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# Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria

Women Now for Development

April 2019



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# **Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria**

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**Special thanks to:**

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## 1. Introduction

The past year has seen a shift in the political context in Syria. The Syrian regime regained most of the Syrian territory. International policy makers and political powers are now discussing and negotiating “reconstruction” and “post-conflict peacebuilding”. However, the winter 2017-2018 witnessed a worsening of the humanitarian situation in the country as revealed by the destruction and deterioration of civil society structures in Eastern Ghouta and the countryside of Idlib.

After 8 years of harsh, bloody and intense military conflicts, negotiations between various political powers invoking “reconciliation” and “justice” appear tense and complex. It is clear so far, despite women’s important social and political involvement within Syrian civil society, Syrian women’s specific roles, positionalities and experiences have not yet been entirely taken into account when thinking of a future Syria. The international discourse focus on issues of “sexual violence” and “honor killings” in the frame of programs supposed to tackle gender specific violence appear at odds with the everyday realities of Syrian women and girls. Moreover, while attention has been drawn to rape and sexual violence, women’s voices, activist-based and grassroots initiatives regarding crucial issues such as the proliferation of weapons, as well as household survival, political and social equity are not given adequate attention and consideration.

Women Now for Development as the largest women’s network working inside Syria and neighboring countries since 2012 has developed, and works within, a holistic approach of gender justice through bottom-up and multi-layered perspectives. Our work focuses on education, economic empowerment, psycho-social support, awareness raising and grassroots campaigning. Its experienced and highly professional work with women and girls in Syrian or in displaced Syrian communities in neighboring countries makes it a unique example of feminist practices in context of conflicts.



The Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria project was developed to provide the appropriate space, platform and feminist critical tools for Syrian women and activists. Specifically, to:

- Document and voice Syrian women's concerns, experiences and needs and put forward their own analysis and understanding of the conflict, the ways to deal with it, and their thinking for the future; Support and strengthen the development of grassroots-based feminist activisms as well as alternative and original social and political activisms connecting social, economic and political justice to gender justice;
- Emphasize their role, not only as central actors in the conflict but also as primary conflict analysts and knowledge producers;
- Develop ways to facilitate feminist thinking and knowledge production, document women and feminist activisms, and ways to disseminate this knowledge.

### Methodology:

To undertake this project, Women Now worked with a feminist scholar, specialized in women and gender in the Middle East and contexts of war and conflicts, Dr Zahra Ali. In addition, Syrian activist and researcher Nisrin.H conducted field research with women in different parts of Syria, and in countries of exile. Finally, there was a consultation/workshop with experienced Syrian women activists in Berlin on February 17 and 18, 2019. Women Now designed the consultation/workshop program with Dr Zahra Ali, informed by Nisrin.H's fieldwork research (please see Nisrin.H's paper attached to this document).

The aim of the **fieldwork research** was to get a qualitative understanding of women's everyday realities, concerns and priorities, as well as the ways in which they perceive and experience the current political context and envisage the future. The research was undertaken in the form of semi-structured interviews and short life-stories, rather than a series of questions. The idea was to not only get the interviewees' opinions and analysis, but also to gather an oral history of their collective experiences, understanding and positionalities. Through this process, the research provided a foundation from which to document and analyze Syrian women's various experiences and understandings notions of justice, peace, equity and social stability.

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1 Interviews were conducted with a dozen Syrian women who lived in Syria most of their lives and witnessed the 2011 developments. The women were aged between 25 and 57 years in different locations (in and outside Syria)



The **workshop/consultation** aimed to develop a holistic approach to Syrian women activism, beyond global gender agendas' notions and terminologies; and to foster and document the knowledge they produce through the ways they think and deploy political activisms and feminisms. It consisted of a face-to-face workshop with a dozen Syrian women and activists within Women Now networks, merging activists and research perspectives on issues of women and gender, and feminist knowledge production in relation to reconstruction, peacebuilding, justice and equity. Instead of defining and framing the notions and tools that Syrian women could use such as CEDAW, 1325 resolution, gender mainstreaming and empowerment, the workshop/consultation centered on women's everyday realities and attempt to document their specific ways of experiencing, tackling and developing concrete forms of conflict resolution and justice. Instead of limiting itself to using feminist tools provided by UN programs and international NGOs, the workshop was designed to place at its center Syrian women and activists as primary feminist knowledge producers and conflict analysts.

This position paper outlines the critical feminist analysis that underpinned the project's approach as well as sharing the research findings analyzing Syrian women activists experiences on everyday organizing, violence, (transitional) justice, political participation and representation. Finally, the paper lists a series of recommendations for external stakeholders that want to support gender justice and feminist knowledge production in Syria.





## 2. A Critical Feminist Approach Towards Gender Justice in Syria – What are the Issues?

### Gendering Peacebuilding or NGOization?

When put in a historical perspective, international policy making and interventions in Syria follow a pattern of global politics that started a few decades ago. In the Middle East, the promotion of “civil society” and “gender” became buzzwords for international and transnational policy makers since the 1990s. From UN institutions, such as UN Women and the UNDP, to the US administration, World Bank and IMF, encouraging “civil society” and “empowering women” are main features of the so-called “democratization” of the Middle East (Greenberg & Zuckerman, 2006; Metcalfe, 2008; Norton, 1993; Rehn & Johnson Sirleaf, 2002).

As Palestinian feminist scholar Islah Jad (2007) points out, the growing number of Arab non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in general, and women’s NGOs in particular, must be seen in the context of a broader development trend that views NGOs as vital vehicles for social change and democratization in the region. Thus, most NGOs promote economic empowerment often based on the neoliberal funds and politics of the IMF and World Bank. Droz-Vincent (2008) asserts that, under non-democratic regimes, civil society activism in the Middle East also became a lucrative activity for educated youth searching for spaces to implement their vision of human rights and democracy in middle class socio-educational and, therefore, not directly political spaces.

Scholar Deniz Kandiyoti (2007) notes that the internationalization of “rebuilding” in post-conflicts contexts appear to be placed under new forms of tutelage. International policy makers and their donor-led institutions propose a set of steps, such as the drafting of a new constitution and the organization of general elections with quotas for female representatives. If we look at the case of Iraq for example, this politics of “rebuilding” was implemented while foreign military intervention created a state of chaos, destroyed a functioning state, and imposed a “prefabricated nation” after overthrowing a regime (Ali, 2018). The post-2011 Syrian context is characterized by a generalized militarization, ethnosectarian fragmentation, state and various forms of political violence. Syrian women are caught “between the hammer and the anvil”, to use Kandiyoti’s (2007) term, in the sense that they have to fight for both for their formal de jure rights that are under constant threat from conservative social forces and for their substantive rights to security and human dignity that have become the casualties of endemic lawlessness and impunity in their society and communities.



