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FOR DEVELOPMENT

Syrian Women's Readings of the Present, Future, and Associated Concepts.

On Identities, Gender Roles, Violence, Peace and Justice, and the possible futures in Syria.

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Dedication

Thank you: to all the women we met while doing this research, for sharing all your ideas, feelings, analysis, and experiences with us, and for trusting us to be the ones to carry your words and amplify your voices. You have expanded our awareness as Syrians on many meanings, concepts, and readings of the Syrian reality and its contexts. You have also shed light on essential, sensitive, and deep issues of Syrian women and their environments in a way that cannot be expressed but by women themselves.

Thank you: to the field researchers for your dedication and mastery of each step, for your endurance of all the required psychological efforts, and for turning them into participation, interaction, and positivity. Thank you for your determination to complete the interviews under the hardest circumstances - war, migration, displacement, and anticipation and for treating this research as your personal project and a part of your cause.

Thank you: to our psychological supporter, for turning our exhaustion into life, and for your presence in each step of the way until our last day. You have brought us together as a team, listened to us as individuals, and kept your smile and strength despite all our exhaustion and yours.

Thank you: to the team of Women Now for Development for translating this feminist work into action, interaction, and goals. Thank you for providing such a space for freedom in planning and implementation, and for supporting, with constant consideration and care for every detail, every woman working on this project.

In the name of Women Now for Development, the lead researcher, and field researchers, we dedicate this research to every woman inside and outside Syria. And to all those who are interested in reading, understanding, and analyzing the Syrian reality and its different contexts from the perspective of women who have lived and are living this reality. And to all those who are interested in working hand in hand for the production of Syrian feminist knowledge.

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A word by the research team

Lead researcher

Nisren. H

I consider myself lucky for many reasons, but I will mention those related to the context of this research. I am 38 years old. I joined the academic sphere of gender studies and critical literature only five years ago. This academic field was not forced upon me. I chose it myself following a personal life journey. I had been working professionally in many Syrian contexts over the past years, and I became in particular close to many women from Syria through volunteering and professional work in asylum, displacement, and other contexts. This led me to dig deeper into the academic texts that describe and analyze us as individuals, women, and communities. I had therefore decided to join that sphere, which I believe to be often detached from reality. I wish to find or even create a link between the two spheres.

First of all, I am lucky because I was able, even if by coincidence, not to follow the conventional pattern imposed on many of us to complete our higher studies at an early age and then dwell into life's experiences after. I have found it more meaningful to project the academic mindset on my life experiences instead, discuss what I do not find sensitive enough, reject what is irrelevant to reality, and learn critical thinking and writing. In brief, I found a strong person in me.

Second of all, I am lucky because I had access to the thinking and writings of many feminists from movements in Africa, Asia, and Europe. These writings have broken the patterns of rigid academic writings/ research and inspired and encouraged me to fill my writing with what resembles me and my language, and with the words of these to whom I write for and with.

Third of all, I am lucky to have been a part of a supportive team that is honest in their goals and cause. And to have the chance, and also the encouragement, to utilize diverse writing methodologies - academic, analytical, and descriptive- in one text. And to have the confidence to say that the form and language of this research are a pilot of writing in a Syrian feminist language.

Field researchers

B.G., field researcher in Idlib

My name is B.G.. I am from Idlib. I have studied nursing and worked in several hospitals in Idlib's villages, and I have worked with the emergency and psychosocial support teams of Women Now for Development. Work has stopped currently because of the circumstances that made me flee my city in the past months. I dream of returning to my place but not necessarily to my job. What matters is that I return to my home and see my family and friends again one day.

