
ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN DEVELOPMENT,
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A Gendered Approach to the
Syrian Refugee Crisis
Edited by Jane Freedman,
Zeynep Kivilcim,
Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu
ROUTLEDGE

A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The refugee crisis that began in 2015 has seen thousands of refugees attempting to reach Europe, principally from Syria. The dangers and difficulties of this journey have been highlighted in the media, as have the political disagreements within Europe over the way to deal with the problem. However, despite the increasing number of women making this journey, there has been little or no analysis of women's experiences or of the particular difficulties and dangers they may face.

A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis examines women's experiences at all stages of forced migration, from the conflict in Syria, to refugee camps in Lebanon or Turkey, on the journey to the European Union and on arrival in an EU member state. The book deals with women's experiences, the changing nature of gender relations during forced migration, gendered representations of refugees and the ways in which EU policies may impact differently on men and women. The book provides a nuanced and complex assessment of the refugee crisis, and shows the importance of analysing differences within the refugee population.

Students and scholars of development studies, gender studies, security studies, politics and middle eastern studies will find this book an important guide to the evolving crisis.

Jane Freedman is Professor at the Université Paris 8 and a member of the Centre de Recherches Sociologiques et Politiques de Paris (CRESPPA), France.

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Contents

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1 Introduction

Gender, migration and exile

Jane Freedman, Zeynep Kivilcim and Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu

The ongoing war in Syria has led to the forced migration of nearly seven million people. With little hope for any immediate end to the war in Syria, and with the continuation of other conflicts and violence in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the question of refugees has become one of the most pressing regional and global issues of current times. The majority of Syrian refugees are located in neighbouring countries including Turkey (with over 2.5 million registered Syrian refugees), Lebanon (over one million Syrian refugees), Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.[1] This massive displacement clearly poses serious questions for the host countries, as well as for the human rights and security of the refugees themselves. There have been many reports of violence against Syrian refugees, both inside and outside of refugee camps, as well as exploitation in the labour market, gender-based violence, forced marriages etc. Although the majority of refugees have stayed in neighbouring countries, many have also tried to reach the European Union, leading to what European political leaders as well as the media have described as a refugee "crisis", with thousands of refugees drowning in their attempts to reach Europe and others suffering violence and insecurity on their routes and on arrival in the destination country.

Conflict, violence and gender in Syria: regional responses

The Syrian refugee crisis has had massive impacts in a region where there are already a large number of refugees from Palestine and Iraq. Access to resources, food, health care and education are a major problem both for internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees, and increasingly for refugees' host countries (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2014). A Regional Response Plan (RRP) has been put in place by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate the efforts of various UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in response to the crisis, but the scale of displacement, and the pre-existing political and economic tensions in the regions, have limited the efficacy of this response. As Zetter and Ruaudel explain: 'The overall picture, then, is one of chronic vulnerability which is both deepening and becoming more entrenched' (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2014: 7). Refugees who are not registered with UNHCR, or who have lost their registration status

and have thus become irregular residents in neighbouring countries, are particularly marginalised and vulnerable. Women with irregular status are increasingly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence as they cannot rely on the local authorities for protection.

Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon allowed Syrian refugees to cross into their territories during the first years of the Syrian war. However, since 2014 the governments of these countries have gradually closed the formal and informal border crossing points, built walls at their frontiers and strengthened border control with military actions that target refugees. They also introduced legal barriers to Syrian refugees by imposing visa requirements or legislation that exclude new refugees from the legal right to legal stay. In December 2014 Lebanon closed its borders to refugees fleeing Syria's civil war with exceptions for "humanitarian reasons". And in 2015 the Lebanese government announced new restrictions on Syrians entering Lebanon, requiring all refugees to apply for visas before entering (Amnesty International, 2015). Jordan allowed Syrians to enter its country through all of its informal border crossings in the east and the west, although it refused entry to many single Syrian men and to Palestinian refugees from Syria. Since May 2014 several border closures, restrictions on informal border crossings and refoulement cases that hinder Syrians crossing into Jordan have been reported (Amnesty International, 2015). In addition, in January 2016 the Turkish government terminated the Syria–Turkey Visa Waiver Agreement that was allowing Syrian nationals to cross into Turkey without visa requirements. It is reported that since early 2015 Turkey has closed its land borders to Syrians (Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016). Turkey has also decided to physically hinder the crossings by constructing a 550 mile concrete wall along its border with Syria; half of this wall was completed by May 2016.

Women make up the majority of those displaced by the Syrian conflict, but the exact figures are not known. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that about 78 per cent of those displaced are women and children (UNFPA, 2014), but this figure is problematic as it mixes together women and children in a manner which has been widely criticised by many feminist scholars (Enloe, 1993). As with other refugee situations, there is a lack of accurate sex-disaggregated data on Syrian IDPs and refugees. This is partly due to the very difficult and complicated circumstances surrounding data collection, particularly on IDPs within Syria. But, as has also been reported, during the initial stages of registration in several countries, data was collected by a conversation with the presumed head of household who was often a man (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014). In the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, it was also reported that data gathering and passing of information was organised through a structure of "street leaders" who were mostly men. Thus women were excluded from the flow of data gathering and information sharing. The lack of accurate sex-disaggregated data clearly hampers efforts to put in place programmes which respond to the needs of male and female refugees.

The number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intersex (LGBTI) among Syrian refugees is not known, particularly as many fear revealing their gender

identity or sexual orientation. However, it is clear that LGBTI have been specifically targeted for violence in Syria and that because of this targeting by all sides in the conflict many LGBTI people flee Syria and seek refuge in other countries. LGBTI refugees may be considered more vulnerable than other refugees as they may not have access to the same emotional and financial support networks. They face persecution from host countries' citizens as well as from other members of the refugee community, and confront many barriers while accessing basic services. The informal networks that provide support to Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries that host them often fail to include individuals from the LGBTI community.

Studies on the conditions of refugees in various camps in neighbouring countries have shown that familiar problems regarding gender equality and women's rights are occurring within these camps. Although the UNHCR and various other international organisations and NGOs have pledged to take gendered needs seriously in their provisions for Syrian refugees, in practice these needs are still not being fully addressed. For example, one study by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) found that: 'Certain populations receive less attention and less access to programs, including the elderly, women and girls living outside the camps, people with disabilities and sexual minorities' (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014: 1). The evidence seems to suggest that this is a case where once again gender mainstreaming is championed by UN agencies and other humanitarian relief organisations, but in practice this mainstreaming too often stays at the level of rhetoric or of policy and planning without real implementation on the ground.

Several reports have highlighted increasing intimate partner and domestic violence against displaced women, which comes in addition to the sexual and gender-based violence that many of these women have faced in the conflict and during their flight. The WRC's report on refugee camps in Jordan recounts that:

> Intimate partner and domestic violence in homes, particularly targeting women and girls, is becoming more common, while challenges for reporting remain, especially in the case of sexual violence. This kind of violence may be aggravated by the fact that households are socially isolated, suffering from tremendous financial stress and lack of privacy due to overcrowding, which all contribute to increasing tensions that sometimes lead to violence, often perpetrated by a male head of household.
>
> (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014: 12)

Some research has shown that women have relativised this type of violence in an attempt to show empathy with the situation of men who have lost their traditional gender roles. This may be one of the reasons why such violence is under-reported. Women have also expressed the fear that if they report violence their husbands will send them back to Syria (Masterson, 2012). Charles and Denman suggest that these fears are supported by structural aspects that 'create the intersectionality of violence that is produced through individual acts and

institutes'. They explain that in pre-conflict Syria, married women were not allowed to travel outside of the country without their husband's permission. 'This law now feeds into the patriarchal control and fear for women of being sent back by their husbands' (Charles and Denman, 2013: 105). For these reasons, many women do not report violence and, even if they do wish to report it, there are few services for support or trauma counselling. The situation may be even worse for women who are living outside the refugee camps. In an assessment of urban refugees in Jordan, it was shown that nearly half of female-headed households had no income and were dependent on donations (Usta and Masterson, 2013). These women face harassment, including offers of transactional sex and marriage (Sami *et al.*, 2013). The Turkish Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), one of main institutions dealing with Syrian refugees in Turkey, indicates that almost one-third of Syrian refugee households in Turkey are headed by women or children.[2] AFAD reports that 80 per cent of out-camp female Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty; they claim that they do not have a sufficient amount of food for the next week.[3]

Many of the women and girls who have been forcibly displaced have also been victims of rape and sexual violence. A report for the Women Under Siege Project recounts that 'rape has been reportedly used widely as a tool of control, intimidation, and humiliation throughout the conflict. And its effects, while not always fatal, are creating a nation of traumatized survivors' (Wolfe, 2013: 1). The report goes on to detail data which shows that:

> Eight per cent of our reports include female victims, with ages ranging from seven to forty-six. Of those women, 85 per cent reported rape; 10 per cent sexual assault without penetration; and 10 per cent include detention that appears to have been for the purposes of sexualised violence or enslavement for a period of longer than twenty-four hours.
>
> (Wolfe, 2013: 1)

Clearly it is very difficult, or virtually impossible, to obtain accurate data on levels of sexual violence in the Syrian conflict because of the problems in accessing and reporting on the conflict, and also because victims of such violence often do not report for fear of stigma and marginalisation. However, these reports tend to support the idea that sexual violence is a huge problem in this conflict. As argued above, women are reluctant to report sexual violence because of the stigma attached, and even if they wish to seek medical or psychological help to recover from this trauma, the provision of such services is severely limited. One researcher who visited Syrian refugees in Lebanon to assess their health needs reports that:

> Here, there are no viable comprehensive medical options for survivors of rape. Considered taboo and seen as a family issue, rape survivors are left with nowhere to go to seek clinical care. Life-saving treatments to prevent HIV, unwanted pregnancy, or sexually transmitted infections require

> immediate action, such as the limited window of 72 h for HIV post-exposure prophylaxis. This lack of access to care has emerged as a humanitarian crisis all of its own.
>
> (Ouyang, 2013: 2165)

A further threat to the security of young women and girls is posed by the practice of early or forced marriage which, reports have shown, is common in Syrian refugee camps across the region. The reasons for this prevalence of forced/early marriage are complex. For some families it provides a form of security for their daughters in that they believe marriage will protect them from sexual violence and assault from other men. Marrying their daughters can be seen as a way of protecting their family honour, and girls who have been victims of rape or sexual violence inside Syria may be married after they become refugees in order to save the family honour. For other parents who do not believe that they will live long enough to protect their daughters, marriage is a way of making sure that the daughter will be provided for after the death of her parents (Charles and Denman, 2013).

For other families, marrying their daughters is a way of generating income in a situation where they have no other access to resources. The forced marriage may take place within refugee communities or with men from outside the refugee community in the host country. The "marriage" is often an informal marriage, with no real legal status, sometimes amounting to little more than forced prostitution. As one report recounts:

> In Jordan, hundreds of Syrian females have been affected by an informal trade that has sprung up since the start of the war in Syria, where men use "agents" to source Syrian refugees for sex. Often this is done under the guise of "marriage".
>
> (Sherlock and Malouf, cited in Jessen, 2013)

Another report describes how young Syrian women in Turkish border towns are marrying older men out of desperation and fear for their future. As most of these women do not have legal status in Turkey the marriages are not legally registered, thus leaving women without any protection or any rights if the couple separate, or if the husband dies (Letsch, 2014). One of the problems in dealing with this issue is that it is sometimes assumed that the practice of early marriage is a cultural practice that has been imported by the refugees from their rural communities in Syria. This assumption that certain forms of violence against women are "cultural" practices which cannot or should not be questioned, rather than the products of particular economic, social and political contexts, means that the practices in question are not properly addressed by those organising interventions to protect refugees.

The legal measures relative to early, forced and polygamous marriages are developed within the immigration legislation of European countries for dealing with the practice of these marriages among refugee and migrant communities.

The approach adopted is characterised by the conception of a "clash" between Western and non-Western cultures and victimisation of 'imperilled Muslim women' by her own backward culture (Razack, 2004: 135–150). Feminist scholarship has criticised this approach and highlighted the fact that forced, early or polygamous marriages are based on imbalances concerning gender and sexuality rather than simply being a reflection of culture (Dauvergne and Millbank, 2010: 57–67). Feminist authors point out that the answer lies in the commitment to ensure women's sexual and social agency (Razack, 2004: 162) and demonstrate that otherwise legal measures for the prevention and prohibition of forced and polygamous marriages create profound negative consequences for the immigrant women they purport to protect (Eichenberger, 2012: 1085 and 1110).

The Syrian refugee crisis also highlights another gendered dimension of displacement and forced migration which is sometimes overlooked, namely, the vulnerability of young men to forced recruitment, and the difficulties that these young men may face in fleeing forced recruitment and being recognised as refugees. In March 2012 the Syrian Government banned all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-two from travelling outside of the country without prior authorisation (Davis *et al.*, 2014). This ban has not prevented men from fleeing, but when they do flee they may find it harder to find protection because they are viewed as a threat by other governments. Some neighbouring countries have imposed intermittent bans on the entry of young Syrian men, especially when they are not accompanied by family. 'This discrimination against men travelling alone derives from the premise that single men and boys visibly detached from a family unit pose a threat to security, whereas men who function as fathers, sons, brothers and/or husbands do not' (Davis *et al.*, 2014). This type of gendered perception may serve to increase the vulnerability of these single men, who are forced to become illegal residents in the host country and who, in addition, may find themselves last on the list for humanitarian aid, behind those deemed more "vulnerable" by the international organisations and aid agencies. Single men may not be allocated housing in refugee camps, as they are not seen as a priority, which further increases their insecurity. As Carpenter has argued in relation to other conflict situations, this false dichotomy between men as "combatants" and women as "civilians" merely acts to reinforce gender inequalities and can lead to increasing insecurities for men as well as women (Carpenter, 2005, 2006). In order to respond to the protection needs of both men and women, such dichotomous representations need to be overcome and the complexity of the situation of all refugees and IDPs needs to be recognised.

Just as men's vulnerability in some circumstances should be acknowledged, so too should women's active role and their agency in protecting and providing for families and communities displaced by the conflict. Within Syria there are few international NGOs who are physically present on the ground and able to distribute aid to the millions of displaced people. Because of this absence, women have frequently become active in distributing emergency assistance, food and medicine (Haddad, 2014). Many women IDPs have also found themselves as heads of household, and have thus had to depart from their traditional

roles within the home and come out of the house to look for food and engage in activities that generate income and resources for their family and dependents. This change in roles has had a real impact on women's lives and for some it seems that it will be very difficult to return to previous gender roles and patterns when the conflict ends. As one woman interviewed by Haddad says, the conflict has 'turned everything on its head'. She continues: 'I can never go back to doing what I did before; I can never be so meek and ordinary' (quoted in Haddad, 2014: 46).

The refugee "crisis" in Europe

In 2015 over 1 million refugees[4] arrived in Europe, seeking protection from armed conflict and violence in Syria and other countries of origin. As the EU had previously made it more and more difficult to arrive in Europe across a land border, the majority of these migrants arrived by sea and many lost their lives in the process. The huge numbers of arrivals on the coasts of Italy, and principally, of Greece, has led the EU to label this a migration "crisis". The influx of migrants from 2015 onwards is not the first time that European leaders have labelled migration as a crisis, and indeed, the term "crisis" was already employed in 2011 when migration increased following the "Arab Spring" uprisings (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, 2014). The use of the term "crisis" may seem banal, but we would argue that this labelling is serving a powerful political and symbolic purpose and, as Edelman has argued, signals a claim that this situation is 'different from the political and social issues we routinely confront' and that it came about for reasons outside of the control of political leaders (Edelman, 1977: 44). In the current situation, EU leaders have repeatedly stressed the unprecedented nature of the flows of refugees trying to reach the EU, and the way that the causes of migration are "out of their hands". They have invoked crisis to justify exceptional measures such as the closing of borders or mass return of migrants to Turkey, which can be seen as contrary to international and European law.

This crisis labelling has served to reinforce an ongoing process of securitisation of migration to the EU, and at the same time to raise calls and pressure for a humanitarian (rather than a mainly political) response to the migration. In fact, we could argue that the labelling of the current migration flows as a "crisis" has served the interests of political leaders in EU member states and EU institutions by diverting attention away from their failures to find any real political solutions to this problem and focusing attention on the humanitarian emergency of migration and the increasingly insecure, dangerous and insanitary conditions in which migrants are living (and dying) in their attempts to reach the EU. While studies of the securitisation of migration in the EU have previously pointed to the way in which the level of the "crisis labelling" and political spectacle operate at the same time as the ongoing bureaucratic and technical processes of migration management, in the current situation it seems that everyday bureaucratic procedure has been largely over-ridden by the political spectacular.

In the process, the level of regional politics and the threat to the EU's own political existence has been highlighted. But this focus on the spectacular politics of crisis has also obscured another dimension, that of the experiences of the refugees themselves, including the gendered experiences of men and women attempting to reach Europe.

The current European migration "crisis" is not new and has not developed out of nowhere. It is the culmination and combination of, on the one hand, the growing restriction of legal channels of migration to Europe and securitisation of European borders (de Haas, 2007; Lutterbeck, 2009) and, on the other hand, huge instability and conflict in certain areas of the Middle East and Africa, in particular Syria, which are causing more and more desperate people to flee their countries and seek protection in Europe. While some European leaders have been quick to point to the existence of trafficking and smuggling gangs as the cause of the increased numbers of migrants attempting to cross the Aegean and Mediterranean, it can in fact be argued that these traffickers and smugglers are only gaining more work as the regular and safer routes to Europe are progressively blocked, leading migrants to take riskier journeys and to pay more to do so. As EU countries have increasingly tried to restrict entry through more regular means, and have closed down previous routes of "irregular" migration, migrants who are trying to reach Europe have been forced to find new and more perilous routes. As Lutterbeck points out: 'Plugging one hole in the EU perimeter quickly leads to enhanced pressure on other parts of its external borders' (Lutterbeck, 2009: 123).

Migration, in particular "illegal" or irregular migration, has been constructed as a security issue in Europe for many years with migrants portrayed as posing an economic threat – a threat to European social cohesion and European "values" and, more recently, a terrorist threat. This supposed security threat has justified the use of increasingly drastic measures to limit migration and has led to attempts to create regional policies and frameworks for migration control. Within this context of securitisation, migration control has become one of the strategic priorities of the EU's external relations and European policy-makers have shown increasing concern with trying to stem flows of migrants across the Mediterranean and, more recently, the Aegean. In the early and mid-2000s the major concern of European policy-makers was migrants arriving across the Mediterranean from Sub-Saharan Africa and landing in the Canary Islands, Sicily or Malta. Already back in 2007 the European Commission argued in a strategy paper that it was vital to deal with migratory pressures in the Mediterranean, pointing out that: 'The events in Lampedusa, Ceuta and Melilla, the Canary Islands or in the Maltese and Greek waters concretely illustrate the increasing migratory pressure from Africa which the EU is confronted with' (European Commission, 2007).

The outbreak of conflict in Syria has magnified migratory pressures as millions of Syrians have been displaced beyond their own borders and are trying to reach the EU. Faced with the scale of the refugee population in Syria and its neighbouring countries, there have been many criticisms of the EU's failure to

do enough to support neighbouring states and to offer protection to those seeking to reach Europe (Fargues and Fandrich, 2012). As the numbers arriving increase, more and more EU member states are closing their borders and refusing to take any further refugees, while attempts at regional resettlement agreements have been largely unsuccessful. Migrants are also arriving in large numbers from other areas where conflict is ongoing such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Eritrea. On 23 April 2015 the European Council held a special meeting in response to the crisis situation in the Mediterranean during which they acknowledged that the situation has become a 'tragedy' and promised to take measures including strengthening the EU's presence at sea, fighting against traffickers, preventing illegal migration flows and reinforcing international solidarity and responsibility.[5] The EU's approach has been heavily criticised, however, by human rights groups and migrant support groups because of its focus on repression of trafficking and prevention of illegal migration rather than on protecting the rights and lives of migrants who are desperate to reach Europe (Giuffre and Costello, 2015). In principle, a plan has been agreed under which each EU state should resettle a certain number of Syrian refugees, but this plan has met with a negative response from some of the Eastern European member states, and even where member states have agreed to the plan the numbers actually resettled so far have been minimal. The failure of the EU to agree on and implement regional plans or policies for facilitating the legal migration of refugees and organising resettlement has increased the insecurities and dangers of refugees' journeys – insecurities which may take specific forms for women.

The influx of refugees has also had repercussions for the functioning of the EU migration system, with many EU states losing confidence in the functioning of the Schengen system of open borders and some EU member states, including Austria, Germany, Sweden and Denmark, reintroducing border controls or sealing their borders to refugees. This has clearly increased the difficulties and the dangers of the journey, and has again raised the prices of smugglers who offer to help refugees cross these closed borders "illegally". The Dublin System under which asylum seekers should make a claim in the first EU country they arrive in has also been put into question by the "crisis". With large numbers of arrivals in Greece and Italy, the EU has been forced to temporarily suspend and rethink the system. However, although there has been pressure to abandon the Dublin regulations, EU politicians have argued for their maintenance with the addition of a 'fairness mechanism' to distribute asylum seekers more 'fairly' across all member states. This 'fairness mechanism' seems unlikely to be agreed by all member states, however, as there have already been huge difficulties in obtaining any agreement on the relocation and resettlement of those refugees already in Greece and Italy, with many states reluctant to take on their share of the "burden". In September 2015, member states agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees between them under an 'emergency relocation' scheme. But at the time of writing (June 2016), fewer than 2,000 refugees had been relocated from Greece under this scheme (European Commission, 2016). More fundamentally,

this view of refugees as a "burden" which needs to be shared by EU member states undermines the human rights of these refugees as individuals seeking protection under international law, and may fuel further some of the xenophobic and racist sentiments which have been expressed towards them.

In March 2016, in an attempt to reduce the number of refugees reaching Europe, the EU agreed a deal with Turkey under which all "irregular" migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey should be sent back. In addition, asylum seekers deemed to have arrived in Europe from a "safe country" where they could have claimed protection are also eligible for return. The EU agreed, in return, that for every Syrian returned to Turkey from Greece another Syrian would be resettled from Turkey to the EU. The deal also involved a promise on visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens, and extra funding of €3 billion (in addition to the three billion already allocated) to Turkey under the Facility for Refugees. As the legal basis of the Syrian refugees' return to Turkey, the agreement refers to the EU Asylum Procedures Directive which identifies a "safe third country" and a "first country of asylum" as countries to which asylum seekers can be returned with less than full examination of their asylum claims.[6]

Concerns have been raised about the deal's compliance with international law and international human rights obligations. The most important concerns are with the lack of individual assessment of asylum applications, access to legal assistance and the right to an effective remedy. Many critics have also pointed out that, given the situation of refugees in Turkey and the fundamental rights violations that exist in the country, it cannot be considered a "safe third country" for refugee return. There are also practical issues concerning the lack of trained asylum and immigration officers to deal with refugees in Greece and decide who to return to Turkey. In response the UNHCR has suspended some of its activities in the refugee "hotspots" in Greece, arguing that rather than being places where refugees can be received, registered and assisted, they have turned into de facto detention centres. The legal problems that hinder the implementation of the EU–Turkey Agreement came to the surface just after the start of the forced refugee transfers from the Greek islands to Turkey. In May 2016, a Court of Appeal on the Greek island of Lesbos ruled that Turkey cannot be considered a safe country of first arrival for asylum seekers. This decision has set a precedent under the country's legal system and jeopardises the EU plan to send Syrian refugees back to Turkey.

The EU Temporary Protection Directive[7] was adopted in 2001 following the ex-Yugoslavian refugee crisis in order to introduce an efficient framework to deal with mass influx situations. However, this Directive has never been activated. The EU did not want to implement this temporary protection scheme in response to the Syrian refugee "crisis", and has preferred to adopt an approach of strict control and coercion in order to prevent refugees from reaching European soil despite the fatal consequences for refugees' lives. Thus we can argue that the EU response to the Syrian refugee "crisis" demonstrates not only another episode of the structural and continuing failure of its asylum system (Heijer *et al.*, 2016), but also an explicit departure from the principles and normative

standards declared as the founding values of the EU including respect for human rights. Besides, the legal and political measures adopted by the EU and its member states seek to bypass the international framework of refugee protection that was put in place by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It should be noted that this Convention was a response to the massive refugee problem that Europe faced after the Second World War and it can be argued that the legal framework it established is currently being undermined and destroyed by the EU.

All of these developments in EU policy seem to demonstrate a failure to engage with how best to ensure the security and protection of refugees fleeing conflict, and a prioritisation of the EU's perceived security and political interests through increasing investment in border control. The impacts of the security politics on refugees and the ways in which they have affected individuals have been under-explored. More specifically, there have been few studies which address the gendered impacts of these policies. This book hopes to redress this balance somewhat by considering how the experiences of individual refugees – women, men, LGBTI people – have been affected by these policy decisions, and how their security has been threatened by attempts to close EU borders.

Gender and forced migration

Gender was for a long time invisible in academic research on forced migration and refugees. Indra, for example, describes the way in which in early academic research on refugees gender was either not mentioned at all or else was considered as 'just another variable like age or occupation.… Women's issues were still not well-publicized "refugee problems", and so little academic research on women was produced' (Indra, 1989). This situation has changed in the last twenty years or so with the emergence of a much greater body of research that considers gender as a primary factor of analysis. This research has led to studies of the operation of gender in conflicts that create refugees and in refugee camps (Indra, 1999; Hyndman, 2000, 2004; Giles *et al.*, 2003; Giles and Hyndman, 2004); these studies combine with feminist investigations in international relations (Enloe, 1989, 1993, 2000; Whitworth, 1997; Baines, 2004) to provide us with insights into the experiences of gender among refugees and the internally displaced, and into the ways in which international organisations such as the UNHCR have sought to respond to the needs of "refugee women" and refugee LGBTI. These studies tend to show that while the UNHCR and other international organisations and NGOs have adopted gender mainstreaming as a policy commitment, in practice gender issues are often still ignored. Other studies have examined the ways in which gender issues may or may not be integrated into the 1951 Refugee Convention and its application in various states, and thus how those claiming protection on the basis of gender-related persecutions they have suffered may or may not be protected (Spijkerboer, 2000, 2013; Crawley, 2001; Freedman, 2008, 2010, 2015; Arbel *et al.*, 2014). Although there has been progress in recognising some forms of gender-related persecution under

national asylum laws, women and LGBTI asylum seekers still face specific obstacles in obtaining protection as refugees.

This book builds on these previous studies, and the theoretical and empirical insights they have produced, to bring a gendered analysis to the current refugee "crisis" that looks at the causes and dynamics of this forced migration, the experiences of women refugees, the changing nature of gender relations and gender identities in conflict, internal displacement and border crossing, as well as during temporary protection in transit countries and in the final destination countries of the EU. Through critical analysis of the asylum policies, institutions and practices in both transit and destination countries, the book sheds light on the impact and outcomes of the policies and their implementation in both regional countries of asylum, such as Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey, and EU member states.

Structure of the book

In examining the Syrian refugee crisis from a gendered perspective it is important to begin with an understanding of the Syrian conflict and the ways in which this has impacted on men, women and LGBTI individuals and their forced migrations and displacement. The book thus starts with a chapter by Nour Abu-Assab (Chapter 2) that examines the impacts of the conflict on Syrian women. Chapters 3–6 all examine issues regarding women and LGBTI refugees in neighbouring countries to Syria, namely, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. In their respective chapters, Zeynep Kivilcim (Chapter 3) and Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu (Chapter 4) examine differing forms of violence – legal, economic and political – that affect women and LGBTI Syrian refugees in Turkey through their status of "tolerated temporality". In Chapter 5, Henri Myrttinen, Lana Khattab and Charbel Maydaa look at the vulnerabilities of LGBTI refugees in Lebanon. Last in this regional perspective, Maysa Ayoub (Chapter 6) analyses the challenges of protracted refugee situations for Syrian women in Egypt. Following on from these regional case studies on the gendered impacts of conflict and the situations and experiences of women and men refugees, the book moves on to examine the question of border security/insecurity and the ways in which this may be gendered, as Sharon Pickering and Rebecca Powell (Chapter 7) discuss the issue of security and deaths at sea and the gendered nature of these forms of insecurity.

The second half of the book focuses more on a gendered analysis of Syrian refugees' experiences and of the representations of refugees in Europe. In Chapter 8, Jane Freedman discusses the experiences of women refugees attempting to reach and travel through the EU, and analyses the ways in which the labels of "vulnerability" which have been used to categorise these women can also be used as a strategy for trying to gain protection. She also discusses the ways in which EU policies on asylum and refugees have (or have not) attempted to integrate gender issues, and the impacts that this may have had. In Chapter 9, Nof Nasser-Eddin writes about the experiences of Syrian women refugees in

the UK and the continuing insecurities they face after reaching an EU country as well as their strategies and methods of integration. Finally, in a chapter on the representations of refugees and issues of masculinity, Jennifer Allsopp (Chapter 10) argues that men cannot be cast as either victims or soldiers: they can be at once vulnerable and agentic too.

Notes

1 For the latest figures on Syrian refugees see UNHCR, Syrian Regional Refugee Response, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.
2 Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, 'Syrian Women in Turkey 2014', Ankara.
3 Ibid.
4 There has been much debate among politicians and in the media as to whether people entering (or attempting to enter) Europe in the current "crisis" should be referred to as migrants or as refugees. While some argue that they cannot be correctly called refugees as they have not as yet obtained official refugee status from the UNHCR or from one of the EU member states, others point to the fact that they have been forced to flee from their home countries because of conflict and persecution, and are thus de facto refugees.
5 European Council Statement, 23 April 2015, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/23-special-euco-statement.
6 Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (Articles 35 and 38).
7 European Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection.

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2 Destabilising gender dynamics

Syria post-2011

Nour Abu-Assab

Introduction

Hope was in sight when popular movements started sweeping the Middle East and North Africa, after they had begun in Tunisia in 2010. This glimmer of hope intensified as Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia in January 2011. Within weeks, revolutionaries took to the streets in Egypt, Libya and Syria, to mention just a few countries. Initially, the feeling on the streets was that the situation across the region would change positively and that this was organic change, that oppressed groups would gain some power and that women's situation and status would improve. However, the hope did not last long in any of the countries within the region. Soon after Ben Ali fled, radical Islamists and regime supporters started organising. In Tunisia, the President left, but not the regime. Despite the continuing status quo with regard to politics and the deteriorating economic situation, changes have occurred in relation to women's status in Tunisia (Tchaïcha and Arfaoui, 2012). Tunisia was considered 'the most liberated in the Arab-Muslim world' (ibid.) before the revolution. After the revolution, more women started to wear the headscarf as a manifestation of conservatism. Radical Islamism also started to increase and gender dynamics changed to a certain degree (Gray, 2012).

To understand changes in gender dynamics in Syria, it is very important to draw parallels to changes in gender dynamics that took place across the region as well as in post-revolution Iran. This chapter seeks to unravel changes in gender dynamics in Syria following the revolution that started in 2011. In order to challenge a universalised narrative of feminist movements and women's rights, the chapter seeks to demonstrate how to a large degree the so-called feminist movements that existed under oppressive regimes in the Middle East and North Africa were perceived as oppressive to women themselves as well as to some minority groups that felt marginalised by these oppressive regimes. The chapter establishes that changes in gender dynamics in Syria are not unique, and shows that the rejection of feminist movements is more of a rejection of the oppressive regimes themselves, which used feminist discourses in order to present a positive picture of themselves to the international community. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that despite the negative impact the so-called

Arab Spring had on gender dynamics across the region, there is hope that more grassroots movements will arise that can redefine gender and sexuality on their own terms through looking inwardly at problems rather than outwardly reacting against or copying Western feminist frameworks and terminologies. By drawing parallels and from interviews, focus groups, project assessments and media analysis of women's rights discourse in Syria, this chapter is based on research that was carried out and mainstreamed through projects implemented by the Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration (CTDC) over a period of three years.

Setting the scene

Under the oppressive Ba'ath regime, social research in Syria was generally limited and insights into gender relations were not nuanced at all. Like elsewhere in the Middle East, research focused heavily on quantitative indicators of gender equality and the status of women's rights. This, however, has been misleading as despite the fact that Syrian women were granted equal rights by the constitution and were visible in public life, they faced many obstacles that went unnoticed due to "state feminism". Syrian women were largely portrayed as: 'represented in most professions. Syrian women have been encouraged to take up medicine, pharmacy and engineering' (Rabo, 1996: 163). The Ba'ath regime to a large degree encouraged women's economic activity and participation in the labour force, and there were a few women in positions of power within the government. However, what most analyses lack is the understanding that these women were 'hand-picked' (ibid.: 163), and were not representative of womankind in Syria. In addition, many failed to notice the grave impact sectarianism had on the type of women that occupied governmental positions, were civil servants or were employed in the public sector. Also, women's relationships with each other were ignored, as was the contentious nature of the Syrian feminist movements that were embraced by the regime.

The regime's encouragement of feminist movements and women's participation came at the expense of creating divisions between Syrian women, as many felt they were being oppressed and silenced by the feminists. State feminism is a phenomenon that has existed elsewhere in the region, such as in Iran and Egypt. It is the state's push for and encouragement of women's participation in public life, while committing atrocities towards other groups, in an attempt to cover up other forms of discrimination that exist within the bounds of the state and oppressive regimes. State feminism has also been found to be engrained in patriarchy and women's oppression (Badran, 2009). Looking at quantitative measures and indicators of women's position in societies where state feminism exists, one cannot fail to notice that these do not necessarily reflect gender parity or gender equality. For example, in Syria, where some women were handpicked for positions of power and encouraged to participate in the public sphere, state feminism has increased the burden on women who ended up in the situation of having to work in the public sphere and fulfil their domestic roles at home. The

integration of women into the labour market is not and should not be considered a marker of women's rights and gender equality, as it does not reflect either societal norms or other forms of pressure on women. The handpicked women, moreover, were mostly from urban areas and elite backgrounds. Those from rural and disadvantaged areas in Syria were in a different position so this does not reflect the daily lives of the majority of women; nor does it indicate physical abuse and patriarchy (Maziak and Asfar, 2003).

Pre-2011 Syria for women, and in relation to gender, seems to have been comparatively and relatively better than elsewhere in the region. As mentioned earlier, very little research has been carried out on this issue. However, much can be understood from a closer look at the socio-economic and socio-religious situation. Under the Ba'ath regime, *Sunni* Muslims were considered a political minority, but a numerical majority vis-à-vis the *Alawis* and *Shiites*. The *Alawis* and *Shiites* were privileged by the regime, as the Assad family is *Alawi*. While doing research with the Syrian community on national and religious identities, *Alawi* interviewees often referred to how 'conservative, traditional and backward thinking' the *Sunni* community was. *Alawi* women interviewees talked about how submissive and 'oppressed' *Sunni* women were, as the majority of them wear the headscarf, and how *Sunni* communities marry their daughters off at very young ages. This portrayal of the *Sunni* community does not necessarily reflect the reality, but rather is reflective of attitudes towards visibly *Sunni* women in Syria. The headscarf was a marker of confession, and of cultural class status. The state used to identify itself as a secular state as well.

There seemed to be a clear division between the "secular" ideal of the state, with which most minority groups agreed, and the "religious" backwardness of the numerical majority in Syria.[1] This is to say that often groups tend to use perceptions and stereotypes of gender relations in other communities to mark their group boundaries and reassert their superiority.

> Ideologies, stereotypes and practices employed to underline the specificity of an ethnic group, signal its superiority.... Ideas of shared ethnicity mean that members of a group take pains to signal through appearance and conduct their closeness to one another while at the same time stressing their difference from others.
>
> (Wilson and Frederiksen, 1995: 4)

On the other side of the coin, *Sunni* women felt they were being looked down on and discriminated against, because of their religious expression. One woman interviewee said:

> I fell in love with an Alawi guy at university. His family rejected me completely, and refused to marry me to their son, because they thought I come from a lower class background. It was my hijab, but I did not want to succumb to their ideals.

Another interviewee said:

> I did not get a job in the public sector, because of my confession. They used to recruit Alawi women only, and they left us to manage our affairs on our own. I felt discriminated against because of my confession.

During a workshop on gender equality, a Syrian man stated:

> I have a problem with feminists arguing for gender equality. Those feminists are the same people that oppress other women. My sisters were bullied by feminists under [the] Ba'ath regime for wearing the hijab and they were discriminated against in the public sector.

As has been established thus far, state feminism does not necessarily reflect the lived reality of women's lives. In Egypt, under El-Sissi's military rule, women have also been used as political symbols, with the claim that women unanimously support El-Sissi's militarisation of the state because of his position on women's rights (Zaki, 2015). In Iran, similarly, before the revolution, the living conditions of women had seemed progressive, without a deeper investigation. However, post-revolution radical Islamisation sweeped through the country forcing women to wear the headscarf and imposing further restrictions on them (Najmabadi, 1991; Moghadam, 2003). It is also important to acknowledge that despite the seeming advancement in women's rights under oppressive regimes, this did not apply to all women, and the burden of caregiving and childrearing remained largely a woman's responsibility. Elders, men and other women were still controlling women. In some specific contexts, there were community reactions to this push towards secularism and the integration of women into the labour force. For example, *Sunni* communities that felt most marginalised by such regimes also struggled to draw the boundaries of their groups and resist attempts to de-Islamise society. However, the Syrian crisis has caused a breaking up of many structures and patterns in relation to gender dynamics. The breaking up of state structures, refugeehood, internal displacement and conflict more generally has separated families and severed ties within the community. Under such circumstances, some gender relations and gender dynamics were affected and have changed to a degree, and with some difficulty, while others have been reinforced.

Breaking structures

Gender roles are dynamic and changing; they do not operate in a strict and rigid manner across time and space. Political, economic, social, environmental and ideological changes can create change in the structures of gender operations. I have established so far that women's experiences of gender in Syria have not been homogenous; there were specific patterns that existed before 2011, and have changed with the crisis. State systems in most of the region operate on the

basis of neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1988). In his theorisation of neopatriarchy, Sharabi (1988) argues that state structures in Arab societies replicate patriarchy existing at the level of the family where it is not the individual who is considered the building block of society, but rather the family, which is often headed by a patriarch. Sharabi (1988) states:

> Between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal will is the absolute will.… [S]ignificantly, the most advanced and functional aspect of the neopatriarchal state … is its internal security apparatus, the mukhabarat[;] … in social practice ordinary citizens not only are arbitrarily deprived of some of their basic rights but are the virtual prisoners of the state, the objects of its capricious and ever-presenting violence.
>
> (Sharabi 1988: 7)

This relationship between ruler and ruled has been challenged by popular movements across the region in defiance of their rulers. This challenge to the larger state structure has also meant that other structures based on this form of hierarchy could be confronted, and has thus influenced changes in the gender order that existed pre-2011.

Women, and particularly the allegedly oppressed *Sunni* women, took to the streets to demonstrate against the oppression of the Assad regime. These women, who were often marginalised and sidelined by state feminism which was supported by elite women, became more visible at some stage of the popular movement. During my work with Syrians, women used to tell stories of how they smuggled weapons to rebels, because it was easy for them to hide them underneath their wide *hijabi* gowns. Others told stories of how they started working in field hospitals providing care for the sick and injured. Some told how under these circumstances they were able to defy all the rules that had previously pushed women to the periphery. One woman interviewee said: 'It was a moment of liberation, when I got involved in organising demonstrations; I felt alive after I had lost hope in everything. I am now even more proud that I am a woman than ever before.' The dismantling of the neopatriarchal structure also influenced some women at the level of the family and the community. However limited, this change in gender dynamics has led to the creation of new forms of resistance.

As women felt more capable of being on the streets, participating publicly in resisting the oppression of the regime, this enabled them to defy their families as well. Under the pretext of protection and safety, many families attempted to prevent women from full participation in the so-called revolution. Although some women were capable of resisting, others obliged. There was nonetheless a large number of women who defied their families in relation to their dress code, particularly among *Sunni* women. Many women took the breakdown of the structure as an opportunity to take off their *hijab*, particularly those who were forced to wear it due to tradition. When asked about the means by which she

resisted, one woman interviewee said: 'At the beginning, I told them for my safety I do not want to be perceived as a Sunni and face discrimination. I took it off and never again did I want to put it back on.' Another woman said: 'Well my family forced me to wear it in the first place and I was never convinced. As our situation started deteriorating and my father had lost his income, he no longer had power over us.'

It has also become apparent that men losing their sources of income has meant a loss of authority in their households. With the prolonged conflict, many Syrian women, who were not economically active before, have found themselves in the situation of having to work to provide for their families. Women's economic activity thus empowered many of them to become more independent and have more of a voice in their households, through breaking the male household-head model. Although this has had an impact on the way women were treated and interacted with at home, it also placed them in vulnerable positions outside the household due to security concerns in rebel-held areas. In areas under regime control, women felt compelled to pursue more employment because of the massive inflation and increase in prices due to the deteriorating economic situation.

Despite the structural breakdown and these changes, there were political implications of this alteration in women's status and the increase in women's voices. On the opposition side, women calling for equal rights or peaceful dialogue have been accused of compromising the spirit of the revolution. Most recently, a women's delegation appointed by Staffan de Mistura, UN Envoy to Syria, attended the Geneva III peace talks. The delegation was massively attacked by opposition activists, who accused them of being regime sympathisers compromising the 'spirit of the revolution'. This can unfortunately be perceived as a reaction to the oppressive regime's state feminism which used women's rights and women's issues as a way to cover up acts of violence.

On the other hand, a significant phenomenon in Syria, despite the partial breakdown in neopatriarchy, has been the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. Regime affiliates often used threats of rape against women in opposition areas, and this has led many to leave the areas out of concern for the security of their daughters, wives, sisters and mothers. There are also dozens of documented cases of sexual violence against women in regime prisons. This demonstrates that despite the changes, gender binaries still exist and women are still perceived as the property of their male guardians, whose responsibility it is to protect them. However, this protection failed in many cases, and here the repercussions on women's lives were striking. As the situation became more intense and violence dominated internal politics in Syria, circumstances began to change for women. Despite the dismantling of the neopatriarchal structure, trends of violence against women started to emerge, even within their own communities in some cases, recreating an even worse gender structure than before. This, unfortunately, has not been properly addressed by organisations and practitioners in the field, and the work done thus far in the field of gender equality has in fact only recreated and reinforced gender structures.

