To be Taken ...Seriously

Sample Analysis of the Coverage of a Few Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

شبكة الصحفيات السوريات
Syrian Female Journalists Network

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WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

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INTRODUCTION

Today, ten years since the start of the 2011 Syrian revolution, in which women played important and pivotal roles in public affairs, especially civil and organizational work as well as political engagement, and over the course of a decade, different political bodies have been formed, and political events, peace paths and negotiations have taken place. However, women's participation in the political sphere at its different levels is still low and unfair, accompanied by unjust and often shallow media coverage that undermines women's efforts in the first place. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate many fields that have developed during the past decade, such as the political and media ones.

To begin with, and in a cursory look at the participation of women in the Syrian political sphere before the revolution, this participation was not in its best, as it was not allowed to form independent political parties or work in public affairs, except during the short-term "ease periods" when the authoritarian regime allowed some space and tolerated women organizations to promote itself as an advocator of women's liberation using them as an avatar, or through secret activists' groups that operated clandestinely, which put women politicians and activists in grave danger. Action was possible through community associations of a charitable nature only, but even this was very limited. The summary of that historical period speaks of the regime's control over the work of "Civil Society", which was not allowed to be called this way to sweep away its political and legal character, thus came the term of "Community Association". Before 2011, women's groups and feminist initiatives were directly affected by the clamp down and expropriation of their work by the regime and its affiliated institutions, especially campaigns demanding to confer nationality to children of Syrian mothers and the amendment of the Personal Status Law.

The revolution had an impact not only on the political field but also on the media, witnessing a variety of Syrian media outlets and a higher ceiling of freedom of expression and criticism after the revolution compared to before, when the media was utterly controlled by the regime's authority. However, the performance of media institutions in relation to discourse has rarely been monitored and evaluated. Therefore, the Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN), as an organization of media development from a feminist perspective, critically monitored the media discourse since 2016, as we published then our first report on monitoring the depiction of women in emerging media outlets "Women in Emerging Syrian Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis".

Ever since, SFJN's work has focused on developing media discourse monitoring tools suiting the political developments and placing them within their local contexts.

Hence, this research presents a feminist analysis of the Syrian media discourse regarding the representation of women politicians, as part of the organization's efforts to contribute to the implementation of Women Peace and Security Agenda, and its Syrian local context, and the relevant international resolutions, especially the UN Security Council Resolution No 1325. In this research, we focused on the Syrian media coverage of women's political participation in international political events being the most visible form of women's political participation as a first step of its kind.

This research would not have been possible without the support of many Syrian journalists, friends, as well as Syrian women activists and politicians, and accordingly, we express our great thanks to: Alice Mfarrej, Dima Moussa, Mariam Jalabi, Nagham Ghadri, Nawal Yazigi, Noura Al-Jizawi, Rima Fleihan, Sabiha Khalil, and Suhair al-Atassi for participating and allocating time during and after the interviews. We also thank Dima Dehni, Rand Sabbagh, Roula Othman, Lama Rageh and other reviewers who prefer to stay anonymous for their comments and editorial feedback.

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In the name of the Syrian Female Journalists Network,
Researchers Rula Asad and Hayma Alyousfi

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research aims to illuminate media practices in portraying Syrian women working in the political field, the focus was made, in particular, on those involved in the "First Track / Track I" (the first track refers to the official negotiations which took place with the participation of official delegations of officials of the governmental entities) and women politicians of the official Syrian opposition entities after the revolution in 2011. The focus was also placed on women politicians who participated in the political events on an international level since the first Geneva Conference, in addition to the women's bodies that were formed under international supervision or by opposition entities (the Syrian Women's Advisory Council of the Special Envoy and the Women's Advisory Committee of the Negotiations Commission). Despite our belief that political action can be practiced through informal bodies or through civil and feminist work, and our appreciation of the efforts made by Syrian women in this domain, and due to the research narrow scope and limited time and resources, in this research we focus on the official political participation.

A desk research was conducted to establish a conceptual framework and a broader understanding of how media practices and discourse affect the role and presence of active women in the political field, and the repeated patterns in media practices, noting the level of women's engagement, in general, in public affairs, and the problems and challenges of this engagement, without losing sight of the problems associated with the Syrian opposition institutions when talking about the presence of women in these entities, but without being the focus of this research.

The methodology of critical discourse analysis was also followed to analyze a sample of media materials that dealt with the participation of Syrian women politicians in political bodies and international political events. This sample was selected from emerging Syrian media materials. In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Syrian women politicians involved in the political field inside different bodies and on multiple levels in order to deeply understand the personal experiences of these politicians with media outlets and its impact on their work in the political field and/ or their appearance or retreat on media.

Based on the materials of the analysis sample, we noticed that media discourse still frames women politicians and creates hierarchical relationships between men and women through the spaces allocated to each gender and the ways to introduce them, in addition to linking women active in the political sphere with the private sphere and their families, specifically with family male members, and referring to their social status as well as focusing on their looks and intruding on their personal life, which reduces their effectiveness as independent women and marginalizes their public roles. The used language choices also played a role assuming that all women are one category enjoying the same traits, which are considered "feminine and essential", and playing the same roles, as traditional perceptions. The discourse was not free of contradictory dichotomies between women politicians themselves in which the division depended on cultural, religious, academic background, as well as fame, popularity, personal experience and the amount of suffering and sacrifices made. During the interviews, women politicians also mentioned a number of practices, which were monitored by the sample analysis, and highlighted how these practices played a role in their reluctance to appear in the media or feeling under threat and preferring to retreat. However, a number of them also indicated the evolution of media outlets and the positive changes they witnessed in the discourse.

A number of positive examples from media coverage are highlighted, with the aim of emphasizing the evolution of media discourse and the efforts made by media outlets to be more gender sensitive, and the importance and impact of media practices in supporting the presence of women in the political field and changing the stereotypes about them and their roles.

Finally, this research was conducted while applying feminist methodologies, which see that all experiences are important and cannot be generalized or used to claim representation. Therefore, limitations persist, and work remains viable for development, modification, and criticism. This research conduces to a number of findings and recommendations which we hope will contribute and help media institutions in producing a professional media discourse that is gender-sensitive and supportive of social justice.

METHODOLOGY

All productions of the Syrian Female Journalists Network are based on feminist epistemology and alternative epistemology that is based on Donna Haraway's idea that **"Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (1988).**

The main objective of the research is to identify stereotypes and frameworks used by Syrian media outlets, covered by this research, in depicting Syrian women politicians in the media coverages. It also aims at shedding light on the experience of Syrian women politicians within emerging Syrian media outlets.

Hence, in this research, in the section related to analyzing media content, we depend on integrating the theory of framing in media and the critical discourse analysis from a feminist standpoint to reveal the power relations related to authority, ideology, social inequality and systematic suppression, to extract the used frameworks and stereotypes, which in turn produce oppressive, marginalizing, and vulnerable discourse.
The methodology of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis is considered useful, in particular, to keep an insightful eye on the way gender and power relations are manifested in the media discourse, and to put the positions and roles given to women, in general, and women politicians, in particular in this research, under discussion.
Moreover, the practical tool formed by merging the two theories is an essential part of this analysis methodology. (The tool is annexed)

The Research Questions

1- What are the frameworks/ stereotypes used by the media in coverages related to Syrian women politicians?
2- What is the impact of that media framing/ stereotyping in depicting women politicians on their experience and work in the political field?
3- What is the experience of women politicians with the media coverage?

The feminist method in this research is based on the fact that all phenomena are socially constructed and not intrinsic, meaning that we are neither born nor created by them. Therefore, experiences, whatever they are, differ based on the different social, cultural, political, and economic contexts.

Therefore, they cannot be mainstreamed nor can be used to claim, for example, that all women have the same experiences as if they are one community category as a repeated media pattern adopting and promoting mainstreaming. Based on that, the so-called representation cannot be achieved in any given field, and therefore, claims of representation are a means of oppression that overlooks the differences of experiences, reduces them, erases their discrepancies, and do not reflect the tangible physical living reality to persons such as women or marginalized groups. Any research claiming representation contradicts the feminist methodology, as it is based on mainstreaming and unchangeability in understanding social phenomena.

Media framing theory provides an explanation for the performance of media and reveals the operations and choices made by media outlets in creating a specific stereotype or framework when covering a specific issue. Where Kaitlyn Ryan (2013) describes framing as a process for selecting information we would like to include or exclude in talking about a certain topic, person, or event. The framing theory takes into consideration the way media outlets cover events and issues, and how individuals analyze these events and issues depending, to some extent, on the way they are presented in the media.
Caitlin O'Donnell (2013) shows that media is used as a means of influence on public views in daily news. She also emphasizes that media uses four tools to influence the public understanding: language, style, composition, and images. And this is what is called the framing process. She defines framing as "building the common sense» (by media outlets).Ryan (2013) defines media frameworks by "the molds embraced by a society for a certain gender and are, subsequently, applied to all members of this gender in the media. This restricts these individuals to a specific role or style which is not necessarily appropriate or accurate." She also adds examples of these frameworks such as "the use of words, images, phrases and presentation methods." These tools and frameworks were compared to the methodology of critical discourse analysis at the level of language and power relationships from a gender standpoint to explore recurring patterns in depicting women politicians and women's political participation.

This section summarizes the logical process followed to select the research sample of the media materials:

• Materials covering international political events related to Syria were mapped, as well as direct interviews with women politicians.

• Number of mapped materials is 198.

• Number of the analysis sample materials is 49.

The production of the following institutions has been scrutinized: Enab Baladi, Rozana, Syria Untold, Ana Press, Aleppo Today, Sham Network, Rising for Freedom, Radio al-Kul, and Watan.

These institutions were selected based on:

1. Keeping abreast of political events specific to Syria, which are:

Geneva Conferences 8-1, Astana Conference, Riyadh Conference, Sochi Conference.

2. Covering the establishment of political bodies related to negotiations: the Women's Advisory Council, the High Negotiations Commission, the Constitutional Committee.

3. Conducting interviews with women politicians involved in the political process at the international level.

• Period: 2019 – 2012

Considerations on selected media outlets:

Establishment period: It did not affect the selection of the sample, but the media outlet's coverage of political events at that time was taken into consideration, regardless of whether it lasted until today or not, as we were able to obtain the coverage from the institution archive on the Internet.

Production language: Only materials produced in Arabic were considered.

Topics: Materials dealing with international political events, as defined above, were selected, or those including female political voices as experts in the field or for interviews with them to talk about their personal and professional experiences.

Materials were scanned using keywords, including Women – Women Politicians – Syrian Women - International Events - Geneva Conference - Astana Conference - Riyadh Conference - Sochi Conference - Women's Advisory Council – High Negotiations Commission – Constitutional Committee.

Analysis of the Selected Sample

The collected data was subjected to a qualitative content analysis. Patterns were extrapolated causally from the analyzed data. The qualitative content analysis is an interpretive analysis that seeks to understand the deeper meaning of data.

The collected data is presented according to the topics included within the tool, formed from a set of criteria using the causal method and the methodology of critical discourse analysis. Each of the research findings was presented, analyzed, and interpreted in a narrative way. They included direct quotes from media coverage as examples, as well as quotes from the interviewed Syrian women politicians, and their answers were rephrased in the findings.

The objective of selecting the sample based on a specific chronological and historical order is to facilitate the process of monitoring, and then mapping and analysis that helped us in understanding the ideologies (religious, political, and social ideas and attitudes) that stand behind the production of texts regarding the power relations and social practices which play a role in producing the text itself. It is important to note that the mapping methodology, used in this research, focused on the context of the text only, rather than its production aspect inside the media institutions, nor even on tracking information related to the most and least read articles, for example.
This study does not give indications of the audience's reception and preferences, as it is limited to highlighting the end product, i.e., the published content, its substance, and its potential repercussions on society under the prevailing social, political, and military context.

The content analysis section focuses on the findings of the sample analysis, and on addressing the opportunities and gaps of the most important points. It is also worth noting that the selected sample is not representative, and the analysis findings are not generalizable to the total production of media institutions included in the analysis sample, but some opportunities are presented for media institutions to improve and to support their efforts in producing a media discourse that calls for social justice and is more inclusive and balanced in representation and participation.

The methodology of critical discourse analysis was followed in the quantitative analysis of texts, to analyze each of:
• Repressive aspects of media production against women active in the political field.
• Linguistic choices and their impact on producing perceptions, reproducing perceptions, or perpetuating perceptions about women politicians.

We focused our analysis on two levels:
First, we examined the general structure of the materials, where we scrutinized the text structure as a whole, and how the writer or journalist considers the balance between the sources. Besides, we studied the amount of space given to both men and women including the topics, methods of dealing with them, the followed ideologies, and dominant power relations, i.e., the potential influence of authority on discourse attitudes.
Second, we explored text and the used language options.
Notably, the two levels inte grate and interact in the process of producing, reproducing, strengthening or challenging perceptions.

We note in this research, and as a methodology for sample analysis, that we did not discuss the analysis of the quotes and sayings of the sources themselves, but rather how these quotes are handled and commented on by the journalist or media institution, and how to achieve a gender and media balance among the sources. It was noticed through the sample analysis that, in many cases, media institutions only add quotations without commenting on them or dealing with them through analysis and media commentary. Such practices have contributed to making the source's words final, which suggests that in the absence of criticism or follow-up, the media institution approves them.

*Disclaimer: all the examples used for the data analysis were translated into English by the researchers.

Methodology of the Interviews Section:

The interviews section, which presents and analyzes the opinions of the participating women politicians, is separated in order to make their voices heard and facilitate access to their opinions by entities and/ or media outlets. Narrating personal and different experiences of women politicians with their own words and voices allows for a "see from inside" and thus a deeper understanding of the issues they shared with the aim of exploring the meanings and implications of these experiences for them. This method allows for more space for women politicians' voices, helps to understand their views, and uses their personal experiences as a means of communicating their reality to a wider audience. The interviews' data is sorted out to be intersected with the sample analysis of media materials.

This section aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that Syrian women politicians faced during their political action in relation to the media approach in dealing with their roles and positions. It seeks to delve into the personal experiences of women politicians which are related to media practices when tackling and portraying women politicians, and for this end, a qualitative analysis has been conducted.

This methodology was selected because the qualitative approaches are closely related to social and cultural research. Literature discussed the strengths and weaknesses of these methodologies and the ethics of field work. However, qualitative approaches remain of high importance when observing and studying behaviors, personal practices, and lived experiences (Wilton, 1999; Sideway, 2000).

Interviews are one of the qualitative tools used in the research of individuals' experiences and understanding their private life (Valentine, 2005, p. III). Whereas a semi-structured interview is a verbal exchange where the interviewer tries to elicit information from another person by asking questions».

Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to explore issues they perceive to be important in the manner of a conversation, where the questions asked can be changed or arranged according to the course of the conversation, depending on the nature of each interview, and the researcher prepares a set of pre-determined questions (Clifford and others 2016, p. 143).

According to Jill Valentine, semi-structured interviews are a social interaction and there are no strict rules the researcher must follow (2005), and participants are selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative and flexible research and projects. Nigel King refers to them as qualitative research interviews, and according to the guidelines he suggested for the situations in which they might be used, this research could fall under the case: where individual experiences and/ or historical accounts are required to clarify the evolution of certain phenomena (King 1994).

In-depth interviews help to explore the issues more deeply than is generally possible using questionnaires, and these interviews are recorded for later analysis. Contrary to the highly structured information gained from questionnaires, this type of interviews includes semi-structured questions, allowing the interviewees to talk freely and openly about issues they are interested in, and it gives them the right to avoid answering questions they feel annoyed or hurt by. Although the use of in-depth interviews for primary data collection involves fewer participants than in the case of questionnaire-based data collection, it leads to more in-depth and individualized data. And because this research seeks to answer questions through the participants' experiences and delves into lived experiences, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions, in-depth semi-structured interviews were adopted to collect data.

This section of the research deals with the views of Syrian women politicians who have been involved in political action by being in the official opposition bodies such as the "National Council", "the Syrian Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces", and "High Negotiations Commission", and have participated in the already mentioned international official events. No distinction was made in this section between women politicians who are still active in the political process and those who left the political field and decided to stay distant, because we think it is also important to understand the reasons that prompted women politicians to move away, and to appreciate their experiences in this field, given the small number of Syrian women who have been engaged in the formal/ traditional political track.

This section is mainly based on the stories and experiences of Syrian women politicians who were interviewed, and it seeks to answer questions about the most important challenges they faced in dealing with media and the most important negative practices they believe affected their desire to be "under the spotlight".

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Although this research doesn't focus on oppressive/ marginalizing practices in the political bodies themselves, they have been pointed out through the interventions of some women politicians.

Twelve Syrian women politicians were contacted, two of whom apologized from eventually not participating, and a woman politician did not respond to the invitation. Thus, nine interviews were conducted between September and December 2020. The interviews relied on semi-structured questions that were not asked the same way for everyone, considering the specificity of each experience and the different positions, as well as the frequency of media appearance of each woman politician, and therefore, their participations were different in each axis according to the different experiences and expertise of each woman politician. (The asked questions are annexed, Table 2).