The investment of UN and international NGOs in women's issues has been important in the Middle East since the Beijing World Conference in 1995, the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted in October 2000. Islah Jad (2003) notes what she termed the "NGOization" of women's activism in Palestine and many Arab countries; other research identifies a similar phenomenon in Jordan (Pietrobelli, 2013) and Egypt (Abdelrahman, 2007). According to Jad and other researchers working on Palestine, the post-Oslo period was marked by the multiplication of NGOs funded by the UN, international and European donors, which significantly changed the shape of women's activism on the ground (Abdel Hadi, 1998; Jad, 2003, 2007; Richter-Devroe, 2008, 2009). According to these studies, this new form of work led to a depoliticization and career focused approach towards women's rights, as "small-project logic" was embraced by a new group of professional elite women attracted to an industry of funding and projects developed around issues related to democracy, peacebuilding, and women's rights.

For Islah Jad (2003, 2007), the rights-based agenda of women's NGOs had a negative impact on the mobilizing potential of mass-based women's organizations and created a space for right-wing and conservative groups to stand as powerful forces in Palestinian civil society. The problematics of NGOization developed by these feminist researchers is essential to understand the post-2011 Syrian context. As many individuals are drawn towards various armed groups and militias, as well as conservative social forces in a context of exacerbated militarization and absence of political alternatives the relevance and effectiveness of women and civil society organizations have never been so crucial. The importance to include grassroots women and girls' voices and experiences offers a valuable way to foster effective and relevant ways to address the current context. Instead of implementing prefabricated projects and programs, placing Syrian women's concerns, ways of addressing and understanding their own realities and context, beyond global gender agendas. IN such approaches, it is essential that human rights are central to any thinking.

### **Using Relational and/or Intersectional Feminist Perspectives to understand the Syrian context:**

Syrian women have been at the forefront of social and political activism since the very beginning of the conflict in the country in 2011. While their involvement at every level of this conflict reveals legacies of advanced social and political status achieved by women's movements despite harsh authoritarian repression, it also shows how Syrian women occupy a specific position within the gendered social division of labor and space. Maxine Molyneux's notion of practical gender interests in the context of women's activism in Latin America, particularly Nicaragua, appears to be



very interesting to explore in the Syrian context. Through this notion, Molyneux shows that women entered the public sphere from a social position distinctive from men; a position shaped by the sexual division of labor. Practical gender interests arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gendered division of labor and represent a response to an immediate perceived need.

The notion of practical gender interests does not generally entail a strategic goal, such as women's emancipation or gender equality. Instead, it has been argued that by virtue of their place within the sexual division of labor as those primarily responsible for their household's daily welfare, women have a special interest in domestic provision and public welfare (Molyneux, 1985). Thus, when governments fail to provide these basic needs and their families' livelihood is threatened, women become bread rioters, demonstrators, and petitioners. This notion is interesting to explore in the context of post-2011 Syria, which is characterized by political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis, as well as a general state of political violence exacerbated by the proliferation of weapons.

In line with Lila Abu-Lughod's "Writing against Culture" (1991), this project suggests that talking about a "Syrian culture" as much as "Muslim culture" is not only generalizing and homogenizing but it also pushes away a careful look at the material realities in which "cultures" are shaped, reshaped, lived and experienced. This project approaches Syrian women's experiences through a complex intersectional/relational seeking to ground Syria women's experiences in their structural social, economic, political and regional contexts. And at the same time, the project acknowledges the transnational and global dynamics that shape their lives. It means analyzing the complex and multilayered ways in which the different forms of power, and mechanisms of domination function and interact with one another. In other words, pointing out the transnational/intersectional/relational dimensions of women's lives and activism is a way to say that what is commonly called local is in fact not limited to a specific time and space and is also defined by transnational/regional dynamics.

In the same vein, what is deemed as global can represent very specific neoliberal, Eurocentric, middle-class interests and concerns. Careful not to fall into the trap of simplistic identity politics, the project also paid attention to the non-fixity of categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, religions and on the necessity to acknowledge their changing dynamics.



### 3. Understanding the specific realities for Syrian Women – Gender, Violence, Transitional Justice, Representation and Participation.

Everyday organizing - Addressing transforming gender roles and relations in changing social, economic and political contexts:

Syrian society is experiencing radical political, economic and social changes since 2011. These changes are deeply gendered and have reshaped Syrian families, livelihood and everyday life (see Nisrin.H's paper). Syrian women activists and feminists are trying to develop original, relevant and efficient ways to address these new realities in the way activism is thought and implemented on the ground:

- **Everyone is affected** Inside Syria, whether in regime controlled, post-ISIS areas, self-administered areas or areas regained by the regime. There is not a single household that has not been affected by the radical social, economic and political changes in the country. Men and women's roles and positions have also shifted, especially in contexts of displacement. Notions and experiences of masculinities and femininities as well as gender relations and everyday practices have significantly changed.
- **Many boundaries have been crossed, taboos have been broken.** Social and gender norms are socially constructed and the sudden and radical changes that Syrian society has experienced have redefined the ways to think about and experience many social norms, including some of which that were taboos such as issues of multiple identities and notions of nationhood. As Syrian society is redefining itself, it is an opportunity for women activists and feminists to propose their own understanding of social, economic and political justice. It is especially essential in contexts of economic and political crisis and militarization where conservative and right-wing forces tend to dominate the social and political sphere.
- **Every aspect of life and livelihood is important:** while political leaders and global policy



makers consider issues of political participation and representation, as well as legal rights as the most crucial issues, Syrian women activists consider the social and the everyday material, psychological and economic dimensions of women's and society's life as equally important.

- **The personal is political:** beyond the politically-accepted forms of activism, it is essential to acknowledge that any action as small and individual as it appears can be politically subversive. Thus, a more complex and broader definition of what is deemed "political" is needed in order to acknowledge the existence of multiple political actions and initiatives on the ground.
- **Beyond orientalizing:** Syrian women activists and feminisms is as politically, ethnically and socially diverse as Syrian society and cultures. Thus, it is essential to consider the plurality and complexity of both Syrian political, ethnic and social cultures and forms of political expressions beyond exoticization and orientalizing. In the case of Kurdish women activists for example, it is important to go beyond the fantasizing of the Kurdish women fighters and acknowledge all forms of political activists such as non-violent grassroots Kurdish women activists.