Reliving gender binaries

The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is strong evidence of the façade the state has created, claiming to support feminism and a belief in equality. Women were, and are still, perceived as representatives of their families' honour, and any extra-marital sexual conduct, even if it was by force, is thought to bring shame to the family. Former women detainees, and especially those who have experienced sexual violence in prisons, often face stigmatisation by their communities. This stigma is because they are perceived as damaging their families' reputation and honour. Not only do women have to deal with the trauma of sexual violence; they are also stigmatised and denigrated by their communities. One interviewee, a former detainee, who has not reported sexual violence said: 'When I got out of prison, I brought the Quran and swore that no one dared to touch me. My father did not say anything at the beginning, but when I swore I could see relief in his eyes.' This phenomenon is very reflective of the way women are in fact perceived in Syria, despite the quantitative indicators that show more gender parity. These false indicators have contributed to preserving the status quo in terms of gender dynamics, as work on women's issues before 2011 was, and is even until this day, perceived as secondary. The break in the neopatriarchal state structure has brought these issues to the surface.

One of the issues that has been long neglected is that of child marriages. Child or early marriages came to light after 2011, with families technically selling their daughters off, under the guise of marriage, to more financially capable men, using the excuse of protection and survival. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon has received wide media attention post-2011, even though it existed before the so-called revolution. One woman interviewee said: 'Child brides are not new to Syria. In our neighbourhood in Homs, I knew many families that used to marry their daughters off to rich old men from other countries such as Jordan and the Gulf.' Others repeatedly mentioned this. As one interviewee said: 'Syrian girls are in demand in the Arab world; they never say no to their husbands and are as obedient as *Allah* has requested of them.' She continued, 'illee ma bitjawaz sooriyeh ma bi'eesh i'sha haniyeh' ['he who does not marry a Syrian woman never lives a life of happiness']. This stereotype of Syrian women being obedient and submissive and capable of making a man 'happy' was prevalent in the region before 2011. The current situation, however, exposed the phenomenon.

As previously mentioned, more women started pursuing economic activities to cope with radical changes in the economic and political sphere. Although this has given some of them power, and enabled them to resist patriarchal control, women's economic activity remains largely confined to areas perceived as "appropriate" for women and leans towards domesticity. For instance, some women started doing hairdressing, tailoring, embroidery, house cleaning and taking on administrative roles, such as secretaries. In some cases, this was empowering for women; in other cases the economic activity women engaged in placed them in unsafe situations, such as being harassed by male managers.

While research has shown that economic activity can be empowering to women, what it fails to show is that economic activities do not necessarily break gender binaries, achieve equality or change stereotypes about women. They can, in fact, reinforce gender binaries as economic activity is often pursued within the realm of what is acceptable. A myriad of non-governmental organisations, international and local, have implemented women's empowerment projects post-2011, but these have regrettably led to a reinforcement of the roles women should play. Instead of focusing on soft skills, such as public speaking or dialogue and engagement, these programmes were often designed as quick fixes to economic deprivation, and focused on professional trainings in nursing, hairdressing, tailoring and embroidery, among other professions, which were considered as "womanly" and "feminine". In addition, many of the women who were forced to work due to their circumstances expressed a desire to be housewives again, because balancing work both outside and inside the household was very difficult to manage.

The changes that took place after 2011 in relation to gender relations went from a stage of euphoria – women being side by side with their menfolk on the streets – to a stage of sidelining and marginalisation. However, the dynamism in gender relations certainly means that they will keep shifting for men and for women. Some traditions, stereotypes and ideologies remain intact, but the breakdown in the structure allowed many issues to rise to the surface. The situation for those who do not identify with, or do not fall within the bounds of the man versus woman binary, is different.

Gender queer people, or those who do not fit within the socially constructed gender binaries, are often neglected when talking about gender in the Middle East. Before the so-called Arab Spring, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people received very little attention or interest from the international community. Since the radical Islamisation of the waves of revolution across the region, gender queer and sexual minorities have started to receive more attention and concerns have been levelled at the international level about their well-being. Interestingly, before 2011, homosexuality had always been a crime punishable by up to three years in prison in Syria (according to Article 520, which criminalises 'carnal relations against the order of nature'). Not many cases were reported before 2011. Post-2011, regime loyalists and the opposition alike used accusations of homosexuality to undermine each other. Many of these were false: the accusations were used to shame people from the opposing side. This shaming has led to many repercussions; most importantly, it made homosexuality and queerness something to be ashamed of, to deny and even fight over within the same party. For example, if an opposition member were suspected of being homosexual, they would be attacked and alienated by the opposition in order to preserve its "clean" image. This shaming caused a backlash against queer people, who have been subjected to violence more than ever; this means that even though gender dynamics have been challenged, this has happened in the specific context of the conflict and has not benefitted everyone.

Conclusions

There have been shifts in gender dynamics post-2011 in Syria. These shifts and changes have fluctuated from positive to negative. It might be consoling to think that people have taken to the streets to demonstrate against oppression and neopatriarchy, and that the authority of the ruler has perhaps been undermined. The situation on the ground is not, however, indicative of a bright future for Syria in the near future. The waves of radical Islamisation that swept the region were a reaction to the radical de-Islamisation that oppressive regimes were practising. One can only speculate that the extremism and radicalisation will at some point create different types of movements, feminist and political, that can challenge gender binaries and change gender dynamics for the better. This chapter has highlighted a number of issues with regard to gender dynamics in Syria. First and foremost, it is important to bring the phenomenon of state feminism to the forefront of conversations about the future of Syria. State feminism has been very harmful in that it prompted the people to reject feminist and women's rights discourses in their entirety, due to its association with the oppressive regime. Disassociation from this discourse is therefore necessary in order to move forward with both women's rights and gender diversity and equality alike.

This chapter has also made clear that while shifts in gender dynamics have occurred, and took place in the case of Syria post-2011, these shifts are limited in nature and will not necessarily have a long-lasting impact. For this reason, work on gender in Syria must focus heavily on discourses around gender and sexuality, rather than "quick fixes" which often lead to the reinforcement of gender binaries and create an association between women and domestic roles. I have also argued that patriarchy has been challenged, as women took to the streets and participated in the organising of the revolution; however, this challenge has been limited and when circumstances changed women were pushed back into the private sphere again, due to security concerns.

Rape and sexual violence are only one manifestation of the way in which the Syrian crisis has impacted Syrian women. Yet, survivors of sexual violence do not receive very much support from their communities, as they are often perceived as dirty and unworthy because they are responsible for the loss of their families' honour. The lack of adequate qualitative research and the use of quantitative indicators to measure and assess women's situation in Syria have been very distorting of the reality of the daily lives of Syrian women – their oppression by the regime, by their families and communities, and also by feminists affiliated to the oppressive regime. In order to achieve a gender dynamic that is equal, just and fair, efforts should be exerted to guarantee freedom of religious practice, freedom of political affiliation and freedom of expression for all. These freedoms are not necessarily specific to women, but they would provide a starting point for women to move forward with their rights guaranteed. A focus on changing perceptions rather than "quick fixes" will make a difference to the lives of women, men and queer folk.

Note

1 This is not to say that the revolution was driven by religious or sectarian elements, but to highlight one aspect of the regime's oppression of a majority group within its lands. The Kurdish people have also been hugely marginalised by the Ba'ath regime; however, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss this instance of oppression (see Abu-Assab, 2017).

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3 Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) Syrian refugees in Turkey

Zeynep Kivilcim

Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) communities in Syria are targeted for brutal public executions carried out by the Islamic State (ISIS) (House of Commons International Development Committee, 2015). They are also subjected to harsh military recruitment measures imposed by the Syrian government (Danish Refugee Council, 2015).[1] Facing persecutions from different sides of the civil war, many LGBT people flee Syria to seek refuge in other countries.

Turkey is the country that hosts the world's largest community of Syrians displaced by the ongoing conflict. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are 2,734,000 registered Syrian refugees in Turkey (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016). The number of LGBT Syrian refugees in Turkey is unknown. A representative of the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), which operates as the UNHCR Turkey Office's implementing partner, reports that there are 250 LGBT Syrian refugees in their system. But ASAM believes the real number is larger, since many LGBT refugees are afraid to out themselves.[2]

This chapter aims to study Syrian LGBT refugees' experiences and problems in Turkey. Analysis in the chapter is based on Turkish legislation governing the legal status of Syrian LGBT refugees and semi-structured interviews carried out with seven LGBT Syrians living in Istanbul, the city that hosts a large number of Syrian LGBT refugees. Interviews were conducted with five gay and two transwomen refugees.[3] All the refugees who were interviewed for this study arrived in Istanbul by air from Lebanon, Dubai or Saudi Arabia. These countries were only a transit for some of them, because there was no direct flight between Syria and Turkey. One interviewee had been living in Saudi Arabia with her family since her childhood. Two interviewees had family members who are residents of Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, respectively; these refugees went first to these countries and spent several months there. However, they had to leave because of difficulties with their families or legal problems with the authorities. Two of the interviewees had been incarcerated in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, respectively, and were expelled after their release. Another interviewee was

expelled from Dubai because he was diagnosed with HIV. The study is based on two sets of interviews. I carried out four interviews between November 2014 and January 2015 in the framework of a larger research project on Syrian refugees in Istanbul (Ozgur Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). Three of the initial interviewees have left Turkey and they reached Europe by different means during 2015 and early 2016. I conducted a second set of interviews between April and June 2016.[4] Carrying out the interviews with an interval of one year provided me with the opportunity to analyse and evaluate the impact of Turkey's changing regulations on the everyday lives of Syrian LGBT refugees.

The analysis also draws on personal communications with representatives of the institutions that are dealing with Syrian LGBT refugees in Turkey. Representatives from UNHCR Istanbul and its local implementing partner ASAM,[5] as well as representatives from two local LGBT organisations working with Syrian LGBT refugees, namely, Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği [Association of Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies] (SPoD)[6] and the Hêvî Association,[7] were interviewed personally. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an in depth understanding of the experiences of Syrian LGBT refugees in their real life context in Turkey.

The chapter begins with an investigation of the legal and operational problems that hinder Syrian LGBT refugees' access to international protection. The second part of the chapter examines Syrian LGBT refugees' daily struggle for survival in the general climate of harsh discrimination. It explains how this discrimination inhibits not only access to housing, healthcare, work and social assistance, but also endangers their physical safety.

Syrian LGBT refugees' access to international protection: legal and operational problems

The 2009 Syria–Turkey Visa Waiver Agreement[8] allowed Syrian nationals to cross into Turkey without visa requirements, until it was unilaterally terminated by the Turkish government on 8 January 2016. Turkish officials declared that Turkey would however continue its "open door policy" as a humanitarian consideration for Syrians entering via Turkey's land borders and would not require Syrians arriving in this way to hold visas.[9] In contrast to this official statement, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International report that, since early 2015, Turkey has closed its land borders to Syrians (Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016).

The exemption from visa requirements was one of the main reasons why LGBT refugees fleeing Syria by land and air routes preferred Turkey as a refuge. During the first five years of the Syrian civil war when the visa exemption agreement was in force and the land borders were open, Turkey was one of the very few routes taken by LGBT Syrians fleeing the conflict in their homeland or expelled from other countries where they had been living. Several of the refugees I interviewed stated that they came to Turkey because this was the only

option for them. They explained that they were concerned about the military recruitment measures imposed by the Syrian government. These measures were identified by many interviewees as the reason they left Syria or why they chose Turkey for refuge instead of other countries in the region. One interviewee stated:

> I have been living in Saudi Arabia for fifteen years. I had legal problems with my employer in 2015 and had been imprisoned for that. After my release Saudi authorities want me to leave the country. I came to Turkey because this was the only country that was accepting Syrians. Jordan was refusing Syrians. I could not go to Lebanon, because Lebanese authorities use an integrated electronic register with Syria. My registration in the Beirut Airport would result [in] my arrest by the authorities and my recruitment by force in the Syrian army.[10]

Syrian LGBTs share the same fate as three million Syrian refugees living in Turkey who are subject to a separate legal regime of "temporary protection". This regime was put into place simultaneously with the arrivals of Syrians into Turkey's territory. The Law on Foreigners[11] and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation,[12] both put into force in 2014, constitute the main legislation regulating the legal status of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

The Temporary Protection Regulation explicitly prevents Syrian refugees' from applying for international protection. The Regulation stipulates that

> the citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic, stateless persons and refugees who have arrived at or crossed our borders coming from [the] Syrian Arab Republic as part of a mass influx or individually for temporary protection purposes due to the events that have taken place in [the] Syrian Arab Republic since 28 April 2011 shall be covered under temporary protection, even if they have filed an application for international protection.[13]

Notwithstanding this provision, the Turkish government allows some Syrian refugees considered to be "vulnerable" to apply to the UNHCR programme for resettlement in third countries. Syrian LGBT refugees belong to this very restricted group of "vulnerable" Syrians. However, they face many legal, administrative and practical difficulties that render resettlement a lengthy and challenging procedure for them.

The restrictive framework of the Temporary Protection Regulation for the registration of Syrian refugees by the Turkish authorities constitutes one of the main difficulties for them. Registration with the Turkish authorities as a person under temporary protection and the acquisition of an identity card are the preconditions for access to the resettlement procedure for Syrian refugees. The previously mentioned provisional article of the Temporary Protection Regulation provides that only Syrian citizens, stateless persons and refugees who come directly from Syria are covered under temporary protection.

Many Syrian LGBT refugees arrive in Turkey via other countries in the region, either because of the lack of direct transport between Turkey and Syria or because they first fled to Lebanon, Saudi Arabia or Jordan but could not find safe refuge in this countries. An ASAM representative explained that until recently Turkish authorities were not implementing the restriction provided in the provisional article and were according temporary protection status to Syrians coming via third countries.[14] She noted, however, that this practice was changed in autumn 2015; since then, the Turkish authorities have fully implemented the Regulation and issue temporary protection identity cards solely for Syrians who arrived in Turkey directly from Syria.[15] This had hindered several LGBT Syrians' access to UNHCR's resettlement procedure.

My interviewees in ASAM, the Hêvî Association and SPoD stated that a large proportion of the LGBT Syrian refugees coming directly from Syria remain unregistered because they abstain from registration. Some even refrain from getting in contact with the LGBT associations for assistance, because they are concerned that the information they disclose may be divulged to their families, their employer, other refugees or to Syrian radical groups.[16]

The UNHCR gives priority to Syrian LGBT refugees and it fast-tracks them for resettlement. Yet the process still leaves many in despair, because the countries participating in the UNHCR Syrian refugees' resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes offer very limited resettlement quotas. The total number of places made available for Syrian refugees since 2013 is only 179,147.[17] This seems to be an important barrier to Syrian LGBT's access to international protection.

The lack of public information about applying to the resettlement programme is another important problem. Information about access to the resettlement procedure for Syrian LGBT refugees is not officially divulged but only informally disseminated. LGBT Syrians in Turkey are informed that they are considered as "vulnerable" refugees and that they can apply for resettlement in third countries via LGBT Syrian friends or UNHCR local implementing partners, ASAM and the Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF), when they occasionally contact these associations for social, physiological or legal assistance.

During the interviews I conducted in November–December 2014, the majority of the interviewees were not aware of their right to apply to the UNHCR for resettlement. I assisted them in contacting the UNHCR's local implementing partners. I noticed, however, that information about access to resettlement was more widespread in 2016. All the refugees I interviewed in spring 2016 declared that they had already applied for resettlement in third countries. Nevertheless, representatives of local LGBT organisations stressed that several Syrian LGBTs may still remain uninformed of their right to apply for resettlement, since some Syrian LGBTs prefer to live within their small circle of close friends because of security concerns and consequently they are not connected with LGBT networks and information about resettlement.[18]

The ongoing changes relating to the competent authorities' handling of applications and the reframing of the legal and administrative procedures for

resettlement complicate further LGBT refugees' access to international protection. Until spring 2015, the resettlement procedure for Syrian LGBT refugees was managed by the UNHCR. The UNHCR obtained regular information about vulnerable refugees, including Syrian LGBTs, through its local implementing partners who provide legal, social and psychological counselling to refugees in Turkey.[19] This information enabled the UNHCR to initiate a resettlement consideration procedure with LGBT Syrian refugees.

The refugees I interviewed who had applied for resettlement before May 2015 stated that they started by giving a basic outline of their story to ASAM or to HRDF. ASAM and HRDF refer eligible cases to the UNHCR, and refugees wait months to be summoned for a first interview with the UNCHR where they will give an in-depth account of their stories and submit any corroborating documents. Next they have the second UNHCR interview, where they tell their story in yet more detail. After that interview, they wait for the UNHCR's decision and its referral for resettlement.

This resettlement scheme, which was operational for the first four years of the Syrian refugees' exodus to Turkey, has now been modified. In May 2015, almost one year after the coming into force of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, the PDMM became operational and these directorates took over the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey which had, until that time, been carried out by UNCHR. A UNHCR representative informed me that a Commission for the identification of vulnerable refugees has been established within the Istanbul Provincial Directorate.[20] It seems to be the main authority currently dealing with the selection of Syrian LGBT to be resettled in third countries. The UNHCR does not have any role in this Commission. The Commission is faced with difficult and extremely complex processes for identifying vulnerable refugees and it has significant operational challenges.[21] Its refugee resettlement eligibility criteria are not publicly known. The accuracy of the registers they work with is also a cause for concern, given the shortcomings of the registration procedure conducted by the Turkish authorities.

The lack of legal guarantees in Turkish law for gender-sensitive reception and registration of Syrian refugees is one of the main problems. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection does not stipulate any measures for gender-sensitive reception, registration or the refugee status determination procedure. The Temporary Protection Regulation provides (Article 21) that registration of foreigners under this Regulation shall be conducted by personnel trained on the registration procedures and requirements, in a separate place sufficiently equipped and where registration can be completed without disruption. The Regulation states that confidentiality is the primary principle in registration procedures and that necessary measures shall be taken for that purpose.

Nevertheless, there is no legal procedural guarantee of gender-sensitive registration for Syrian refugees in the Temporary Protection Regulation. The refugees I interviewed noted that, with regard to the practice, the registration of Syrian refugees consists of an expeditious procedure where the interviewer aims to take very basic information about the applicant in around twenty minutes

and deliver an identity card to him/her. There is no possibility of LGBT Syrians disclosing their sexual orientation during the registration procedure or being registered as a "vulnerable refugee".

Consequently, the official registers of the Directorate General of Migration Management that the Commission for the identification of vulnerable refugees work with do not include any information about the vulnerability of Syrian refugees or their sexual orientation (Ozgur Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015: 44–48). The interviews I conducted revealed that the current system for identifying LGBT refugees for resettlement functions due to the informal referral of these refugees to the PDMM's Commission by the UNHCR's local partners. The refugees I interviewed who had applied for resettlement after May 2015 stated that they had been referred by UNHCR's implementing partners to the Commission and obtained interviews there. They explained that the interviewer was not a police officer and that they felt comfortable during the interview. It seems that the legislative handicap is partly recovered in practice by the apparently gender-sensitive working of the new Commission established in the Directorate General of Migration Management.

There are other operational difficulties in the identification of LGBT refugees and their referral to the UNHCR resettlement programme. Syrian refugees in general, and LGBT Syrian refugees in particular, are constantly on the move within Turkey and towards European countries. This is a factor that impairs the accuracy of the registers and consequently complicates the mission of the UNHCR local implementing partners when they try to reach LGBT Syrian refugees and refer them for interviews at the resettlement commission.

All the refugees and representatives of SPoD and the Hêvî Association that I interviewed agreed that UNHCR gives priority to LGBT Syrian refugees' applications, but it still takes approximatively two years to complete the lengthy resettlement process and move to a third country. The interviews I conducted revealed that many LGBT Syrians do not pursue the UNHCR's resettlement procedure but prefer to hire smugglers to carry them from Turkey to Europe on a boat. One of the gay respondents left Turkey in that way, some months after our interview. His file was progressing under the UNHCR's resettlement procedure. However, at the end of his first year in Turkey, he decided that he could not wait until the completion of the procedure and took a perilous boat to the Greek islands.[22] The representatives of SPoD and the Hêvî Association said that many LGBT Syrian refugees that had been in contact with their organisations had left Turkey by dangerous boat crossing to Europe.

The agreement concluded between EU and Turkey in March 2016 has, however, radically changed this picture. According to this agreement, all new irregular migrants, including Syrians, crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey. The Turkish government has also committed to take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for irregular migration opening from its territory to the EU (EU–Turkey Statement 2016). The agreement has immediately affected the number of crossings from Turkey to the Greek islands. According to European Agency for the Management of

Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (Frontex) statistics, the number of migrants arriving on the Greek islands in April 2016 plummeted by 90 per cent compared to the previous month (Frontex, 2016). The representative from SPoD explained that some LGBT Syrian refugees arranged a crossing to Greece as a way of leaving Turkey just a few days before the agreement came into operation.[23] He stated that the number of LGBT Syrian refugees who hire smugglers to take them to the Greek islands has radically dropped since the Turkey–EU Agreement.[24]

Since March 2016, the UNHCR resettlement programme has been the only gateway for LGBT Syrians in Turkey to a decent future. The refugees I interviewed explained that they check the UNHCR's website regularly to keep track of the progress of their file. Several stated that they also visit implementing partner associations' offices at least once a month to ask for updated information on their case. During the years that they wait for the completion of the resettlement process, Syrian LGBT refugees try to survive the insecurity and discrimination they face in Turkey.

Surviving the insecurity and discrimination in Turkey

Turkey's domestic laws do not explicitly discriminate against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.[25] However, no legislation exists in Turkey that protects LGBT people from discrimination in employment, education, housing and health care. LGBT persons face discrimination, harassment and even violence from their relatives, neighbours, co-workers, bosses, employees, teachers and members of the Turkish police (Engin, 2015: 840–843).

The laws are applied in a discriminatory way by the police, prosecutors and judges because the criminal code has vaguely worded prohibitions on 'public exhibitionism' and 'offenses against public morality' that are used to harass gay and transgender people (Shadow Report by Turkey's LGBT Associations, 2015). The systematic violations of rights based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, the hate crimes operated with relative impunity against LGBT individuals, the discrimination in employment, the violations of the right to freedom of assembly and association and discriminatory treatment of LGBT inmates are the human rights violations reported on account of sexual orientation/gender identity (Shadow Report by Turkey's LGBT Associations, 2015). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has recently expressed deep concerns over attacks and incitement to violence against LGBT people in Turkey and has called on the authorities to take active measures to combat homophobic and transphobic violence and discrimination (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2015).

LGBT refugees in Turkey suffer the consequences of a general climate of intolerance towards LGBT individuals; additionally, they are deprived of the traditional support systems and resources to which straight refugees and LGBT citizens may have access (Cragnolini, 2013: 110). LGBT refugees are much less likely to pursue their legal rights or to benefit from them (Grundgras *et al.*,

2009). Syrian LGBT refugees' marginality is "triple"; they are LGBT, refugee and Syrian.

A gay refugee I interviewed in November 2014 said that he arrived in Istanbul three months previously and was concerned about discrimination against Syrians in Turkey. He explained that he was not looking for a job, nor had he applied to the Turkish authorities for registration since he wanted to go to Europe as soon as possible.[26]

> The homophobia in Turkey is less severe than in Syria. You can see rainbow flags on the buildings. However, it is very difficult to live in Istanbul as a Syrian. I prefer to not speak Arabic; I try to hide that I am Syrian.[27]

A transwoman refugee said that she hides her sexual identity and also her nationality in order to survive the discrimination.

> I changed my clothes, the way I speak. I say that I am Lebanese. My appearance helps me. Turkey taught me how to convert myself. Hiding my nationality is also good for my online sex business. However, I am discriminated [against] when people realise that I am Syrian, for instance in the bank, when I have to show my passport.[28]

The Hêvî Association's representative argued that Turkish police behave better with Syrian LGBT refugees than they do with Turkish LGBTs, because they completely ignore them.[29] The refugees I interviewed stated that they did not have problems with the Turkish police but some of them stressed that they did not trust the police, because police officers never intervene when a Syrian LGBT refugee is attacked even when he/she is expressly asking for help.

Most of the LGBT Syrians emphasised that they felt unsafe in Turkey, because they were discriminated against by the local people as well as by other refugees. A Syrian transwoman refugee explained to me the strategies that she developed in order to ensure physical safety in her daily life.

> I do not feel safe in the neighbourhood where I live in Istanbul. I go out only during days and by wearing the hijab.[30] I am a practising Muslim, nevertheless I wear the hijab not only for religious reasons but for feeling myself secure. The police behave better with me when I am in the hijab. They stopped me several times at Taksim Square and asked for my identity card. They were not hostile but only teased me because I wear the hijab but my identity card shows that I am a man. Another day that I was out without the hijab, a man harassed me. I approached the police and asked for help. They did not take care of me and were very rude to me. Turkey is so hard for me. I don't trust Turkish people; I am scared of them.[31]

A gay respondent explained his fatigue and despair about the violence that he faced in Turkey.

> I [have] lived in Turkey for six months and I [have been] physically aggressed already three times. Once by [a] taxi driver who asked me to pay more than the taxi's meter indicated. He took the extra money he wanted by beating me. The second time I [was] attacked by a person who wanted to borrow my lighter and got angry when I responded that I don't have my lighter with me. The third time I was mugged and wounded by a knife-wielding person under drug influence. Why all this violence against me? Why? I am tired; I am exhausted because of the incessant discrimination against me in Turkey. I want to leave this country.[32]

Housing and economic means of survival

Housing is one of main problems faced by Syrian LGBT refugees in Turkey.[33] Upon their arrival, most of them find accommodation in crowded apartments with other Syrian refugees or sleep at their workplaces. However, cohabitants easily guess their sexual orientation; consequently, they are forced to leave or obliged to consent to sexual abuse.

A Syrian transwoman refugee told me that she had found accommodation in a very crowded building with 400 Syrians but could not stay there very long.

> Six people were sleeping in each room. We have been paying 350 TL [Turkish lira] per month for a bed. Some of the Syrians there don't want to stay with me because I am homosexual. Some others forced me for sexual intercourse. I left this building six months ago and went to ASAM [to ask] for accommodation. ASAM [referred] me to the LGBT guest house. I still live there.[34]

Most of the LGBT Syrian refugees I interviewed (four out of seven) had been accommodated in the LGBT guest house in Istanbul for periods varying between one month and one year. This is the only shelter for LGBT people in Turkey and it is run by a local LGBT organisation. It was started to provide accommodation for elderly Turkish transsexuals, but is currently hosting LGBT refugees coming from various countries. The organisation has very limited financial resources and can accept only a small number of refugees for a limited time.

Some of the interviewees told me that they wanted to find accommodation in areas that are relatively safe for LGBTs, but are discriminated against by landlords; besides, they cannot afford the rents on their own. They try to rent apartments with other LGBT Syrian refugees so that they can share the costs.

The interviews revealed that Syrian LGBT refugees very rarely find jobs in Turkey. The Temporary Protection Regulation indicates that the procedures and principles concerning the work of persons under temporary protection will be determined by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security following proposal by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers had taken no decision on this issue until 2016 when the Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees Under Temporary Protection was issued (15 January 2016). This Regulation covers

Syrians who have completed the registration procedure and it provides that they can apply for a work permit six months after they obtain temporary protection status. Since the Regulation has only recently been issued, more time is needed to evaluate its effects on the lives of Syrian LGBT refugees. One can only wonder whether this new Regulation will help them overcome the overwhelming discrimination that they face.

The refugees I interviewed explained that their sexual orientation and the fact that they cannot speak and understand the Turkish language constitute barriers to LGBT Syrians' access to work. They told me that they accept every kind of precarious job, very long working hours and hostile workplaces. The representatives from SPoD and the Hêvî Association I interviewed stated that most LGBT Syrian refugees speak English and they work in tourism agencies, in the entertainment sector, in restaurants and in textile workshops. Some are employed as translators while several are engaged in sex work.[35]

It is very hard for LGBT Syrian refugees to hide their sexual orientation in cases where they sleep at their workplaces. This makes them even more vulnerable to harassment, violence and sometimes regular rape by their employers or other workers. A gay refugee who worked as an archaeologist in Syria told me that upon his arrival in Istanbul, he started work in a textile workshop. He had been sleeping at his workplace along with other Syrian refugees and was regularly raped by one of them. He withstood this for only a month and then left this job.

Another interviewee described the harsh working conditions and the discrimination that he experienced at his workplace.

> I worked in a restaurant in Istanbul. They also [gave] me a place to sleep. I worked for 10–12 hours a day and received 600 TL [Turkish lira] per month. The working hours are very long in Turkey. I don't understand the language. The staff in the restaurant behaved very badly with me, I think they realised that I am gay. After I left this job I started to live in the guest house for LGBT. I don't go out from the guest house since I don't have any money. I can hardly find money to buy cigarettes.[36]

Access to work is even more problematic for transsexual Syrian refugees; they are almost automatically refused when they ask for jobs. One interviewee told me that she is a tailor but she cannot find any work in Istanbul: 'The fact that I am a transwoman is the main obstacle. I asked some restaurants for work as a dish cleaner; they understand that I am a homosexual and told me to go away.' Another Syrian transwoman explained the difficulties she faced when she searched for a job.

> Istanbul is very expensive. I cannot find any work here. I am a make-up artist. When I apply for positions in beauty salons they refuse me because I cannot speak Turkish. I do occasional sex work but when I stand for that, the Turkish transsexual sex workers yell to me and chase me away. I am currently trying to survive by doing trans sex workers' make-up.[37]

Health care and social assistance

LGBT refugees encounter significant difficulties in accessing basic services, social assistance and health care. Those I interviewed revealed that LGBT Syrian refugees do not receive any assistance from official authorities but find support exclusively from UNHCR's implementing partners and some local LGBT associations. The fact that they are discriminated against by other members of the refugee community as well as by medical personnel and social workers results in LGBT refugees being excluded from sources of support for refugees. The Syrian transwomen refugees told me that they do not go to Istanbul city centre where they come across members of the Syrian refugee community, because other Syrian refugees exert physical and verbal violence and abuse towards them. One gay interviewee who lives alone in Istanbul and whose family is in Syria said that he avoids the city centre and Syrian restaurants. He explained that it is highly probable that he will see somebody from his home town in these restaurants; they would realise that he is gay and tell his family.[38]

In Turkey free access to health services is legally guaranteed for Syrian refugees under some conditions. Until October 2014, the legal framework regarding health services for Syrian refugees was drawn up by several directives adopted by the Prime Minister's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD). According to these directives Syrians were provided with the right to access public health institutions without charge in all provinces of Turkey.[39] The Temporary Protection Regulation provides for free primary and emergency health services to persons under temporary protection. Since October 2014, various circulars have been issued for the implementation of the Regulation, according to which registration is the precondition for access to health services for Syrian refugees.

Non-registered refugees can access only emergency health services and health services for the prevention of communicable diseases. Syrian refugees under temporary protection can access health services only within the province where they are registered.[40] LGBT Syrian refugees cannot access free medical care provided by the Turkish state if they are unregistered or if they live away from the city where they were initially registered.

The previously mentioned restriction provided by the Temporary Protection Regulation that excludes Syrians coming from a third country from the temporary protection regime creates an important barrier for many LGBT Syrians' access to health care. Syrian refugees coming from third transit countries cannot benefit from temporary protection and procure an identity card. Refugees who suffer chronic diseases including HIV are particularly concerned about this registration problem.

One of the refugees I interviewed told me that he was expelled from Dubai because he was diagnosed with HIV. His family lives in Syria but he chose Turkey as the country to be deported to because the civil war conditions in Syria prevent access to the medication he needs and he could enter Turkey

without a visa. However, once he had arrived in Turkey he was informed that he could not be registered, and could not access free HIV medication available for Syrians under temporary protection, because he came from Dubai. He explained that he bribed the responsible police officer and procured an identity card. He can now obtain free medication from the public hospital that he visits periodically.[41]

The interviewees stressed that Syrian refugees in general, but transsexual Syrian refugees in particular, are discriminated against in hospitals. One of the transwoman interviewees told me that the first time she went to the public hospital, the doctor did not want to touch or examine her and preferred to talk from a distance. She said: 'Now when I have health problems, I am getting help from ASAM. They arrange an interpreter who can accompany me and give me money for the consultation.'[42] The representative from ASAM explained that their interpreters accompany LGBT refugees to hospital appointments not only to assist them to overcome the language barrier but also the prejudices of medical personnel.

Conclusion

The aim of my study was to highlight Syrian LGBT refugees' experiences and problems in Turkey. The analysis of Turkey's legislation as well as the information communicated by the interviewees revealed that the legal framework that determines Syrian LGBT refugees' daily struggle has been constantly changing and evolving since they started to cross into Turkish territory. The legal framework regulating entry into Turkey, legal stay in the country, access to rights and to international protection as well as the procedures for resettlement in third countries is continuously changing. This creates a pervasive legal insecurity for LGBT Syrian refugees.

The visa regime concerning Syrian nationals' entry into Turkey's territory was changed in 2016. Turkey's legislation governing their legal status and their rights and obligations, namely the Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation, were negotiated during the first three years of the exodus and came into force only in 2014. The EU–Turkey Agreement was adopted in 2016.

The gradual implementation of this new legislation and of the EU–Turkey Agreement, as well as the establishment, in stages, of the institutional body (the Directorate General for Migration Management), creates not only important operational difficulties for the official apparatus that deals with Syrian LGBTs but has also direct repercussions on the daily lives of these refugees. The information on new rules and procedures are not effectively divulged by official authorities but only informally disseminated through refugees' networks. Syrians from the LGBT community are generally excluded from these networks and rely on patchy information from other Syrian refugees. The interviews I conducted revealed that they try to gain information from these informal networks and to build and re-build strategies for survival that fit the new regulations.

One interviewee noted that legal insecurity is the main reason why she does not want to stay in Turkey.

> Suddenly [the] Turkish government close all borders, they change their politics and their law. The government's probable new rules and new politics about Syrians are the biggest fear for me for the future. I don't trust [the] Turkish government. That's why I want to leave this country.[43]

This study has made it clear that the legal rules that govern Syrian LGBTs' lives in Turkey are changing, but what remains constant is the discrimination they endure. This discrimination puts their physical safety at risk, constrains their economic means of survival and hinders their access to social assistance as well as to health care. Survival in this discriminatory environment depends on their ability to hide their sexual orientation. Paradoxically, their access to international protection and to the UNHCR's resettlement programme to third countries is contingent on their coming out as lesbian, gay, transsexual or bisexual.

Syrian LGBTs facing violence and discrimination in Turkey consider resettlement in third countries as the only option for a decent future. The very low quotas accorded by third countries participating in the UNHCR Syrian refugees' resettlement programme is the main barrier they face.

Acknowledgement

This chapter is dedicated to Turkey's "Academics for Peace".

Notes

1 The issue is gaining more visibility at the United Nations. The situation of Syrian LGBT people was recently discussed for the first time by the UN Security Council during an unofficial meeting. ('LGBT in the Middle East under the spotlight at the UN', 27 August 2015. Available at www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2015/08/lgbt-in-the-middle-east-under-the-spotlight-at-the-un/#.VzBBGfl97cs, accessed 18 May 2016).
2 ASAM representative, personal interview, May 2016.
3 I could not reach any lesbian Syrian refugees despite my efforts. The local LGBT organisations that helped me to contact the refugees for my interviews confirmed that lesbian Syrian refugees' visibility is extremely limited in Turkey (SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016; ASAM representative, personal interview, May 2016).
4 This second set includes a new interview with the only initial interviewee who was still in Turkey and three new interviewees (two gay and one transwoman Syrian refugee). All interviews were conducted using the same set of questions. I used open-ended questions and my objective was to understand the respondent's point of view and his/her individual experience. This method allowed the respondents to talk freely about the issues. Three interviews were carried out in English and four interviews were in Arabic with the help of translators. The interviewees were aged between twenty and twenty-nine years.

5 ASAM is a non-governmental organisation that helps refugees to meet their primary needs and supports them in accessing fundamental rights and services. ASAM has two Multi-Service Support Centres (MSCs) specifically for Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Gaziantep. The centres provide social and legal counselling (mainly on registration procedures, legal issues and social rights), access to education and primary health care counselling to access health services and mental health and psycho-social support as well as access to social rights. In addition to these services, the centres organise courses, trainings and social activities for Syrian refugees.
6 SPoD is a national non-governmental LGBT organisation. It was founded in 2011 and initiated its activities with Syrian LGBT refugees in January 2016.
7 The Hêvî Association identifies itself as the "Kurdish LGBT Association" and works with LGBT refugees. It has recently conducted a field survey with Syrian LGBT refugees.
8 'Agreement between the Government of Turkey and the Government of Arab Republic of Syria for the Reciprocal Removal of the Visa Requirement' (*Official Gazette*, 23 October 2009, No. 27441). The Agreement exempted Syrian nationals from visa requirements for a stay of up to ninety days in Turkey.
9 'Turkey Changes Syria Visa Policy to Curb Illegal Entries', www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-changes-syria-visa-policy-to-curb-illegal-entries.aspx?pageID=238&nID=93243&NewsCatID=352 (accessed 12 September 2016).
10 Personal interview, May 2016.
11 'Law no. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection', *Official Gazette*, 11 April 2013, No. 28615.
12 'Regulation on Temporary Protection', *Official Gazette*, 22 October 2014, No. 29153.
13 Provisional Article 1 of the Temporary Protection Regulation.
14 ASAM representative, personal interview, May 2016.
15 Ibid.
16 Hêvî Association representative, personal interview, April 2016; ASAM representative, personal interview, May 2016; SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016.
17 UNHCR, 'Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees', 18 March 2016.
18 SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016.
19 The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) and the Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) are the main implementing partners that deal directly with LGBT Syrian refugees.
20 UNHCR representative, personal interview, April 2016.
21 Ibid.
22 At the time of writing, this refugee is now in Germany. He made a new application for asylum and is waiting for a decision.
23 SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016.
24 Ibid.
25 Gay sexual conduct between consenting adults, in private, is not a crime in Turkey. The age of consent for both heterosexual and homosexual sex is eighteen. However, Turkey does not recognise same-sex marriages, civil unions or domestic partnerships.
26 Some months after our interview, I heard from his friends that he reached Europe with a false passport.
27 Personal interview, November 2014.
28 Personal interview, April 2016.
29 Hêvî Association representative, personal interview, April 2016.
30 The hijab is a veil that covers the head and chest.
31 Personal interview, May 2016.
32 Personal interview, June 2016.
33 SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016.

34 Personal interview, May 2016.
35 SPoD representative, personal interview, May 2016; Hêvî Association representative, personal interview, April 2016.
36 This refugee was resettled by UNHCR in a third country and left Turkey in March 2016.
37 Personal interview, November 2014.
38 Personal interview, June 2016.
39 AFAD Circular 2013/1 of 18 January 2013; AFAD Circular 2013/8 of 9 September 2013.
40 The costs are paid by the governorship of the relevant province. The costs of medical care related to the loss of an organ are not paid in case the incident occurred before entry into Turkish territory. Wounded refugees might be provided with some basic prostheses.
41 Personal interview, June 2016.
42 Personal interview, April 2016.
43 Personal interview, April 2016.

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4 The violence of tolerated temporality

Syrian women refugees on the outskirts of Istanbul

Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu

Introduction

Modern biopower hides direct violence through a biopolitical rationality of administrative strategies, articulations, policies and tactics. The legal and administrative techniques governing temporary protection in Turkey have placed urban Syrian women refugees in Istanbul under protracted structural violence based on securitization, victimization, marginalization and minimal access to basic human rights. The following chapter aims to expose the main dimensions of structural violence and the challenges that Syrian refugee women face, as well as exploring the survival strategies they develop to cope with the administrative and economic reproduction of poverty and vulnerability.

The beginning of the twenty-first century brought numerous complementary forms of humanitarian protection that are replacing the human rights based international protection system. Refugee rights as stated under the 1951 Refugee Convention are being curbed by various configurations of access to basic human rights such as health, education, legal residence and employment. While facilitating the transnational expansion of a growing humanitarian aid and charity sector, administrative statuses such as "tolerated stay", subsidiary protection, secondary status and guest status have narrowed tremendously the living spaces of "unwanted refugees" in the transit and receiving countries.

Through these complementary forms of humanitarian protection, the power structures categorize, commercialize, criminalize, exploit and manage unwanted refugees through preventive border management structures and illegal deportation as well as institutionalized poverty and exploitation based on various administrative forms of legal violence. Grounded primarily on the temporary tolerance of the local, temporary protection has become one of the most violent political strategies in the production and government of "bare lives" in the modern metropolitan cities of refuge. Through extensive transnational securitization of refugees as a public security threat and social burden, the globalizing temporary protection policy emerges as masculine, European and religious. It leaves out women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intersex (LGBTI) refugees (see Chapter 3), marginalizes and victimizes women refugees and externalizes low-income refugees fleeing war in Africa, the Middle East and South

Asia. Temporality and tolerance narrow the living spaces of women refugees through the social construction and governance of structural violence, i.e. structures of inequality, poverty, systemic discrimination and the power relations of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Structural violence works through deep biopolitics that constructs, legitimizes, reproduces and normalizes hegemonic power relations.

Galtung's theory of structural violence offers a comprehensive framework for approaching SGBV within this multidimensional context of legal, political and societal violence. The three components of the violence triangle posited by Galtung provide an extensive explanatory framework for exploring legal, structural and discursive sources of SGBV in exile. SGBV is grounded in direct, structural and cultural violence and is closely related to the social construction and governance of the structures of inequality and power relations of SGBV. As Galtung says, 'violence is built into the structure, and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (Galtung, 1990). It is hidden in the lack of access to legal rights and social services, the unequal distribution of resources and of the 'power to decide over the distribution of resources' – these contain the essence of structural violence (Galtung, 1990). Structural violence works through complicated biopolitics that construct, legitimize, reproduce and normalize hegemonic power relations through the reproduction of inequality, poverty and vulnerability (Confortini, 2006: 333–364). Thus, to understand the reasons for growing SGBV against refugee women, it is important to explore the role of gendered technologies of power during exile, border transit, flight, accommodation, survival, detention and return (Pickering 2011). All these experiences shape not only access to temporary and tolerated protection, but also the return possibilities of women refugees.

The following study employs a qualitative gender-based methodology (Madriz, 2003) to explain the experiences of Syrian women refugees during their flight to Turkey, access to protection and survival. The study is based on 25 semi-structured interviews with Syrian women living in several districts (Tarlabasi, Fatih, Bagcilar, Bahcelievler, Aksaray, Basaksehir, Sariyer) of Istanbul,[1] as well as guided conversations with citizens, charity volunteers, non-governmental organization (NGO) practitioners from the Human Resource Development Foundation, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), Multeci-Der and local officials from the Directorate General for Migration Management. It fosters narrative and contextual understanding of women refugees' experiences and expectations in Istanbul. Through analysis of Syrian women's stories and articulations, the study aims to bring to the surface the strategies through which various state and non-state actors produce direct and structural violence. It attempts to bring to the forefront women refugees' approaches to exile, protection and violence, and their intersection with ethnic and religious identities. (Pickering and Gerard, 2014: 340–342).