The interviews were conducted online, using the "Zoom" application as physical meetings were difficult to happen because of the remote location of women politicians in different countries, in addition to the protective measures of Covid19- and restrictions on traveling, movement and meetings.
The interviews were recorded following a signed consent by the participating women politicians. Each interview duration ranged between 1,15 hour to approximately 2,30 hours. This difference in time is due to the difference in the experiences of women politicians, whether in the political field, the way media treats them, or in their choice to provide details or answer briefly.

We have selected women politicians who are or were involved in the political action at the official level and are/were participating in the political events and conferences at the international level, to create a correlation between the sample analysis of media discourse and the group selected for interviews. Therefore, it was possible to identify women politicians who are involved at this level despite that they are few and some of them were recently absent from the political arena. Due to SFJN expertise and knowledge of the context and its relations with several women organizations and initiatives, we were able to identify a list of women politicians. We were also keen, as much as possible, to select women politicians from different ideologies, different Syrian cities, and different academic backgrounds and experiences, with different age groups, places of residence and length of their involvement in politics.

The questions were formulated in several main sections. The first was personal questions about experience, the start of interest in the political field, the political bodies with which each woman politician was involved, and the events/ activities she was part of. The second was related to the relationship with the media and the negative practices they were exposed to during their political activity and how this affected their relationship with the media and their work progress in the political field. The last section was about their evaluation and opinions about the positivity and development of media coverage of the participation of women in the political sphere, in addition to the recommendations they believe would make the media more sensitive and supportive of their work in the political field. (The asked questions are annexed, Table 2).
Finally, an email was sent to each woman politician who participated in the research, including the way she is introduced and the quotes taken from her interview, so that each woman politician is aware of what is taken from her interview, giving her the right to modify and review, in order to correct any misunderstanding or change in the context or wording, as interviews were conducted in the spoken dialect, not in Standard Arabic.

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▌Introducing the Participating Women Politicians:

All women politicians were contacted to introduce them the way they prefer, and each woman politician chose to introduce herself as follows:

Alice Mfarrej

An opposition politician and a leader in the Communist Labor Party. She co-founded the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change. She was subjected to investigation and was summoned.

She worked on the ground since the start of the revolution, in Jaramana Coordination Committee. She co-founded a coordination committee in Rif Dimashq for women "the Coalition of Syrian Women in the Heart of the Revolution".

She co-founded an umbrella organization for feminists called "Suriyyat" (Syrian Women), which was balancing between civic and political work. She was arrested in August 2011 and for a second time in December 2013. She was released in the first exchange, known as "Barzeh al-Balad" exchange. She reactivated her role in the coordination committee and became the vice-chairwoman of the oversight committee, which is a committee parallel to the executive office. She pursued her work in political organizations.

She also co-founded the Syrian Woman Network. She attended the conference of the Democratic Tribune and withdrew from it the day Abd al-Aziz al-Khayyer was arrested. She also co-founded the "Syrian Women for Peace and Democracy" initiative under the auspices of the United Nations..

The initiative adopted a political document on the basis of the Geneva Communiqué and included women from different political alignments. The initiative froze later and resulted only in the Women's Advisory Board. She participated with the negotiating delegation on behalf of the Coordination Committee, and from Geneva 4 to Geneva 8, she was appointed deputy head of the negotiating delegation. Earlier in 2016, she worked on the detainees' file, and attended the Riyadh Conference 2.

She later joined the Executive Office of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change due to her political work, and she became a permanent member of the negotiating body. In addition to participating in delegations with the United Nations and the international community. She also co-founded the Syrian Women's Political Movement in 2017.

Dima Moussa

A Syrian politician. She lived abroad since the early 1990s, in the United States, as her family left Syria for political reasons. She studied electrical engineering in the States and studied and practiced law in the United States until the end of 2012..

At the start of the revolution, she worked with activists from Homs in the field of media and human rights. Her direct political involvement took place with the establishment of the Syrian National Council, as she was a part of the founding bloc of the Council in September 2011. After that, she moved to Turkey and worked in the field of civil society with a number of organizations. Upon gender expansion in the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, she was nominated and joined the Coalition in October 2016. She served as Vice President of the Coalition for two consecutive terms (from May 2018 to July 2020). She participated in the Geneva Conference in 2017, in the Advisory Council, not in the negotiating delegation. She later served as a representative in the Constitutional Committee, in the Small Body (also sometimes described as the mini-committee) of the opposition. She is one of the founders of the Syrian Women's Political Movement in October 2017.

Mariam Jalabi

The Representative of the National Coalition to the United Nations. She is a graduate of political sciences and worked with Karama Organization, which deals with the rights of Muslim women in North America. In January 2013, she started working as the Office Manager of the Coalition Representation to the United Nations in New York, and then took the position of the Coalition Representative.

She participated in Antalya Conference in June 2011, which was the first political meeting that brought the opposition together and attended the preparatory meeting for the formation of the Syrian National Council. She was interested in women's participation, then turned to political participation. She attended the Syrian opposition conferences and focused on political files. She participated in Geneva as part of the Women's Advisory Council (WAC) that was set up by the opposition in 2015.

She also co-founded the Women's Political Movement, which works in parallel with the official opposition bodies to create a space for women's political participation.

Nagham Ghadri

Opposition politician and former Vice President of the Syrian National Coalition. She co-founded the Latakia Coordination Committee in the revolutionary movement, and upon the establishment of the Syrian Revolution General Commission, she joined the Political Bureau of the Commission as an independent member, and from there, she started her political action. She joined the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces upon its expansion, as she applied to join its general assembly independently. In July 2014, she ran for the political committee and won its membership. She was then elected as Vice President of the Coalition in January 2015 and held this position for two consecutive terms until February 2016. She left the Coalition in December 2016. She attended Geneva and Riyadh conferences and was a member of the WAC of the Negotiations Commission. She recently, and for a short time, held the position of Coordinator of the National Democratic Gathering.

Nawal Yazigi

A women's human rights defender. When she was young, she joined the student movement and the Syrian Communist Party in the mid 1960s when Syria was living important periods of political action and public momentum.

Back then, the party was secret for fear of detention and raids. She joined the Syrian Women's League in the late 1960s and was later elected to its executive committee. Her political and feminist actions were parallel, inside the party and society, and with a group of women young leaders, she sought change. She was in the Preparatory Committee of the 1995 Beijing Conference and participated in it as a delegate by the League. She established the Forum for Cultural Dialogue in partnership with Dr. Hassan Abbas from 1999 to 2003 during the Damascus Spring and hosted monthly meetings in her home, where the forum lasted for four years and hosted different literary, artistic, cultural, and political events. She also contributed with Dr. Hassan Abbas to his project to establish the Syrian League for Citizenship in Damascus in 2012 and hosted its meetings at her house as well. With the start of the revolution in Syria, she became active through the "Committee to Support the Uprising" and co-founded the "Syrian Women for Democracy"

" rally and was elected as its chairperson. It included 16 civil society organizations that were active inside Syria. A number of these organizations were headed by women and others by men. The rally has been interested in gendering the constitution. She co-founded, with other feminists, the "Syrian Women Initiative for Peace and Democracy" in 2014, in cooperation with the UN Women. The initiative brought together 47 women activists, with the aim of unifying a feminist vision on supporting women's access to political decision-making positions and enhancing women's participation in the political process and their presence at the negotiations table. The initiative demanded the active participation of women in the political process from all the active forces and carried out lobbying and advocacy to several countries and decision makers. The initiative sought for effective and independent women's participation at the negotiations table. In 2016, the "Women's Advisory Council of the Special Envoy" was formed electing Ms. Nawal as a chairperson.

Noura Al-Jizawi

A human rights activist and opposition politician. She has been involved in public affairs since 2004 in several political and opposition events with a small group of students from the University of Homs, where she studied Arabic literature. She also joined a political and human rights group that was secretly active in the city of Homs.

With the start of the revolution, she participated in the field action and coordination groups, and she co-founded several alternative media institutions such as Flash Network and Hurriyat Newspaper. In addition to her engagement with the peaceful action and media activity, she worked in the field of human rights documentation, and established with a group of university students and higher study students the Free Syrian Students Union in 2011, which subjected her to security chasing, and she was arrested in 2012. After her release, she continued to be active for several months and then left for Turkey and joined the National Coalition in the expansion phase, representing the revolutionary movement in Homs. She used the name of "Noura al-Amir" at the start and was away from the spotlight, out of fear for her family in Syria and for her arrested brother and uncle. She joined the National Coalition at the end of May 2013 as a member of the General Assembly and a representative of the revolutionary movement of the city of Homs. In January 2014, she was elected Vice President, and was re-elected in July 2014. After the end of her two terms as Vice President, she was elected as a member of the political committee of the Coalition for three terms. Then, she left the coalition and all political opposition entities in August 2016. Noura was the deputy head of the opposition

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delegation to the Geneva 2 negotiations in 2014, and she headed the opposition delegation that participated in the 2014 London Summit to Combat Sexual Violence in Conflicts. She tried, under her duties, to enhance the opposition's communication with international institutions. She also participated in Riyadh 1 Conference and Geneva 3 Negotiations as part of the advisory delegation.

Rima Fliehan

A writer and activist in the field of human rights and women's rights. Executive Director of the Syrian Women's Lobby, and she is currently working with refugees in the fields of integration and stability with an Australian organization.

She co-founded and has been the spokesperson of the Local Coordination Committees for 3 years. She was a member of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. She worked in human rights and humanitarian fields in Syria before 2011, as she first started individually in 2000, uncovering issues and violations, and documenting them through published articles, then in civil society groups. She received a travel ban in 2007 and faced security chasing for several years. Since 2000, she has published a large number of articles and social, human rights, and humanitarian investigations, and issued collections of short stories.

She later wrote TV series scenarios in 2008, aiming, through this type of expression, to reach out to a larger number of people in her critique of the legal, social, and humanitarian reality and to urge a dialogue inside the community. From 2009-2007, she was in contact with the Damascus Declaration in As-Suwayda without being a member, and she attended some meetings as a human rights activist, and she was a member of the Committees for the Defense of Freedoms for a short period before 2011. With the start of the Arab Spring, she participated in the action and protests, then started working with Damascus and As-Suwayda coordination committees as well as with independent activists,

and with lawyer Razan Zaitouneh. She was arrested for organizing, in cooperation with other activists, the intellectuals' demonstration. She was arrested with a group of them during the demonstration in July 2011. She left Syria on 25 September 2011 to Jordan, following the issuance of three arrest warrants with her name. She joined as a member of the Secretariat of the Syrian National Council of the opposition as a representative of the revolutionary movement. She was the head of the preparatory committee for the

2012 Cairo Conference for the Syrian opposition, and then attended the Friends of Syria Conference in Paris. She worked on co-founding the National Coalition and joined it as a representative member of the local council of As-Suwayda, and a representative of the coalition for the relief affairs in Jordan. She participated in the Geneva 2 Conference, in the first round of negotiations, and was responsible for the human rights file.

She later resigned in April 2014 and moved away from political action. She co-founded the Syrian Women's Lobby with a group of feminists and returned to community work and defending women's rights.

Sabiha Khalil

A feminist since early 2000. She was active with the Syrian Women's League and then founded an independent Kurdish feminist association to work and influence the local environment, at a time when most of the women groups were affiliated with political parties. After the Syrian revolution, she participated in the action and joined the political sphere. She was a member of the preparatory committee for the establishment of the Kurdish National Council, then joined the Council leadership in November 2011. She later disagreed with the council in terms of opinion and ideology and withdrew in July 2012 and focused on the feminist work. She is one of founders of the Syrian Women's Network, which was launched in May 2013 in Cairo, and a member of its preparatory committee. Later, she became a member of the network's follow-up and coordination committee, and then the legal committee. She participated in the Riyadh 2 Conference and the meeting of the independent figures in Riyadh 3. She was an elected member in 2019 in the independents' bloc in the Negotiation Commission. She is a member of the Syrian Women's Political Movement, which was founded in 2017, as she was on the preparatory committee, and currently a member of the national advisory team.

26   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

27   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

Suhair al-Atassi

A political activist, a graduate of higher studies in French literature. She contributed to the re-establishment of Damascus Cinema and was a chairwoman for a while. She joined the political arena with the Damascus Spring and co-founded Jamal al-Atassi Forum for the Democratic Dialogue, where she held the position of Chairwoman of the Board of Directors for two non-consecutive terms.

She was arrested in 2005, and later the forum was besieged and forcibly closed. She participated in the sit-ins at the start of the Arab Spring. On March 2011 ,16, she was one of the organizers of the sit-in in front of the Ministry of Interior to demand the release of detainees and was arrested. After that, she co-founded the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union, and later, the Syrian Revolution General Commission. She hid for several months due to the incitement against her and the death threats she received. She left Syria illegally and then contributed to the establishment of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. She participated in the negotiating delegation to the Geneva 2 Conference in 2014. She headed the Assistance Coordination Unit and held the position of Vice-President of the Coalition for two consecutive terms. She co-founded the High Negotiations Commission and was part of the negotiating delegation in Geneva 3. She also attended the Riyadh 1 Conference and did not attend Riyadh 2. She expressed her resentment and protest for deviating from the political track. She later resigned and withdrew from the Coalition.

TERMS AND NOTIONS

Security Council Resolution No. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Issued on October 2000 ,31, and it is considered the first official and legal document issued by the Security Council, in which it requests the parties to the conflict to respect women's rights and support their participation in peace negotiations and the post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution is important and essential to support women's rights at the global level, as it is the first Security Council resolution aimed at linking the experience of women in armed conflicts with the issue of maintaining international peace and security. The resolution urges the Security Council, the Secretary-General, Member States, and all other parties to take the necessary measures in issues related to women's participation in decision-making and peace-building processes, and to adopt gender integration in training, peacekeeping and protection of women. In addition to gender integration in all United Nations reporting systems and program implementation mechanisms.

Source: Syrian Female Journalists Network, a Guide to Covering Women`s Issues, peace, and security (in Arabic).

Gender

The term "gender" refers to the social roles and differences that emerge under the terms masculinity and femininity are based in society on a system of opposing dichotomies between men and women, such as: man's supremacy against woman's obedience, man's rationality against woman's emotionality, man's might against woman's vulnerability.

Source: Gender Wiki (in Arabic).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a critical theory of context-sensitive language that views the use of language as a social practice. In particular, critical discourse analysis is defined as the study that deals with "often ambiguous causal and deterministic relationships between: (a) practices, accidents, and logical texts, and (b) structures, relationships, and broader social processes, to investigate how such practices, accidents and texts emerge from power relations and struggles over the power, and how an ideology is shaped by them; and to explore how the vagueness of these relations between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power."

Source: Syrian Female Journalists Network, Women in Emerging Syrian Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Gender-Based Violence

UNFPA defines gender-based violence as: "Any act of physical, psychological or social violence, including sexual violence, that is perpetrated or threatening to be perpetrated (such as violence, intimidation, threats, coercion, exploitation, deceit and manipulation of cultural concepts, use of weapons, or exploitation of economic conditions.) Gender-based violence derives its origins from the social imbalance in the roles between men and women and is supported by the authoritarian patriarchal social concepts in any society, and its severity increases in times of armed conflict and crisis and during natural disasters. The biggest challenge is the lack of reporting and data on cases of gender-based violence in times of conflict, lack of reporting of crimes committed under this name, and the services and support provided to victims/ survivors."

Source: Gender Wiki (in Arabic).

Emerging Media Outlets

The term emerging media outlets in Syria refers to those that emerged after the 2011 Syrian revolution, and they are based in the regime's non-controlled areas, and they are mostly non-profit. They are produced in Arabic and Kurdish and are free of charge.

Source: Syrian Female Journalists Network, Women in Emerging Syrian Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Tokenism

The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce..

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

The concept of «tokenism» has been used widely to explain many of the difficulties women face as they enter traditionally male occupations. Tokenism explains women›s occupational experiences and their behavioral responses to those experiences in terms of their numerical proportion, suggesting that barriers to women's full occupational equality can be lowered by the hiring of more women in organizations that are highly-skewed male.

Source: Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory

Quota

The "quota" system or allocating quotas (fixed minimum) for women was one of the mechanisms proposed at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing in 1995, as a provisional solution to the problem of women's weak participation in political life and decision-making positions, as women suffered from marginalization and exclusion leading to a lack of their representation or misrepresentation, and their reluctance, in many cases, to participate in decision-making positions.
Source: Nazra for Feminist Studies (in Arabic).

Positive Discrimination

The mandatory candidacy quota as a positive discrimination motivates political parties to push women to better positions in their internal structures and work to better empower women and rehabilitate women's cadres to work in elected councils. As the political will of parties is one of the important aspects to activate the political roles of women. Women usually refrain from participating in political parties due to marginalizing their role inside parties and dividing work on the basis of gender, such as the formation of women's committees in which women participate without being involved in other committees or in decision making positions inside the party organizational structures. Therefore, political parties shall bear the responsibility of supporting women in the political field through effective participation inside them and provision of political support in the electoral process.
Source: Nazra for Feminist Studies (in Arabic).

Agency

The concept of agency has been developed through sociology and is based on the premise that each of us, regardless of their position in the hierarchies of power, has an agency and ability to make decisions and choose. Through this concept, we move away from the stereotypes about us as women and marginalized groups that we are victims of repressive regimes without an agency. Despite all kinds of oppression, women and marginalized groups are able to make choices in their lives within the limits of our material life that affect us and those around us. At worst, we make our own choices, either by directly resisting oppressive patriarchy, negotiating with it to achieve certain ends, or even identifying with it to obtain certain guarantees or privileges. Hence, we acknowledge that everyone has a space for self-agency by which we can make decisions on the individual level.

