The shifting of gender roles during displacement: is women's sustainable empowerment possible in this context?

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Abstract: When dealing with situations of armed conflict and displacement, a complete gender analysis should consider long-term needs of refugee women, including equal representation in decision-making processes and leadership roles. It should also elucidate how shifts to non-traditional roles affect power balances, security and gender relations.

Women's empowerment during and within a context of displacement challenges the "dependency syndrome" myth which emphasizes the tendency to exclusively relies on humanitarian aid. In sharp contrast to this vision, refugee women have the potential to become less vulnerable, independent and more participative in community decision making.

Keywords: Syria, displacement, refugees, refugee camps, gender, women, violence, empowerment

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Introduction

More than 13 million Syrians have been displaced in Syria and surrounding countries (mainly Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt) by the ongoing armed conflict since March 2011, creating the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21th century. For Syrian refugee women, life has meant becoming the main caretaker of the family group and facing many challenges. Staying in a refugee camp, within the country of origin or seeking protection elsewhere, bring serious threats to their security, freedom and health. Women fleeing to the safety of refuge countries do so with the hope of escaping the physical and psychological violence that accompanies war. Displacement can increase women's vulnerability but can also give female refugees the opportunity to assume different gender roles and empower themselves. The aim of this article is to explore women's and girls' vulnerability in refugee camps in the Middle East, trying to understand the positive and negative impact of "refugeeism" on them. Indeed, on the one hand, life in the refugee camps can represent an opportunity for women and young girls to reconstruct gender roles and to focus on women as active agents of change. On the other hand, it can constitute a disempowering experience. In fact, not taking in consideration women's individual, family and community contexts and assess if their environment is receptive to accept women's empowerment and only focusing on their personal context − could even create unintended consequences. Consequently, addressing only women in humanitarian interventions will not impact men's attitudes or even women's environment. War and displacement are driving changes in gender relations, some positive, some negative, and some whose results are still unclear.

This essay will address these two issues, firstly by analysing the challenges and the vulnerabilities experienced by the refugee women during displacement and, secondly, by using the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan as a case study and emphasizing the importance of participation and empowerment of refugee women using the UN Women[1] "Oasis Centre for Women and Girls" of the Za'atari camp as an example of how to intervene for the empowerment of women in refugee settlements. In conclusion, the present article will examine possible strategies to achieve the respect and the fulfilment of women's rights during displacement, providing a central position for women in a reconstructed society.

1. Gender and Refugeeism

According to Krause, *refugeeism* is defined as forced displacement and migration as well as the life of the displaced persons which often takes place in camps and settlements and is influenced by protection and aid mechanisms. On the other hand, gender, according to Tickner, is defined as "*a set of variable but socially and culturally constructed characteristics − such as power, autonomy, rationality, and public − that are stereotypically associated with masculinity. Their opposite − weakness, dependence, emotion, and private − are associated with femininity*". This paragraph aims at analysing the phenomenon of refugeeism under a gender lens to see how women are affected but also empowered by this phenomenon.

[1] UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

While in the past the academic and policy discourse of refugees and their identities revealed a clear trend toward the homogenization, objectification and victimization, recent studies tend to criticize this view[2]. Since women and girls experience humanitarian crises differently than men and boys during displacement, defining refugees as a homogeneous group produces gender biases and blindness because it focuses on the group instead of on individuals. Indeed, refugee women, like other refugees, were subjected to generalization and gender stereotyping and excluded from political responsibilities and participation. Refugee camps constitute the perfect environment to study in which ways gender relationships and the balance of power can change under these specific conditions.

In fact, similar to all other political, social, and economic relations, gender relations are influenced by context. Considering that around 80% of all refugees[3] come from developing countries with mainly patriarchal[4] and male-dominated society structures, Turner argues that forcible displacement could break patterns as ascribed gender roles and relations are deconstructed, renegotiated, and redefined during the time people spent in refugee camps. It is also noteworthy that while displacement is mainly considered as a temporary or transitory phenomenon, it is often a prolonged process. In fact, globally, many generations have been displaced more than once and for significant periods. In 2012, almost 42% of all refugees worldwide were encamped in 30 protracted refugee situations with an estimate average duration of 20 years[5]. Therefore, refugee camps shift from transitional spaces to living spaces where new hierarchies and relations are established over time. This is because the roles and functions, learned and historically developed over time, cannot be applied in the traditional manners during displacement, because of the new and particular living situation, and changing livelihood conditions during encampment. It is important, therefore, to analyse displacement as a peculiar scenario where gender relations are reshaped; it is, in fact, a gendered process during which it is possible to observe temporary changes in gender roles but not in gender identities.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter UNHCR) affirms that the gendered process of displacement and settlement in a hosting country could both positively and negatively affect people and, hence, can be an empowering or a disempowering experience for women[6]. In fact, as the majority of refugees comes from patriarchal societies, it is possible to assume that displacement can finally give women the chance to create or negotiate new and different gender roles in refugee camps. Changes in women's life experience towards gender equality and violence protection will not only happen on their individual life level but in relationship with their partner, family, community and systems of culture, social norms and law; therefore to empower women it's of utmost importance to enable the sociocultural and legal environment.

Thus, to develop more equitable gender norms first it would be necessary to accept the principle of equal rights for men and women and also a sociocultural context in which these rights can be promoted and put into practice, including the legal prohibition and the prosecution of violence against women.

Referring to the Syrian context, for civilians the changes in lifestyle and mobility have forced a repositioning

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[2] Turner, S. (2010). *Politics of Innocence. Hutu Identity, Conflict and Camp Life*. NewYork/Oxford: Berghahn Books.
[3] UNHCR (2013). Displacement. The New 21st Century Challenge. UNHCR Global Trends 2012. Geneva: UNHCR.
[4] Characterized by a conservative approach to gender roles and rights.
[5] UNHCR, Displacement, the new 21st century Challenge. UNHCR Global trends 2012-2013. Geneva: UNCHR.
[6] UNHCR (2008). Handbook for the protection of Women and Girls. Geneva: UNHCR.

of identity, and consequently a redistribution of power and changes in behaviour. For Syrian refugees, displacement was frequently a traumatic event, leading to unemployment, loss of social networks, fear, and grief over family members left behind or killed in the conflict. This affects men, women and children in diverse ways, partially altering the balance of power. Demographic change, due to conflicts, has led more women to become heads of households. This has contributed to changes in the division of labour and has created new opportunities for women; however, in some respects, it has further marginalised their place in society. While women have to take on greater income-generating roles during displacement, mostly this is seen as a threat to men's identities[7]. For many men this transformation in the gender dynamics has triggered hyper masculine associated codes of behaviour in an attempt to re-establish normative gender roles; in order to achieve this goal, violence is often directed toward women and children, continuing that cycle of abuse often experienced by them even before the displacement. However, at the same time, some men were forced to take greater caregiving roles, suggesting a pathway to change in gender relations. Whether such changes are long term, or just temporary connected with the displacement context, is still unclear.

