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The Contradictions of Imperial Feminism: Humanitarian Discourse, U.S. Militarism, and the Suffering of Iranian Women

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Abstract

This study looks at the paradoxes of U.S. humanitarian discourse and actual experiences of Iranian women in the current Iran-U.S. conflict. Popular political discourses regarding Iran mainly focus on women's rights; democracy and liberation, while in reality social, economic and psychological hardships are deepening at the hands of militarism, sanctions and geopolitical tensions. The study states that these paradoxes are representative of the politics of imperial feminism, which involves feminist/humanitarian language being used opportunistically to support interventionist/militarist politics. Building on the framework of postcolonial feminist theory, the research methodology used is qualitative with a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in examining the political speeches, media representations, policies and humanitarian narratives about Iranian women. The study examines the construction of Iranian women as oppressed subjects that need to be saved by Western political and media discourses while ignoring the gendered effects of war, sanctions and structural violence. In addition, the research examines the marginalization of the voice, agency and resistance of Iranian women in the dominant geopolitical discourse. This study will analyze the intersections of gender, power and militarism in a way which will enrich feminist scholarship on war, representation and global politics. It makes explicit the potential of the humanitarian language as an ideologically-driven tool that validates violence and suggests that the life experience of women in conflict situations is invisible. Finally, the purpose of the study is to bring up the realities and resistances of Iranian women in other discourses concerning imperialism, feminism and international politics.

Keywords: Imperial Feminism; Iranian Women; Critical Discourse Analysis; Postcolonial Feminism; Humanitarian Discourse

Introduction

The current U.S.-Iranian rivalry is one of the most important geopolitical rivalries in modern-day Middle East. For decades, tensions between the two states have grown and have been expressed in various ways, such as economic sanctions, military threats, ideological confrontations, cyber warfare, and regional proxy wars. In the international community, the U.S. often speaks about its engagement with Iran in terms of human rights, democracy and humanitarianism, creating the impression that Iranian women are oppressed and need to be liberated and protected. But the social, economic and psychological effects of all the humanitarian issues are still being felt by Iranian civilians, especially women and children, as a result of continued militarism, sanctions and war

8policies. This contradiction presents a thought-provoking question about the connection between humanitarian discourse, imperial power and gendered violence. The voices of women are rarely heard in geopolitical debates or discussions, but rather in the conflict itself, when they are often placed at the center of the political narrative. In the case of Iran, women's rights has been a constant theme in the Western political debate, especially regarding issues like compulsory veiling, state repression and restrictions on personal freedoms. These are valid concerns that many Iranian women encounter but the representation of women from the Global South as passive voiceless objects to be saved by Western powers is characteristic of the feminist scholars (Mohanty, 1988). Many of these stories fail to account for the historical, political and militarized circumstances that have been established through foreign intervention, sanctions and global power dynamics which all contribute to further deepening women's suffering. The notion of imperial feminism is crucial to the understanding of this paradox. Imperial Feminism is the practice of framing the use of feminist and humanitarian language to validate political control, military intervention or imperial agendas. As Lila Abu-Lughod has pointed out, and others have noted, the discourse of "saving Muslim women" has been used to legitimate military intervention while erasing the agency, voice, and resistance of Muslim women. In the same way, Chandra Talpade Mohanty challenges the Western feminist discourse, which defines the Third World women in terms of oppression and victimization as a group. These depictions perpetuate colonial power structures and the idea that Western actions are morally imperative and politically justifiable. Humanitarian language is frequently coexistent with practices that fuel instability and structural violence in the context of the Iran–U.S. conflict. Economic sanctions, political isolation and tensions on military fronts have profoundly impacted ordinary Iranians, resulting in high inflation, unemployment, a shortage of medicine, and worsening living standards. These crises disproportionately affect women because of the inequalities in their status, limited economic opportunities, care responsibilities and social vulnerability. Meanwhile, Iranian women persist in challenging both internal oppression under patriarchy and political domination by other nations through feminist organisation, protest, education, digital resistance and activism. Their experiences demonstrate a reality more complicated than a simple victim/liberator dichotomy. This paper analyzes the tensions between U.S. humanitarian discourse and the reality of Iranian women from a postcolonial feminist perspective and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research aims to study the narratives of the politics and media that construct Iranian women in terms of oppression, rescue and security, and at the same time obscure the gendered effects of militiarism and geopolitical conflict. The study places focus on the concept of imperial feminism and examines how rhetoric of humanitarianism can be used as an ideology that allows for intervention and violence and silences the voices and experiences of Iranian women themselves. Moreover, this work has a feminist approach to the study of war, representation, and global power which foregrounds the intersection of gender, militarism, and discourse. It resists dominant Western narratives around intervention as humanitarianism and its failure to address the material aspects of suffering of women in conflict zones. The study will employ a qualitative and interpretive method to gain a critical understanding of the role of discourse in the construction of Iranian women's image and in the construction of image of the Iran–U.S. conflict by them in the international arena and media coverage.

