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DO WOMEN WAR REFUGEES OWE CONNUBIAL LOYALTY TO THE MEN THEY LEAVE BEHIND?

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The present war in Ukraine has seen millions of women flee as refugees, while martial law forbids adult men under 60 from leaving the country. According to various reports, many and perhaps most women Ukrainian refugees are breaking romantic ties with the men they leave behind, building new lives with men in their countries of refuge, and/or planning never to return. I avoid any comment about the morality of these events, and instead take up the general question of whether women war refugees have any obligations of “connubial loyalty” to their menfolk in circumstances where those men are discharging a moral obligation to fight in the war that precipitated their womenfolk’s flight in the first place. I answer that they do.

Keywords: ethics of war, gender ethics, refugee ethics, sexual autonomy, Ukrainian conflict

INTRODUCTION

The moral duties of “womenfolk” (the women of a people) separated from their “menfolk” (the men of a people) in war are, as far as I can tell, a topic that has been entirely ignored in contemporary ethics. The closest precedent to this essay comes from outside the war ethics literature: Charles Mills’ “Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?”. As will this essay, Mills’ broaches the question of a beleaguered people’s (for lack of a better term) *connubial duties* to each other, and similarly rejects a liberal dismissal of the question.

I have no neat, wrap-up conclusion to offer, since I think the issue is a complicated one about which a lot more could be said. Rather, my basic aim has been to demonstrate this complexity, and, as a corollary, to show the mistakenness of the knee-jerk white liberal (or, for that matter, black liberal) response that no defensible case could possibly be made for the existence of such a duty.¹

Another near-precedent for this essay can be found in a recent op-ed by political scientist Valerie Hudson arguing against enrolling women for military drafts.

[L]et’s start from the reality-based premise that only women give birth to the new generation of Americans. What, at a minimum, must a nation have to survive? It must have protection, even physical protection in the form of soldiers willing to lay down their health and even their lives if necessary to counter threats to the nation’s security. But protection is not enough for a nation to survive. Even a well-protected nation will die out in the space of a generation if there is no reproduction. Only through reproduction does a nation have a future. These two tasks, protection and reproduction, are the fundamental tasks of the nation.

Hudson goes on to make the case that more American women have died in childbirth than men in war, and thus have done more than their fair share for the nation:

So tell me again why “it’s only fair” that women be added to the Selective Service mandate? More women are already laying down their lives for our society in greater numbers than men are. Drafting women would mean a grossly disproportionate burden of physical risk would fall on women compared to men.²

Hudson discusses what’s necessary for national survival and how, corporately and historically, American women have taken the necessary reproductive risks while their male counterparts have taken the needed martial ones. But she doesn’t concern herself with duties. Does she think at least some men have martial *duties* to their nations? If so, does she think women have reproductive ones?

Although the romantic choices of a people’s women while their men are away at war may not have caught the attention of ethicists, it was certainly a central concern for the ancients, as illustrated by real and fictional figures such as Homer’s Penelope, Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra, and Livy’s Lucretia. It’s a modern worry, too. For instance, German propagandists sought to demoralize Allied troops during WWII by dispersing “the girl you left behind” leaflets that portrayed British women sleeping with American GIs and American women fending off advances from their (Jewish-coded) bosses.³ The leaflets must have touched a sore spot, as American war propagandists replied with “Rosie the riveter”-style posters portraying WOWs (women ordinance workers) contemplating with devotion their men fighting on the front: “The ‘girl he left behind’ is *still behind him*—she’s a WOW,” one poster reads.⁴

I bring up these examples not to defend the way connubial loyalty in war has traditionally been conceived of or manipulated, but to draw attention to its undeniable importance to

warfighter morale. Indeed, the current Ukrainian refugee crisis is raising the question anew. For instance, in March of 2023, a Ukrainian therapist with over 280,000 followers on the TikTok platform alone posted a video that, as of this writing, has garnered over 1.7 million views and generated a good bit of discussion on social media.⁵ In it, he says that most of his clients are men who,

like any honorable men with dignity, have taken their wives with their children, their girlfriends, and their women out of the country and into a safe place, and then either took up arms and went to defend their country or just stayed in Ukraine. Well, seven out of ten Ukrainian women ditched their men, broke up with their husbands, and found themselves new men: Poles, Spaniards, or Germans. They have destroyed their families and ruined their relations. And I don't know . . . this is the tragedy of our times . . . what's wrong with this world, what's wrong with our women?⁶