2. Women's Vulnerabilities in Displacement

The highly stressful situation that Syrians are experiencing has produced varying effects on women. At this regard, António Guterres, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, stated that "*life for Syria's refugee women did not stop when they crossed the border; rather, it was the beginning of a new, deeply traumatic experience – filled with misery, anxiety, isolation and hardship*". Numerous studies have highlighted the vulnerability of women and children in refugee camps, based upon the premise that the camps are often criminalized spaces where political and power structures reinforce and strengthen the patriarchal tendencies of the displaced community[8]. Indeed, camps and host cities alike often do not provide a "sanctuary" for displaced women; instead, they may be subjected to a repetition or re-initiation of cycles of violence and abuse experienced in their countries of origin, or may experience physical and sexual abuse for the first time in the displacement context. Despite the fact that the term "refuge" precisely and literally signifies shelter and/or protection. Because of this, safety and security issues are a major concern for refugee women all over the world, in particular women without male companions or husbands that have to provide for their children.
The lack of security has led to an increase in child marriages[9] as well as young girls being denied to attend school due to safety concerns. In 2014, the United Nations Children's Fund (hereafter UNICEF) reported that

[7] For example, once Syrian refugees settled in Lebanon, there was appreciation for help received but such assistance was also perceived to have an emasculating effect. In the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in the Middle East and North Africa 2107, several Syrian refugees reported in interviews that the humanitarian assistance they received was a further complicating factor in household dynamics and the question of who is the provider in the home. Many Syrian refugees in Lebanon rely on relief aid for food, shelter, and clothing, particularly as registered refugees are not allowed to be officially employed. Women are often the beneficiaries of this aid, because of their real vulnerabilities but also because many men think that, as men, it would be shameful for them to ask for assistance. This role reversal seems to have contributed to men feeling emasculated.
[8] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2014). *The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
[9] The main causes of child marriage in displacement and humanitarian crises can be the increased poverty; increase of anxiety and insecurity feelings; lack of services; fear of rape and sexual violence; fear of unwanted pre-marital pregnancies. Early marriage can be

the percentage of child marriages among Syrian refugees in Jordan increased from 12% in 2011 to 31.7% in 2014. Moreover, UNICEF also reported that parents, who allowed their daughters to get married under the age of 18, justify this arrangement as a protection measure from rape[10].

Women in refugee camps based in Jordan reported that they were asked for sexual favours in exchange for humanitarian goods. Camp humanitarian issues distribution sites were considered the second highest area of risk of violence against women after home. In order to counter this specific problem, for example, separate goods distribution lines and services for men and women were established in some refugee camps in order to respond better to gender needs. However, the challenge continues to be around the long waiting time, which is difficult in severe weather, and for female heads of household with young children. Women, in particular, indicated they were subject to harassment while they waited for many hours under the sun. While direct food provisions and food vouchers may increase nutritional intake by refugees, they also generate feelings of stigma and humiliation and levels of frustration due to the lack of control over what one eats and when. Cash vouchers may address these problems and are slowly replacing food distributions and food vouchers outside the camp as well as inside the camp. However, the cash vouchers are being distributed to the head of the household (in most of the cases to the male member of the family) as per registration at UNHCR and consequently may reinforce gender hierarchies[11].

2.1 Isolation and Trauma

Displacement contexts make that people, and in particular women, are confronted with very difficult situations. Refugees are at a high-risk of developing mental health problems due to multiple traumas of witnessing conflict, experiencing displacement and losing their loved one. Refugees may also experience survivor's guilt, which acts as a barrier for their sense of well-being and safety.

An ethnographic study on the experiences of protracted displacement of Syrian refugee women and girls in northern Jordan found that many were living with enormous psychological pressure and were suffering from high levels of stress[12]. Letitia Anderson, from the United Nations (hereafter UN) Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, stated that the partial lack of psychosocial support and counselling services for refugee women victims of violence is the Achilles' heel of the UN's humanitarian fieldwork. Moreover, Vian Darwish, an Iraqi field operator working with refugee Yazidi women in Dahuk (Iraqi Kurdistan), highlighted the lack of psychosocial services in camps that represent the major need for these women as one of the biggest gaps of the humanitarian intervention[13].

Furthermore, many Syrian refugee women and girls are extremely isolated, also because of the changing social fabric of families. In 2013, almost half of the women and girls in camps in Jordan had rarely left their "homes"

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a family coping mechanism strategy: to reduce financial burden on family; protect girls from sexual assault advances; preserve the family's honour.

[10] UNICEF, A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan 2014. Amman: UNICEF, 2014.

[11] Davis, R. & Taylor, A., Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon: A Snapshot from Summer 2013. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2013.

[12] Boswall, K. & Al Akash, R. (2015). Personal perspectives of protracted displacement: an ethnographic insight into the isolation and coping mechanisms of Syrian women and girls living as urban refugees in northern Jordan. *Intervention: Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas*, vol. 13, issue 3: 203-215.

[13] Personal interview June 2017.

and many women felt like their home was a prison. Women and girls have responded to harassment by changing their behaviour, opting to stay home instead of leaving their house or tent. While freedom of mobility was somewhat limited for many women and girls even prior to displacement, increased fear for sexual assault and harassment has placed even further restrictions on displaced women and girls. For example, a recent report commissioned by UNHCR, which surveyed 135 female heads of households taking refuge in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, showed that approximately half of the interviewed women left the house less during their stay in the host country than when they were living in Syria[14]. This confirms the previously mentioned decrease in women's mobility.