Rana Khalaf, field researcher in Ar-Raqqah

My name is Rana Khalaf, I am from Ar-Raqqah. I hold a degree in IT. I love the field, although I have not practiced it in the last few years. But I have benefited a lot from it. I am from the marginalized city of Ar-Raqqah, the city that wore black for four years. I have tried, I am still trying, and will always try my best to amplify the voice of the city and of its women and girls who were not spared from marginalization. I have been working in monitoring and evaluation for three years. I really love my job. My passion in life is first for me to have an impact and a name in my city, and second for every woman and girl on this earth to have noble goals and seek to achieve them.

Salam, field researcher in Lebanon

Salam preferred not to write.

Sulnar Mohammed, field researcher in Hasaka

My name is Sulnar Mohammed. I am from Hasaka. I have studied Arabic literature and have been working in media for six years. I am glad to have taken part in being a medium for Syrian women's voices, as I believe that women are the core of any change.

Mouna Khaity, field researcher in Turkey

I am a feminist and civil activist, and I majored in pharmaceuticals and lab medicine. I believe that the foundation of a healthcare system that is fair to everyone, especially women, must be one of the main demands of the feminist movement in Syria. Therefore, I seek to pursue a Master's degree in managing and redesigning healthcare systems in a sensitive and fair manner.

Hala Matar, field researcher in Europe

My name is Hala Matar. I studied English literature, which at first I did not like at all, but later benefited greatly from. I really loved to draw, and I drew a lot. Then I stopped. I do not know the reason. I am currently a mother of one son, which is probably the happiest experience of my life so far. I will soon start my Masters. I have worked with many Syrian and other civil society organizations in Syria, Lebanon, Germany, and Turkey. I have too many goals to mention, but the most important one is for this earth to be a place big enough for all of us, and big enough for all of us to succeed together.

Yara, field researcher in Damascus

My dream after the revolution was to start small income-generating projects for women who have endured damages due to the crazy situation after 2011, and to replace aid with individual livelihood means, especially after two projects I had started met success. Social and personal changes and new relationships have been the center of my attention, which is where the importance of constant discussions, detailed documentation, and attempting to amplify the real voices of women came from. This is why I have written a research on women and on the positive and negative changes they go through, and why I have participated in the field work of this research. I have learned a lot from these women about determination, patience, and strength, and still am.

Hanan Allakoud, psychologist

The most beautiful feeling in life for me is when a human allows me in their heart and shares their feelings with me. We are not afraid of sadness when we cry together, nor intimidated by anger when we explode together, nor cease to absorb the love we float in together. With the team of researchers, I discover the secrets of women's power to overcome suffering, and to create a smile that blows away the clouds of tears.

> " **"Women in Syria are not weak, all these concepts around her are wrong. The wife is the one responsible for all the household responsibilities from A to Z; this is not weakness, this is strength. It has always been this way, your mother and mine were working women and raised us and took care of our houses. A woman in Syria has little independence; she is not able to be independent nor utilize her energy and strength in the right place or for personal benefit. She is forced to redirect her capacities in directions that might be unfit for her. She cannot be a decision maker unless her husband is absent. Why do I have to wait for males to disappear from my life so I can make decisions? Can't my husband, father, or brother still be present, and at the same time, I get to make my decisions?" Rawan.**

Executive Summary

In this research, we read the analysis and opinions of a group of Syrian women from different geographic locations, contexts, and experiences on topics that touch and shape their daily lives. They tell us the analysis of their identities and their perspectives towards the changes in gender roles. They describe the differently experienced realities of violence and militarization, their positions in these realities, and how they affect and are affected by it. They also share with us their approaches to the concepts of justice and peace in Syria, and to the scenarios of the return of refugees and displaced Syrians.

The input of women in this research reflects the levels of struggle, determination, action, and participation of a group of Syrian women in their personal, social, political, and positional contexts.

