

9. From Dominant Media Frames to Spaces of Appearance

In this chapter, I reflect on the biases and blind spots that have appeared in reporting in the sociopolitical context of the Syrian conflict; I then link these to the ownership of the respective television stations. I summarize the dominant media frames that have appeared throughout the news reports analysis, and I reflect on the procedures of media reporting that have produced the media frames. I discuss how the figure of the Syrian woman in the television news appears as a stage for the mediated representation against the background of the geopolitical tensions during the Syrian conflict. In the last two sections, I summarize the main findings of the research project in the context of media logic, gender logic, and war logic, and I propose a feminist logic to the media representations by discussing the notion of ‘spaces of appearance.’

9.1 Television Ownership: Biases and Blind Spots

Nikunen (2020) found that the groups of refugees in Europe who were interviewed about the European media covered the refugee ‘crisis’ in 2015 “shared this sense of frustration” with regard to “the gap between representations of refugees and their own experience of being a refugee.” These groups found the news coverage repetitive, as it reported “the same stories over and over again, with sensationalism and a tendency to make errors” (Nikunen, 2020).

Granted, the decision-making process in the newsroom remains largely in the hands of the social elite. “Hegemonic and gender ideologies [are] repeatedly reproduced” in media representations, and thus “circulated in society and habitually accepted as ‘truth’” (Georgiou 2012, p. 795). The way mainstream media represent minorities and marginalized groups, such as refugee women, is highly influenced by these factors.

The three Arab satellite television stations, *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan*, are owned by different government officials and political elites from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE respectively (Sakr, 2007; Najjar, 2018). This research project has demonstrated how news reports from these television stations similarly condemned human rights violations committed by the Syrian regime. The three stations embraced sensationalism¹ when reporting on the violent crimes committed by the Assad regime. At the same time, they also ignored the violence inflicted on Syrian women by the Syrian opposition groups that were fighting against the Syrian Arab Army.

This probably does not come as a surprise to the reader, as the governments of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are not only outspoken about their support for the Syrian opposition: they have also contributed to a proxy war in Syria by selling and providing weapons to armed groups fighting the Syrian regime. The *Financial Times* revealed in 2013 that Qatar was becoming the largest provider of arms to the various rebel groups in Syria, such as the al-Nusra front (Khalaf & Smith, 2013). Similarly, in 2017, an article on the *Al Jazeera* news website disclosed that “an investigative report by a Bulgarian journalist says Saudi Arabia and the UAE have supplied Eastern European-made weapons to armed groups in Syria [...] using different intermediaries and diplomatic cover to mask their points of origin and final destinations” (Al Jazeera News, 2017).

Television ownership and political context explain the editorial bias in the television reporting. The editorial bias in the coverage of the Syrian conflict becomes evident in *Al Jazeera's* news reporting, as previously discussed by several academic studies (Zayani, 2016), as well as in the news reporting by *Al Arabiya* and *Al Aan*; the latter two stations are “seen as a simulacrum of *Al Jazeera*” (Darwich, 2009, p. 132).

The television stations owned and controlled by the Syrian regime, SANA, SAMA, and *Syria Al-Ikhbariya*, have acted as a mouthpiece to the government policies and political agendas of the Syrian regime and the Baath Party and ignored Syrian women living in exile. Only Syrian women living in Assad-controlled parts of Syria appeared in the news reports, as they were portrayed through their roles of as servants and protectors of the nation. Similarly, *RT Arabic*, a television station controlled by the Russian state, omitted the figure of the Syrian woman living in exile in its reporting. The depictions by this station were limited to the ‘positive’ experiences of women inside Syria, such

1 This has been previously shown by Ayish, 2002; Falk, 2003; Gunter and Dickson, 2013.

as young Syrian women getting married to soldiers from the Syrian regime in a public ceremony in Aleppo. The editorial bias in *RT Arabic's* reporting is explained by Russia's political and military support of the Assad regime, ongoing since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, and Russia's direct military involvement in Syria that began in September 2015 (Tsvetkova & Zverev, 2016).