According to the UNHCR 2014 assessment report of the Za'atari Camp, "*Households headed by women, girls and boys are reportedly more vulnerable than those headed by men due to cultural difficulties in negotiating entitlements […] It is not uncommon for these households to band together or to seek shelter with a household headed by a man in order to secure social protection*", which resulted in intensified restrictions on women's movement and autonomy.

Inside the camp, the educational needs of young women and girls have been difficult to address. The perceived lack of safety has meant that families prefer not to send their daughters to school[15]. Moreover, a 2014 UNICEF's study revealed that while parents indicate the lack of interest of their children in education as the main reason for lack of attendance, "*the majority of primary and secondary school-aged children themselves report that they would like to go to school. They say their key reasons for non-attendance (or drop out) are violence and harassment in the route to and from school and between students at school, insecurity of leaving their family even for a few hours, having to help at home or work to earn money and the distance to school and the lack of appropriate toilets*"[16].

Restricted movement also limits women and girls' ability to reach goods and services, and consequently makes them less likely to take part in social and economic activities and to achieve a good level of education. The lack of education for females will have a huge effect on society at large, leading to a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. This, then, translates into less decision-making participation in the public sphere. Poorly educated women are, in fact, less likely to hold positions of responsibility within government and agencies, affecting their society and gender equality.

Supporting access to education and the development of new skills for Syrian women and adolescent girls (both married and unmarried), may be one of the most effective long-term solutions to diminishing their isolation and economic hardship and improving their physical and psychological wellbeing. In fact, the human capital theory defines education as an investment, which not only creates benefits to the individual but also to society as a whole.

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[14] UN Women (April 2014) We Just Keep Silent—Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, http://uniraq.org/images/documents.

[15] CARE. Syrian Refugees in Urban Jordan: Baseline Assessment of Community-Identified Vulnerabilities among Syrian Refugees Living in Irbid, Madaba, Mufraq and Zarqa. Rapid Participatory Community Assessment, Jordan: CARE and UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP. Joint Assessment Review of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan. January 2014.

[16] Often toilettes are not safely separate between man and women (sometimes the separation do not even exist), and this can lead to women's insecurity and fear of violence.

2.2 Violence Against Refugee Women

Women's experiences in Syria before the crisis and as refugees in hosting countries will have an impact on their long-term ability to claim their rights in all the areas − from economic and social independence to political participation. Aubone and Hernandez refer to the pre-conflict treatment of women in a society as "*strong indicators of the likelihood of rape in war, whether examining them as passive members of society to be protected, or active, empowered members of society to be treated as equals*".

The female refugee experience differs from male one because women and girls, in addition to facing general insecurity, also face the heightened threat of violence. As the Women's Refugee Commission describes, this is a common fear among female refugees who are collectively "*overwhelmed by the violence and risks of violence they encounter nearly everywhere they go*"[17].

Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and could be defined as "*any act of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*"[18].

Even before the civil war, the situation for Syrian women was difficult. The majority of women were living in a context of traditional patriarchy and embedded gendered cultural norms that limited their mobility and autonomy. Moreover, they were subject to discrimination, both in law and in practice. While the Syrian Constitution affords all citizens equal rights, and despite the 2003 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (hereafter CEDAW) by Syria these commitments have not been fully implemented through national legislation[19]. Although CEDAW call on states to "*modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women*" (art. 5)[20] reservations have been made regarding several articles of the convention "that protect, to some extent" men's physical control over women[21].

Moreover, Syria has a mixed legal system: the court system includes both secular and religious courts. *Sharia* is applied in matters related to personal status, with religious minorities applying their own laws in many of these cases. Laws assign inferior status to women compared to men, notably the Personal Status Laws that govern marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and other key areas[22]. Furthermore, there is also no legislation in place that specifically addresses violence against women. In November 2011, a joint study by the government and the United Nations Population Fund (hereafter UNFPA) reported that one in three women

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[17] Women's Refugee Commission. Mean streets: Identifying and responding to urban refugees' risk of gender-based violence. New York: Jennifer Rosenberg, 2016.

[18] Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, G.A. Res. 48/104, art.1, U.N. Doc A/48/49 (Dec. 20, 1993).

[19] CEDAW underlines the positive duty of states to act, through the law and other measures, to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality across all spheres of life (private and public).

[20] Niamh, R., *Women's Human Rights: Seeking Gender Justice in a Globalizing Age*, Polity, 2013, pp. 59-61

[21] Alsaba, K. & Kapilashrami, A. (2016) 'Understanding women's experience of violence and the political economy of gender in conflict: The case of Syria', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 24(47): 5–17.

[22] Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Syrian Arab Republic", http://genderindex.org/country/syrian-arab-republic.

suffers domestic violence in Syria[23]. The Penal Code prescribes lower penalties for murder and other violent crimes committed against women because defence of family "honour" is considered a mitigating factor.

Moreover, even the cultural norms of some hosting countries, such as Jordan, continue to affect Syrian women in refugee camps. The negative connotations associated with seeking help are perceived as giving a bad reputation to women and may lead to enhancement of social stigma and consequently silence about sexual violence.

In a 2013 quantitative study measuring attitudes of Jordanians towards violence against women, Al-Matalka and Hussainat reported that current culture in Jordan "*accepts the use of violence with women as a kind of discipline*" and that intervention from officials on behalf of a victim would cause a "*bad reputation*" to the family. According to Ferris, even after fleeing conflict and seeking refuge in a camp, the social norms that may have traditionally protected women from violence continue to decline causing an increased risk for intimate partner violence[24] within the community. Families have turned to harmful coping strategies: financial insecurity has led together emotional pressures on families, and episodes of domestic violence, gender-based violence, in particular early marriages, have increased[25].