Although the best sources suggest that over 20% of Ukraine's population has fled the country (about half of those women and the rest mostly children), no one can say how representative this report is of the facts.⁷ Also worth mentioning is that the pre-war Ukrainian divorce rate was already among the world's highest.⁸ But the stereotype of Ukrainian women refugees divorcing the husbands they left behind is by no means confined to social media and internet forums. A recent *New York Times* article is devoted to the war's negative effect on Ukrainian marriages, and features the story of Andrii Shapovalov and Tetiana Shapovalovaa, a successful middle-aged couple who, upon the invasion, agreed that Tetiana and the children should flee the country.

Tetiana was thrust into a whole new world, discovering a new country, a new language and, in a shock to Andrii, a new boyfriend. Andrii found himself on the front lines counseling depressed soldiers and, for the first time since he was a teenager, living alone. [...] [Meanwhile,] "since last August[, Tetiana says,] "I've been living with someone else. My life's flourishing. I'm not missing a thing. Maybe it's trauma, maybe it's not logical, but I really don't want to come back to Ukraine and see all the changes. I don't know why, but I'm not crying at all. Maybe later it will burn through me."⁹

Later in the article the journalist wryly notes that Andreii's only family now is an "intensely loyal" Shar Pei.

Some may be reluctant to discuss the duties of women war refugees out of fear of being called sexist or unsympathetic. "Haven't women war refugees suffered enough?" or "Don't you

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have something better to do than pick on refugee women?” are challenges one can expect for taking up this topic. Philosophers should not be moved by such rhetoric, which is meant to distract us from legitimate, timely, and important questions that lie at the intersection of war, gender, and migration ethics. Yet for what it’s worth, I will refrain from commenting about the moral obligations of Ukrainian refugees here,¹⁰ and advert to the Ukrainian war only as a stalking horse for my general point, which is that women war refugees *do* have obligations of connubial loyalty to their menfolk in circumstances where those men are discharging a moral obligation to fight in a war that precipitated their womenfolk’s flight in the first place. Although I restrict my discussion only to refugees from war and have nothing to say of refugees who are fleeing (say) political persecution, I will forgo the more accurate “war refugees” for the shorter “refugees” in the remainder of this essay.

AN ARGUMENT FOR CONNUBIAL LOYALTY

Let us imagine a fictional country, Xistan, fighting a morally just defensive war raging within its borders. Circumstances are such that women may flee Xistan as refugees to “Refugeland.” Our question is whether women Xistani refugees have obligations to the Xistani men they left behind. I argue that they do, conditional on the assumption that those men are actually discharging a collective duty they have to fight for Xistan. I say Xistani men have a “collective” duty to fight because obviously some men—the disabled, Xistani diplomats, those in essential fields such as doctors and machinists, etc.—are exempt from this obligation as they are either unable to contribute or are already making greater contributions to the war effort than they could on the battlefield. In addition to being collective, these obligations are *prima facie*, outweighable or trumpable by incompatible obligations or freedom rights. Finally, this obligation shouldn’t be taken to mean that a military draft would be obligatory or even permissible. Any connubial duties claimed here to be borne by women Xistani refugees would likewise be collective, *prima facie*, and unenforced.

Why must Xistani men fight? The best explanation will be that they must fight to preserve the Xistani people and the critical interest Xistanis have in maintaining their territorial sovereignty. Some non-defensive wars are probably permissible, and these might have other justifications, such as preventing genocide. But for most cases of legitimate defensive wars, the

obligation the menfolk have to fight will be best grounded in a more general duty to preserve their peoples and homelands.