9.2 The Dominant Media Frames and the Procedures of Media Reporting

The research project found that the experiences of Syrian women during the conflict were depicted in five dominant media frames in the television news. These media frames were perpetuated in the news reports through seven different forms of media reporting. The table below illustrates these findings and categorizes them according to the four main concepts: *violence*, *vulnerability*, *resilience*, and *resistance*.

Table 10. Main findings: dominant media frames and procedures of media reporting

| Main Concepts | Dominant Media Frames | Procedures of Media Reporting |
|---------------|---|---|
| Violence | Women as a source of shame | Circulation of shame |
| | Women as victims of their previous imprisonment | Stigmatizing the female victim |
| Vulnerability | Females as destined child brides | Dehumanization by misrecognized female desire |
| | | Sentimental de-politization |
| Resilience | Women as the neoliberal subject | Strategic silencing |
| | | Dehistoricization |
| Resistance | Women as mothers of the nation | Nationalizing the female body |

One of the perpetuated media frames in the television coverage is the construction of former female Syrian prisoners as victims of shame and their previous imprisonment. The *circulation of shame* in the news reports is built on the figure of a Syrian woman, who is shamed for falling as a victim to gender-based violence at Syrian prisons and detainment centers. This dominant media frame contains sexist rhetoric that normalizes the *stigmatization of fe-*

male victims by portraying the former female prisoners as a source of societal shame.

Similarly, the television coverage of child brides showed repetitive frames of victimization. The news reports from *Al Jazeera*, *Al Aan*, and *Al Arabiya* exposed the increasing number of child marriages among displaced Syrian communities in Lebanon and Jordan. The media narrative sympathized with the vulnerable figures of child brides.

Numerical dehumanization of refugees is a common finding among scholars who have spoken about the “highly numerical representation of refugees’ plight in Europe” in the mainstream media (Nikunen, 2020, p. 414). Although the news report analysis did not find any dominant media frames that *numerically* dehumanized the images of the displaced Syrian communities, a different type of dehumanization occurred in the news reports. The news presented the figure of the child bride as akin to the figure of *Homo Sacer*. A term coined by Agamben, “Homo Sacer, or the dehumanized, the misrecognized, is an individual who can be killed with impunity because, already in exile from the moral community, his life counts for nothing” (Agamben, 1998, p. 71-115, from Oliver 2010). In this media frame, the child bride’s state of victimization and vulnerability are reaffirmed; the child brides’ desire to lead a different life is portrayed as something unattainable, and marriage is her only way to survive in exile.

By showing the pitiful and tragic stories of child brides and close-up images of their families living in states of impoverishment, the media reporting aroused sympathy and understanding for the displaced Syrian communities. However, this emotional intimacy offered through the individualized stories of child marriages and the media narratives’ tendency to sympathize with their suffering, led to the depoliticization of the child brides’ plight. Nikunen (2020) found that this is also a common mechanism used by the European mainstream media’s reporting on Europe’s migration ‘crisis.’ She writes:

“In terms of agency, news stories that evoke empathy and compassion often lean on representations of passive victimhood. In this way then, the benevolent, empathic discourses depict victims who are grateful, humble and explicitly vulnerable (Höijer, 2004; Tickin, 2011: 186–7). This means that submission to the forces of chaos and exploitation, ill treatment and hard conditions seems to be inscribed in the figure of the victims and operate as a guarantee of their innocence” (Nikunen 2020, p. 415).

Johnson (2011) asserted these visual constructions function, on the one hand, as tools for “the mobilization of support behind humanitarian intervention and refugee work” (Johnson 2011, p. 1032) and, on the other hand, contribute significantly to how the observer sees and acknowledges the dynamics of refuge and asylum.

In the context of this research project, similar notions appear in two approaches of media reporting: *The dehumanization by the misrecognized female desire* and *sentimental de-politization*. These forms of media reporting depicted the displaced child brides as vulnerable, innocent, passive, submissive, and ‘in need of saving’ (see Mohanty 1984), thereby reinforcing “traditional gender assumptions” and denying these individuals “the capacity of political agency” (Johnson 2011).