On the experience of dealing with gender-based violence, Zaeemah, a Syrian refugee in Jordan says[26]:

> "*In late 2013, I fled Syria after my husband was briefly detained. In Jordan, our once loving relationship quickly grew tense and my husband became more violent. It was illegal for him to work and growing frustrated with his inability to provide for our family, he began hitting me and our children. I've lost all respect for him because of how he treats our children. I have so much love for my children—they have missed out on a lot of things, and I blame him for not being able to help them and not treating them well. When he is hitting me or them I just cry a lot—I try not to, but I do. Despite taking contraceptives, I recently learned that I am pregnant. I feel suffocated. My husband can't handle any more kids. We both felt that we did not want to have another child with each other. I've tried to get an abortion, but here it isn't allowed. I see similar situations happening with my neighbors and relatives.*"

The social stigma associated with sexual and gender-based violence (hereafter SGBV) creates double victimization and double traumatization of women[27]. Cultural norms and social stigma, together with the fact that so often perpetrators are related and/or known to the victim, further complicates the reporting process and

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[23] Amnesty International (2011) "Annual Report 2011: Syria", http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/syria/report-2011.

[24] If within their countries men perceived gendered role as breadwinner and protector, in refugee contexts this perception change. Men cannot find work and do not take up any of the household or care functions. This leads in boredom and disempowerment. Men's low self-esteem and feelings of frustration often generate acts of violence against family. Ferris, E. G. (2007). Abuse of power: Sexual exploitation of refugee women and girls. Signs 32(3): 584-591.

[25] Boswall, K. & Al Akash, R. (2016). Personal perspectives of protracted displacement: an ethnographic insight into the isolation and coping mechanisms of Syrian women and girls living as urban refugees in northern Jordan. Intervention: Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas, vol. 13, issue 3: 203-215.

[26] Interview conducted by the IRC (International Rescue Committee) from May 18 to July 1, 2014.

[27] Women may survive sexual violence, but many times do not survive to social stigma such as family rejection that often can lead to suicide.

increases the invisibility of these cases and the women's vulnerability. In fact, humanitarian agencies face significant challenges with regard to under-reporting, particularly for sexual violence, with cultural constraints and isolation in the home contributing as barriers to disclosure. In a study on SGBV in Jordan conducted by UN Women in 2013, "*an alarming 83% of participants did not know of any services available in their community for survivors*" of gender-based violence. Moreover, according to UNHCR reports, existing data on a number of protection risks, including SGBV, represents a small proportion of the actual number of incidents.

3. Case Study: Za'atari (مخيم الزعتري) Refugee Camp in Jordan

The reason for using the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan as the case study in this article is mainly based on three considerations. First, the Za'atari camp is the largest refugee camp in the Middle East; second, the majority of refugees come from the same Syrian region, thus sharing a similar historical, cultural and social background; finally, because the Za'atari camp is structured with a pseudo urban setting, similar to a city. Taking into consideration these issues and the topics underlying this essay, the study of the Za'atari camp may give insights regarding the impact of displacement, the development of coping mechanisms and transformative action in women lives.

The conflict between the forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those opposed to his rule[28] has caused political and economic instability and large-scale destruction in the country, leading to a huge number of Syrians being displaced and seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The first anti-government demonstrations took place in March 2011 in the city of Dara'a, in southern Syria close to the Jordanian border[29]. The response of the Syrian military to the uprising was violent and brutal. This response contributed to the transformation of the movement from peaceful protests to a violent civil war that still continues today. Consequently, a huge number of Syrian refugees fled to find safety, many of them in Jordan. In July 2012, the UN opened three refugee camps in the area. At that time, it was estimated that 6,000 Syrians were fleeing the country every day[30] and the situation was becoming one of the largest refugee crises in the recent history. By July 2015, over four million people were living as refugees outside the country, with over half of the 629,000 in Jordan mainly coming from Dara'a[31]. According to a 2015 assessment report by the office of UNHCR, the registered Syrian refugees in Jordan represents about 10% of Jordan's total population.

The working and farming communities surrounding Dara'a were traditional and composed mainly of large extended families, which provided women with a strong sense of identity and belonging. Clear delineations of

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[28] Currently, the actors are numerous and changing every day, but the map of the conflict can be classified into three main groups: Islamic groups (ISIS, J. Al Nusra), secular rebels (as the Free Syrian Army) and the Syrian regime itself.

[29] Some youths, or schoolchildren depending on reports, were arrested, tortured and beaten by the police in the southwestern city of Dara'a for painting anti regime graffiti on walls. This event poured fuel onto the already ongoing anti regime movements.

[30] Retrieved from http://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syrian-refugee-crisis.

[31] UNHCR 2015. Syria Regional refugee response Inter-agency information sharing portal http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.

private and public spheres, and particular conceptualisations and delineations of gendered behaviour, were intrinsic in the practice of everyday existence[32].

Only 30 km of farmland separate Jordan's second largest city, Irbid, from Syria's southern capital, Dara'a. Both are on the Hauran plain, one of the most fertile regions in Syria. Following the creation of a physical border between Syria and Jordan after the First World War, trade, movement and marriage between the two populations remained commonplace. In fact, when the conflict began, many Syrians moved to Jordan to stay with relatives, not as refugees, but as visitors[33]. As the number of Syrians crossing the border continued to increase, applying pressure on services and local facilities, it was feared that violence would erupt. However, this did not happen, and despite Jordan did not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, understanding and collaboration have quickly developed[34]. Perhaps without the shared historic-cultural connection, northern Jordan, over these years, would not have maintained acceptance of refugees in relative peace despite the challenges that this situation has created. This especially because Syrian refugees compete with the Jordan's population for the limited resources of this country such as water, employment opportunities, healthcare, shelter and education[35].

According to latest data provided by UNHCR, the total population of Syrians registered in Jordan was 655,365[36]. Jordan hosts 513,961 (78%) Syrian refugees in urban, peri-urban and rural area[37] such as in Amman, Irbid, Mafraq and Jordan's poorest northern municipalities. The remaining 141,404 (22%) were settled in three camps established in the Jordan desert: Za'atari, Azraq and Emirati Jordanian camp[38].

The first camp, established on July 28, 2012, stretched over two miles and was located in the northern part of Jordan in the Mafraq Desert. Due to its proximity to Za'atari, a village included in the Mafraq Governorate, the camp came to be known as the Za'atari Camp, and became the most concentrated site for Syrian refugees (with 79% originating from the Da'ara Governorate in Syria's southwest) in Jordan[39]. Because of its desert location, the Za'atari Camp is subjected to harsh winters, hot summers, and sandstorms.