Significance of the Study

The value of this study lies in the fact that it critically analyzes the inadequacies, inconsistencies, and anomalies of the U.S. humanitarian discourse and how these affect Iranian women as a result of the impact of militarism on them. The political rhetoric often proclaims support for women's rights and liberation, and only few studies have examined how this humanitarian discourse can at the same time legitimize violence, sanctions and geopolitical intervention, which increases the suffering of women and children. The study is part of broader feminist discourses on war, representation and global power relations by introducing the concept of imperial feminism. Academically, this research enriches the current discussions on postcolonial feminism, geopolitics of gender and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by focusing on the lived experience, representation, and resistance of Iranian women during the Iran–U.S. conflict. It also illuminates the social construction of Muslim

women in the current global wars through political and media tactics. Moreover, the study seeks to offer a critical appraisal of the possibilities of humanitarian narratives as an instrument of international politics. The results could contribute to the academic field of feminist studies and to the human rights community in general, as well as to researchers, feminist scholars, media analysts and human rights activists by fostering more nuanced and ethical debates on women's rights, war and the militarization of intervention. First and foremost, the study aims to represent and amplify the voices and realities of Iranian women, which are overlooked in the prevalent geopolitical discourses.

Problem Statement:

The U.S. often communicates its engagement with Iran in terms of women's rights and women's liberation. But while all these claims are made, militarism, sanctions and political conflict continue to exacerbate the social, psychological and economic plight of Iranian women. This paradox is indicative of the political nature of imperial feminism, in which the humanitarian discourse might help to justify violence and geopolitical intervention. While there has been increased tension between the Iran-U.S. conflict, there is limited research that critically analyses the narratives that build a picture of Iranian women without considering their lived experiences, sufferings, and resistances. This study aims at examining the tensions between humanitarian discourse and feminised effects of militarism through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a postcolonial feminist approach.

Research Objectives

1. To examine U.S. humanitarian and political frameworks and texts about Iranian women using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).
2. To explore the process of creating, justifying and normalizing the plight of Iranian women as part of the Iran–U.S. conflict in humanitarian discourse.
3. To examine the representation, experience and resistance of Iranian women from a postcolonial feminist perspective, focusing on the notion of imperial feminism.

Research Questions

1. What are the storylines of US humanitarianism about Iranian women and how do they rationalize them in the name of military and imperial feminism?
2. How do the social, psychological and economic suffering of women in Iran result from war, sanctions and political conflict?
3. How does Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and postcolonial feminist theory show the discrepancy between the humanitarian discourse and life circumstances of Iranian women?

Research Design

In this study, the qualitative research approach is used to examine the incongruence between the U.S. humanitarian discourses and the experiences of Iranian women in the context of the Iran–U.S. conflict. This study will benefit from qualitative research as it can provide an in-depth study of meanings, representations, ideologies, and lived experiences which are found within political and media discourses. The research is interpretive in nature and it is exploratory in order to understand the construction of Iranian women as languages and discourses in wider global geopolitical contexts. The study is based on a postcolonial feminist framework that analyzes the intersection of gender, imperialism, power and representation in international politics. Postcolonial feminism calls into question the dominant western discourse of women's passivity in the Global South, which centers on the idea of women as passive victims waiting to be saved by intervention, while explaining the structural violence faced by women as a result of militarism and global power relations. The use of this framework in the study allows for an examination of the concept of imperial feminism and its part in the construction of humanitarian discourses about Iranian women.