So far none of this should be hard to accept. For instance, most readers support Ukraine in the current conflict, and I have never heard a supporter of Ukraine remark that Ukrainian men needn't fight to protect their country, or even complain about their being drafted. Moreover, I assume that the vast majority of those who support Ukraine feel Ukrainian resistance is justified *not* just for some larger geopolitical goal, such as stopping Russian expansionism, humiliating Putin, or even promoting liberal democracy. Most Ukraine supporters would say that the sake of the Ukrainian people themselves and their territorial integrity is sufficient for grounding an obligation for Ukrainian men to fight for their country as their abilities and other obligations allow.

Rarely, however, does public comment go beyond the platitudes to wonder about the obligations of Ukrainian women. But it would seem that if—*if*—fighting-age men have an obligation to leave their families, homes, jobs, and educations to be exposed to war's hardships, terror, traumas, and mortal risks, then their women equivalents would have equally weighty obligations. What shape would those obligations take?

Some readers will insist that it would be sexist to think men and women have *equal* but *different* obligations. (The Ukrainian government apparently disagrees since, as of this writing at least, it's contemplating drafting only women with medical training, while it has drafted hundreds of thousands of men.)¹¹ If men and women have the same obligations, and if women are given the opportunity to fight, then most fighting-age women refugees would be failing to discharge their duties to their nations precisely because they sought refuge in foreign lands when they should have been fighting at home.

It might be reasoned that women do have as weighty obligations as men do to fight in such cases, but those obligations are outweighed or obviated for some reason. Maybe women needn't fight because they face the additional risk of sexual abuse from enemies or even some members of their own military. Or maybe they aren't permitted to fight. Whatever the reason, this just means that Xistani women have *other* obligations to discharge on behalf of their nation, and again we must inquire into what those obligations would be. Perhaps Xistani women should be helping resistance efforts in support roles? Maybe; but even so, this means it would be *prima facie* wrong for most able-bodied women to flee their nations in wartime.

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Historically and even today, however, most women faced with war in their homelands do not join the military or resistance networks. Most stay put, adding to their already grueling workdays the labor usually performed by their absent menfolk, and doing what they can to protect themselves and their children from local predators taking advantage of their vulnerability. In doing so this population of women perform a great national service and, in my view at least, are discharging their duties to Xistan as fully as warfighters do.

But most readers probably feel that it's unproblematic for Xistani women to sail for safer shores. And yet obviously Xistani women war refugees haven't fled their obligations, as Jonah might have hoped to, by a mere change of scenery. What, then, are these refugee women required to do for Xistan while in Refugeland? We can think of a few things. Fundraising. Remitting money they earn abroad. Generating sympathy for the Xistani cause. Petitioning the Refugelandic government to support Xistan militarily. These efforts noted, probably the most valuable and permissible service women Xistani refugees can render their nation is for the wives to stay faithful to their husbands and for the single women to remain unattached so that, when they return to Xistan, they are available for Xistani men they favor. That is to say, probably the most valuable thing women refugees could do for their people is to exercise *connubial loyalty*.

We needn't be too specific about what connubial loyalty amounts to. It's unnecessary to dig into whether this or that particular liaison would be disloyal. What matters is that the womenfolk in question avoid new romantic encumbrances that would discourage successful reunions with their menfolk. If Xistani sexual norms are permissive, then this standard allows for quite a bit of sexual freedom for women Xistani refugees. But in any realistic scenario, Xistani women marrying or permanently partnering with Refugelandic men would be, above demoralizing the menfolk they leave behind, choosing a cultural and biological path that branches away and shrinks the Xistani people.

Now I take it to be uncontroversial that Xistani women *may* avoid Refugelandic entanglements for such nationalistic reasons. What is controversial is whether they have a (collective, *prima facie*) obligation to. To help motivate that claim, recall we are restricting our concern *only* to wars that you, the reader, think a nation's men (and maybe women) are obligated to fight in. The challenge for those opposed to my thesis would be to explain why Xistani men (and maybe women) morally must fight while Xistani women refugees would have no reciprocal or equivalent duties or, if they do, what those obligations would be if not connubial in nature.