### Thinking and Implementing a Relational Feminist Approach of Violence(s):

International policy making tends to sub-categorize and differentiate several forms of violence. While Syrian women activists recognize the importance to dedicate specific work to different types of violence, they all insist on the necessity to adopt a holistic and relational feminist approach of violence especially in the case of both sexual violence and mental health. Social, political, economic, psychological, mental, and political violences are all connected to each other and while there is a need to be pragmatic on the ground, it is necessary to think them all together.

- **Women should not face being bombed or displaced, being detained or raped:** Syrian women activists emphasize the importance of considering military and armed violence as intertwined with sexual violence. It is impossible to prioritize one form of violence against the other, de-militarization and the struggle against sexual violence and trafficking are related and the programs and initiatives around these issues should be interdependent.
- **Partners should refuse instrumentalization and foster complexity:** women and gender



issues are often instrumentalized by local and global actors to justify their political ideology and rule, especially when it comes to sexual violence and human rights abuses. Syrian women activists refuse any type of neo-orientalist, racist, conservative, religious and right-wing instrumentalization of women's rights issues and insist on the necessity to refuse simplistic and binary understanding of women's lives on the ground. Showing the structural and intertwined forms of domination and power at plays in various forms of patriarchal and sexual violence do more justice to their victims than essentializing them as oppressed by a so called "culture of violence".

- **The task is to be gender-sensitive, not gender exclusive:** gender justice is about societal equity, social, economic and political justice and equality thus when gender specific programs support women, it is because of their social, economic and political marginalization not because they are "women". Patriarchal social norms are inextricably influenced and shaped by other types of social and political power relations such as class, ethnicity etc. Thus, gender specific programs should be sensitive to the complex power dynamics existing in a specific context to make sure that it takes into account all forms of marginalization and does not exclude marginalized social groups, including men.
- **Shelters should be managed by professionalized staff:** the opening of shelters for female victims of various forms of abuse should be coupled with the professionalization of staff working specifically on sexual and gender specific violence. The open question remains how to institutionalize shelters when on the one hand the regime is using sexual violence a weapon of war and on the other hand areas run by armed groups are outside of any type of legislation.
- **There is an urgent need to systematize sexual violence support:** appropriate training and programs on sexual violence informed by feminist methods should be available and implemented to all institutions and groups working on any type of social, political and economic support to Syrian civil society.
- **There should be a holistic approach towards legal protections from gender specific violence:** most programs dedicated to legal work on gender specific violence tend to focus on honor crimes, child marriage and domestic violence. It is necessary to widen "rights based" agendas and consider the importance of social, political and economic structural violence. Patriarchal violence is shaped and strengthened by different types of social domination and power.



- **Insist on learning from the wider women's rights movement:** being aware of local, regional and international legislations and activist experiences on gender specific violence and sexual violence, seeing what works and does not work in countries going through conflicts such as Iraq is essential to build a strategy of action in Syria.
- **Move towards systematizing mental health and psychological care, support and prevention:** a systemic strategy should include mental health in every initiative and campaign. Activists should foster a culture of mental health and psychological support and prevention built on the importance that does not differentiate between physical and mental health. It is essential to build a sustainable mental health strategy beyond workshops, trainings and small grants and short-term projects in order to empower and sustain a professionalized staff.
- **Gather more robust and verifiable data:** in every institution, group or initiative some activists should be trained in documenting sexual, gender specific violence and mental health cases they encounter. However, there is a need for more data and fieldwork research on the different types of violence that women and society have experienced and are experiencing today as the result of the conflict. It is also important to make sure that the data concerning sexual violence are anonymized, securely stored and protected and put away from any political or social instrumentalization.



## 4. Findings from the Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Project.

The following section outlines findings for the key issues discussed in this paper.

### (Transitional) Justice for Syrian Women Today

Talks about “transitional justice” and “reconciliation” are now on the agenda of international policy makers. Syrian women have often been excluded from the conversation, but more importantly Syrian women’s unique approach and understanding of notions of peace and justice are often totally absent from these agendas. Syrian women activists and feminists are reflecting on what justice, security and peace mean for Syrian women and how they can voice their specific experiences and positions on these issues. The following identifies certain principles that should inform approaches to transitional justice or other forms of justice:

- **Peace is not only a political process, it is also a social process:** peace is often understood as happening at the global level and involving high profile political leaders. However, Syrian women’s “everyday peace practices” emphasize that economic, food, social, political, psychological, education, health and mental safety and security are all intertwined.
- **The local is political:** there is an urgent need to address the gap between the local political activisms and the “peace negotiations” happening at the global level. Moreover, successful small scale, local and regional political initiatives should be further studied and they should inform global political initiatives.
- **Legal justice is important but so is social, economic and political justice too:** being aware of local, regional and international legislations and fostering legal awareness is important. However, legal initiatives should be informed by social realities with a focus on diverse (and divergent) local and regional micro social, economic, political and everyday realities.
- **Demilitarization is as social as it is political:** the need to address Syrian society’s militarization is essential however, it cannot be limited to negotiations happening between political leaders at the international or regional level. Demilitarization demands social and economic work that addresses the structural dimensions of armed violence. Poverty is a form of violence not a consequence of it and armed violence should not be isolated from its economic and social conditions of existence.
- **There should be a holistic and relational approach to violence in justice mechanisms:** beyond documenting human rights abuses and sexual violence, there is an urgent need to elaborate long-term support for the victims. Systematic accountability mechanisms that



protect the victims should take into account the complex and intertwined social and political dimensions of violence.

- **Promote and foster feminist pragmatisms in global peace negotiations:** we need a feminist approach of peace that would on the one hand foster critical feminist perspectives on the conflict and on the other enable us to build partnership and participate to negotiations with global actors. For example, a Syrian feminist approach of peace would insist on the importance to disband/reform Syrian security services along with rebuilding social and societal relations. It would also include taking into account children's rights, education, health and social and economic justice.
- **Transitional justice is about how women also experience justice:** history from the point of view of women needs to be told and documented. Arts and cultural initiatives both for women in general and Syrian women activists themselves. Arts and cultural initiatives offer not only new and creative spaces of expression and socialization for women in and outside Syria, but also foster alternative readings and understandings of both everyday realities and global politics.
- **Evidence based research on the various social and economic realities that face Syrian women should underpin all interventions:** in every institution, group or initiative, activists should be trained in documenting Syrian women's everyday needs and challenges. However, there is a need for more data and fieldwork based research on the everyday realities that Syrian women and society are experiencing in the various locations in which they now live.