Research Methodology

The method used in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main method used. As a subject, CDA aims to investigate the reproduction of systems of power, ideology, inequality and

domination in society through language, discourse and communication (Fairclough, 1995). Using CDA to examine the way humanitarian discourse and political narratives are deployed to produce specific images of women within Iran and their relationship to war, liberation and security issues. This study will employ secondary qualitative data, such as U.S. political speeches, government documents, media coverage, policy documents, international human rights documents, feminist commentaries, and digital narratives on the Iran–U.S. conflict. Through purposive sampling, texts and documents will be selected that specifically talk about Iranian women, humanitarian intervention, women's rights, militarism and conflict narratives. The chosen data will be analysed with the aim of detecting common themes, ideo-typological forms, and discursive strategies of imperial feminism, gendered violence, victimhood, resistance and humanitarianism. Thematic analysis will be used in conjunction with CDA to uncover meaning and power positioning in the texts selected. Especial focus will be on the representation of Iranian women as oppressed subjects, the legitimation of political and military intervention by humanitarian discourse, and the marginalisation of women's lived experiences in dominant geopolitical narratives. The study also aims to investigate the agency and resistance of Iranian women as agents of internal oppression of patriarchy and external military interventions. The research is rather interpretative in nature, not positivist, so that it does not seek objective or general truths. Rather, it aims to question the nature of discourse and its effect on the construction of the image of Iranian women as well as their role in the context of other power structures, imperialism and gendered violence. The study which interweaves CDA and postcolonial feminist theory is a critical tool for analyzing the nexus between humanitarian discourse, militarism and the plight of Iranian women.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to support this study is postcolonial feminist theory, one of the theories that emphasizes imperial feminism. Postcolonial feminism is a critical reflection on the intersection of gender oppression and colonialism, imperialism, race/culture and global power. It enables Western feminist discourses to imagine women of the Global South as passive objects needing to be saved by Westerners and their feminist agenda without recognising the political, historical, and militarised contexts that are responsible for their plight. Postcolonial feminism serves as a critical framework to analyze the representation of Iranian women in humanitarian and political discourses in the context of the Iran–U.S. conflict. This research revolves around the concept of imperial feminism. Imperial Feminism is the rhetoric that powerful states use, especially in politics, military, and geopolitical actions, to invoke feminist and humanitarian sentiment. There is disagreement about the extent that women's rights can be used selectively to justify military interventions and foreign policies that create violence and instability for those same women who are supposed to be being “saved” (Abu-Lughod, 2002). For Iranian women, the narratives of U.S. humanitarianism frequently make them a passive victim of oppression who must be rescued from that oppression, yet their social, psychological and economic plight is deepening with war, sanctions, and military conflict. It is this contradiction that is the study's analytical focus. It is also based on the notion of the “subaltern” as developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her critique of the speaking-for of women who are not given the chance to speak for themselves in dominant Western discourses. In the same manner, Chandra Talpade Mohanty challenges the Western feminist scholarship which makes the women of the Third World a single bloc of the oppressed and weak. These viewpoints are important for comprehending the roles given to Iranian women in U.S. political and media discourses. In addition, the study draws on Judith Butler’s idea of “frames of war” that elucidates how political language constructs who is an “important person,” a “visible person,” a “person who counts” or a “person who is not counted” during a war. This framework allows us to examine the ways in which humanitarian discourse can acknowledge the plight of Iranian women while also enabling forms of militarized violence against them. The theoretical framework combines postcolonial feminism, imperial feminism and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to allow the study to look at the intersection of gender, war, representation, and power in a critical way. It lays the groundwork for understanding the potential for humanitarian narratives to

serve as a means to normalise militarism and marginalise the lived experiences, agency and resistance of Iranian women.