Nor can one complain that connubial loyalty is too demanding. Celibacy, and even non-celibate singlehood, is a sacrifice to be sure. Among the harms of war are years of “delight, merriment and carnal love” lost to those it separates.¹² A few years without romance is especially costly for young women, who are at their most fertile and attractive to men.¹³ But if we are willing to say that fighting age Xistani menfolk must endure exposure to bad weather, constant terror of attack, lifelong trauma from killing and seeing their friends killed, and a grave risk of being maimed or blown apart (all of these in *addition* to significant sexual and reproductive costs), then any complaint with my thesis cannot be that it asks too much of women refugees. Any reasonable objection must be that, although women Xistani refugees have duties, they don’t have specifically *connubial* duties.

One might concede that women Xistani war refugees have as serious an obligation to the Xistani people as Xistani men do, but maintain that this obligation is discharged by other sorts of efforts, such as the aforementioned remittances and political agitation on behalf of the war effort. But what of the refugees who do not do these things? And even of those who do, are such efforts, usually quite meager in their effects, discharging duties to Xistan that are equivalent in strength to those of Xistanis called to fight on the front lines? If we’re frank, the answer is that they obviously are not. The question isn’t whether women refugees are *miserable* enough. There is no duty to suffer on behalf of Xistan, and many duties are a joy to discharge. The question is whether, within the limits of morality and acceptable sacrifice, refugee Xistani women are doing enough on behalf of their people merely by remitting money, awareness-raising, and otherwise pursuing their happiness in foreign lands.

Connubial loyalty would be a good for Xistan that would probably dwarf any other effort of the typical Xistani woman refugee. First, because few things can buoy the morale of fighting men more than the fidelity of their wives and girlfriends and reasonable hopes of returning to, or starting, a family in peace and prosperity. Second, because the preservation of the Xistani people—that thing the Xistani men (and perhaps women) are fighting for, we must ever bear in mind—requires Xistani women and men parenting the next generation of Xistani children. For when we say the military fights for the nation, we don’t refer to a set of presently living nationals, but the nation in the sense of a people extending into the future.

Perhaps a corollary of these considerations is that the connubial duties of Xistanis to each other grows in strength in proportion to how reduced the Xistani population is by the war in

question. By analogy, those obliged to fight for their lands are called not to preserve *part* of their nation's invaded territory, but as much of it as possible, and (all other things being equal) the more territory threatened by the invader, the greater and more extensive the obligations a nation's people have to resist. Likewise, the survival of *some* Xistani people doesn't mean that women Xistani refugees have *no* connubial duties. They have some obligation, and that obligation only grows as their people are cut down or scattered. Applied to the real world, if the Russian incursion is expected to reduce the population of Ukrainians by 1% by (say) mid-century, that would place less of a connubial obligation on women Ukrainian refugees than if the war was expected to reduce the Ukrainian population by 25% in that timeframe, which is a conservative estimate given the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who will have been killed by the war and the millions who have emigrated and plan never to move back.¹⁴

To conclude this section and come full circle, I do not claim that the condition specified here—a just defensive war in which (at least) the menfolk have a duty to resist—is necessary for activating a *prima facie* duty of connubial loyalty. For instance, Charles Mills' discussion of the situation black men and women living the West find themselves in might point to another, and I am agnostic about that question. Additionally, one might see my discussion and Mills' to be at root about demographic threats, and wonder if that is necessary, or at least sufficient, for activating connubial obligations. I have not argued this either, nor (for what it's worth) do I hold that position. We can imagine a people or nation who are in decline simply because they've ceased to like each other's company, and I personally don't feel such a demographic threat implies any connubial duty. Finally, and critically, I haven't argued for connubial duties full-stop: I have merely argued for them in conditions—should there be any—where (at least) the menfolk have a duty to resist in a defensive war. How often these conditions obtain I leave to the reader and other discussions.