Masculine access to the temporary protection system

The tolerated temporary protection regime has become one of the most oppressive strategies in the production and government of "bare lives" (Agamben, 1998) in the modern metropolitan cities of refuge. Current governmental rationality employs detailed mechanisms of biopolitical governmentality and violence in the management of refugee women crossing national borders. Living in exile as women with a burden of protecting the family and its honour means a struggle against masculine hegemonies hidden, not only under the physical forms of direct violence, but within the governmental techniques of broader structural violence embedded in border passages, territory entrances, residence registration and access to rights (Freedman, 2015).

In the case of Syrian women refugees in Turkey, this process is governed through administrative and civil institutions, procedures, strategies, actions and articulations that construct Syrian women as victims, ungrateful guests and vulnerable persons dependent on the mercy and hospitality of local males and the charity sector. 'Syrian women never speak. She is always obedient. Give her some bread, and she is yours', said a Turkish man who bought a 15-year-old Syrian bride for €150.[2] A woman practitioner who works in a local charity in Basaksehir became angry at a Syrian woman who was complaining and said: 'Guests eat whatever they find. This is the appropriate way. You have to be thankful we share our bread with you! It is shame on you to complain and ask for more.'[3] Officials' statements about billions of US dollars spent on Syrian refugees[4] constructs these refugees as a social burden on the tax system, while Syrian women are blamed for having lots of children during the harsh conditions of war. This hierarchical approach marginalizes Syrian women refugees as a source of social burden and as stealing the social rights and benefits of Turkish citizens. As guests under temporary protection, approximately 1.35 million Syrian women refugees in Turkey – 46.9 per cent of the 2,688,686 Syrians registered in Turkey by AFAD (Emergency Search and Rescue Directorate) in 2016 – are a priori bounded by the awkward status and conditions of a temporary protection that is based primarily on the status and tolerance of the male. Syrian women do not have direct access to their rights, because the majority lack access to personal registration and Temporary Protection ID cards.

AFAD data from 2014 show that almost all the Syrian women are registered, and thus had access to their basic rights. Most of these women were registered through their husbands as head of the family. This is because 73 per cent of Syrian women in Turkey do not hold a passport and almost 77 per cent crossed the Turkish border illegally. According to the AFAD data, 81 per cent of the women lacked a residence permit, i.e. did not have personal access to any rights except emergency health services (AFAD, 2014). In May 2016 an official from GDMM (General Directorate for Migration Management) told me that almost all officially counted 2,688,686 Syrian refugees are granted a "99" numbered foreigner ID card; this is different from the previous "98" personal number in that it is integrated into the whole public database system and thus facilitates better

access to public services. Refugees say that it facilitates access to health services, education (especially at the university level) and application for legal employment and bank transfers.[5]

However, as recent studies and reports show, Syrian women without passports, those who crossed the Turkish–Syrian border in irregular ways and those who entered Turkey via a third country (i.e. Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, etc.), are not given temporary protection status and thus are not registered under ID number 99. Thus, since the beginning of 2015 there has been a growing population of Syrian women refugees who are not registered and do not have access to any public services. Moreover, left without any public voice and with no protection these Syrian women are forced to resolve their administrative problems through the services of the informal sector, the so called *gayr-i mesru*.

As a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report states, since the enforcement of the Turkey–Syria border and the implementation of the visa regime in the spring of 2015, numerous Syrian women and children who do not hold passports have been refused entrance at the Turkish border with Syria. After Turkey's enforcement of the 911 km long wall at the border with Syria, thousands of women and children started to pay large amounts of money to smugglers and undergo dangerous passages at the borders (HRW, 2016). In May 2016, HRW reported that 165,000 displaced Syrians were waiting at informal makeshift settlements along the Turkish border, desperate and afraid of Islamic State (ISIS) attacks (Simpson 2016). Irregular passages not only further impoverished the Syrian women who usually found themselves without any financial resources in the midst of the Turkish city of Antakya (the main crossing zone for irregular passages), but women and children often experienced violence, injury, death and sexual exploitation during these passages (HRW, 2016). The women interviewed told stories about families who did not have money and had to leave their daughters with warriors and soldiers as a bribe for crossing the Syrian–Turkish border.

The interviews revealed that Syrian women married to Syrian men are being registered as a member of the family, and thus benefit from conventional health and social services only through the temporary family ID card. Moreover, Turkish law allows only single wife marriages, thus second and third wives are not usually registered and so do not have access to public health and social services. The male is the one who decides and controls the women's access to rights and services. Women who experience violence in the private sphere do not have many opportunities to complain and apply to the public authorities – who remain blind to the unregistered refugees and avoid intervening in such cases based on arguments around cultural difference or privacy. Religious marriages with Syrian girls have become common; however, they do not provide any rights or protection. In fact, some parliamentarians have suggested that religious marriages, including those between the victims of SGBV and the violators, should be officially recognized.[6] All these changes facilitate SGBV and exploitation in the lives of Syrian women married – or more often sold as wives

– to Turkish men and their children.[7] With the recent revocation of Article 103(a) of the Turkish Criminal Code Law, any act of a sexual nature committed against a minor who has not reached 15 years of age or who, in spite of having reached the age of 15, lacks the competence to understand the legal significance and consequences of such acts, does not constitute sexual abuse; thus, any person who sexually abuses a child will not be imprisoned.

The changes in the civil law started to legitimize forced marriages and SGBV against children above 15 years of age as well. The authorities and wider society also seem blind to the increasing number of religious marriages with children. There is no legal or administrative action or punishment for the trade in Syrian girls as wives or any control against the widespread harsh social exploitation of Syrian children in industry (Atasu Topçuoğlu, 2015: 116).

The law seems blind and indifferent towards the sources of violence that are degrading the lives, not only of Syrian women and children, but of society as a whole. As a result, access to and registration with the temporary protection regime and its services depends primarily on the will and tolerance of the male as the main guardian of private space. This basic administrative dependency converges with the structural violence of poverty and leaves Syrian women open to abuse, exploitation and SGBV.

The structural violence of tolerated temporality

Through the growing bulk of administrative regulations, circulars and directives, Syrian refugee women were placed outside the international protection regime created under Turkey's 2014 Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Numerous circulars and directives contain various rules and criteria regarding Syrian refugees' access to health, education and social and employment services (Kivilcim, 2016). Beyond this vast amount of legal and administrative circulars and regulations, the practice is rather different (Amnesty International, 2014). Confined within narrow, masculine administrative boundaries Syrian women appear to be "included" though de facto legal and social exclusion follows inequality, lack of access to basic rights and resources, illegality, poverty and victimization. Within these boundaries, women are subjected to the critical gaze and inadequate mercy of the male as well as the violence of the growing charity sector and black market in Istanbul. Indeed, beyond their legal status women's lives seem very much determined by their economic and social conditions in exile, as well as by masculine cultural arguments and strategies for survival that are legitimized in exile.

Status and family structure under poverty

Exile itself reconstructs the ordinary social, economic, legal and cultural structures in Syrian families. According to official data, 22 per cent of Syrian women and 5 per cent of children registered themselves as heads of families (AFAD 2014). Syrian women find themselves overwhelmed by their new status and

gender roles – in the family, in the Syrian refugee community and in the receiving society. Under the precarious conditions of exile, many single women have to maintain their physical, moral and psychological integrity and provide for the family's basic material needs for safety, shelter, nutrition, activity and health. Starting from their transit to the destination country, exile is a period of significant environmental, social and physical risks and challenges for women refugees. They survive damaged by the gendered kinship ideologies, relations and practices defined by the conditions of patrilocality, the traumatic inheritance of death, loss, injury or SGBV in the family and structural poverty.

Indeed, poverty itself constitutes the basic component of the structural violence that engulfs their life in exile. The administrative reproduction of poverty through discriminatory registration procedures, limited access to legal employment as well as the discursive construction of Syrian women refugees as powerless and vulnerable guests, results in a governmental strategy for justification and normalization of SGBV against them. In this way structural violence provides the basis for the construction and reproduction of gendered relations, and in particular for the construction and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Syrian women are left subjected to men. 'I am fine because I am here with my husband, but let God save the lonely women! I would never want to fall in their situation', says a 40-year-old Syrian Alawi women in Bahcelievler (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). Syrian women who are somehow attached to a Syrian man feel safer than the others. Thus, among Syrian women, Syrian men are often perceived as a source of safety.

However, this is not always the case in practice; often avoidance of violence in the public sphere meets with normalization and legitimization of violence and exploitation in the private sphere. Recent story-telling activities among Syrian women involved in KADAV (Kadin Dayanisma Vakfi [Women's Solidarity Foundation]) show that there is widespread direct psychological violence in the private sphere.[8] The degradation in the status of the man who, as head of the family, provides and controls its financial resources, results in violence against the woman who is considered responsible for the provision of adequate accomodation and nutrition for the children. Indeed, in most cases, women have to live in wider families or share housing space with other Syrian families because of high rents and low income. All these changes in the living conditions effect the power relations in the family.

Each change during exile produces family hierarchies that impact on the survival strategies and decision-making of Syrian women. Subjected to patrilocality (living with the husband's family after marriage), they are obliged to obey the rules of the oldest man or mother-in-law who have authority in the distribution of the family resources; when left alone in neolocality (living on their own after marriage) they become open targets and at the mercy of the local men. A 30-year-old young, self-sufficient and emancipated Syrian teacher of English and Arabic finds herself left alone with twins after a six-month long religious mariage to a Turkish man. The conflict in Syria prevents her from accessing the documents required for official marriage procedures, while the tolerated

temporary status as a guest in Turkey leaves her an open target for sexual exploitation. She is left without any material or legal sources to defend herself, to open a case against the Turkish man or to work and regain her life. She is left only with the option of taking care of her children, dependent on the mercy of others. The legal and structural violence reconstructed her from an emancipated independent woman to a vulnerable single mother subject to the charity sector (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015).

Violence in camps, streets, bedsit rooms and boarding schools

For many single women the flight to exile has resulted in poverty and degradation of their social status followed by an empowering of the masculine hegemonic relations in their surroundings. Single Syrian women, and especially single mothers, have no option other than family solidarity; however, exile and extreme poverty have inverted the traditional solidarity mechanisms in the wider family (Kesgin and Ozturk, 2014). Hierarchical power relations of survival define the urban refugee settlements and families. Joint lives, common sharing of small apartments and inhuman survival conditions make the refugee experience of Syrian women far more precarious and contingent. The new power relations are deeply gendered and are involved in the production and reproduction of violence in the private sphere (Amnesty International, 2014).

Locked within the poor periphery districts of the cities, many women experience discrimination based on gender or on their ethnic or religious background. Being a foreigner, a women and Syrian builds up numerous expanses for discrimination and exploitation. Thus, many single women avoid the critical gaze of locals in the small border cities (Armstrong and Jacobsen, 2015), and escape to cities such as Istanbul, Izmir or Antalya. Nevertheless, without sufficient resources for accommodation, the majority of single Syrian women in Istanbul have to pay extortionate rents for accomodation in bedsit rooms or abandoned depots without any basic sanitary conditions, heating, clean water or electricity. These are mostly situated in unsafe districts famous for their thriving black market economies, such as Tarlabasi, Yenikapi, Kumkapi and Küçükpazar. These districts accomodate criminals, sex workers, burglars and human and drug traffickers.

Nevertheless, for many single women and single mothers these districts are perceived as safer than living on the streets or being deported to camps. In 2014–2015, all of the refugees interviewed said they were afraid of forced encampment: 'Better die in Syria, than go to a camp' youngsters protested when we approached their house (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). For Syrian women, camps represent places of rape and SGBV: 'Women who live in the camps are known as dirty', said an 18-year-old woman who lived for four years in a tented camp called Ceylanpinar. She elaborated:

> We never could go to the toilet or bathroom alone, always accompanied by other family members or friends. We never could sleep all together, always

> some of us should keep guard of the tent. This is how we could survive there, but all this was very exhausting.[9]

Indeed, a study found that 71 per cent of the Syrian women in Gaziantep tent camps suffer nervousness, anxiety, sleeping disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (Alpak *et al.*, 2014). They want safety and self-sustainability through employment outside the camps, but the camps are located in border cities which lack any opportunities for employment (TBMM, 2012). That is why they move to Istanbul, an industrial city and financial capital where possibilities of finding a job and thus of being able to support themselves are higher. The situation had not changed very much in 2016, when Syrian refugees started to talk about their fears of radical Islamic military groups ruling the camps situated along the border zone with Syria. By 2016, refugees started to approach the camps as detention facilities for those who had not completed official registration, had infringed public order, lived on the streets or attempted to cross the border illegally.

Thus, rather than endure dependency and SGBV in the camps, Syrian women prefer to suffer the inhuman conditions of poor accomodation in Istanbul. However, usually left without financial resources, they have to tolerate further violence and exploitation in order to gain some kind of shelter in the big metropolis. Some women put up with rape by landlords in order to keep their rooms and/or jobs – or in some cases the jobs of their husbands, as in the case of a woman in Kucukpazar who endured sex with her husband's boss (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). Landlords subject Syrian women to violence and harassment on the grounds of their nationality and/or sexual orientation. Interviews with 18–20-year-old Syrian women in Aksaray showed that some landlords scutinize, control and threaten to evict Syrian women for allowing visits from Syrian men. Even when they settle in safer districts women have to live under the constant gaze of local neighbours.

Many Syrian single mothers rely on temporary charity or the mercy of Turkish or Kurdish neighbours or volunteers, but these relationships often result in religious or sexual and gender-based discrimination. In return for small food or second-hand clothes packages, most of the refugee women in Fatih and Bayramtepe are expected to join Quran meetings and send their children to Quran courses at the district mosque, or to obey the rules of the charity providers. Women know this aid is only temporary, feel oppressed and dependent, but in some cases such small amounts of aid saves their lives. Although communication between Syrian and Turkish women is rather limited and hierarchical, in some cases solidarity between Arabic-speaking Turkish women (usually from the border cities of Hatay or Antakya) and Syrian women, or between Kurdish women from Turkey and Kurdish women from Syria, provides a sound basis for solving problems of estrangement and for finding solutions for everyday problems. A Syrian woman teacher in Fatih relied on her neighbours' understanding and support to take care of her disabled husband and small children.[10] Another strategy employed by single mothers to provide for their children is to send them to local free of payment boarding schools. Turkmen refugee mothers in

Başakşehir send their boys to unregistered local boarding Islamic Quran schools in order to keep them free from hunger and to provide them with shelter. This was the only way they could work and earn money to rent a house.[11] These schools are usually illegal and are not inspected by the Ministry of Education; thus, there are many rumours about the use of threats and violence.

Social exploitation: 'cabuk, cabuk works', child labour and sex workers

War and exile has transformed the performance of traditional gender roles and everyday domestic labour. Crossing borders, finding refuge and building a safe life are the main challenges that confront Syrian women. According to AFAD data, 22 per cent of Syrian women and 5 per cent of Syrian children are registered as head of their families. About 87 per cent of Syrian women do not have an income-generating occupation and 97 per cent had not been able to earn an income in the previous month (AFAD, 2014). Nevertheless, under these conditions they have to take care of between three and five children. In exile, they find themselves in a struggle to protect their family, their children and the honour of the wider family. This is hard task to achieve in a century and in regions where masculinity is built upon the subjugation and implication of women in the gendered, class, and racist configurations of the political. Faced with the violence of the war economy, many Syrian women endeavour to provide food and shelter for their large families. Without any financial resources they have to find a way to arrange shelter and food for their children.

A 30-year-old woman in Şirinevler expressed her regret at sending her children to sell napkins and water and to beg on the streets (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). She said she wanted them to continue with their schooling, but this was the only way to pay the rent for the room and survive. Under conditions of structural violence, education is no longer an option; thus, women are forced to sacrifice their children's future. Studies related to informal labour show that employers prefer child workers who work 12 hours per day for lower salaries and less food, and are keen to obey and fear the boss ('Informal Immigrant Labour in Istanbul', 2016). Child workers work for €200 per month and are often not paid for many months (Akdeniz, 2014). According to a 'Work Safety and Health' parliamentary report, between 2013–2015 out of 144 immigrant workers killed at the workplace, 21 were women and 18 were children (İşçi Sağlığı ve İş Güvenliği Meclisi, 2015).

Although the Regulation for Employment of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection[12] provides opportunities for legal employment, the rules of the growing informal sector in Turkey prevail. Indeed, Syrian refugees who request legal employment are usually sacked because employers do not want to pay them the national minimal wage. Apart from some exceptions for upper-class Syrian refugees, informal employment is the only option left for most Syrian refugees who are often viewed as low-quality unskilled employees. This stereotyping has lowered the average wage of Syrian employees to around 300 Turkish lira

(€100) per month. Women refugees, in particular, are regarded as unskilled and often paid the lowest wages as they lack knowledge of the Turkish language because they live in the districts or stay at home: 'I have lived in Istanbul for three years, but I never saw it!', said a 40-year-old woman in Bayramtepe.[13]

When I called a women who runs an agency for babysitters and house servants, she advised me that young 14–18-year-old Syrian girls are the cheapest option, since they are satisfied with €100–200 per month: 'However, you will have to teach her everything since they are too primitive and do not know anything!', she added. While the cost of legally employing a nanny or maid from abroad (Bulgaria, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Ozbekistan, etc.) is around €700 per month (including social security and residence expenses), the cost of a Syrian nanny or maid is about €200–300.[14] Besides the prejudice and market-based mapping of Syrian women as low-skilled and cheap labour, lack of knowledge of the Turkish language is the major obstacle to self-realization and access to legal employment for Syrian women. A young, well-skilled 25-year-old Syrian woman, with knowledge of French and English and high-quality work experience in Syria, was rejected by universities and companies on the grounds that she did not know Turkish and wanted legal employment and a fair salary. Kurdish Syrian women have a better chance of finding a paid job at the Kurdish-owned manufacturers in Istanbul, but often these manufacturing plants are illegal and the bosses do not pay them (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). There are also small, informal manufacturing companies established by Syrian patrons who employ Syrian workers on low salaries.

Besides the low or unpaid salaries, Syrian women are very often faced with sexual abuse and harrasment at the workplace. One girl told me that she had left the restaurant where she worked becasuse of sexual harrasment by the owner. She was angry, because she did not want to marry but to work and help her mother make ends meet.[15] Aware of these problems, one Kurdish Syrian woman was working together with her daughters at the same textile manufacturer in Bag. When interviewed in spring 2014, they had not been paid for three months and felt squeezed between the boss and the landlord who was threatening to evict them because they had not paid their rent (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). This endless circle of structural violence, i.e. low/unpaid salaries or unemployment vs high rents, eliminates any hopes or dreams of building a future. Instead, Syrian women and children find themselves in a continuous struggle for survival (UAÖ, 2013).

Futures lost in the whirlpool of structural violence

This endless struggle for survival prevents children from accessing education as well. Although Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MONE) issued Circular 2014/21 and facilitated the registration of Syrian children in public schools, this is still problematic and left to the will of school directors who often reject applicants on the basis of lack of particular documents or because classes are full. There are no intensive preparatory Turkish language courses to facilitate

the adaptation of Syrian children to the Turkish school system. And there are no opportunities to compensate for the lost elementary school education (YUVA Association, 2014).

Since 2011, the Syrian elite has been establishing temporary education centres based on the Syrian official education programme. And since 2015, MONE has been accrediting these schools, though at the time of writing there are rumours that in 2017 they will be integrated into the Turkish education system and closed.[16] Although the cost of the schools is relatively low (around €40–60 per month), only a minority of Syrian families could to send their children to them. In 2014–2015, total primary and secondary enrolment in temporary education centres was 74,097 from camps and 101,257 from outside camps (HRW, 2015). A Syrian teacher who used to teach in one of these schools in Fatih was unable to pay for her son, because her low and temporary salary was not sufficient to cover rent, food and school.[17] Indeed, the circle of structural violence forces Syrian mothers to send their boys to work instead of to school. In October 2015, of nearly 1,300,000 children in the age range 0–17, there were approximately 708,000 Syrian refugee children of school age (5–17) in Turkey. Only 36,655 Syrian children were enrolled in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school in the Turkish public school system in the year 2014–2015. This number represents merely 6 per cent of the school-aged population among Syrian refugees in Turkey (HRW, 2015).

Children aged 12–17 who represent 14 per cent of the Syrian refugee population (i.e. 182,000 children), are a lost generation. They are no longer considered as children, either by Syrians themselves, or by the host society and government. The boys live under social exploitation, working for €15 per week (HRW, 2015), while girls who do not have access to education are left with only one option: to get married as early as possible. Childhood forced marriages became a survival strategy legitimized by the memory and trauma of the widespread SGBV against Syrian women during the war, border passages, camps and exile. Looking at her 12-year-old daughter serving us tea that smelled of gas because of the dirty water they are forced to use, Farida from Fatih said: 'I pray for my daugther to have her menstruation as late as possible, otherwise I will have to marry her, in order to save her…'. She was sad, felt sorry and so hopeless; she continued:

> But she is still child!, She is still child! I know! But what will we do if somebody does something bad to her? If our relatives in Syria and here heard about it? How we will return to our district, to our house after the war? How we will look at their eyes.[18]

This small child is going to be sacrificed for the sake of the family's honour, one fear of SGBV "prevented" by another form of SGBV and exploitation. Afraid of xenophobia and sexual abuse, Syrian women are often unwilling to send their daughters to school. One mother from Idlib said: 'I cannot send my daughter to the school. I have to protect her.…'[19] On the other hand, the victimisation and the discourse of vulnerability of young Syrian women provides the basis for the

legitimisation of virility and supremacy of the male in Turkey who feels free to buy, sell, abuse and enslave Syrian women. A young man from Nigde who was working at the bazaar in Bakirkoy was asked about his marriage: 'Who is the bride? Is she from Nigde as well?'. He replied as follows:

> …No! My father bought her for me, for 500 TL [Turkish lira], a Syrian girl.
> How old she is?
> 15 years old!
> Aren't there older [over the age of 18] girls in Nigde; why [did you buy] her? She has a mouth, but not tongue! Always loyal and silent. I do not let her go out, to not open her eyes! She fully depends on me! She is fully mine! Everybody buys Syrian brides! Give her some bread, and this is enough, no need for more…[20]

Gendered, ethnic and social exclusions as a poor, Syrian 15-year-old girl, set the stage for further marginalization and exploitation of women and LGBTI refugees. A strategy normalized by masculine cultural arguments and constituted by the structural violence of temporary protection, normalizes enslavement of and violence against Syrian children and women.

"Mouths without tongues": struggling for honour under masculine tolerance

For Syrian women in Turkey, the hardest task is guarding the honour of the family, i.e. to preserve the honour and morality of their daughters. Living in tents or semi-ruined houses without doors and windows means long sleepless nights. An 18-year-old girl from Ceylanpınar tent camp said:

> I am happy now in Istanbul, because after 4 years in a tent camp, for the first time I am living between four walls and locked door. There is a private toilet, now, I can sleep and go to the toilet alone, without any company, whenever I want.
>
> (Quoted in Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim 2015)

It is not so much the bombing, but the threat of sexual violence and exploitation that is raised as a major threat during women's flight across masculine borders and boundaries. Putting up with rape as a bribe for survival, border passages, accomodation or employment constitutes only the tip of the iceberg. Anonymous stories about Syrian women who have undergone SGBV uncovers lives in the shadows at border crossings and in the peripheries of metropolises. A significant proportion of the Syrian refugee women in Turkey had observed, heard about or experienced gender-based violence during their escape from the conflict in Syria and crossing the border.

The interviews and stories told show that the majority of the women came to Turkey already traumatized by the fear of experiencing or facing gender-based

violence. According to Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reports, between March 2011 and November 2013, 10,835 Syrian women and childreen lost their lives (3,614 were children) and 7,500 women were victims of gender-based violence (SNHR, 2014). According to refugee stories collected during a MAZLUMDER (Association for Human Rights and Solidarity with the Oppressed) field-study, all parties to the conflict in Syria exercized gender-based violence and exploitation. There are numerous stories of penniless mothers who had to leave their child-aged daughters as bribes to warriors, armed groups or border guards on their way to Turkey (MAZLUMDER, 2013).

The villages and suburbs of Damascus, Halep, Humus, İdlib and Deraa are known for the high number of women's deaths and disappearances. More than two million women are in a situation of internal displacement while millions more have crossed the borders to seek refuge abroad (Anadolu Agency, 2013). Moreover, according to data from the Prime Minister's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), 27 per cent of the Syrian women who reside in refugee camps in Turkey are single women and single mothers who lost their husbands or fathers in the conflict in Syria (AFAD, 2014). As Table 4.1 shows, the majority of the Syrian women and girls living in the camps are aged between 18–57 and 5–11, respectively. The number aged between 11–18 (15,710) is relatively low. There is no data on Syrian women who live outside the camps. However, there is certainly a lack of gender-sensitive organization of the settlement in the camps (Akyüz and Balamir Coşkun, 2014).

Almost all of the women interviewed told me that the camps are not safe places for women and especially for young girls, and they would prefer to live outside the camps. There were families that spent some months in the camps but left them in order to protect their unmarried daughters. The age breakdown of women in the camps shows that the number of girls of marriageable age is relatively low compared to other groups (see Table 4.1). Indeed, most of the women interviewed during our study in Istanbul had at least one daughter aged between 11–18 and were afraid of being forced to live in the camps.

A common refrain was families' differential treatment of adolescent boys vs girls, particularly the pronounced disciplining of young women's sexuality. Adolescent girls shoulder not only their families' reputations but also those of their entire ethnic group. The constant search for safety for the girls exemplifies the deep trauma that Syrian refugee women have undergone since the beginning of the war. Indeed, most of the women interviewed during our fieldwork tended to

Table 4.1 Age breakdown of Syrian refugee women living in camps in Turkey

0–4 years	*5–11 years*	*12–17 years*	*18–54 years*	*55–59 years*	*60+ years*	*Total Syrian women in camps*
18,958	21,765	15,710	46,663	No data available	4,072	107,168

Source: AFAD, 2014.

stay at home and the only place they knew was the nearby surrounding area. None of the women interviewed had ever taken a trip around Istanbul. There were cases in Bayramtepe of women who had been living in Istanbul for three years but had never left the district. Financial barriers (lack of money to buy a ticket) and fear (of being abused, etc.) are the main reasons for this.

Besides the lack of adequate language for communication, growing negative prejudices and xenophobia in the host society are the main factors that negatively impact on access to rights and services. For example, although access to health services is well planned, the hostile attitude towards Syrian women keeps them away from public hospitals. For example, pregnant Syrian women are accused of becoming pregnant while in exile: 'It is a shame to become pregnant in your situation, why you make babies in these conditions!' (Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim, 2015). Women who have the resources go to Syrian doctors or hospitals, and mostly tend to buy medicines trafficked from Syria. A majority of those interviewed recounted that they did not go anywhere to seek medical treatment and tried to put up with pain. Because of negative sentiments in the host society, most Syrian mothers do not leave their children on the streets in order to avoid any blame from neighbours who may be disturbed by the noise: 'The weather is nice, but I cannot leave my boys to go out, my daughters better stay home', said a Turkman women with three sons.[21] The best way to avoid discrimination is to avoid the streets, thus travelling directly between the home and the workplace is the favoured strategy adopted by most of these women.

As Hyndman states, violence is constituted, sustained and reproduced through institutions, practices and discourses (Hyndman, 2004). This seems even easier under the circumstances of legal and structural violence created under discriminatory charity-based approaches and policies. Similar to my findings on the role of charity actors in the production of gender-based discrimination and violence against African refugee women in Konya (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2011), violence against Syrian women, and Syrian refugees in general, seems also to be agglomerated via actions, practices and discourses of various non-state actors, especially some Islamic charity associations. Inherent biases, personal value systems and the marginalizing approach of the charity associations and charity givers that also keep detailed registers of the refugees, constitute significant sources of threat, especially to single Syrian women. During the interviews in Başakşehir, one Syrian refugee told me that various military groups from Syria used to keep registers of Syrian refugees living around Başakşehir, Bayramtepe, Celiktepe and Sahintepe in Istanbul. As most are informal, no accountable or engaged non-state actors can be charged for any direct or structural violence (Pickering and Gerard, 2014).

Besides women's rights NGOs such as KADAV, the IKGD Women Refugee Programme and ASAM workshops, there are very few instances of solidarity between local women and the Syrian women in Istanbul. There was a protest campaign by Muslim women against sexual harassment and exploitation of Syrian women in Turkey. However, as interviews with local conservative

women in contact with Syrian women show, there is a hierarchical relation based on a discourse of civilized local vs uncivilized Syrian women (Reyhane 2015).

Almost all the women interviewed expressed a desire to return to Syria, but they know this is only likely to happen far away in the distant future. Those who had lost any hope or desire for return and those who had the financial resources continued the dangerous "Crossing, no more!" movement to European countries.

Conclusion: masculine solutions for gender-based priorities

Nothing will be better in the near future! The night after the attempted coup in Turkey in July 2016, xenophobic and racist groups set fire to fifty Syrian houses and shops in Onder quarter in Ankara (JINHA 2016). President Erdogan's statement, granting Turkish citizenship to between 30,000 and 300,000 wealthy Syrian refugees, caused huge xenophobic debates and movements in the country. Groups and tweet campaigns against Syrıan refugees started and hate euphoria became powerful across the country. The hate speeches began to blame Syrian refugees for the terrorist bombings and insecurity in the country.

The legal, political and administrative procedures governing temporary protection in Turkey have placed Syrian refugees under protracted structural violence based on securitization, victimization, marginalization and minimal access to basic human rights. In every aspect of their lives, Syrian women are left to survive under the critical gaze and with the inadequate mercy of institutions and the humanitarian aid sector in Istanbul. The fear of lost shelter, encampment, sullied honour, deportation and sexual and social exploitation expose the main dimensions of structural violence that Syrian women experience in Istanbul.

The administrative and economic reproduction of poverty (high costs of accommodation, social exploitation) and the discursive construction of Syrian women as hopeless victims are governmental strategies for the justification and normalization of SGBV against Syrian women in Turkey. In this way violence and power relations become mutually constituted in all social spaces related to urban refugee lives. The threat of sexual violence and exploitation is used as a tool of control, intimidation and humiliation throughout the conflict and while in exile (Freedman, 2015). In this way any policies based on self-sufficiency, self-realization and self-sustainability are obscured. Confined within narrow administrative and legal boundaries women develop their own strategies of "exit or choice", i.e. leave for Europe or survive under solutions suggested by cultural essentialism and local hierarchies: the violence of early marriages, women trafficking and sexual and social exploitation normalized as temporary survival strategies that in fact never end. Nevertheless, five years after the start of the war, when the municipalities and the other administrative units and local women's NGOs started to offer support, we have started to see more cases of women's self-sustainability initiatives headed by Syrian women or by Turkish–Syrian women's partnerships (Unal, 2015).

Notes

1 The interviews were conducted with Zeynep Kivilcim during our fieldwork study on Syrian women and LGBTI refugees in Istanbul; they are published in Özgür Baklacıoğlu and Kivilcim (2015).
2 Conversation with 50-year-old S.Y. in Bakirkoy, 10 July 2016.
3 During fieldwork in Basaksehir, I interviewed women members of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [Justice and Development Party]) local women's organisation. One of the women was a former Syrian immigrant who had found refuge in Turkey during the 1980s. During the interviews, she was very angry with the Syrian refugee women.
4 The Turkish government announced the 'First Stage Assessment of Covering 2016–2018 Period for Syrians with Temporary Protection in Turkey' in March 2016. This estimated that the cost of services and humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees would reach €19.13 billion by 2018. For previous data see AFAD, 'Suriye Insani Yardim Raporu', 10 October 2014.
5 Conversation with a representative of the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) during the EurAsia Higher Education Summit (EURIE) panel on Syrian children, May 2016. See also Suriyelilere 'Yabanci Kimlik Numarasi' Verilmesine Iliskin Duyuru, 22 December 2015, www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/suriyelilere-%E2%80%9Cyabanci-kimlik-numarasi%E2%80%9D-verilmesine-iliskin-duyuru_350_360_8912_icerik.
6 'Cinsel istismar mağduru çocuk, istismarcısı ile evlendirilecek', *IndIgo Dergisi*, 17 May 2016, https://indigodergisi.com/2016/05/cinsel-istismar-magduru-cocuk-istismarcisi-ile-evlendirilecek/.
7 Fahri Gökçen Taner, 'A Multiple Layered Solution Proposal After the Decisions of the Constitutional Court Related to Child Sexual Abuse and Religious Ceremony of Marriage, *TBB Dergisi*, 222–246, http://tbbdergisi.barobirlik.org.tr/m2016–124–1574.
8 Personal interview with a social worker in KADAV, Istanbul, June 2016.
9 Interview with an 18-year-old Syrian woman who had lived in Ceylanpinar tent camp for four years and fled to Istanbul three months before the interview, Tarlabasi, 13 December 2014.
10 Interview with a Syrian woman teacher in Fatih, October 2014.
11 Interview with a Turkmen Syrian mother, Balat, İstanbul, 9 May 2015.
12 Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine Dair Yönetmelik, 2016/8375.
13 Interviews with Syrian women in Bayramtepe, May 2014.
14 Interview with a housemaid commissioner in Istanbul, May 2014.
15 Interviews with Syrian women in Sahintepe, May 2014.
16 Note from a conversation with a representative and Arabic translator at the Istanbul National Education Directorate, April 2016:

> We were trying to register six boys above the age of nine in a public school in Okmeydanı. They were not accepted because they did not understand Turkish and had not completed the first three years of elementary education. We were advised that the elementary schools of the temporary education centres would be closed and integrated with the public schools. In the end, the boys lost hope in their education.

17 Interview with a Syrian teacher in Fatih, April 2014.
18 Interview with Farida in Fatih, April 2014.
19 Interviews with Syrian mothers in Bayramtepe, Fatih, Başakşehir and Sahintepe, May 2014.
20 Dialogue with S. Yuksek in Bakirkoy, 10 July 2016.
21 Interview with a Turkmen Syrian mother, Balat, İstanbul, 9 May 2015.

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5 'Trust no one, beware of everyone'

Vulnerabilities of LGBTI refugees in Lebanon

Henri Myrttinen, Lana Khattab and Charbel Maydaa

While the field of gender and conflict has tended to focus on issues faced by women and girls and recently also on men and boys (almost always assumed to be heterosexual), the situations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and communities in conflict-affected contexts has generally speaking been under-researched. Recent research on the gendered impact of the displacement of Syrian refugees into neighbouring countries has also, for the most part, failed to meaningfully include LGBTI vulnerabilities and needs. This chapter aims to fill an analytical gap in the literature, by drawing attention to the specific vulnerabilities and subsequent needs LGBTI individuals and communities face in the refugee setting of Lebanon. These include dealing with the physical and emotional trauma of war and displacement, often compounded by the need to hide one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity; harassment, pressure and violence from security services, host communities and other refugees; and a lack of access to economic opportunities, services and aid. The case of Lebanon also highlights the need to look more closely at the complexities contained within the broader category of "LGBTI", as Syrian LGBTI refugees enter a country which not only has its own LGBTI community, but also hosts those from Iraqi and Palestinian refugee populations, affluent ex-pats and poorer migrant workers.

Introduction

> According to the participants of the discussion, there is one clear [piece of] advice they would give to people in similar situations: 'Trust no one, beware of everyone'.

This is the somewhat sobering, and in many ways disheartening, summarising quote that came at the end of a focus group discussion (FGD) with several Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian lesbian and bisexual women as well as transgender men, which echoed the experiences aired in previous FGDs with Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Lebanese gay and bisexual men as well as transgender women on their lives in Lebanon.[1] Identifying – or being identified by others – as LGBTI often adds additional layers of vulnerability, precariousness and danger

to lives which are already under threat in situations of violent conflict and displacement. As with other gendered vulnerabilities and power imbalances, pre-existing conditions of discrimination and exclusion of LGBTI persons are heightened and exacerbated in these situations.

To date, however, with few exceptions, the particular needs of LGBTI individuals and communities have largely not been examined in academic, policy or non-governmental organisation (NGO) deliberations on gender, conflict and peacebuilding (Hagen, 2016).[2] More research and policy attention has been paid to LGBTI in humanitarian disasters (e.g. Dominey-Howes *et al.*, 2014; Knight and Sollom, 2012; Mustafa *et al.*, 2015; Richards, 2010; Roeder, 2014) as well as displacement (see, for example, Couldrey and Herson, 2013), but even here the raising of LGBTI concerns and perspectives tends to be more the exception rather than the rule. An encouraging sign is that key international agencies such as the UNHCR (2015) are becoming increasingly aware of these issues, such as in the context of working with refugees in Lebanon (key informant interviews). Violence by Daesh/Islamic State against LGBTI persons in Iraq and Syria also had the effect of prompting the first United Nations Security Council debate ever on LGBTI rights in August 2015 (Al Jazeera, 2015).

This long-standing lack of attention to and interest in examining LGBTI issues is somewhat striking, considering that approaches championed by most peacebuilding actors, such as inclusive approaches, as well as rights- and needs-based approaches, would clearly call for these issues to be examined. A strong argument for taking these concerns, needs and perspectives into account comes from an inclusive, liberal understanding of peacebuilding. If one takes the premise that 'building inclusive, sustainable, and positive peace in societies affected by violent conflict requires analysing and addressing gendered power dynamics, as well as, gender roles and expectations' (Myrttinen *et al.*, 2014), then this should mean including, so far as possible, everyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identities (SOGI) and all gendered dynamics.

This approach is also close to rights-based approaches, according to which human rights apply to *all* members of society, without discrimination. Taking a needs-based approach should also lead to an examination of LGBTI concerns, as there are particular needs and vulnerabilities which other individuals and sectors of society do not face. Lastly, if intervening actors and agencies really do seek to give priority to the needs of the most vulnerable, then at least parts of the LGBTI community would often fall under this category – such as, for example, transgender or transsexual persons from poor socio-economic backgrounds, who are often reliant on sex work for survival (Rumbach and Knight. 2014). While LGBTI are often not able to form communities per se, apart from clandestine and essential networks of trust and mutual support, this is not always the case. In the case of a flood prevention programme in Islamabad, Pakistan, for example, one of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods was a third gender *hijra* settlement with around 5,000 inhabitants (Mustafa *et al.*, 2015)

Apart from the conceptual and ethical reasons for examining LGBTI issues for their own sake, investigating them can also give us valuable insights into

other gendered dynamics which perpetuate violent conflict. Across the planet, militant xenophobic, ultra-nationalist and hard-line factions of all major world religions have used the issue of LGBTI rights as a rallying point for broader campaigns against increased gender equality, democratisation or other processes seen as a threat to "traditional" patriarchal cultural mores. On the other side of the debate, espousal of LGBTI rights has been used by far-right groups in Western Europe as a cudgel against migrants, especially those from Muslim societies, not out of concern for LGBTI rights but rather arising from Islamophobia.

At the micro-level, examining the violence against and shunning of LGBTI individuals can be revealing about the gendered ideologies and fears of the perpetrators. Furthermore, trans- and homophobic violence can act as a very effective early warning indicator of violent conflict (Ekvall, 2016). Thus, investigating LGBTI issues, including anti-LGBTI sentiment and violence, can be a way of getting to the heart of dominant heteronormative gender ideologies, of understanding how these perpetuate violence and unequal power relations, and how they are driven by personal and communal insecurities and fears of the other. Examining the mobilising power of these issues for individuals and groups also leads to a better understanding of the dynamics of potentially violent moral panics and how these can be countered.

In terms of the terminology used here, we shall use the LGBTI acronym as it is a broadly recognised one, although it is not always universally espoused, including by some organisations working for SOGI rights.[3] It is not a perfect fit and not only leaves out many local identities not covered by the more "Western" categories of the acronym, but also does not cover those who do not necessarily identify as LGBTI but may face similar issues of discrimination, vulnerabilities and violence. These include, for example, men who have sex with men (MSM) or women who have sex with women (WSW) but do not identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual; or, for example, men and women who become targets of homo- or transphobic violence for being seen by others as not conforming to expectations of "real" manhood or womanhood. The latter has for example been the case in Iraq, before the rise of Daesh/Islamic State, where men accused of being too "effeminate" and women of being too masculine (and therefore suspected of being gay or lesbian) based on their mannerisms, sartorial style, haircut or the like, faced violence, including death, from family and community members, state security forces and militias (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

On the whole, gay men have been globally much more visible in research (and campaigning) on LGBTI issues followed by male to female trans- women, with lesbians, trans- men, bisexuals and intersex persons getting far less attention. Examining why this is so is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it does raise important questions (see for example Richards, 2010, on how these dynamics, coupled with race and class, can also come into play in terms of post-disaster reconstruction). In some cases, (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2014), the reason given for exclusively examining gay men ('Lesbians are more difficult to find in Syria's closeted culture') seems somewhat simplistic and disingenuous. A further research gap, but one which came up time and again in our interviews

and FGDs, was the need to *not* view LGBTI as a homogenous group, but to understand in more depth how lesbian women, gay men, bisexual women and men, trans- and intersex persons face different challenges, and also understand these in an intersectional way: age, class, appearance, social capital (e.g. having or not having *wasta*),[4] location, education, marital status, having or not having official papers, religious and ethnic background as well as nationality, all intersect with SOGI to determine the degree of vulnerability and extent of agency.

This chapter is based on a literature review, participatory observation and a series of interviews and FGDs with Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Lebanese lesbian, gay, bisexual women and men, and trans women and men, as well as service providers in Lebanon. The research was carried out during September–November 2015 by researchers from the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality – Middle East and North Africa (AFE MENA) and the MENA Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity-building (MOSAIC), and was commissioned by International Alert. Given small sample sizes due to the limited scope of the study, the findings should not be taken as being a full survey of issues surrounding LGBTI refugees in Lebanon, but rather as an initial, indicative study which will hopefully lead to and catalyse further, broader and more in-depth research.