In the case of the resilient displaced Syrian woman, the television news limited her visibility to her participation in vocational and cash-for-work programs funded by humanitarian organizations. These representations were constructed with two procedures of the media reporting: the procedure of *strategic silencing* and the procedure of *dehistorization*. Initially coined by anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1996) as “the architecture of silence,” strategic silencing appears when the media headlines limit the narrative to the ‘benevolent’ humanitarian initiatives conducted by NGOs. The research showed that the media frames rarely showed any engagement with the female participants; rather, media attention was directed to the humanitarian initiatives. Moreover, by producing media headlines that fail to mention the contextual background of the Syrian conflict and the complex reasons why the displaced Syrian women had to seek exile, a form of dehistorization takes place. The strategic silencing appeared in the dehistorization that reduces the visibility of a displaced person to a ‘philanthropic mode of power.’ This form of visibility objectifies the subject as apolitical, poor, and passive. Under the umbrella of neoliberal ideals, the plight of displaced Syrian women again becomes de-politicized, but this time not with sentimentalism but with humanitarianism.

As for the concept of resistance in the television news, ‘mothers of the nation’ was the dominant media frame that appeared in the reports by the stations SANA, SAMA, and *Syria Al-Ikhbariya*. In this media frame, as a nation Syria appears as the motherland in which motherhood becomes a national service (Aghacy, 2009). The media frame of the ‘mother of the nation’ portrays the figure of the Syrian woman as a subject who resists opposition groups, which destabilize the ideology of nationhood perpetuated by the Ba’ath Party in news reports. Similar representations are discussed by Elizabeth Thomp-

son (2000) in the context of “women and deviance in Syrian and Lebanese periodicals of the 1930s” during the French colonization of Lebanon and Syria (p. 220). Thompson (2000) characterized these stereotypical gender roles of ‘the women of the nation’ into two juxtaposed groups. The first group of women are *the Patriotic Mother* and *the Good Wife*, who “protect the nation, produce patriotic children, and marry” in the face of colonial power. The second group of women are *the Backward Woman* and *the Deviant*, who are “the highly sexed, aggressive women who were a danger to the nation itself” (Thompson, 2000, p. 222).

The representations of the second group of women – *the Backward Woman* and *the Deviant* – do not appear in the news reports. Nevertheless, the media reporting’s constant affirmation of the importance of pursuing the roles and duties of the ‘mothers of the nation’ reveals how the media narrative is being utilized by its owners and authorities, which define the agenda for the news. In times of conflict, anxieties on maintaining the national and state identity – the “authentic” culture of the Ba’ath Party and nationhood in Assad Syria – appear in these mediated representations as *a site of struggle*. Thus, when the groups of Syrian women who participate in the armed and unarmed resistance in Syria are portrayed as beacons of stability in the face of change; in this context, “change is seen as a potential betrayal of one’s culture, values, and language” (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2). A different approach is pursued in the media reporting: the figure of the Syrian woman becomes *nationalized* in the television news.

9.3 The Mediated Figure of the Syrian Woman at the Forefront of Geopolitical Tensions

In their study on the German print media’s construction of Afghani women during the war in Afghanistan, Klaus and Kassel (2005) found that women were rarely depicted shaping their own lives. Instead, the media depictions of vulnerable women and children in refugee camps were generally used to evoke feelings of sympathy and pity in the reader. The media representation called for the “protection of the refugee women and their children” from the Taliban as a way to justify the armed intervention by the USA and its allies in Afghanistan (Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 346).

A more recent study by Amores, Arcila-Calderon and Gonzales-de-Garay (2020) found that journalistic photographs in Western European media be-

tween the year 2013 and 2017 underrepresented refugees while also portraying male and female refugees differently. The study showed that,

“Female refugees were more frequently depicted as victims compared to male, while male refugees were more frequently depicted in burden or threat frames compared to female, so that in a more negative but also more active way” (Amores, Arcila- Calderón & Gonzalez-de-Garay, 2020).

Depicting refugees and displaced persons as a threat is a common and often repetitious media frame in the television coverage of migration and crisis (Nikunen, 2020). Although this dominant frame does not appear in any of the news reports analyzed for this research project, this does not mean that it does not exist within the context of the Syrian conflict.