Understanding the agency helps us to treat women, regardless of their background, as makers, doers, owners of knowledge and they understand their conditions better than us, the male and female experts.
Source: Center for Transnational Development and Cooperation, Political Participation from an Intersectional Feminist Perspective (in Arabic).

Gender Blindness

"Gender blindness" is a term used in media studies to indicate the bias of media outlets and media messages, as well as journalism professionals in favor of men, and in all arts and formats of written, visual and audio news production as well as digital and social media, as men, in media coverage, appear as creators and influencers, as well as commentators on their repercussions, while women hide from news and information, even if the news are about them. The space for women's presence in the media content remains small compared to the men's, and through methods of content analysis of texts, images, messages, policies, and behavior.
Source: Fe-Male feminist collective, Training Manual on Media Coverage that is Sensitive to the Issues of Women and Girls who are GBV Survivors (in Arabic).

First Political Track "Track I"

The concept of multiple tracks in diplomacy was further developed through the work of conflict resolution scholars in the late 1990s. "Track I" refers to formal talks/ interactions: official government, and senior commands of the military and political actors. "Track II" refers to the informal conflict resolution pathway: academia, NGOs, and civil society (Palmiano Federer et al. 2019).
Source: Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes.

PART 1

MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Depicting Syrian Women Politicians in the Syrian Media Coverage: Findings and Analysis

As defined previously, critical discourse analysis is a critical theory of context-sensitive language that views the use of language as a social practice. In particular, critical analysis of discourse is defined as the study that deals with **"often ambiguous causal and deterministic relationships between: (a) practices, accidents, and logical texts, and (b) structures, relationships and broader social processes; to investigate how such practices, accidents and texts emerge from power relations and conflicts over power, and how an ideology is formed by them; and to explore how the vagueness of these relations between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power."**

A critical analysis of the discourse has highlighted sensitive issues such as those related to power, ideology, social inequality, conflict, and systemic oppression. In this paper, the agenda of the critical discourse analysis from a feminist perspective is particularly useful for keeping an open eye on the way in which gender and power relations are manifested in the Syrian media outlets, and to put the positions and roles given to women politicians under question. Moreover, the practical tool developed under the methodology of critical discourse analysis from a feminist perspective, to analyze it, becomes an essential part of the analysis method.

At the media level, it is important to check the discourse on a permanent basis to reveal the authority and criticize the practices that contribute to the process of guiding the opinion and persuasion.

Therefore, critical discourse analysis is useful because, as **Mohamed Yattaoui** (2019) sees it, it is based on studying the dialectical relationship between language, discourse, and society, and seeks to expose the power exercised on the perceptual models that consume discourse. Language, according to this approach, is the actual medium for consolidating the ambitions of hegemony at the social level, and through it, convictions and choices are controlled.

This approach intersects with what is discussed in media theories about the impact of media on the social structure, that this is the most important effect of media, as media outlets establish meanings from the content and then present it to the audience, as confirmed by Denis McQuail, McQuail(2007). She argues that the media constructs social formations and framing images of reality in predictable ways. Audience mixes their own view of reality with what is presented to them to form an opinion. According to McQuail, media outlets are not only content carriers, but they also filter out that content and thus construct what people should think, resulting in a "public identity and definition." The constructivist approach can be applied to the influence of media outlets regarding public opinion and social attitudes.

Ryan (2013) restores that school of thought as she points out that media outlets are a reflection of public norms and thus tries hard to project and abide by these norms in order to preserve the audience. This theory places in the forefront the findings of the study on the role of media in spreading negative narratives about women in leadership positions. It supports the study attitude that these narratives weaken and negatively affect women politicians, as well as marginalize their toil and roles. McQuail's assertions provide a strong pillar for this study's assumptions that media broadcasts narratives of gender inequality not deliberately but through a process of systematic social construction.

For this purpose, SFJN has worked to develop analytical tools for media discourse from a feminist perspective, integrating the theory of framing and the critical discourse analysis approach, taking into account the specificity of the Syrian local context, Arabic language, and Syrian local dialects. This has been done with the aim of revealing the power and influence in media discourse regarding the depiction of women involved in political action. We focused on identifying the areas of stereotyping through the linguistic patterns used by, mainly, content producers, and analyzing their direct impact, i.e. on the short term, as well as their longer-term impact creating certain images that may, due to their frequency without any accountability, lead to convictions against women and their activism in male-dominated sectors, and to oppressive social practices against women activists in the public sphere.
To achieve this goal, we focused on showing how media discourse can consolidate or repeat repressive practices, intentionally or unintentionally, by exposing the areas of: (1) marginalization, (2) vulnerabilization, and (3) language and hidden power relations.

Marginalization

Marginalization is a repressive practice of dealing with issues of individuals or groups of people as if they are secondary and insignificant. The way we choose our words and expressions may lead to the marginalization of several societal groups, including women. At the media level, this means the way in which women's issues are covered as individual and private problems. By focusing more on media discourse about women politicians, and through the analysis of the selected sample, we notice that women politicians are marginalized, as actors, in the political field by: **1) Considering women politicians as one category and by summarizing their opinion and representation by one female politician without taking into account the different contexts and experiences; 2) Focusing on their sexual, social, regional and religious identities with the aim of creating a dichotomy (we/ they); 3) Reproducing the narratives that would consolidate gender biases against them as women and objectify them, that is, focusing on their appearance.**

In this section, we review, in further detail, media practices which lead to marginalizing women's political participation and reduce the importance of media coverage related to women politicians.
Within the selected sample, marginalization is observed in the media discourse through:
- Marginalization of women's efforts in general and women politicians in particular .
- Social prejudices: objectification and sexism.
- Reduction through generalization and aggregation: considering women politicians as a one category.
- Focusing on social identities, family, and religious affiliation.

Below is a broader analysis of these patterns with examples from the selected sample to illustrate this:

1. Marginalization of Women's Labour and Roles in General

Historically, women's toil has been marginalized in the private sphere, i.e., underestimating the importance of domestic work and care, but this marginalization of toil has extended to the public sphere, where the media sometimes deliberately marginalizes and stereotypes the activities and work conducted by women in the public sphere, which does not allow a real media highlight of the activities of politically active women.
Through the analysis, we noticed that the adopted discourse either confines women political activists to certain roles, ignores the efforts they make, minimizes the value of these efforts, or exaggerates them in poetic ways to provoke emotions.

Marginalizing their toil may take shape in press coverage by focusing on recent events - ignoring or not recognizing women's past efforts.

*Disclaimer: all the examples used for the data analysis were translated into English by the researchers.

Example 1

"The spring of 2011 was a different season and an exceptional date of history-making in Syria, it was the season of apocalyptic awakening and resurrection from the wasteland. The Syrian women came out announcing their glorious revolution, the revolution of freedom, dignity and human justice.

Comment

Although the 2011 revolution in Syria was not preceded by a similar event before, considering it an "awakening" and a "resurrection" gives the impression that women activists and feminists were inactive or asleep, ignoring their past struggles and the historically systematic exclusion.

Example 2

"Being far from the spotlight, Alice Mfarrej was not one of the opposition figures who faced accusations of integrity, as she was known for her opposition to Islamic currents (…) and although her face was not familiar enough for those who followed the events of the conference to know who the woman in the photo was, but the extensive sharing of the names of the opposition delegation figures in Geneva was enough to speculate that she was the deputy head of the delegation, Alice Mfarrej."

Comment

1. Linking "keep out of the spotlight" when being in the public sphere with integrity, this practice is a kind of "poison in honey", creating excitement through the discourse of (she) versus (them), she is the honest woman who is out of the spotlight versus them - the corrupt opposition figures - light lovers". This discourse first carries a generalization (a generalizing form), but secondly and most importantly, creates an indirect depiction of the "ideal/honest" woman politician, that is to be "away from spotlight" and her "face is not familiar", as a criterion for acceptance when engaging in political work.

2. Assuming that the political figure here is unknown raises several questions, including known to whom? On the media, political, or feminist level, etc. Creating suspense in this way is inaccurate, because the political figure "Alice Mfarrej" is well-known at the political and feminist levels, and therefore, if the article writer does not know her, it does not mean that she is not known in the circles involved in public work. It also urges to diminish the history of the female political figure by repeatedly not recognizing the struggle and political activism in the public sphere.

Example 3

"Aksoy is considered one of the new faces in the Syrian opposition, as she was not known among the women who participated in the revolutionary action, or had positions against the regime (…) Aksoy is considered the first woman to occupy the position of Vice President, without being known in the opposition, unlike her predecessors Samira al-Masalma, Noura al-Ghadri, and Suhair al-Atassi, who have been very popular since the start of the revolution, and despite that, they preferred to be distant."

Comment

In this example, the aforementioned analysis of example Γ can be traced back to the practice of marginalizing the non-traditional political toil, role, and activism of women.

In the public sphere, i.e., engaging in political action through activism only with bodies, groups, assemblies, and traditional political parties, by taking a criterion of the effectiveness of their participation by the extent of their popularity or the extent of their media visibility. At the end of this example "they preferred to be distant" suggests .

the inability of women politicians to tolerate working in the public sphere, leaving this open to interpretation without making a little effort to explain the reasons. In addition to that, another form of marginalization appeared when the writer of the article erred in writing the name of one of the women politicians, which reflects a lack of accuracy when it comes to women politicians and not taking them seriously enough to know who they really are.

2. Social Prejudice: Objectification and Sexism:

Sexism in media outlets is defined by Amanda Haraldsson and Lena Wängnerud, as stories that distort, reproduce, and perpetuate narratives based on gender inequality (Haraldsson and Wängnerud 2019).

Usually, media outlets justify reproducing those narratives by claiming that the media task is to convey the reality and truth, which are two different things, because conveying the reality only without paying attention to the power relations that produced that reality enhances social prejudice against women politicians, which is the truth. Consequently, reproducing those narratives would reduce and smash women's ambition to engage in political action.

Objectification is used to limit women to their physical appearance and define them based on it, rather than defining them based on their identities and indicating their capabilities. This is done by focusing fully or partially on the physical appearance.

in the media coverage, as this contributes to limiting them to these characteristics, often targeting them with the aim of marginalizing their actions and limiting their presence in the public sphere as only a body. This type of description in media coverage causes **a shift in the audience focus from the subject and drives their attention to the woman politician as a body filling the vacuum or aesthetically completing the scene, and therefore, the coverage becomes full redundancy and confusion, instead of delivering professional journalistic performance centered on the subject and not the bodies of women and their looks.**

In this regard, it is possible to expand on the analysis of long-term impact of media coverage focusing on the physical appearance of women, especially women politicians and activists in public affairs. This is known as the "bystander effect" while in fact media outlets' hostility towards women in politics has a negative impact on all women. This ambient gender bias negatively affects self-esteem and acts as an effective deterrent to women who may be ready to enter the political arena (Hadjiri 2019).

Example

To the right of Nasr al-Hariri, the short-black-haired woman has the front seat in the pictures of the press conferences of the Geneva 4 Conference, which ended its meetings on Friday, March 3rd.

3. Generalization and Aggregation: All are One Category

Women are usually seen in several sectors as a single and homogeneous category, and the international development sector played a role in creating this discourse. Women, especially in countries from the Global South, are wrongly considered victims in need of a savior. Considering that women from these parts of the world cannot save themselves from the forces that oppress them, the international development expert must save them, because the "Third World Woman" is irrational, ignorant and uneducated, and there is no need for the development expert (man) to consult her about the development process. To the contrary, that would be a mistake. Given the fact that she is "identical and interchangeable" (Aung ١٩٨٨) with every other woman of the "Third World" in ways that are of interest to development. Knowing one woman, and what she needs and how her needs to be covered, is enough for the development expert to know and empower all women of the "Third World" (Wood 2001).

This generalized and aggregative discourse exists abundantly in local media as well, and often aims to promote certain ideologies and to enhance assumptions and biases. That reduction occurs through specific practice in the production of media discourse regarding the coverage of general women's issues, and here, we focus on ad hoc coverage of women's political action and women politicians.

The repetition of these linguistic practices and structures, which in turn contribute to reducing women and producing an exclusionary discourse, has become an accepted media practice and an acceptable pattern without even being questioned or doubted. This is done through:

1. **Generalization and aggregation:** This is done through the tendency to talk about female political activists in traditional political fields only such as political bodies, ignoring non-traditional forms of political action, and using "the" to include all women.

Example

The Syrian woman sought to access the political field through a number of political bodies.

Comment

Through the use of "the," this assumption was generalized, meaning that all women sought that goal, and by not specifying who of the Syrian women (geographically, age, which socio-economic class, level of education, ethnicity, religion, physical ability, etc.) sought to access the political field in the traditional

sense, that is, through entities only, and thus women were grouped as one category with one goal in this regard. And finally, assuming that political action can only be through political entities. Thus, establishing non-recognition, or not taking seriously, the unconventional political work, i.e., outside the framework of assemblies and parties.

2. Representation: It is a controversial issue when it comes to the representation of women at any level, especially in politics, and, according to Chandra Mohanty, much of the literature on women and development "discursively colonizes the material and historical discrepancies of women's lives in the Third World." Consequently, it produces the image of "Average woman of the Third World" that is the subject of development (the foundation of development projects) (Mohanty 1991, also Kong 1988). This homogenization (imposing homogeneity) is a problem in itself, as without recognizing the diversity and differences among women, the universal principles of gender would be applied without criticism or consideration of the differences at the level of region, culture, class, and race (Wood 2001).

At the media level, a discourse is produced considering women, and women politicians - the subject of this research, a homogeneous group. This happens by reducing the representation of women to one voice, i.e., one woman, one female politician, who can represent and speak on behalf of all women and all women politicians, as if there are no ideological differences or no opposing stands among them. Usually, the issue of representation is not there when talking about men, i.e., it is not suggested that one politician represents all men and all politicians. Usually, men are dealt with in a specific way, i.e., x politician represents x ethnicity or x party. This specificity considers the differences and reduces generalization, so using the same method when talking about women and female politicians would improve the discourse and would make it more sensitive to those differences, more realistic and avoiding the repetition of the issue of representation and the gaps resulting from it.

Example 1

"The Head of the Syrian National Coalition, Riad Seif, spoke at the opening session. The participating delegations gave successive speeches, starting with a speech by Hassan Abdel Azim on behalf of the National Coordination Committee, Jamal Suleiman from the Cairo Platform, Mahmoud al-Kasr on behalf of the independents, and Basma Kodmani on behalf of the participating women."

Comment

This practice, which is called "gender blindness" i.e., bias for men, is repeated, in addition to grouping women and showing that one woman represents all female participants while no man represents all the men. On another level of analysis, we would like to highlight that the woman politician's intervention was placed at the end of the list, and this is a topic that the media can cover and criticize from the perspective of exercising power in the hierarchy of presenting the speeches and women-related interventions, that women politicians usually make, at the end of the sessions.

Example 2

Her presence "meaning Alice Mfarrej" as a key figure in the opposition delegation in Geneva 8 was surprising to many observers, as it happened amid the absence of other women who are more influential on the media level, such as Suheir al-Atassi and Randa Kassis, with Basma Kodmani, with her rife-with-political-action history, participating with her."

Comment

Considering that the presence of a woman politician came at the expense of representing other women in the opposition delegation, instead of asking the main question, which is the lack of sufficient representation of women politicians in the opposition delegation. In addition, it is a discourse that reinforces the concept of competition among women, meaning that a woman cannot take a position without removing another woman.

4. Focus on Social Identities, Family and Religious Affiliation

Through the use of personalization and non-personalization in depicting and presenting women politicians, as personalization can be used to give a certain statement additional weight, and non-personalization can be used to mask particular issues or downplay the importance of the figure being covered as well as marginalizing her/ him. However, personalization and designation can be used in a positive way when formulating sentences about famous women, or when mentioning a woman's profession (journalist, lawyer, etc.). In other cases, they are also used to reinforce stereotypes that link a woman to a specific man, give her a particular role, or associate her with a particular geographical area while suggesting whether or not the place is important.

Example 1

"The granddaughter of the former Mufti of Syria, Ahmed Kaftaro, and the wife of the prominent preacher Muhammad Habash is also on the Advisory Council. She left Syria two years ago with her husband, and we did not monitor any statements of her opposing or supporting the Syrian regime.""

Example 2

"A woman in the news… Alice Mfarrej from the town of Sultan Pasha to Geneva."

Vulnerabilization

Vulnerabilization is defined in this research as the **stripping of individuals from 1) the power and ability they possess, 2) the positions and resources they have, and 3) the effectiveness, in order to show them weak and vulnerable.** Hence, in this regard, our use of words and expressions affect creating stereotyped images of women and other marginalized groups at all levels and contributes to deepening a sense of vulnerability inside them, and their inability to make decisions, and it comes in the form of many oppressive practices of this weakness and impotence feeling.

This vulnerabilization may be direct and targeted or indirect through other repressive practices such as violence, marginalization, and exploitation, which in turn lead to vulnerabilization.

