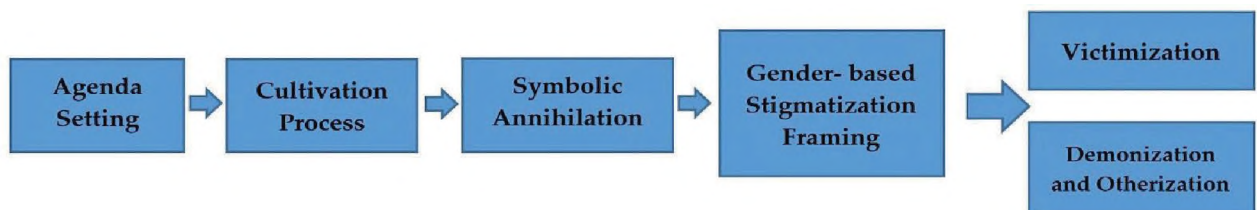
Negative portrayals affects Syrian women in particular and Syrian refugees in general because they may lead to compassion fatigue among inhabitants of host nations (Aldamen, 2023a). Because of the public's habituation with specific information, such as gruesome photographs, people can no longer regard the victims of these images as individuals but rather as part of the media machine (Mast and Hanegreets, 2015). This habituation gets ingrained in the population's psychological fabric, diminishing individuals' ability to feel sympathy for those depicted in the photos. Compassion fatigue sets in as a result of this extended exposure to the ongoing catastrophe. The exaggeration in reporting and fake news reporting on most social media platforms about those migrants makes it impossible to discern between fake and legitimate news, discouraging people from assisting those in need (Shehabat, 2012). As well as it leads to hostility and xenophobic speech directed at them (Aldamen, 2023b). Particularly as several participants highlighted the media framing of some refugee women who traveled to Turkey to marry Turkish men, which lessens compassion for refugee women in host communities they pose a danger to family bonds in Turkish society. It might be claimed that social networks also have a role in creating the public agenda since they can shape journalists' agendas and consequently the public agenda on certain issues, like crises and war.

Syrian refugee women's stigma creates damaging gender stereotypes and exacerbates existing disparities. In many circumstances, rather than assisting victims, the media adds to the negative framing of refugees and vulnerable groups, particularly women, in frames such as demonization and victimization. As a result, that media leads to "symbolic annihilation," which decreases one's power and control over one's image and experience (Gerbner, 1972).

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Social media-created and led media messages have the power to affect views and trends. It is therefore the communicator's process that changes the message into people's perception and persuasion. According to Entman (1989), the influence of media frames on communications is determined not only by consciously creating frames but also by media message controllers eliminating and disregarding intentional and occasionally inadvertent omissions. The media has a significant impact on setting agendas and informing the public on what and how to think about topics (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

From these perspectives, it could be concluded that when the agenda of the media set the representation of the refugee women, it contributed to the cultivation of symbolic annihilation and the gender-based stigmatization framing, which enhances certain frames such as victimization, demonization, and otherization of the Syrian refugee women, as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Process of enhancing stigmatization frames of
Syrian refugee women in media (Source: Author)**

This continuation of damaging stereotypes frequently promotes conventional gender norms, depicting Syrian women as helpless victims or passive objects who are wholly reliant on male family members for protection or in need of Western nations' rescue.

Furthermore, the media frequently portrays Syrian women as dangers or agents of disruption, demonizing their presence in host communities and establishing a misleading image of their purported ability to disrupt social order and threaten national security. These demeaning depictions of Syrian refugee women not only contribute to the marginalization of their experiences, but also promote a culture of xenophobia and prejudice, impeding their smooth integration into host cultures.

The cultivation theory was mentioned in this study to highlight that media can change citizens' perceptions based on the understanding that continuous exposure to poor portrayal or stigmatization of news or messages through media and social media may shape public opinion. Furthermore, in order to stimulate research on the effect of repeated exposure to stigmatization-based content in news and representations of refugee women, as well as to study public reactions to those refugee women when the public becomes accustomed to negative content, images, and representations through

social media and, as a result, becomes cultivated with certain impressions of Syrian refugee women.

The discussion indicated that the refugee women believe they are presented in unfavorable ways on social media. Such insights from the target themselves raise the question of whether the related representation could cumulatively cultivate certain impressions or affect the empathy of the audience, resulting in compassion fatigue later if the audience is distressed when exposed to certain negative frames for the Syrian refugee women.

This repeated exposure to the negative representation of Syrian refugee women in the media is significant because it could be studied further using Harold Lasswell's 1927 Magic Bullet theory, which assumes that the media's message is a bullet fired from the media gun into the viewer's head when the message is transferred and repeated while the audience is passive.

Furthermore, analyzing positive representation and concentrating on refugee women, as each woman has a unique experience, may help to reduce stigmatization of refugee women.

Conclusion

This continuation of damaging stereotypes frequently promotes conventional gender norms, depicting Syrian women as helpless victims or passive objects who are wholly reliant on male family members for protection or in need of western nations' rescue. Furthermore, the media frequently portrays Syrian women as dangers or agents of disruption, demonizing their presence in host communities and establishing a misleading image of their purported ability to disrupt social order and threaten national security. These demeaning depictions of Syrian refugee women not only contribute to the marginalization of their experiences but also promote a culture of xenophobia and prejudice, impeding their smooth integration into host cultures.