Experiences of violence

> No reason in this life will make me think to go back to Syria, whether there is war or not. My problem is not just the war.
> ('Mary', transgender woman from Aleppo, upon being re-settled in Canada; quoted in Secker, 2015)

There are few reliable reports of LGBTI lives in pre-civil war Syria and current reports which contrast a "secular, tolerant" Syria of the pre-war era with the current repression by groups such as Daesh/Islamic State may present, to a degree, a distorted and overly positive view of the past. The level of direct targeting and killing of LGBTI individuals was not at the level it is at now and pockets of LGBTI communities existed prior to the outbreak of the civil war; however, LGBTI individuals in Syria did, by most accounts, risk harassment, violence and repression from official state actors, wider society and also, potentially, family members – the latter in the name of "family honour" (Austrian Red Cross/Accord, 2009; also confirmed in our interviews and FGDs).

Homosexuality was criminalised in pre-war Syria and still is today. Article 520 of the penal code of 1949 prohibits homosexual relations, and notes the following: 'carnal relations are against the order of nature'. Punishment for this "crime" is imprisonment for at least three years (West, 2016). Syrian LGBTI individuals have been, and are still, potential targets for harassment by Syrian security services and most individuals therefore live out alternative approaches to SOGI in secrecy (West, 2016). Furthermore, religious and social stigma means that being known as a LGBTI individual has created risks not only for

the individual, but also for nuclear and extended family members who might face restrictions on social interaction and professional opportunities (West 2016).

While individuals were able to adapt by essentially living double lives and engaging with an underground "scene" or community, this was always a risky endeavour to a degree, especially for those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, those who were seen to be "too visibly" LGBTI and those lacking requisite wasta. Likely, the situation will have been easier in urban compared to rural areas, though this is mere speculation in the absence of research. Some gay Syrian male respondents in our FGDs who were from Damascus reported being able to live "normal" lives even after the outbreak of the war so long as they remained inconspicuous, and several had fled from rural areas to Damascus before continuing to Lebanon. A large number of our respondents, especially bisexual and lesbian women, were in seemingly "normal" heterosexual marriages (as defined by dominant social norms) as women had and have less social leeway if they are unmarried than younger men. As one female FGD participant put it: 'We chose to marry in order to silence society [i.e. end gossip and other forms of social pressure] and live in hell, but that is our only choice.'

Pre-war Syria also hosted LGBTI refugees, both Iraqi and Palestinian. According to a pre-war op-ed in the *Guardian* newspaper (Littauer, 2010), the Syrian state security apparatus began cracking down more intensely on Syrian and refugee Iraqi LGBTI individuals about 6–12 months before the outbreak of the civil war, which is an interesting correlation with respect to the hypothesis noted above (Ekvall, 2016) of increasing homophobia being a potential early warning indicator of violent conflict.

Although pre-war Syria was a restrictive place for LGBTI, individuals and smaller groups had been able to build up their own support and coping mechanisms. As Rumbach and Knight (2014) point out, one of the first impacts of disaster on LGBTI individuals and communities is often the loss and collapse of these informal community or peer support systems. The situation was exacerbated in Syria not only by more intense crackdowns by the state security apparatus and associated militias, but also by non-state actors that espoused increasingly narrow and intolerant readings of social or Islamic gender norms. These included the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra and Daesh/Islamic State, with the latter making public spectacles (including internet distributions) of its executions of suspected homosexuals (Human Rights Watch, 2014, 2015; Outright Action International, 2016; Secker, 2015; responses from interviews and FGDs).

Respondents in our FGDs reported more government surveillance of LGBTI social media sites after the outbreak of the civil war and both state and non-state actors seeking to entrap users through "dummy" accounts (see also Saul, 2015 on Daesh/Islamic State using similar tactics). Some gay men had been forced to regularly provide sexual services to male members of the police and armed forces in return for protection lest they risk "outing" and/or violence (responses from interviews and FGDs).

However, LGBTI individuals were not only threatened by armed actors; they also often continued to face the threat of rejection and violence from other community members as well as family members, at times after they had been forcibly "outed" by armed groups (Human Rights Watch 2014, 2015; responses from interviews and FGDs). Gay male respondents also reported being blackmailed by men they had had sex with, who threatened to "out" them. Many continued to try and live their lives as best as possible, with women especially remaining under the legally and socially protective cover of heterosexual marriages (responses from interviews and FGDs). Worsening overall living conditions, the violence of the war but also increasing direct targeting of LGBTI friends and acquaintances, and in some cases death threats (including one who had been deemed to be 'blasphemous' for singing too often), had all compelled our respondents to flee to Lebanon.

Fleeing out of/into violence

Many of the responses of our interviewees and FGD respondents echo Ulrike Krause's (2015) research on the 'continuums of violence' that displaced people fleeing from violence face, being subjected to violence not only in their country of origin but also during various phases of the flight and upon arrival in the "safe" country – which may indeed not turn out to be a very safe haven. In the context of direct exposure to violent conflict, vulnerability to violence, harassment and discrimination is dependent on one's socio-economic status, the degree of protection one has through social connections and the extent to which one is able to "pass" as non-LGBTI as opposed to being "read' as LGBTI by others, regardless of one's actual SOGI. Many of our respondents reported harassment (including sexual harassment), insults and experiencing violence at the hands of Syrian state forces and armed groups but also by the Lebanese General Security Forces (*Sûreté Générale* – responsible for border and immigration control). Some had had their documents confiscated by Syrian forces, leaving them in legal limbo in Lebanon.

The Lebanese government introduced new requirements for obtaining residency documents in January 2015, and since this time the majority of Syrian refugees have become illegal. Registration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not sufficient for staying legally in Lebanon. Instead, a number of additional conditions need to be met and a US$200 annual fee needs to be paid for each individual permit. In September 2015, 56 per cent of the refugees did not have valid paperwork, and this number is said to have reached over 70 per cent by the end of the year (Slavova, 2015).

Syrian refugees, regardless of SOGI, face legal restrictions on working and are largely unable to access the formal Lebanese labour market. Most Syrians work in the informal economy without the necessary papers (International Labour Organization, 2014). In order to receive residency permits in Lebanon, Syrian refugees who are registered with the UNHCR need to provide a notarised pledge not to work and those who are not registered are required to provide a 'pledge of

responsibility' signed by a Lebanese national or registered entity to either obtain a work permit or sponsor an individual or family of Syrian refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

While these visa and residency restrictions affect all Syrians, the precarious situation of LGBTI individuals makes them even more vulnerable. This includes restrictions on their mobility if they face security threats based on their sexual orientation or a high risk of harassment by security institutions in Lebanon if they are stopped and found to be without papers. Lebanon is not deporting any Syrians back to Syria at the time of writing and they do not make any exceptions for LGBTI individuals. Several LGBTI refugees have been resettled in safe third countries, as discussed in more detail below.

Lebanon, or more particularly the cosmopolitan parts of Beirut, has long had a reputation as a relatively LGBTI-friendly space in the Arab world, with this reputation at times going further than the reality on the ground. Homosexuality is not illegal per se, nor are there any laws against transgender and transsexual identities. Article 534 of the Lebanese penal code which prohibits 'sexual relations that contradict the laws of nature' has nevertheless been used in the past to prosecute homosexual activities. However, in 2014 a judge in Jdeideh ruled in favour of a transgender man, arguing that the Article could not be used against LGBTI, as homosexual behaviour was not against the laws of nature (Al-Akhbar, 2014; Economist, 2014). The Internal Security Forces (ISF), as the Lebanese police force is called, has in the past used anal examinations to "prove" male homosexual acts, but this was banned in 2012 (Khattab and Myrttinen, 2014). However, allegations persist of the ISF illegally using – or threatening to use – these examinations (Whithnall, 2014).

Police officers and members of other state institutions have in the past used the law and the threat of making an individual's sexual or gender identity public for extortion purposes, and LGBTI rights organisations have documented numerous cases of homo- and transphobic harassment, sexual abuse and violence (Khattab and Myrttinen, 2014). LGBTI individuals also face verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual violence, exploitation and homo- and transphobic violence, including threats thereof, from members of the public, even in areas of Beirut considered more cosmopolitan, such as Gemmayzeh or Hamra (Duncan, 2011; FGD respondents; Gagné and Qubaia, 2013).

The degree of freedom in terms of SOGI has always been, as mentioned above for pre-war Syria, different for those with greater wealth, wasta and other necessary forms of social capital (e.g. in terms of style, fashion and speech) compared to those with less – for urban, university educated, gay men more than for rural, lesbian women with little formal education; for those able to "blend in" more than for those who "stick out". Levels of acceptance also have differed depending on class and location and between different ethno-religious communities, but also based on the degree of personal acceptance by family and community members (for a differentiated reading of Lebanese LGBTI history, see, for example, Allouche, 2016; Farah, 2015; Gagné and Qubaia, 2013; Saleh and Qubaia, 2015). Nonetheless, the relative openness of especially the more

cosmopolitan scenes in Beirut has long acted as a magnet for LGBTI from across the region seeking a less hostile environment (Duncan, 2011).

The experiences of Syrian LGBTI refugees in Lebanon also need to be seen in the broader historical context of Lebanon, its relations with Syria and its history of hosting Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations, of which there are, at the time of writing, officially around 450,000 and 10,000, respectively.[5] While Lebanon has rightly been praised for hosting one of the largest Syrian refugee populations (over one million) while others have closed their borders, this has not been without its frictions. In part, the relationship is coloured by the previous, and often highly conflictual, relationship which Lebanon as a host country has had with other refugee populations, especially the Palestinians, who played an active role in the 1975–1990 Lebanese Civil War (Johnson, 2001).

Possibly to a greater degree, however, relations between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community are influenced by the role which Syria and Syrians have played in Lebanese society and history. From the end of the Civil War until the so-called Cedar Revolution, Syria was a de facto occupying power in Lebanon, and some of the 'hatred' the respondents in our research reported encountering from Lebanese people may be due to long-standing resentments stemming from this history (see also Allouche, 2016). Syria has also historically been a source of unskilled labour for the Lebanese economy, resulting in Syrians being looked down upon as social unequals, as uneducated and potentially dangerous, a dynamic which has been reinforced by the influx of Syrian refugees. As Qubaia and Gagné (2014) put it: 'Syrian male refugees are at the bottom of this [social] order, and viewed as dangerously sexual and hyper-masculinised, rapacious, morally bankrupt, and flat out criminal.' Syrian women, meanwhile, are in part also cast as a danger to Lebanese social mores and morality, based on fears that they will engage in sex work and/or become wives or second wives of Lebanese men – fears which in some of our previous research were especially held by more rural Lebanese women, especially in northern parts of the country (Khattab and Myrttinen, 2014).

The experiences of LGBTI refugees in Lebanon in part echo some of the broader problems and vulnerabilities faced by Syrian refugees, but are also in part exacerbated by their SOGI status. The experiences and challenges are also very different across the whole refugee population, depending on how much of a social network they have in Lebanon (many Syrians have family ties to the country), their social class, clan and religious background. Also, conditions vary greatly between those who live dispersed in urban areas (some with and some without access to affordable housing) and those who live in what are officially termed informal tented settlements (ITS).[6] In the ITS, refugees tend to be from similar geographical areas and share a religious/clan background; social structures as well as gender norms from Syria tend to be replicated to a degree.[7] Thus, it is likely that LGBTI refugees living in urban settings, especially Beirut, have at least potentially more social freedom than those living in ITS.

Common problems raised by our respondents and shared by other refugees regardless of their SOGI status included facing harassment and open resentment

from the Lebanese population, struggling to pay extortionate rents, lack of documentation or unclear legal status and difficulties in finding employment as well as lack of knowledge about and access to services. Of the service providers interviewed as part of this research, most did not collect information about the SOGI status of their beneficiaries, but they estimated that around 10 per cent were LGBTI, and among those offering targeted support to LGBTI individuals such as on sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/Aids, this rises to over 80 per cent (key informant interviews).

In addition to the more common problems faced by Syrian refugees across the board, LGBTI individuals also face particular SOGI-related issues. While there are some specialised services for LGBTI refugees, these may be more difficult to access for those in ITS compared to those in urban environments; the difficulties include the risk of being spotted accessing these tailored services by other refugees. This is especially the case for transsexual and transgender refugees and refugee agencies routinely relocate them from the ITS in the Bekaa valley to Beirut so that they do not become targets of violence.[8] Also, lesbian and bisexual women from socially more conservative families may face increased difficulties in accessing tailored services due to social norms, especially that against younger women moving out of the household confines when not accompanied by a male relative. Female and trans FGD participants reported landlords demanding sex for renting flats, and one transgender woman who had been thrown out of previous flats because of her appearance ended up having to provide sexual services to an older man in exchange for renting a space (by the time of the FGD she had been able to relocate to a flat-share with friends and acquaintances).

Finding employment is a key survival concern for all refugees in Lebanon, and again those with less social capital and fewer connections, as well as those seen as too "flamboyant", were at a distinct disadvantage in the labour market. Both Lebanese and Syrian bisexual and lesbian women respondents reported repeated sexual advances and harassment by male employers and also university lecturers, and a mention of one's sexual preferences would lead to the men demanding that the women bring a female lover and perform sex acts in front of them (FGD respondents).

A number of the male as well as transsexual and transgender refugees had taken to informal sex work to survive, which is precarious due to its illegality and risk of violence and STIs. A further option for gay and non-gay refugees has been working in hamams (steam baths), some of which also serve cruising purposes. Employees at the hamams are often not paid a salary and subsist on the tips left to them by patrons, though the hamams may also provide a place to sleep. A raid of the Al-Agha hamam in August 2014, in which 27 people were arrested, highlighted the risks of this work but also the differentials in vulnerability between different LGBTI men as well as those suspected of being gay due to having been in the hamam (LebMASH, 2014; Wansa, 2014).

The raid was triggered after a gay Syrian refugee was questioned, subjected to physical and verbal abuse and his telephone messages screened by General

Security. This led to a raid of the hamam by the ISF, with many of those arrested reporting severe verbal and physical abuse, much of the former homophobic in nature. Syrians who had been working in the hamam were also racially abused (Wansa, 2014). The degree of abuse suffered by those arrested also highlighted the differentiation by nationality, income level and wasta as well as "flamboyance". Lebanese and those with enough connections and money were able to extricate themselves from the situation relatively easily, while those with less social and financial capital, Syrians (whether they self-identified as gay or not) as well as a transgender person were imprisoned (interviews quoted in Khattab and Myrttinen, 2014). In prison, they were subjected to verbal abuse and physical violence both by prison staff and other inmates, and those not able to pay US$300–500 were forced to spend the night in the toilet (Wansa, 2014).

According to Allouche (2016), and echoed also in interviews and in Farah (2015), discrimination even occurs in everyday interactions in what could be assumed to be "safe" spaces, such as within the gay scene itself. Syrian gay men are seen as being "bottom", as being uncouth and insufficiently urbane, or as too effeminate or "queeny". As one of the co-authors observed, the most tolerant group was that of transgender and transsexual persons, who did not actively differentiate based on nationality or background, whether it be Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian or Iraqi.

Most Syrian LGBTI individuals consider their stay in Lebanon to be temporary and aspire to move to perceived LGBTI-friendly countries in Europe and North America. Transwomen in particular perceive Lebanon as a "transit" country as they face high levels of discrimination and cannot undergo gender transition there. Different social variables including social class play a role in making the decision to leave the country, as an economically well off Syrian gay individual living in Beirut might find living conditions in Lebanon easier than an economically vulnerable transwoman living in the Bekaa.

While access to international protection for Syrian LGBTI individuals is still limited, awareness about the need for such measures is growing. The realities on the ground are difficult, as many LGBTI individuals reside in Lebanon with their families and would not disclose their sexual and gender identities to caseworkers, who are mostly Lebanese or Syrian themselves, due to fear of stigmatisation, retribution or of being reported to authorities. While many international organisations providing protection in Lebanon are aware of LGBTI needs, social realities on the ground mean that this does not easily get translated into practice. Lesbian women and transmen Syrian refugees have least access to international protection, while transwomen often do have access as they tend to be "rejected" by their families. That said, collaboration between UNHCR and national organisations providing protection such as MOSAIC is increasing, as referral systems are set up. Services provided to Syrian LGBTI refugees include, for instance, safe houses, legal aid, psychosocial support and drama therapy.

Resettlement into third countries for Syrian LGBTI refugees does take place but the process is not without its hurdles. While LGBTI refugees are prioritised

for resettlement, many Syrian LGBTI individuals are not aware of this or refuse to speak about their sexual and gender identities in the first place. Only Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR are eligible for resettlement programmes, so those Syrian LGBTI refugees who are not registered cannot be resettled. In May 2015, the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded that UNHCR stop registering Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the agency has in practice stopped doing so.[9] For Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, resettlement into third countries is on a case by case basis with serious threats to an individual's life taking precedence over other circumstances.

Glimmers of hope

While this chapter has so far highlighted many of the negative experiences and ongoing challenges, the discrimination against and persecution of LGBTI people in Syria itself but also in Lebanon, there are also positive findings. Despite the difficulties of refugee life, as a Syrian transgender refugee now living in Beirut put it: 'in spite of it all, at least here I can live, and openly be who I really am'.

Our research has also shed light on advances in the LGBTI community in Lebanon as well as many prospective steps to better ensure the well-being of vulnerable and marginalised communities. The research highlighted that many local NGOs are increasingly adopting anti-discriminatory approaches towards sexual minorities in Lebanon, be they LGBTI refugees or those from the Lebanese host communities, even if some of these approaches have not yet been anchored in official policies. This is a positive achievement as it helps minimise prejudice and discrimination in the realm of service provision and maximises health, psychological and livelihood benefits for those in need. More importantly, some NGOs, such as Oui Pour La Vie, have dedicated much effort towards tailoring their services specifically to members of the LGBTI community. According to the organisation, 95 per cent of those benefiting from free HIV and STI testing are members of the LGBTI communities (both refugees and host population), and all services are provided with special care to ensure respect, anonymity and confidentiality.

While our FGDs highlighted the struggles faced by LGBTI refugees, many participants also said they had developed a sense of solidarity with other members of the community, including across citizenship lines. They were providing and receiving assistance and advice to and from their peers in order to build more resilience in a community that is facing ostracism and exploitation. This support has helped them build their own capacities and self-confidence, and helps them empower others. It also means a rebuilding and reconfiguration of informal support networks that were destroyed by war and displacement.

What was also apparent from the research was that LGBTI individuals, when provided with suitable safe spaces, are willing to disclose private information about their lives, or about their alternative sexual orientations and/or gender identities – even when the sessions were held in spaces provided by charities

that have a religious background that might be seen as an obstacle (in this case, Catholic). Thus, respectful and non-discriminatory approaches by service providers can go a long way towards creating trust.

Another positive outcome has been the emergence of service providers in Lebanon which provide medical as well as financial support for LGBTI individuals who have been victims of violence or abuse, or are considered to be a high risk case, in order to improve their living conditions. Some of these associations are even attempting to provide employment opportunities for LGBTI, especially to refugees of Syrian origin.

Conclusion

Our research sought to explore not only the particular needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTI refugees – which have often been neglected in research, policy and programming – but also to highlight some of the intersectional issues within and between LGBTI individuals and those who might not self-identify as LGBTI but are assumed by others to be so. Some of the needs and vulnerabilities are shared in common by refugees, others are particular to LGBTI people, and yet others are specific to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex refugees. The case of Syrian as well as other refugees in Lebanon raises a number of these issues but also, on a more positive note, highlights advances in responses by the community itself, by local civil society organisations but also to a degree by international agencies. The research also brought out the 'continuum of violence' and discrimination faced by refugees not only in their country of origin but during their flight and in the supposed safe haven – including at times from who might be expected to give the most support, such as family members or other members of the LGBTI community. This highlights the need to counter trans- and homophobia, but also the sheer lack of understanding of LGBTI issues at various levels, from service providers, to security forces, to host communities and families and, above all, the need to tackle the gendered roots of violent conflict in the first place.

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Notes

1 The FGDs were conducted between September and November 2015 as part of a larger research project by International Alert on conflict-affected LGBTI. The FGDs included Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian LGBTI persons in Beirut, in addition to which a series of key informant interviews were conducted with service providers.

2 A remarkable exception in the regard is the report by the Colombian Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2015) on LGBTI in the Colombian armed conflict. In our own work

we have also sought to address the issue; for example, in López Castañeda and Myrttinen (2014), Myrttinen *et al.*, (2014), Naujoks and Myrttinen (2014) and Naujoks (2016).

3 We are very aware of the lively debates around terminology and how contested terms are; we have settled for LGBTI here as, over the course of our broader research on the issue, some of our southern partners have objected to the use of "Q" (for queer) as a term that was relevant mostly to a Global North context.

4 'Wasta' refers to having personal connections, or clout, that one can rely on to get things done, especially with respect to state authorities.

5 The figures, especially for Palestinian refugees, are quite possibly not an accurate representation of reality, as many Palestinian refugees officially registered in Syria have fled to Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

6 Refugees in Lebanon are not housed in large-scale camps per se, unlike for example in Jordan or Turkey.

7 Interview with researcher working on Syrian refugees in Lebanon; Beirut, May 2016.

8 Interviews with service providers; Beirut, May 2016.

9 Hala Helou, Advisor to the Minister on Humanitarian and International Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon at the London School of Economics and Political Science workshop 'The Long-term Challenges of Forced Migration: Local and Regional Perspectives from Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq', 16 June 2016, London.

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6 Gender, social class and exile

The case of Syrian women in Cairo

Maysa Ayoub

Introduction

Egypt is a sending, receiving and transit country. Historically, it was known as a land of immigrants rather than emigrants as it has been home to many refugee populations including Armenians and Palestinians. During the oil boom of the 1970s, Egypt became a major labour supply country to the Gulf States. And in the 1990s, a considerable number of forced migrants from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea came to Egypt, fleeing wars in their countries. Today, Egyptian emigration to the Gulf continues, albeit at a slower rate; Egyptian emigration to Europe is taking place, both regularly and irregularly, and Egypt continues to receive forced migrants from neighbouring countries, including the recent inflow of Syrians after 2011, many of whom are hoping to return to their countries once the situation permits though many others are using Egypt as a transit country to other destinations. Given the fact that Egypt is a developing country struggling to meet the needs of its own population, very few migrants aim to stay in Egypt permanently (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012).

Most refugees settle in Cairo, the capital of Egypt and its most populated city (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). There is a rich literature on refugees that documents the living experiences of the different refugee groups in Cairo. This includes research with Somalis (Al-Sharmani, 2003), Palestinians (El-Abed, 2003), Sudanese (Grabska, 2006; Ayoub *et al.*, 2012), Iraqis (Fargues *et al.*, 2008) and recently Syrians (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). Most of these studies include a section that focuses specifically on the experiences of refugee women. However, in doing so, they treat women as a single category ignoring the impact of social class on the experience of being a refugee woman in a transit country.

The Syrian case in Egypt in particular necessitates an analysis of the impact of class on the experience of exile. Research with Syrians documents that a considerable number of those who fled to Egypt following the crisis belong to an affluent class who do not perceive themselves to be "refugees". With the continuation and escalation of the Syrian conflict, Syrians belonging to a range of economic classes started to arrive in Egypt. Research highlighted the involvement of the early comers, particularly women, in helping and assisting the less fortunate (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). How does class impact on the experience

of being a refugee? To what extent does "class identity" overshadow "refugee identity"? To what extent are the gender problems faced by Syrian women in Cairo directly linked to class? How does the refugee experience impact on gender relations and gender identity and how does this differ according to class?

To answer these and other questions, this chapter adopts an intersectional analysis, which 'begins with the experiences of groups that occupy multiple social locations and find approaches and ideas that focus on the complexity rather than the singularity of human experience' (Dill and Zambrana, 2009, 2). This analysis is considered a new approach to studying the experiences and struggles of marginalized people. One of the assumptions of this approach is that inequality is not derived from one element such as race, ethnicity, class or gender but rather from the intersection of these elements. This intersection 'place[s] specific groups of the population in a privileged position with respect to other groups and offer[s] individuals unearned benefits solely on group membership'. (Dill and Zambrana, 2009, 4)

The chapter argues that the exile experience is not always negative and in some cases it could have an emancipatory effect on women. The extent to which it has this effect depends on the socio-economic status of women. The interviews carried out in the framework of this chapter revealed, as will be explained below, that exposure to the busy life of the city of Cairo had an emancipatory effect on Syrian women. However, only those with sufficient economic resources were able to get such exposure and to benefit from it. Syrian women with limited economic resources are confined to poor neighbourhoods in Cairo that are unsafe and lack basic infrastructure. Living in these areas burdened them with additional restrictions and increased their vulnerabilities rather than their emancipation.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first explains the methodology adopted by the chapter. The second section gives some background information on Syrians in Egypt. And the final section provides the findings of the interviews, focusing on the specific experiences of Syrian refugee women and highlighting the impact of class on gender identity and relations.

Methodology

This chapter attempts to qualitatively examine the experiences of Syrian women living in Cairo, how class influences these experiences and the impact of the experiences on gender relations and identity. The information upon which it is based was collected through primary and secondary data. The next section discusses how both kinds of data were collected. A brief explanation of the definition of poverty and social class adopted by the chapter precedes this discussion.

Definitions

The traditional definitions of absolute and relative poverty are adopted in this chapter. In absolute terms, poverty is measured in relation to the amount of money that is necessary to meet basic needs. Relative poverty, on the other hand, defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society (UNESCO, 2016). Recently, the International Poverty Line has been raised to US$1.90 a day (Ferreira, 2015), which is equivalent to 19 Egyptian pounds. According to the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the domestic poverty line stands at an annual LE3,920 (US$569) which is equivalent to LE326 per month, less than the international standard of US$1.90 a day (Ahram online, 2013). As such, in absolute terms, a person is considered to be below the poverty line in Egypt if he/she makes less than LE326 per month. In relative terms, a person could be considered to be below the poverty line even if he/she makes more than the above amount if other members of society are making considerably more than that amount. A person is also considered poor if he/she lacks or has very limited access to utilities and services (Chambers, 2006).

Anthony Giddens' classification of social classes that measures class based on occupation is adopted for the purposes of this chapter. Giddens distinguishes between four levels of social class: the upper class, the middle class, the working class and the underclass. The upper class, which is shrinking in modern capitalist societies, includes executives of banks and multinational institutions as well as classical industrial entrepreneurs. The middle class is divided into two: the upper middle class which includes professionals such as doctors, lawyers and engineers and the lower middle class which includes nurses, schoolteachers and other employees in the service sector who are not in managerial positions. The working class is divided into high- and semi-skilled bluer collar workers. Finally, the underclass is comprised of people who are socially excluded such as those who are unemployed, homeless, etc. (Giddens, 2009).

Data collection

Secondary data

Information was collected from earlier studies on refugees in Egypt, particularly from a one-year study on Syrians in Egypt carried out between May 2013 and August 2014. That study was based on a survey as well as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews that were carried out between May and August 2013 and on follow up interviews that were conducted after the political changes in Egypt associated with the ousting of the former Egyptian president in July 2013. The survey took place in seven governorates with 310 households including 1,700 individuals. The seven governorates covered were Cairo, Giza, Qalyubia, Alexandria, Dakahlia Ismailia, and Damietta. The focus group discussions were carried out in three of the seven governorates where the survey was

administered. In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals working in organizations and associations that provided services and assistance to Syrian refugees (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

Primary data

Primary data was collected for this chapter through observation and in-depth interviews with a selected sample of Syrian women.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out with fifteen Syrian women during March 2016. Since the aim of the chapter is to understand the impact of socio-economic conditions on the experiences of Syrian refugee women, a snowball purposive sampling was adopted. The sampling technique was followed through collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with Syrians and through contact with members of the Syrian community in Cairo. In addition, two interviews were conducted with staff of two NGOs that are registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Egypt. One is the Fard Foundation,[1] which was initiated by Syrians and Egyptians following the Syrian influx. Although most of the beneficiaries are Syrians, the Foundation's mandate is to enhance the well-being of all individuals (Egyptians and members of other refugee groups) as indicated by its Arabic name "Fard", which means "an Individual". The other is the Sharawai[2] Foundation, an NGO that was established to provide services to relocated Egyptians in Masaken Othman neighbourhood, a very poor neighbourhood in 6th of October City. As an NGO that does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity, the Sharawai Foundation's services were also directed to Syrians who moved to the neighbourhood. Its name is a tribute to Mohamed Sharawai, an Egyptian activist who passed away during the Egyptian revolution.

All of the fifteen participants interviewed, except one, were married with children. They came from different economic and social backgrounds. Three variables were taken into consideration to determine their economic and social status: level of income, rent and assistance from aid agencies.

With regard to income and rent, four interviewees reported irregular income ranging from 300–1,000 Egyptian pounds per month and indicated that they pay LE250 per month in rent. The husbands were the breadwinners engaged in casual labour while the interviewees, the women, were not involved in any income generating activities. This level of income is less than the minimum wage for government employees put forward by the Egyptian government (Kholaif 2013) and slightly above Egypt's domestic poverty line, as discussed above. Ten interviewees reported a monthly family income of between LE1,500–5,000 and reported their rent to be between LE750–1,800 per month. Those ten stated that their husbands worked in restaurants or shops. Some of the women, as will be explained, were engaged in income generating activities

or worked in nurseries or schools. Only one from among the sample earned more than 5,000 Egyptian pounds per month. She was a dentist who had recently given up her occupation and was working with an international organization on a project helping Syrian refugees.

As such, based on the above definition of "social class" adopted for this chapter, fourteen of the fifteen interviewees could be considered to be from the lower middle class or the working class and one only would be from the upper middle class. Considering the definitions of poverty discussed earlier, four of the fourteen lean more towards the "underclass" as they reported an unsteady level of income from casual, unstable work.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides cash assistance to the most needy among the refugee communities in Egypt (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012). Only the four interviewees who reported a low level of income were receiving cash assistance from UNHCR. Those four lived in Masakan Othman, a deserted neighbourhood in 6th of October City that lacks all kinds of social services including police stations, hospitals and schools. Syrians living in Masakan Othman are known to be the poorest and most vulnerable, as they cannot afford the rent in areas with better facilities. As such, their social exclusion and the assistance they receive from UNHCR further confirms their position among the underclass.

Nine of the interviewees had university degrees, three had undergone secondary education and three had completed only primary education. All the interviewees had been in Egypt for three to four years; they all came before the imposition of visa requirements in July 2013. They all arrived with their families; none of them came to Egypt alone. The most common reasons cited for choosing Egypt included the lack of visa requirements, the low cost of living and the fact that it is a safe country compared to Lebanon and Jordan that were perceived as politically unstable. Some said they chose Egypt because their children were already studying in universities in Egypt when the conflict erupted so it was much easier just to join their children. Others stated that the common language was an attraction in comparison to Turkey where Arabic is not spoken. Seven out of the fifteen women had children who travelled irregularly to Europe through smuggling networks. Some of them sent children under the age of eighteen in the hope that this could facilitate family reunions.

Observation

Observation is an ethnographic research method that allows the researcher to study people in their native environment so as to understand things from their perspective (Baker, 2006). For the purposes of this chapter, information was also collected by observing young males and females engaged in selling in the streets of 6th of October City between the months of March and May 2016. The survey with Syrians mentioned above highlighted the involvement of young boys in selling in the streets of the neighborhood where they lived (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). As earlier studies, including the above mentioned survey, highlighted

the concentration of Syrians in 6th of October City, regular observation of Syrians selling in the streets of 6th of October City was carried out for this chapter; it was found that young females as well as males were involved in selling in the streets. During regular observation, short interviews with some of the boys and girls were also conducted. As such, the researcher adopted the role of the observer-as-participant:

> This role, as described by Gold (1958) and Pearsall (1970), includes more observation than participation. The researcher who adopts this role advances very slightly in her/his involvement with the insiders. While still mostly involved in observing, she/he may conduct short interviews.
>
> (Baker, 2006: 175)

Background information on Syrians in Egypt

Numbers and arrival patterns

Egypt, in comparison to countries in the region that share borders with Syria, has received the lowest number of Syrian refugees. According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Syrians registered at UNHCR was 114,911 as at 31 July 2016 (UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response: Egypt). However, this number does not reflect the actual number of Syrians in Egypt, which is probably much higher. The long history of migration between Egypt and Syria has produced a well-integrated community of Syrians in Egypt. It was the existence of such community that encouraged Syrians fleeing the conflict that started in 2011 to go to Egypt where they had families, businesses and/or some personal networks (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

Syrians fleeing the conflict started to arrive to Egypt at the end of 2011, and the rate of their arrival reached its peak in April 2013. The rate stabilized between April and June 2013 and then fell dramatically as of August 2013 with the imposition of visa restrictions by the Egyptian government (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). Syrians in Egypt form two groups. The well-to-do economically are from the city of Damascus and the less fortunate are from the cities of Homs and Aleppo as well as from the rural outskirts of Damascus.[3]

Legal status and UNHCR registration

Egypt is party to both the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as well as to the 1969 OAU (Organization of African Unity) Convention. However, Egypt has neither adopted national refugee legislation nor established domestic asylum procedures, but has rather delegated its responsibility for dealing with refugees to UNHCR through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 1954. As in all host countries, UNHCR's internationally mandated obligations are to provide protection and assistance to refugees in the form of registering asylum seekers, conducting refugee status

determination and finding durable solutions. Asylum seekers are required to register with UNHCR upon arrival in Cairo, when they receive the asylum-seeking card (the yellow card) which enables them to stay in Egypt under the protection of UNHCR until they are scheduled for a Refuge Status Determination (RSD) interview. If RSD is granted, the person becomes a recognized refugee and receives the blue card. Those who are rejected after the RSD interview are entitled to appeal. If the appeal fails the file is considered closed by UNHCR, the person is no longer of concern to UNHCR and is expected to leave Egypt (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012). This procedure is not adopted with Syrians because of their arrival in large numbers, which made RSD unfeasible. As such, Syrians in Egypt do not go through the RSD procedure. They are given the asylum-seeking card (yellow card) upon registration, which entitles them to protection and assistance. The yellow card is valid for eighteen months and is renewable. Upon receiving the yellow card, Syrians, like other refugees and asylum seekers, must register at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and have their card stamped for residency every six months. Syrian asylum seekers who are identified as especially vulnerable by UNHCR, and thus entitled to possible resettlement, are the only ones who undergo RSD interviews because RSD is a requirement for resettlement (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

According to the survey carried out with Syrians in various governorates of Egypt in 2013, the rate of registration with the UNHCR was very low until May 2013. The lack of visa requirements, the welcoming reception by Egyptians and the stigma associated with refugee status were among the reasons mentioned in the survey for the reluctance to register with UNHCR. Moreover, the early comers to Egypt were well-to-do economically and many among them, through investing in Egypt and initiating a business, were able to acquire residency and did not feel the need to register with UNHCR (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

With the continuation and escalation of the conflict in Syria, less well-to- do Syrians started to arrive in Egypt. According to a recent socio-economic assessment by UNHCR, a large number of Syrian refugees in Egypt are classified as 'severely vulnerable' (Rollins, 2015). One of the interviewees highlighted this saying:

> The belief that most Syrians in Egypt are well off is a misconception; there are many poor, vulnerable Syrians but they are not noticeable because they live in very poor remote areas that are not known and not accessible. Although I work in an NGO that has a centre in Ain Shames, it took me a while to discover that there are extremely poor areas that are not noticeable to anyone in Ain Shames.[4]

The political changes in Egypt in 2013, and the imposition of visa requirements, halted the arrival of Syrians to Egypt and led to an increase in the registration rate of those already residing in the country. However, it seems that the increase in registration rates at UNHCR was only temporary (in summer 2013) because of the political changes. One of the interviewees argued that the current rate of

registration at UNHCR still did not reflect the actual numbers: 'Nobody knows the actual number of Syrians in Egypt. The rate of registration at UNHCR still is not an indication as many Syrians feel that they would not benefit from UNHCR so they opt not to register.'[5]

Living arrangements

Egypt does not have a policy of encampment, with the exception of the refugee camp that was set up along the Libyan border area near Salloum that hosted the influx of Libyans, third country nationals and African refugees fleeing Libya in January 2011 (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012). As such, apart from this temporary camp, all refugees in Egypt are self-settled. Syrians, unlike other groups of refugees who are concentrated in Cairo, are scattered across the whole country. According to UNHCR statistics, 63 per cent of registered Syrian refugees live in Greater Cairo (which includes Cairo, Giza and Qalyubia), 18 per cent live in Alexandria, 8 per cent in Damietta and 10 per cent in a number of other governorates (UNHCR, 2015). Despite the fact that they are dispersed across a number of governorates, Syrian refugees tend to cluster around specific commonalities in each governorate. For example, in Cairo and Giza they are concentrated in the satellite cities of 6th October and Al Rehab (Save the Children, 2013).

The level of rent paid depends on the area of residency. The highest reported rent in the survey of Syrians was LE2,500 and the average was between LE700–1,000. In poorer areas, rent was, on average, LE300 (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). The most vulnerable Syrians are found in four areas: Masaken Othman, a poor suburban area developed to accommodate relocated Egyptians from other areas; Obour, a poor, suburban new town; and Faisal and Omraneya which are two informal settlements (Save the Children, 2013)

The survey of Syrians in 2013 highlighted that they mostly came to Egypt as a nuclear family. Moreover, most of the households surveyed were headed by men (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). However, interviews for this chapter revealed a change in the composition of families. Most interviewees commented on the increased number of single women and attributed this increase to two factors. One is the greater number of male irregular movements to Europe, leaving their families behind in Egypt in the hope of reuniting once they have succeeded in reaching new destinations. The second factor is the higher number of divorces that occur after arriving in Egypt. The increased rate of divorce was attributed to the stressful and protracted experience of exile as well as the stressful life in Cairo. Interviewees also commented that some of the women who came to Egypt alone in the expectation that their husbands would follow got divorced when the period of separation was extended after the visa imposition.[6]

Employment

Refugees and asylum seekers can work in Egypt if they can find an employer willing to sponsor them and pay for their work permit. Obtaining a work permit

is contingent upon there not being Egyptians who could fill the position. In practice, refugees cannot obtain formal employment and so most of them resort to the informal sector. Although the majority of Egyptians also work in the informal sector, the participation of refugees in the sector increases their exposure to abuse and exploitation (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012).

Syrians, in contrast to other refugees, were able carve a niche in the Egyptian economy because of their reputation as experienced and hard workers – particularly employees in the food industry. This was revealed in the survey on Syrians in 2013 where work was indicated as the main source of income for many Syrian families in Egypt. However, tensions emerged when Syrian refugees came in larger numbers and Egyptians began to perceive that they were preferred for job opportunities in the food industry. Their situation worsened when they became allegedly associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, as will be discussed below. As such, Syrians' ability to find work has declined compared to when they first started arriving. An alarming finding in the survey conducted in 2013 was the engagement of children under the age of eighteen in the informal sector (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

Access to services

Refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt are entitled to access public health services and enrol their children in primary public schools despite the reservations placed on them in the 1951 Refugee Convention. This is due to a number of factors. First, various ministerial decrees have been issued in recent years allowing refugees to access public health care and primary education. Second, according to Egyptian law, any student funded by UNHCR is entitled to enrol in Egyptian schools. Third, some nationalities (Sudanese, Libyans and Jordanians) have access to public education regardless of residency status because of bilateral agreements with Egypt (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012). Last, but not least, refugees' rights to access services (such as education and health) must be seen in the broader context of Egypt's obligations under the universal human rights system (Grabska, 2006). Moreover, with regard to Syrians, former president Mohamed Morsi issued a presidential decree in September 2012 granting them the right to protection, residency permits and access to government schools (El Nemr, 2016).

Actual access is however restricted because of poor public service infrastructure and overcrowding (Ayoub *et al.*, 2012). With regard to access to education, there are additional problems including different Arabic dialects, loss of previous school certificates to determine grades and the long process of providing proof of residency and letters from UNHCR (Grabska, 2006). Moreover, the poor quality of education forces families to resort to private tutoring. Syrian families are unable to cover such costs which leads children to either fail or, more often, leave school (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

Relationship with Egyptians

When they first arrived in Egypt in 2011, Syrians commented on the welcome they received from Egyptians. However, two years later, they highlighted a sharp change in Egyptians' attitude towards them that was attributed to developments in the Egyptian political situation and media accusations that they were involved in domestic Egyptian politics. A few Syrians reportedly participated in an extended sit-in organized by the Muslim Brotherhood in protest against the ousting of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president, on 3 July 2013. The participation of those few Syrian refugees was highlighted on various Egyptian media channels, and this led to the emergence of hostile attitudes towards Syrians refugees because of their alleged interference in Egypt's internal politics (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). This hostility towards Syrian refugees was at its highest between July and September 2013. The situation calmed down with a decline of the media's fuelling of hate speeches against Syrian refugees. The interviews conducted with Syrian women in the framework of this study indicated that, apart from incidents of bullying towards Syrian children in schools, there is a reasonable level of tolerance and acceptance by Egyptian citizens towards Syrians.

Refugee women and socio-economic status: Syrian women in Cairo

Most of the literature on refugee women, particularly before the turn of the twenty-first century, portrayed them as victims and focused on their vulnerability rather than on their strength and resilience during and after flight as well as the role they play in exile (Moussa, 1991: 12). Since 2000, however, the literature has moved towards highlighting the important role refugee women play, their courage and determination and the contribution they make to their families (Ross-Sheriff, 2006: 207–208).

Reports on Syrian refugee women in Lebanon and other host countries highlight their resilience and activism (Peterson, 2016). Additionally, the interviews with Syrian women carried out in the framework of this chapter indicate that the experience of exile may not only increase resilience but can sometimes also have an emancipatory effect. A Syrian woman interviewee said:

> The experience of exile is not always negative. One of the Syrian ladies who works in the NGO with me was conservative to the extent that she would cover her hair and face in black – she could not even wear [a] colourful head and face scarf. In Syria, she used to live in a very remote village and she never left the house. When they came to Egypt, her husband took the boat to Europe in the hope of having her and the children follow. She found herself forced to go out of her house to work. Her work with our NGO exposed her to many of the educational training courses on issues like gender, democracy and political changes. She does not only have an

> interest but she participates and makes arguments. She realizes her own social development and she always comments that she cannot believe how much she has changed.[7]

It is argued in this chapter that the extent to which experience of exile can have an emancipatory effect on women depends on their socio-economic status. The interviews revealed, as will be explained below, that exposure to the busy life of the city of Cairo had an emancipatory effect on Syrian women. However, only those with a reasonable level of economic resources were able to gain such exposure and to benefit from it. Syrian women with limited economic resources are confined to poor neighbourhoods in Cairo that are unsafe and lack basic infrastructure. Living in these areas burdened them with additional restrictions and increased their vulnerabilities rather than their emancipation.