Through the analysis, we were able to identify several journalistic practices that were repeated within the selected sample and led to the creation of patterns that contribute to the vulnerabilization of women politicians as actors in the public sphere and enhance treating them based on their gender and traditional social role as women. Vulnerabilization practices in the media discourse is noticed through:

- Reproducing the concepts of custodianship and guardianship as well as depicting women politicians as dependent and incapable of making decisions.
- Ignoring the titles of women politician.
- Stripping them of agency and depicting them as subservient.

Below is a broader analysis of these patterns with examples from the selected sample to illustrate them:

1. Reproducing the Concepts of Custodianship and Guardianship and Depicting Women Politicians as Dependent and Incapable of Making Decisions

By depicting and presenting them as unable to independently engage in political action. In some cases, female politicians and activists in the public sphere are portrayed as influencers, and this is a positive presentation, but it needs solidarity and partnership with men to be taken seriously, thus reducing their effectiveness in the public sphere as independent figures. In other cases, they are presented as in need of protection, sympathy, advice, and help, whether from male family members or colleagues from the same field.

Example

Headline: "And was she affected by the career of her father as a diplomat in the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs?"

Female presenter: "you said a very important thing that this regime worked to tear the social fabric, and you said in the introduction that your late father was a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and after the Defeat of 1967, he quarreled with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and was imprisoned for that for six months. How much do you feel that the Syrian regime started all this since 1967 for us to be here today"?

Comment

Shifting the interview and the time allotted to talking with the woman politician to another axis and trying to link her political experience and analysis to that of her "father". This contributes to reducing the woman politician's personal professional experience and even suggesting and linking her political work to her family political affiliation, intensively, without talking in a balanced way about that.

2. Ignoring the Titles of Women Politicians

While male politicians are usually introduced with all the degrees, positions, and titles they hold, and presented as "Master" to show respect even if they are not masters in the professional sense, this is replaced by "Ms." For female politicians, this practice is neither fair nor professional, because "Ms." carries a social connotation in terms of relationship (marital status) or in terms of age, and thus reproduces women politicians' depictions in a non-professional manner compared to their male counterparts, even if it is common to say those titles as a kind of impartial practice and showing respect, but not following the same practice and generalizing it when presenting male politicians makes this a professional defect and contributes to the stereotyping of women politicians.

Example 1

"The Head of the Syrian National Coalition, Riad Seif, spoke at the opening session. The participating delegations gave successive speeches, starting with the speech of Hassan Abdel Azim on behalf of the National Coordination Committee, Jamal Suleiman on behalf of the Cairo Platform, Mahmoud Al-Kasr on behalf of the independent figures, and Basma Kodmani on behalf of the participating women."

Comment

1) Presenting the woman politician by her title, as she holds a doctorate degree in political sciences, was ignored, while one of the speakers was identified by his title "Dr. Nasr" in the same article,

2) Presenting all speakers through the bodies they represent while presenting the woman politician as a spokesperson for the participating women without explaining whether the women participants are an assembly, a party or that is a regrouping of women as a homogeneous group regardless of their various political affiliations.

Example 2

1. "While Mays Kredi said…"

2. "Member of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, and Candidate for the Constitutional Committee membership: Alice Mfarrej."

Comment

In the same example: 1) introducing the speaker "x said" was ignored, while 2) another speaker was presented in a professional manner.

We cited this example to confirm that introducing women with their titles and the entities they represent is a professional and possible practice that contributes to breaking the vulnerabilization of women politicians and political activists and enhances the presence of women in the public sphere as serious actors.

3. Stripping Women Politicians of Agency and Depicting Them as Subservient

The discourse strips agency away from women politicians when it raises issues in which they are the primary stakeholders, but does not present their voices, subjective experiences, or opinions, but replaces them with the voices and opinions of others who are not in the same positionality. In our analysis of the sample materials, we found that women politicians are not presented as independent actors, but rather as dependent or their actions are presented as a reaction to a larger event, not as initiatives, and they are not responsible for the choices and decisions they make. area while suggesting whether or not the place is important.

Example

The study mentions what happened behind the scenes of the meetings of the "Friends of Syria" conference, which was held on February 24, 2012, and quoted a former member of the "Syrian National Council" as saying that the number of the Syrian delegation members who entered the hall was about ٣٠ men, while women stayed outside the room, then they entered following the inquiry of the US Assistant Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, about the reason of no women representation in the council.

Basma Kodmani, who was present during that incident, recalls that "Hillary Clinton was upset about the lack of female representation, and I was the only woman among the II members of the executive office responsible for meeting with senior officials."

Comment

Returning to the study on which the report was based, a study by researcher Lama Qannot entitled "Women's Participation between the Board and Margin," it is found that many details were reduced, and were replaced and shortened through the use of the word "were let inside", knowing that in the study it was indicated that the narrator of the story withdrew and refused to enter because the request came from a Western party, and this was not clarified in this report, but rather a negative image has been established about them as being submissive, and linking women's issues and their rights to Western agendas instead of criticizing the Syrian political bodies that ignore women in their formations.

Language and Hidden Power Relations

Many feminist studies and research confirm that, for many years, masculine bias has led to the accumulation of distorted and disturbed knowledge about the division of roles between men and women, leading to a disturbance in the use of language and an emergence of languages that are biased in their linguistic structure towards men more than women. Prejudice has also led to the spread of gender-blind humanities such as history and its writing, as writing history has marginalized the roles of women in building states and societies. Gender blindness is a manifestation of masculine bias, and the term is used to analyze the bias aspects of men and the ignorance of the space required for women to express their active or passive participation in human production processes. Media can be an effective tool for influencing the discourse and creating change, particularly regarding women's effectiveness and involvement in public affairs such as political action. While media is contingent on social reality, it also shapes reality, as it influences what people think through the information it chooses to present and the way in which they are presented. Media uses language and images to ascribe - and create - meaning to groups, practices, events, conditions, and even things. This meaning permeates the society discourse, and it has the power to repeat privilege, and normalize particular viewpoints. Because these views are influenced by their origin and ideology, which in turn influence our perceptions of certain things, incidents, etc., there will always be competition among groups over what should be considered corrective or favorite depiction (SFJN 2016).

Use of Words that Reinforce Assumptions

The language chosen by media content producers frames women in certain ways, whether they intend it or not, because this language is built on ideological positions and assumptions and uses different strategies to reinforce them. Herein lies the power over women and the discrimination against them in media outlets.

Example

"I mean, although you studied Sharia, you are with the civil work in this field?"

Comment

In a radio interview with a woman politician, the female journalist asks this follow-up question after the woman politician praised the important role of women's bodies working on women's rights.

The question is based on preconceptions and unrealistic divisions that stereotype women activists in the field of women's rights and exclude some of them based on their religious backgrounds.

woman politician in the private sphere. Questions were repeated about her father and husband, who are also activists in the public sphere, without any mention of the role of the woman politician herself and her public activity. As for the second part, it consisted of questions about her position on issues such as murdering women and changing gender roles after immigration to Europe. All of these questions put the woman politician in a position to defend her attitudes as if she was accused simply for belonging to a certain religious background, especially that the same program had other episodes with other different women politicians in a completely different way, as she, the journalist, focused on the political activity only.

This could create, albeit unintentionally, competition among women politicians and promote the images of some at the expense of others.

Use of Stigmatizing Words… For Race, Sect and Ethnicity

Here, we mean the media discourse reuse of socially stigmatizing words to describe people or groups. It is important to take into consideration the possibility that some neutral words may deviate from their neutrality depending on the context and message to be conveyed to become stigmatizing, instead, and a number of media coverages made the mistake of re-stigmatizing over and over again.

Accordingly, when having to reuse these words in order to reject them, it is preferable to mention them in quotation marks, or to associate them with an explanation of their discriminatory social origin (SFJN 2021).

Example 1

"Personally, I tried to contact the Advisory Council of De Mistura, but unfortunately, they apologized and had their reasons that we can talk about during the interview."

Comment

Resorting to suspense, ambiguity, suggestion and attempt to stigmatize by saying "the Advisory Council of De Mistura" instead of the Women's Advisory Council of the United Nations Envoy to Syria, which contributes to producing a hate speech against women activists in the political field and reduces their hard work, in addition to linking them to a white man, which promotes a discourse against liberty and gender justice, and linking this to the agendas of Western governments to reject any attempt to make the topic of women's rights and gender equality a political subject.

Example 2

"Diana Jabbour, Director of the Syrian State TV for several years, is from the Alawite sect to which the President of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, belongs, and is known for her support of al-Assad's forces in their military operations. Ansaf Hamad is also a university professor and a prominent member of the ruling Baath Party in Syria. She also comes from the Alawite sect and is known for her supportive stances to the Syrian regime, and her frequent presence on its channels."

Comment

Under the explanation and talk about the women of the Council, only the religion (sectarian affiliation) of two members was mentioned, with the aim of stigmatizing and linking that sect to the oppressive regime, and not to mention that among the members opposing the regime there are also members of the same sect. This discourse contributes not only to stigmatization but also to promoting the ideology of the content producers and media outlets by highlighting certain details and omitting others, to suggest and stigmatize, as in this example, i.e., female supporters of the oppressive Syrian regime are only from the Alawite sect.

Not Avoiding Generic Masculine Structures: Using the Masculine Form for Female Positions

In the analysis sample, it was noted that language masculinization predominates over its feminization, not only in the plural forms (males and females), but even when addressing or talking about and with women. It is necessary to refer to the biases the Arabic language carries (same as in other languages such as French and Spanish), away from the choices of journalists journalists, as there are many words that have no feminine form in the language, and if any, they are not common such as: female director, female member, female deputy, for example. In addition to taking into account what text masculinization and feminization together requires of additional letters and marks. However, journalists' attempt to achieve gender balance at the level of language is considered the first step towards amending it to become more appropriate (Syrian Female Journalists Network 2021).

The following examples are mentioned in the materials of the analysis sample that carry general masculine structural uses, although all of them had well-known feminine forms, and a number of them were even used when addressing women.

Examples

All examples mentioned hereunder are originally in Arabic and the masculine form of words in Arabic was used when referring to the Women politicians/ activists

1- The Vice President of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, Salwa Kattaw, said…

2- Hind Qabawat, Member of the High Negotiations Commission

3- Basma Kodmani, Member of the Syrian Negotiations Commission, announced…

4- Member of the Syrian Negotiations Commission said… Alice Mfarrej

5-"Biyman Ahmed" , one of the demonstrators, said…

6-By appointing her the Deputy Head of the Negotiation Delegation of the Syrian Opposition in Geneva

7-Mrs. Asmaa Kaftaro, Member of the Syrian Women's Advisory Council / Member of the Syrian Women's Lobby

8-Diana Jabbour, Director of the Syrian State TV for several years

9-Rima Fleihan, Writer and Opponent… She works as a "bus driver".

Use of Poetic Style and Linguistic Ornaments

Through SFJN's work in the field of media discourse analysis from a critical feminist perspective, we noted that this method is frequently used with the aim of:

1. Either achieving political goals to gain the audience's buy-in of specific political issues or for certain figures in the public affairs, or to stimulate a counter-feeling, which may take the form of hate speech, against public figures, specific regions, or an ideology that contradicts with the ideology of the media outlet.

2. Achieving commercial goals by arousing the audience's sympathy and thus their following of the media outlet.

3. Promoting certain institutions.

In this research, we tried to analyze the goals for which a poetic style is used in relation to interviews or coverage related to the political participation of women, especially those involved in traditional political work (through political bodies). In general, we found out that this style pushes towards a non-serious coverage of the issues under discussion. We can say that this method contributed to reducing the value of the content, as instead of seriously presenting the content, the proposed questions are romanticized to the interviewed women politicians, or the interviewers use metaphor, metonymy, and linguistic trimmings.

Example 1

Female interviewer: Let me ask you the first question: Where was Basma before 2011? I read a lot about you, and I know many things, but Basma with her soul, heart, and passion, where was she?

Female interviewer: I still have a small question for you. Were you heartbroken before 2011? I mean, like you said your love is politics and your research and studies on the Arab world and the democracies of the Arab world as well as the Palestinian diaspora. Were you heartbroken that you could not do anything in your country, Syria, as you said, your family is from Syria, you lived your childhood in Syria, did you have a heartbreak?

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Example 2

"Two years after Fleihan, the daughter of As-Suwayda, obtained refugee status in Australia, with her sister and children, to make this distant continent her last home after her "definite divorce of politics", says a human rights worker... It seems that the writer and opponent is enjoying a share of psychological comfort in her asylum."

PART 2

ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

In general, women are subject to more expectations, criticism, and obstacles than men, especially when engaging in public affairs. Experiences in Syria show that women were ‹required› to demonstrate their ability to work across parties/ ideologies and to reach ‹common› positions before they were taken seriously in terms of their participation in peace processes or official negotiations. These expectations are not required or expected from male participants, and they lead to the creation of unintended – and intended – obstacles to women's participation (Kapur 2017).

Adding to that the continuous proposition that deals with women as one group, and with great emphasis on the necessity of "unifying" women in order to take them seriously, especially when talking about work in the political field, despite the numerous literature efforts to point out that women are not one homogeneous group, as location, education, and opportunity determine how people are affected by conflict (Conciliation Resources 2013), and that women have multiple identities, affiliations, interests, and expectations that shape their views and responses to conflict (Conciliation Resources 2017).

In the Syrian context in particular, many men impede Syrian women's efforts to participate in political processes - not only "extremists" - but also family members, colleagues, and community notables who use the issues of "qualifications" and "safety" as pretexts to reduce or prevent women's participation.

Literature also shows how the mainstream local, regional, and international media outlets chose to focus on the military developments in Syria, thus sustaining a bilateral discourse in which the conflict is reduced as well as the focus on some parties than others. Research conducted by the Female Journalists Network in 2016 on emerging Syrian media outlets highlights the poor coverage of topics from women's perspectives, the negative depiction of women as victims of violence, and the lack of published women's images. This created a domestic and general view of women as powerless, lacking agency and efficiency.

It is, therefore, essential that civil society strongly participate, including women activists as well as women and feminist organizations, in local, regional, and international media outlets to reshape the prevailing narrative around the conflict, specifically the narrative and discourse on the experiences of women and their roles, and to publish their issues and their views on the political and transitional processes and the future of Syria.

As for how media outlets influence, it is noticed that when reporting on women in politics, there is a tendency to focus on gender roles, domestic services, and childcare (Page 2003).

In contrast to women, men are rarely described in terms of their physical attractiveness in news reports. Women's ages and marital status (social status) are often discussed and are depicted in a household setting (Ross 2002).

A number of studies from around the world found out that women's appearance is discussed more than their policies or messages (Lind and Salo 2002).
Data from the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which is the most reliable global source for media coverage from a gender perspective, shows that women make up %24 of news subjects globally (GMMP, 2015a), while women make up %23 of national parliaments in the world (www.ipu.org, January 2017).

Table 11: Overall presence of women in print, radio and television news, by region, 1995-2015

Region	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	Δ 20 yrs
Africa	22%	11%	19%	19%	22%	■ 0%
Asia	14%	17%	19%	20%	20%	▲ 6%
Caribbean	22%	24%	25%	25%	29%	▲ 7%
Europe	16%	19%	21%	26%	25%	▲ 9%
Latin America	16%	20%	23%	29%	29%	▲13%
Middle East	14%	15%	15%	16%	18%	▲ 4%
North America	27%	25%	26%	28%	36%	▲ 9%
Pacific	20%	25%	26%	25%	26%	▲ 6%
GLOBAL AVERAGE	17%	18%	21%	24%	24%	+7%

Table 12: Overall presence of women in print, radio and television news, by major topic, by GMMP year. 1995-2015
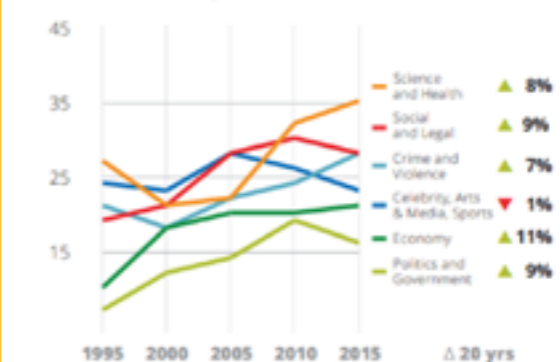
Thus, it can be said that there is an important relationship between gender bias in media outlets - when measured as the share of women in all news topics in general, and also from news topics in which women experts are hosted – and the share of women candidates of parliament membership, for example. We can say the higher the level of sexism in media outlets, the lower the proportion of female candidates. Consequently, this supports the idea that sexism in the media may play an important role in encouraging and supporting or excluding women from political participation. This explains, and according to the "bystander theory" mentioned earlier, how women's view of media coverage that includes reliable and expert female voices can translate this experience into a sense of belonging to strong roles in the community, as in politics.

Conversely, portraying women politicians and candidates of political offices (and indeed women in general) in the news in a way that renders them less effective, less credible, or simply giving them less space, can contribute to the disengagement of women in the field of politics, and suggests that women interested in political action must overcome strong societal / informal norms, even in contexts where official laws and state systems include and protect women's rights.

In this part of the research, we will address some of the challenges that Syrian women politicians faced without focusing primarily on the challenges related to opposition bodies and policies, but rather on how the media coverage of their roles and participation in this field took place and what impact this has on their political action. Participants will be introduced by name only, as the full definition including their positions and experiences is presented earlier in this research, as we aim here to avoid repetition and not to ignore their titles or experiences by introducing their names only.