The Syrian refugee crisis has been one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, driving millions of people to escape their homes and seek safety in neighboring nations. The findings revealed that participants shared the belief that refugee women are framed negatively in a collective representation that includes frames of humiliation and dehumanization. Participants notice that their image in the media is framed by gender concerns. The framing of the negative depiction and message in the media allows for the demonization and humiliation of those refugee women. Furthermore, the unfavorable portrayal of refugees, both men and women, as a burden or threat in host nations undermines their acceptability in those host countries.

There has been increased concern in recent years about the symbolic destruction of women and people of color in numerous kinds of media, including television, cinema, and advertising. This phenomenon has far-reaching repercussions for society's views toward these groups and their sense of belonging, as well as for their employment and

other prospects. The underrepresentation of women and people of color in leadership roles in film, for example, promotes the perception that they are unfit for such a position. As a result, the media employs part of their material in popular and essential social forms in order to discover and magnify occurrences as well as simplify and develop solutions.

The study identifies the viewpoints of Syrian refugee women, implying that the media has a substantial influence on shaping public opinion and attitudes toward refugees, particularly Syrian women. Media outlets regularly perpetuate harmful stereotypes and inaccurate images of Syrian refugee women, further marginalizing and erasing their experiences and identities via gender-based stigmatization and symbolic annihilation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is critical that media outlets and authorities take a more nuanced approach to portraying and treating Syrian refugee women, one that acknowledges their agency and offers them the help and resources they need to reconstruct their lives. Furthermore, it is critical to confront the media's negative narratives and discriminatory attitudes against Syrian women refugees by emphasizing their resilience, strength, and different experiences, as well as elevating their voices through inclusive storytelling and representation. Addressing the media stigmatization of Syrian refugee women demands a joint effort from all parties. It is past time to acknowledge the humanity and dignity of all refugees, especially women, and work toward a more inclusive and caring society. This may be accomplished with a multifaceted strategy that includes activism, legislative reform, and media literacy education. Partnering with local organizations that specialize in refugee resettlement, providing language and vocational training programs specifically tailored to women, implementing antidiscrimination policies, and fostering a more inclusive dialogue on refugee issues in the media are some potential solutions. In order to overcome the continuing refugee crisis, we must prioritize the needs and rights of Syrian refugee women.

As a result, the media should play a larger role in ensuring that these women and girls are not stigmatized, as well as in assisting victims in recovering and moving on with their lives. The media, being a powerful tool in all of its forms, plays an important role in influencing how people think about specific issues or make judgments about them. In addition, media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and new and social media have a big effect on how agendas are developed. The media, which plays a vital role in defining the agenda, informs the public on what and how to think about a subject.

Furthermore, based on the refugee women's observations, the study advocates for the adoption of specific ethical norms in reporting on gender-based concerns affecting Syrian refugee women. The United Nations Population Fund (2015) has published a journalist's guide that contains these ethical standards. From here, it is recommended that UNHCR and UNFPA collaborate to encourage all countries with UNHCR offices

around the world to agree on the ethical principles handbook issued by UNFPA and encourage them to guide how gender-based issues should be covered and to ensure the implementation of the ethical principles discussed in the book, which could contribute to reducing refugees' feelings of being demonized, humiliated, or dehumanized. Also, emphasizing some good tales of Syrian refugee women, advocating for greater humanitarian reporting on Syrian refugee women, and avoiding excessive negative reactions in the host country.

The first step toward efficient media cultivation is to cultivate a critical attitude in which everything is questioned and verified before being accepted as true. To develop a more inclusive, truthful, and empathic knowledge of Syrian refugee women and their experiences, it is vital to critically assess and criticize these problematic media depictions. We may begin to develop a more fair and informed discourse by deconstructing and debunking these destructive tropes, which respect the resilience, agency, and various contributions of Syrian refugee women in their host cultures. This may be accomplished through spreading alternative narratives that emphasize the agency, resilience, and variety of Syrian refugee women. This strategy necessitates a collaborative effort on the part of media practitioners, policymakers, and civil society groups to raise the voices of Syrian refugee women and provide them with outlets to express their tales and experiences. Furthermore, including intersectional views in media reporting and policies will result in a more nuanced understanding of the complexity and different identities of Syrian refugee women.

To build a more inclusive and accurate knowledge of their experiences and identities, as well as to create a more fair and welcoming environment for them in their host nations, it is critical to question and transform the prevalent damaging media narratives surrounding Syrian refugee women. This may be achieved via a variety of methods, including media literacy programs that teach audiences how to critically assess and understand media messages, as well as the provision of resources such as counseling and legal assistance to empower Syrian refugee women in host communities. Finally, these initiatives will not only help to break down stereotypes and promote a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Syrian refugee women, but will also help to establish a fairer and more just society that values diversity, inclusion, and refugee rights for all. It is critical to realize that the difficulties experienced by Syrian refugee women are the result of systemic and structural hurdles such as gender inequity, economic marginalization, and discrimination.

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