As such, the experience of refugee women cannot be reduced to just being a "refugee woman" in a transit host country; rather, it should be studied in the context of its intersection with other elements such as race, class, educational background, rural–urban background etc. The next section presents and analyses the results of the interviews. It is divided into three parts. The first part highlights the impact of the experience of exile on gender identity and relations; the second identifies the most important problems mentioned by women and the challenges they face living in Cairo; and the third narrates their plans and hopes for the future. In all three parts, the intersection between class and gender and the impact of this intersection on the refugee experience is analysed, highlighting how social class influences such experience.

The impact of exile on gender identity and relations

Almost all of the women interviewed for this chapter commented that they started working outside the home and earning an income only when they came to Cairo. They emphasized that in Syria men do not like their women to work outside the home, a situation that changed in Cairo because of higher living expenses. Some of the interviewees indicated that they produced handicrafts or food at home and then sold their products either through the help of NGOs or of friends. Others indicated that they worked in schools, nurseries or NGOs. One woman attributed their engagement in paid work in Cairo to the attitude of Egyptian women saying:

> We used to be afraid of the idea of working or even going out of the house but the attitude of Egyptian women encouraged us. I felt embarrassed that a lady who is 70 years old is supporting herself by selling in the street and I am staying home – work makes you value yourself, it is a nice feeling.[8]

Another woman said:

> The engagement of Egyptian women in the workplace and in the social life of Cairo is so normal – it encouraged our husbands to accept it. My

> daughter's husband was not allowing her to go out of the house but now he accepts the fact that she leaves the house every day for work.[9]

A thirty-year-old single interviewee with a university degree came to Egypt in 2012 with her brother. She attended speech therapy training at Ain Shams University in Cairo to become a licenced speech therapist after which she was employed on a project funded by Terre Des Homes. When asked about the experience of exile and how she feels about herself and about her relationship with her brother, she replied:

> Life in Cairo is so different than the one that I used to have in Syria. In Syria I had my family [who I could] reach for when something happened – here it is difficult because I must depend on myself [for] everything. I came to Cairo with my brother who at the beginning was very protective and didn't want me to leave the house alone to work or study. However, after a while he realized that we do not have a choice. I convinced him about the course. After a while he got used to it, and now he accepts the fact that I work and contribute to the living expenses. Despite the difficulty and despite the fact that my ultimate hope is to go back to Syria, I feel I have achieved something and I am proud of myself.[10]

In addition to engaging in income generating activities, Syrian women in Cairo also undertake the responsibility of dealing with bureaucracy. Renewing residency permits in Egypt is a very long and tedious process. Since in most cases Syrian men are the main breadwinners in the family, the responsibility of renewing residency falls on women who have to deal with all the bureaucracy.[11]

By contrast, the four interviews conducted with residents of the Masaken Othman area, the poorest of all the areas inhabited by Syrians, revealed a different story. The four women interviewed did not work and rarely left the house alone because of fear of sexual harassment. When asked about the kind of harassment, they indicated that it was mostly verbal but it made them uncomfortable and afraid that it might develop further. So they went out of the house only with their husbands or, in the case of emergency, with other Syrian women. One interviewee explained her feelings saying:

> Since I came to Cairo, a lot has changed. My freedom of movement and the level of my activity have decreased as compared to Syria. I have fewer friends and less reason to do anything. [It is] true that I did not work in Syria but I had my family and neighbours whom I used to interact with daily. Here I feel lonely. I am afraid to walk in the street alone because it is a dangerous area and I [do not have a relationship] with my neighbours.[12]

Masakan Othman, as mentioned earlier, is a deserted area with no public services. It was developed to house Egyptians who were relocated from informal settlement areas or homes that were damaged by landslides. There is a common

belief that these relocated Egyptians are mostly drug dealers and criminals (Save the Children, 2013). Thus, Masaken Othman not only lacks basic public services but is also known to be unsafe. According to an interview with the chairwoman of the Fard NGO, five cases of rape of Syrian women occurred in the area.[13] In addition, Fard was regularly receiving complains about attempts of rape and sexual harassment to the extent that many men quit their jobs out of fear of leaving their wives at home alone. Following many complaints, Fard moved 180 families out of the area; the move was funded by individual contributions. Through reaching out to both Egyptian and Syrian communities, Fard was able to raise funds and relocate families identified as the most vulnerable from the area of Masaken Othman to buildings known as Beit al 3ail, which are owned by military officers in 6th of October City. Priority for relocation was given to single women. Thus, 22 single women were moved out of the area first followed by the rest of the 180 families. The rent in Beit al 3ail is equivalent to LE750, which is three times more than the rent in Masaken Othman where it is equivalent to only LE250. Through the contribution from individuals, it was agreed with those who were relocated that Fard would pay the rent for a couple of months until the family could sustain itself and pay rent. The rent of a very few vulnerable cases is still covered by donations.[14]

According to the chairwoman of Fard, the area of Masaken Othman used to host around 500 Syrian families, of which 180 were assisted by the organization and many others moved at their own expense.[15] According to the interviews conducted with the four Syrian women in Masaken Othman, only fifty families still remained in the area. When asked why they did not move, the women indicated that they could neither afford the cost of moving nor the cost of rent in other areas. They confirmed that the area is dangerous and a lot of robbery and pickpocketing takes place, but they indicated that they had heard about only one case of rape of a Syrian woman (none of the four interviewees claimed to have known the woman) and said she went back to Syria following the incident.[16] The interview conducted with an employee from Sharawi Foundation also confirmed the case of rape and suggested that other cases might have occurred that the foundation was not aware of.[17]

According to the above, and as indicated by the interviews, Cairo had an emancipatory impact on some Syrian women. Witnessing the high level of activity of Egyptian women and the normality with which they are engaged in the everyday life of the city changed their perception about paid work and their role in society. Their engagement in paid work and income generating activities made them value themselves and increased their sense of self-worth. Moreover, their identity as equal partners and contributors was reinforced. Although the ultimate hope of all of them is to go back to Syria, they feel they have achieved something while in exile and are proud of themselves. However, such a positive impact is only the case in respect of those women who have a reasonable level of income and access to both economic opportunities and service providers. The experience of poor Syrian women who live in remote, deserted areas has been totally the opposite. Their level of mobility and their interactions within the

community have been greatly reduced while their level of vulnerability has increased. Moreover, their identity as a helpless refugee has been reinforced.

The problems and challenges Syrian women face in Cairo

This section discusses the problems that were identified by the interviewees. It does not by any means include all the problems faced by Syrian women in Cairo. Three problems in particular were identified when asked about the main problems the women encountered in Cairo: education for their children, earning an income and the imposition of visa requirements. The highlighting of education and earning an income corresponds with previous research on refugee women. In a comparative study conducted with refugee women in eleven different crisis areas, it was indicated that refugee women in all the areas reported displacement, economic impoverishment, damage to education, psychosocial health and sexual violence as the most serious problems they faced (Brittain, 2003: 41–43). In this current research, and contrary to expectation, gender related problems such as sexual harassment were not explicitly identified as problems. They were either mentioned in the context of problems related to education or when asked directly about sexual harassment. The section below discusses Syrian women's perceptions of education, income generation and sexual harassment in Cairo as well as the impact of visa impositions on their lives.

Education

Access to quality primary education for their children was cited as one of the main problems facing Syrian women in Cairo. As mentioned above, Syrians in Egypt have the right to access public education. However, actual access is usually not granted; many of the interviewees commented that public schools reject their children on the grounds of lack of space. Moreover, even if access is granted, the low quality of the education and the negative environment forces children out of school. Almost all the interviewees agreed that the environment in public schools in Egypt is very dangerous – including students being exposed to the selling of drugs. The result is a high dropout rate. Although the main reason for dropping out of school is low quality of the education, other reasons were mentioned including harassment and bullying by both students and teachers. Moreover, the need for boys to work and support the family and the subjection to sexual harassment with regard to girls were mentioned as additional reasons. Interviewees commented that boys who drop out of school to work usually work in exploitative conditions and had to work over twelve hours per day earning no more than LE150 per week.[18] Problems with education, and thus the inability to foresee a future in Egypt for their children, were the most common reasons cited by interviewees who had encouraged their children to move irregularly to Europe using the services of smugglers. Of the interviewees' children who had left for Europe almost all were boys; however, some families

had also sent their girls. In Europe, they argued, their children can gain residency, education and the potential for career development. Most of the women interviewed said they would prefer to stay in Egypt because of the common language, religion and culture but for their children Europe is seen as the gateway to a better future.

In an endeavour to solve the educational problems, some NGOs have established community schools for Egyptians as well as for refugees. However, establishing community schools is a lengthy process because it requires the approval of the Ministry of Education. Children in these schools are taught the exact curriculum of the Ministry and take the Ministry's exams. To avoid the long process, other NGOs have established educational centres where students are supposed to attend after school to help them with their studies. However, because of the problems with public schooling as mentioned above, students attend the centres for the whole day and go to the public school only once a week to register so they can sit the exams. Ten educational centres are operating in 6th of October City where only two of them are not-for-profit (the latter are funded by individual donations and charge students a very minimum registration fee). Educational centres not only provide students with a good learning environment but also offer opportunities to women. For example, one centre has eighty Syrian teachers and staff, of which seventy are women. Thus, these schools offer good opportunities for Syrian women to contribute to their community and at the same time earn an income.[19]

Making a living and earning income

Earning a reasonable income was identified as one of the main problems facing Syrian families in Cairo despite the fact that the cost of living was perceived to be lower in comparison to other countries such as Jordan and Lebanon (this was cited as one of the reasons for choosing Egypt).

As mentioned earlier, many Syrian men, when they first arrived, were able to find work in Egyptian-owned businesses as they were perceived as experienced and hard workers. According to the survey conducted on Syrians in 2013, this was not the case with women. Unlike other groups of refugee women in Cairo who fulfilled the demand for female domestic workers, Syrian women, at the time of that survey, were not engaged in paid work. A few among those surveyed were involved in economic activities, mostly food production, without leaving the home. The survey indicated that the reasons for this could be attributed to the nature of the employment opportunities in Cairo which are more suitable for men, cultural stigma around domestic work and conservative attitudes based on religious beliefs that home is the appropriate place for women (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014).

The interviews carried out in the framework of this chapter, as explained earlier, highlighted a shift in women's perception of paid work. The high engagement of Egyptian women in paid work changed the Syrian women's perception of work and the role of women in society. Among the fifteen women

interviewed, five were engaged in regular paid work (usually in schools, nurseries or NGOs), six were involved in economic activities (mostly food production and dress-making) at home and four were not engaged in any income generating activities at all. These last four, as mentioned above, were among the very poor who had no exposure to potential economic activities. Those who produced at home either sold their products at bazaars or other outlets with the help of NGOs or gave the products to their sons to market them or sell them in the street.[20]

In 6th of October City it is very common to see young boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen selling Syrian finger food and deserts next to big malls and supermarkets, targeting elite Egyptian women who attend these places. Recently, boys as young as ten years old and girls between the ages of 16–20 have also frequently been engaged in selling in the street. This is an alarming observation that not only confirms the high level of drop out from school but also indicates the increased economic needs of Syrian families in Cairo. The interviews carried out in the framework of this chapter as well as those that supplemented the 2013 survey have highlighted how Syrians perceive the role of men and women. In Arab culture men are responsible for protecting and providing for the family, and the interviews signalled that this was clearly deep-seated in the Syrian context. Allowing their children, and particularly girls, to sell in the streets of Cairo and their possible subjection to harassment is indicative of families' desperation and desolation. However, the young people's choice of selling place indicates a high level of awareness of the streets of Cairo and a firm understanding of the Egyptian context. The young boys and girls were seen selling only in the elite areas of 6th of October where the probability of selling their products is high and the possibility of subjection to harassment is low. The discussion below explains how subjection to sexual harassment positively correlates with poor underprivileged areas.

Sexual harassment

In 2005, sexual harassment was officially identified as a problem in Egypt when a group of female activists protesting against the constitutional referendum outside the Press Syndicate offices in downtown Cairo were sexually harassed and assaulted by the police and thugs who had been hired by internal security. A survey was carried out by an advocacy NGO known as the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) following the incident. The results were published in 2008 and revealed that 83 per cent of Egyptian women and 98 per cent of foreign women had experienced sexual harassment (Abdelmonem, 2015).

Although the above-mentioned survey revealed that foreign women are usually more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment, the interviews carried out for this chapter as well as the results of the 2013 survey of Syrians did not reveal a higher incidence of Syrian women's experience of sexual harassment. What was widely reported in the 2013 survey was the fear rather than actual experience of sexual harassment (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). None of the

women interviewed for this chapter, with the exception of the four living in Masaken Othman, mentioned sexual harassment as one of the problems they faced in Egypt. However, when explicitly asked about it, some did reveal occasional experience of verbal harassment. Others, when confronted with a direct question, claimed they had heard that it happened to other Syrian women they knew but not to them.

The chairwoman of Fard was asked her opinion regarding the rape cases in Masaken Othman and whether Syrians were the only victims. She replied:

> Subjection to rape and kidnapping occurs only in dangerous, deserted areas. Syrian women are not specifically targeted; any woman in a deserted, dangerous area could be subject to rape. However, being a foreigner places one in a more vulnerable position and as such makes one an easier target. Middle and upper class Syrian women like their Egyptian counterparts are less likely to be subjected to rape or other forms of sexual assault. It is poverty rather than ethnicity (or the fact that you are a foreigner) that makes one more vulnerable in Cairo.[21]

The survey carried out by ECWR indicated that sexual harassment is not class-based and that the harasser does not usually distinguish between victims according to class (Hassan, 2008). However, women belonging to the upper and upper middle classes, as the findings of the interviews for this chapter suggest, are less exposed to sexual harassment by virtue of their class which excludes them from regular interaction on the streets of Cairo. One interviewee commented:

> Syrian women, like Egyptian women, are exposed to sexual harassment mostly in popular public areas. Naturally, the higher the social class you belong to the less likely [it is that] you will be exposed to such areas and as such [it is] less likely [that you will] get exposed to sexual harassment.[22]

Thus, it could be concluded that Syrian women's experience of sexual harassment is no higher than that of Egyptian women. Syrian women from the lower strata of society, like their Egyptian counterparts, experience sexual harassment by virtue of their class not their ethnicity. Such a finding, however, contradicts the above-mentioned ECWR survey as well as other studies on refugee women in Cairo. For example, a study of Southern Sudanese refugees revealed a very high exposure of Southern Sudanese women to sexual harassment and even to rape (Johnson, 2012). The differences in these findings indicate the need for further studies with other groups of refugees and migrants across different ethnicities, as it might be that Syrians and other Arab nationalities are perceived to be Egyptians and, as such, are less exposed to sexual harassment compared to other migrants.

One alarming finding from the interviews for this chapter, which was identified as a problem without further probing, was the high rate of sexual

harassment in schools. Girls are subjected to sexual harassment both at the schools and on their way to and from school. The harassment is usually inflicted on them by boys of their own age who attend the same school. Exposure to sexual harassment in schools, as discussed earlier, was mentioned as the main reason for girls dropping out and thus constitutes an obstacle to the social development of young Syrian girls. It should be noted, however, that Syrians are not targeted specifically. According to the Egyptian Administrative Prosecution, Egyptian girls reported over sixty-one cases of sexual harassment and physical assault inside schools during 2014 (Fahmy, 2015).

The 2013 survey of Syrians focused on the issue of so-called *sutra* marriage (in which Arab Muslim men marry Syrian girls to "protect" them from difficult living conditions); this was reported at the time of the survey as being common among Syrian families (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). The results of the survey revealed, however, that it is more a false perception rather than an actual phenomenon. Despite this fact, most of the female participants in the survey reported having received unsolicited marriage proposals from Egyptians that were either made directly to them or to their families and which were regarded by the participants as insulting and demeaning. However, they indicated that some families had married off their daughters after receiving such proposals and explained that this would have happened anyway in Syria because these were families from rural areas whose daughters usually got married through family arrangements and at a young age (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). The legal age of marriage for girls in Syria is seventeen but religious leaders are authorized to make exceptions. Before the conflict, it was reported that 13 per cent of Syrian girls were married before the legal age. It has also been confirmed that the number of child marriages increased after the conflict (UNICEF, 2016).

For the purposes of this chapter an attempt was made to further investigate the issue of *sutra* marriage among Syrian women after five years of protracted exile in Egypt. Again, similar to the results of the 2013 survey, most participants agreed that it is a false perception but at the same time testified that either they, or other women they knew, had received such proposals. In other words, there was total agreement that there is a widespread belief among Egyptians that Syrian women are available for marriage. However, there was disagreement as to whether this kind of marriage actually takes place. The interviews revealed that the level of disagreement is directly related to social class. For example, a Syrian upper middle class woman claimed that she did not know any woman who had accepted such a marriage. She said:

> Syrian women getting married in the framework of *sutra* marriage is more of [a] rumour, I do not know any Syrian women who married in this way. However, there is a widespread perception that Syrian women are available for marriage. Once a journalist approached me in a conference and asked me if I know of a Syrian woman he can marry. I was shocked that a well-educated man would think in this way. On another occasion, someone came to my office and asked me if there are Syrian women available for

> marriage. The belief that Syrian women are available and willing to marry Egyptian men is negatively affecting their life in Cairo. I know a single Syrian woman who was denied the right to rent an apartment because the landlady was worried that she might seduce her husband.[23]

On the other hand, middle and lower middle class Syrian women did not deny that this kind of marriage occurs but argued that it is uncommon. They also did not deny the possibility that it could occur with girls under the age of eighteen, the legal age of marriage in Egypt. One of the participants summarized the situation as follows:

> The concept of girls' early marriage is common in Syria, particularly to those coming from rural areas. As such Syrians coming to Egypt came with the same values. Most of us were married between the age of fifteen and eighteen in Syria. In Egypt or any other Arab country, we would prefer to have our daughters married to Syrians. This is the case for everyone here because it is normal that you would like your children to marry from your own country. However, there are cases of intermarriages with Egyptians – a few are for the sake of money (*sutra* marriage) but many are based on love.[24]

Finally, interviews with participants from Masaken Othman indicated the possibility that this kind of marriage could be common among this poorer group. As one participant said: 'Many women got married to Saudis and Egyptians in this way. Some did [so] out of poverty and desperation and some out of [wanting to] enjoy the more luxurious lifestyles that such marriages could offer.'[25]

One interviewee gave an explanation of how and why this belief about Syrian women's availability for *sutra* marriage was spread:

> Syrian women have always had the reputation among Egyptians that they are excellent housewives and mothers. Unfortunately, it seems that some religious organizations, believing that they are doing something good for Syrian women, started to suggest to Egyptian men [that they should] propose to them. These organizations kept the passports of the Syrian women who they provided services to and they showed these passports to potential Egyptian husbands. This practice led to the belief that Syrian women are available for marriage for protection. The way the media handled the incidents further led to [such beliefs becoming] widespread.[26]

The interview with the employee of the Sharawi Foundation confirmed that some religious groups used to keep Syrians' passports. According to the employee, religious organizations donated household supplies to Syrians when they first arrived. However, the donation was only provided if the head of the household agreed to leave his passport with the organization. The rationale was to guarantee that the Syrian family would return the supplies before travelling back to Syria. If the head of the household needed his passport, he would have

to give the organization the passport of another family member (i.e. wife, son or daughter). When asked if the passports were used to connect Egyptian potential husbands to Syrian families, the employee could not confirm this but he did verify that many marriages between Egyptian men and Syrian women took place through such religious organizations.[27]

Impact of the visa imposition

The imposition of a visa requirement by most Arab countries including Egypt from 2013 was cited as a major problem. The interviewees commented that coming to Egypt could now cost over LE3,000 in bribes because usually no more than 5 per cent of visa applications through regular channels were accepted. The result is that many Syrians are unable to reunite with their families in Egypt and in other Arab countries (Zaman Alwsl, 2016) Most of the interviewees commented on this separation. For example, one of the interviewees was from a family that had been scattered over a number of countries following the Syrian crisis, with one brother in Saudi Arabia, another in Jordan, a sister with her in Egypt and two siblings in Abkhazia, while her parents remained in Syria. The problem, she suggested, was not that they were living in many different countries because three of them (herself, the brother in Jordan and the one in Saudi Arabia) were already abroad when the conflict erupted; the problem was that because of the imposition of visa requirements they could no longer see each other. The interviewee gave an example of the impact of the restrictions. Her brother in Jordan has a daughter who is enrolled at a university in Egypt. Following visa impositions by the Egyptian and Jordanian governments, neither one could leave Egypt or Jordan because if they left, they would not be able to go back. The result is that father and daughter have not seen each other for over three years.[28] Another interviewee mentioned that her niece cannot see her fiancé who works in Saudi Arabia. His visa to visit Egypt for a short period to see his fiancé and his family was rejected although he has a valid work permit in Saudi Arabia.[29]

As a result of the continuing visa restrictions, many Syrians living in Egypt started to bring their families to the country via Sudan as this is much cheaper than buying a visa.[30] During 2014–2015, the number of Syrians who entered Egypt via Sudan was relatively low with no more than fifty persons per month. However, at the time of writing, it is reported that the number is increasing. The journey from Sudan to Egypt is dangerous because of the operation of smuggling and trafficking networks that take advantage of refugees who use this route. Risks of death due to car accidents, clashes among smugglers and human traffickers and the possibility of being shot by Egyptian border guards has also been reported (Zaman Alwsl, 2016).

Plans for the future

Almost all the participants came to Egypt as a transition phase and were planning to return to Syria at the end of the conflict. The continuation of the conflict meant that returning was no longer expected in the future. Of the fifteen participants, ten had plans to move to Europe. Among those ten, eight had already sent their children to Europe and were hoping to be reunited with them; one would not risk the trip to Europe but was hoping to be resettled through UNHCR; and one was prepared to do the trip but could not pay the smugglers' fees. Among the five who were planning to continue living in Egypt, one had an Egyptian passport and had always lived in Egypt and the other four believed that Egypt was a much better place to live than Europe because at least they were familiar with it. One of them planned to continue living in Egypt and return to Syria when the conditions permitted. She said:

> I'm planning to go back to Syria. I will go [back] to my previous job but will also open a centre for children with speech problems to make use of the skill I learned here at Ain Shams University. That is my plan for the future.[31]

The remaining three were from among the very poor area of Maskan Othman; they had no hopes for the future and were living on a day-to-day basis. Some of their comments express their helplessness, loneliness and despair:

> I can't think and do not want to think of the future, it is completely vague and unclear, I live day-by-day with no hope except to feed my children.

> Don't know anything about the future, Allah only knows.

> We have no future, I hope one day, we will return to Syria but I don't see it happening.

> I do not want to think about anything and what you know is better than what you don't know, so we will stay here just passing days.

The eight women whose children travelled to Europe had lost hope in the UNHCR resettlement programme; they argued that resettlement is confined to the most vulnerable, particularly those suffering from chronic illness or in need of protection. They claimed that most of the Syrians resettled from Egypt were originally from the city of Hamah (a city that witnessed terrible genocide committed by the former Assad regime in 1982). They were aware that UNHCR only identify the most vulnerable and that the decision to select from among those identified is the decision of the resettlement countries.[32]

These accounts suggest a high level of awareness of the resettlement criteria and process. An interview with a UNHCR resettlement officer in Cairo

revealed that UNHCR's resettlement criteria are based on vulnerability. Those who are identified for resettlement are survivors of violence and torture (whether in the country of origin or first country of asylum), women at risk, children at risk, those who have medical needs and those who are in need of legal and/or physical protection. Family reunification is also considered as a criterion for resettlement. Various units at UNHCR refer cases, using the above criteria, to UNHCR's resettlement unit. Once the resettlement unit receives the referral, the selection is carried out in three phases. The first phase is telephone screening; UNHCR check the basic information and try to find out if the selected person is interested in being relocated to another country. During the second phase, UNHCR selects, from among those willing to be relocated, those who have no major issues that would prevent them from being accepted for resettlement. For example, polygamy is not accepted in most resettlement countries so if someone has more than one wife, he would probably not be accepted for resettlement. The third and final phase is face-to-face interviews with those identified as in need of resettlement, who want to be resettled and have no major issues preventing them from being resettled. Once that is completed, decisions are made regarding who to resettle and where to submit his/her application. Following that, the UNHCR Cairo office sends their recommendations to the regional UNHCR office in Amman. Once the regional office approves the recommendation, it is sent to the resettlement country. A representative from the resettlement country then comes to Egypt to carry out interviews with the recommended cases for resettlement.[33]

The resettlement process is therefore long and complicated and makes moving irregularly through the smugglers' networks the only option available for many refugees in Egypt. The decision to pursue this option is a family decision that is taken based on information provided by other Syrians who have successfully made it to Europe. The eight women interviewees whose children had left for Europe indicated that they were boys, some of them under the age of eighteen. The decision to send young children was in the hope of family reunification as most European countries allow families to be reunified only where children are under the age of eighteen.[34]

When the eight women were asked if they were worried about the dangers of irregular travel, they suggested that the risk could be minimized through the choice of time of travel, of the boat taken and of the place of departure. They claimed that the problem is the greediness of the smugglers who try to encourage too many people to travel on one boat by offering them lower prices. The risk is minimized when the migrant insists on travelling on a safe boat.[35] This account, however, does not correspond with other accounts from the staff of international organizations who claim that migrants are not given the chance to negotiate which boat to take.[36]

Conclusion

Most of the Syrian women interviewed for this chapter came from conservative, rural backgrounds. Their first encounter with the city was stressful and disruptive because of difficulties in adapting to a new and challenging lifestyle. After a while, the women gradually started to adapt and to find ways of improving their lives and those of their children. Thus, contrary to the widespread belief that exile deprives refugees of agency and renders them helpless, the exile experience in Cairo increased the resilience of Syrian women, changed their perceptions of paid work and their role in society and even exposed some of them to new ideas and opportunities. However, this was only the case in respect of Syrian women who had reasonable sources of income, access to NGOs and service providers and lived in safe neighborhoods. The experience of women from the lower strata of Syrian society who had no or very few sources of income and who lived in very poor and deserted areas was markedly different. The exile experience increased their vulnerability, reinforced their feelings of helplessness and isolated them. Their refugee identity prevailed over other layers of identity. These poor women perceived themselves as "helpless refugees" who were forced out of their countries and who had no hopes for the future and no reason to do anything. The "refugee" identity overshadowed other layers of identity including their identity as mothers and wives. The identity of the middle and lower middle class women as mothers and wives was, by contrast, very prevalent and overshadowed their refugee identity. Their narrative focused more on their role as mothers and wives and less on their "refugeeness".

In addition to the impact on identity, socio-economic status affected the women's perception of many issues as well as their plans for the future. Middle and lower middle class women had clear plans for the future of their children in contrast to those from lower social strata who can be characterized as "waiting" without any plans for the future. Moreover, the problems the women faced in Cairo were directly linked to social class. For example, women living in poor, deserted areas were more vulnerable to sexual harassment, had more difficultly enrolling their children in public schools and were less exposed to opportunities for income generating activities. Additionally, they were more likely to accept marriage proposals that were not based on mutual consent and to perceive this as normal.

As explained earlier, this chapter aimed to challenge earlier literature that treats refugee women as being one homogenous category and portrays them as helpless victims. It has demonstrated that the position of women in exile differs significantly depending on their socio-economic status and their access to economic and cultural opportunities. Thus, this chapter holds that the vulnerability of refugee women is linked to social class and therefore disputes studies that link their vulnerability to pre-existing gender roles. One such study holds:

> Before conflict even breaks out and a female receives the brand of refugee, they have to deal with strictly enforced gender roles on a daily basis.

> The institution of patriarchy all women face outside the refugee camp experience does not cease to exist when conflict erupts, but instead becomes exacerbated.
>
> (Wiggett, 2013: 26)

This chapter has argued that this might be the case in refugee camps, but in urban settings patriarchal norms can be transformed if women are given opportunities and resources. Otherwise, how can the change in the perceptions and attitudes of some of the Syrian refugee women in Cairo who came from rural, conservative backgrounds where a rigid patriarchal system was prevalent be explained?

Although the narratives of many of the women interviewed for this study portrayed positive experiences, this should not obscure the reality that the experiences of the women in Masaken Othman are not limited to this area; rather, the women in Masakan Othman are one of the many groups of poor Syrians in Cairo who live in remote, deserted areas unnoticed and underdocumented. This chapter recommends that mapping research should be conducted, to map the poor areas in Cairo that are inhabited by refugees and document the particular experiences of poor refugee women.

Notes

1 Fard website: www.fardfoundation.org/.
2 The Sharawi Foundation's Facebook page is available at: www.facebook.com/groups/399131516843241/?__mref=message_bubble.
3 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes.
4 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes.
5 Same interview as Notes 3 and 4 above.
6 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes.
7 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes.
8 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
9 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
10 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 29 March 2016 at the premises of the old campus of the American University in Cairo.
11 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
12 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 28 March 2016 at the premises of the Sharawi Foundation in the Masakan Othman area of 6th of October City.
13 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of the Fard Foundation, on 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.
14 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of the Fard Foundation, on 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.

15 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of the Fard Foundation on 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.
16 Based on the interviews carried out with the four women living in Masakan Othman. The four interviews were carried out on 28 March 2016 at the premises of the Sharawi Foundation in the Masakan Othman area of 6th of October City.
17 Interview with Mr. Ibrahim, social worker at the Sharawi Foundation; the interview was carried out on 28 March 2016 at the premises of the Sharawi Foundation in the Masakan Othman area of 6th of October City.
18 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes. The interview was carried out at the premises of the new campus of the American University in Cairo.
19 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of the Fard Foundation, on 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.
20 Based on interviews carried out with a number of Syrian woman from among the sample on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
21 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of Fard Foundation, on 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.
22 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes. The interview was carried out at the premises of the new campus of the American University in Cairo.
23 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes. The interview was carried out at the premises of the new campus of the American University in Cairo.
24 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
25 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 28 March 2016 at the premises of the Sharawi Foundation in the Masakan Othman area of 6th of October City.
26 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes. The interview was carried out at the premises of the new campus of the American University in Cairo.
27 Interview with Mr. Ibrahim, social worker at the Sharawi Foundation. The interview was carried out on 28 March 2016 at the premises of the Sharawi Foundation in the Masakan Othman area of 6th of October City.
28 Interview with a Syrian woman on 15 March 2016. At the time of writing she was working on a project funded by Terre des Hommes. The interview was carried out at the premises of the new campus of the American University in Cairo.
29 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
30 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
31 Interview with a Syrian woman; the interview was carried out on 29 March 2016 at the premises of the old campus of the American University in Cairo.
32 Based on interviews carried out with eight of the Syrian women from among the sample whose sons had travelled irregularly to Europe during the previous year. The interviews were carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
33 Interview with Ms. Heidi Boener, head of the UNHCR Cairo Resettlement Unit, on 29 May 2016 at the UNHCR office.
34 Based on interviews carried out with eight of the Syrian women from among the sample whose sons had travelled irregularly to Europe during the previous year. The interviews were carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.

35 Based on interviews carried out with eight of the Syrian women from among the sample whose sons had travelled irregularly to Europe during the previous year. The interviews were carried out on 27 March 2016 at the premises of the Association of Syrian women in Heliopolis, Cairo.
36 Interview with Ms. Rash Maati, chairwoman of the Fard Foundation, 27 March 2016 at Fard Foundation premises in 6th of October City.

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7 Death at sea

Migration and the gendered dimensions of border insecurity

Sharon Pickering and Rebecca Powell

Introduction

Women are increasingly crossing borders for purposes of protection but also to seek work, family reunification and for other social, political and cultural reasons. In most regions of the world the proportion of women irregularly migrating is increasing. This challenges us to better understand the commonalities and differences as to why they are on the move, their experiences during migration and specifically the risks and harms they face. We have argued elsewhere that when women seek to irregularly cross borders they can face different and increased harms and risk of death (Pickering and Cochrane, 2013). The Syrian crisis is no exception. In this chapter we seek to outline the gendered dimensions of irregularly crossing borders from Syria and via the Mediterranean to Europe by comparing it to other key border sites – notably women fleeing Myanmar and asylum-seeking women travelling to Australia. In doing so we wish to highlight the invisibility of women's deaths when they cross borders and why we need to understand gender as a key element in redressing the loss of life at border sites in Europe and globally.

We want to begin by stressing that issues related to gender and border deaths can be similar across different border crossing contexts; however, specific local elements including environmental conditions, modes of transport and border control policies have a significant impact on the nature of the migration journey and level of risk faced, including the risk of death. The examples of the current European migrant crisis, the recent Andaman Sea migrant crisis in South East Asia and border deaths in the Australian context are used as case studies to exemplify gender-based risks and associated border deaths in three unique border crossing contexts. We take this comparative approach because it is only through understanding irregular migration by paying careful respect to localised conditions *and* global and regional interconnections that, we believe, can we significantly advance the knowledge base and thinking around safe migration pathways for women.

Unapologetically, we focus on the lack of reliable data on irregular migration and border-related deaths. This is because globally there is a dearth of reliable data on border-related deaths so our ability to recognise trends and

opportunities to develop sustainable and ethical responses remains impoverished. But even more concerning is that the data we do have routinely does not record sex, nor gender-related factors, that contribute to deaths. So the invisibility of *sex and gender* is at the centre of our enterprise to render women more visible in the way we record, understand and respond to border-related deaths. Nowhere is this more pressing than in the current European migrant crisis.

Women and the European migrant crisis

Large-scale irregular migration to Europe, particularly through established Mediterranean Sea routes, is not a new phenomenon (Freedman, 2016b; Last and Spijkeboer, 2014). Although it is estimated that only about 10 per cent of irregular migrants travel to Europe by sea, it is the sea journey that is the deadliest (Last and Spijkeboer, 2014). Moreover, it has been on the Mediterranean that European border deaths are most visible and are therefore identified and counted. The highest mortality incident recorded in the Mediterranean during the European migrant crisis that began early in 2015 was in April of that year, when up to 700 people were reported to have drowned after their wooden boat carrying up to 900 people capsized near Libya (IOM, 2015). In April 2016, 700 people were feared dead across three separate boat capsize incidents in the Mediterranean, many reported to be women and children (Kingsley, 2016; Zalan, 2016). It has been estimated that for every body found in the Mediterranean between two and ten go undiscovered (Weber and Pickering, 2014).

Whilst most of the continent, and the world's attention, has been focused on this sea route as a point of risk and the site of numerous border deaths, the conflict in Syria which began in 2011, along with ongoing conflicts in other Middle Eastern and North African countries (for example, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea), has sharply increased the number of migrants travelling by irregular and dangerous overland routes. Moreover, while borders are closing en route and at the edges of Europe, the volume of people seeking safety and refuge in Europe is increasing, including the number of women migrants.

The European migrant crisis began with a surge in the volume of irregular migrants entering Europe as well as in border deaths. By the end of 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 3,771 border deaths/missing persons in the Mediterranean making 2015 the deadliest year on record (UNHCR, 2016a). The crisis continued in 2016 with nearly 3,000 deaths or missing persons in the Mediterranean reported by June (UNHCR, 2016a) as the migrants continued to arrive despite the risks and dangerous journeys which included the risk of death.

Deaths have not only been occurring at sea, but have also been recorded in immigration detention centres, while travelling overland en route to destination countries, due to environmental and health-related conditions (for example, starvation, dehydration, exposure to heat or cold, sickness) or as a result of accidents, suffocation in the back of lorries and violence by smugglers (UNITED for Intercultural Action).

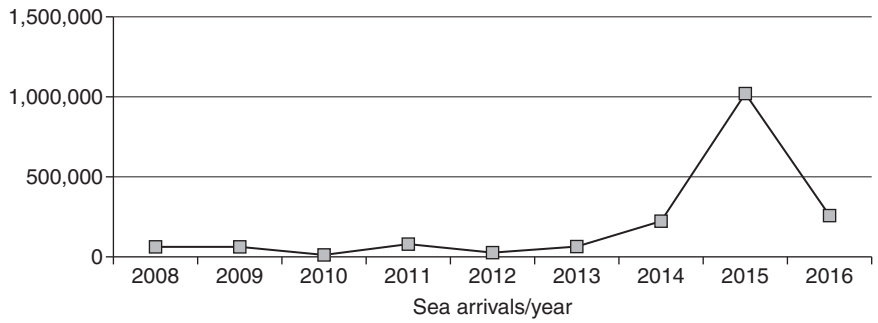

Figure 7.1 Arrivals by the Mediterranean Sea 2008–July 2016.
Source: UNHCR Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean.

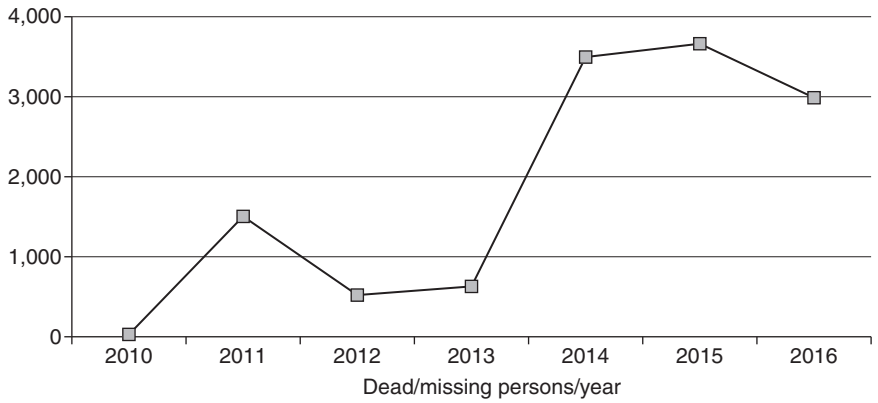

Figure 7.2 Deaths and missing persons in the Mediterranean Sea 2010–July 2016.
Source: UNHCR Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean.

More people are reported to have arrived in Europe during the first six weeks of 2016 in comparison with the first four months of 2015, with a larger number of women migrating than recorded in previous years (Freedman 2016b), and reportedly, in larger numbers than men. UNHCR has reported that in January of 2016, 58 per cent of irregular migrants arriving in Europe were women and children (UNHCR, 2016a). While the figures for January showed a higher percentage of women migrating than men, the overall number of women on the move across the Mediterranean Sea and into Europe in the crisis since January 2016 has been estimated at around 20 per cent of all migrant arrivals (OSCE PA, 2016; UNHCR, 2016a). In 2015, demographic data recorded by UNHCR showed that 50 per cent of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean were men, 19 per cent were women and 31 per cent were children. In June 2016, the demographics of men, women and children migrants and refugees

recorded to have made this journey was 31 per cent, 18 per cent and 51 per cent respectively (UNHCR, 2016a). With regard to Syrians fleeing for safety to Europe, the data shows that of those Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, almost half as many Syrian women are migrating as men (UNHCR, 2016c). But there may be a myriad of reasons for this involving peculiarities of the registration system, such as that the male head of household is recorded while the rest of the family go unrecorded and that many refugees remain unregistered entirely. Regardless, what is clear is that as the flow of refugees out of Syria has continued, the proportion of women moving to Europe has been increasing.

There are a number of reasons why women have been fleeing to places of safety in Europe which are not necessarily unique to their gender; these can be motivations for men too, including escape from conflict and war and political, social and/or religious persecution. However, other reasons to flee have been identified that specifically relate to women and girls, such as experiences of sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV), forced marriage, transactional sex, domestic violence, rape or sexual or physical assault, not only in their country of origin but also on the migration journey (Amnesty International, 2016; Freedman, 2016a; UNHCR, 2016a; UNHCR *et al.*, 2016). A report by an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) coalition (UNHCR *et al.*, 2016) which presents findings from interviews with asylum-seeking women and girls in Greece and the former Republic of Yugoslavia who had been caught up in the European migrant crisis reveals that: 'SGBV was identified as both a reason why refugees and migrants are leaving countries of origin and first asylum and a reality along the refugee and migration route for women and girls' (UNHCR *et al.*, 2016, p. 8). Freedman (2016a) argues that the increase in women migrants is a reflection of conditions in countries of origin, where migration is a last resort, and 'women do not migrate until they have absolutely no other choice'.

The increase in the number of women and girls in the migrant crisis travelling by irregular means to Europe has also seen a growth in the numbers of families travelling with young children, single women migrants, pregnant women and unaccompanied children (Freedman, 2016a; OSCE PA, 2016; UN Women, 2016). One reason for the increased number of women and children (unaccompanied minors) travelling alone is because it is believed they will be prioritised for asylum claims and registration given their perceived vulnerability. Therefore, they are more likely to be granted asylum (compared to male and/or adult asylum seekers) and can then pave the way for family reunification (Freedman, 2016a; UNHCR *et al.*, 2016).

An examination of border death datasets by Pickering and Cochrane (2013), including European border death data found that 'women are more likely to die crossing borders at the harsh physical frontiers of nation-states rather than at increasingly policed "internal border" sites'. While Pickering and Cochrane's analysis reveals this information with regard to the gendered nature of border deaths in Europe, little effort has been made to record sex and gender-related data in border death counts at the Mediterranean Sea or land crossing points during the European migrant crisis.

The increase in the number of women and girls travelling to Europe in the crisis prompts an assessment and understanding of the particular risks, vulnerabilities and gender-related circumstances they face during their migration journey. Given the nature of the crisis and the fact that it has been labelled as a crisis only since 2015, there is limited academic literature on gender and border deaths in the context of the European migrant crisis. However, considerations regarding risks, dangers and vulnerabilities to border deaths taken from the existing literature on gender and border deaths more broadly (Freedman, 2016a, 2016b; Gerard and Pickering, 2013; Pickering and Cochrane, 2013; Weber and Pickering, 2012, 2014) confirms that we should rightly be concerned with the gendered nature of risks for women when irregularly crossing borders.

Risks leading to deaths

Securitisation of migration and borders (Gerard and Pickering, 2013) has been identified as a key driver in asylum seekers taking riskier journeys: relatively safe entry points close and migrants are forced to take alternative, irregular migration routes (Weber and Pickering, 2012). While European leaders and civil society organisations call for European governments to respond to and prevent violence against women during these dangerous irregular migration journeys, at the same time, European border security has tightened pushing migrants, including women, to take more dangerous migration pathways (Freedman, 2016b). The European response has been to try to halt irregular migration and prevent smuggling and trafficking of people across its borders, rather than assessing and implementing safe migration pathways that can sufficiently respond to the current and future volume of migrants. With the closing of key European borders, reliance on the services of smugglers becomes a more likely option for those looking to enter Europe when fleeing conflict (Freedman, 2016b).