Review of Literature

Gender and humanitarianism, as well as gender and militarism, are critical fields of discussion in feminist and postcolonial scholarship. Today's feminist thinkers contend that women's rights are being used as a rhetorical device to advocate for military operations, sanctions and geopolitical control in international politics. As part of the Iran–U.S. conflict, Iranian women have been increasingly discussed and represented as oppressed objects in need of being liberated by Western political action through humanitarian narratives. But these stories tend to be ahistorical in their depiction of the material impact of militarism, sanctions and political violence on women and children. The paradox is the cornerstone of "imperial feminism." Postcolonial feminist theorists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) challenge Western feminist discourses and argue that women in the Global South are degraded in the name of universal oppression and are considered to have no agency. Mohanty maintains that such depictions reinforce colonial power dynamics, making Western intervention appear as heroic and righteous. Likewise, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) states that the "subaltern" woman, or marginalised women, are often represented for in dominant political discourses without giving them the right to speak for themselves. These arguments are still pertinent for the portrayal of women in Iran in the U.S. discourse of human aid and politics. The notion of imperial feminism gained further salience following the "War on Terror," in which women's liberation was invoked over and over again in the justification for intervening in Muslim majority countries. In arguing against the idea of a "need" to save Muslim women, Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) raised important questions about the ways in which Western humanitarian discourse might serve imperialist interests, and the structural violence that can also be generated by war. This argument is now continued in contemporary scholarship in relation to Iran. Badiei (2024) asserts that global media attention on Iranian women often results in selective visibility with some kinds of suffering being more visible, while others are not. Likewise, Tortolini (2025) points out that the difficulties of Iranian women are inseparable from the prevailing global political and economic systems which aggravate repressive and inequitable conditions. Recent writings about the Iranian feminist movements reveal that Iranian women are not victims but actors of resistance. In his article, Martinez-Rabadan (2025) examines the feminist uprising following the death of Mahsa Amini and suggests that "Woman, Life, Freedom" was an intersectional movement that challenged patriarchal, authoritarian and state violence. Similarly, Tohidi and Daneshpour (2025) point out that the activism of Iranian women has now become a wider national effort that involves issues of democracy, social justice, and political freedom. These studies question the orientalist assumptions regarding Iranian women as the only stories that can be told are about women's victimization and dependence. Feminist IR scholars also focus on the gendered effects of sanctions and militarized policies. Adverse effects of the sanctions on Iran have a disproportionate impact on women, particularly on their economic security, unpaid work, care responsibilities and social vulnerability (Abdi 2025). The study proves that economic warfare is a structural violence which restructures women's everyday-life of survival. Likewise, Altiparmak and Thies (2025) state that the sanctions, instead of humanitarian motives, are applied with growing frequency with emotional and punitive political reasoning, increasing the burden on the civilians and presented as a means to ensure global security and democracy. Imperial feminism is the stuff of rhetoric and in recent political discourse, examples are abundantly found in the rhetoric of the Trump administration. The policies of the Trump administration have consistently portrayed Iran as a threat to freedom and women's rights and encouraged military escalation and harsh economic sanctions. In February 2025, the Trump government reinstated the "Maximum Pressure" policy toward Iran, characterizing it as a path to peace and stability in the region, but also tightened sanctions that had a serious impact on the Iranian people, including women and lower income families (The White House, 2025a). The feminist scholars believe these policies represent the intersection of humanitarian and security discourse with structural forms of violence.

Trump's public statements also consistently associated the cause of women's liberation with a militaristic nationalism. In the framework of the events held in the White House regarding women's freedom, the issue of Iranian women's freedom was linked with an aggressive foreign policy and militarization (The Independent, 2025). This is an expression of imperial feminist logic: in which feminist ideals are woven into the political agenda of nationalistic and interventionist politics. Likely, the same happened in Trump's case, when he spread stories of Iranian women being, quote, “executed” and himself saving them, yet questioning the veracity of his claims (Lead Stories, 2026). This kind of rhetoric placed the U.S. state in the role of a savior of oppressed Muslim women, while conveniently overlooking the destabilizing effects of military aggression and sanctions.