It also reflects the extents of similarities and differences in experiences, perspectives, and goals of Syrian women who have experienced Syrian life before and after the revolution in many different places in Syria and abroad. The important, deep, and detailed discussions and conversations on topics that deeply concern most Syrian women shed the light on the new spaces that have become available, even if on the personal level, as these topics were not open for discussion or analysis on neither individual nor collective levels before the revolution and the war. The women in their participation in the research allow us insights into ideas they have developed, changed, and observed on definitions of identities that were either imposed on them or that they have accepted and related to. Some of them take us to revolutions on rigid identities, and to the making of new identities fit for them, identities they choose and shape with every step they take and every thought they think. After that, the participants discuss their roles, spaces, and ambitions that were available or that they chose before the revolution and the war in the country, followed by their criticism and analysis of these spaces and their situation in a patriarchal system that is socially and politically supported in Syria. This is coupled with their sensitive analysis of context, culture, and society, in comparing women's situation during the revolution and war, leading to their own definitions of "changing gender roles".

In the research, we read the words, opinions, and voices of Syrian women from different age groups and social positions on heavy concepts that are not normally attributed to women as the main source of knowledge, yet revolve around women. Here, women talk about the impacts of violence and militarization after the year 2011 as witnesses, participants, receivers, and actors. We will be reading new terms and definitions, including on the linguistic level, as the participants go deep into the details of their lives and the lives of their family members and communities. They show us where violence lies, and how it transfers and changes, and they mention their fears of this violence escalating, in addition to its impacts on them, how they affect it, and how they act towards it.

Women in this research break the stiffness of the social, national, and international definitions of women's relation to peace and justice. They share their opinions and analysis of peace and justice scenarios based on the particularities of the Syrian context and based on their own aspirations. They also redefine peace and justice based on their experiences, knowledge, and observations, and position themselves within these scenarios that concern them on the personal level and on the level of their relation to their country and its future.

This research might have succeeded in opening a small space for the voices and words of many Syrian women that are absent from many Syrian feminist efforts, and from the plans, initiatives, political participation, and civil work. What is more important, however, is our[1] realization of the negative impact this absence of voices and discussions has left, and will leave, on the efficiency and credibility of all those working on causes related to the life of Syrian women, and of all those leading or representing the Syrian feminist movement or civil or political work.

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1   "We" here and in the entire research refers to the team of Women Now for Development, not a generalization of any other group.
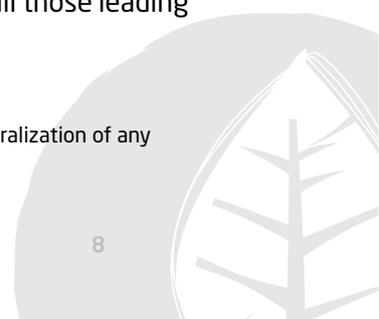
In order to translate the aforementioned into actions, and based on the women's input in this research, and on what we can add from our continuous learning process in civil, research, and feminist work, **we will mention some recommendations to ourselves and to all the individuals and entities reading this research, which we will present as the corner stone to any Syrian feminist efforts on the short and long terms.**

As Syrian women, we were limited before the revolution and the war to communication channels imposed on us by social, political, and even economic frames. While currently, and despite the difficulties we each experience in this war, including unprecedented lack of communication between us, we might have a new chance to open new communication channels between each other where we can listen to different voices and understand the depth of the impacts on each of us in order to define a new starting point for Syrian feminist work.

We can do so in an organized manner and with well-defined goals, whether through the use of targeted strategic non-physical communication (publications, campaigns, oral history, research, artwork, online sessions, and initiatives) or through organizing and supporting spaces for local meetings within individual areas. This would allow us: to learn from each other how to dialogue; to listen to disagreements; discuss them to reach common grounds; to establish a sustainable and unanimous social change; and to extend and impose our voices in local and international political representation that rarely take our voices into consideration, yet affects our lives and future first hand.

We must seriously rethink about how much those working in the Syrian feminist context, especially those outside Syria, represent the reality of Syrian women and their different contexts and demands. We must break the universalization of women and their needs and demands, with concepts that are particularly imposed by certain Western politics. We must also deconstruct the concept and definitions of the "Syrianism" of women imposed by some Syrian feminist groups and many political and social groups while representing women, and while analyzing these concepts according to the relevant contexts.