The camp was initially designed to house 5,000 refugees. However, one year after its establishment it was housing more than 30,000 refugees. Within two years, it had become the world's second largest refugee camp and the largest in the region with over 100,000 refugees.

The camp is now the fourth largest "city" in Jordan covering some 5.3 km^2. Za'atari is jointly administrated by the Jordanian government and UNHCR. It has two hospitals, nine health care centers and one delivery unit, 29 schools, mosques, 27 community centers providing psychosocial support and recreation activities, a market-

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[32] Mahmood, S. Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[33] In fact, many Syrians had family in Jordan, and the borders had been quite fluid in previous years due to Bedouin groups that lived in the area long before the border was established in 1921.

[34] Jordan's law on refugees is defined by a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, amended in April 2014. It includes the 1951 Convention's definition of "refugee" and accepts the principle of non-refoulement and third country resettlement for refugees. However, it does not allow for local integration of refugees as a solution.

[35] Alexandria Francis. "Jordan's Refugee Crisis." Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015. Accessed March 2016. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_247_Francis_Jordan_final.pdf.

[36] UNHCR, Syrian Regional Refugee Response. Accessed October 2016. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] LIVED Project. "The Za'atari Refugee Camp." Accessed March 2016. http://www.livedprojects.org/zaatari-refugee-camp/.

like structure of 3,000 makeshift shops (in the so-called Champs-Élysées avenue) selling a wide range of food, household goods, and clothes[40].

As families were forced to leave Syria, many males were separated from the rest of their families (killed, kidnapped, stayed behind to fight against the regime or protect family properties). This has resulted in many households being headed by females. For the first time in their lives, females who came from conservative communities have found themselves responsible for their parents, siblings, and children. Their vulnerability has increased as the traditional familial roles they were accustomed to prior to their displacement have changed, perhaps forever. According to UNHCR, females represent 54% of the total Za'atari Camp population with one out of five households headed by females.

In an attempt to have the camp organized as a city, Za'atari was divided into 12 districts, with representatives (mainly men) chosen from each district. As Susan F. Martin highlights in her book *Refugee Women*, refugee women in refugee camps remain responsible for domestic work though at the same time having to deal with shifts in family structures and roles. However, these changes in gender roles that conduct to a mayor responsibility of women rarely conduct to new opportunities to women to become part of the public sphere. Leadership in the camp remains an issue with the presence of gang leaders, which is why UNHCR is hoping to have traditional Syrian leaders, who were previously involved in their communities, stepping up as positive leaders in the districts[41]. The oldest part of the camp, Districts 1 and 2, namely the 'Old City', benefits from close access to services such as schools and hospitals and they represent the highest densely populated area of Za'atari refugee camp. UNHCR is trying as much as possible to regroup refugees from the same previous Syrian communities into the same district, as an attempt to foster a new sense of community within each district[42].

The camp's expansion and organization has been beneficial to many refugees, with the implementation of a taxi system, shopping streets, etc. However, socio-economic inequalities can be observed in Za'atari, with a widening gap between those whose economic situation improved by the renewed economic market of the camp, and those who are still highly dependent on international aid. Children and women, who are heads of their families, are especially vulnerable to these difficult living conditions[43]. Furthermore, due to the urgency of the situation and lack of long term planning, the Za'atari Camp's infrastructure is not adequate for meeting the needs of that many refugees. The camp has become known for its poor housing, unsanitary conditions, limited access to water, crowded schools, and sexual crimes. Most refugees live in tents, which lack any heating or air conditioning for weathering the harsh temperatures of the desert and constant sandy winds. Currently, the camp is becoming more organised, with the availability of caravans, which were distributed according to the "vulnerability criteria" that UNHCR has determined: it ensured that female-headed households, single woman and households with many young children were adequately sheltered[44]. Nonetheless, just having floors,

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[40] UNHCR factsheet Za'atari refugee camp May 2017.

[41] No reference to women participation in leadership at Za'atari Camp was founded in a review of documents and literature.

[42] Retrieved from http://www.livedprojects.org/zaatari-refugee-camp/.

[43] Ibid.

[44] "By the end of 2013, the shelter situation had improved significantly, with other 17,000 trailers provided in Za'atari and only 2,500 tents remaining. The objective is to replace all tents with solid structures by early 2014" (UNHCR 2014).

windows and doors have made caravans "hot commodities" and a source of envy for many tents dwellers. Electricity provides an essential lifeline for refugees, such as preserving food, maintaining hygiene, lighting shelters. However, the high cost of powering the camp has conducted to a use of electricity by refugees of a few hours a day after sunset. In order to improve the refugees live and safety, a new solar power plant was built recently (November 2017) in order to provide camp residents with 12 to 14 hours electricity each day[45].

The shortage of food and drinking water, as well as the lack of "public facilities" have become recurrent events in the camp. Despite this the camp was initially viewed as a safe place, violence is being quickly spreading[46]. In fact, security is one of the biggest challenge for refugees inside the camp. Females, in particular, are living in fear of being raped, harassed, or forced into early marriage to escape the dangers of the camp. In addition, domestic and gender-based violence has increased because of a shift in male roles in the family, which has become a major concern for refugee women in the camp. According to UNICEF, this camp has not reached the necessary level of prevention of SGBV and violence and fear of sexual violence are two main challenges in Za'atari. In a survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee (hereafter IRC)[47], during June 2014, violence against women was often reported to the IRC in Za'atari. It was also estimated that only one out of 10 women who have experienced violence reported it. This demonstrates an astounding amount of invisible gender-based violence occurring with impunity.

Constructive steps were made by some humanitarian organisations and UN agencies such as IRC, which provides a program of psychological counselling, UNFPA and UNICEF, which have supported training on clinic treatment of SGBV victims. However, services and professional personnel are not sufficient and very often not even known by refugee women.

Schools in Za'atari camp are available for every child and distributed among the districts, and this makes school accessible in terms of geographical proximity. Despite that, fifty percent of the school-aged population are not enrolled in Za'atari camp's schools[48]. The abovementioned numbers and facts raise a well-founded fear of the children of Syria becoming a lost generation.