### **Moving beyond political representation/participation: political organizing for Syrian women today**

UN programs and international policy makers set their own agenda and goals for women in Syria based on predetermined and uniformized agendas applied elsewhere. Their programs and initiatives focus on "political participation" and "political representation" such as implementing women's quota in representative assemblies, elections etc. They also aim to foster "empowerment" and "leadership". While these agendas can be useful, they are also limited and limiting and based on simplistic notions of democracy, power and domination.



- **Widen the definition of democracy:** while narrow understanding of democracy tends to relate it to parliamentary systems, general elections and representative assemblies, for Syrian women activists, democracy means access to resources as well as social, economic and political justice.
- **“I represent an idea not a group of people”:** instead of thinking representation as communal and related to social, ethnic or political categories, Syrian women activists insist on considering representation as a system of values. Thus, the risk to fall into essentialist notions of communal representation is avoided, and more fluid, changing and contextual forms of representation are fostered.
- **Document and evaluate impactful grassroots initiatives:** several spontaneous grassroots movement and initiatives have been developed in Syria since 2011 such as the Haraer Darya or Ayam al-Huriya as well as political participation at the national level from the early days of the uprising. These initiatives need to be documented and evaluated by Syrian women activists so that they can be further developed, or inspire future projects, dedicated to political participation and representation.
- **Empower the underprivileged/avoid elite reproduction:** many initiatives of women’s political participation and representation have been developed in the past few years. Many of these women’s networks and platforms reveal top down approaches to activism and representation. Many gender specific programs are often not only elaborated and designed away from their specific contexts of implementation, but these programs are shaped by educated middle class individualistic notions of rights and needs. As a result, these initiatives tend to reproduce power relations existing between women as well as privileged, career-oriented, middle class and educated women’s activists profiles. Political participation and representation should be context-based, shaped and designed in order to include underprivileged and marginalized women and social groups.
- **“We are always the elite of others”:** women’s political participation and representation should be based on the recognition of the power relations existing between women and across marginalized social groups. Without a clear awareness of the power relations based on class, education, ethnicity, religion etc. women’s political initiatives can strengthen domination mechanisms instead of questioning them.
- **Beyond women’s quotas, protect, promote and support feminists:** political legitimacy should be based on experience of activism, engagement with grassroots social groups and experience-based knowledge. Representing feminist concerns is more relevant than repre-



senting (potential patriarchal) women even when these women are influential public figures.

- **Foster a culture of feminist leadership:** the politics of representation and political participation there is a growing need of pragmatic and effective feminist leadership that would accept leadership role and responsibilities and refuse instrumentalization.

## Developing Syrian Critical Feminist Thinking and Activisms

The term “Syrian women” refers to very heterogeneous, diverse and multilayered social, economic, cultural, ethnic, religious and political realities and experiences. Syrian feminist thinking and activism need to be plural and context-sensitive to reconcile/encompass/support women from different backgrounds and locations and foster critical notions of sisterhood and solidarity.

- **Propose rather than oppose:** whether working at the legal level such as on the Syrian Penal Code, Constitution or Personal Status Code, or negotiating peace agreements, there is a need to be proactive rather than reactive. Syrian women’s knowledge of realities on the ground coupled with a clear feminist approach should inform and shape their activism both at the local and global level.
- **Work with the “religious” and the “non-religious”:** As gender and feminism are often stigmatized, there is an urgent need to develop specific work around local and culturally acceptable references such as the religious framework. The work developed by transnational Muslim/Islamic feminist network such as Musawah can be very useful for Syrian women activists as well as building partnerships with religious institutions and leaders willing to work on gender justice agendas.
- **Think and practice (ethnic, religious, multilingual etc.) inclusivity:** it is important to reflect on the difference between a “women’s movement” and a “feminist movement”. There is a need to think and practice gender inclusivity further in including the role of men as political partners in the movement for gender justice. There is a need for further reflection on what “activism” means, and a necessity to recognize and take into account that there are diverse and divergent approaches and practices of women’s activism and feminisms.
- **Be conscious of the politics of positionalities:** The situation of Syrian women living in Leba-



non is very different from the one of Syrian women living in Germany for example as much as the difference between Syrian women living in regime-controlled areas and those in formerly besieged areas such as Ghouta. Thus, it is important to consider that differences or divergences of experiences occur not only between “those of the inside” and “those of the outside”, but within and across locations and nation-state boundaries. Reflecting and acting upon Syrian women activists’ varying positionalities appear essential when many activists who reside outside of Syria live in constant “guilt” in relation to activists in Syria.

- **Ensure women’s and civil society accountability:** women and civil society political activism needs to be documented and evaluated. Activists, groups and networks are accountable for their impact on the ground and their local, regional and international involvement in policy making.





## 5. Recommendations and next steps:

- Create first-hand data and fieldwork based research on social, political and economic everyday realities of Syrian women and girls and civil society since 2011 until today. Necessity to train activists in oral history and ethnographic research.
- Write and document Syrian women and civil society history of the past and present.
- Create an interactive database (such as a virtual feminist library) that would document, gather and disseminate Syrian women social and political activism of the past and the present.
- Disseminate intellectual and theoretical critical feminist tools that would support the development of Syrian women feminist thinking and activism.
- Train and sustain Syrian feminist scholars in various disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities, and fostering academic scholarship produced by women and for Syrian women and society.
- Disseminate and democratize Syrian critical feminist work and thinking in the form of accessible publications and (online) platforms (such as blogs, website, forums, documentaries etc.).
- Structure and coordinate existing feminist activism, knowledge production initiatives and groups through virtual and non-virtual platforms.
- Create specific working groups tackling particular issues or dimensions of women's lives and activism: sexual violence, mental health, demilitarization etc. The creation of these working groups would facilitate activists' professionalization and effectiveness.







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**Annex:**

# **Justice from a Gender Perspective Field Research**

**Women Now for Development**

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**Special thanks to:**

All the women who shared their personal stories with the researchers.