This can be done through:

- Carrying out effective action steps based on the conversations held for this research on: identities; changes in gender roles; violence; militarization; justice; peace; and relevant major topics such as returning to Syria. These steps exemplify the importance of women's perspectives in shaping any concept or decision, and in implementing any project or researching issues related to their realities, future, and environment in general. This is in addition to conducting more specialized research on individual topics in order to dwell deeper on topics, and to reaching conclusions and analyses that facilitate the design and implementation of these effective actions.

- Reading, understanding, and reviewing the perspectives of many Syrian women on concepts related to women's rights and demands in an inclusive and non-exclusionary manner, in such a way that feminist work is not limited to the 'woman' category or on a woman as an individual only, as the repercussions of war affects all society members from all age groups. The overall situation will not improve by just improving the situation of women. At the same time, while there is a necessity for a holistic, sustainable feminist approach that address all issues that affect and are affected by women, the feminist groups and organizations must not be held responsible for filling large scale gaps that require international funding and efforts such as ending the war, establishing transitional justice, releasing detainees, and the rehabilitation and reactivation of the education and healthcare sectors all over Syria. Working on these gaps limits feminist efforts to responding to urgent, immediate needs as well as collective advocacy and mobilization to bring these files to the table and form pressure on the relevant international and local entities.

- Increasing the production of theoretical and applied feminist research on topics related to the current context and future of Syrian women. This research can enrich our knowledge and help us reach deep understanding and analysis of sensitive issues. It can also be one of the main references to understand the needs and demands of any future projects, studies, and plans for women and their contexts. These efforts should not be restricted to research only, but must also be translated into action steps, projects, and initiatives relevant to different contexts and to women's positionalities in these contexts.

- Carrying out well organized and planned initiatives between Syrian women inside and outside Syria to provide the psychological support needed by every Syrian woman on different levels. This is in addition to including such support as an integral part of any project or initiative planned or implemented with Syrian women, both participants, and practitioners. Many women have expressed their desire for and need of psychological relief, whether through communication, speaking and active listening, or through other means relevant to the need and location, such as providing job opportunities, organizing forums, discussions, solidarity groups, and so on.
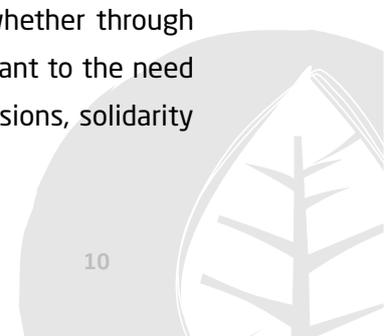
Introduction

This research is part of the "Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria" project, which has been carried out by Women Now for Development on different levels since its establishment in 2013, and on a research level since 2019. This research focuses on the contexts of some Syrian women inside and outside Syria, and on their various analyses and views of concepts that concern them. In other words, women are the main source of information and analysis of the research. In order to establish this feminist approach as a thinking and action approach, women must be centered and placed as its actors and participants, not only as a target audience. This helps us read the variables from a perspective relevant to women contextually, and helps us collaboratively plan and implement the action steps based on these readings.

The 2011 Syrian revolution and the war that followed it has affected the daily life and future vision of every woman who has lived through this period regardless of age, social role, economic class, or geographic, religious, political, and ethnic affiliation. This impact varies in intensity and shape for each woman depending on her context, her role, personality, position or participation, the consequences she had and still has to deal with on a daily basis, the spaces she has created or has been allowed to move within, and the spaces she has been prevented from due to the patriarchal structures, the authority of state and society, and the new powers that have been generated during these past years.