AN EXCURSUS ON THE GENDERED NATURE OF THE QUESTION

Being surrounded by foreign men, women refugees practicing connubial loyalty would need to be intentional about putting their love lives on hold. But the occasional duty of a nation's menfolk (and perhaps its womenfolk) to fight for it, and the reason for that duty, entails that connubial loyalty is owed by more than its women refugees. Women who remain in their war-

torn country have these obligations as well, for the same reasons. It's just less of a sacrifice for them, as the opportunity doesn't arise to get involved with foreign men. I would argue that men contributing to the war effort in non-military capacities also have connubial obligations. In fact, as there is likely to be a sex ratio imbalance caused by male casualties, if the attacked nation in question is a monogamous society, its men may have an even *weightier* connubial duty to their countrywomen than the converse. Even warfighters (of either gender), who of all citizens can claim to have fully shouldered their burdens in the war, might reasonably be said on this logic to retain some sort of obligation to find mates among their people.

These gender-neutral concessions happily noted, the discussion is most realistically and relevantly put in terms of *women* refugees. One reason for this is that, as we see in the Ukrainian war, most adult refugees will be women and most warfighters men,¹⁵ and these disparities have critical implications for nations in terms of fighting morale and demographic sustainability. As the average global person becomes more mobile, it's predictable that ever-greater percentages of populations will seek to flee their homelands when they're attacked. This might be a good development, for obvious reasons. But one (apparently) non-obvious *problem* with such a practice would be that mass refugeeism, absent norms of connubial loyalty, will inevitably undermine the fighting morale of defensive forces and doom these nations to grave demographic injury, even if victorious.

Another consideration in favor of a gendered discussion of these matters is the added complexity of whether male refugees make desirable mates. Is fleeing war morally acceptable for a fighting-age man in the circumstances we're imagining?¹⁶ After all, any considerations outweighing an obligation for Xistani women to fight or at least help with resistance efforts generally won't apply to adult Xistani men. If men Xistani refugees are seen as betraying their people because of cowardice or selfishness, it's unlikely that Xistanis who stay behind will have their morale boosted by contemplating a reunion with them. Nonetheless, some men refugees will make acceptable mates in the estimation of most cultures: a few might already be married to a partner they leave behind, some will be single fathers and thus the only parent who could remove the family's children from harm, and so forth. On my view, desirable men refugees would also have a *prima facie* duty of connubial loyalty insofar as such loyalty would boost the morale of Xistani warfighters and help Xistan recover demographically after the war.

A third reason for our gendered discussion is to help address the aforementioned silence among ethicists about women's obligations in war. Recognizing the full agency of women means judging their conduct in all contexts for which we have moral expectations for men, whether or not in the final analysis we consider their determinate duties to be the same. In popular discussions, the responsibilities of women in war tend to steer into one of two ditches. The first is an unrealistic androgenization that pretends a nation's womenfolk do, or will be expected to, have the same responsibilities as their menfolk. Whatever their stated ideals about gender equality, few-to-no commentators or academics of any note have complained about Ukrainian policies that conscript only men and permit only women to leave the country. Nor do I. But it won't do to adopt this posture whenever the chips are down *and* get indignant whenever, in the abstract, it's proposed that men and women have different wartime duties.

The second ditch is a masculinist cynicism or feminist advocacy that infantilizes women by holding their wartime behavior to no standard whatsoever. If women are as agentive as men, they have equally weighty moral responsibilities as men do, even to their nations in war. "Masculinist cynicism" as I mean it is a type of misogyny that doesn't see women as being as agentive as men, at least in these circumstances, and thus doesn't see it as worthwhile even to debate the moral obligations of women refugees, whom the masculinist cynic will say will inevitably pursue their selfish interests. Homer, Aeschylus, and Livy were certainly sexist by today's standards, but their portrayals of Penelope, Clytemnestra, and Lucretia did at least assume that women separated from their menfolk were highly agentive and could be held to moral expectations.¹⁷ On the other hand, an extreme sort of feminist advocacy is reflexively inimical to any exploration of the duties of women as-such, and is especially hostile to any suggestion that women can have connubial obligations. As just discussed, considering the obligations of women as-such is reasonable in contexts (such as war, apparently) in which our expectations for women and men so clearly diverge. In any event I do not single out women as the lone bearers of connubial duties, nor do I see any reason why connubial duties should be off limits if martial duties are not—a point I repeat below.