The most important problems mentioned by the interviewed women politicians will be clarified to complete this research about the media coverage of their participation in the various political tracks and bodies, by dividing them into:

1. Marginalization (including stereotyping and objectification).

2. Personal targeting (as a form of gender-based violence).

Then, some of the effects of these practices will be presented by explaining **the reasons behind women politicians' reluctance to appear on media outlets**.

Finally, the thoughts and opinions of women politicians, about their **evaluation of media outlets' treatment of them and their roles,** will be shared.

* Disclaimer: all interviews were conducted in Arabic and the politicians' quotes were translated into English by the researchers.

"To Fill in the Blank" Marginalizing Women Politicians by Media Outlets

Marginalization is one of the most prominent repressive practices on the media when communicating with or talking about Syrian women politicians, by stereotyping their participation to be, in most cases, centered around talking or commenting on topics related to the participation of women and women rights, enhancing the notion that there are general and political topics tackled by men only, and "women's" topics tackled by women even if they hold political positions. While this can be understood in some contexts, taking into account the need to talk about the problem of small and "shameful" presence of women in the opposition political bodies, and the interest of some women politicians in talking about these problems and the challenges they face, but ignoring the political expertise of women and the roles they play as well as the positions they hold affect directly and indirectly the awareness of the importance of their presence in this field and belittle them.

Most of the interviewed women politicians pointed out that they feel the media outlets invite and host them only because they are "women" despite their accumulated expertise, whether on the political, legal or human rights level. **Media outlets may mean well but most of the interviewed women politicians feel that their expertise is ignored and marginalized, even if their expertise is older and more profound than that of the male counterparts who are invited by media outlets to speak and comment on the political events and developments without an academic background or practical experience in this domain**.

Dima Moussa indicates that "there is a fundamental problem in the media; when it wants to cover a political topic, it does not think about women, but rather contacts any man on the basis that he is absolutely qualified and has expertise in politics, economics and law. While for women, the stereotype is there and their expertise and interest in political action is ignored and they are often hosted to achieve diversity, in the sense that the media outlet hosts women too."

She adds that even when hosting women, it is not about their field of specialization or their position, but rather "only to talk about issues related to women, women's rights and their role in the political work." She points out that "I'm in this position not to talk about women-related issues but to, for example, give my opinion on all the constitutional articles as a woman". She gives an example of one of the Syrian stations that produce a political debate show which hosts guests to talk and debate about a specific political topic: "I used to watch the show and noted that guests are

are always men, and when I was invited to participate in one of the episodes, the subject was on women's participation in public affairs. I accepted the invitation and made it clear during my participation that there is certainly a problem with women's political representation in opposition bodies, but the media also plays a role in stereotyping women in politics and reducing their participation to speaking only about women. So, when women were hosted in this show, the topic was on women's participation in public affairs. This is in itself negative, albeit indirectly."

Mariam Jalabi agrees with her, as she believes that **despite her economic experience and her work in the political field, her appearance on the media outlets was mostly to talk about the presence of women and their participation in the opposition bodies, or on events related to women such as International Women's Day, where most of the media outlets cover this kind of topics**.

Although her position is the "National Coalition's Representative" in New York, Mariam indicated that media doesn't often contact or interview her as part of the political action, but merely because she is a woman: "If the media wants to know, for example, the Coalition's attitude of certain event or topic, it automatically hosts and asks men, despite me being the Coalition's Representative and that I work on sensitive issues and politically complex files. But we also as women politicians, and because we are few, we focus on many occasions on the importance of our presence, our participation and the issues related to our rights because others do not do that." She pointed out that media outlets' interaction with women politicians is in most cases a formality and not for political interventions that discuss developments, sensitive political issues, or the negotiations.

There was a repeated remark in the interviews that media outlets stereotype women as (victims, eyewitnesses on the ground) and that few women are presented for their active and leadership roles, as Mariam indicates that **the media likes to show women talking about humanitarian issues, aid, and assistance, and they are not presented as decision makers but as a means for empathy**. She adds that "the media sometimes tries to show women as out of control, especially when they have a loud voice and strong character". This enhances the idea of dual stereotyping of women: victim/ exception (to the norm).
One of the aspects of stereotyping women politicians in the media is to talk with them about the participation of women, civil action or humanitarian work,

beyond the topic, as Alice Mfarrej explains, "the interest in women's participation falls under the second track (Track II that refers to the civil society), and women in that domain can talk about their work to increase the participation and presence of women in the public space, but as women politicians, we are at the formal level and in these political bodies, so we want to talk about politics." This made her, as she stated, stay away from all the talk shows that revolve around women's participation, but on the other hand, she nominates other women working on these issues.

Suhair al-Atassi explained how the media's behavior changed with her: "In the beginning, the questions were professional and political, the same questions and topics that were discussed or asked to men in the political opposition, and I was perceived as a woman working in politics, I think I took my space and expressed my opinions during media interviews. However later, the media outlets began to host women often in a way that responded to the stereotyped image that became associated with the role of women in the revolution and public affairs, as well as programs and issues related to relief, nursing, humanitarian situation, and rarely were asked about politics or latest events and developments of the political situation.
For example, I was asked about my opinion of the role of women in the political process - specifically women - without focusing on my action or my role in the political bodies, so interviews were confined to a small angle only, without going into the ups and downs of developments, situations and data in politics that men are asked about." She added, **"Then, they started to only invite me to talk about gossip about me in the press, and they would ask, for example, it was claimed that you disagreed with x and x, what is your response?"** That is why Suhair thinks that her voice and position are no longer heard in the media.
Noura Al-Jizawi emphasizes that depicting women politicians on the media is different from that of men politicians, as even when women are invited to comment on a political event or to a media interview, they are asked to talk about detainees, children, aid, and combating violence against women. She says: "As a woman, besides my interest in all the issues I mentioned, I had a political position and was involved at various levels, including the internal policies of the opposition bodies, security issues, the political tracks, governance, etc.
However, media outlets had no interest in that, it always attempted to put women into certain molds, or in other words, to invite them to fill out certain molds."

We mention here that both Suhair al-Atassi and Noura Al-Jizawi held positions in institutions concerned with civil work for different periods of time, as mentioned in their bios earlier in the research. Therefore, it is worth noting, to avoid marginalizing women's positions or stereotyping them in specific roles, that the media outlets must respect women's desire to introduce themselves as they wish, for what objective they participate in a media interview or report, and how they want their positions and roles to be mentioned.

In the same context related to the marginalization and stereotyping of women's roles, Nawal Yazigi says, "The image of women in the media is still traditional, and there are still senior men politicians who speak of women only as their wives, mothers, sisters... The attitude that women are partners does not exist and is not shown. This is not only when talking about politicians, but also in the civil society."

Nawal says, "Unfortunately, media outlets still deal with women in a typical way, dialogues are not professional and there are errors in the way women guests are presented, asked and interacted with, where it seems that the media does not take its responsibilities towards showing women and their roles in all fields. Consequently, the way it deals with women is not deep, and the attitude towards women's participation is still fragile. **When the audience sees this type of treatment, it perceives that this space is for men only,** and it is difficult to penetrate it, even attempts to garnish it hugely fails, because they are not based on strong beliefs of the importance of women and their roles, even for women in the decision-making positions."

Here we can add that this practice of focusing and venerating the status of women only through stereotypical social roles and subordination to men (e.g., veneration of the mother's status) takes place while wome's rights are neglected, or introducing them as independent figures is ignored, which promotes the stereotypes and reduces the roles of women.

Another practice often carried out by media outlets is flouting and not putting enough effort on the coverage and interviews with women politicians, which in turn leads to marginalizing women politicians and their toil, which a number of the interviewed politicians mentioned, as the media presents wrong or inaccurate information about women because it does not spend efforts to search and ask. Alice Mfarrej indicates that "some Arab media stations used to mention my name as Vice President, with false information about me (such as she left Syria in 2012, knowing that she left after being released from detention in 2014), while they can call me to find out or ask.

They also sometimes mention my name incorrectly."

Sabiha Khalil also refers to the same practice of providing incorrect information about her, publishing a "strange and false" biography about her without consulting her.

What Alice Mfarrej also mentions, is the objectification that was explained with examples in "part I", which analyzed the media coverage, and it is a kind of marginalization of women. **She indicates that the media sometimes focused on her look without respect to her position or political work:** "One of the media outlets described me as the woman with the short hair that stands next to Nasr al-Hariri.

They did not respect me when they introduced me, as I have been a partisan and political opponent for a long time, I was arrested, and I moved from coordination committees to the field civil action until I arrived in the official political track.. but they did not search."

Noura Al-Jizawi adds that the media focused on her as a woman in a "negative sense" and not on her as an active woman in politics, as her clothes were commented on in more than one media occasion: "The conservative current does not consider you a good Muslim, and the other side sees you as a head-covered woman who cannot talk about politics and democracy, or in a general way, as if all head-covered women belong to the Muslim Brotherhood."

In addition to the practices of marginalization, **women's abilities and competences are doubted,** and this is constantly questioned in various fields, especially in politics, where the question of competence and representation emerges as one of the obstacles that are placed in the paths of women to humper their participation or prevent them from occupying certain positions. This negative practice appeared in the media sector, as the media's coverage of women politicians on several occasions and the questions directed at them were **disparaging the competencies and experiences they possess or criticizing their existence on the grounds that they do not represent broad segments of women.**

At the same time, similar questions about representation are not directed to men politicians.

Mariam Jalabi says that, "for example, a woman politician always appears in the media, but she has a long experience and a strong presence that they cannot ignore her, meaning that the performance of women politicians must be excellent to appear in the media."

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Mariam also mentions that the media focused on the fact that she came from a business management background in the fields of fashion and marketing, which is the field she previously worked in, and although she holds a university degree in political sciences, many men do not take her seriously as she states. She was attacked when she undertook the representation of the Coalition: "They were repeatedly asking who this woman is? What is her expertise? With the style of yellow journalism (scandalous media). There was an attack against the whole political opposition, but when I was attacked, it was personal, on the grounds that I am not qualified, or I do not understand politics, but not because of my political opinions or stances or my commitment to the cause. The attack was never because of my ideas about change or because I was (not revolutionary enough), it was based on me being present in a field I do not understand because I used to work in a different field, as if all men in the opposition were engaged in politics before!"

Alice mentions that these negative comments are always used when tackling women politicians, as they are mentioned in a way that **"they do not represent us, they are not legitimate, why are they talking on behalf of Syrian women? Or, for example, to use their ethnicities and sects against them because they do not belong to the sect which paid the heaviest dues"** as she says. Alice explains how one of the Syrian stations attacked her, with others, in a very negative and harmful manner because they do not wear head covers, using the pretext that they are "secularists who exclude head-covered women and they want to enforce the CEDAW convention that demands the separation of religion from the society!" According to Alice, despite the Western media's interest in their participation as women, this attention may be due to an inferior look and a "fascination" on the grounds that they are an exception, and their presence gives a better image.

In her opinion, the local media did not deal well and positively with the increasing roles of women in the political action after the revolution, and was questioning their access to positions, and the effectiveness of their presence in opposition bodies that are described as masculine. Even more, that a number of media outlets think that women are present in those bodies because of renunciations they made: **"For example, they believed for sure that we were subjected to harassment and were silent because we were in this position or that our presence was fictitious. There was no professionalism in dealing with us and we were seen as vases,** and therefore, the media outlets do not highlight the efforts women politicians make or the important roles they play because of describing the political body as a women-repelling environment. **Also, women's effort in these bodies to create change is not highlighted."**

Sabiha Khalil also stresses that the media "always asks about women's seniority and entitlement, whom they represent and where are the mothers of martyrs and victims, and in this way, women are excluded on the pretext that they are not entitled to their presence in these positions."

Noura also says that this is one of the biggest challenges faced by women, and noted the **stigmatization** with which women politicians are accused; **which assumes that feminism necessarily means neutrality and work for reconciliation, and in a way that the international community and the media contributed to; that women and women assemblies are (pigeons of peace) and cannot differ politically:** "The biggest challenge is that they ask about competencies when they talk about women only, while men are not asked about that, although we struggled and worked hard to reach this place and enjoy our right to political participation, and despite that, our presence is not taken seriously. We did not come from nowhere, but rather from our experience and ability to fight and continue in these bodies for our rights and the right of the rest of the Syrian women to exercise our feminist struggle in parallel with our revolutionary struggle and to be in the decision-making position. When we say we want equality and that we are feminists, this does not mean that we stand at a position of political neutrality, nor that we will reconciliate with the regime or let down the revolution that we started our struggle from its squares."

It should be noted here that most of the women politicians mentioned a number of other problems and factors that contributed to the marginalization of women, which are not only related to the media, but also to the public space and political action as well.

In Noura Al-Jizawi's opinion, there are several factors for not highlighting the efforts and roles of women, and it is not only the responsibility of media outlets: "There is a reality of political polarization in the opposition entities, which has obstructed the institutional work, as there are controversial positions that have control over the whole – institution – such as the position of secretary-general, which was able to disrupt women activities and participation, in particular, and more generally, the blocs or figures that disagree with him. In addition, there is the Coalition's media office that had a daily newsletter to the media outlets on the work of the Coalition and its activities. However, this office worked under a polarized management. It was not allowed to operate as an institution, but it was utilized to serve the polarizing agenda and was controlled by patriarchal policies that had a problem with women, and therefore, if we did not agree with them, we would not have a fair media appearance. Also, there was no feminist agenda that supports women's roles in general, and on the media in specific.

Women were fully excluded from planning and internal policy changing of the opposition entities. A number of men in the Coalition who were affiliated with different currents had media teams working to increase their media visibility, which was not available to women, as there was a huge gap in the resources and networks, and at the time, a political feminist movement had not been yet formed to support women politicians or seek to enhance women's political participation. On the contrary, there was a general case of rejecting the political action and attracting women to civil spaces or the spaces of mediation and peace building. This is all added to the changes and losses inside Syria and the decline of the peaceful movement on the ground, which was reflected in the media's interest in opposition bodies, and their women members, especially those who do not belong to any political party or traditional political assemblies, but their political participation came as a result of participating in the revolution and revolutionary action." Other factors that contributed to the marginalization of women is that their efforts and initiatives in the political bodies are not noticeable or highlighted in the media, and this may be because the media coverage focuses on the political body itself and not on individuals' efforts (men and women). Nagham Ghadri mentions that "The media coverage was on the work of the coalition - or the political body - and not on women members or their roles in it." These bodies themselves have negative and repressive practices regarding the presence of women and stereotype their participation, which would be reflected in the media discourse." She emphasizes: "In addition, it was sometimes said that women politicians do nothing, do not actually influence, and do not make a difference. But if the work of the political body is negative, we (women politicians) are included in the criticism, sometimes more than men."

Nagham also adds about the role of social norms and traditions, which in her opinion play a key role in the coverage of media outlets, which aims to generate more views and followers, and does a kind of favoritism to the audience, rather than challenging those obstacles and seeking change, so the "audience taste" determines the content, and the audience is the outcome of a patriarchal society which believes that "women are not fit for political work".

"This Field is an Incinerator" Media Outlets Targeting Women Politicians

Violence against women in politics is physical, sexual and/ or psychological. Of course, both men and women are subjected to violence in politics, but violence against women in politics is a multiple and gender-based violence, as it targets them because they are women and because of their political activity. This type of gender-based violence includes, for example, sexual comments, harassment, or sexual violence. Violence against women in politics is a violation of human rights, an obstacle to women's participation in politics and a violation of political rights. (iknowPolitics 2018). In the media, all of the above (marginalization, vulnerabilization, biased linguistic choices) can be included within the hidden violence of the media discourse against women politicians, as sustaining that discourse can contribute to directing violence against women politicians. Most of the direct violent reactions happen heavily on social media, especially on the pages of media outlets. In this research, we could not monitor that accurately while analyzing the media discourse because the sample included only the directly produced content of media outlets. However, through the institution follow-up of the media discourse and its access to the products of feminist institutions regarding women's political participation, these violent responses through social media can be summarized as follows: intrusion into the private life and posting of personal details, defamation insults, posting images of the woman politician's private life, intervention in personal choices, presenting of remarks on the body and/ or clothes with the aim of humiliation and harassment, fabricating charges, rumors, accusations of "honor" and corruption, and public threats against women active in public life and women expressing their political opinions online. Noting that women active in defending the rights, freedoms and social justice are particularly attacked. **This targeting of women politicians on the media and through social media does not only affect women in politics, but also their families and close circles as well.**

In the following pages, we present a number of the examples mentioned by the interviewed women politicians during the interviews, regarding targeting them by media outlets for reasons not related to their opinions or political attitudes but rather for being active in the public sphere.

When asked about the media attacks against her, Rima Fleihan said, "There was a kind of systematic targeting of some figures (women in particular) by the media outlets in an attempt to destroy them, as some alternative media stations worked to distort the reputation of a number of figures and presenting them with a sectarian image.

This was clear to every follower of the events and the examples are numerous. Rumors are always circulated about women figures in a horrifying, ugly and dirty way, or news are published without evidence, basis or facts (for example: An article was wrote about me in one of the websites, while I was still in Jordan, saying that I am in America meeting with a Zionist delegation to facilitate my return to the homeland) and this is not absurd and it aims to destroy the image of women who work in the political field."