Syrian women who have believed and took part in the revolution, who have lived in rebellious areas and environments and interacted with these changes, or who have had to deal with their consequences in their areas, have all witnessed changes in societal and familial relations, in their own worldview and belief system, and in their relations with and positions on private and public concepts. These changes are reflected in gender roles and responsibilities, and in women's relations with space and time, as some of these women have relocated and stayed in areas inside Syria (where they currently remain), while others were forced to flee and stay in neighboring countries (also), or have sought asylum and stayed in European countries that officially recognize the right of asylum (and also), while others still have remained in their place and witnessed the changes from there, feeling instead that the place 'displaced' them.

Many things have changed for these women: their goals, dreams, and fears; their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others; their definitions of politics, state, and the international community; and of large scale concepts like justice, peace, belonging, identity, safety, stability, and human rights. For many of them, the definitions of a woman, her capacities, rights, and duties have also changed. However, the voices of most of them are not usually heard, and their views and experiences are not taken into consideration, as they are not perceived by political, international, local, and civil entities as partners, but as victims and recipients.[2]

> **Many "neutral" and non-profit international organizations perceive most Syrian women from an orientalist and superior perspective full of perceptions of the ignorance, underdevelopment, and weakness of women in our region, and their need for "western" civilization and ideologies to civilize and "empower" them. A new form of colonialism emerged; "civil colonialism of conflict", or "NGOization"[3], as Dr. Zahraa Ali calls it in her joint research publication with Women Now for Development. Syrian women, like Iraqi and Palestinian women before them, and most women from countries that were colonized by the "west" and then ruled by local dictatorships, became an interesting phenomenon for research, and an interesting topic to show the changes in gender roles.**

Women in most research and studies[4] are approached as targets, and not as complete human beings capable of describing and analyzing reality, and of demanding strategic changes relevant to the context and experienced reality on all levels. The idea and goal of this research have been already initiated by Women Now for Development in the research paper "Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria"[5]in 2019. Through field research with 12 women inside and outside Syria, followed by a workshop in Berlin with Syrian women civil and political activists, we were able to draw an initial vision of the methodology of this elaborate research with 57 Syrian women. We initiated this in May 2019 in collaboration with Syrian women field researchers in many areas within Syria and in countries of asylum.

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2   We recommend reading the introduction of the paper of "Women's Involvement in Peace, Security, and Transitional Practices in The Arab Word" conference, organized by Friedrich Ibert and Musawa Women's Studies Center in Beirut, November 2017.

3   The term "orientalism" is based on the Orientalism Theory of professor Edward Said, founder of the academic field post colonial studies.

4   We can't deny the existence of many researches, papers, and publications that gave full space for Syrian women to express themselves, their experiences, and their aspirations. Here the reference is to a general pattern of following a western approach that objectifies women by many international organizations and researchers.

5   We recommend reading "Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria" on Women Now for Development's website: https://women-now.org/ar/gender-justice-and-feminist-knowledge-production-in-syria/

In this research, we want Syrian women, researchers, and participants, to claim back this space that [we] were excluded from most of the time before and after the revolution. Using a feminist approach based on the Syrian feminist context supported by the necessary tools and knowledge from other feminist contexts, we want to reposition Syrian women as speakers, analysts, describers of their selves and contexts, and readers and actors of their future prospects. We also want to hear each other's voices and read our analyses and changes as Syrian women who have lost communication and interaction because of war.

> **We want to read our differences, similarities, and the reasons behind these, and to collectively think of reaching a common ground for all of us, in order to fix what was torn by the war and by the political and patriarchal authorities in Syria before it, and in order to draw on the conversations and analyses in this research and expand it to reach relevant feminist action to pave the way for a future Syrian feminist scene.**

All the input and analyses in this research is categorized as "politics" as we consider all private sphere issues attributed to women and all public sphere issues, excluding women as political. We also propose connecting the private to the public, and calling these "politics" as an alternative approach to the conventional "politics" and the consequences of the disassociation of the makers of these politics, which we witness on a daily basis.