When migrants turn to the use of facilitated travel, women routinely face additional risks in negotiating and executing a facilitated journey. Examples from fieldwork conducted by Freedman (2016a) with refugee women migrants travelling to and through Kos, Serbia and France following sea journeys to Turkey reveal stories from several women who

> talked about the violence they had experienced at the hands of smugglers, including sexual violence and also the pressure to exchange sexual relations in return for the price of their passage when they did not have enough cash to pay for this journey.

This research also presents a number of incidents of sexual assault experienced by the women migrants interviewed, including rape as well as physical violence, at the hands of smugglers (Freedman, 2016a).

Gendered vulnerabilities particular to women have also been identified and documented for women who survive the journey and reach Europe. Service provisions including accommodation and shelter, access to food and water,

clothing, hygiene and health care for women irregular migrants are inadequate, putting them at risk along the journey (Amnesty International, 2016; Freedman, 2016a, 2016b). An example from Freedman's research cited above (2016a, 2016b) reflects the insecurity experienced by women migrants on arrival and as they transited through. Freedman reports that many women migrants were sleeping outside in parks or, where accommodated, did not want to leave their rooms alone, particularly at night, because they felt so vulnerable and insecure. Similar stories of women migrants feeling vulnerable and insecure while travelling and surrounding places of transit are reported by Amnesty International who interviewed migrant women in both Germany and Norway who travelled from Turkey to Greece and then across the Balkans to reach these destinations (Amnesty International, 2016).

Deaths

There are no official, publicly available border death statistics on the migrant crisis from European border agencies such as the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (Frontex) or national border control authorities and coastguards. Publicly available border death records produced and maintained by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) remain partial, are not frequently updated and often do not adequately capture the increase in border deaths or any of the associated data that can assist in ascertaining the nature, extent and changes in border-related deaths. Civil society organisations UNITED for Intercultural Action, Fortress Europe and Andalusian Association for Human Rights (APDHA) are the main European-based NGOs that have been recording and reporting on European border deaths and had provided publicly available data associated with these deaths for a number of years in the lead up to the crisis. The 'Deaths at the Borders of Southern Europe' by the Human Costs of Border Control project also has a border deaths database for Southern Europe[1] developed by a team of academics and researchers from the University of Amsterdam. The 3,188 deaths recorded in this database cover the period January 1990 to December 2013 for those travelling from the Balkans, the Middle East and North and West Africa, and whose bodies were found in or brought to Europe. These border deaths records provide the most widely used and primary sources of data on European border deaths.

UNITED for Intercultural Action has a well-established border deaths record and has been counting border deaths in Europe since 1993. Data is collected from news sources, government reports, shadow reports, newsletters, news bulletins and documents produced by NGOs, blogs, testimonies and artwork. In an update published in June 2015, UNITED recorded 22,394 deaths of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants as a result of what they identified as Fortress Europe border control policies. Of this number, 1,671 were recorded to have died in 2015, 251 of whom were women (UNITED for Intercultural Action 2015). At the time of writing this was the most recent update to the UNITED border deaths record. Where data is available UNITED records the sex of each

person who has died along with their name, date of death and cause of death (if known). Fortress Europe was established in 1988 by an Italian based blogger and has a wider geographical coverage of deaths recorded, including en route across the Atlantic Ocean towards Europe. The last update was recorded in September 2012 with a total of 19,144 deaths, largely from information extracted from media reports. APDHA has a focus on the deaths of migrants travelling to Spain including deaths at sea en route to Spain and at Spanish land borders; the latest English language reporting year was 2013–2014, before the European migrant crisis. It reports on IGO and NGO border deaths figures including from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR and UNITED and on significant individual border deaths incidents. It does not have a source-based deaths list recording each death – with the exception of deaths resulting from irregular migrant attempts to scale the fortified barbed wire fence separating Melilla from Morocco in 2014 (from media-based sources); eleven deaths were recorded at this site in 2014 (APDHA, 2015). Routinely, the sex of the dead migrant is recorded as unknown.

However, both UNHCR and IOM have been tracking border deaths across the Mediterranean Sea routes in the European migrant crisis since it began. IOM has developed a dedicated project, the Missing Migrants Project,[2] to count migrant deaths and missing persons who travel across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, with data reported from 2014 to the time of writing (July 2016). In 2014, 3,279 deaths were recorded; 3,676 deaths were recorded in 2015. As at July 2016, 2,954 deaths had been recorded for 2016 from a total of 250,403 arrivals in Europe of which 240,884 had been recorded to have arrived by sea and 9,519 by land (IOM Missing Migrants Project). Recording Mediterranean border deaths across the crisis since 2014 has reflected a steady increase in the numbers of deaths recorded as the migrant crisis continued. The breakdown of deaths by sex is not given.

As at 6 July 2016, UNHCR had recorded 2,896 deaths or missing persons in the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR 2016b) as a part of their Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response data collection.[3] By May 2016, the death toll was 2,510 in comparison to 1,855 recorded deaths in the Mediterranean Sea during the same period (January–May) in 2015 and fifty-seven in the first five months of 2014 (Edwards and Savary 2016). In respect of yearly death totals in the Mediterranean Sea during the European migrant crisis, UNHCR recorded 3,500 deaths in 2014 and 3,771 in 2015 (see Figure 7.2). While the UNHCR data differs from that collected by IOM, the same trend is observable in the increasing numbers of border deaths in the Mediterranean Sea as the crisis continued.

UNHCR data on Mediterranean deaths and missing persons comes from information provided by the family and friends of migrants, UNHCR staff, border control and government and news media as well as civil society organisations (UNHCR, 2016b). Although the number of deaths and missing persons are recorded, there is no disaggregated data on the deaths of men and women in the Mediterranean. Arrival data provides gendered information recording the arrival of 51 per cent men, 19 per cent women and 31 per cent child irregular

migrants via the Mediterranean since January 2016. In 2015, a total of 1,015,078 arrivals via the Mediterranean Sea were recorded by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2016b).

The Mediterranean is not the only fatal sea journey location for irregular migration to Europe. IOM reports that: 'Over 850,000 migrants and refugees came through the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece, accounting for over 80 per cent of irregular maritime flows to Europe in 2015' (Brain and Laczko, 2016). While this may be reflective of the volume of migrants travelling from Syria and the Middle East to cross into Europe via the Aegean, it became Europe's most deadly sea crossing in 2015. Of the 806 deaths or missing persons reported by IOM in the Aegean in 2015, ninety-one women died for every 100 men in cases where the sex of migrants was known (Brain and Laczko, 2016).

Reviewing the available data on border-related deaths in the European migrant crisis, it is apparent that women remain invisible in the available data. Moreover, the SGBV and discrimination that marks their journey, as well as the conditions of their death, remains largely invisible. Without this information we are unlikely to be able to respond comprehensively or sustainably to redress the levels of harm and death for the increasing numbers of women making the journey from Syria to Europe.

The Andaman Sea migrant situation

Background

Irregular migration by boat from the Bay of Bengal and through the Andaman Sea towards Malaysia and Thailand is a well-established migration route in South East Asia largely used by Bengali economic migrants travelling from their homeland in Bangladesh and stateless Rohingya migrants from Myanmar. UNHCR (2015c) has described this unregulated maritime movement as a 'complex, mixed migratory movement composed of refugees, stateless people and economic migrants'. Many Bengali migrants are seeking opportunities for a better life in other destination countries. In respect of Rohingya migrants, their official status and everyday experiences as stateless persons following the passage of the country's 1982 citizenship law has resulted in periodic flare ups of state-based and sectarian persecution against them that has been well documented (Equal Rights Trust, 2014; Green *et al.*, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2014; O'Connor, 2014; Parnini, 2013; Ullah, 2011). This persecution has been a major driving factor for many Rohingya, causing them to flee their homeland in Rakhine State in search of asylum in transit and destination countries in the region including Thailand, Malaysia and Bangladesh.

The Andaman Sea route is used throughout the year with a seasonal increase in voyages at the end of the rainy season in October marking the beginning of "sailing season" (Amnesty International, 2015; UNHCR, 2015a). UNHCR estimates that in 2014, 63,000 people travelled the Andaman Sea route from

the Bay of Bengal to South East Asia (UNHCR, 2015c), with a further 31,000 making the journey in the first half of 2015 (UNHCR, 2016c). For the year 2015, UNHCR reported an estimate of 33,600 migrants and refugees travelling by sea through South East Asia, including an estimate of 1,000 migrants crossing the Strait of Malacca and those attempting to reach Australia by boat from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam (UNHCR, 2016c).

Although voyages across the Andaman Sea have long been used as a migration route in the region for those fleeing persecution and seeking economic opportunities abroad, it has remained largely inconspicuous. It was not until the Andaman Sea crisis in 2014–2015 that global attention was directed to the risks and dangers, including death, along this irregular migration pathway. Deaths have been reported and recorded as a result of drownings, starvation, dehydration, disease and fatal violence and abuse on board smugglers' ships (UNHCR, 2016c). Border deaths have also been reported in migrant smuggler camps along the Thai–Malaysia border and the discovery of mass graves in May 2015 (Fredrickson, 2015; Reuters online, 2015; Yi, 2015). These death sites are highly gendered. Rates of drowning have long been held to be higher for women (Pickering and Cochrane, 2013) while it is known that a number of women migrants have passed through the smuggler camps (Mezzofiore, 2015; Tazreiter *et al.*, forthcoming 2016).

The crisis was sparked by a surge in the number of migrants embarking on this sea journey from October 2014 to May 2015 – in large part due to renewed persecution and violence against Rohingya in Myanmar from 2012, which saw a rise in overland departures from Myanmar to Bangladesh in the first quarter of 2015. During 2014 and the first half of 2015, 94,000 irregular migrants are reported to have made this journey (Brain and Laczko 2016). Many Rohingya fled to neighbouring Bangladesh to take onward journeys from the Bay of Bengal to Thailand and Malaysia via the Andaman Sea (UNHCR, 2015a). At around the same time, mass graves along the Thai–Malay border were discovered, thus identifying smuggler camps where migrants were held for periods of time following disembarkation as smugglers demanded further payments to facilitate onward travel. In 2015, the remains of 220 people were discovered in or around these smuggler camps (UNHCR, 2016c). Although the number of women (and men) who have passed through or died in these camps is not known, it is known that Rohingya women irregular migrants pass through these camps as part of their migration journey from Myanmar to Thailand and onward to Malaysia and that some have experienced physical and sexually-based violence while held there (Mezzofiore, 2015; Tazreiter *et al.*, forthcoming 2016). The discovery of these camps caused Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian authorities to orchestrate a crackdown on people smugglers which included intercepting and turning back boats at sea bound for their shores (McLeod *et al.*, 2016; Missbach, 2016).

Boat interceptions and news of the crackdown resulted in smugglers abandoning their ships at sea, leaving the passengers stranded as boats were left drifting. At the peak of the crisis in May 2015, at least 5,000 irregular men, women and child migrants were left stranded at sea off the coast of Thailand, Malaysia

and Indonesia for many days on large, overcrowded holding ships, some with the capacity to take over 1,000 passengers each (IOM, 2015; UNHCR, 2015b). Seventy people are reported to have died in this incident alone while the boats remained stranded at sea with many more missing (UNHCR, 2015b).

Dearth of data on gendered nature of migration

There is a limited data on the gender breakdown of irregular migrants travelling from the Bay of Bengal and across the Andaman Sea during the crisis; however, it has been reported that there are an increasing number of women making this journey (Newland, 2015; UNHCR, 2016c). UNHCR has captured some data on the percentage of men, women and children who travelled this route and experienced the crisis. The organisation reported that of the 62,000 irregular migrants who departed the Bay of Bengal by boat and crossed the Andaman Sea towards Thailand and Malaysia from January to September 2014, 10 per cent were women and children (UNHCR, 2014). While the nationality or ethnicity of these women was not recorded, it is known that Rohingya women travel to join husbands and family who made the journey ahead of them or to find a place of safety; a number also travel to Malaysia for the purpose of marriage, including arranged marriages organised by family members (Equal Rights Trust, 2014; Tazreiter *et al.*, forthcoming 2016).

For the final quarter of 2014, UNHCR reported a 4–14 per cent increase in the number of female passengers on board boats departing from the Bay of Bengal (UNHCR, 2015a); and by the end of 2015, UNHCR reported that female passengers made up 15 per cent of all passengers travelling in that year (UNHCR, 2016c). This indicates an increasing trend in the number of women migrating along this irregular pathway. From interviews conducted by UNHCR and the Arakan Project with those irregular migrants who disembarked in Thailand and Malaysia, we know that women in family groups, pregnant women and single women made this journey during the crisis (UNHCR, 2015a, 2016c).

Risks and dangers

Since the crisis, the risks and dangers experienced by migrants during the Andaman Sea journey has attracted increased attention. While men and women have been exposed to irregular travel-related risks including violence at the hands of smugglers, starvation, exposure, dehydration, sickness and the risk of death, there are a number of gender-based risks experienced particularly by women migrants, heightening their vulnerability when travelling by sea. These include, as Pickering (2013) notes, 'lower levels of swimming ability, their location below deck, the clothes they are wearing, their vulnerability to sexual violence during crossings, and succumbing to exposure and hyperthermia sooner than men' (see also, Pickering and Cochrane, 2013). Interviews conducted by UNHCR and the Arakan Project with migrants disembarking in Thailand and Malaysia revealed that for women migrants, travel by boat was a dangerous

experience: they travelled in cramped conditions with no privacy, minimal food and water (including for their children), poor hygiene and limited access to toilets. Furthermore, women witnessed beatings and violent killings of fellow passengers who were then thrown overboard (UNHCR, 2014, 2015a, 2016c).

Deaths

Evidence and information concerning the gendered breakdown of border deaths during the crisis does not exist; this can be understood as an extension of identified data collection challenges and lack of monitoring in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea with regard to arrivals deaths (Brain and Laczko, 2016). As IOM recently concluded: 'The lack of monitoring in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea means that numbers who die during this crossing are very vague estimates arrived at through a variety of methods.' It can be assumed that the majority of deaths go 'unrecorded and unidentified' (Brain and Laczko, 2016).

However, border deaths – at sea, in smuggler camps and in immigration detention centres – have been recorded in various ways during the crisis. These deaths are largely reported by IGOs and in the media in response to specific incidents and are based on estimates given the lack of official recording of and accountability for these deaths and difficulties in identifying and recording irregular migrant deaths. Of the data recorded by UNHCR while monitoring the crisis in the Andaman Sea, up to 2,000 Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants are estimated to have died during the sea journey from an estimated 170,000 refugees and migrants who departed from the Bay of Bengal between 2012–2015, with estimates of 370 deaths in 2015 alone. Furthermore, UNHCR reports the discovery of 220 bodies in or near migrant smuggler camps along the Thailand–Malaysia border in 2015 (UNHCR, 2016c). While deaths in immigration detention centres in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have been reported by the media (ABC News, 2016; Forum-Asia, 2009; Missbach and Sinanu, 2013) no official statistics are available. UNHCR reported the deaths of thirteen asylum seekers and refugees in immigration detention in Malaysia in 2015 (as cited by the US Department of State, 2016) without a gendered breakdown of these deaths; the number of deaths in Thai and Indonesian immigration detention centres before and during the crisis could not be found. The number of deaths recorded during the crisis has highlighted the Andaman Sea route and onward migration through Thailand and Malaysia at the point of disembarkation as one of the deadliest routes in the world: in 2015 the fatality rate was three times higher than that experienced during the European migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea (UN News Centre, 2016; UNHCR, 2016c).

UNHCR has reported that twelve out of every 100 migrants departing the Bay of Bengal to cross the Andaman Sea do not survive the journey. In 2014, UNHCR estimated that over 750 migrants had died in the Andaman Sea during irregular migrant departures from the Bay of Bengal (UNHCR, 2014). In 2015, 800 deaths were recorded by IOM, with 550 deaths along this sea route (in contrast to 370 reported by UNHCR) and over 160 found dead in migrant smuggler

camps along the Thai–Malaysian border (Brain and Laczko, 2016). While there are discrepancies in the data between the IGOs monitoring and reporting on the crisis, the data does show that the sea route is the most visibly deadly. At the time of writing, figures have yet to be published for 2016; however, the volume of irregular migrants travelling across the Andaman Sea has not been as large as anticipated (Brain and Laczko, 2016).

Gender and border deaths in Australia

Background

Australia is a destination for irregular migrants seeking asylum primarily from the Middle East after transiting the South East Asia region. Dangerous and deadly sea routes from Indonesia to Australia's outlying territories, including Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands, are known to have caused significant loss of life among asylum seekers travelling to Australia. The Australian government has increasingly strengthened border control policies, most recently with Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) which commenced in September 2013,[4] in an attempt to "stop the boats". However, loss of life at sea is not the only border site for Australian border deaths and while the government claims to have stopped deaths at sea, they continue to be recorded at other border sites. The Border Crossing Observatory[5] hosts the Australian Border Deaths Database which provides the only publicly available and regularly maintained border deaths register in Australia. The Database records deaths that occur across several border sites using a methodology developed by Weber and Pickering (2012) to include deaths en route to Australia (both inside and outside Australia's border surveillance zone), deaths in onshore and offshore immigration detention centres, during border enforcement operations, in community contexts where there is direct evidence of a link to border control (for example, suicides following receipt of visa rejection letters) and following return to countries of origin or transit (in the rare cases where this is reported) (Border Crossing Observatory).

Gendered nature of Australian border deaths at sea

The Database provides data and reporting on Australian border deaths relying on verifiable media reports, coroner's reports and, where available, government reports of border deaths. There are inherent difficulties in obtaining information on the age and sex of those who have died although this information is recorded where it is available. Tragic large-scale drowning incidents at sea in 2001 with the sinking of SIEV X and SIEV 221 in 2010 highlighted the large numbers of women and children on board who lost their lives when these boats foundered. However, the Australian government's lack of transparency in reporting border deaths, particularly deaths at sea, coupled with the unregulated nature of this mode of travel, negatively impacts on the maintenance of an accurate border deaths count and accountability for these deaths.

Research conducted by Pickering and Cochrane (2013) to examine border deaths in Europe and Australia shows that for both contexts, when considering border crossings by sea, 'the cause of death for women was more likely to be drowning than it was for men' and that 'of the known deaths the proportion of women who drowned was larger than the proportion of men who drowned'. The SIEV X and SIEV 221 incidents show that for these sea journeys, fatality rates were higher for women than for men on board. During the SIEVX incident in 2001, of the 350 people on board, 77 per cent ($n = 65/85$) of the fatalities were men while 93 per cent ($n = 142/152$) were women and 95 per cent ($n = 146/155$) were children (Pickering and Cochrane, 2013). The SIEV 221 incident in 2010 when the vessel, carrying asylum seekers, crashed onto rocks at the shores of Christmas Island, had a high proportion of women who drowned of the fifty fatalities recorded. Of the fifty who died, only thirty bodies were recovered, but of these thirty all were identified including recording their gender (Hope, 2012). Of those recovered, fifteen females and fifteen males were recorded to have died in this incident by the Western Australian Coroner's inquest report (Hope, 2012). This data from both the SIEV X and SIEV 221 incidents aligns closely with Pickering and Cochrane's (2013) overall hypothesis that 'the physical border remains the site of greater concentrations of female deaths compared to other border sites and the size of these concentrations differ to those of men'. This supports the argument that women and children are particularly vulnerable during risky and dangerous boat journeys and border crossings.

The vast majority of deaths recorded by the Australian Border Deaths Database have been at sea, including on boats that have foundered en route to Australia both in Australian waters and off Indonesia as well as deaths that have occurred during interdiction at sea by Australian border control authorities (1,909 deaths) (see Table 7.1).

Non-maritime deaths at sites including onshore and offshore immigration detention centres, during pursuit by police or immigration authorities in the community or on return following deportation are fewer in number (Border

Table 7.1 Deaths at sea in the Australian border deaths context as recorded by the Border Crossing Observatory (as at July 2016)

Maritime location of death	*Males who have died*	*Females who have died*	*Those of unknown gender who have died*	*Total*
Australian patrolled waters, including interdictions at sea	67	26	96	189
En route	269	201	1,248	1,718
Total	336	227	1,344	1,907 out of 1,977 recorded deaths

Crossing Observatory; Weber and Pickering 2014). As demonstrated above, from Pickering and Cochrane's research on border deaths and gender, the gendered impacts of maritime deaths in particular are higher among women than men and this is reflected in the deaths recorded by the Australian Border Deaths Database. Deaths recorded at non-maritime border sites impact more on men. The Australian Border Deaths Database shows that of the deaths recorded on these sites where gender was identified, forty-four out of sixty-eight deaths recorded in non-maritime settings were men.

Increased vulnerabilities of women irregular migrants travelling to Australia

Weber and Pickering (2014) provide insights into the gendered nature of border deaths while acknowledging that associated reasons are not necessarily discernible from the data:

> yet based on the extant literature it is reasonable to conclude that in addition to the role of border control measures (such as restrictions on family reunion which may prompt dangerous journeys), gendered social practices within countries of origin and transit, smuggling practices and gendered social mores are contributing factors.

The evolution of Australia's border control policies has resulted in border strengthening as a result of tighter immigration controls forcing those who are not eligible for visas to make risky and dangerous migration journeys to Australia. This is the only option for many asylum seekers travelling from Middle Eastern and other countries of origin, including Sri Lanka and Vietnam, who are ineligible for regulated entry into Australia.

Many irregular migrants who travel to Australia by sea are from the Middle East including Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. There is some information on the gendered nature of these migrant groups, particularly surrounding the role of women in decision-making with regard to irregular migration journeys. Pickering and Barry (2013) have conducted research on the arrival of female Iranian asylum seekers in Australia during the period 2010 until Operation Sovereign Borders came into effect in late 2013. More than 3,000 Iranians arrived by boat from June 2010 to June 2012 and close to 4,500 during the following twelve-month period from June 2012–June 2013. Among this cohort, the proportion of female Iranian asylum seekers was larger than for other comparable groups arriving in Australia by boat.

Based on interviews with fifty Iranian women who had arrived in Australia between 2010–2013, this research provides an understanding of why, and how, the status of women in Iran who experience and are culturally exposed to a range of gender-related practices, contributes to their decision to undertake irregular migration journeys, including seeking asylum (Pickering and Barry 2013). The research revealed that: 'women's increasing participation in irregular

border crossing, and in particular, their involvement in high risk border crossings, is directly related to the status of women and increasingly repressive social mores in Iran.' Identified social mores associated with this migrant group included changing gender relations, gender roles and the status of Iranian women, particularly within the family unit; these resulted in fear and threat of persecution in the context of intimate and familial relations. Moreover, women spoke of facing persecution from their extended family with regard to their gender roles and social mores when husbands had passed away or left them (as single mothers), and conflict with their extended family in relation to gender-related roles. Furthermore, the impact of these changing social mores is to limit women's access to economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their children (Pickering and Barry, 2013), thus providing further reasons to leave Iran by irregular means.

Research conducted with Afghan and Iranian irregular migrant communities in transit in Indonesia (Pickering *et al.*, 2016) provides further evidence of the impact social mores in countries of origin has on causing an increase in the numbers of women migrating by irregular means, and with Australia in mind as a destination. This research shows that women are key decision-makers concerning migration journeys and are increasingly on the move from the Middle East to Indonesia in different travel configurations including with families, husbands or solo. Reasons for leaving home countries among the women migrants interviewed for this study (25 per cent of respondents, $n = 35$) were because of gender-based persecution, deaths of family members (including husbands and fathers) and lack of economic and educational opportunities for themselves and/or their children (Pickering *et al.*, 2016).

For those women who take dangerous voyages at sea facilitated by people smugglers in an attempt to reach Australia, similar experiences to migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe and those crossing the Andaman Sea in South East Asia reveal the vulnerabilities that women face. Cramped conditions aboard the boat, limited access to food and water (including for their children), starvation, dehydration, poor hygiene and privacy and the ongoing threat of gender-based sexual and domestic violence (Pickering, 2013, 2014) are parallel experiences for irregular women migrants who take boat journeys to Australia and for those who journey by the same means in Europe and South East Asia.

Conclusion

The increasing proportion of women fleeing conflict in Syria and travelling to Europe to seek protection is a trend seen in other parts of the world where conflict is driving irregular migration. Common to the three sites we have considered is that as irregular migration routes are established, women begin to travel in increasing numbers. This is most likely fuelled by their assessment that remaining behind is impossible due to heightened conflict and, specifically, the risk of gender-based violence. It can also be surmised that similar to their

Iranian counterparts, changing gender and social mores may mean that for Syrian women remaining behind with extended family becomes increasingly unbearable. When women do flee, crossing increasingly securitised borders shifts migration routes to often longer and more dangerous journeys both by land and sea. When the risk of crossing borders heightens and particularly when women face environmentally hazardous conditions – such as maritime or harsh land crossings – they are often more likely to succumb to physical difficulties including drownings and exhaustion. When women are intercepted they are less likely to be able to remove themselves from detention and detention-like arrangements operated either by states, agencies working on behalf of the state or, indeed, by smugglers.

What we are most certain of is that the above conclusions continue to be based on partial information and data on border-related deaths. The evidence remains that the majority of those who die crossing borders go unidentified. Moreover, most dead migrants do not have their sex identified. The invisibility of women within these partial accounts means we are still piecing together the ways in which the circumstances of border deaths are often gendered. There is an urgent need to build this knowledge base, not only so we can count the dead and understand how and why migrants are dying in increasing numbers, but also so we can duly account for their lives, so families can mourn, and the world can disaggregate irregular migration flows into people with all the complexity of their protection needs.

Notes

1 The Human Costs of Border Control, 'Deaths at the borders of Southern Europe', www.borderdeaths.org This database count falls outside the scope of the European migrant crisis, but the deaths are recorded based on state-produced evidence from Spain, Gibraltar, Italy, Malta and Greece including coroners reports and deaths certificates.
2 IOM, Missing Migrants Project, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean
3 Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean, http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php
4 Operation Sovereign Borders, www.border.gov.au/about/operation-sovereign-borders
5 www.borderobservatory.org

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8 Women's experience of forced migration

Gender-based forms of insecurity and the uses of "vulnerability"

Jane Freedman

Introduction

As the refugee "crisis" began to gain widespread political and media coverage in Europe, little attention was at first paid to the presence of women and children among those arriving on European shores. The principal images of these "boat migrants" were of young men arriving on the shores of Italy or Greece. However, as the "crisis" progressed, more and more women and children were among those on the migrant boats and some observers began to point to the particular "vulnerabilities" of these women. While the recognition that many of the refugees arriving were women has helped to highlight some of the particular dangers they face (and, in particular, the risk of sexual and gender-based forms of violence faced by women on their journeys and on arrival in Europe), much of the reporting on this subject has not gone beyond this superficial recognition of the presence of women. A more in-depth analysis of the gendered differences and relations of power which are created and transformed during the refugees' journeys and on arrival in Europe has not, at the time of writing, yet been undertaken.

This chapter is based on empirical research carried out in several locations within Europe (particular on the Greek island of Kos, in Serbia and in France), both in countries of "transit" and in countries of destination. Interviews were undertaken with women refugees, their husbands or travelling companions, as well as with representatives of international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work to support refugees. The chapter brings together and analyses women's experiences of migration and identifies the ways in which these experiences are gendered. We look at women's experiences of the various stages of the journey to Europe, gendered migration strategies, relationships with other migrants, with local populations and with immigration authorities and police. We also examine gendered representations of male and female refugees, and how the constructions of these representations contribute to individual refugee's security/insecurity. In doing so, the chapter aims to provide a more nuanced view of women's experiences of migration that highlights both the various forms of insecurity that women face as well as their agency and strategies for successfully reaching Europe, particularly that of

playing on the imposed category of "vulnerability" to try and achieve safety for themselves and their families.

A "feminisation" of refugee flows?

In 2015, over one million refugees arrived by boat in the European Union (EU) and, at the time of writing, there had already been over 200,000 arrivals in the first six months of 2016 (UNHCR, 2016). The majority of these refugees landed on the shores of Greece and Italy, mainly hoping to move on to other EU destinations. Of the sea arrivals in the first six months of 2016, 86 per cent came from just ten countries, with 45 per cent from Syria and 24 per cent from Afghanistan.[1] The highly risky nature of this means of reaching Europe is demonstrated by the fact that at least 3,440 people were dead or missing during sea crossings in 2015 and over 2,500 were dead or missing in the first six months of 2016 (UNHCR, 2016) – although the figures are probably higher because of the number of unrecorded deaths. Reports of boats sinking have sadly become more and more common. And the dangers do not start with, or end after, the sea crossing. As an increasing number of EU member states and neighbouring countries, such as Serbia and Macedonia, attempt[2] to close their borders to prevent the passage or influx of refugees,[3] the journey becomes more difficult and more dangerous. Refugees have been victims of violence from police and border guards, as well as smugglers, who are now demanding high prices to facilitate entry to the EU (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The 2016 EU agreement with Turkey has added another layer of complexity and difficulty to the situation for refugees, many of whom find themselves "trapped" in Greece following this agreement, unable to move on to their European destination of choice because of the closing of the borders between Greece and its European neighbours, and fearful of being "returned" to Turkey.[4]

While the figure of a "typical" refugee was for many years that of a young man, recent refugee flows have been marked by increasing numbers of women and children. It is impossible to give an accurate figure for the number of women refugees arriving in Europe due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data; however in 2016 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that among those arriving in the EU, about 20 per cent were women (UNHCR, 2016). According to a representative of UNHCR interviewed for this research, the proportion of women refugees has been increasing since 2015, and a greater proportion of women are now travelling alone, or just with their children.[5] In some cases, this respondent argued, this is a specific strategy on the part of families who believe that sending women and children ahead will be a more successful means of gaining entry to the EU, as they will be perceived as more "vulnerable" and will thus more likely to be offered protection by EU States. The hope is that the husbands or partners can then rejoin their family through family reunification procedures. In other cases, women are travelling alone because they are single, or because they have lost their husbands or partners during war. In some cases, families become separated,

either by smugglers or by officials. There have been cases, for example, where a sea rescue has been carried out by both Greek and Turkish coastguards, with some refugees being taken to Greece and others taken back to Turkey, or where families have been separated by border guards in the struggles and chaos of the crossing from Greece to Macedonia. Other respondents for the research also noted an increase in women refugees and in women travelling alone. In another interview, a representative of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) based in Athens estimated that around 25 per cent of new arrivals were women, although she emphasised that there are no accurate sex-disaggregated statistics available from the Greek authorities.[6] An MSF representative working in Kos also put the figure of women migrants as between 20 and 30 per cent, and said that he had seen an increase in women arriving since the end of 2014.[7]

There are demographic differences between the refugee populations of various nationalities arriving in Europe. In Kos, for example, while Syrian and Afghan women arrive mainly accompanied by their husbands (although the number of Syrian women travelling alone is increasing), and often children, women from other countries such as Eritrea or Ethiopia may arrive alone. And migrant populations from Pakistan are composed entirely of men. Similarly, in the camps in and around Calais, women from Eritrea or Ethiopia were far more likely to be alone with no male travelling companion, than women from other countries. Travelling in family groups may provide some degree of security for women migrants, and some women have chosen to travel with male companions who are not in fact members of their family in order to try to gain some extra protection. However, these family groups can also pose problems in terms of unequal relations of power, incidences of conjugal violence within groups and obstacles to women's ability to make independent decisions concerning their migratory journeys.

It does seem that there are now increasing numbers of women travelling without a husband or male partner, in particular those whose husbands have been killed in war or conflict, or women who are sent ahead by their families to try to claim asylum in a safe country before attempting to bring other family members across to join them. Those women interviewed who were travelling without a husband or male partner spoke of the particular difficulties and insecurities they faced. 'It is certainly very difficult to be a woman alone. It is hard to cope on my own, people look badly at me, I have to protect my children and do everything for them on my own',[8] said one woman whose husband had been killed in Syria, and who was travelling with two teenage children in an attempt to reach her brother in Hamburg, Germany.

Previous research has pointed to the difficulties and obstacles that may prevent women from migrating, including lack of economic resources, responsibility for children and children's welfare, restrictions on women travelling alone both within their own country and outside of it and fears of violence during migration. These obstacles mean that often women do not migrate until they have absolutely no other choice (Freedman, 2015). Thus the increasing numbers of female migrants who risk the journey across the Mediterranean to

reach Europe could be attributed to the worsening conditions in Syria, and for Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan (see, for example, Chapters 2–6 in this book), as well as a realisation that the Syrian conflict is not likely to end soon, so that these women are taking the choice of last resort. Other refugees have been arriving from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea, which have also been experiencing high levels of violence and armed conflict. Women from these countries who choose to migrate also seem to feel that there is no other choice and no possibility for them to live safely in their own country. Although there are increasing numbers of women making the journey to Europe, there is still little research on their specific experiences, the difficulties they may face or the strategies and choices they employ. The main sources of information on these women's experiences are reports by various NGOs and human rights organisations (Amnesty International, 2016; Nobel Women's Initiative, 2016).

Gender, migration and security

The interconnections between gender, migration, violence and insecurity have been highlighted through research in various regions of the world (Freedman 2012; Marchand 2008). Different push and pull factors and migration control regimes, as well as differing social and economic conditions in countries of origin, transit and destination, create varying types of insecurity and violence for men and women, depending on their varying social and economic positions and the relations of power between them. As Marchand argues: 'It goes without saying that the migration–violence nexus is gendered. Men and women are affected in different ways and the violence to which they are exposed is related to their position with respect to the migration–violence nexus' (Marchand, 2008: 1387). Recent research has also highlighted the physical risks of border crossing for women, and the higher rate of mortality at borders for women compared with men (Pickering and Cochrane, 2012). Despite these risks, women continue to try to cross the Mediterranean and the Aegean to reach Europe and escape conflict, violence and persecution in their home countries and find a safer home for themselves and their children.

When listening to the stories of migrants and studying their experiences it seems clear that migration does entail considerable threats to human security and that individual security is particularly threatened by contemporary efforts to control migration. This seems to support an argument for a 'reconceptualisation of security in multidimensional and multilevel terms' (Tickner, 1992: 128), and of a re-analysis of the relationship between migration and security beyond that of the threats that migration poses to states. To move beyond a state-centric approach to the insecurities of migration, a gender-informed approach to human security such as that proposed by Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006) seems a productive one. This type of approach can, its proponents argue, 'offer a great deal in opening human security up to voices from below' (Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 2006: 217), stressing the need to make visible relations of dominance and to

identify the ways in which insecurities develop as a result of these relationships. The prioritisation of an epistemological approach based on a concern with 'peopling IR [international relations]' (Pettman, 1996), and with dealing with contextually dependent practices and relationships also seems highly relevant in the study of migration. As Hoogensen and Stuvoy explain:

> The theoretical concern with the activities and experiences of average people, referred to as 'everyday feminist theorizing' (Sylvester, 1996: 256), institutes an empirical focus of gender IR on the experiences of marginalized people, among them women, for the purposes of bringing new insights on the inter-connections between everyday practices and international politics.
>
> (Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 2006: 223)

It can be argued that the focus in Europe on regional migration management has led researchers and policy-makers to ignore the individual experiences of migrants, and the impacts policies have on them. In doing so, women's experiences and the gendered differences in migrant experience have been completely overlooked. Thus in studying the experiences of women attempting to migrate to Europe, this chapter attempts to expose the ways in which contemporary European and national migration policies impact on the security and on the gendered relations and representations of refugees. As argued in Chapter 1, the "crisis" labelling employed by European politicians and media, and the move towards a humanitarian rather than a political solution to the refugee question, may be seen to have reinforced dichotomous gender representations of women as "victims" and "vulnerable" and of men as threats to security.

Violence as a cause of migration

All the Syrian women interviewed on Kos had either suffered violence directly in Syria or had a close family member who had experienced violence. They talked about violence from all sides in the conflict, the official Syrian army as well as the Islamic State and rebel forces. One woman, for example, had lost her husband who had been killed in Aleppo and had fled with her son and daughter, aged twenty and twelve. She said she no longer felt safe in Syria and felt that she had lost her home and everything she had. She explained that in addition to the direct insecurities arising from the fighting, she experienced another layer of insecurity as a woman alone without a husband. Another woman, travelling with her husband and two baby sons, had had her house and all her possessions destroyed by a bomb blast and the family had decided to leave straight away to seek safety for themselves and their children. There were many similar stories of women and families who no longer felt safe and had fled to protect themselves and their children, determined to reach Europe and find a place where they could be safe so they could restart their lives. Many had little hope of ever being able to return to Syria. 'I feel as though I have lost my home for ever',[9] said one

woman, echoing the feelings of many others. Women from other countries of origin had also experienced violence. One Afghan woman recounted how the school in her village had been attacked by Taliban fighters causing her to leave with her husband and children in order to try and guarantee their safety. And Iraqi women in the Grande-Synthe camp near Calais in France spoke of how their husbands had been killed while fighting in Iraq and how they had fled in order to protect their children and try to find a safe place for them to live.[10]

Dangerous journeys

As pointed out above, men still make up the majority of refugees arriving in Europe, although the numbers of women are increasing. The dangers of the journey to Europe have been documented by various researchers, who have also pointed to the ways in which EU policies have increased these dangers through the "securitisation" of EU borders; this has made reaching Europe more difficult and more costly and has led to refugees taking longer, more expensive and increasingly dangerous routes (Last and Spijkerboer 2014).

Most of the migrants interviewed had travelled through Turkey, some taking longer than others to finally reach a European destination. Some of the Syrians interviewed had stayed in Turkey for several years and had attempted to "settle" there, but had then moved on due to the deteriorating situation for Syrian refugees in Turkey (Amnesty International 2015) and the lack of opportunities for employment and their children's education. In 2016, at the time of writing, Turkey was host to more than 2.75 million Syrian refugees, far more than could be hosted in the twenty-two refugee camps constructed by the Turkish government, and thus the majority of these refugees had to fend for themselves. Although the Turkish government has adopted an "open door" policy to allow Syrian refugees into the country and has given them temporary protection, they are not allowed to work, and there have been many stories of exploitative work and housing conditions (Özgür Baklacıoğlu 2015). In addition, many families are worried that their children are not going to school and are missing out on vital years of their education. One family interviewed for this research had been living in Turkey for five years, and the two children had learned to speak fluent Turkish. The mother explained, however, that they had encountered increasing hostility from the Turkish authorities and population and that she could not find any work, meaning that they were living in squalid conditions. She wanted to move to Europe to try to find a better future for her children: 'I want my children to go to school, to have an education. And I want to work. There was nothing left for us in Turkey, and I can't go back to Syria', she said.

European leaders have blamed smugglers and traffickers for the "migration crisis" in the Mediterranean and have even gone so far as to suggest bombing smugglers' boats (Sengupta 2015). However, the role played by smugglers in the migrants' journeys is more complex than that of simple "exploitation" and any analysis of the relationship between migrants and smugglers thus needs to be more nuanced. All the migrants interviewed had used the services of smugglers

to cross borders and to cross the sea to reach Europe. For some this was a "normal" part of the journey, while others complained about being victims of exploitation. The cost of the passage varied but some quoted prices of several thousand euros for the short crossing between Turkey and Kos, and up to €10,000 for the journey from Calais to the UK. For many, the prices were unexpectedly high, and had eroded the money they had saved for the journey, making them fearful of running out of money before they reached their final destination and causing insecurities about their ability to procure basic necessities (food, shelter, etc.) for themselves and their children.

The refugees encountered in Kos expressed this worry about money very clearly; for them it meant that they were reluctant to buy anything from the shops in Kos other than very basic necessities, and were even limiting the amount of food they bought for themselves and their families. They complained about the high prices on the island which were driven up by the fact that it was a tourist destination. They were also worried about the price they would have to pay to complete their journeys, to travel across the borders from Greece on their onward trips. The Greek economic crisis of 2015 and the closure of banks for several weeks in June and July had also critically affected migrants, as it meant they were unable to access money transferred from abroad, or change their currency or withdraw euros, thus creating even greater economic insecurity.

Apart from being worried about the price they had to pay the smugglers, some migrants felt they had been cheated by them, or had suffered violence or harm. Several families complained that the smugglers had thrown all their possessions into the sea because there was no room in the boat, or because they thought the boat might sink. One woman said she had lost everything, including all her own and her children's clothes, as well as money and papers during the crossing; she was now relying on the help of local people to clothe and feed her family.[11] Others had been promised passage in a "real" boat but had found themselves in a small rubber dinghy overcrowded with too many people. One Syrian family with two young children had paid US$1,000 for the crossing on the assurance that they would be making the crossing in a proper fibreglass boat. However, they found themselves in a three metre long rubber dinghy with fourteen other people. Halfway across the 5 km stretch of water the motor stopped working and they found themselves floating helplessly until they were eventually rescued by the Greek coastguard after nine hours at sea. 'I would never do that again, I thought I was going to die, and my children too; it was the worst experience of my life – I would never do that again',[12] the woman said, close to tears as she recounted her experience. The women all seemed very distressed by the memory of the journey and the sea crossing; indeed, the MSF psychologist interviewed said that in her experience women seemed more traumatised by the experience of the journey and the crossing than men. Or, in any case, women expressed their feelings of trauma and fear more readily.

Women travelling alone, or just with children, are particularly vulnerable to attack by smugglers, and there were several accounts of women who had been raped or sexually assaulted on their journeys. One woman was travelling with a

woman friend who had been raped by smugglers and badly injured. She expressed fear about continuing their journey in case this type of incident occurred again. UNHCR has also noted what they call "transactional sex", with women being forced to swap sexual relations in return for help on their passage to Europe.

Danger comes not only from smugglers, but also from the police and military in the countries that the migrants have to cross to reach Europe. Women alluded to attacks and harassment by police and military in Turkey. A psychologist working with MSF and providing psychological support and counselling to migrants on Kos, recounted how one Syrian woman had told of her experience of being separated from her husband and children and held in a Turkish prison for forty-five days on her own. The woman would not talk about the details of the abuse she had suffered, but was showing signs of severe trauma as a result of this experience.[13]

Various incidences of sexual or gender based violence (SGBV) have been reported on the refugees' route to and through Europe. Human Rights Watch, for example, reports incidences of SGBV against refugees in detention in Macedonia, as well as transactional sex during which women were promised priority treatment of their cases and faster release if they agreed to sexual relations with the male guards. One woman recounted the behaviour of one of the police officers in a detention centre:

> He tried whatever he could to get me alone in a room with him. He used to approach me and whisper to me that I am very beautiful and that he would help me out, that he would personally look into my case.
>
> (cited in Human Rights Watch, 2015: 17)

There have also been several reports of sexual violence within the Calais refugee camps where women have been involved in transactional sex or prostitution networks in order to support themselves and their families and to pay for their onward journeys to the UK. Staff of NGOs working in the refugee camps around Calais in France who were interviewed for this research also pointed to demands for coerced sex by smugglers, and the existence of networks of "sex workers" within the camps.[14] They also reported that they knew of incidences of violence against women in the camps, but that these women were reluctant to report the violence and would not consider going to the police as they were considered to be even more of a threat. Women who are victims of violence thus have no one to turn to for help and little hope of gaining any kind of redress for the actions of their attackers.