In Europe, the arrival of a large influx of refugees in 2015 gave rise to both a humanitarian discourse and a securitization discourse in the European media. A study by Ricarda Drüeke and Elisabeth Klaus (2017) analyzed the Austrian media reporting of the arrival of refugees to Europe in 2015. The findings of the study showed that the refugees were portrayed

“...as victims of war and terror when they reach the saving beaches of Europe, that is, when they are still far away. But as soon as they arrive in Austria, there are only few visual representations that frame the topic in a humanitarian way – instead, a threat and security frame dominates” (Drüeke & Klaus, 2017, p. 15).

This shift from the humanitarian discourse to the securitization discourse in Austria, and Europe in general, is best explained by the “normalization of nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist rhetoric that fear of change of any kind that can be constructed as a threat for ‘us’, an imagined homogeneous group of people in Europe” (Wodak, 2015, from Nikunen 2020, p. 417). Another study found that the media narratives that portray refugees as a threat in the European news are mostly projected towards “young men with dark skin” who are perceived as foreign elements that trespass spaces and disturb social order (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017).

While the shift in the media frames in the Austrian media took place once the refugees had physically entered Europe (Drüeke & Klaus, 2017), the shift in discourse in the context of Lebanon took place in a slightly different form. Between 2011 and 2014, a humanitarian discourse dominated the media depictions of Syrian refugees entering Lebanon. Initially, Syrians arriving in Lebanon were depicted as the next-door neighbors who were fleeing a war.

They were “portrayed both as brothers [and sisters] in need, deserving of the best intentions, and as a burden that weighs on the Lebanese state and its population” (Turbay, 2015, p. 17) — given the fact that Lebanon is a country with dysfunctional and underfunded public services and failed infrastructure.

After the Syrian conflict had “spilled over into Lebanon, leading to gun battles and bombing, with major incidents ...of bomb attacks in Beirut,” which also left the country with “economic strains as the number of Syrian refugees [...] reached over one million, or close to one-fifth of the population” (Kinnimont, 2014, p. 53), the political media discourse in the country started to show notions on securitization. In 2015, the Lebanese mainstream media started portraying the large number of displaced Syrians no longer as a burden but as a threat to Lebanon’s delicate sectarian balance and its political, social, and economic stability (Turbay, 2015).

The news report analysis in this research showed that *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan* did adopt a humanitarian discourse in their reporting. However, no shift to the securitization discourse was noticeable in the news reports used as a sample for this case study, even though the reporting was specifically focused on the displaced Syrian communities, particularly displaced Syrian women in Lebanon. Nonetheless, this does not indicate that the shift did not take place in the general political discourse in the Arab Gulf States. An article by *Reuters* in 2015 reported on a political analyst from Kuwait, a wealthy Arab Gulf State that supported the radical Islamist opposition in Syria (Baxter, 2016), who “raised hackles by saying in a television interview [...] that [Syrian] refugees were better suited to poorer countries” such as Lebanon and Jordan, “failing to acknowledge the pledges of rich European countries like Germany to take in many thousands” (Bayoumy & Browning, 2015). The article also revealed how a government official from the UAE defended the Arab Gulf States’ policies of not accepting any Syrian refugees into their countries,² by claiming that the proportion of foreigners to the locals was already overwhelming. An article by the *Washington Post* (2015) stated that “like European countries, Saudi Arabia and its neighbors also have fears over new arrivals taking jobs from citizens” (Tharoor, 2015).

These statements show that the notions of threat and securitization appeared in the general political discourses, as they implied that accepting Syrian refugees would result in their ‘outnumbering the locals’ and thus disturb

2 These affluent Gulf Arab States officially took in no Syrian refugees since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011 (Browning and Bayoumy 2015).

the delicate demographic balance in the countries (Bayoumy & Browning, 2015). While the news report analysis found that the humanitarian discourse showed ‘immense sympathy’ towards displaced Syrian women, these mediated representations juxtaposed with the immigration policies of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Although the Arab Gulf States offered “collective donations under \$1 billion (the United States has given four times that sum)” (Tharoor, 2015) in humanitarian aid to the Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, the conspicuous role the Arab Gulf States have played in the Syrian conflict by “funding and arming a constellation of rebel and Islamist factions fighting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad,” places the countries in a partisan geopolitical position as they were clearly not “innocent bystanders” during the conflict (Tharoor, 2015).