We have analyzed the input of participating women and categorized it into four main chapters, each including a set of interconnected and overlapping concepts and analyses; **women's analyses of identities, their approaches to changing gender roles, their analyses of violence, and their attitudes towards militarization and its impacts, and the concepts of justice and peace and women's readings of return scenarios to Syria.**

> **Women in these chapters were the main analysts of the Syrian conflict and the main source of knowledge. Therefore, the opinions, positions, and analyses in each chapter and about each topic are as diverse and rich as the diversity and richness of the experiences of women and their discussions.**

Research Questions and Objectives

The main questions of this research revolve around the views of a group of Syrian women with regards to their views on the political changes in the country, their impacts on their daily lives, and how that has impacted their own identities and gender roles. In addition to their readings of violence and militarization, their views on large scale concepts that are constantly present in the international efforts on the Syrian context such as the concepts of peace and justice after the war, and the return of Syrians who are refugees and/or displaced.

How does a group of Syrian women, based on their own experiences, see the impact of revolution and war, and how have they impacted their own definitions of identities and gender roles? How do such concepts develop individually and collectively, and how sustainable are they? What do these women want? And what will they do?

How do women read the social and political challenges before and after 2011? How do they view the impacts of these changes on the future? And how do they position themselves within these changes?

What are women's definitions of violence, of its manifestations, and of its impact? What have they done or will do about it? Where do they see themselves in the current militarized reality? And what are their attitudes and actions towards militarization?
What do the concepts of justice and peace in a postwar Syria mean to women? How do they position themselves, define their roles, and describe their relationships to these concepts?
What are women's visions of possible solutions? What do they recommend, expect, wish, and do? How do they see Syria in the near and far future? And how, in their opinion will the role of refugees and displaced be in a future Syria?

In order to emphasize the idea of women being the main source of feminist knowledge production in Syria, we have proposed the aforementioned questions through individual narrative interviews with women, so that they are the main source of information and analysis, as a primary step towards giving the lead back to Syrian women, through their own words and tools, to be the speakers and analysts of circumstances and challenges that immediately concern them on all levels as women and as Syrians.

Under the circumstances of war, refuge, and displacement, we have tried to reach as many areas as possible where women have lived and where the different contexts imply different impacts on their analysis of their identities and gender roles, as well as on their relations with their surrounding circles and communities. This was to offer readings and analyses that enhance the understanding of the extent of diversity and intersectionality and to establish a clear ground to help direct the Syrian feminist and civil efforts towards the needs and capacities of women and their communities in the present and the future.

This is a feminist research. Therefore, feminist principles were applied throughout the stages of the process, including the reasoning of the research, the objectives behind the questions, the design and implementation, the research methods used as well as their application. Most importantly, we stress that each step of the research and its outputs are from women, not only about them.

We have used the grounded theory methodology in order to understand and analyze the causality and connections in data and reach conclusions based on data, without consideration to previous assumptions. Hence, we were able to avoid the usual generalizing and orientalist approaches applied to the Syrian context, and especially to women. We developed an intersectional, rational approach that analyzes information with a consideration to most of the interacting factors and the context that affects and is affected by this information. **We have also taken a gender perspective as the main framework and tool to read and analyze the many issues that the women addressed.**

Methodology

The woman is the center and the source, with visible and invisible relationships to the hierarchies surrounding her, and is subject to explicit and implicit authorities. It is through a gender perspective that we can see these invisible and implicit aspects. Even when entire populations face shared injustice and violence, like bombardment, the experiences of women and men[6] can differ in many important ways such as mobility, access to healthcare, their whereabouts during the bombardment, the space to which women and men have access after the bombardment, and the responsibilities expected of each. Another example is when a woman and a man say that they used to work, and now they are unemployed. We notice that the reasons behind these similar statements might completely differ. The woman might have stopped working because she lost her mobility in a conflict zone or an area controlled by extremists, because she was subject to harassment or exploitation, or because her husband or male relative had prevented her from working, while the reason for the man might be the lack of relevant job opportunities during war, or the lack of necessary legal paperwork, among other reasons.