In 2013, Abouzeid after visiting the camp, described Za'atari as follows[49]:

> "*...The camp is a sprawling labyrinth of tents and trailers that, like most things here, are covered in a gritty, sandy dirt [...] The older parts of the camp, close to the entrance, are generally safer than the newer, outlying areas. They have streetlights, and established communities, often organized around clan or village, that offer safety in numbers and familiarity. In the newer parts, trailers and tents are more widely spaced, people often don't know each other, and a darkened nighttime dash to the*

[45] This solar power plant was funded by the Government of Germany through the KfW Development Bank. Moreover it will deliver annual savings to UNHCR that will be able to reinvest the savings in vital humanitarian assistance.

[46] UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2016.

[47] The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a nongovernmental organisation founded in 1933 and offers emergency aid and long-term assistance to refugees and those displaced by war, persecution, or natural disaster.

[48] Human Rights Watch. "Preventing a lost generation: Jordan. 'We're afraid of their futures'. Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan." 2016. Accessed September, 2016. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/jordan0816web_0.pdf.

[49] Abouzeid, R. "A Wedding Dress in Za'atari", The New Yorker, October 29, 2013. Retrieved from www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-wedding-dress-in-zaatari.

communal toilets, for example, is a heart-palpating trip. There is talk of rapes and other gender-based violence in some places, as well as activities like prostitution. It's a difficult subject to broach in a society where a family's honor is often tied to women's purity; even the violent theft of chastity is considered a grave stain [...]The camp's peripheries are marked by earthen berms meant to prevent smuggling, but they don't stop the movement of goods and people, even in broad daylight—they just slow it down [...] There are plans to train some refugees to look after their neighbourhoods, and to train and deploy Jordanian police in community centres inside the camp. The current system, in which non-governmental organizations deal with mainly self-appointed "street leaders" among the refugees, has largely been a bust. Many of the street leaders, who are uniformly men, are despised or feared by other refugees; they've exploited their positions of relative power to benefit personally, by taking a larger share of the aid that is distributed, employing friends and relatives in jobs around the camp, or using violence to extort money and to suppress potential rivals".

4. Refugee Women Empowerment during displacement

The image of women as pure victims during times of conflicts has an influence on how responses are shaped, as well as access to key leadership positions and decision making in refugee camp settings. According to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014), some scholars identified and represented refugee women as apolitical and non-agentic victims or as weakened and dependent impersonal subjects. In reporting the emphasis on feminizing victimhood of humanitarianism, Liisa H. Malkki, a scholar specialising in refugee studies, writes: "*The visual prominence of women and children as embodiments of refugeeness has to do not just with the fact that most refugees are women and children, but with the institutional, international expectation of a certain kind of helplessness as a refugee characteristic*"[50]. Moreover, Hajdukowski, Khanlou & Moussa underline that "*While increasingly recognized that women's experiences of displacement differed from men's, these accounts often reduced such experiences to women's vulnerability to sexual violence, rather than exploring how and why women were victimized and persecuted, or recognizing that displaced women could simultaneously be victimized and yet remain active agents deserving of respect, and not simply pity*"[51].

Portraying refugee women as vulnerable and perpetual victims is supposed to be part of the explanation for continuing patriarchal power relations in camps. For example, in refugee camps in Jordan, during the initial processes of registration, data were collected through surveys with men in the camp because it was presumed that they were the householders. Consequently, information from humanitarian organizations and UN agencies was shared directly with male family members, assuming that they would share it with women in the

[50] Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/656300.

[51] Hajdukowski-Ahmed, M., Khanlou N., and Moussa, H. (2008). *Not Born a Refugee Woman: Contesting Identities, Rethinking Practices*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

household[52]. In this way, the direct access and involvement in the information gathering process was denied to many women. Moreover, also the media coverage of refugee women's issues can protract the image of women as only war victims. For example, in a Lebanese Qualitative Content Analysis study conducted by ABAAD[53] organization during 2015 and 2016, that covered six of the most prominent Lebanese broadcast and print media outlets, Syrian refugee women were represented no more than victims without any political, social or economic roles[54]. Gender issue was extensively covered, but only to underline the women's traditional roles and to depict Syrian refugee women as vulnerable and helpless victims. This was actually established in most of the photos attached to the published materials where women's role was highlighted as merely caring for family and children.

Nevertheless, a shift of the focus from women as victims of war to women as agents of change and a comprehensive inclusion of women and gendered perspectives in transitional mechanisms and policies has been recognised not only as ethically correct but also as a big opportunity. The transitional period is the perfect moment to cope with inequalities, not only in relation to conflict's features but also to other patterns of marginalization already existing before the conflict. Transition offers indeed a great chance for those, as women, that were previously denied with their fundamental human rights. In fact, the end of conflicts offers a window of opportunity for increased participation by women in the transition process and for the transformation of gender relations more broadly. All in a society would benefit from these achievements. Many studies, in fact, show that states with a higher general level of equality between women and men are more peaceful in various respects. For example, gender equality has been found to be associated with less violent international conflict, a lower risk of armed conflict within states and civil war, and lower levels of human rights abuses by the state[55].

In fact, a common problem in international peace-building process over the last years has been exactly the position of women in conflict and post conflict situations, such as displacement, considering their limited involvement in peace-building strategies. To cope with this fact, the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000); it was the first time the Council focused exclusively on women as subjects in their own rights in situations of conflict and of transitions from conflict[56]. Besides considering women as victims who need protection, resolution 1325 focuses and addresses not only the inordinate impact of war on women, but also the pivotal role women do play in conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace. Specifically, art. 1 calls for the "*increased representation of women at all decision-making levels […] in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict*". Unfortunately, the resolution does not provide much guidance on what a gender perspective consists of, and, does not identified

[52]Women's Refugee Commission (2014). Unpacking Gender: The Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan. New York: Women's Refugee Commission.

[53]ABAAD is a non-profit, non-politically affiliated, non-religious civil society association founded in June 2011 with the aim of promoting sustainable social and economic development in the Middle East and North Africa region by advancing the equality, protection, and empowerment of marginalised groups, especially women.

[54] http://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1488981478.pdf

[55] Caprioli, M. and Boyer, M. (2001). Gender, violence, and international crisis, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol.45, no.4.