In addition, political debates about Iran often used the image of Iranian women as helpless victims of outside struggles for liberation rather than acknowledging the agency of the feminist movements within the country. The “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement has been appropriated by Western political discourses to justify the west's interventionist agenda and ignore the independent political voice of Iranian women. This selective representation is similar to what Abu-Lughod (2002) points to as the politics of “saving Muslim women” – in which women's plight is used as a tool in a larger geopolitical agenda. These paradoxes are best captured in news commentary during recent Iran – Israel – U.S. tensions. In her 2025 article in The Guardian, titled ‘Muslims' rights to justify war and invasion against Iran and Gaza', Mona Eltahawy condemns the use of Muslim women's rights as justification for military aggression and invasion against Iran and Gaza. Likewise, news reports on Trump's threats to Iran focused on the plight of Iranian women, while also advocating for military escalation and airstrikes that could result in civilian deaths and displacement. Judith Butler's (2009) idea of “frames of war” offers a valuable background to the above contradictions. Within conflict, Butler suggests that the lives of some are made visible as valuable and grievable, while others remain hidden and unconcerned. The victims of the sanctions and the victims of the bombings and the victims of the militarized policies are Iranian women, and the victims of these policies, are the human consequences of these policies, which are often ignored in the dominant western narratives. This selective framing lends room for humanitarian discourses to co-exist with violence which is justified in the name of security, democracy, or liberation. The theory of Orientalism by Edward Said (1978) also helps to account for the construction of Eastern societies as oppressive, irrational and backward in the past, thereby justifying intervention and domination by the West. Orientalist views and assumptions are reiterated in contemporary portrayals of Iranian women, which depict them as symbols of oppression, veiling, and victimhood, and fail to acknowledge their complexity, activism, and resistance. These depictions of political "rescue" and "chivalrous" assistance contribute to the imperial feminist portrayal of the "saving" of the East in a moral sense.These images are instrumental in perpetuating narratives of the "saving" of the East in moral terms, through Western "chivalrous" or "rescuing" intervention. While the scholarship on postcolonial feminism, sanctions, humanitarian intervention and Iranian women's resistance movements has been well-developed, the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a lens to unite these themes and analyze the connection between imperial feminism and these resistance movements has been limited. The literature is either exclusively on Iranian domestic politics or Western foreign policy, neglecting the study of the humanitarian discourse as an ideology in the system of militarism and global power. In this regard, the present study aims to fill in this gap and critically analyze how U.S. narratives about women in Iran and humanitarianism intertwine with militarized policies, sanctions, and geopolitical agendas, while foregrounding the lived experiences and resistance of Iranian women.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this research indicate a great contradiction between the humanitarian discourses about Iranian women in the United States and the actual material products generated by the practice of militarism, sanctions and geopolitical conflict. The study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the recurring characteristics of Iranian women’s agency, the victimization discourses, militarised humanitarianism, structural violence, and imperial feminism that appeared in political

speeches, policy statements, media narratives, and humanitarian discourses. The results indicate that humanitarian language is often used to express protection and liberation, and at the same time is an ideological tool that authorizes intervention and oppressive political policy. The one of the leading conclusions of the research is the on-going production of Iranian women as the oppressed victims and the need to be saved from outside. The stories of Iranian women in the United States were often told in terms of their suffering under authoritarian and patriarchal regimes. In public addresses and policies women's rights were discussed as proof of their moral superiority and democratic legitimacy. But this depiction sometimes marginalized Iranian women as the non-political subjects. Results corroborate Mohanty's (1988) contention that in the West, women of the Third World are often conceived as a uniform group of victims, lacking in social diversity, activism, and agency. Likewise the scrutiny of speaking for the “subaltern” by Spivak (1988) is applicable, since Iranian women were often described by the voice of the west, with Western political perspectives, rather than by their own stories and actions. It also shows that humanitarian discourse was closely intermingled with militarized nationalism and politics of security. Throughout the Trump administration's speeches, the rationale for U.S. intervention and sanctions has consistently been grounded in the principles of freedom, peace, and rescue of Iranian women. Political rhetoric focused on liberation and at the same time, policies were pursued to increase economic instability, inflation, lack of medicines, social insecurity in Iran. This paradox clarifies the main principle of imperial feminism: the introduction of feminist principles into military and imperial political programmes. The research identified that there were often instances where the humanitarian concern corresponded with a narrative around military power, national security and geopolitical dominance indicating a strategic use of the humanitarian concern in relation to other foreign policy goals.