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OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Here I will briefly address a handful of objections, each of which grants our assumption that some defensive wars ground an obligation for (male, at least) nationals to fight.

Objection from intimacy: “Your claims about ‘connubial duties’ offend against core feminist and liberal commitments. If our nations have any such claims on our bodies at all, they are easily overridden or trumped by our right to reproductive and relational autonomy.”

My reply is simply the core insight of this essay: it would be remarkable if autonomy as it concerns reproduction and intimate relationships trumped even our most weighty duties to our nations, but that bodily autonomy as regards military service and all its attendant unfreedoms, hardships, and risks didn’t have an equivalent power. I challenge anyone to watch videos of Ukrainian soldiers being blown to bits in the field, or castrated by their captors,¹⁸ and conclude that such risks are morally obligatory for some (usually men) for the sake of their nation while connubial loyalty in a country of refuge, which is compatible with a comfortable and socially active lifestyle, asks too much. But that is precisely what this sort of critic is committed to, since the present argument says the duty of connubial loyalty for women refugees is premised on the menfolk (at least) of a nation having and discharging a moral obligation to fight in a defensive war.

Objection from explicit promises to particular partners: “Maybe married refugees have connubial obligations to the spouses they left behind because they made explicit commitments of fidelity to particular individuals. But unmarried refugees have made no such agreements and thus have no connubial duties, of any strength, to their countrymen corporately, or to some indeterminate countryman.”

By way of reply, what would this sort of objector say of the duty of civilians to fight for their nations in just defensive wars? Such an obligation would be to a corporate entity (i.e., their nation). It also wouldn’t be based on an explicit agreement, given that the civilians hadn’t previously enlisted in the armed forces. It seems highly improbable to me that such martial duties *cannot* obtain, or even don’t obtain in rather common circumstances. But if I’m wrong about that, that is no objection to this essay, which doesn’t argue for connubial duties in the absence of martial ones. If on the other hand such martial duties can obtain, then once again we’re faced

with the mystery of how martial duties with these qualities could exist while connubial ones with these qualities cannot.

Objection from scope: “For some women war refugees, connubial loyalty might (for one reason or another) have low value, or their capacity to send remittances might be very high. For instance, their expressions of connubial loyalty may not inspire any resistance efforts and they may be unable to have children. Why insist on the importance of connubial loyalty in particular when there might be more choiceworthy options for such women?”¹⁹

In reply, I think this is correct: women in such instances don’t have connubial obligations. This wouldn’t be anything like the majority, however. For although it’s true that not all women refugees are young beauties like those imagined on war propaganda posters of yesteryear, almost all the married ones would still have connubial duties of some strength, and the connubial loyalty of even unattractive middle-aged single women is likely to inspire resolve in the unattractive middle-aged single men fighting at home. We should also note that demonstrations of connubial loyalty by a people’s elders should raise the mate value of its youngsters, since it creates a cultural expectation that raises the expected payoffs of marriage.

All this noted, the scope of my generalizations above may be understood as restricted to women refugees whose connubial loyalty could reasonably be thought to have these beneficial effects. Likewise, we may say that those left behind who couldn’t reasonably contribute to the resistance on or off the battlefield also have no prima facie obligation to do so. What wouldn’t make sense is to say that (at least) the men of some nation have an obligation to fight (although some men cannot contribute to the war effort), and then say women war refugees have no obligation of connubial loyalty (even though some can contribute to the war in that manner).