Given these contextual factors, the displaced Syrian women came to be portrayed in public political discourses in the Arab Gulf States as the *other Arab*, one who is better suited to staying in economically-struggling Arab countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. The mechanism of ‘othering’ in the television reports by *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan* appears, as in the Austrian media, when the representations depict “political-geographic and geopolitical spaces” that situate the displaced communities “with other territories, places, or spaces, creating an imaginary geography, with images of landscapes and the people who populate them” (Drüeke, Klaus, & Moser, 2019, p.9). In Chapter 6, I analyzed such a space that was constructed in news reports as a ‘heterotopian site’ occupied by the urban poor. These depictions suggest that displaced Syrian communities will always remain outside those countries.

Thus, the “mechanisms of othering with frames of threat and management of masses” (Nikunen, 2020, p. 414) should be seen in conjunction with the procedure of dehistoricization under the frame of the neoliberal subject and the procedure of nationalizing the female body under the frame of mothers of the nation. I explore the connection between the aforementioned procedures of media reporting and media frames below.

The news report analysis demonstrated how *SANA*, *SAMA*, and *Syria Al Ikhbariya* have placed the figure of the Syrian woman within an imagery of “the Syrian collective family.” According to Wedeen (1999), these images are “established through endlessly repeated narratives of sacrifice and familial loyalty to Assad” (quoted from Haugbolle, 2008, p. 264). Haugbolle (2008) asserted that these images of nationhood, which are characterized by Ba’athist nationalist propaganda, are part of a greater political agenda that depict “the

steadfastness (*al-sumud* |دومصل|) and “the sacrifice (*al-tadhiya* |ةيحيضتلا|)” of ‘the people’ as a way to “resist Zionism, Israel, and Western imperialism, salvage the Golan Heights, and unite “the Syrian people and the Arab and Muslim *umma*” (p. 264). These imageries of the Ba’ath party, which are “strongly influenced by Communist imaginaries of ‘the people’ [...] [and] that mostly focus on collective historical feats of the people, the party and the nation” (Haugbolle, 2008, p. 264) place the ‘heroic’ figure of the mother of the nation at the forefront of this ideological battle; the Syrian woman is expected to offer her “sacrifice for the greater good of the nation” (Wedeen, 1999).

Here, the media frame of the Syrian woman as ‘the mother of the nation’ is juxtaposed with the mediated representations of displaced Syrian women as the neoliberal subject, which is a dominant media frame perpetuated by television stations owned by opponents of the Syrian regime (such as the Arab Gulf States). Portrayed as part of the passive poor with a neglected history, the figure of the vulnerable displaced Syrian woman is ‘othered’ in the television media owned by the political elites of UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. These countries supported and funded the opposition groups that rebelled against the Ba’athist nationalist power in Syria. Hence, these mediated representations are part of two competing political agendas: the Ba’ath’s political agenda to have the regime’ retain its power in the region and the Arab Gulf State’s political agenda to dismantle the Syrian regime.

Given all these factors, this research project perceives the media frames that have appeared in the news reports as a reflection of the geopolitical tensions during the Syrian conflict. These tensions could be traced to a resistance axis of two opposing sides that have fought in the Syrian conflict: the Assad Regime and its allies, i.e., Iran, Hezbollah, Russia and Hamas, a (geo)political alliance that opposes and fights “US and Israeli interests in the region” (Kinninmont, 2014, p. 52), on one hand, and the Arab Gulf States, who tend to take pro-western and anti-communist stands (Cordesman, 1988) and who have a strong Islamic (Sunni) national identity (Kéchichian, 2001, p.444), on the other hand.

Klaus and Kassel (2005) asserted that “war needs the dichotomy of friends and foes, of perpetrators and victims, of those who act and those who suffer” (p. 336). In this research project, the dichotomies depicted through the dominant media frames in the television news appear in the context of these geopolitical tensions. Moreover, although the meanings attached to the media frames of the different groups of Syrian women during the conflict are contextual and may shift in the future, I argue that these media frames are mediated

instances that are always symptomatic of broader issues concerning nationalism, neoliberalism, gender politics, conflict, and (geo)political tensions.