The other major discovery involves sanctions and economic warfare's impact on genders. The analysis illustrates how the existing inequality in society was compounded by sanctions which targeted Iranian women disproportionately. Women's load of care grew as inflation, unemployment, lack of healthcare facilities and economic instability affected women's lives. Political and socioeconomic turmoil seemed to affect women from poorer socio-economic statuses more drastically. The results corroborate the feminist political economy literature, which says that sanctions are a form of structural violence that can be seen as a way of reconfiguring gender relations and survival conditions. While sanctions were cast in the language of peace as alternatives to armed conflict, the results indicated that they had a direct impact on human rights and welfare, and adversely impacted the civilian population, especially women and children. It also highlighted the selective visibility of women's suffering in the political and media discourses. In the narratives of humanitarianism, some types of oppression were often highlighted and others ignored, such as the forced wearing of veils, or the restrictions the state places on women's rights, whilst others were comparatively overlooked, such as the suffering caused by militarisation, sanctions, and geopolitical instability. The selection of the frame is in line with Butler's (2009) idea of ‘frames of war': the ways in which suffering is made visible and matters morally in political discourse. The oppression of Iranian women by the Iranian state was consistently pointed out, while the effect of economic warfare and military threats on the human rights of the Iranian people was relatively less discussed. This led to the normalization of the effects of sanctions and geopolitical conflict within dominant narratives, resulting in the suffering being made politically invisible and normal.This meant that within dominant narratives the suffering due to the sanctions and geopolitical conflict became politically invisible and became normal. The results also show that orientalist ideas were still very much entrenched in the images of Iranian women. Media and political rhetoric often created the image of the backward, oppressive and uncivilized Iran, and the Democratic and humanistic U.S. as the savior. Such images reinforce Said's (1978) thesis that Western history and discourse makes opposing constructions of Eastern societies in terms of 'civilization' and 'barbarism' to justify Western political dominance. Iranian women were frequently used as a symbol of Iran's oppression and as a reason for interventionist rhetoric. These stories, however, did not often recognize the historical importance of Western intervention and geopolitical conflict on instability in this region.

Although the majority of the narratives around victimisation are dominant, the results also point to the resistance and agency of Iranian women. Analysis of feminist movements, digital activism and protest discourse showed that the Iranian women are very active in challenging the internal patriarchy and external geopolitical domination. The “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement has become a powerful emblem of feminist resistance, highlighting that Iranian women are not being liberated by others, but are themselves political actors who are active in their own fight for justice and equality. This discovery sets aside the imperial feminist discourse which has suggested that liberation can only be facilitated by outside Western forces. On the contrary, the study revealed that Iranian women were consistently articulating their own political demands, identities and ways of protest beyond the agenda of Western political discourses. The findings also suggest that humanitarian language was often used to moralize about the policies and practices of coercion. Strong speeches about the plight of Iranian women generally came out in the times when the pressure was increased on the country, either by the economic sanctions or military threats, or in geopolitical tension. It also implies that a humanitarian concern was selectively mobilized to frame moral legitimacy for interventionist policies, not necessarily mean consistent commitments to the global rights of women. The use of the feminist rhetoric was particularly noticeable when comparisons were drawn with other countries in the region, which had similar patterns of gender inequalities, but were not given nearly as much political attention. This disjuncture is part of the foundations of postcolonial feminist critiques of humanitarianism as a selective discourse that is politically motivated, driven by strategic state interests. In addition, the study identified that the media constructed binary narratives of oppression–liberation for Iranian women's experiences. These depictions neglected the class divisions, political opposition, more feminist opposition movements, and cultural negotiations of Iranians as they grappled with issues of identity and gender. The dominant discourse narrowed Iranian women to the status of a victim, thereby disregarding their intellectual works, activism, and political resistance power. The findings highlight the need to employ postcolonial feminist lens that situates women's voices and lived experiences as central to the discussions, and avoid perpetuating simplistic geopolitical narratives.

In general, the results of this study show that discourses on humanitarianism about Iranian women cannot be detached from the systems of militarism, imperialism, and geopolitical power. The antinomy between the rhetoric of ‘liberation' and the lived experience of sanctions, economic sanctions and militarized violence is an illustration of the work of imperial feminism in the current geopolitical frame. The rhetoric of U.S. politics around Iran's freedoms for women often frames the interventionist policies as the means to promote women's liberation, but the real-world effects of those policies are furthering gendered social and political hardships and instability. Meanwhile, Iranian women continue to challenge and resist both internal and external systems of domination, and to assert themselves as not just passive victims in need of rescue but agents of their own agency.