Objection from cosmopolitanism: “Although we sometimes have a duty to fight aggressive forces, that duty isn’t grounded in a people’s obligations to their nation, but rather in the obligation to (say) defend the human rights of individuals, and *that* obligation doesn’t entail connubial duties of the sort you suggest.” Note this objection is radically cosmopolitan but not uncharitably so, since any more moderate cosmopolitanism allowing that citizens may have *some* special duty to defend their homelands for the sake of their nation and its sovereignty would be sufficient for getting the above argument off the ground.

In reply to it, it would seem that if the prima facie obligation to defend Xistan is based on the importance of individual human rights, then the burdens of defending Xistan fall upon us all,

Xistanis and non-Xistanis alike. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, we can expect (and indeed find, as in the case of the present war in Ukraine) that “global citizens” rarely take up arms to fight injustices abroad, or even agree about which military actions are unjust in the first place. Realistically, the only demographic likely to willingly violently resist aggression is the able-bodied men of the aggressed people, and their willingness to fight will be significantly correlated to their domestic hopes should they survive. Perhaps women “global citizens,” offering their own connubial loyalty, could supply the requisite morale for the Xistani resistance? That prospect is at least as unlikely as significant numbers of “global citizens” volunteering to join the resistance itself, and in any event doesn’t address the morale of married Xistani warfighters who hope for a reunion with their wives upon the war’s conclusion, not some random woman with a peculiarly strong commitment to cosmopolitan global justice. Relatedly, even if for some reason “global citizens” do step in and stop a foreign attack on Xistan or even offer themselves as replacements for women refugees who never return, they couldn’t possibly render the necessary demographic aid women refugees can and should offer, since it takes Xistanis to make more Xistanis.

Objection from immigration: “But *does* it require Xistanis to make more Xistanis? This essay ignores the possibility of immigration, which makes endogenous mating unnecessary to preserve the Xistani people.”

In reply, first note that this objection ignores the question of fighting morale. Even if we grant that massive inflows of immigrants can replace a nation’s war dead and diaspora, would a nation’s warfighters be as willing to die for future immigrants as they would for the posterity of their current folk? Doubtful. It’s also hard to see what incentive fighters would have for taking on mortal risk when, if lucky enough to return to their villages and hometowns, they would find not wives, sweethearts, or eligible mates, but migrants who probably feel no particular affection for them and quite possibly the opposite, as immigrant populations often have their own endogenous mating norms.

Turning to the question of replacement migration, it must be acknowledged that although a nation can survive *some* immigration, even on “civic” conceptions of nationhood it cannot survive its people being scattered and replaced by newcomers.²⁰ So even if we grant that some immigrants can replace Xistanis killed, dispersed, or never born because of the war, how many can do so is contingent upon the number of surviving Xistanis around to pass on the “civic

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identity” of Xistan. So even on views of nationhood that are entirely civic as opposed to ethnic, Xistanis are still needed to perpetuate Xistan and thus (all things being equal) the fewer Xistanis reuniting and starting families with each other because of the war, the greater the demographic injury to Xistan.

Objection from renunciation: “Your polemic assumes that refugees value their nations or are in the relevant sense still a part of their nations. But maybe those who don’t show connubial loyalty really don’t care about their nations, or don’t consider themselves to be part of those nations any longer. If so, they cease to be obliged to their former nations, and thus cannot have connubial duties to them, even if they remain citizens of them legally.”

This objection addresses the elephant in the room, and raises difficult discussions about what it means to be part of a nation, what responsibilities come with nationality, and whether one can owe something to one’s nation even when that nation doesn’t or cannot provide one with any benefits (a conversation at least as old as Plato’s *Crito*). Those questions cannot adequately be addressed here, however. In lieu of an extended argument for why duties to our nations may not be so easily escaped by refugees (recall our argument is restricted only to cases for which the reader thinks some nationals have a prima facie duty to fight, which renders mysterious why other conationals have no binding duties), or whether receiving countries should be wary of admitting into their lands people who don’t seem to have a strong sense of national loyalty, the foregoing can be read to apply only to refugees who still consider themselves members of their attacked nations and deserving of being recognized as such.