[56] It seems important to observe that 1324 resolutions have been issued before by the Security Council, and none of them have any specific reference to women.

women and girls as different subjects. Since then, the Security Council adopted other seven resolutions about women and conflict situations[57]. In 2008, for example, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations to halt acts of sexual violence against civilians in conflict zones. The Resolution recognizes that conflict-related sexual violence is a tactic of warfare, and calls for the training of troops on preventing and responding to sexual violence, deploying more women to peace operations, and enforcing zero-tolerance policies for peacekeepers[58]. Furthermore, two important resolutions were prepared and adopted in 2009: Resolution 1888 on the Protection of Women and Girls from Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts and Resolution 1889 on the Protection of Women and Girls in Post-Conflict Situations. The first one strengthens the implementation of Resolution 1820 by calling for leadership to address conflict-related sexual violence, deployment of teams (military and gender experts) to critical conflict areas, and it improves monitoring and reporting on conflict trends and perpetrators; this resolution also undertakes to raise the number of women in peacekeeping operations. The second resolution, instead, calls for greater representation of women in mediation processes and peace negotiations. For the first time, it attaches a central role to women's education in the promotion of women's participation in post-conflict decision making. The last UN Security Council Resolution (No 2242) was adopted in 2015 and stresses the differential impact on the human rights of women and girls of terrorism and violent extremism, pointing out on the peculiar situation of our time.

The concept of women's empowerment in the context of humanitarian and development aid is not yet coherently defined. UNHCR acknowledges that women's "*independence and economic self-reliance and their leadership and decision-making abilities*" is relevant to promote women's empowerment. Moreover, understands the concept of empowerment of men and women in general as *a "process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment*"[59].

Furthermore, the UNHCR's guidelines on the protection of refugee women recognizes also the importance of women's participation: "*Participation itself promotes protection. Internal protection problems are often due as much to people's feelings of isolation, frustration, lack of belonging to a structured society and lack of control over their own future...Refugee participation helps build the values and sense of community that contribute to reducing protection problems*"[60].

While women's practical needs are important to meet in the context of refugee status, strategic needs are also important. Women have practical needs as caretakers, including the need for food, shelter, water and safety. Strategic needs, however, are needs for more control over their lives, needs for psychosocial support, for

[57] UNSC Resolution 1325, 2000; UNSC Resolution 1820, 2008; UNSC Resolution 1888, 2009; UNSC Resolution 1889, 2009; 1960, 2010; 2106, 2013; 2122, 2013; UNSC Resolution 2242, 2015. Full texts available at: http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/.

[58] Rehn, E. and Johnson Sirleaf, E. (2009). Focus: Women, Gender and Armed Conflict, *Gender Policy*, October.

[59] UNHCR (2001b). UNHCR good practices on gender equality mainstreaming: a practical guide to empowerment. Geneva: UNHCR.

[60] UNHCR (1991). Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. Geneva: UNHCR.

political participation to help them to shape public decisions and for a safe space for women outside the household.

Many different initiatives have been carried out to face sexual and gender-based violence, and promote the empowerment of women and girls in refugee camps. In Za'atari refugee camp, INTERSOS[61], in coordination with UN Women, established in November 2012 a safe place under the name of "Women and Girl's Oasis", which was funded by the Government of the Netherlands. There are currently three Oasis Centres serving women and girls, one of which is co-managed by World Food Program (hereafter WFP) and UN Women. According to WFP[62], most of the women working in the Oasis Centre, prior to displacement, were homemakers who relied on their husband's financial support in Syria, and were forcibly made the head of household due to the conflict.

Refugee women and girls could meet and receive assistance out of the family control system. On the one hand, this project permits Syrian refugee women to work and receive "cash for work scheme", and, on the other, it allows them to engage with a peer to peer support mechanism and empowerment process. Furthermore, this safe structure helps women's growth allowing them to develop at personal and social level and to re-build confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. The Centre helps women to deal with security challenges by providing protection referral services for gender-based violence, disability and legal status. Emergency medical support and technical assistance on gender equality and women's empowerment is also provided. Workshops and classes are offered to develop their leadership and life skills (such as language, literacy training and health). The Centre supports mothers working at the Oasis by providing a nursery on site[63]. Some of the activities provided by this project are tailoring, drawing, learning English, attending mosaic and handcraft workshops and playing football for girls[64]. Women and girls of all ages can access a multitude of services and build a sense of community in a safe space. Offering on-site day care services makes it possible for mothers to be included in events as well as work. Children at the daycare are taught the alphabets and how to draw using educational material created by refugee women in the Za'atari camp.

This vocational training program in Za'atari Camp showed an increased women confidence, improved their business skills, helped to generate income to build a better life for their families and gave them hope and opportunities[65]. The IRC's experience across countries in the Middle East also indicates that women's economic activities are safer and impactful when accompanied with social activities, which help them create social connections and networks[66].

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[61] INTERSOS is an Italian humanitarian aid organization that works all over the world to bring assistance to people in danger, victims of natural disasters, armed conflicts or living in conditions of extreme exclusion.

[62] https://www.wfp.org/stories/zaatari-women-oasis-away-from-home.

[63] Shada Moghraby, "Women in Za'atari: An Oasis Away from Home," World Food Programme, December 10, 2015.

[64] INTERSOS. Women empowerment in INTERSOS "Women and Girls Oasis" at Za'Atari Refugee Camp. March 5, 2013 by Intersos, http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/women-empowerment-intersos.

[65] Jabbar, S.A., & Zaza, H. (2016). Evaluating a vocational training program for women refugees at the Za'atari camp in Jordan: women empowerment: a journey and not an output. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, vol. 21, issue 3: 304-319.

[66] Retrieved from https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC_WomenInSyria_Report_WEB.pdf.

The Oasis Centre is unusual and unique because it provides a space for women to escape the "displaced" and "victimized" labels normally placed on them and it explores their aspirations, while supporting them to take on leadership roles.

Creating and investing in spaces and programs for women that go beyond addressing immediate needs require reorienting our view of women: from mere victims of humanitarian crisis and conflict to "inventive survivors" and subjects capable of transformative leadership.