She adds that this attack was personal, through malicious reports of defamation and harm, and that this started since she began expressing her political position, when she issued a statement to save the children of Daraa, or what the Syrian regime, and its supporters, call "the Milk Statement". The Syrian state's media did not target her stands but her personal life using threats and insults. Later, she was targeted by media groups affiliated with the opposition by publishing false information about her and rumormongering that questioned her ethics, insulted her, and accused her of lying. She says that **"Some of the articles published on websites were life-threatening and might have gotten her killed, because they were very dangerous and were widely disseminated. I was under psychological pressure and reached the stage of disgust from working in public affairs.** I received personal threats because of these rumors, which was a devastating time for me. Until today, I psychologically suffer from that, which is one of the reasons that pushed me to stay away from working in politics, in addition to the general frustration with the political situation and the feeling of helplessness."

In the same context, Suhair al-Atassi comments, "I have not been targeted or attacked for a political stand.

I have always been abused because I am a woman, by using a personal photo of me and publishing it or promoting rumors and moral accusations. Even when a woman works in politics, she is targeted in a totally different frame, the 'honor' frame, her reputation, her ability to lead and manage, and she is discredited. These aspects are targeted, that is, even in targeting, women are placed in a lower rank than men who are accused under the political framework."

She adds that there is a lot of so-called "yellow journalism" as well as attacks and abuse of women, especially in media outlets that serve specific propaganda, where: "There is now the media that attacks and the media that hosts you to ask about the attack. And therefore, interest in the political role is lost… I have always been under accusations and defense in this way."

Since the personal attacks against women politicians on the media is a widespread practice, it does not only affect their political career, but also their personal life, as Dima Moussa indicates that **she worries that the media outlets may hunt something from her personal life and use it against her, and that is why she is cautious - more than any man in her same position - to protect or hide her personal life, even if, by all standards, it is a "normal ordinary" life, but it can still be used against her to attack her on something not related to her political work or attitude.** She considers this to be one of the main reasons for some women's reluctance to work in public affairs. Nagham Ghadri confirms that she was targeted for reasons not related to her political position, but it was personal.

"The attack method is different when the woman works in the political field. They tend to use hate speech against women as a way of criticism. She is attacked using private and personal points not related to her work. Especially that people, most of the time, do not know the background of the event, and there is no coverage of women's efforts in this field, so it is easy to incite against them."

Sabiha Khalil adds: **"Women figures are often distorted through the media, there is hate speech and sometimes sectarian incitement against them, in a way that harms their political work, and that is based on false rumors and news in order to push them away from the scene."**
Targeting women in the Women's Advisory Board of the UN Special Envoy may be one of the examples in which women politicians were targeted because of their different political opinions. However, most of the attacks were personal, and they underestimated the women members of the Board (WAB). Nawal Yazigi explains: "As soon as the first statement was issued by the WAB, attacks on the Board started from every deep rift on social media and other platforms, and later a website published information about all women members of the WAB, without asking or contacting the members themselves. No one was interested in analyzing the importance of having a group of women in that place. No one was interested to study the experience and support it.
Through the Board, we tried to hear the women's opinions on every aspect of the political process, there was no other available option. However, the most important question here is if it was a board of men, would the media have dealt with it in the same way and manner of obscenity and attack? I do not think they would call it (De Mistura's Men)."

She adds: "When we started, all the news were targeting the women in the Board in a personal and harmful way, and criticism was about the board's non-representative character, even though we made it clear in every forum that we do not claim that we represent anyone. Even in the delegation letter from the Envoy, it was mentioned that we were there as independent figures, and that the task of the Board is advisory. I think we probably did not note, due to the novelty of the experience, that issuing statements was not the task of the Board, but rather to work quietly and to provide consultation and advice to the International Envoy regarding the updates of the political process and to ensure the rights of women in the outputs and their active participation in all the bodies that make up the ground of the political solution and process. Later on, criticism became about the ambiguity of the role of the WAB and its work, as people did not know what we were doing, and it was an objective and justified criticism, as the documents, papers and ideas issued by the Board are all exclusive materials for the Special Envoy's office and they cannot be shared or published. However, we talk about our meetings and the papers and consultations we work on in the various activities and meetings in which we participate, and we answer the questions put to us as frankly as possible."

The ideology of the media outlet also plays a role in targeting women politicians, as a number of women politicians, during the interviews, referred to the involvement of the media outlet donor with the targeting process, as there are media outlets subordinate and/ or supportive of certain political actors and currents inside the political opposition bodies, which attack and accuse women when they do not agree with these currents in attitudes. Although these attacks or accusations are caused by the difference in political stances, **they are centered on personal life choices, such as clothes and habits like smoking, for example, or allegations of lack of knowledge and expertise as well as inappropriateness.**

A number of women politicians also made it clear that they were not targeted personally, as happened with their female colleagues, or that this targeting was due to political positions they took, which is what the media can do with women and men in the political field. However, the defamation that some female colleagues were subjected to negatively affected their desire to appear in the media or to work under the spotlight.

In general, and through the examples shared by women politicians, attacks against them were systematic on a number of media outlets with various ideologies and agendas, targeting personal life, storming accusations and allegations and promoting false news without investigation

or research for evidence, pushing women in most cases to move away from the lights and hesitate to talk to the media, and sometimes give up on practicing politics.

"Big Atonement" Reasons Behind Women Politicians' Reluctance to be on the Media

Hilde Lindemann's "An Invitation to Feminist Ethics" shows how identities are socially constructed elements used to describe ourselves to others and are created through and within the specific social bonds that we develop. "Common narratives" are acceptable narratives and are perceived as true. According to Lindemann, "Master narratives that represent women as virgins, whores, witches… often absorbed unconsciously, as are images of women as babes, chicks… or temptresses". p 61-60

The author also refers to "women's deprivation of identity" as the impossibility of integrating women into a society dominated by prevailing metaphors such as those included in her quotation. This deprivation of identities means that women will have less opportunities or will not have roles in certain fields. When women internalize demeaning narratives, it affects their ability to claim their rights and fight for what they deserve (Lindemann 2019).

It can be said that when the media understands its role in creating those humiliating narratives that reproduce oppressive discourse on women, the media itself can play a different role, supportive to narratives that reflect the diversity of audience and its contexts, with the objective of achieving social justice in the media discourse and promoting it at the level of social practices.

As previously mentioned, verbal violence and media attacks against male and female political activists affect both men and women, but defamation, insults, insinuations, sexual language, and interference in personal choices are mainly directed at women politicians. And all the previous repressive practices of stereotyping, objectifying, and targeting women politicians in the media outlets, contributed in one way or another to the hesitation of women politicians to appear in the media.

The following is an explanation of some of the points they focused on during their explanation of why they gave up on media visibility: According to Rima Fleihan, **what prevents some women politicians from media visibility is the spirit in some of the media outlets, because women politicians are not sure how these media stations would present them, in what image, and what are the questions to be asked**. There are also reasons related to the nature of the Syrian context such as the internationalization of the conflict, political tensions, militarization, and general frustration. She explains, "I felt that all of this does not resemble me at some point… I do not suit this scene, and there is nothing for me to say, and I do not want to repeat the same talk. **In addition to the negative treatment, defamation, and bullying,** it is also related to personal choice as well as geographical location.

As for the Western foreign media, for me the issue is different as I want the world to know what is happening." Nagham Ghadri stresses that tension comes from media visibility, "Because we have seen how well-known women are dealt with, many women fear being exposed to the same treatment. Always, when women make mistakes, for example, or show a different opinion that does not accord with the political opinion or stance of some individuals, women are targeted personally, while men are targeted through their profession, position, or how they made mistakes. Women are targeted with private and personal matters, not for their work or stand. That is why women withdrew to the back seats. Fear is from the general reaction that will start with commenting on my way of talking to what I wear…".

For Suhair al-Atassi, **the media treatment of women politicians in this way was fatal that it made many women refuse to participate, even if opportunities are available for them to work in the political sphere or are invited to join an opposition body. Despite their eligibility, they refuse because they continuously witness how women are targeted, this is why many women consider this field as an "incinerator**."

Suhair continues, "The media puts us in a corner that sometimes forces us to isolate ourselves, to work silently away from the spotlight, or, for example, to retreat to be in the tenth row, without leading the scene because the price is huge, especially if the woman is independent (not affiliated with a political party)… this kind of accusations is directed to men and women in politics, but the issue is escalated differently when it is directed against a woman, which is why many women have turned back."

She indicates that she abstained from media visibility for a long time, because she knows that with every appearance on the media, a new campaign would erupt against her, and she adds that this forced a number of women politicians away too, contributing to the retreat of women working in the political field when they expect an attack against them: **"I have not heard of a man who has been insulted or slandered because his appearance on the media is inappropriate, for example. Women see what happens when one of us appears on screens.. You rarely find a woman who occupies a decision-making position and is under the spotlight without being attacked. That is why they prefer to stay away from the media and the spotlight."**

Mariam Jalabi also indicates that women often hesitate to appear in the media, ".. and **this comes from the fact that our mistakes, if we make one, require a very big atonement. Consequently, we need to prepare well what we want to talk about and how we will express our opinions to the media, because there is higher accountability on us and harsher than on men. The focus on women is greater in**

terms of their ability to act and deal with the situation. Therefore, **the pressure is**. **greater I must have an excellent appearance and not make any mistakes because I may not be able to bear the consequences of that mistake. I do not want my voice to be dragged to the wrong place."** Nagham Ghadri agrees with Mariam on this point and confirms that when she started her political engagement, she was nervous about appearing in the media because she did not have enough experience to stand before the camera, because the reaction to any mistake she would make would be bigger.

Most of the comments that follow women's media appearance **will be on the way they talk, what they wear or how much cosmetics they put on!**

Concerning the difference in the media's treatment of women as a reason for their reluctance to appear on the media, Nawal Yazigi says that: "No matter how small the dispute is, it is exaggerated, and the attack against a woman or the dispute with a woman is crueler than the reaction against a man they disagree with or oppose. Appearance, age, and clothes do not matter to the media if we were men. Women's battle is not easy at all. Women are standing up to a system that stands against them and at the same time they are holding a national cause, and therefore, the battle they fight is not easy at all, while instigation against them is way easier. There is no problem with differing positions, criticizing, and rejecting them, of course, but if a person has access to platforms to address people, he can very easily incite against women who disagree with him, even strong women who present themselves clearly."

A number of women politicians also mentioned their fear of the media and described it as an "incinerator" of women, especially those working in the political field, as it might affect their political career.

Alice Mfarrej indicates that she rarely appears on the media and believes that the frequent and continuous appearance on the media channels contributes to "burning women", especially if they express a different opinion or position, and she mentions that there is a number of examples on the suspension of the political career of a woman or man because of an interview. She also boycotted a number of written media outlets that cut and edited her statements according to the goal of the media outlet or its donor, especially when the speech is cut out of its context to take an unintended meaning. She also notes that her invitation by a media outlet often comes in the form of "fill in the following blank" in order for her to speak according to a specific agenda or goal. She adds that she may be mistaken about the boycott, as she realizes the importance of the media to establish the role of women.

Dima Moussa explains that women stay away from media exposure for several reasons, a large part of which is societal, as when men talk on the media about political positions, people listen to what they say, while if women appear on the media, there are other factors that come to the mind of the audience, and women are categorized even before they start speaking as veiled / not veiled, with make-up or not, the appearance and clothes, even the hair color and hairstyle, and based on that, they are placed in certain areas. So, women are under greater pressure, and they feel they need to prepare well (which is required from both men and women) but women feel that they have to be more careful because there is a stereotype which implies they are not competent to be in the political field, "Women must prove that they are qualified to be in this position, all their speech is placed under the microscope, and when one of us appears on the media, people's efforts are directed to research and investigate her, and therefore, she may be afraid of the society because the criteria for evaluating her are different and not the same as men, and because the media and society may talk about her personal life as a result of any mistake. She feels she needs to be double careful to hide her personal life and everything that may be used against her. When women are attacked, this happens regardless of their qualifications, expertise and stances, the attack starts by using what the society considers related to women: their honor, reputation, tact… and a large number of women working in the public sphere fear the influence of this on their families and close circles."

In addition to the community pressure and high standards of evaluation developed for women politicians, and their feeling that the media is lurking their personal lives and relationships, Sabiha Khalil mentions that she was not happy with the way she appeared on the media, and that, according to her opinion, women do not exaggerate in praising themselves and claiming titles and attributes as a number of men do: "We as women, if we do not really enjoy the trait, we do not describe ourselves with it. As for a man, he may possess a quarter of the experience that a woman has, and he does not feel embarrassed in using the titles of expert or analyst. As women, even if we do something well, everyone, including the media, will look for the mistakes, while the man, no matter what he does, receives applause, while they hunt our actions, and if we are not completely sure of our knowledge of the subject, we apologize and prefer not to participate."

It should be noted that more than half of the interviewed women politicians pointed out that the lack of their experience in dealing with the media, the basics of media appearance and dealing with the camera, for example, was a reason for hesitation after experiences they are not proud of. They highlight that women politicians, in particular, need training on this topic and the techniques they can use during dialogues or media interventions, which increase their self-confidence and their ability to express their positions, whether in dialogues, or audio or visual interventions. We need to highlight here that this is also a kind of pressure on women as well as the standards imposed by the patriarchal society to be an additional burden thrown on women's shoulders when they access the political field. These pressures create a dominant presumption that women are not qualified or eligible to enter the political sphere and thus appear on the media, and that is why they feel the need to make an extra effort, knowing that men politicians also do not have enough experience to deal with the camera or media exposure, but their societal judgment is less harsh.

"Under the Spotlight"
Syrian Women Politicians' Evaluation of How Media Outlets Treat them

Women politicians have variant views as a number of them sees that despite the negative sides, the emerging Syrian media outlets have made positive steps, even if small, in the direction of shedding light on the importance of women's roles and participation. While a number of them sees that media outlets started well and then fell into the trap of polarizations and political alignments, and women were the easiest prey to politically attack the adversaries.

It should be noted here that during the interviews the focus of questions was made to assess the emerging Syrian media outlets. However, a number of women politicians has more experiences with Western media, especially those speaking in English, or with the regional Arab media. The goal is certainly not to put the emerging media outlets in comparison with global media with long experiences and huge resources, and to ignore the various challenges and different contexts, but rather to highlight some points of difference in dealing with women in order to develop and improve the discourse, bearing in mind that many of the aforementioned negative practices are still noticed on the global media, and the road is still long and needs effort and persistence.

The "alternative" media has developed sufficiently, according to Dima Moussa, who mentions that **merely developing the way interviews are conducted so they do not underestimate your political capabilities is a positive step,** but the major part is related to the general scene and how the audience interacts with it. However, in general, in her opinion, having no negative attitude towards women politicians is in itself a positive matter, taking into consideration that these problems and practices still exist today in a number of Western media outlets that have more experience than the emerging Syrian media outlets, which in turn have made significant progress with regard to dealing with women working in public affairs and specifically in the field of politics. She points out that from her experience, she was often asked about political issues related to her expertise and specialization.

For Nawal Yazigi, the media coverage of women politicians varies between good and bad, and she highlights the recent progress: "women are present now in interviews and seminars that discuss a political issue or event, and this is an improvement compared to the previous period, thanks to the pressure and advocacy carried out by feminists to adopt policies that require the presence of women."

She mentions that there are reasons related to the political bodies and their treatment of women, as: "Not many women's names have emerged on the political scene, although there are women in the various political bodies who are more important and experienced than men, but they are not given the opportunities, and this, in a way or another, was reflected in the media."

She adds that the positive change began even though it took time: "Just because people are paying attention and discussing these issues in the Syrian society is a positive thing, if the Syrian society is able to see that women do exist and have voices and political stance, it would be in itself a big change."

For Nawal, although she personally did not favour the media visibility, she adds: "Some websites contacted me and asked for statements about the WAB, its composition and importance, and I participated, and they were honest and professional in publishing what I stated."

Rima Fleihan thinks that the media coverage of women politicians varied between "subversive" or "objective."

Even if most of her experiences were acceptable, she still indicates that there are stations that host people to embarrass them, for example, when the questions are a clear attempt to annoy. Nevertheless, her participation in many interviews were about analyzing a political event or about her participation in a certain political activity.

She adds, **"I feel that we have been used by a number of media stations: At the beginning of the revolution, the focus was on the peaceful action, so the media preferred to show secular women's faces, activists from minority backgrounds. It wanted to focus on civic secular educated faces then when it was decided that these specific platforms would be media voices of the Islamists or the armed groups, they started to distort those faces and public figures at the expense of polishing the image of a number of figures who fit with this stage. Therefore, we were used when needed, and burnt when needed, according to agendas set by the donors or the ideologies of the station owners."** In periods of negotiations and political events "at an international level", the political figures present in the negotiating delegation, or the persons officially authorized to give media statements, appear in the media, as media outlets are obliged to speak to them due to the files they are responsible for. While, if there is no significant event in the normal political process, practices of the media return to marginalizing women and favoring men.

For Rima, there was a difference between the local media and the Arab or foreign media. For her, the regional and Western media treated them (women politicians) with more respect and professionalism, while the local media would only host them when it is "obliged" as she says.

Mariam Jalabi noted that most of her media interventions were with foreign media outlets, and for her, the questions of the Western media too were centered around women presence, and most often she is hosted by the media for being a woman and to ask her about the participation of women and women's rights and not, for example, on the negotiations or economy.