Living in limbo

Both in Greece and in the refugee camps around Calais, the refugees interviewed for this research were living in situations of limbo, waiting to travel onwards and not always sure whether or not they would make it. This type of situation creates extreme anxiety which reinforces the insecurities and trauma

they have already experienced on their journeys. On Kos, while waiting for permits to leave and travel onwards to Athens, the refugees faced extremely difficult living conditions. The living conditions of all refugees are precarious and insalubrious in the extreme. Kos has no official reception facilities and does not provide any basic services (such as food or health care) for migrants. Basic health and psychosocial support is provided by MSF, while a local support group, Kos Solidarity, provides food (one cooked meal per day plus milk and other essentials for children), clothing and basic hygiene necessities such as toothbrushes and soap for the migrants.

The local authorities have requisitioned an abandoned hotel, the Captain Elias, on the outskirts of Kos Town, to house the arriving migrants. As they land on the island, and once they have been registered by the coastguard and police, they are led out on in a procession and left there. The building, which has twenty-five bedrooms and was originally built to house 100 or so people at the maximum, is now "home" to around 700 men, women and children. Mattresses line the floor not only of the bedrooms but of all the corridors and communal areas, and more tents and mattresses are crammed into the garden outside. Still more migrants have made camps in the nearby fields, apparently worried about the security of their families within the crowded "hotel". There is no electricity in the building and no cooking facilities. Some migrants make fires outside in the garden to cook, others eat only cold food and the meal distributed in the evening by local volunteers. There are only two working toilets and running water comes from standpipes outside in the garden. MSF have also installed a few shower cubicles outside the building in order to try to provide some private washing facilities for the migrants. MSF provide basic health services, sanitary services and psychological support to migrants, but faced with the huge numbers of people arriving in Kos every day, the support they can offer is limited. Kos Solidarity collects clothes, food and sanitary supplies which they distribute to migrants, but as one of the local volunteers explained, they are a small group who are also overwhelmed by the number of people needing help.[15] The volunteers are angry that the local authorities on the island have not done more to help meet the needs of migrants.

Following a big fight in the Captain Elias between groups of Afghan and Pakistani migrants over the food that was being distributed by volunteers, some families chose to move out and were sleeping in nearby fields or in a park in the centre of the town. One Afghan family sleeping in a field with their three daughters said they felt it was unsafe for their daughters to sleep in the Captain Elias with all the other migrants, especially the single men whom they saw as a threat to the girls. In the local park several Syrian families were sleeping on pieces of cardboard, with a few blankets donated by local people. There were no toilets or running water and one interviewee said they had been using water from the park's irrigation system to wash, and even to drink, until some local volunteers provided bottled water.

This lack of access to basic facilities and services is a source of insecurity for all migrants but women may be especially affected, particularly by the lack of

sanitary and cooking facilities. Women interviewed for this research who were living in the Captain Elias complained that they felt unable to take a shower because the shower facilities that existed were not private enough and they felt scared going to wash in front of the men. Those that were "lucky" enough to have been able to find a room to share with their family could ask husbands or male friends to bring buckets of (cold) water upstairs for them to wash in the relative privacy of these rooms, but others sleeping outside or in corridors were not so fortunate. Women also complained about the lack of cooking facilities and the fact that they could not provide meals for their families. 'We have to wait for the local people to bring us food. It is only one meal a day, not enough for my children. We are hungry all the time', said one woman.

There seemed to be a de facto division of space, with women migrants trying to remain in bedrooms or other more "private" spaces and to avoid the more crowded "public" areas of the Captain Elias. Women spoke of their fear of being attacked or harassed when they tried to use the toilets or the showers outside, and most said that they refrained from using the toilets or from going outside their rooms at night because there was no lighting and they were very scared of moving around in the dark. One seventeen-year-old Afghan girl, travelling with her mother and young sister, described how she and her family spent their days and nights barricaded in their room with another two Afghan families, only venturing out when they were desperate to use the toilets, or when they had to walk into town to the police station to see if they were on the list of migrants who could collect their permits to leave.

Accommodation facilities are also lacking in other EU countries, including destination countries. Syrian families interviewed in France in October 2015 were camping in makeshift tents on the pavements and borders of a busy road junction. One woman was camping out with her twenty-one-day-old baby, born just after she had reached France. Another older woman who had arrived from Homs in Syria with three teenage children expressed her dismay at the living conditions: 'My husband was killed and I came here with my children. It took three months to arrive here, and now we are living in the streets, with nowhere to wash or take a shower.' Even for those who had been in France for a longer period, finding accommodation remained difficult. A Syrian woman who arrived in France after fleeing Syria, following a period of incarceration for opposition to the government, was still living in emergency accommodation provided by the 115 service (an emergency housing service for the homeless) a year later. She was housed in a hostel where she shared a room with three other women, and a bathroom and toilet with another dozen women. The hostel was closed between 9 am and 6 pm every day, during which time she walked the streets to pass the time and keep warm. She talked about her feelings of vulnerability and the aggression she had experienced while out on the streets, and also the way in which this regime had exacerbated her health problems which had still not been treated.

Living conditions in the refugee camps around Calais were also very insanitary with few washing and cooking facilities and mud and dirt surrounding the tents,

caravans and shelters where the refugees were living. Women expressed dismay about the unhygienic conditions, both for themselves and their children, and the lack of clean and safe spaces. Women were also hardly visible in the public spaces and tended to remain hidden in their tents or caravans because of fear of violence or harassment from other migrants or police in the outside spaces.

Changing gender relations

Migration can also lead to changes in the relations of power and gender relations within families and couples, and in some cases to increasing incidences of domestic violence. As indicated above, some women who are worried about the prospect of travelling alone join up with a male travelling companion or a "family" group in order to try to improve their security en route. But these "family" groups can themselves prove to be sources of insecurity. One of the issues that emerged during the research was that reception processes and procedures often treat refugees in "family" groups without enquiring further into the nature of these families, whether they are really related, and taking into consideration the relations of power and inequality (and possibly violence) within the group. And it is assumed that women travelling within these "family" groups will be protected by their husbands/fathers/male travelling companions, and will thus be less in need of support or protection from others. In practice, this means that often the "father" or male group leader is the only person in the refugee group who will have direct interaction with authorities or with humanitarian and support organisations. Women refugees will not have the opportunity to express their needs, or to signal incidences of violence within the family or group.

The MSF officials interviewed reported cases of both psychological and physical violence within families, and said that women had spoken about the fact that they were victims of violence perpetrated by their husbands during their journeys. These women suffered the insecurities both of their journey and their own husbands, who not only failed to protect them but actually represented a threat. Women in this situation find it almost impossible to leave their abusive husbands or partners because the idea of continuing the journey alone, or just with their children, is too difficult. So they find themselves stuck in a violent relationship.

Respondents in Serbia also said that they had noted cases where husbands were violent to their wives, but again they felt there was little that they could do to help these women who were determined to continue their journey as quickly as possible. One NGO staff member in Serbia reported that the organisation felt unable to approach women within family groups, even when these women were evidently distressed or when they were unsure whether the group was really a family. The member of staff described one incident: 'We saw one woman holding her baby and crying. Her husband was shouting at her, and they were arguing. But we can't intervene in cases like this. It is too hard to speak to the women alone.'[16]

There have also been reports that women who have arrived in EU countries have had little help or support in escaping violence from their husbands or partners. One report in Germany, for example, recounted the story of a Syrian woman whose husband raped and beat her while they were living in a temporary camp set up to house newly arrived refugees. When the woman tried to file a complaint with the police they would not listen to her, and there was no real help either from social work or refugee support services. A group founded to help refugee women in Berlin explained that: 'There is no real security for asylum-seeking women because whenever they are attacked, either physically or sexually harassed, nobody knows what to do. There is no clear policy' (Moore 2015).

Gendered strategies of migration

Having spoken of specific sources of insecurity and violence for women, it would be wrong to paint a picture of these women as merely passive victims without their own migratory strategies and systems for coping with insecurity. In some cases, women expressed the feeling that migration had in fact improved their security and well-being despite the difficult conditions under which they were travelling or living. For some this had meant escaping from family violence and constraints in their countries of origin. One Afghan woman interviewed in Kos, who had travelled from Kandahar with her children, said she felt much freer since her arrival in Greece, despite the difficult living conditions that she was experiencing (she was sleeping with her children in a field and relying on donations of food and water from local people). She was also very positive about the possibilities for her children's schooling, explaining that the school in her village had been destroyed by the Taliban, and that she was enthusiastic about the opportunities for her children in Europe. Another Syrian woman explained that she was pleased to be alone with her husband and children, and no longer "controlled" by her husband's family.

And although in the division of space, women migrants seemed to be more relegated to private and "safer" spaces, they also proved to be taking the initiative in some areas, and to be more central to some aspects of their families' well-being. The MSF psychologist noted, for example, that women are far more willing than their husbands to ask for medical and psychological help. While Syrian men are constrained by norms of masculinity and are reluctant to admit trauma, illness or weakness and to ask for help, their wives are much more forthcoming in requesting help for themselves and their husbands. So in some respects these women are ensuring the health and well-being of all of their families by seeking help, particularly for illness and stress.

Women also had definite strategies for onward migration, and had clear ideas about where they wished to go and what they wanted to achieve through their migration. Nearly all the women interviewed in Greece were hoping to reach Germany with their families, although a few said they were just aiming for countries in the north of Europe. All planned to continue their journeys as soon as

possible via Athens, and then through Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary to reach Germany. None of the migrants interviewed intended to stay in Kos or to remain in Greece, citing the lack of facilities and hospitality towards migrants as well as very limited opportunities for integration and employment. One of the women remarked that 'Greece has its own crisis, there is nothing here for us, we need to go elsewhere where we'll be safe and have a life'.[17] The choice of destination seems to be governed by several factors including the presence of family or friends already living in Germany (or another country), the idea that other countries have better reception conditions for migrants, including fairer and more rapid asylum procedures, and perceptions about the economic conditions in other EU countries where migrants may more easily find work to support themselves and their families. The issue of language was also raised, as although the migrants did not speak German, many spoke some English (in some cases quite good English) and hoped that this would assist the process of settling and integrating in northern European countries.

Some women also played on the idea of their vulnerability to advance their migratory strategies. There were families, for example, who planned to stay in Athens and send their wives on ahead to Germany or to other European destinations. They believed that the women would have an easier time negotiating with border guards and immigration authorities because of their perceived vulnerability, and that an asylum claim made by a woman on her own would have more chance of success than a claim by a man. These families hoped that their wives/mothers would be able to obtain refugee status and would then be able to safely bring their families to join them. The perception that women are more "vulnerable" and in greater need of protection can therefore be used strategically by migrants to help them to further their goals of securing protection for themselves and their families within the EU.

Representations of threat and vulnerability

The representations of the recent influx of refugees in the media and in political discourse are highly gendered. For men, and particularly young men, there is a persistent representation of the threat that they pose to Europe, both at a regional and at an individual level. The fact that some of those involved in the Bataclan attacks in Paris in November 2015 may have travelled through Turkey and Greece with the other refugees fuelled these representations of threat, as did the supposed involvement of some refugees in the sexual violence perpetrated against women in Cologne during the 2016 New Year celebrations. Following the Cologne attacks there were many articles in the media and statements by political leaders drawing on discourses on the lack of respect for women's rights in "other" cultures and the need to "educate" migrants about "European values" concerning women's rights and gender equality.

Women, on the other hand, when they are made visible in discourses on refugees, are portrayed largely as "vulnerable" and in need of protection. As mentioned earlier, many humanitarian and aid organisations deal with refugees

as "family" groups and assume that men will protect the women with whom they are travelling. As well as obscuring relations of domination and violence within these groups, this also acts to silence women's voices and to take away the possibilities of them expressing their own needs and wishes. Women who travel alone are categorised as vulnerable because of the lack of male protection. As noted earlier, this supposed "vulnerability" can be used as a strategy by women to try to gain easier access to Europe and to facilitate the entry of the rest of their family, but it is also a label which may have negative connotations in so far as women are overlooked as independent agents. And although women have been labelled as "vulnerable" there is still a real lack of any kind of understanding of what this vulnerability means to different women, across boundaries of class, nationality, age, race, sexual orientation etc.

The women interviewed for this research, while highlighting the insecurity they felt and the lack of support from European authorities, also claimed that they often felt diminished because of a lack of respect from officials or from aid workers with whom they came into contact. This was particularly marked in the case of women who were wearing a headscarf who felt that they were treated as "other" and less educated, enlightened or intelligent than both European women and refugee men. One woman said: 'They think that all Syrian women are stupid and oppressed. They don't understand how it was for us before in Syria.' This woman was an architect who had a well-respected career before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict; she felt that she was treated as an 'oppressed victim' by those working with refugees, even though the efforts to help her may have been well-intentioned. Another Syrian woman interviewed in Paris explained how she had been treated by the Croix Rouge when she went to ask for food:

> They gave me 1 kg of chocolate biscuits, and I told them I don't like chocolate. But then they said, 'I thought you said you were hungry; if you're hungry you'll eat them.' I felt so humiliated. They just treated me as if I was stupid, nothing.

This type of symbolic violence seems unfortunately to be a common experience for women refugees arriving in Europe, and particularly those who are easily identified as Muslim.

Conclusions

The European migration "crisis" has exposed the failure of EU countries to offer real protection to those fleeing from conflict, including the thousands of Syrians who have been forced to flee their homes and who have sought refuge in Europe. The journey to Europe can provide particular insecurities for women, who appear to be affected in specific ways by the dangers of the journey and the lack of facilities in transit countries and in countries of reception such as Greece and many others in Europe. However, these women also show resilience and have in

many cases adopted strategies for coping with the insecurities of migration. There is little real analysis of the gendered experiences of migrants, and thus stereotypes of the "dangerous" migrant male or the "vulnerable" migrant woman prevail both in media and in political discourse. In order to move beyond such stereotypes a more careful analysis of the experiences and needs of female and male migrants and refugees should be undertaken, including that of the ways in which gendered relations may change during the migratory process. The EU must react to ensure that those seeking protection are able to access it and, rather than blaming smugglers and traffickers, must look to the root causes of migration and see how it can offer regular and safe routes to Europe for those who can no longer remain in their home countries, as well as safe places to stay and to live for both men and women once they arrive in the EU.

Notes

1 The very fast changing nature of this "crisis" means that all the figures were accurate as of the time of writing (June 2016). More updated statistics can be found on the UNHCR website – www.unhcr.org.
2 The word "attempt" is used to signify that although many of these countries have officially closed their borders to refugees, it is impossible to effectively stem all refugee flows. The official closure of borders means that more refugees will use smugglers to help them cross these borders and transit through countries "illegally".
3 At the time of writing, the refugee crisis is rapidly evolving and the circumstances in which EU states or neighbouring states are currently allowing refugees to enter or traverse their territory is changing daily. Currently, many refugees have found themselves "trapped" in Greece because of the closure of borders with Macedonia and Bulgaria and the EU's signing of an agreement with Turkey to allow the return of refugees from Greece to Turkey.
4 At the time of writing it is not certain whether this agreement will hold and that the EU will in fact be able to "return" refugees to Turkey.
5 UNHCR official, telephone interview, November 2015.
6 Telephone interview, July 2015.
7 Interview, July 2015.
8 Interview, July 2015.
9 Interview, July 2015.
10 Interviews, January and February 2016.
11 Interview, July 2015.
12 Interview, July 2015.
13 Interview with MSF psychologist on Kos, July 2015.
14 Interviews, January and February 2016.
15 Interview with a member of Kos Solidarity, July 2015.
16 Interview, November 2016.
17 Interview, July 2015.

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9 Gender performativity in diaspora

Syrian refugee women in the UK

Nof Nasser-Eddin

Introduction

The Syrian conflict has resulted in more than 11.4 million Syrians losing their homes and livelihoods; 4.8 million of these have become refugees in other countries with the majority remaining in neighbouring countries. Early in 2014 the UK government established a 'Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) Programme' as the criterion for deciding the cases of refugees who would be given refugee status in the UK. The scheme accepts refugees who are victims of sexual violence and torture, those who are elderly and people with disabilities. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the VPR scheme in detail. However, Turner (2015) provides a critical analysis of the weaknesses of the scheme which does not reflect the reality of refugees' lives and experiences in the Middle East and offers a gendered image of the "vulnerable" refugee who is, more often than not, either a woman or a child. Most Syrian refugees who have made it to the UK have been resettled through the scheme, which is based on screening refugees in transit countries[1] prior to selection. In 2014, the UK government announced that by December 2015 1,337 Syrian refugees would be settled under Humanitarian Protection Status with permission to work and access to public funds (Gower and Cromarty, 2016).

Most Syrian refugees in the UK were resettled in areas in the north of England making access to the Syrian community generally easy. However, the refugees I met at public events were mainly men, and women were more difficult to find. Accessing Syrian women refugees was more challenging as they were confined to the private sphere rather more than men in the Syrian community. My interviews with women took place through a female Syrian gatekeeper, who allowed me access to the community and facilitated meetings and interviews. The interviews were mainly unstructured in the form of conversations and focus groups, without clear and pre-defined sets of questions, to allow the women to express the challenges of refugeehood and their experiences of resettlement in the UK. The interviews and focus groups were analysed thematically, to highlight the common experiences refugee women have in the UK.

Conceptualising gender

This chapter is based on common themes women talked about, reflecting on their experiences as refugees in the UK. These included gender identity within the household and the challenges of integrating into the British community, as well as isolation due to cultural and language barriers which intersects with their gender identity and anti-Muslim sentiments in the UK. Changes in gender performances within the household were a major issue that women discussed.

Using an intersectional approach to gender performativity, the chapter seeks to deconstruct the ways in which the experiences of Syrian men and women refugees differ and shift according to the context they are in. It demonstrates how women's and men's lives change in diaspora, as do their gender performances, making an argument that gender is performed and the impact of culture does not necessarily linger unaffected after refugeehood. The main argument builds on Butler's conception of gender performativity:

> Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follows; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through the stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.
>
> (Butler, 1990: 140)

I look at the experiences of Syrian refugee women who have been settled in the UK following the Syrian crisis that began in 2011. Life in the UK forces women to adopt new roles and to challenge traditional gender roles while maintaining their ascribed gender roles in being the caregivers in the household. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with Syrian women and some men who have been resettled by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The sample included women from different age groups, married and single. Marital status and age seemed to be major factors determining the ways in which women negotiated patriarchal structures. I explore the experiences of Syrian women refugees in the UK, and demonstrate how gender dynamics change throughout their journeys. There are obstacles that hinder women's integration into British society yet, at the same time, some women gain relative power through laws that protect and empower them in the UK. In other words, there has been a change in gender dynamics to a limited extent because women feel "safer" as the law in the UK supports them and thus makes them feel empowered.

Women and men experience refugeehood, asylum, conflict, post-conflict situations and displacement differently; they do not share the same challenges because of the social construction of gender roles and the division of labour and responsibilities. Gender dynamics and gender (dis)order are applied and

practised differently depending on time and space. In other words, the practise of patriarchy is not constant but influenced by many factors such as class, marital status, legal status, age, etc. Traditional gender roles can be reinforced and/or challenged regardless of whether women stay in conflict areas, in transit countries or in a country of resettlement. Traditionally, men tend to undertake the role of provider for their households, and to occupy the political, social and economic spheres. However, these culturally prescribed traditional roles can be disturbed by several factors. For instance, there is evidence that, in times of conflict and refugeehood, women are very likely to become head of the household, especially in cases where men go missing, are killed or become unable to provide for their families and thus "fail" to perform their traditional gender roles (Lindsey, 2001; Justino, 2012). It is important to bear in mind that refugees' experiences in relation to gender dynamics in transit countries are different from their experiences when they are resettled in third countries. Usually in transit countries refugees are not allowed to work; thus women and young children are forced to seek irregular and informal economic activities outside the household for survival and to help their families (See Nasser-Eddin, 2014). Gender relations can be challenged and negotiated and can have contradictory outcomes during displacement, conflict and refugeehood, but they should not be simplified; a new environment where there is anti-Muslim sentiment, xenophobia and fear of migrants and refugees can increase women's vulnerability.

Isolation and integration

The process of resettlement is difficult for all refugees; however, there are differences in the experiences of men and women. Based on a study with Somali women in Australia, Habbani explains that 'a practical disadvantage for refugees is the adaptational demand of daily communication and integration' (Habbani, 2014: 41). The issues of integration and isolation can be very interlinked: the extent of refugees' integration can be closely linked to whether they feel isolated. I suggest that there are both internal and external reasons that hinder the integration of refugees, thus making them more isolated, and that the whole process of integration is gendered. Isolation for women can take two forms, physical and social. Women feel physically isolated because they are usually confined to the private domain as caregivers within the domestic sphere. Social isolation, on the other hand, manifests itself in the way women lose ties with their extended families and community networks and find it difficult to create support networks and communities (Bassel, 2012). A woman in her sixties said:

> Nothing has changed in the UK in terms of our roles as women; we do the exact same things, we take care of the kids, cook, and clean. The main thing that has changed is that we do not have our extended families here. Back home in Syria, or even when we were in Lebanon, I used to see my sisters and I had a great social life.

Traditional gender structures put women in inferior positions whereby they depend on their male counterparts in various aspects of their lives, financially and for physical "safety". Isolation adds to women's dependence on men in such situations, and language barriers also have a huge impact on their lives. Syrian refugee men and women struggle with language in the UK. However, for women, language is more of a barrier to integration, especially since they are often confined to the private sphere and do not spend time with others speaking the language. The education system in Syria does not focus on learning the English language and refugees were not given the chance to study English in transit countries before arriving in the UK. However, skill levels in English language vary depending on age and marital status. For younger, single women refugees it was apparent that learning the language was much easier because they were able to access schools, were much more exposed to the outside world and had fewer family responsibilities.

Thus, age and marital status were the main determinants influencing the refugees' ability to learn a new language. For example, married women refugees were likely to stay at home and be responsible for the household chores. Women tended to meet in each other's houses and were often busy with their household responsibilities. In nuclear families, where there were younger children, women were more likely to learn the language because they needed to help their children with their assignments and homework. For this reason, many married women attended classes to learn English; however, they indicated that when their husbands were present they did not practise it as much as they would like to because they felt intimidated and less confident. The women interviewed generally expressed the view that they felt isolated in the UK. Men, on the other hand, tended to meet with other Syrian men outside the household. This mingling among men usually took place in coffee shops and restaurants, and they were therefore likely to be much more exposed to the outside world.

Syrian women's "visibility" can also put them in inferior positions due to their dress code. One refugee woman in her twenties said: 'I have been exposed to anti-Muslim attacks a few times on the streets and on the bus; I felt threatened and unsafe. I did not do anything or say anything because there was no need, I just looked away.' It is apparent that single girls are much more likely to experience racism and anti-Muslim sentiments because they are exposed to the public more than their mothers or married women. For example, Habbani's study on Muslim women in Australia demonstrated that 'the ethnic characteristics that make immigrants distinct in the Australian (western, English-speaking) social context and among a predominantly white population' affects them in critical ways in relation to how the community perceives and interacts with them. Such characteristics can be based on 'skin colour, physical, and facial features, or accents and publicly observable cultural differences, such as attire (often to do with religion, e.g. Muslim hijab)' (Habbani, 2014: 176).

Visibility also contributes to women's isolation, as many Syrian refugee women wear the veil. This visibility as Muslim women makes them prone to anti-Muslim attacks and this again makes women's experiences different from

those of men. In recent attacks on refugees and migrants, many veiled Muslim women were targeted, and this contributed to Syrian refugee women's feelings of lack of safety and security. The last few years have witnessed an increase in attacks on refugees, particularly following acts of terrorism in Europe. Furthermore, government policies and narratives have contributed to negative sentiments towards refugees. For example, in the UK Prime Minister Theresa May and former Prime Minister David Cameron have been blamed for intensifying the threats of migration and 'portraying migrants as a threat to the UK society and fuelling a xenophobic climate in Britain' (Travis, 2016).

Indeed, when she was Home Secretary, Theresa May argued that Syrian asylum seekers should be screened twice to ensure they do not belong to terrorist organisations and that they are genuine about their asylum claims. Such remarks and policies put forward by government contribute to changing perceptions regarding immigration and asylum generally, and Syrian refugees specifically, as they are strongly perceived in relation to Islamic State. Such narratives and perceptions have contributed to the criminalisation of asylum seekers and the stereotyping of migrants who come from Arab or Muslim states. These are all factors that place refugees in vulnerable positions and hinder their integration within British society. Moreover, this not only affects the refugee community but also influences how UK residents perceive refugees and asylum seekers coming from the Middle East, as they are also demonised by mainstream media, especially following the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the attacks in Belgium in March 2016 (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001). For example, a survey carried out by YouGov on behalf of *The Times* newspaper showed that 'the number of Britons against the arrival of the refugees from the Syrian civil war had increased by 22% since September' (following the Paris attacks in November 2015); the poll further showed that 49 per cent of the British public believed that Britain should not take any more Syrian refugees (Paton, 2015).

Parker (2015) argues that the representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the British media has been very negative; the narratives constructed around asylum seekers and refugees as 'unwanted invaders' are extremely powerful. He argues that refugees and asylum seekers have been portrayed as criminals and as a "threat" to national security. The UK has also been described on many occasions as being "swamped" or "flooded" by refugees. These narratives play a significant role in marginalising, "othering" and isolating refugees, and as women are more visible as Muslims when veiled this places them in particularly vulnerable positions. However, as mentioned above, women's experiences have also changed, as the law in the UK offers them more protection. These changes have led to changes in gender dynamics – in some cases inside the household.

Space, bodies and agency

Gender is not only about women. Boys and men often find themselves in situations where they are unable to meet social and cultural expectations and struggle with the stereotypes of what it means to be a "man" and/or masculine.

Gender is also culturally specific and constructed differently across the world. In other words, for men and for women what is perceived as masculine and feminine in one country might not be perceived as such in another. Both women's and men's bodies are also gendered; bodies carry and hold symbolic social meanings that can place men and women within different social structures. Bodily performances are negotiated, carried out and perceived differently depending on the space. Space here refers to factors that can affect the positionality of the body. Salih suggests that there is no 'natural body'; she builds on Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* that gender is an act – in other words, one "does" gender. This conceptualisation of gender is the one I use here, but with caution. The theory cannot, by itself, be applied to all contexts, as gender performances are very much influenced by various structures of oppression: gender does not operate on its own.

For married Syrian refugee women their marital status meant that they retained their roles; so they carried out "womanly" and "feminine" performances such as caring for the household, cooking, cleaning, etc. However, this does not mean that all women did so in the same manner. Younger Syrian women had different experiences and more chances for "integration". During my interviews with young Syrian women, most of them stated that they felt they had better opportunities and options for education in the UK. All of them were learning the language, and they were more likely to leave the house than married women or older women because they did not have as many responsibilities. Women from different generations occupy different spaces within their community and therefore their agency is practised differently.

Howson (2013) states that 'people experience and engage with the social world and with other people from an embodied perspective …[;] embodiment is a critical component of social interaction'. I argue that Syrian women's bodies and embodiment changed, and changes, in different contexts. For example, younger women described the space their bodies occupied before they came to the UK as a "restricted space"; they could not interact with the public sphere as they wished because of cultural norms and traditions. They had experienced limited freedom of movement because of their gender. As for older women, the situation was different; they said that prior to their flight they were happier because they were close to their families and friends – they did not feel isolated or even "suffocated" as they felt now. Older women expressed the view that their space had become "smaller" in the UK, because of language barriers and other issues such as familial ties that were based in their home and/or in transit countries.

Differences in Syrian women's experiences across time and space show that bodies are socially constructed and the significance of the body can change from culture to culture and from time to time, as well as being influenced by various other factors. I am not, however, implying that we can de-naturalise bodies and treat them as mere "objects" because analysing the body is to 'discern the power relationships that regulate, denigrate, define or produce it as well as to identify the ways in which different bodies are located and constructed' (Coole, 2013: 166).

Connell argues that gender is 'the weaving of a structure of symbols which exaggerate and distort human potential' (Connell, 1987: 79). The structure Connell is referring to is not fixed or stagnant: the 'weaving' implies that the structure can be negotiated and/or resisted depending on various factors. The 'weaving' suggests flexibility and elasticity, and that was demonstrated by the comments of Syrian women and men. As one Syrian refugee man said:

> We know that we do not have a say in our children's future because things are different here. I do not have control over their choices; it is not like back home where I was able to perform the role of a traditional father.

A Syrian woman said: 'We are scared that our children will not abide by our cultural traditions; they might go astray. Our culture is different from this culture and now they live in a different context.'

The quote cited above by the Syrian man shows that the experiences of refugeehood and exile do not necessarily affect men in the same way as they do women, but take different shapes and forms. There has been also a focus on the hybridity of bodies, which is a result of cultural, political and physical influences, and it resists the idea that race and sex is essentialist (Bhabha, 1994). Men's bodies and the performance of masculinities can also be hybridised because of the different context they are in. Thus, Syrian refugee men now 'occupy' different spaces because they are located in different 'locales' or spaces (Giddens, 1984: 367). They therefore act differently towards others, either within their families or with the outside world. In other words, spaces influence the way people interact with one another, and they also influence the conduct of the body and the space the body occupies (Haque, 2002). The spaces people occupy with their bodies are deeply gendered. In the case of Syrian refugees, the UK is a new space and a new 'locale' is being created for them; this new space has created new gender identities and performances that are hybrid. Syrian women refugees from differing age groups have diverse experiences, and they live within and occupy contradictory spaces within the UK. The experiences of Syrian refugees cannot be taken out of context and the gender dynamics that are being (re)produced in exile cannot be analysed as the sole system of oppression that determines men's or women's experiences.

Intersectional power

Intersectionality as a theory scrutinises the complex ways in which gender, sex and sexuality intersect with other forms of inequalities such as race, class, ethnicity and ability. Intersectional theory stresses the notion that bodies are located at the intersection of different forms of structures. It challenges universalising women's experiences and even men's, as gender, for instance, can be performed differently depending on, for example, varied racial contexts. Moreover, masculine behaviours can be performed differently depending on the context and because of intersecting factors. Coole argues, 'while some aspects of identity may

bestow privilege others may be a source of discrimination, with identities and their bodily markers being distributed unevenly across social hierarchies' (Coole, 2013: 184).

Intersectionality as a theoretical approach explores the interaction of the axes of structures of oppression and subordination. Through the intersectional approach we can fully understand how racism, classism, patriarchy and other structures of oppression create hierarchal power relations between different social groups. This approach 'addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these axes constituting the dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment' (Crenshaw, 2014: 17). The aspects of disempowerment that Crenshaw refers to do not necessarily have to be to the disadvantage of women; there are also aspects of empowerment through which women can gain power in the matrix of intersectionality.

When looking at gendered experiences we need to explore factors such as 'social attributes, expectations and opportunities that influence the constructions related to "being" female or male' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 397). These constructions can change over time and space and are influenced by social, political and economic changes, such as conflict and dispossession. Processes of change also influence gender relations; one cannot simply generalise that the new environment affects "men" and "women" as independent agents of change. Rather, there is an interdependent process through which gender relations are (re)produced. Syrian refugees try to negotiate and find ways to balance being caught between different social and cultural values.

Values and contradictions

Syrian refugees talked about how they are exposed to different "values" in the UK and said they wanted to keep some of their cultural values to "preserve" their culture and traditions. For example, Syrian women refugees spoke about the challenges they faced with regard to schooling and the curriculum. Many Syrian families found the school system in the UK very different from that in Syria. Sex education was perceived as particularly problematic, as it was not taught in schools in Syria. During the interviews with Syrian women they said they felt their children were exposed to "values" different from theirs, and that this might affect their connection with their homeland in Syria. Most interviewees, men and women, stressed that the quality of their lives was much better in the UK than it had been in Syria, and that they felt safe and secure. They also expressed the view that there were many opportunities for their children in the UK in terms of education and employment. However, all the Syrian families interviewed were very concerned about the differing cultural values between themselves and the host community. They felt that the host community was much more "open-minded", "liberal" and "different" from them. They talked about their concerns in terms of "losing" their children to the host community: they were afraid that they would lose control because they did not have the strict boundaries they used to have in Syria. They used the term

yeflatu, meaning to get out of control. In my conversations with Syrian families these issues were raised with reference to both male and female children. However, they also said that the effect on women would be more acute because of their gender and the fact that they represent the "honour" of the family within their communities. Young Syrian women spoke about how the cities where they have settled in the UK have become small communities for Syrian refugees.

It has been argued that Arab societies are collectivistic in nature (Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001; Hopkins and Ibrahim, 2006). Collectivistic societies are generally characterised by people being defined in terms of group membership, and priority being given to group goals, needs and values, rather than personal or individual ones (Mortazavi *et al.*, 2009). The behaviour of the individual is reflective of the collective while the well-being of the family is seen as the guarantee for the well-being of the individual (Newman, 1999). For this reason, the shame and honour of women is seen as a reflection of the whole group in collectivistic societies. In the Arab world, for example, the misconduct of a woman is seen as the misconduct of her father/brother/husband, and under that banner honour crimes take place (Barakat, 1993). Collectivism has been also practised in the communities where Syrian refugees live and it has become an issue for Syrians, especially women, because of the nature of family relations. Joseph (1993) describes familial relations in the Arab world in relation to patriarchal connectivity. She defines connectivity as: 'The relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others.... I use connectivity to mean an activity or intention, not a state of being' (Joseph, 1993: 467).

Syrian refugees in the UK remain part of that collectivistic Arab community and still practise its values, even in exile – especially the older generation and those who are married. Interviewees stressed that they want to "protect" their values and morality. One Syrian refugee girl said:

> People from the Syrian community talk about me behind my back because I go to the college and I want to carry on with my education. They tell my father, 'How do you allow your daughter to come back home late? How do you let her go to places on her own?'

She continued:

> My father trusts me and does not listen to these people. It is very frustrating and disgusting that people love to gossip and talk about people behind their backs.

In the same conversation, the girl said that her family sometimes tried to control her mobility because they wanted to "protect" her from the outside world and because they feared that she could potentially be harmed.

Joseph (2006) discusses emotional relations within households, which are based on love and power. She describes brother–sister relations as based on love

and romanticisation, leading brothers to offer "protection" to their sisters. This love relationship may lead to control over women's sexuality, using the excuse of protection. However, Joseph reminds us that a study of such relations should not only take love into consideration, but should also include an analysis of the power relations within familial contexts which are justified by cultural practices (Joseph, 2006). During the research for this chapter it became clear that although certain refugee families wanted to control women's mobility in order "protect" their daughters from the outside world, the women found ways to resist those patriarchal controls. For example, some of them used "silent treatment" by not talking to their families for months, and in some cases even years, to convey this message to their families. Syrian girls said they use the *bahareb* technique, meaning "strike" in English. This technique is used by women to get what they want and they see it as a way to negotiate patriarchal gender oppression. It is usually used by women who are subject to such oppression and who cannot achieve what they want through "direct" means. The *bahareb* technique includes acts such as not eating or talking to other family members. This strike has proven to be effective for many women who felt that their demands within family structures were not being met.

Legal protection

Despite the fact that Syrian women still felt that they were being monitored and controlled, the majority also thought that legal protection in the UK gave them power. Women of differing ages have varied experiences and different ways of negotiating and even resisting gender oppression. Syrian women discussed external factors that gave them some kind of power to negotiate and resist gender oppression, such as legislation that protects women from domestic violence. This kind of power, gained from the space they occupy, can create intersectional experiences that place men and women in different spaces; it can also be empowering to women because it can, to a certain extent, limit patriarchal control. Laws in Syria regarding women's rights are very patriarchal and do not protect women. Cultural traditions also undermine women's rights and their right to enjoy full citizenship. Moreover, in times of conflict and crisis women's rights are usually on the periphery and women become much more vulnerable and subject to violence. Women interviewed said they used the institutional power of laws to gain their rights. Syrian families and especially Syrian women have said that they have often been separated since their arrival in the UK because women have sought help from the government and from the law in order to separate from their husbands.

In my conversations with Syrian women refugees, they stated that they knew many Syrian women who had divorced their husbands after resettling in the UK. It became apparent that these women were exposed to domestic violence by their husbands in Syria and/or in transit countries but could not report it because of the lack of security and safety for women. Many of these women realised that when they could report cases of domestic violence there was a chance

that it would be taken seriously. One Syrian woman said: 'I know a couple of families that have been separated after coming here, the wife kicked out the husband because he used to hit her.' Many of these women use UK legislation to protect themselves. They use the laws either to divorce or separate from their husbands or just as a tactic to threaten them. Another woman said:

> My husband used to hit me when we were in Syria and even when we were in Jordan and he hit me again when we came to the UK. I know that the law protects me here, and I know that I can threaten to leave him with the children if he does it again and so I did. He has not hit me since.

However, the same woman also said:

> I only use this as a tactic, I would never report my husband; he remains the man in the family and I cannot live without a father figure for my children.

This shows that despite the fact that legal protection is available to Syrian women, many would hesitate before changing the gender dynamics in the household and prefer to keep the status quo.

Conclusion

Binaries within the gender order can be challenged and/or disturbed through a variety of factors. However, research has revealed that some values and cultural traditions linger in diaspora, thus limiting change in the traditional gender order. Living in exile creates different gender dynamics, which can lead women to sometimes resist and sometimes accommodate patriarchal rule. The experiences of Syrian refugees in the UK serve as a useful example of how gender dynamics can change in certain circumstances, while at other times, in the same context, they remain intact. There are factors, such as age, that allow women to exercise some kind of power within the gender hierarchy. Refugeehood creates new forms of interaction between men, women and their children, in addition to varied masculine and feminine performances.

This chapter has sought to show that whereas gender is performed depending on where the body is located some structures remain unaffected, particularly if women practise their agency in a way that accommodates patriarchy. Bodies hold symbolic and social meanings and are deeply gendered; additionally, bodies occupy differing spaces across different times and consequently the practise of bodies is enormously dependent on varying contexts and cultures. There has been relative improvement in women's lives through the opportunities provided to younger generation Syrian refugee women and the legal protection provided by the state. Syrian refugee women in the UK are at a crossroads between their culture, traditions and gender roles of origin and the new life they are seeking to create for themselves and their families.

Note

1 Transit countries are countries where refugees settle temporarily until they can be resettled in third countries such as the UK, other European countries or the US. In the case of Syrian refugees, they are settled temporarily in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt.

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10 Agent, victim, soldier, son

Intersecting masculinities in the European "refugee crisis"

Jennifer Allsopp

Many of the complexities of modern masculinity are pulled to the surface in migration and refugee movements. This chapter explores how over the course of the European "refugee crisis" which began in 2014, the traditional trope of militarized masculinity has been set against the figures of "man as provider" and "threatening young male" in subjective and popular narratives. For some men, the decision to flee is a decision to protect their families without violence; others flee war only to find new manifestations of it at Europe's many borders. Their accounts frequently betray a vulnerability which challenges not just subjective ideas of manhood and strength, but also reveals the fallibility of the militarized nation-state system in which it has been argued that masculinity finds its most violent manifestation. The chapter demonstrates that masculinity in this context is fluid and intersectional: at once subjective and structural. Hegemonic tropes are traceable to the legal and social constructs that migrants face upon arrival in Europe as well as being authored by, or belonging to, the migrant men. I argue that a more intersectional approach to refugee masculinities is required which recognizes the gender specific displacement experiences of boys and men and acknowledges that they cannot be cast as either victims or soldiers, but should be seen as at once vulnerable and agentic.

Introduction

A tinny tinkle of bullets sounds intermittently in the Fiat Punto as I travel to the clinic with Madu[1] and his social worker for an assessment of his torture scars. 'What are you doing?', I ask Madu, tilting my neck around towards the back seat. 'Shooting Libyans', he replies straightforwardly: 'bang, bang, dead, die, BANG!'. The 17-year-old (initially assessed by the Italian authorities to be an adult, despite presenting as much younger than even this stated age) collapses onto the backseat, pretending to be dead. I wonder whether he understands the English writing on his second-hand T-shirt: *Save Water, Drink Beer*. 'Now it's your turn', he offers a second later, jumping back to life. I accept the 'phone thrust towards me and become a white, male American soldier patrolling a warehouse in … Iraq? Afghanistan? Libya? I'm shot at immediately and I lose a life. 'Way too slow!', Madu chastises.

I'm trying to imagine what this game is like for Madu whose enslavement in Libya en route to Europe evokes a chain of traumatic memories: the black man who was lynched in front of him, the regular beatings he endured at the hands of smugglers alongside his fellow migrant boys and men. In the waiting room at the clinic his 'phone transforms into a family photo album: 'this is my sister, my mum, my dog…'. He's used a Photoshop app to border them with pink love hearts and baby blue swans and birds. I'm moved as he repeatedly kisses his phone screen. His father, whose hand administered many of the scars the doctor is here to see, is conspicuous by his absence in the photos.

In this ethnographic vignette, Madu exhibits traits linked to various intersecting masculinities: home sick and deeply vulnerable in the fashion of a stereotypical feminized refugee, he can also be cast as a potential soldier who had, just two days previously, delivered a kick so powerful that it smashed a wardrobe at his shelter accommodation.

The lived experiences of young men like Madu are often invisible in both media and academic treatment of displacement (Griffin, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Rajaram 2002); it is frequently the (child) soldier narrative that dominates and men's vulnerabilities are ignored. The history books tell us that while the men stay and fight heroically, it is the women and children who flee. "Women and children first!" is a common refrain – from the historic Titanic to the contemporary flotilla of migrant boats with distress flares ablaze in the Mediterranean Sea. Where the identities of refugee men are discussed in popular culture, meanwhile, they are usually linked to narratives surrounding the "dangerous" refugee who may be a threat to economic and political stability in Europe.