9.4 The Intersection of Media Logic, Gender Logic and War Logic in Television News Narratives

After discussing media ownership, procedures of media reporting, and dominant media frames in relation to the geopolitical tensions, I reflect on how the findings in the news report analysis underscore the interrelation of media logic, gender logic, and war logic.

In their study on the German print media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan, Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel (2005) demonstrated how media narratives on war and conflict are militarized in the mainstream media as a way to legitimize the warring parties' political and military interventions. This often has led "the mainstream media in times of war [to] regularly neglect their function of presenting a diversity of opinions and of criticizing and controlling the political and economic elite" (Klaus & Kassel 2005, p. 338). In this case, "the media logic on conflict and war leads to 'structural militarization' of the media discourse" (Dominikowski, 1993, quoted from Klaus & Kassel, 2005, p. 338).

The findings in this research project were similar, given that a 'structural militarization' in the Arab television news has been identified. For instance, Assad's prosecution of Syrian women was heavily perpetuated in the news reports by *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan*. The depictions of former female prisoners who had been abused in detention centers were used to reveal how 'the enemy', namely the Syrian regime, violated human rights. The same news reports ignored the honor killing and sexual assault incidents committed against women in rebel-held Syria. The media discourse 'reduced the complexity' of these human rights violations, focusing instead on the particularities of how the female victims were shamed and stigmatized for to their imprisonment. This induces an emotional rather than an analytical response. By presenting the media content on the sexual violations and assault in the Assad prisons in a sensationalist manner, the experiences of the victims of gender-based violence were restricted to gender binary constructions and attested to only 'the enemy.'

Furthermore, because the content of media texts is always shaped by cultural and political factors and vice versa, Klaus and Kassel (2005) proposed to

“extend the concept of media logic³ (the militarization of the media and journalism) with those of gender logic (the symbolic construction of male–female dichotomy) and the logic of war (the legitimization of war through the construction of self and other)” (p. 335). In this research project, television images generated through the lens of gender logic appear in the news reports published by the television stations that are politically leaning against the Syrian regime, as well as in the news reports by the television stations that are owned or controlled by the Syrian regime.

In the news reports by *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan*, different groups of Syrian women were depicted as helpless victims, child brides, and desperate mothers destined to their vulnerable states and their own victimhood. In the news reports by *Syria Al Ikhbariya*, *SANA*, and *SAMA*, the female fighters in Syrian Arab Army were portrayed as the mothers serving the nation and the motherland, and they were described by Asma’a Al Assad as ‘the beautiful ornamented flowers of Syria.’ The stereotypical image of “the woman that has to be protected by a husband and brave fighter,” as established by Schießler (2002) (from Klaus & Kassel 2005, p. 346), does not appear in the news reports. Nevertheless, the general depictions in the Arab television news still placed the figure of the Syrian women in the context of traditional femininity.

As for the war logic, Klaus and Kassel (2005) found that “gender logic and logic of war are closely entangled in the refugee question: the connotation of women as weak, passive, and in need of protection mingles with a demand to help the needy refugees and a condemnation of the evil ‘other’ who forced the women to leave their homes” (p. 346). On the one hand, in the news reports by *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Al Aan*, the condemnation of the evil ‘other,’ that is the Syrian regime, appears in the news reports related to the context of violence, for example by perpetuating images of former female prisoners. On the other hand, images of displaced Syrian women with missing husbands and child brides are depicted as helpless victims living in shelters of failed infrastructure and as ‘the needy refugees.’ Such images appear in the news reports related to the context of vulnerability. These two media frames – the evil ‘other’ and ‘the needy refugee’ who requires help – are intermingled with images of displaced women participating in vocational and cash-for-work programs.

By relying on a humanitarian discourse to show the viewer that the displaced Syrian women are ‘being taken care of,’ the television news re-estab-

3 The concept of media logic was initially introduced by Altheide and Snow (1979).

lished spatial and temporal distances between victims of war and the television audiences. In this context, the media narratives gave the displaced Syrian communities ‘the celebration of abstract humanity.’ Konstantinidou (2008) described this media tactic as “the celebration of the dignity of the passive victim,” which, in return, “gives the imaginary community back its sense of power, wellbeing, and, essentially, its ability to speak for and on behalf of the unity of human beings and to look down upon others” (p. 163).