## 1. Basic Information About the Research:

The interviews (11 interviews in total) were conducted over a period of approximately one month. From the start, the researchers (Zahra Ali and Nisrin .H) agreed that the number of interviews should not exceed 15, out of consideration for the narrow timeframe as well as the fact that these interviews will be used to develop the outlines of a broader research project which will include a larger number and wider range of interviewees in order to obtain results that are both deeper and closer to the lived reality of Syrian women in a variety of contexts and personal situations. (see Women Now Position Paper on Gender Justice)

### 1.1 Research Goals:

- To understand the lived experiences of Syrian women, which are taken here to be a source of feminist knowledge, as a form of feminist documentation of their various realities.
- To create a space where the voices of Syrian women can be heard, as they are seldom heard.
- To create a link between Syrian women inside Syria and abroad in order to locate points of participation and support.
- To learn more about the opinions, thoughts and feelings of Syrian women with regard to both the present situation and the future of Syria, especially as they pertain to justice in general and gender-based justice in particular.

### 1.2 Criteria Used in the Selection of Women for Interviews:

- Syrian women who lived in Syria before the year 2011 (as this was the year when the situation of the country changed).
- After conducting the first two interviews, we agreed on a minimum age of 25. The women interviewed were asked to talk about life before 2011, and we concluded that this could be difficult for women younger than 25.
- Marital status was not among the criteria, however the differences here may shed light on some sensitive points.
- Interviewees should come from a variety of social contexts (inside Syria) and refugee contexts (outside Syria).
- Interviewees should not be involved in direct political action (i.e. they do not have a platform for expression and their views are not influenced by any clear political orientation).



### 1.3 Research Environment:

The research was conducted by two women: The primary researcher, Dr. Zahra Ali, and the field researcher, Nisren Habib, with continuous assistance from Dr. Maria al-Abdeh, executive director of Women Now. These three women held joint meetings throughout the duration of the research period in order to share their observations and suggestions on an ongoing basis.

### 1.4 Research Methods:

The researchers decided on a semi-structured interview method, as the nature of the research called for a qualitative approach. Interviews ranged from one hour to as long as two and a half hours in order to give the interviewees the space they needed to talk about their experiences and voice their ideas.

Most of the interviews were conducted virtually (using either Skype or WhatsApp), depending on whether or not the women had access to these applications and how comfortable they were with using them.

Most of the women opted not to record their interviews for security reasons. Instead, the field researcher took notes during the interviews.

### 1.5 Analysis Methodology:

The researchers relied on content analysis in obtaining their results. This was especially important as they wished to focus on obtaining information that was representative, subjective and intersectional, as this was the most helpful way to analyze the given information from a critical feminist point of view.

### 1.6 Descriptive Information (Semi-Quantitative):

As previously mentioned, we were able to interview 11 Syrian women who represented a variety of regions, environments, experiences, and ages. Here is some detailed information about these women:

- Age group: All of the women interviewed were between 25 and 57 years old; three were in their twenties, four in their thirties, one in her forties, and two in their fifties.



- Marital status: Five women were married, three were single, one had a boyfriend, and one was engaged.
- Areas of residence: Four women were in Europe, one in Turkey, two in Lebanon, one in Damascus, one in Raqqa, one in Qamishli, and one in Idlib.
- Means of communication: Two women were interviewed in person and the rest were interviewed by Skype or WhatsApp.

### 1.7 Circumstances Surrounding the Interviews:

Challenges	Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The interviews were conducted without a foundation built on trust.</li> <li>- Most of the interviews were conducted virtually.</li> <li>- Difficulties communicating, both technical and practical, in some cases (Deir ez-Zor, some areas of Damascus).</li> <li>- Security risks for some of the women.</li> <li>- The sensitive nature of the research subject matter.</li> <li>- The narrow timeframe for the research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A spirit of teamwork and a dedicated team.</li> <li>- Highly experienced researchers.</li> <li>- Assistance provided by the Women Now team in communicating with women in different regions.</li> <li>- High level of responsiveness among the women interviewed.</li> </ul>



## 2. Research Results:

### 2.1 Change in Patterns Analyzed from the Perspective of Gender

In order to examine the extent to which the daily patterns of women's lives changed in 2011, researchers had to address the daily life of each woman before and after on all levels (personal, social, economic, familial and professional), as life's daily patterns, with all their details, feelings, goals and actions, can be reflective of the nature of the change taking place. Of course, we have been careful not to draw generalizations from any of the results, as we are fully convinced of the specificity of each individual experience and believe that change is relational rather than general. We divided the comparisons based on time periods with some common characteristics, for example: before 2011, when all of the women were settled in Syria in more or less familiar and stable circumstances; and the period from 2011 to 2015, which marked the beginning of total change in Syria at all levels and brought with it high hopes for a radical change of the Syrian situation, especially on the economic and political levels, along with instability and transience (displacement, asylum, expulsion); finally, there is the period from 2016 until today, which most of the women characterized as a period of disappointment at both the national and international levels and which began setting the course for the near future with regard to their place of residence and future possibilities: the possibility of attaining stability in their current location, either as a displaced person or a refugee, rhetoric around returning, the clear control of Russia and Iran and the decline of US intervention, rhetoric around reconstruction, the control by the regime of the south of Syria and of Eastern Ghouta, and the expulsion of its people, etc.

#### Common Features of Daily Life (Before 2011):

- The struggles taking place in the women's lives were happening at the individual or familial level, if at all (studies, work, family, emotional life, societal freedoms as they relate to the individual's personal life), along with some struggles, internal and individual, against corruption, harassment and dependency.
- The women were fairly comfortable in their social circles and these circles are fairly stable (family, friends, relatives, university, work); The women make frequent mention of their homes and families; Moreover, their lifestyles are clearly defined.
- The women are familiar with the places in which they live: The geography of these places is known to them and they can describe them in detail; Moreover, they are connected to a great many personal experiences and memories.
- The women's work environments are typical and, to a large extent, familiar socially (studies, teaching, agricultural work, pharmacy, home, private sector).



### Common Features of Daily Life (2011-2015):

“Abu Majid no longer has a salary. We begin doing whatever work we can. I begin heating and curdling milk to sustain us and we do not leave the house, and we tell ourselves it will soon pass. Then the men begin to say that the women should leave, as they fear there will be a battle. I go with my daughters first to Yabroud and later to Lebanon. Of course it broke our hearts to leave. We were hoping for something better and were barely getting by. You cannot clap with one hand alone. I hope that everyone will be reunited.”