5. Conclusion

To support and empower refugee women in humanitarian contexts, it is necessary to recognize the barriers that impede their participation. For empowerment to take place, a shift from women and girls representation as victims and as a vulnerable group to women and girls as agents of social change is necessary. "*They are more than mouths to feed and bodies to care for, and recognition of their humanity, creativity, and resilience is required even in the midst of difficult times*"[67]. On the experience of dealing with life in a refugee camp, Danal, a 38-year-old Syrian refugee woman in Jordan says[68]:

> "*For the first year I lived in the camp, I was depressed—I struggled to cope with the living conditions and the stress of trying to make sure my family was taken care of. But then one day I said to myself—I have to deal with this. I have to move on and rebuild. I changed my whole mind set and worked really hard—I was lucky enough to find a job, and I began to rebuild my sewing business, which was destroyed in Syria. I managed to save up and buy a sewing machine and now I have a backlog of orders. I consider myself an activist—not necessarily a political one, but I go out and help others—even in the camp. I have some medical training, so I walk around to see if anyone is sick or wounded—I also assist doctors from time to time. It has been a constant struggle, but now I am more powerful. I want my daughters to finish school. I want my business to grow. I want stability. And I am slowly making things happen*."

It is important to find entry points for increasing women's political and economic empowerment and to mobilise affected communities in order to capitalise on and use their capacities to be part of the solution. Additionally, it would be necessary the development and implementation of diverse policies to identify risk factors, which can be addressed to maximize the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in camp situations, rather than merely responding to sexual and gender-based violence post-facto. The movement from GBV *response* to GBV *prevention* is crucial. Sexual and gender-based violence is a system of fear that keeps women out of the public life, conditioning their movements, participation and way of living. The lack of

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[67] http://www.academia.edu/6410386/Womens_Refugee_Commission_Unpacking_Gender_The_Humanitarian_Response_to_the_Syrian_Refugee_Crisis_in_Jordan.

[68] In interview conducted by the IRC from May 18 to July 1, 2014.

effective reporting mechanisms and an inadequate or even access to justice for refugee women is blocking progress in addressing GBV and fostering a culture of impunity. These specific barriers need to be understood to better address and stop further violence against women.

Moreover, even where equal rights are recognised, the practice remains unequal because women and men do not have the same opportunities to claim these rights, due to the differential access to economic, political and legal resources. Furthermore, spaces for alliance between different genders should be defined in humanitarian framework and policies, engaging men and boys on gender issues, in order to help to support the positive roles men and boys can take in addressing the issue of gender inequality and violence. For example, providing targeted psychological counselling and mental health services for men who are coping with low self-esteem could help them to better manage their inability to fulfil their traditional gender roles. Refugee women and men's anxieties and fears concerning their shifting gender roles need to be acknowledged and addressed. In order to change men's views and to promote engagement in the urgent need of tackling violence against women it's also necessary to promote the collaboration with community leaders- such as elected officials, religious figures, judges, police officers, and lawyers – who work along the fault lines of gender issues. This can be used as an entry point for challenging customs that have traditionally restricted women's participation in social, economic and political spheres, and also for changing long-established social and cultural rules.

International commitments are difficult to enforce in practice and a range of cultural, historical and patriarchal justifications exist for the exclusion of gendered concerns in both human rights and human security approaches. Consequently, it is essential, when working with refugee women, to have an understanding of the common traditional practices and cultural codes, and to know how they used to conduct their lives prior to their displacement. It is also crucial to amplify the voices and experiences of the refugee women and bridge them to policy spaces connecting the grassroots, civil society and the treetops.

Support is a short-term solution. Sustainable initiatives would increase and consolidate change. Therefore, there is the need for strategies and bottom up interventions that specifically target the differential access to security, resources and opportunities. This requires not only commitment to the legal framework but also long-term compliance and development of strategies. Transformation of laws and resolutions into solutions is crucial.

Moreover, women, as both leaders within humanitarian organizations and in times of crisis are significantly underrepresented. As of January 2016, of the 29 UN Humanitarian Coordinators, only nine were women[69]. According to OXFAM International[70], humanitarian responses often fail to appreciate the importance of women's existing roles and their capacity as leaders in emergency response being leadership predominantly

[69] Humanitarian Advisory Group, "Why We Need More Women in Humanitarian Leadership" (2016), http://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/HAG_Think-Piece2-Women-in-humanitarian-action.pdf.

[70] Oxfam is an international confederation of charitable organizations founded in 1942 in Oxford, focused on the alleviation of global poverty

male within the humanitarian community[71]. In a 2011 survey of over 270 senior and mid-level representatives of humanitarian agencies, 68 percent of senior managers were male[72].

These data show that, despite of these new useful international initiatives, the realization of justice for women in transitions after armed conflicts is particularly tied to their bottom-up implementation and to a severe monitoring system of compliance that it is still lacking. UNHCR's guidelines on SGBV mitigation and response for refugees indeed underline community engagement and improvement of local capacity and participation.

Furthermore, facilitating women's leadership within humanitarian organizations and UN agencies can also ensure that the unique needs of women and girls in conflict are addressed and lead to a more effective emergency response. To achieve a truly commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, it is necessary that women are granted the chance to participate in key leadership roles within humanitarian settings, such as refugee camps, as well in UN and non-governmental organisations.

In conclusion, refugee women suffer from war or other forms of persecution in their countries of origin and continues to suffer human rights violations in the countries in which they seek protection. There is a considerable gap between the legal dimension and reality that highlights an intrinsic vulnerability and mistrust of the human rights treaties, conventions and declarations as a law instrument.

I believe that the implementation of women's rights has to be seen as an enforceable obligation and not a mere rhetorical and moralistic pretence of sympathy or declarations; therefore, a more effective law enforcement is urgently needed in order to achieve their total recognition.

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71 Oxfam, Gender Issues In Conflict And Humanitarian Action: Oxfam Humanitarian Policy Note (Oxford: Oxfam, 2013), https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/hpn-gender-conflict-humanitarian-action-291113-en.pdf.

72 "Addressing the Gender Challenge," Humanitarian Response Index (2011), 51, http://daraint.org/wp content/uploads/2012/03/HRI_2011_Addressing_the_gender_challenge1.pdf

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