CONCLUSION

Ignoring various sub-arguments, I have argued the following:

1. Suppose a subset of individuals N1 (usually mostly men) of a nation (“Xistan”) are discharging a (collective, prima facie) duty to fight in some defensive war.
2. If (1), then the best explanation for that obligation is a more general duty they have to help preserve the Xistani people and Xistan’s territorial sovereignty.
3. The subset of nationals N2 (which includes refugees, usually mostly women) who, for whatever reason, do not have an obligation to fight, nonetheless have equivalently weighty duties to Xistan as N1, and for the same reasons.

4. Many women Xistani refugees cannot discharge their duty to help preserve the Xistani people and their territorial sovereignty without demonstrating “connubial loyalty” in the technical sense described above.
5. If an action is necessary for discharging a duty and not supererogatory or otherwise immoral, it’s (at least) prima facie obligatory.
6. Given the sacrifices expected for N1, connubial loyalty wouldn’t be supererogatory.
7. Connubial loyalty would not be immoral.
8. So many women Xistani war refugees have a (collective, prima facie) duty of connubial loyalty.

As we have seen, this essay does not merely explore a theoretical gap in the literature of war, gender, and migration ethics. Real people fighting present wars that most readers think are just are raising such questions online and, as a perusal of those discussions will reveal, many of them are answering along the lines I have taken above. I hope to have clarified these often-inarticulate concerns in a manner suitable for philosophical consumption, and to have drawn to philosophical attention a matter of bubbling resentment that, justified or not, has its own negative effects on peoples ravaged by war.

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¹ Mills, "Do Black Men," 149.

² Hudson, "Women Don't Belong."

³ An extensive collection of these leaflets can be found at "World War II German Propaganda Leaflets."

⁴ Treidler, "The girl he left behind."

⁵ For instance, the English translation of this video was posted on the "antifeminists" subreddit ("Ukrainian psychologist says") and was discussed in Dutton, "Are Ukrainian Women."

⁶ @stanis_laves, untitled post. An English subtitled version is saved here: <https://tinyurl.com/36jjky6e>. A Russian-speaking philosopher has confirmed to me that the translation is accurate enough to quote, which I do with light edits.

⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Ukraine Emergency."

⁸ Sheth, "Highest Divorce."

⁹ Gettleman, "How War Destroyed."

¹⁰ I do not argue for connubial loyalty in cases where co-nationals don't have an obligation to fight for their nation, or are not discharging that obligation if they have it. To avoid needless political debate, I am agnostic on whether Ukrainians do have the obligation to fight, and thus am silent on whether women Ukrainian refugees have connubial duties.

¹¹ Khvostova and Kryvosheiev, "No Partial Measures"; Court, "Women with Medical Education."

¹² From Horace's *Epistles*, II. ii. 55 ("eripuerē iocos, venerem, convivia . . ."), as translated by O'Brian, *The Commodore*, 10.

¹³ A point I raise not to be insulting, but to note as it could be the basis of an objection claiming that the sacrifice for young women refugees is indeed weightier than I suppose. On the claim itself, see Buunk et al., "Age Preferences" and the often-cited OkCupid-based data on the question (Rudder, "The Case").

¹⁴ European Commission Joint Research Centre, "The War Exacerbates."

¹⁵ As of late 2023, it's estimated that 90% of Ukrainian refugees are women and children (UN Human Rights Council, "Ukraine Situation") and that about 15% of Ukrainian servicepeople are women (Prus, "Female Soldiers").

¹⁶ Note that the Ukrainian government is requesting extradition of Ukrainian men who have fled the country (Kottász, "Ukraine Demands").

¹⁷ Indeed, Penelope and Lucretia hold themselves to more rigorous standards of connubial loyalty than their menfolk had for them.

¹⁸ "Torture and castration," *Wikipedia*.

¹⁹ I thank an anonymous referee for this objection.

²⁰ Recall that even for a non-ethnonationalist such as Mill, a nation must be *inter alia* "a people" with "historical antecedents" (Mill, *Representative Government*, Ch. 16).