Umm Majid al-Qasir – Lebanon

- The inability of most of the women to move between places as they previously had, either because of the security situation, fear, sieges in Syria, or because they have sought refuge in new places which were unfamiliar to them and unprotected.
- The hope for positive change in Syrian society may reflect changes on the personal level (freedoms, job opportunities, the end of corruption, and in some cases access to basic rights, etc.).
- The suspension, whether temporary or permanent, among some of the women from studying or sitting for exams due to the security situation and political conditions.
- A changed relationship with matters previously regarded by most of the women as fixed or stable (view of the media, relationship with family, fields of work, etc.).
- Difficulty obtaining basic services (water, electricity, heating, internet, etc.). Moreover, most of the women bear additional burdens (additional work, transportation, governmental processes, searching for missing persons), while at the same time maintaining the basic responsibilities they had before.
- A changed sense of trust vis-à-vis the immediate environment (old friends, new friends) due to a different outlook and attitude towards what is happening, moving to new places and the death, arrest and loss of some friends, etc.).

### Common Features of Daily Life (2016-Present):

- Fatigue – sometimes vocalized, sometimes hidden – due to a lack of clarity about the Syrian situation and the future of the country, and despair vis-à-vis the absence of desired changes (transition of power in Syria, the exit of privately funded armed groups, and the exit of all external parties).



- The disappearance of old relationships, difficulty finding new circles, and a growing sense of loneliness. Most of the women complained of not having similarly-minded people around or at least a comfortable environment, even women in Syria who had not been displaced but where the social fabric around them has changed dramatically as a result of the conflict.
- Increased mental fatigue among all of the women and a lack of outlets for expressing or alleviating this anxiety and fatigue.
- Disappointment among some of the women with regard to political and civil groups. All of the women expressed a sense of disappointment vis-à-vis political groups, while their opinions ranged with regard to civil groups (meaning local and regional organizations involved in civil affairs) between satisfaction and support for some of these groups and accusations of corruption and being out of touch with reality against others.
- Facing severe challenges (forced displacement).
- Fear of the near future and an unwillingness to think about the more distant future among women both inside and outside Syria.

“It may sound strange to say this, but we are afraid of the alliance coming, afraid of Turkey and the Free SYrian Army coming because there will be killing. And at the same time, we are afraid of the regime entering because there will be killings, detentions, and forced conscription. There are a lot of girls in particular who want the regime to return so that they can continue their studies at the universities. There are mothers who want the regime to return so that education will improve and mothers who don’t want it to return because they fear for the young men.”

Reham from Raqqa

## 2.2 Changing Trust Circles:

It was clear during the interviews that the trust circles of most of the women have undergone a radical change. This change is mostly negative because it is characterized by the loss of people or circles and the inability to replace them with circles and relationships that have the same effect as those before.

There were constant indicators – when the women were asked about their trust circles before the year 2011 – expressions such as “my (female) friend, my (male) friend, my dear, my family, my relatives, my sister, my neighbors, meetings, occasions, etc.,” while after 2011, these were replaced by



expressions such as “virtual communication, loss, distance, loneliness and superficial relationships lacking a shared history,” among some of the women.

It appears that the change in trust circles, along with widespread and radical changes on the psychological and personal levels, have given rise to new questions in the last three years, questions about identity and belonging among most of the women, with them voicing the feeling that they did not feel a sense of belonging in their new realities, with all their civil, political and societal features. Most of the women mentioned that they no longer felt a sense of harmony vis-à-vis their old communities, and many of them began asking questions like “Who am I?”, “What do I belong to?”, “What did I want to become?”, and “Who have I become now?”

It was as if the identity of the women before 2011 had been based on questions related to the individual, the family and the place at most, while after 2011, the women began to identify with changes occurring at the collective level. That is to say that most of the women began to connect changes in their personal lives with changes on the political level and to feel, for the first time, a sense of collective belonging that had not existed before. Then, after displacement, migration and the absence of any political solution or a clear future for their individual lives or for Syria in general, this collective affiliation was lost. Each woman turned her attention back to herself and her individual status as a woman and as an individual in the society in which she lived and began to examine her relationship with herself and with her community.

“I have three real (female) friends, but they are in Syria, and I met my fiancée four years ago. There are things I tell my fiancée and other things which I can only tell my girlfriends. It really bothers me not having them nearby. I’ve been here in Germany for a month and when I leave the house I always think I’m going to run into someone I know, but I never do.”

Rasha (from Qamishli – now in Germany)

“When you’re in the city center, you don’t notice the losses. You are losing little by little without feeling it. Currently, I don’t feel secure at all. Everyone I was close to is gone. It took a long time for me to understand that my friends’ house, where I used to go whenever I was tired, is no longer there. I felt compelled to form relationships just so that I wouldn’t feel like I was alone. Life has begun to return, but it’s not like before and I feel a sense of alienation.”

Samar (Damascus)



## 2.3 Changing Gender Roles:

Before talking about the gender roles of the women interviewed, we have to ask about the nature and reasons for this change: There are many indications that the roles of some of the women changed from before 2011 to after. Among most of the women, tasks changed as they became more involved in the outside world, whether through work, keeping up with bureaucratic processes, or even moving between places when they had not traveled previously. There are many reasons for this change, but through the interviews we can focus on the most important:

- The war, which led to a comprehensive change in all relations between people, a change in the economic, security, and community situations. It is a factor which led some of the women to begin working, provide for their families, secure resources, or move from one place to another.
- Changing roles of men: In most of the cases mentioned, the man is either missing (dead, detained, disappeared) or unable to move, as is the case in Lebanon due to the strict laws relating to residency and work. It should be pointed out that the laws apply to both men and women, however the situation is such that women are allowed to move and are able to take advantage of work opportunities. Moreover, there are civil society organizations concerned with the well-being of women, which seem to provide a safe space and a sufficient source of income for some women.
- The refugee situation itself varies depending on the host country, its laws, and its economic, legal, and political status. For example, refugees in Europe have been encouraged to enjoy the benefits of women's rights, but face the pressures of new institutions, a new culture, a new language, and a lack of family support. Moreover, these countries do not take into consideration women's previous experience and they are made to start from zero.
- Militarization within Syria, which in most contexts led to a reduction in freedom of movement for women and gave rise to a worrying security situation.
- The poor economic situation of most women, which prompted many of them to work in different fields (civil society organizations, retail, makeup and jewelry, writing articles, etc.).

This change can neither be described clearly nor can it be evaluated as positive or negative; it is a change related to each woman's personality and circumstances. Among some of the women, it



may have led to increased freedom of movement, freedom to express their opinions, and freedom to make their own decisions, while at the same time being accompanied by a lack of safety, comfort and stability, all of which the women had previously wanted. While some of the developments brought about by this change continue to have a positive effect on some of the women today – especially with regard to their sense of playing a bigger role in their communities – the path which led to this change taking place was not something all of the women desired.