Consequently, the war logic prioritizes humanitarian initiatives over the political meaning of the plight of displaced Syrian women. Meanwhile, the dominant narratives in the television news indirectly spares the affluent Arab Gulf States the assumption of greater responsibility for their participation in the proxy war in Syria. In other words, the depictions of displaced Syrian women participating in humanitarian initiatives have the following connotation: The humanitarian aid programs and donations exist to support the vulnerable Syrian women in exile, hence there is no need to assume responsibility for offering resettlement sites for the displaced Syrian communities.

9.5 A Feminist Logic by Spaces of Appearance?

Elisabeth Klaus and Susanne Kassel (2005) posed relevant questions that fit the context of this book. For example, they asked: “What are the gender discourses into which the news coverage ties? Do women routinely have their voices heard in the news? Are there more than symbolic and fleeting references to the way they live their lives?” (p. 351). This research project reflected upon these questions by addressing the notion of agency among the different groups of Syrian women in relationship to their visibility in the Arab television news. This research has attempted to expand the gaze of media logic, gender logic and war logic by both criticizing and reimagining the television news narratives through a feminist logic.

By taking a turn towards moral philosophy and sociology, I have enabled myself as a media studies researcher to expose the existing structures of power in the television images, as well as interpret them in context of socio-economic inequality and suffering. Furthermore, by delving into questions on agency, points of reflexivity, power relations, affects and emotions, the purpose of this book is not to discard the analysis of television representations all together. By stepping away from the representations and media frames analyzed in the television news, the book has attempted to break the silence in

the media, and rediscover spaces for voices that could have been lost between the entanglement of media logic, gender logic, and war logic. Nikunen (2020) writes:

“While it is important to understand how representations work and what kind of political and moral claims they make, research could be more proactive in finding the spaces of agency and voice, in listening to migrants and refugees. Such a move requires a step away from the representational analysis of mainstream media, the frames of victimization and fear, to expand the exploration towards voice and alternative ‘spaces of appearance’ (Arendt, 1998 [1958])” (p.418).

While there is little hope for the mainstream media to start offering a feminist logic in their reporting, in which contemplating, acknowledging and visualizing alternatives become a dominant part of the discourse in the news, meanwhile, I do not find it productive to conduct research that is solely immersed in exploring the hegemonic media practices. This can lead to inadvertently ignoring the voice and agency that exist in other media realms. Therefore, I would start by asking: Where can refugees, migrants, women, minorities, and any marginalized community gain a political voice, rather than be represented as ‘objects of inquiry’ in the media? Where do the ‘spaces of appearance’ that challenge hierarchies of representations and empower voices exist?

Drüeke, Klaus, and Moser (2019) explored spaces of identity in press photographs and artistic representations of refugees and migration in Austria. They stated that hegemonic production of meaning is rarely challenged in mainstream media images of refugees and migrants. In contrast, they found that ‘a counter-hegemonic image discourse’ is more likely to appear in the “ambivalent and irritating representations” that are produced in contemporary artistic practices (Drüeke, Klaus, & Moser, 2019). They found that:

“Art can ‘infiltrate’ or emphasize content that remains hidden in media discourses, for example, by addressing the causes of flight, multifaceted identities, the emphasis on flight as a self-determined act or freedom of movement for all. At the moment of reception, art can open up spaces of in-between and trigger productive uncertainties that – at its best – set in motion differentiated processes of reflection on identities and their constructions” (Drüeke, Klaus & Moser, 2019, p. 21).

While art can be a significant site for spaces of appearance, social media contexts where civil society protests, and grassroots movements are channeled

are also spaces where hierarchies of representation can be undone and voices are enabled (Butler, 2015).

Throughout the discourse analysis of Arab television news, this research project showed that the experience of the subaltern is linked fundamentally to problems of social justice (see Mohanty, 2003; Stevenson, 2014). Thus, it is up to us, as researchers and as feminists, to seek methods in communication studies and other interdisciplinary fields that not only identify injustices in society, but also enable the subaltern to speak in dialogue, collaboration, and mutuality.