In the Arab media, participation was determined according to the state that supports the media outlet, i.e., whether its position is compatible with the woman politician's positions. Mariam does not feel that her voice or her position is clear on the media, but rather that she is a second-degree guest and that the media - even the Western - prefers to host men when the topic is politics.

Mariam mentions an example that happened with her in one of the training workshops on the media appearance for the women of the Women's Advisory Council (WAC): "The trainer was a man of a foreign nationality, but he started giving us examples of women politicians followed by his wife because she thinks their style is similar to hers, so she feels they are close to her. Then he started giving us advice including that the Western public opinion will not hear us if we talk about political issues or share our views on the negotiations, but rather, we must tell human stories that influence the international community, and to focus on the impact of the conflict on children and public health." Mariam said she could not finish the session and she left the room, as how can the training be for women politicians, and we are advised not to talk politics!

Mariam indicates that the most comfortable times for her were when she was contacted by women media professionals or feminists. She says, "The few times I spoke politically, the invitation was from feminist media organizations or outlets." She also points out that there are foreign media outlets with feminist ideology but they look to Syrian women politicians as marginalized, with no rights or even do not exist in the political sphere, and they speak about that as if the reality of Syrian women is separate from the global reality that marginalizes women, or this is only because of our "backward or underdeveloped" societies, and not as we are part of the global system that marginalizes women on the media, in politics and in decision-making.

For Mariam, we, as Syrians, have a greater opportunity on the alternative media, because it is still emerging and these negative practices have not yet been institutionalized, so there is still a room to work on its development and to change its discourse.

Alice Mfarrej thinks that th**e Syrian media outlets presented a good image of the role of women, but in the humanitarian field, relief, or in civil and media work, especially the female citizen journalists, but not in the same way for the role of the women politicians.**

"The local media did not present any good image about the political work of women, rather it contributed, by opinion polling, to smashing the image depending on the attitude towards the opposition, which is being criticized continuously.
Of course, the numerical representation of women is weak, but our presence is not a formality, and the media did not mention the efforts of women in this area and their struggles or their distinct effectiveness inside the group because they work with the ground and defend the rights of women in various files such as the return, the constitution and the property rights."

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, Suhair al-Atassi considers that **the media at the beginning of the revolution was better in dealing with women activists and politicians, and then later played a negative role, as it did not highlight the efforts of women, instead of being erased especially with the scarcity of women who accessed the political field.**

It is rare for a woman to be asked about her opinion, for example, on the Astana Agreement[3] or about the axes related to the influence of regional countries. The questions are not relevant or fundamental, and women politicians are put in a box with limits, and they are not treated as competent politicians, instead of helping them to break the stereotypes. She says, "For example, during my work with the Coalition, I was on the committee that works on meetings with the military factions, and I was the only woman on this committee, but the media does not shed light on these issues and roles, nor does it work to break the stereotypes of our patriarchal societies." According to Suhair, women are treated as faces and images not as political brains.

Suhair also refers to the problems that the media outlets suffer from and affect their content in general, and not only regarding the coverage of women's roles, although they necessarily affect them when they hold political positions. "There is a kind of nepotism, the media outlets that belong to someone or funded by powerful political figures in some blocs, for example, are utilized to destroy some figures and marginalize others, and media outlets have started a conflict of allotments and blocs."

Suhair also believes that the media outlets did not work in a fundamental way to cover the initiatives presented by women politicians or their positions. Only the political body was considered. "The Coalition publishes a statement, and the matter is covered as the position of the political body without considering who worked on it". Also, political disputes inside the opposition institutions are not covered. The media was certainly focused on the first row (higher positions), and since men are in that row, women did not feel that their roles were known, or their efforts were appreciated.

As for the negative focus on women's positionality by the media, the main reason, according to Suhair, may be that discrimination started from the political bodies themselves, for example, that it appeared as a point of strength, that the body includes a woman from a certain minority, and this is reflected on the media. According to her explanation, the secular Sunni woman was the most marginalized, because the preference was for either a veiled woman to cover the pretext of representing people on the ground, or better to be from the "minorities." Political institutions practiced discrimination in this way, even when forming delegations or selecting for positions. The media barely presents the role of women politicians, especially regarding the qualitative leaps and the intensification of experiences after the revolution over the years, and with quick steps by women and youth, so it was the media's task to look for these women and highlight their achievements.

Noura also points out that the **media outlets were interested in inviting high positions, and the faces of well-known and active figures, or sometimes faces that cause the so-called "media pops" and thus increase the number of views, according to her opinion, because there was no strategy or goal of the interview, and the goal of the media outlets was not to search for the truth, on the contrary, there was a kind of superficiality.**
According to what she said during the interview, she does not believe that the coverage of women's participation was fair and positive, but rather there was a kind of chaos and confusion on the politically different parties "for example, in Geneva 2, with the different opinions on participation or withdrawal of a number of figures, the participated delegations were targeted on a number of media outlets. Certainly, targeting women has increased because they are more vulnerable, and the work done by the women in the negotiating delegation was not highlighted, although women were present in the delegation (3 women out of 15 members) and they were not secondary characters unlike many participating men.".

Noura explains that this may be understood as the alternative media institutions were emerging and did not have strategies to highlight different opinions or a different independent line within the Coalition, (whether this opinion/line was by men or women): **"Under the lack of a strategy of a media coverage, the focus is put on the person on the top, on the star, the head of the pyramid, and this is part of the collective unconsciousness that perceives the existence of one hero, often a man.**

[3] "The «Astana Process» talks aimed to support the framework in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and ended on the 24th with an agreement between Iran, Russia, and Turkey to form a joint monitoring body to work to enforce the Resolution 2254 ceasefire." Link

80   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

81   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

The lack of institutionalization and competences in the opposition bodies created a state of confusion in the media outlets, adding that many communication officers, who are responsible for contacting guests, do not make efforts to reach out and search, so the result is hosting those who respond faster and not the best." Most of the media outlets behave according to the desire of management or donor and as a result "we did not have platforms to clearly express the performance and roles we take to make our voices heard and let people know the updates inside Syria and the situation of people on the ground." As for the regional media, the dialogue is controlled by the host, knowing that she/ he is also governed by the policies of the funder and the polarizing factors of the region's conflicts. The difference is made by female media anchors who are experienced and intelligent, and they adopt principles supporting women's roles - especially in the political field – and they were, therefore, leading the dialogue in a way that shows the role of active women in politics. "The alternative media has recently started to work on highlighting the role of women and this has positively improved, but the issue has taken and will take a long time and diligence."

Noura also mentioned that the media coverage in which she was comfortable and felt that she expressed herself well and was asked about her opinion on various issues was when the interviewers were women.

Nagham Ghadri points out that **her experience with the emerging Syrian radio stations was the best, as a number of these radio stations were interested in hosting women to talk about different topics and to comment on political events.** Nagham also mentions that the regional media outlets used to host her to talk about the political reality and current situation, such as events or statements issued by the political body with which she worked. The questions were professional and political without focusing on her as a woman only. And, consequently, they were better than the Syrian media outlets in this regard. She clarified that the alternative media's interviews or coverage of the Coalition's members was not frequent, whether of men or women, and the funder of the outlet played an important role in the selection of guests and the interviews' aspects. In her opinion, **the Syrian alternative media made fewer interviews with women and did not give women politicians the space or highlight their work:** "While the Arab and Western media treats us as politicians in a formal political position, and not as women only, the same questions are asked regardless of your gender, while when a woman is invited for an interview or a dialogue by a Syrian media outlet, she is asked to talk about the role of women, humanitarian issues or the situation in camps...and it is a dress or a costume they put on us intentionally...".

She adds that she does not feel that the media work to change the society's perceptions towards women politicians, or to challenge the stereotypes or negative practices in depicting women. To the contrary, **there was magnification and focus on rumors and news that target women in the political field at all levels**.

Sabiha Khalil disagrees with this view and considers that the emerging Syrian media was **"a media revolution, whether we like it or not, with its advantages and disadvantages, of course, but it was far better than the traditional, official state media that is based on lies."** Sabiha agrees with the point that was repeated regarding women journalists and their positive role, as she believes that the media highlights the presence and efforts of women and deals professionally with them when women are in charge. She says: "Sometimes the man interviewer interrupts and competes with you for being a woman, even though you're the guest on his show, but he carries a sense of superiority over you". She also notes that when **"being hosted in a talk show, for example, with a number of male/ female guests, men are given a bigger chance, more space and longer time to express their opinions."**

Sabiha mentions, for example, that the handling of the Syrian media outlets of the Women's Advisory Board of the UN Special Envoy for Syria (WAB) was extremely bad, and she thinks that despite the political difference with the women in the Board, tackling those women was a "personal and offensive" attack.

82   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

83   Sample Analysis of the Coverage Emerging Syrian Media Outlets of the Participation of Syrian Women Politicians in the First Track (2019 – 2012)

"THERE IS HOPE"
POSITIVE EXAMPLES

In this section, we list some media practices that take into account the use of language in an inclusive and professional manner, with the aim of sharing the experiences of some local media outlets in this regard. Here, we shall commend the efforts of media institutions in developing their media discourse, making it more gender-sensitive, challenging the inertia which the language imposes as a means of producing discourse, and seeking to contribute to the dissemination of a more just and balanced discourse. Hence, we have dedicated this section to talk about positive examples of a gender-sensitive media discourse in order to disseminate those efforts and techniques that are used by a number of media outlets, to say that producing a justice and equality sensitive discourse is possible and to invite other media outlets to experience it and adopt it.

Media Practices to Present Women Politicians in a Professional Manner:

● Presenting women politicians as experts by introducing them with their professional titles (position, job title, academic background, etc.), and inviting them as a main source for commenting in the news and providing a political analysis on the events.

Examples

1. The Adviser in International Politics and Member of the Constitutional Committee, Marah al-Beqai, said…
2. She holds a PhD in Political Sciences and has authored numerous academic papers and articles on democratization in the Arab world, the Palestinian diaspora, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the strategies of Arab countries toward Islamic movements and regional security.

● Use of language in a women-inclusion manner by feminizing the positions (i.e., the use of feminine formula for the post), which is a private professional and positive media practice, especially that masculinizing the senior management positions, even if occupied by women, is an approved practice on the media level, without accountability, despite being unprofessional and biased in favor of men against women, which causes a defect in the discourse, not only from a feminist point of view but also linguistically, so we find in some of the following examples a professional and unbiased practice.

Examples

1. Female Member of the Constitutional Committee's minimized committee of the civil society list, Raghda Zeidan, said.
2. With the two female guests, Lina Wafa'i, Female Member of the Coordination Committee of the Syrian Women's Network, and Ruba al-Shoufi, Female Member of the Coordination Committee and Secretary of the Syrian Women's Lobby.

● Diversifying the linguistic forms to be inclusive and not following the easiest way of using one form (usually masculine singular or masculine plural).

Examples

1. Its female and male activists
2. 3 million female and male Syrians

● Providing enough space to discuss discrimination against women in the political sphere and allocating time to talk about it.

Examples

1. Alice Mfarrej, in your opinion, what are the most important differences, or perhaps one difference, that differentiates between a Syrian man who works in politics and a Syrian woman who works in politics too, because you spoke about Syrian women and men, and mentioned earlier the Syrian Women's Political Movement.
2. Presenter: From the start of the revolution, we said that women are indeed peacemakers, but there is another opinion that says this is another stereotyping of women that they are only peacemakers, meaning that they do not have any political role and do not have presence, even one woman said… pigeons. Women are portraying themselves as white pigeons who want to make peace. Lina! What do you think, is this another stereotyping of the role of women?

● Balanced inclusion of all names of men and women in the lists of male and female candidates, whether of the Negotiations Commission or the Constitutional Committee, and equally, whether in terms of titles or roles inside the formed committees.
● Visually: All the pictures of women politicians were published in a professional and positive way, as they clearly appeared in them, looking directly to the camera that is at the level of their eyes as well.

Positives Aspects Mentioned by the Participating Women Politicians:

As previously mentioned in section of politician's evaluation of the media outlets, a number of positive and professional practices were mentioned, although we do not present them in detail here because the women politicians mentioned the names of certain media outlets and specific male and female media professionals. The most important of which may be giving enough time for women politicians to express their opinions and views, asking them about their field of work and expertise in a clear way, and publishing what they say professionally and honestly.

From this, we can conclude that the will for change is present in a number of emerging media outlets, but it needs more awareness and practice. We can say that there has been a clear development and a conscious effort by media outlets and media professionals to produce a balanced and sensitive discourse, although being in the cradle yet. It must be pointed out that the observed practices, whether negative or positive, are not related only to personal efforts or self-awareness of a media professional but are necessarily affected by the editorial policy of the institution and its decision-making mechanisms. They are also influenced by the human, training, research, time, resources that are available to work on developing the media institutions, achieving its stability, and developing gender-sensitivity in the media work to be more aware of gender-based biases, aware of structural obstacles and historical injustices against women, and to be supportive of women active in the public sphere, especially politics.

SUMMARY OF THE
MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

In this section, we provide a summary of the most important findings of the report, in its two parts, an analysis of the media discourse and interviews with a group of women politicians:

Regarding the media discourse analysis, the most important findings are:

● Repeatedly adopting and building on the opinion of men only, without taking into account the gender balance of sources.

This practice is called gender blindness, and it means the bias practiced by media outlets and those in charge of the journalism in favor of men in the field of news coverage, so that men appear in the coverage as active event makers, and commentators on the outcomes, while women disappear from news and information, even if news is about them. The space of their presence in the media content remains small compared to the media visibility of men.

● Although materials were produced by women on women politicians, many of these materials did not include direct personal interviews with the sources that are the subject of the material.

● Grouping: Reliance on one-woman source in order to generalize the experience of that source to all women. In other words, it is sufficient to know the opinion of one woman to know the opinion/ need of all women without taking into account the different contexts and lived experience of each woman and each individual, and this is what is called grouping.

● Not paying attention to the defect of sources' balance. Relying on the opinion of a woman politician against two or more opinions of men political analysts, in addition to shortening and reducing the allocated spaces in the sense that the opinion of the women political analysts was brief while men analysts were given all the space needed for their opinions.

● Choosing the easy: The recurrence of specific names of women politicians, not others, in the sample materials, where the highest of which reached ten times, pushes us to think about the role of the media in reaching the largest possible segment and providing a fair space that ensures plurality and inclusion and takes into account the age, race, religion, socio-economic class, academic background, profession, etc. of the sources that are consulted. This applies to all sources, not just women.

Regarding the analysis of the interviews with women politicians, the following common points emerged in the interviews:

● The "inheritance" of involvement in public/ political affairs, through growing up in a politically active family/ or going through the experience of political detention, often affiliation with the political left, and its impact on engaging in politics by the women politicians. Although the women politicians who referred to this issue mentioned it as a motivation or a primary reason for their involvement in public affairs and the political sphere. However, as we mentioned earlier, the media's focus on attributing women to men politicians of the family is a negative practice that deprives women of their will and imposes guardianship over their decisions and choices.

● A large number of the participating women politicians were engaged in feminist / civil / union activism before the revolution of 2011, even if not in traditional political parties or bodies, and this contributed to their political experiences, and later, their persistence to be in decision-making positions.

● The general political situation in Syria, the restriction of freedoms and the dictatorial regime contributed to the marginalization of women and stereotyping their roles before the revolution. The desire and interest in defending marginalized groups was one of the motives of women politicians to be engaged in public affairs, and this affected their desire to interact with the media. It similarly affected the media outlets and their relatively new experiences after decades of repression, and consequently on their treatment of women politicians.

● The general frustration with the political situation, obstruction of the political process, and the feeling of uselessness contributed to the exclusion of women from political work in addition to their distance from the media outlets, as well as the abandonment of comrades in the same field (i.e., when they were targeted or attacked by the male/ female comrades of the same history and the same feminist or political struggle, especially men in this field who claim to adopt revolutionary libertarian values and work differently when dealing with women) has a significant impact on the willingness of women politicians to continue working or appear on the media.

● The lack of women at different levels and political bodies, and the problems related to the rights and participation of women in decision-making positions in these bodies in an effective and real way, also contributed to the way the media handled the roles of women politicians, and affected the media discourse, in addition to stereotyping the roles of women in these bodies in the "humanitarian/ relief" files.

● The security risk, in terms of the presence of family members or relatives in the regime-controlled areas, was sometimes a reason for the regression of women politicians, or even women wishing to engage in politics and those with political expertise and activists, and for the hesitation to appear in the media.

● The negative focus on the positionalities of women politicians on the media was directly or indirectly affected by discrimination and the focus in this way by the political bodies that carried out a kind of symbolic quota (tokenism) during the selection and election of women or formation of delegations and distributing positions.

● The desire of media institutions to please the audience, in light of the social legacies and the patriarchal system that sees that women are unfit to work in politics, contributes in one way or another to discrimination against women politicians on the media outlets, especially those interested in the number of views and satisfying the community without a real attempt to change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Media Institutions

● Media has a decisive and increasing role in shaping the image of women politicians. Instead of making the media coverage a mere reflection of traditional social and cultural patterns and defending that by claiming that the media role is to convey reality rather than challenging it and holding it accountable, media outlets can be a change factor by carrying out wise and gender-sensitive coverage as a means towards social justice.