Most of the women still struggle to answer this question: “Are you satisfied with your changed role?” It may be the case that the question itself is not sufficiently sensitive with regard to the general situation and the women’s experiences, and may not consider that the women’s previous circumstances and freedoms were not one and the same, that not all of them suffered from the same social oppression and were forbidden from moving freely and operating in the public sphere. In fact, it may be the case that some of the women actually enjoyed greater personal freedoms before 2011. What we have concluded from these interviews is that change is neither systematic nor collective; rather, it relates to the women’s individual situations and may or may not relate to the surrounding political, economic and societal circumstances.

“I would love it if things were to go back to the way they were. Life was easier before. But at the same time, I want to have my own work, like the work I’m doing now. Before, I used to work only with my husband and never once thought that I could actually do something I loved, and do it on my own.”  
Umm Hassan (from Homs – now in Lebanon)

## 2.4 Changing Laws Related to Women and their Mechanisms of Application:

During the interviews, the women mentioned that, in some areas, some laws relating to women – or the mechanisms through which they were applied – were changed. For example, in predominantly Kurdish areas (under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces), some of the women reported a change in the laws regarding punishment for and criminalization of violence against women, which had become a punishable offense. They explained that rulings are handed down by a women’s court dealing with women’s affairs (divorce, violence, familial problems, rights, etc.). In Idlib, on the other hand, one of the women mentioned that divorces are handled exclusively by an Islamic Sharia court. In neither case were the women satisfied: In the case of the women’s court, the women found that the mechanisms currently being adopted were not fully developed, while in the second case, the women complained that the court was unjust.

We did not dwell further on this point, but did feel that it was necessary to draw attention to it, and



we believe that it can only be analyzed through an in-depth study of the context of each region and the factors influencing this change.

While some of the women who have moved to Europe are satisfied with the laws concerning their rights and consider them to be a source of support, especially with regard to marriage, divorce and violence, the women do not all feel the same sense of contentment. Some of the women, for example, complain that certain laws in Western European countries are not sufficiently sensitive to the situation of refugee women.

## 2.5 The Impact of Violence and Militarization on the Situation of Women:

We consider the issue of militarization to be the most complex because the meanings and stages of militarization in Syria vary from one region to another, as do the different experiences of women in each stage. However, most of the women agreed that militarization and violence had had a negative impact on all aspects of life, especially on interpersonal relationships, which had grown fragile and lacked trust. Although the women all observed that violence in its various manifestations had had a psychological impact on everyone around them, it did not originate from a single source – the use of weapons in war – rather, the women observed several forms of violence:

- The violence of war (death, injuries, weapons, sounds, bombing, destruction) and the accompanying feelings of fear, terror, anxiety and helplessness.
- Family violence, especially in families where women are opposed to the regime and harbor views which run contrary to those of their parents.
- The violence of public spaces (widespread checkpoints, popular committees, armed factions, difficulty reaching nearby areas).
- The violence of the economic situation, which has resulted in a deterioration of interpersonal relations, forced some women to engage in very difficult work, given rise to a lack of basic necessities and blackmail and exploitation by certain parties capable of providing those materials, etc. Moreover, the economic situation has affected women in particular ways: Many families have stopped sending their daughters to schools and universities, there has been an increase in early marriages, especially to commanders (this is of course related to the security situation, the economic situation, and the restructuring of power), the freedom of movement of women and girls has been restricted (in most areas, even those under the control of the regime), and there has been an increase in sexual harassment in some areas.



“Outside violence, that is to say bombing, is one thing, and societal violence is another. People no longer have any mercy for one another. For example, I might have no water or sugar and go ask someone who has some and he doesn’t give it to me. To me, this is a form of violence. Because he knows that he might die at any moment, but still he won’t share what he has.”

Sarab (from Eastern Ghouta - now in Turkey)

## 2.6 The Concept of Gender Justice:

The women responded in a variety of ways when the concept of justice was brought up. Some considered justice to be the accountability of all parties and the return to people of what is rightfully theirs. Others felt that justice will only be served when everyone experiences the displacement, death, poverty and war from which some have suffered. Some of the women said that justice could only begin with the requisite political will and the support of the international community, while others said that justice could only begin with the return of healthcare services, especially for children with special needs, and the reconstruction of schools and the advancement of education.

Despite the diversity of their views, all of the women felt that the question itself was in some way ridiculous, the reason being their almost complete despair with regard to any of the things they mentioned becoming reality, especially in the near future. All of them were clearly distrustful of international negotiations, political leaders and armed factions.

**It was clear from their reactions that most of the women viewed the reconstruction process in Syria – whether current or future – as “an embodiment of the complete opposite of justice.”**

Even mention of the concept of transitional justice did not elicit any positive reactions. Some of the women were not familiar with the term, and those who were expressed a sense of mistrust vis-à-vis any part of transitional justice. The source of these feelings and thoughts are the repeated disappointments of the past seven years with regard to the approach of the international community to dealing with the Syrian situation, with the women having found that none of the steps taken by states or international bodies have brought about any kind of justice. This is accompanied, of course, by a total despair among the women to see any justice done to the current Syrian regime. No explicit mention was made of gender-based justice, but it was a part of each of the conversations. Most of the women do not view gender-based justice as being separate from justice in general, which has yet to be brought about.

“Peace in Syria is very far away and justice in Syria is an impossibility. For us, peace has been rel



egated to the world of fantasy and dreams. And justice is further away than peace. In Syria, we have many problems such as ignorance and the dictatorship inside us. Current events have led to increased problems between Arabs and Kurds. Before, when I would see someone from Qamishli, I always enjoyed talking to them and felt that we were similar. But now, I can't even talk to Kurds anymore. Everyone has some political affiliation or ideas."

Reham (Raqqqa)

"It's too early to talk about justice and peace. The first thing we need is to rid ourselves of this war. We still suffer from killing, the effects of injuries, and the psychological effects of war, especially since the people in Raqqqa have now been living through war for a long period of time."

Samar (Damascus)

"For me, justice means returning to my country with my head high and free of humiliation, returning to live in my house, and seeing those responsible brought to justice. Only then will we stop fearing one another."

Umm Majid (from Homs – now in Lebanon)

## 2.7 The Women's Views on Returning to Syria:

The issue of returning to Syria and the likely scenarios thereof may be one of the most difficult and most sensitive issues for the women. What exactly is meant by return? Does it mark a new beginning and the end of the current phase? Then, who can return and who cannot? Where can one return to and under what conditions? Many questions arose during the discussions around the issue of return, and there was a clear difference of opinion with regard to the situation inside Syria as well as the women's current places of residence.