These tropes do not just appear in an apolitical vacuum, but are initiated and enacted by individuals in a way that sustains wider structural regimes. In her analysis of the politics of masculinity, femininity and nationalism, Cynthia Enloe (2004) has demonstrated how the binary of 'all the men are in the militias and all the women are victims' is orchestrated by elites to propel violence in wartime. Meanwhile, Turner has argued that 'women are construed as more "true" refugees, being the victims rather than the perpetrators of war and violence' in a way that propels humanitarianism (Turner, 2000: 8).

While women's gender identities have in recent decades been accorded a sophistication of analysis in academia that now embraces intersectional identities as a core component, analysis of men's gender identities is less evolved. Even today, while war and peace studies dedicates increasing attention to questions of masculinities (e.g. Kronsell and Svedberg, 2011; Sjoberg and Via, 2010), books about gender and refugeehood still tend almost exclusively to focus on refugee girls and women (e.g. Crawley, 2001; Freedman, 2015). Whether civilians or fighters, women's gender specific vulnerabilities are, needless to say, and as this volume testifies, substantial and rightly cannot be ignored. Yet it is only since around the turn of the twenty-first century that men's gender specific vulnerabilities in war and displacement have started to be documented and that the international community has begun to recognize, for example, the extent to which sexual violence is used as a weapon against men as well as women. Russell

reports that 'in the last decade, sexualized violence against men and boys – including rape, sexual torture, mutilation of the genitals, sexual humiliation, sexual enslavement, forced incest and forced rape – has been reported in 25 armed conflicts across the world' (Russell, 2007: 22). If one expands this tally to include cases of sexual exploitation of boys displaced by violent conflict, the list includes 59 armed conflicts. Pockets of research stand out in this emergent field as slightly more developed, such as the burgeoning research on the experiences of sexual minority men among refugee populations (e.g. Berg and Milibank, 2009; Lee and Brotman, 2011); so too that on refugee men with disabilities (Couldrey and Herson, 2010).

Segal has argued that it is men themselves who have been largely silent about their experiences of personal trauma or vulnerability during war (Segal, 2008: 32). And indeed for many men, whether civilians caught up in the fighting or soldiers on the frontline, suffering remains a taboo (Jaji, 2009). While it was once argued that women's experiences of war were ignored in part because they were harder to research (Enloe, 2004), male research participants may be similarly hard to reach for the purpose of this research agenda: there is a common – albeit under-researched and anecdotal – understanding that refugee men may be reluctant to share their experiences of vulnerability with researchers.

Yet it is refugee men who have been the protagonists of recent migratory movements towards Europe. To take a snapshot, in October 2015, 94,655 men claimed asylum in EU countries compared to 30,395 women, 39,710 boys and 18,635 girls (Eurostat, 2016). As refugee movements to Europe continue, however, it should be noted that the proportion of women is growing and refugee movements are becoming less and less "male" (UNICEF, 2016).

As a consequence of the predominance of men in refugee movements to Europe between 2014–2016, new notions of what it means to be a man and to be a refugee are starting to emerge in subjective and mainstream accounts of the "European refugee crisis". By virtue of their gender (and often religion), many male refugees have been cast as potential rapists and terrorists, catalyzing much of the resistance to the European Refugees Welcome movement (Rettberg and Gajjala, 2016). In other spheres, the same men have been cast as loving fathers and breadwinners bravely setting out first to secure their family's future. On Father's Day 2016, the *Huffington Post* was among many major news outlets that ran tributes to refugee fathers caring for their children on the trail to Europe. 'Some of the dads who deserve particular recognition this Father's Day are those who day in and day out risk their own lives to protect their children and seek out a safer future for them', reads the online tribute, before mounting a collage of photos of the top eight refugee dads of the year (Frej, 2016). One of the dads is shown hauling his infant from the Mediterranean Sea; another snuggles up to this daughter in a tent hastily erected at the Calais border; and a thin man is shown crying as he walks his child towards the prospect of safety in the pouring rain (Frej, 2016).

Methodology

This chapter explores how we might begin to understand the conflicting accounts of refugee manhood perpetuated by the European "refugee crisis" and also asks what a research agenda in this area might look like. It is based on emerging findings that are in no way representative of the population of male refugees in Europe as a whole, but are rather a series of discrete discussions that highlight some initial themes for further exploration.

I spent one year conducting field research with young migrants and refugees over the course of the so-called "refugee crisis" between 2015 and 2016, in two cities in Italy and the UK respectively. Over the course of this period I conducted semi-structured interviews with over 40 unaccompanied young men between the ages of 16 and 25 about their well-being and welfare experiences in Europe, and spent time as a participant observer based in three support centres where I kept detailed field notes. The research received ethical clearance from the University of Oxford ethics committee and ethical considerations were addressed on an ongoing basis over the course of the research. The safety, well-being, consent and anonymity of participants were primary concerns at all times. Interview participants were selected through a mix of referrals from gate-keepers and support centres and through snowball sampling. I sought to diversify my sample by including individuals from a range of backgrounds and with different pathways through and experiences of the reception system (including those outside of it). The sample is in no way representative and the findings are not generalizable.

Ethnographic field notes from this research provide the source material for this chapter. The notes detail my participant observation in support settings for refugees coupled with description and analysis of political developments and rolling media coverage of events in Italian and British media. What it means to be a migrant and a man emerged as a central theme in the men's discussions and interviews with me, a white British female researcher. The chapter is structured around three norms of refugeehood and masculinity that appear most prominently in my analysis of these gendered accounts of the "refugee crisis". They are: (i) militarized masculinities; (ii) the man as father and provider; and (iii) the threat of the strong, young male. For each norm I lay out the main trope and its sub-tropes. I then provide some empirical counter-examples that seek to problematize them. In light of the evidence, the chapter argues that the European "refugee crisis" has exposed new ways of understanding masculinities. Masculinity is revealed in this context, it is argued, to be fluid and intersectional: at once subjective and structural. Hegemonic tropes are traceable to the legal and social constructs that migrants face upon arrival in Europe as well as being authored by or belonging to the migrant men.

Militarized masculinities

While it is widely recognized that masculinity, like all identities, is a fluid social and historical construct, the association of masculinity with traits including violence, aggression and dominance is seen as widespread and 'hegemonic' (Connell, 1987), that is, 'propelled by ideological and cultural norms'. As Segal explains, 'traditionally, we have been encouraged to think that there is some natural bond between men and violence, simply given full reign in times of war' (Segal, 2008: 32). Some feminist scholars, meanwhile, have long argued that the ideology of militarism is intrinsically linked to masculinity and war (Cockburn, 2007; Cohn and Enloe, 2003; Enloe, 2016). Mama contends in turn that 'it is not that "masculinity" generates war, as the question has been put, but rather that the process of militarization both draws on and exaggerates the bipolarization of gender identities *in extremis*' (Mama, 2015).

For a long time, a common trope of centre-right European media has been to portray migrant and refugee men through this hegemonic lens, associating them by default with the violence they have fled (Rettberg and Gajjala, 2016). This same trope has been used by politicians to cultivate fear, as when a Lebanese government minister claimed in September 2015, based on a "gut feeling", that 1 in 50 Syrian refugees entering Europe could be Jihadists sent by the Islamic State (ISIS) (Sims, 2015). There has nevertheless also been a backlash to the default linking of – in particular Syrian – refugee men with the ISIS Jihadists they have fled. Following outrage at a widely shared photograph which was said to be of refugees attacking police with an ISIS flag, several major British newspapers published articles to explicitly "debunk" the myth. This particular image, the *Independent* revealed, was falsely linked to the "refugee crisis", having been taken at a protest in Germany in 2012 'before the rise of the so-called Islamic State' (Griffin, 2015). The newspaper went on to discredit a range of other photos popular on social media which explicitly depicted the refugees through the lens of militarized masculinities and claimed to 'show Isis militants arriving in Europe, comparing images of men in battle dress and pictures of people arriving on the continent' (Dearden, 2015). The Pope is among a number of influential figures who have warned of the need to be vigilant of the encroachment of ISIS into Europe through the infiltration of refugee groups.

In the testimonies emerging from male refugees who have fled such threats and travelled to Europe we can observe the crumbling of the stereotyping of refugee man as a potential threat himself and the construction of a parallel identity of refugee man as an individual in need of help. Men's accounts frequently betray a vulnerability that challenges not just subjective ideas of manhood and strength, but also reveals the fallibility of the militarized nation- state system in which, it has been argued, masculinity finds its most violent manifestation (Mama, 1998; Nagel, 1998).

The border is the most vivid manifestation of this system; it is therefore unsurprising that it is here that refugees often experience a reification of militarized masculine identities and also find themselves at their most vulnerable.

At the frontier, nationalism and militarized masculinities blur, making it a site of contested identities and power. The border is at once an assertion of – and a threat to – men's historic monopoly of institutionalized force (Segal, 2008: 30). Helms (2015) has documented how, as the Hungarian–Serbian border became militarized in the summer of 2015, for example, media and government discourses cast the men seeking to cross it as soldiers. This image was sustained through a range of cultural tropes; these included directions from the government broadcaster not to show women and children on TV and a YouTube video posted by the mayor of one small town 'full of tough-guy swagger and action-adventure aesthetics to convince migrants that coming through Hungary would be "a bad choice"' (Helms, 2015). The video starkly pits one group of men against the other.

When fighting did break out at the Röszke border crossing on 16 September 2015 following the introduction of a new, repressive set of Hungarian laws and the sealing of the border with a razor wire fence, the fighting was between mostly male Hungarian border police and groups of mostly male refugees who had been barred from crossing the border from Serbia. Reporting from the border, one BBC journalist commented, 'it looks like a war zone on the edge of the European Union' (BBC News Channel, 2015). A Hungarian spokesman on the BBC spoke of 'an armed mob of hundreds of thousands of people'; meanwhile Serbia strongly condemned the violent retaliation and 'brutal treatment' from the Hungarian authorities (BBC News, 2015). The men were depicted as belligerent fighters who, by virtue of their gender alone, posed a security threat. Their protests about not being allowed to cross were met with tear gas and water cannons. The refugees were cast as bandits, with hoods up and scarves over their faces to protect them from the tear gas as they tried to break down the fence which had been, until just recently, open. 'The young men', the BBC reported, 'decided to keep up their fight well into the night' (BBC News, 2015). The human face of the refugees thus dissipated and border crossing became a combat sport for "real men" once more. While boat arrivals are met with a humanitarian response, the land border is governed by law and order.

The resurgence of militarized masculinities at Europe's physical borders is not a new phenomenon. In immigration detention – at once a physical and symbolic border – it has been documented that acts of desperation or peaceful resistance on the part of detained migrants are often militarized; recast as an attack and harshly repressed (Browning, 2007). High razor wire topped fences, surveillance cameras, fingerprint checks, pat-down searches and multiple sets of locked doors create a culture of hostility towards refugees. As Griffiths reports in the UK context (in one of the rare explorations of this area): 'detention is experienced by those inside as punishment and tends to be indistinguishable from prisons to those outside. Those detained are associated with danger in the public imagination simply as a result of being held there' (Griffiths, 2015: 475). This sense of danger, Griffiths argues, is propagated by the media that portrays all 'incidents' as 'violent events, in which the pent up frustration of angry men boils over, putting staff and the wider public in danger', events which 'bear little

relation to the accounts given by those directly affected.' Griffiths contrasts the media portrayal of a fire sparked by a 'riot' in an English detention centre in 2008 with the reality of a fire started by one individual. One man, cast as 'dangerous' simply by virtue of sharing the same nationality as the individual and pre-emptively moved to another centre, recounts his experience of being a victim: 'He told me of the panic as he and others begged for the officers to let them out but were refused, meaning that they were trapped inside what they assumed was a burning building' (Griffiths, 2015). As in war as at the border: in the "mob", the suffering individual disappears.

Problematizing militarized masculinities

Most of the men I spoke to who had travelled to Europe experienced the border similarly, as a site of vulnerability where one masculinity battled with another and, most often, those in charge of the border struck hardest and last. In the most extreme examples, I learnt of sexual abuse and exploitation committed by men against men and boys. One young man was being treated in hospital following an incident in Malta in which a police officer had inserted a broom stick into his anus.

In addition to frequent accounts of less extreme violence at the hands of border guards and police, men spoke of subtler forms of control and humiliation. These often appeared to be linked to experiences of shame related to their perceived lack of power; in other words, shame and frustration on these occasions stemmed from their own perceived failure to fulfil patriarchal expectations and aspirations. One man who spoke jokingly about beatings at the hands of police and smugglers became noticeably angrier as he recounted how the first time he tried to reach Italy the coastguard sent the whole group he was travelling with back to Libya. 'The Italian coastguards *taunted* us,' he explained to me in an interview, 'they told us we were going to England and everyone cheered and then they broke the news and they were all just laughing at us … there were kids and men on the boat *in tears*.'

Men who make up most of the population in immigration detention across Europe often speak of a similar sense of powerlessness. 'I tried to kill myself twice in Brook House because it was just too much', blogs a man who spent 3 years locked up in several of the UK's 11 detention centres. He continues:

> They put my name in a special book and then officers came to check on me every thirty minutes. I never liked it at all because I didn't want to see their faces. When I saw them, I felt angry.
>
> (H, 2014)

Reports of self harm and suicide are alarmingly high among men in immigration detention (Coffey *et al.*, 2010) and also among asylum seekers awaiting decisions of applications for state protection who report a similar sense of powerlessness (Allsopp *et al.*, 2014). A guard at a children's detention facility in Italy told me

about some of the ways the men seek to challenge authority and reassert their power in these highly militarized environments: 'They cannot hurt you so they hurt themselves', he explained. He continued:

> One guy, I was telling him off a bit, and he looked me dead in the eye, like dead in the eye, and put out a cigarette on his hand. I could smell the flesh … the Afghans always self harm…

Where migrant and refugee men seek to shed this militarized mantel of masculinity and expose their vulnerability they are often feminized, cast as morally deviant or depicted as "other" to the dominant militarized model of a man in a time of war. Refugee men who have sewn their lips in objection to their treatment in countless protests across Europe, most recently in Calais but also on the Greek–Macedonian border, have their desperate behaviour recast as "savage acts" which serve to "other" them from Western values. This otherness may be exaggerated for political effect, as in the Children Overboard scandal that hit Australia in 2001 when politicians falsely accused migrant men of the barbaric act of throwing their children into the water to prompt their own rescue. As one survivor explained to the media, 'Mr John Howard said we threw the kids in the water, but were just showing them for help' (cited in Toohey, 2013). The episode recalls another powerful image from the Hungarian border: a baby, caught in a cloud of tear gas, is screaming and its eyes stream with tears.

'Look at this!', shouts the baby's father to the news camera. The image stands in contrast to what Rajaram (2002) refers to as the 'de-politicized and de-historicized' image of the refugee which – in humanitarian crisis, in refugee reportage and in fundraising appeals – is commonly that of a passive mother holding her baby (Fair, 1996; Johnson, 2011). If the feminization of the refugee equates to greater victimization, assertions of agency by male refugees as in this example are met with the opposite response. A representative of the Hungarian government quickly accused the refugees of using their children as human shields (BBC News, 2015). One man's desperate act was thus recast as a tactic of war.

In other instances, the very fact of fleeing serves to open men up to the accusation that they are morally lacking and "unmanly". A common argument is that the men fleeing are weak and should go back and pick up arms on behalf of their countries and their wives. 'If they came here to fight, why don't they go home and fight the regime instead of running away!' comments someone on Facebook. The person who posted the message continues: 'It will now be *our* men who risk their lives trying to save *their* women and children.' As Walker Rettberg and Gajjala report (2016) in their analysis of the #refugeesnotwelcome hashtag which trended in late 2015, Syrian refugees are most commonly portrayed in social media in militaristic terms as either terrorists or cowards. One popular image, the authors write,

> shows a crowd of men in a train station, walking between two blue trains, some with their hands up in a way that looks more anxious than

> threatening, with the text: '2,200 immigrants arrive in munich. [N]o women no children. [A]pparently only men [fl]ee [*sic*] 'war zones'?

Rettberg and Gajjala (2016) give another example of a tweet that captures this mood: 'if you're a military age male who [fl]ees [*sic*] violence and leaves behind his women and children, you'll never be an [A]merican! #refugeesnotwelcome.' Once again, militarism, masculinity and nationalism converge.

It can be seen, then, that at the level both of the individual and the group, a particularly militaristic and in some cases nationalistic norm of masculinity is – across different settings – projected onto, enacted by and resisted by refugee men. The refugees are expected to adhere to a certain violent norm; meanwhile, state-sanctioned strategies seek to pre-emptively quash this by rendering them powerless through a range of symbolic and physical acts that embody this very militarism. It is at the border – an institution that structurally embodies the militarized nation-state system – where we see the starkest manifestation of this "clash of masculinities" but also where we see flashes of vulnerability that challenge the hegemonic norm in its subjective and structural forms.

The father figure and provider

The second masculinity norm which features both in subjective accounts and popular renderings of migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe in 2015 and 2016 concerns men not as lone soldiers, but as fathers and providers. The figure of the man caring for his family not by taking arms, but by sheltering and nurturing his children, was immortalized in the field of war reporting with the famous image of Jamal al-Durrah and his 12-year-old son Muhammad al-Durrah. This was taken in the Gaza Strip on 30 September 2000 on the second day of the Second Intifada at a time of rioting and violence in the region. Caught in the crossfire between Israeli and Palestinian factions, Jamal can be seen sheltering his son behind a bin as he cries out. In the next clip his son is shown collapsed on his father's legs; the boy had been shot dead. The image sparked an outpouring of grief around the world. Its major resonance was also a cause for scandal, with an official Israeli report claiming that the image was staged. In the wake of political fighting over the photo, the father, Jamal, remained resolutely pacifistic, commenting in 2013: '…I am for peace. War is against humankind. I don't want others to lose their sons. Which parent doesn't want their children to grow up safe and secure?' (cited in Sherwood, 2013).

The "refugee crisis" is one of the first times we have seen this pacifistic image of man as protector and nurturer as an actor in flight. Indeed, if the unfurling of and discussion around the "refugee crisis" has served to largely rehearse established and historic tropes of men and violence, one area where we have seen something genuinely new is in the portrayal of migrant fathers. If the potential terrorist trope serves the interests of the securitization lobby, the father trope serves to construct a more humanitarian agenda. As such, many of the major humanitarian agencies including Save the Children and Médecins Sans

Frontières have relied on images of fathers and their children in fundraising efforts in response to the "refugee crisis". Two photos have resonated particularly strongly with the public; and they echo in some ways the famous father and child image of Muhammad and Jamal.

In the first image, Syrian Laith Majid clasps his two children tightly as he is brought ashore to the island of Kos in Greece after their tiny boat capsized; his face distorts in a look of abject desperation, his lip heaves over gritted teeth and tears stream from his eyes. Photographer Daniel Etter who took the photo explained on Facebook that while he may not be 'the most emotional person … the father, Laith Majid, and his reaction when he and his family reached Greece still makes me cry'. This image of fatherhood was something new, and as such it sparked an empathetic reaction in a man who self-defined as unresponsive.

The second photo that has become iconic of the crisis is that of Abdullah, the father of Aylan Kurdi, the small boy whose corpse stirred Europe's conscience as it was photographed washed up on the shore in Turkey in 2015. Standing in a freshly dug grave in his native town of Kobane, Abdullah holds his son's body in a white shroud. A man to his left offers his own arms to support the little body. Abdullah's pained expression suggests he could collapse with grief at any moment, leaving the small boy to fall through his arms a second time.

The images of the two fathers depict new masculinities of war and flight that challenge the militarized assumptions that have surfaced at European borders. Yet while "the refugee father" may have gained some traction as a figure of sympathy rather than fear during the "crisis", there is evidence that this figure is similarly cast as a subject of distrust and rendered in a fashion that is overly simplistic.

Problematizing the father figure

The migrant or refugee father has long been viewed as a figure of distrust in, for instance, the British asylum and detention system. Indeed, fatherhood and husbandhood are aspects of the identity of migrant men that are frequently belittled (Campbell *et al.*, 2013). Again, in what is one of the only interventions on this topic, Griffiths cites examples of men in immigration and asylum detention in Britain being denied bail on the grounds they would abscond, despite having close ties to their children (Griffiths, 2015: 479). She cites the case of one detained man 'who would cry throughout our meetings at the thought of being deported away from his baby' who was accused by an immigration officer of having his child in order to remain in the UK. Griffiths concludes that in making asylum and detention decisions,

> Home Office representatives routinely dismiss the importance of the men's role as fathers and husbands. Their correspondence often inexplicably has the "no close ties" box ticked even if they have partners and children in the United Kingdom, and I saw several official letters which argued that

> deportation would not interrupt family life as adequate paternal contact could continue by telephone.
>
> (Griffiths, 2015: 479)

While it is stressed here that contact between fathers and their families can continue post-deportation, fathers who arrive to seek asylum without their children are often immediately viewed with suspicion by the authorities and cast as "lone, feckless" figures by the media. As in the social media posts discussed above, the men are often accused of "abandoning" their families and children back at home.

Donald Trump, Republican candidate in the 2016 US presidential election, is among those apparently baffled by the prevalence of men arriving without their families. In relation to the "refugee crisis" he stated:

> [T]hree weeks ago I'm sitting and I'm saying, 'isn't that a shame?' And then I said to myself, 'Wow. They're all men.' You look at it. There are so few women and there are so few children. And not only are they men, they're young men. And they're strong as can be – they're tough looking cookies. I say, what's going on here?
>
> (cited in Rhodan, 2015)

In another comment, Trump specifically links the unaccompanied men to terrorist militancy: 'You look at the migration, it's young, strong men. We cannot take a chance that the people coming over here are going to be ISIS-affiliated' (cited in Rhodan, 2015).

Many of these young men have left their families behind at some point in the journey and moved on alone, partly to escape the lack of opportunities to provide for their families in a first safe country. Researchers have documented the relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies among male refugees and their ability to feel that they are able to provide for their families in a time of crisis. Turner (2000: 8) reports, for example, the damaging effect of aid programmes that ignore the breadwinner function of men in certain contexts and instead exclude them, with the effect of causing shame and negative behaviours among men. As Helms (2015) too explains,

> [R]efugees typically face restrictions or bans on legal work or schooling in neighboring countries that shelter the vast majority of them. Their lives are stalled.… The most rational and responsible thing for a husband, father, or son to do is to try to get to a more economically dynamic and stable country, to be granted asylum status there and send back earnings or bring his family along later. These men are taking the most dangerous routes now in the hopes of easing the journey later for their families.

Cole (2015) has shown in relation to Eritrea that the migration of one person in one family can provide a survival line through remittances to generations of

family members. It is a question of joining the dots between economic and migration based strategies of survival – between an individual flight and a family's ability to sustain itself and remain alive in the region.

Many of the unmarried and childless men on the move carry weighty familial expectations. Of the young men I spoke to, many had lost a father in conflict or through illness and found themselves to be the breadwinners for the remaining children in the family. Some were sent away from their families against their will and struggled to cope on their own; others decided to leave, feeling that they had no alternative way to support their families. 'I can't tell my parents how hard it is here', says Ali, a 21-year-old Moroccan in Italy. He's speaking in broken French through tears. For Ali there is no option but to carry on. He has three siblings back at home and he is the eldest and the only one who is educated. 'My sister', he tells me, appalled, 'is 12 and she's never been educated!' He must first pay back the €3,000 of debt that his family has paid to send him away before saving up to fund his sister's schooling. At first his parents tried to get him into the Moroccan military, he tells me, but they didn't have any contacts so his application was refused. He bites his nails in a boyish way as he tells me of the only job he's found so far: a car wash one and a half hours away that pays €10 a day. Over the six months I am acquainted with Ali his appearance undergoes a transformation. He starts and then quickly stops shaving his head and wearing his hood up. He pleads for and then ditches a second-hand pair of trendy Nike trainers. I ask him why this is and he tells me frankly that it means he looks less troublesome and is therefore less likely to be stopped by the police. 'I tell all the others as soon as they arrive to do the same', he adds. Like most men I meet, Ali is very aware of how he is perceived.

For many men then, young and older, migrating alone is a familial strategy; a way to provide for their families through remittances. The provider trope focuses in a very Westernized fashion on physical contact and on the protection offered by a father to his child. It thus fails to capture the multiple virtual strategies that families employ to survive and support one another in times of war and displacement.

The threat of the strong young male

Finally, in popular imaginings of the "refugee crisis", many fathers or other types of provider have been recast – like Ali – in Trump's model image of the threatening "strong young male". The experiences of the "strong young male" are little known, though for many he is the face of the crisis part of the "refugee crisis".

In many respects it is unsurprising that young men are over-represented in recent refugee movements to Europe. We have seen above that young men are often required to provide for their families; meanwhile, in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, they are at greater risk of being forced to join combat groups or of being persecuted for refusing to do so. Young men also face gendered forms of persecution. Refugee rights lawyers have, for example,

previously argued that 'able-bodied young Afghan males' forced into recruitment by the Taliban could constitute a 'particular social group' worthy of specific protections under the 1951 Refugee Convention (*Applicant S* discussed in Edwards, 2012). Other young men, in particular those from Afghanistan or Albania, are fleeing blood feuds or violence that targets them specifically as men because of a patriarchal culture that pits men against men to secure family honour. One young Pashtun who fears murder by his uncle in retaliation for a family dispute that has lasted decades tells me in an interview that he just cannot understand it – 'I wasn't even born when it kicked off! It's stupid'.

Hudson (2016) is among those who have raised the demographic alarm in relation to the arrival of such men referring to the fact that, in 2015, 66.26 per cent of adult migrants registered through Italy and Greece were male. In her apocalyptic portrayal of Europe invaded by migrant men she stresses that almost all terror attacks are carried out by unattached young adult men. While there is a need for consideration of demographic trends – a fact which many states are seeking to remedy through resettlement programmes that favour women and girls (e.g. the UK and Canada) – Hudson's argument seems to rely on a fragile dichotomy which sees all unmarried, young male migrants as a specific "type" of threat. 'Why would European societies, many of which rank highest on global measures of gender equality and stability and peace, jeopardize those hard-won and enviable rankings?', she asks, having previously referenced the Cologne sex attacks which were committed by men identified primarily as "North African" against primarily "white" women in Germany on New Year's Eve 2015 (Hudson, 2016). The horrific attacks sparked an unprecedented backlash against new migrants and refugees on social media and in certain segments of the press across Europe. Polemicist journalist Katie Hopkins captured the hostile mood among some in Britain who saw the attacks as indicative of a wider threat. 'Cologne is a small case study for scenarios playing out all over Europe', she argued in a piece in the tabloid *Daily Mail* which has a daily circulation of over one and a half million (figures cited in Mail Classified, 2016). Hopkins (2016) continued:

> It is a story repeated at Calais, across Germany and into France. And in African and Arabic countries where sexual violence is the norm. White women are nothing to some Islamic and Arabic men. […] They see us as white trash. And we are no longer safe. These migrants are a cultural time-bomb, brought up in a different era, Islamic Bernard Mannings – incompatible with modern life.

There is evidence that the fear that all "these" strong, young migrant men are potential aggressors is shared among those who identify as more liberal or sympathetic towards refugees. Helms (2015) reports, for example, that among volunteers from Austria who mobilized in support of refugees to take them from Hungary, some refused to take single men, preferring to return empty because there were no more families to transport.

Problematizing the threat of the "strong young male"

The clash of sexual mores between young male refugees arriving and established populations has been a popular media trope during the "crisis". While much of this reporting is sensationalist and scandalizes unaccompanied male migrants en masse, as illustrated above, my research suggests that the issue of many young men's differing understanding of intimate relationships is a much more complex albeit fundamentally important one.

For many young unattached men, integrating in Europe naturally poses a range of particular problems and some of these undoubtedly stem from a lack of familiarity with the gendered norms in a new country. Some of the young men I spoke to discussed their childhood and growing up in polygamous families in countries including Mali, Senegal, Ghana, Gambia, Sudan and Libya. Several of them had little or no experience of intimate relationships themselves and explained that they felt they were becoming adult in Europe. More than one teenager confessed to me that he had no knowledge of contraception methods, and I had a sense that the young men were embarrassed to discuss some of these issues with their carers or support workers for fear of being stereotyped as promiscuous. It was not uncommon during fieldwork for young male participants to ask me for relationship advice and when I responded the reaction was one of gratitude and interest. As one unaccompanied 21-year-old Muslim Sudanese man with refugee status in the UK explained to me over coffee, in his country the families 'sort all that out – marriage and stuff'. He stressed that he was grateful for the freedom to choose a partner for himself now that he was in the UK but that time was not on his side. 'I have a huge amount of pressure from my family back home and', he joked with his head in his hands, 'I have absolutely *no idea* where to start!'. The number of European cities that offer free and in some cases obligatory sex and relationship education classes to newly arrived refugees as part of an orientation programme suggests that opportunities to discuss such issues may be becoming more widespread. While it has been suggested by some commentators that such classes primarily serve to propagate the idea that young migrant men are all potential sex offenders, they can equally be seen as a response to demand and a willingness to dialogue on the part of many men.

In parallel to them being cast as over-sexualized beings, some young migrants reported being stripped of their sexuality by those helping them. This typecasting had its own dangerous momentum. Bilil, a 17-year-old Senegalese asylum seeker, confided to me his confusion after he was taken under the wing of a well-meaning Catholic family while staying at a homelessness shelter in Italy as he awaited documentation to disprove an erroneous age assessment. The mother of the family had met him there and invited him back for dinner. Having initially dined with them once a week he was now invited every day and was even asked to stay over. The mother of the family offered the possibility of him sharing the bedroom of their 15-year-old daughter. Bilal, who had taken a liking to the girl, was deeply confused. In the context he grew up in, he would

have interpreted the situation as the mother "offering him" her daughter, he explained to me. But he'd been in Italy long enough to know there must be another meaning. As we discussed age restrictions on sex in Italy along with his feelings, we realized that the misunderstanding had probably begun with the mother who saw him as a totally desexualized, vulnerable "refugee boy". Bilal's response to the situation was to stay away from the family for a while and take comfort in his faith, learning to 'avert his gaze'. The last time I saw him he showed me a YouTube channel which has advice for men, including 'how to get over a girl'.

To turn from the subjective to the structural for a final time, it is important to note that hordes of threatening "strong young men" do not simply arrive in Europe as such, but are in part created by our legal and cultural structures which rigorously police the boundary between childhood and adulthood, innocence and experience, for individuals like Bilal. In the context of the European "refugee crisis", the difference between being a man of fighting age and a victim child marks the difference between two very different realms of rights and entitlements (Chase and Allsopp, 2013). As a minor you are entitled to child protection from the state; if you are over 18 you are considered to be a fully independent man which includes facing a range of challenges including destitution, detention or deportation with little or no support. Age assessments – which may include wrist measuring, dental X-rays, genital examination and psycho-social exams – are used during the reception of refugees to, quite literally, sort the boys from the men. This process was frequently reported to me as being deeply humiliating. Bilal, wrongly age assessed originally as 25 years old, commented: 'I was just like what on earth is this? I thought this country was meant to be civilized.' 'It was mostly the black guys,' he continued, 'the Arab boys got through.' He was not the only man to talk to me about the racialized assumptions they faced as migrant men. Driss was surprised at how local volunteers responded to him as a young black man. He explained that he felt pressure to 'perform' for the volunteers. 'If I don't smile they think I'm shifty,' he remarked, 'but I don't want to smile! … I'm going through so, so, so much.' The next time I saw Driss, a bubbly female student volunteer ran up to him and hugged him tightly before commenting, 'Oh my god, you're still not smiling!'. He gave me a shrug. There is not sufficient space in the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the racialized discourses around migrant masculinity that arose in my research, though it should be noted that this is an important area that requires much greater attention (Fassin, 2001; Hubbard, 2005).

Young men carry this stereotyping heavily and with significant awareness, adapting their coping strategies accordingly. Underage migrants often spoke to me during my research of the dread of turning 18 or "ageing out" and being cast out into the street to cope alone. One social worker in Italy told me about what he saw as the 'quintessential story' of this transition:

> You have a young man I'm working with who asked me for boxing lessons so that he could prepare for turning 18 and for life on the street. He's got a

> month before he turns 18 and is 'toughening up', trying to work out and make himself bigger and even practice getting into fights, preparing himself for life outside the train stations.

Preparing them for this transition, another social worker tells me, requires 'tough love' on the part of the carers. In other words, both the recipient and the giver of care must lead by example by exhibiting traits that are characteristically male. This model of resilience is inherently ironic: to survive, the young men feel that they must internalize and enact traits of the "strong young male" stereotype; yet it is this stereotype that governs the very care system that they feel has failed them as it casts them out at the age of 18.

These examples suggest that the polarized stereotypes around young migrants and refugee men as either hyper-sexualized youths or kids without agency may be standing in the way of a frank discussion of important gender issues. This binary portrait of masculinity is in many ways reinforced by institutional mechanisms including the age assessment process during the reception procedure.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that many of the complexities of masculinity are pulled to the surface in migration and refugee movements. In the testimonies emerging from refugees who have fled to Europe we can observe the crumbling of the bipolarization between the threatening soldier and the woman victim. Men's accounts frequently betray a vulnerability which challenges not just subjective ideas of manhood and strength, but also reveals the fallibility of the militarized nation-state system in which, it has been argued, masculinity finds its most violent manifestation. We have seen how in the European "refugee crisis", the traditional figure of militarized masculinity is set against the figures of the man as provider and the promiscuous and unruly young male. I have sought to problematize these norms in the light of evidence emerging from fieldwork in two cities in Europe during the largest arrival of refugees and migrants in recent history.

A detailed analysis of common tropes about male refugees shows how complex and often contradictory the reality can be. We have seen that the tropes are fluid and intersectional: at once subjective and structural. They are traceable to the social constructs that migrants face upon arrival in Europe as well as being authored by or belonging to the migrant men. Alongside further exploration of men's lived experiences of displacement, it is therefore crucial to better understand the often intentional and agentive conditions under which tropes of refugeehood and masculinity, new and old, are forged and propagated. More research is needed to explore the gender differences in refugee flows; understanding men's experiences and the forms of identity that at once fuel and sustain their journeys must be part of this. Viewed together, the evidence calls for a more intersectional approach to refugee masculinities which recognizes the

gender specific displacement experiences of boys and men and acknowledges that men cannot be cast as either victims or soldiers: they can be, at once, vulnerable and agentic too.

Note

1 All names have been altered to protect the anonymity of research participants.

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11 Conclusions

Jane Freedman, Zeynep Kivilcim and Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu

This book has attempted to provide a multidisciplinary and diversified gendered approach to and analysis of the Syrian refugee "crisis". Bringing together sociological, legal, political and anthropological perspectives, the various authors have used a gendered lens to observe and analyse the lives of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt as well as the challenges they face in accessing international protection and resettlement in the European Union (EU). Together these studies show the changing nature of gender relations and gender identities arising from the conflict itself, from displacement and forced migration, temporary protection and transit, and from attempted relocation and resettlement in "safer" destination countries in Europe.

Many of the chapters have highlighted the multiple insecurities and violence – both physical and symbolic – experienced by women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and intersex (LGBTI) refugees. The high rates of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict zones are a major cause of forced migration and leave deep fears among women and LGBTI refugees. The memory and fear of sexual violence follows and guides their flights through countries of transit and into the country of destination. The gendered impacts of conflict and exile on the situation, experiences and strategies of women and men refugees merges with the deep legal and structural violence constructed under the conditions of temporary protection regimes, implemented primarily in transit or regional countries. Almost seven million displaced Syrian refugees live in countries neighbouring Syria: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. Although some live in camps, the majority of the Syrian refugees in these countries live in urban settings. Women and children represent an overwhelming majority of the Syrian refugees who live in neighbouring countries and women may thus face particular challenges in attempting to provide for their own needs and for those of their children. They may be particularly vulnerable in this situation to exploitation in the labour market, as well as to various forms of violence. During the refugee "crisis" men have also experienced specific gendered vulnerabilities during war, at the border crossings and during displacement. Their vulnerability is often perceived as weakness and feminization; they might be cast as morally deviant or depicted as cowardly "others" to the dominant militarized model of a man at a time of war.

Besides the physical and emotional traumas of war and displacement, the insecurities of Syrian LGBTI refugees are often compounded by the need to hide their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Often they can be victims of targeted harassment and violence perpetrated by various armed groups, by host communities in the countries of exile or resettlement and by other refugees against individuals perceived as being LGBTI. Lack of access to human rights guaranteed under the international conventions on refugee protection thus intertwines with social and economic exploitation and with sexual and gender based violence. Syrian LGBT refugees in neighbouring countries endure discrimination and often become reliant on sex work as a survival strategy.

In Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon, women and LGBTI Syrian refugees are at a distinct disadvantage in the labour market, and face sexual harassment and violence from male employers and co-workers. Gender-based and sexual discrimination and violence are the main sources of fear, threat and insecurity in the lives of these Syrian women and LGBTI refugees. This fear of sexual and gender-based violence accompanies their flights, their lives in the camps, their escape to the cities and their future plans. Early, forced and religious marriages have become normalized as strategies for survival by Syrian women in Turkey. Structural violence intervenes on multiple levels, both within the public and the private spheres. Most LGBTI refugees suffer discrimination from their relatives and from other members of the Syrian refugee community, while women have to deal with patriarchal hierarchies and disciplinary practices in their extended families or may have to accept forced marriages.

On the other hand, contrary to the widespread belief that exile deprives refugees of their agency and renders them helpless, the experience of exile in urban spaces such as Cairo, Istanbul and Beirut can also increase the resilience of Syrian women who succeed in accumulating local social capital, have a certain level of income or become involved with and empowered by work in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other social movements. Women and LGBTI refugees' involvement and activism in rights-based NGOs and social movements in host countries not only develops social capital and brings alternative strategies for self-sustainability, but also strengthens the refugees' agency and capacities for self-determination. Nevertheless, the degree of socialization and accumulation of local social capital depends on pre-migratory class and social structures among Syrian refugees. Syrian women refugees who originate from conservative rural areas seem to encounter more difficulties in adapting to what is for them a new and challenging lifestyle in the urban space. For these lower class refugee women who lack the resources and social capital to adapt and make a living in the urban space, their identities as "vulnerable" refugees prevail over all other identities including those of wife and mother. For other, more well-off and urban refugee women, it may be possible to relegate their refugee identity to a less prominent position through better economic and social integration in the city: their narratives may focus less on "refugeeness", and more on other aspects of their identities related to their new lives in the urban space. However, even for these better-off refugee women

structural violence acts to provide obstacles to the full realization of their rights.

The lack of a gender sensitive legal framework, of a law on refugee protection or the constant changes and politicization of the legal frameworks that regulate the legal entry, legal stay, access to rights and international protection of refugees – as well as the procedures for resettlement in third countries – lead to persistent legal insecurity for women and LGBT Syrian refugees in the region. This legal violence is exacerbated by discriminatory social, political and economic environments which jeopardize their physical security, constrain their economic means of survival and hamper their access to human rights. For many refugees, legal insecurity in neighbouring countries is the main reason for attempting to move onwards towards Europe.

In a world of increasingly violent borders, barriers and razor-wire fences, each search for exile begins with the struggle for passage and survival at various national, militarized and often deadly borders. Spaces of physical exclusion and criminalization or illegalization of refugees and migrants, these borders rise as smart, high-technology performative spaces of gendered violence. The violence of the border manifests itself both at external and internal borders, at various intersections and junctures of women's and men's migratory journeys. European policies which criminalize and illegalize migration act to reinforce and exacerbate already existing insecurities for refugees – insecurities which are both gendered and racialized in nature.

Indeed, the regional and EU policy shift towards humanitarian rather than political solutions to the problems of the Syrian refugees has reinforced gendered representations of Syrian women as "victims" and "vulnerable" – thus a social burden – and of Syrian men as threats to public security in the EU. Stories of sexual violence by refugee men against European women or links between refugees and terrorist attacks have served to reinforce these representations of refugee men as a threat, and hence to increase support for "securitization" of Europe's borders. While women refugees are represented less as a threat and more in terms of "victimhood" or "vulnerability" and some concerns have been raised about the violence to which women may be exposed as refugees, there is still little or no support (medical, psychological, financial) for these women. Most do not have any knowledge about formal or informal procedures for accountability or redress when they have been victims of violence, and there are no services in place to support them. Women who are victims of violence by a husband or intimate partner may be unable to leave that partner because they have nowhere else to go and no support to turn to. Similarly, targeted support or services for LGBTI refugees who have been victims of violence or discrimination are virtually non-existent. The legal and social frameworks in EU countries that provide tools to prevent and fight against gender discrimination should in theory empower Syrian refugee women to resist domestic violence. However, binaries within traditional gender roles do not change very much, values and cultural traditions linger in the destination countries, and these legal and social frameworks are too often unavailable to the women they could help.

The perception of the influx of Syrian refugees as a "crisis" has legitimized extraordinary measures and has prevented the implementation of the long established international refugee protection regime and institutions for the protection of Syrian refugees' rights. These extraordinary measures and regimes have gendered impacts. However, Syrian women and LGBT refugees have shown resilience and in many cases have developed and adapted their own strategies for coping with physical, legal and economic insecurities. In order to move beyond the stereotypes, a more careful analysis of the experiences and needs of female and male migrants and refugees should be undertaken, including that of the ways in which gendered relations may change during the migratory process. Syrian LGBTI refugees facing violence and discrimination in neighbouring countries consider resettlement in safe third countries as the sole option for a decent future. The very low quotas accorded by third countries participating in the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Syrian refugees' resettlement programme are the main barriers they face. EU authorities must understand that they can no longer close the doors and borders on conflict in other parts of the world and that this forced migration is a reality which cannot be avoided. They should therefore respect their obligations under the UN Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights and offer regular and safe routes to Europe for those who can no longer remain in their home countries, as well as safe places to stay and live for both men and women once they arrive in the EU.

The EU response to the Syrian refugee "crisis" has illustrated not only another episode in the continuing structural and political failure of the EU asylum and refugee system, but also an explicit shift away from some of the fundamental principles and normative standards which the EU has claimed to represent and uphold, and which have been cited as its founding values. As well as neglecting the protection of the human rights of refugees attempting to gain international protection in Europe, the EU appears to be seeking to bypass the international framework for refugee protection put in place by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. With no end to the conflict in Syria in sight – and indeed with the spread of the conflict into neighbouring countries as well as the resurgence of violence and conflict in several other areas of the world – the EU cannot honestly imagine that it can close its borders and keep the effects and impacts of these conflicts out. It needs to act to help to protect the rights of all those forced to migrate, and to consider the ways in which its policies have particular impacts on individuals in relation to their gender, sexual orientation, age, class, nationality, ethnicity and religion.

Index