● Realizing that stories and coverage that achieve rapid dissemination and interaction through social media often contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes that conflict with the promotion of democracy.

● Not repeating the pattern of dealing with women politicians as women/ females only, i.e., reduce them to their gender and traditional social role, and accordingly, reduce their work in the public sphere, and to remember that the media rarely sees men politicians as men/ males and ask them questions related to their being fathers or husbands.

● Providing enough space for interviews and coverage on women's political participation and paying attention to the achievements of women politicians at all levels.

● Female/ male journalists may also need to be encouraged to cover socially sensitive topics such as gender-based violence, or politically and legislatively sensitive issues such as the active participation of women in decision-making. This encouragement could be in the form of giving extra time to complete the material, editorial support, and assistance in accessing sources and references, or perhaps even slightly higher compensation to cover the extra time needed to work and negotiate with the sources on the ground.

Recommendations for Male and Female Journalists

● It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between the gender bias of sources and respect for the right of stakeholders to choose their political position and introduce themselves. The text does not have to agree with everyone's positions, but it has to define its position and present all female participants as they wish, clearly and respectfully.

● Repeating the plural in the masculine/ feminine forms each time may seem cumbersome at first, but the reader`s eye gets used to it quickly.
Switching between the two forms within the sentence may be surprising in the first paragraphs, but the point quickly gets across. Each male/ female writer will have his or her preferred choice, as well as the male/ female readers, and the editorial board can adopt a standardized editorial policy for it, or in cooperation with other media institutions, but it is necessary to start work in this direction, and not to wait idly by.

Recommendations by the Interviewed Women Politicians

● Hosting more women working in the political field, not only to talk about women's rights and their role in political work, but to talk as an expert and politician. If the media tends to present women in an equitable way, i.e., hosting women politicians in the political axis, as this is a priority to combat stereotypes. The presence of women in the media should be cumulative and continuous, and not seasonal or formal.

● Work to have a quota and positive discrimination in the media outlets with regard to female journalists and decision-makers in the institution, as well as female guests in the various programs.

● Introducing women politicians in an objective manner that focuses on the challenges they face in an objective and positive way and does not show them as victims of the community, but rather reflects their experiences and the entitlements of their presence in this place, as shedding light on women and their political views encourages other women to be engaged in the political action.

● Covering and promoting women's presence and experiences, highlighting their participation and interventions in various fields, providing objective and accurate information about them, and providing a platform and space for women to express their ideas.

● Supporting women politicians by training and sharing of expertise and information on the basics, techniques and tools of media visibility, media interviews, and press conferences, and the delivery of messages and dealing with the camera. Women politicians and workers in the public affairs need training on such expertise, which may encourage them more to appear in the media and boost their confidence to deal with the media.

● The biggest obstacle is the independence of the media outlet, so to have good and objective media, independent initiatives must be supported.
Media institutions and feminist organizations should try to support the emerging media institutions that support women and their participation.

● Developing an "observer of violations" practiced by the media outlets in this field, which monitors any practices such as hate speech or stereotyping and addresses this and refutes it scientifically and professionally.

● Drama can bring about significant societal change as it reaches wider segments but at the moment it does not seem that the production companies / stations that have the capacity to enter the field of TV production are interested in such topics.

● Providing a platform or database that contains information about the female experts in various fields so as to push towards the presence of women in media materials/ programs (as the availability of data invalidates the argument that there are no female experts or that no one can find them).

● Media institutions should communicate with women organizations and feminists, in order to attract women and nominate experts.

● Issuing an ethical charter or "honor charter", to make media outlets adhere to the standards necessary to achieve equality and fair representation of women and working on controls and standards for the media outlets to take into account and evaluate what is published on women, to eliminate bullying against women and undermining them in the media.

- Providing means and tools of protection and support for women activists in public affairs, from what they are exposed to and affect them, and their families when they are targeted in abusive and harmful ways, and by forming lobbies or supportive entities.

- Learning and developing supportive strategies for women by the media outlets. Without a clear and applied strategy and practical training of staff members, there will be no impact or real change.

- Establishing a platform that is interested in conducting dialogues with women politicians, so that their efforts and participation are introduced, their opinions are sought, and important and national issues are addressed outside of stereotyped matters.

- Visual media in particular, can effectively change the behavior and mentality of the community because it has access to every household and therefore has a great responsibility.

- Practicing pressure through the media, institutions concerned with women's rights, and civil society to have qualitative masses of women in decision-making positions, and not just numbers, despite the importance of the numbers of women at this stage.

- Supporting media organizations led by women, producing feminist content, and promoting feminist ideology, even if indirectly but by shedding light on issues and rights.

ANNEXES

1– Analysis Tool

Marginalization: It is an oppressive practice that treats an individual or a group of people as if they were secondary and insignificant. The way we choose our words and expressions can lead to the marginalization of many societal groups, including women. In this section, we review media practices that lead to the marginalization of women in the media discourse.

Topic
1. Marginalization of women's issues by considering them individual and private problems.
2. Marginalization of women by omitting their names.   Note: It should be noted that there are texts and topics that do not need names to be mentioned.
3. Marginalization of women by focusing on their identities rather than their names.   (Participant, activist, refugee woman, Kurdish woman)
4. Marginalization of women by considering them as one category (generalization and stereotyping).
5. Marginalization of women by neglecting their positions and jobs, or by ignoring their titles.
6.Marginalization of women by treating them as statistics and numbers and ignoring the details that explain the meaning of the statistics (unless it is said)   This means generalizing women's experiences as if they were one experience through the use of numbers and statistics. Also, relying on numbers and statistics without adding qualitative analyzes or explanations is considered marginalization – for example, statistics can say that the number of women in the labor market has increased, and this may be true, but the reality is that women are treated poorly in the labor market, or to say that the percentage of women in the education sector is high, or even their presence in politics – while ignoring the concrete lived realities of women.
7. Marginalization of women by reducing and objectifying them, by focusing on the look without the performance or role.   Marginalization occurs when women are compared to things through different language and terms. For example, the streets are overflowing with women in a demonstration to demand the right to citizenship. The term "overflowing" dehumanizes women and aims to objectify them.   This is in case that there is a need in the article to mention the role or performance of women, and the writer describes her look or focuses on secondary points. For example, focusing on women politicians' personal lives and looks, or describing the looks and bodies of women protagonists in media stories without justification.

8. Marginalization of women's domestic work.   Dealing with the work done by women, such as cooking, upbringing, teaching and cleaning, as if they were secondary or less valuable than the work that is provided under the framework of the public space.
9. Marginalizing women's toil: (1) their roles in general, and (2) underestimating the emotional toil of women.   This may include any work that women do outside the house.   Underestimating the role of emotional care as if it is secondary - this may include underestimating the emotional and psychological support that women provide to each other under the names "women's talk", "gossip" or "pointless talk".
10. Treating the success stories as an exceptional case.   Assuming that women are incapable of a certain action because they are women, and that some different experiences are individual and exceptional. Sometimes positive and effective experiences of women are presented as a model for other women to follow, without taking into account the different circumstances, abilities, and individual experiences.

Vulnerabilization:

stripping individuals of their strength, capabilities, positions, resources, and effectiveness to make them appear weak. Our use of words and expressions influences stereotyping of women and other marginalized groups on all levels.

Topic
1. Reproducing the hierarchical power relations between men and women. To answer this question, we can rely on a number of symbols and their intersections. For example, if there are pairs in the text related to "we" and "them" in relation to men and women. Or when the objectification of women appears, which is a reproduction of hierarchical power relations. Representations of positive and negative actions can also be seen between men and women. It also shows us a comparison of the use of veneration titles that may show the differences in power between men and women.
2. Depriving women politicians from their agency and portraying them as submissive, superficial, or executors of the decisions and desires of political office holders. A number of symbols can be used to elicit manifestations of depriving women of agency, especially those related to identity, as well as the finding of analyzing the use of negative and positive actions. When answering this question, it is necessary to investigate the texts that deal with injustice against women and that talk about the life experiences of some women. men and women.
3. Reproducing notions of custodianship and guardianship and portraying women as dependent and incapable of making decisions. Focusing on the subordination of women to men - such as describing a woman as the daughter or wife of so-and-so (concepts of custodianship and guardianship) We can determine this factor by looking at verbs as well - we need more information about the verbs and their connotations. For example, if a woman is identified by the name of her husband, father, brother, or son - this shows dependency. It is important to note that the use of this form of linguistic dependency reproduces notions of guardianship, but it is also important to take into account the cultural context. As, in our contexts, defining women by the name of their eldest son reflects a specific social situation for women that may be beneficial to them and may give them privilege. Therefore, it is not a mistake on the media not to mention the woman's first name, nor is it a mistake of women, but it is important to put this example to highlight the dependence that these linguistic choices may create.

The semantics of verbs can also be seen in this section.
For example, ways to describe women active in the "public sphere".

4. Restricting women to certain roles and limiting their effectiveness and capabilities.
It is possible to look at this indicator by looking at the verbs and identities.

5. Linking emotions and irrationality to women, unlike men.

6. Restricting women to certain roles and limiting their effectiveness and capabilities, or reinforcing traditional stereotyped roles between men and women, which leads to their vulnerabilization.
Usually, in the political context, women's effectiveness in traditional politics is limited to women's rights and issues only, and general political affairs are not addressed.
It is possible to look at this indicator by looking at actions and identities.
We and They binaries - between men and women.
For example, a woman being forced to work, as if working outside the house is a role that a woman does not play except when she is forced

7. Belittling and minimizing women - in other words, describing them and placing them in the same category as children and adolescents.

8. Blaming women (1) directly for making or not making a decision, (2) indirectly for events in which they had a secondary role in or were recipients of.
Blaming women with regard to political participation at the local level due to the pressure and focus of the international community on their engagement and inclusion in political processes as an image, through which women are blamed for participation rather than the community for exclusion or the international community for exploiting them.
When women are blamed in any subject or issue just for being women, they can be blamed in the public sphere (politics, economics, law, etc..) and the private sphere (housework, divorce, marriage, child-upbringing, etc.).
When women are blamed for an abusive event, they witnessed, or were the recipients of other people's decisions and actions – e.g.: (1) decisions to marry off their daughters, (2) decisions not to complain against harassers or abusers, (3) decisions to remain silent about certain incidents.

Cultural imposition:

Cultural imposition is the practice of promoting and imposing cultures, ideas, and behaviors by one party on another, and it may take several forms, including reinforcing stereotypes, generalization, creating "we and they" binaries, and other repressive manifestations that are concerned with stigmatizing behaviors or practices in order to appear superior to the "other". In many of these practices, the other may be women or ethnic and racial groups or others.

Topic
1. Generalizing about the experiences of certain groups of women, such as Kurdish, Arab, refugee, and Yazidi women.
2. Reproducing stereotypes about certain groups of women, such as Kurdish, Arab, refugee, and Yazidi women (Arab women are oppressed, refugee women are victims, Kurdish women have more rights).
3. Dehumanizing certain groups through objectification, generalization, or stigmatization. Specifically, if there is a generalization about certain groups, and not just women – e.g., minorities, ethnic groups, working class, etc.
4. Creating binaries between them and us, especially when comparing men to women.
5. Creating binaries between "we and they" as social groups and groups of different races, abilities, and nationalities, or according to the geographical area.

Violence

We define violence by harmful or do-harm actions and words. In the context of analyzing the media discourse from a feminist point of view, we consider offensive words and the marginalization and vulnerabilization of women as a form of symbolic violence. When we analyze violence in the media, we seek to address how the media deals with violence, its coverage, and the abusive practices against women that reinforce stereotypes about abused women.

Topic
1. All materials dealing with violence against women must be given a symbol.
2. Targeting women politicians with violent language and writing – such as defamation, using their personal lives to belittle them and using offensive words to describe them.
3. Accurate naming of violence or mixing the types of violence. For example, talking about marital rape or domestic violence without naming them. For example, symbolic or psychological violence is classified as physical.
4. Blaming the victim or the survivor of violence.
5. Blaming victims or survivors.
6. Depriving the victims/ survivors of agency.
7. Hiding perpetrators or violence causes.
8. Stereotyping of female survivors of violence or those who are exposed to violence such as former female detainees, "ISIS women" and those who are subjected to rape and other forms of violence.
9. Normalization of violence. When incidents, stories or issues of violence are discussed and passed superficially without taking a moment there or rejecting and denouncing them, as if they are a natural thing that must exist.

Note: We cannot consider media practices violent unless they are symbolic violence or a form of bullying against women through the use of abusive or offensive words. Usually, women involved in traditional politics are subjected to this type of violence.
Portraying women negatively and men positively generates what can be seen as cumulative symbolic violence.
* It is important through the analysis to look at the following:
The media›s practice of different types of violence - a. superiority, b. bullying against women politicians, c. stigmatization, etc. (This is indicated by the type of certain/ offensive words against women).

Sensitivity of language choices:

Some language choices lead to the creation of stereotypes and the reproduction of intrinsic and stable identities of different societal groups, whether it concerns women and men, or racial, ethnic, and sexual groups, physical and mental capabilities, or social class. The use of certain stigmatizing or stereotypical adjectives or words creates these intrinsic and immutable identities.

Intrinsic identities are those that are usually associated with ‹nature›, biology, or creation, which may result in stereotypes and are usually taken for granted by the society..

Topic
1. Using words that reinforce traditional roles through the use of general masculine linguistic structures – e.g., postman, firefighter, policeman, manager, chief, etc.   Meaning to focus specifically on the masculine language uses that serve to stereotype certain professions or positions, which are considered men's and not women's business, and the non-use of a comprehensive gendered language.
2. Frequent use of words that reinforce certain traits, usually describing either men or women, such as courage, tenderness, passion, magnanimity, and care.
3. The use of stigmatizing, stereotypical, or discriminatory words to describe different social groups, including LGBTQ people, women, and people with different abilities (such as: (stigmatized) gay, homosexual, effeminate, hermaphrodite, shemale, lesbian, prostitute, spinster, prostitution, retardation, backwardness, primitive, etc…, (stereotyping or differentiating: master/ Mrs., male/ female Hajj, grandfather/ mother)
4. Use of a poetic/ compositional style to describe women's issues and affairs.
5. Using words that question the credibility of women.

Depicting Women Active in the Public Sphere

When analyzing the way women activists are portrayed in the public sphere, it is important to compare that with the following:

1. Ways to portray active women in what is considered a private space

2. Methods of portraying men activists in the public sphere

Therefore, this analysis is based on a comparison of symbols. In this context, it is important to look at the verbs that are used to describe women in the public sphere, women in the private sphere, and men in the public sphere.

At this point of the analysis, and because this analysis is fairly recent, more precise symbols describing the practice can be extracted after the first analysis process that will result in patterns in the methods of description.

In this part of the analysis, the reliance will be on the comparison between all the parties mentioned in the symbols. For example, the portrayal of men in the private sphere may reflect the reproduction of traditional gender images, if compared to the active men in the public sphere. Some may use phrases or descriptions that degrade the active men in the private sphere. This applies to depictions of women in the public/ private sphere.

It is important to note that this separation between the private and the public is problematic. Therefore, we recommend that when conducting the analysis, to clarify that this separation is fundamentally problematic and creates hierarchies of power and binaries between women and men and women themselves and between men as well.

Topic
1. Portraying active women in the public sphere
2. Portraying active women in the private space
3. Portraying active men in the public sphere
4. Portraying active men in the private space

2. Questions to the Women Politicians

Table 2: The questions asked for Syrian women politicians during the interviews

General Personal Questions	- Tell us about yourself - How did you start working in the political field? - What are the years of experience? - The reason behind your interest in political work? - In which political body was your participation and for what period? - The position, if exists, inside the political body. - Were there women politicians in the same body?
Questions related to the media (the media outlets, their social media, or people who work for them)	- Was there media coverage of the events you participated in? - Did any media outlet invite you to talk about your participation in this event? If yes, how was the experience from your personal perspective? (Professional/ unprofessional, biased, supportive of your work…?) - Were the media questions to you related to your experience or what you presented during your stay in this body, or did they focus on women's presence and women's participation? - Was there a preference for the media to cover certain women politicians? How? - Do you feel that your voice and your political position are clear and heard in the media? Why? If yes, how (examples) If no, what is missing? - In general, how would you describe the media coverage of women politicians' participation? - Are women politicians portrayed differently from men politicians, in your opinion? How so? - Is the focus on you as a woman or as a politician? - Did the media focus on your geographical, religious, political, age, national, or even social status? How? - Is there a difference between the local media (opponents/ supporters), the regional media and the Western media in dealing with women's political participation issues? - Did the media make a distinction between your role as a politician and the political body you were a part of, by stigmatizing / demonstrating it as a masculine institution?- Have you been treated as a politician by the media as a number or a formal issue? How? Why? - Were you directly targeted by a media outlet for reasons not related to your political stance/ participation? - Did you make any political proposals/ initiatives during your work? - Have these initiatives received appropriate media coverage?
Learning and Recommendations	- In your opinion, did the alternative media present a positive image of the change in the role and participation of women in the (traditional) political sphere after the revolution? - Examples of positive or negative media coverage - Is there hesitation/ distrust in dealing with the media by women politicians? Why? and how? - Do you think politicians have a similar reluctance? Why? - What can the media do better to ensure supportive representation of women politicians? - Do you see any role for an institution such as the Female Journalists Network to improve coverage and support women politicians?

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