**Refugee women in Lebanon and Turkey:** Demonstrate their concern and lack of confidence in any local or international decisions ensuring the safety of Syrian men and women returning to Syria. This concern has its roots in real experiences (especially those of some Syrians who returned from Lebanon in 2018). Moreover, some of the women are afraid and refuse to return to new areas ("Who is there? Where will we live? What about our homes?"). There is even fear of returning to the same areas. Who will prevent the Syrian security apparatus from again tearing apart these families, arresting the men, and humiliating and blackmailing the women? Moreover, who are the people who make up the current social structure in those areas? Will we be afraid of them? Will we be able to live with them?



**Women inside Syria:** There is a great deal of confusion among women in Syria around the idea of staying there or leaving. The situation in Syria with all its factors makes the idea of leaving appealing to lead a different life elsewhere, one that will at the very least be more secure. At the same time, the women struggle with the idea of departure and find it difficult, both emotionally, practically (as there are no opportunities to leave Syria legally), financially and, sometimes, physically. In particular, the women focused on the deteriorating economic situation, which affects their daily lives, as well as on the effects of the war, which they feel has not ended, and their constant fear that the fighting might flare up again at any moment.

**Refugee women in Europe:** There is confusion among the women regarding the possibility of returning to Syria, even after a period of time. There is fear regarding the nature of the society to which they will return and what rights they will have there. What will the education system be like for them and their children and what freedoms will be available to them in all areas of life, especially with regard to women? Some of the women also questioned the meaning of the concept of homeland. They have a great desire to return, but will they really feel that they are returning home just because they are Syrians returning to Syria? There is still a system of government in place which they have come out against and laws and customs which would hinder any progress in their lives, along with all the physical, psychological and social devastation that the war has brought. Some of the women mentioned the possibility of returning but said that they would like to become citizens of their host countries as a security measure. Meanwhile, those women who have children said they would hesitate to bring their children back to a place that is unsafe for children for a great variety of reasons.

“Some of the people closest to me – my aunt, for example, left immediately for Turkey. She came back to visit Damascus but she couldn’t live there, so she went back to Turkey with its structured laws and rights. She couldn’t live in Damascus at all. I think that there are a lot of people who have become acclimated to where they are and can no longer return. Personally, I try not to think about it. What we were living before was difficult but sweet, but now, I don’t know what the point of my returning would be. Would I return just for the sake of returning? What would I do there? Maybe I will go back just to see my uncle.”

Sarab (from Eastern Ghouta - now in Turkey)



### 3. The Women's Demands and Suggestions:

The women inside Syria called for a quick solution to the deteriorating education and healthcare situation, and for civil and international bodies to work to return security even to areas under the control of the regime. There is a great deal of fear among the women of arbitrary arrest, kidnapping, extortion and harassment. The women suggested that organizations working in the area of civil society should continue to do so and broaden the scope of their operations. Most of the women inside Syria said that their work with women's and feminist organizations provided them with job opportunities and safe spaces, to a certain extent, not to mention the opportunity for personal development in a number of areas. The biggest hope among the women was for the total cessation of the fighting and real steps being taken towards justice and accountability.

The refugee women hoped for a scenario in Syria that is just at all levels, that effective and serious international initiatives be formed – initiatives that can engage in a sensitive and realistic reading of the Syrian situation, especially for women – for Syrian women to be given a strong role in these initiatives, and for their return to be one of dignity and not subject to any conditions, exploitation or extortion. **When they talked about their return, they talked about it as a collective return, that is to say, the return of their families, relatives and friends.**

Most of the women inside Syria also demanded that Syrian organizations outside Syria play an active role in supporting Syrian civil initiatives, including established and newer ones, inside the country, rather than launching new projects based on perceptions that may or may not actually reflect women's demands or needs, or hinder the growth of effective initiatives at home. As for the women in Europe, they called for the development of Syrian civil services in their current countries, through which they would be able to reactivate their abilities and draw on their past experiences, which have, to a certain extent, been lost among the asylum procedures and steps imposed on them in the name of "integrating" them into their new countries.



## 4. Recommendations Based on Initial Research Results:

Our interviews have proven to be an important source of knowledge about the experiences of women and their views. Continuing and completing the interviews will be useful and productive for the research carried out by Women Now at the following levels:

- Our interviews with Syrian women reflect a variety of contexts and subjective and personal experiences along a timeline from 2011 to the present day. Among the main themes mentioned in the research results was the need for a survey and map of the women's movements and the events which accompanied them during that time period, using women's and feminist thought and narration as its basis, and not only rigid maps and sources from politics, the military or traditional media.
- Critical Cartographies of Conflict and Borders Based on Syrian Women's Experiences
- Another essential step for Women Now is to continue the interviews to arrive at a somewhat representative sample of the various experiences of Syrian women, thereby building an archive of women's experiences for a very important historical time period in the Syrian context. Such an archive would be an invaluable resource for the future strategies and projects of the organization, as well as for other Syrian civil organizations, and an important source of knowledge for future field studies and academic research.
- An in-depth analysis of the visions, ideas and aspirations of Syrian women as they pertain to justice and peace in Syria and the issue of return is crucial for the Syrian present and future. This is especially important in light of the start of reconstruction operations built only on political and economic interests, which are not even remotely interested in the demands and rights of Syrian women and the Syrian people in general, or in justice and accountability. We believe that amplifying the voices of Syrian women with regard to these issues and translating what they say into studies or papers for advocacy and mobilization will be one of the main tasks for the coming period. This also serves to support all of our advocacy and lobbying activities and will help us to apply the principles of the feminist economy in Syria in the coming stage.
- In addition to all of the above, we discovered through conducting the interviews that there is a clear need for Syrian women in their various locations to communicate with one another, with the aim of bringing about Syrian feminist solidarity and breaking the existing physical, security and societal boundaries by creating virtual safe spaces in which the various Syrian women can operate. Research such as this will enable the organization's team, with its many contacts with women both inside Syria and in the places where they have sought refuge, to better manage and organize such communication, which works to



strengthen the (somewhat broken) relationships between Syrian women.

- Through monitoring, listening to and analyzing the interviews, we found that Syrian women everywhere are in need of psychological support, listening sessions, and emotional support sessions. Some of the women interviewed asked for them directly, going so far as to view the interviews themselves as a kind of therapy and complaining that there were no circles or people with which they could discuss their feelings, fatigue, fears, and so on. We therefore recommend that psychological support sessions be implemented with participants both inside and outside Syria, run by female experts on the trauma which results from conflict, war and displacement.





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