Conclusion

This research critically analyzed and challenged the paradox and tensions between the U.S. humanitarian discourse and the everyday lives of Iranian women in the context of militarism, sanctions, and geopolitical conflict. From postcolonial feminist theory and imperial feminism viewpoint, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to examine how political and media discourses created Iranian women as oppressed subjects to be liberated from oppression and gave support to policies that exacerbate their oppression. The results showed that humanitarian discourse is often used as an ideological instrument that legitimizes a morally defensible form of military intervention, economic sanctions and geopolitical control in the name of democracy, women's rights and freedom. The study showed that Iranian women are frequently used as symbols in the United States' political debates, rather than complex individuals who resist oppression or are political actors. These depictions reflect orientalist and colonial views which suggest a need for intervention from the west to free Muslim women. Humanitarian discourses are more likely to focus on the oppression experienced by Iranian women in the context of patriarchy and state-sanctioned

violence, but fail to address the harm inflicted by military threats, political instability and economic warfare, which predominantly targets women and children and sanctions. This duality echoes the core tenets of imperial feminism feminist values are invoked to serve strategic interests and interventionist agendas of the Imperial state. Moreover, it pointed to the gendered impacts of sanctions and militarization on the daily lives of Iranian women. Economic crises, inflation, lack of health care, high rates of unemployment, and social insecurity became the most prevalent forms of structural violence, making women even more vulnerable and increasing their work on care-giving. These findings show that violence towards women can't only be explained by direct physical violence but needs to be analyzed within the bigger contexts of economic and geopolitical power. The study thus calls into question narratives in the humanitarian field that have separated women's rights from the material impact of war and coercive foreign policy. Meanwhile the study has underlined Iranian women's agency and resistance which persist against both domestic patriarchy and imperial narratives. Iranian women are not mere victims in the sense that they are waiting for the West to save them, but political actors who are in struggle for justice, equality and social change, as shown by the movement of “Woman, Life, Freedom”. Themselves they defy the binaries that are so often assumed in Western media or political debate, between oppressed and liberating. The study enriches the feminist scholarship by engaging in the critical discussions of gendered geopolitics, war, representation and humanitarianism. The research integrates postcolonial feminist theory with Critical Discourse Analysis, thus giving a framework to the understanding of how discourse influences public perceptions of conflict, and how it legitimates systems of power. It also brings into the foreground the need to focus on women's life experiences and voices, as opposed to the reproduction of 'women's stories'.

Finally, the author has found that humanitarian discourse concerning Iranian women is not separable from the other discourses of militarism, imperialism, and geopolitical interests in which it occurs. Politics of liberation and protection are morally compromised if they are accompanied by practices of violence, displacement, economic hardship and insecurity for the very people that they are supposed to protect and free. Feminist responses to global conflict then need to challenge the way that women's rights are politicized and focus on strategies that enhance gender agency, dignity and lived experience in contexts of war and political violence.

The study has been limited by its scope. The study was limited in scope.
The study was limited to qualitative secondary data (such as political speeches, media reports, policy documents and scholarly literature) which is a limitation of the study due to the lack of qualitative primary data (such as field research or interviews with Iranian women). Consequently, the research mainly focuses on representations and discourse instead of first-hand experiences. The study also applies a specific lens to humanitarian discourse in the United States and its linkages with Iranian women, potentially restricting comparison with other global actors or regionally acting powers. A second constraint is the swift evolution of geopolitical tensions and Iranian, Israeli and U.S. media coverage regarding the relationship between these three countries. Some interpretations are time-sensitive because of political, military and diplomatic developments that can be ongoing and changing the discourse and public perception. Moreover, the research is based on postcolonial feminism and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in which the findings are interpretive in nature and are not generalizable in a sense of theory objectivity. In addition, due to language difficulties and limited availability of some local sources in Iran, there is a risk of excluding a variety of grassroots voices from within Iran. The study is nonetheless analytically important and critical of the nexus between the humanitarian discourse, imperial feminism, militarism and the lives of Iranian women.

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