6   The researcher gender binarism (Man and woman). However, we followed and adhered to the information collected in the research, as no other genders were mentioned.
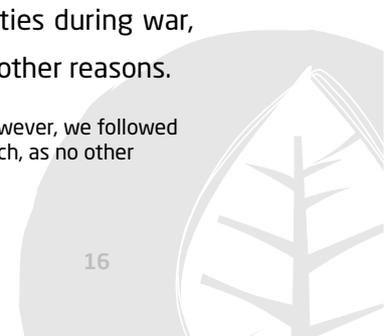
Also, from an intersectional gender perspective, the reasons for quitting work can differ for women in Idlib, Damascus, Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqah, Lebanon, Turkey, and European countries. They might also differ for two women living in the same neighborhood in the city of Homs, for example based on their age, knowledge, religious or political affiliation, social relations or family conditions, mental wellbeing, health reasons, or a combination of all or some of these factors.

Gender perspective and intersectionality[7], might seem, and in fact, are complicated concepts. These two concepts approach research targets as sources of knowledge and active subjects rather than objects[8]. They also, as much as possible, exclude any former assumptions about the research topic, especially if the researcher is familiar with the context in which the research is carried out. However, adopting these concepts increases the complexity of information reading and analysis, especially in qualitative research. This complexity reflects the depth of lived realities, and moves away from simplifying and generalizing outputs.

We intersected gender sensitivity and perspective with conflict sensitivity through all the stages of this research, as it was carried out with Syrian women living in a war context. This intersection was also necessary to ensure that no harm was caused to the women researchers and participants at any stage of the research, and to understand the conflict dynamics in each area and how they intersect with gender dynamics.

In this research, we chose semi-structured qualitative interviews with women as our main tool and the generated data as our main source of information. This is in addition to the field researchers' observations and analysis of the circumstances of the interviews as well as secondary resources (academic and research publications, reports by civil society organizations, etc.) useful for the clarification and understanding of some relevant concepts and ideas.

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7   There are many references about feminist research methods. We recommend " The Science Question in Feminism" Harding, Sara. 1968.

8   We recommend reading "Feminist Solidarity" an article by Sara Salem published on Ikhtiyar online magazine. The author elaborates on the meaning and importance of intersectionality in feminism. Arabic version of the article can be found at https://www.ikhtyar.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/011.pdf

The researchers focused on familiarizing themselves with the interviewees during the interviews to take a more narrative nature. The knowledge women shared include all aspects of their daily lives before and after 2011, including their roles in society, their definitions of themselves and identities, their circles of trusts, and their dreams and fears. Interviews then carried on to focus on 2011, the year of change, and how women perceive that year, their participation in it, their opinions and visions at the time, the situation in the last three years, and how they interpret future scenarios. In addition, the research also explored the interviewees' definitions and analyses of violence and its impacts on them and the society around them, their position in circles of violence, identifying those most affected by violence, and how it can be mitigated. Women also shared their views on militarization from the beginning of the revolution until the time of the interview, and how militarization has affected them. Then we asked the women about their own visions of justice on the personal level, and on a national level, and how and when justice can be achieved. In addition to questions on how to reach peace, what it means, and their positions in it, and how they read scenarios of return to Syria.

The researchers had the liberty to sequence the questions as necessary since the goal was not for interviewees to narrate events in their chronological order. The narration style also differed between different women. Interviews were recorded after receiving the consent of women[9], data was later logged using a preset coding system, and new codes were added when any emerged during interviews.

The lead researcher agreed with the field researchers to log the interviews in first person wording, so that women's own words remain intact, in order to maintain important indicators for analysis, and to ensure women's ownership of the narration and analysis, and not to consider them third parties. We developed a coding system for data based on the topics of the research questions with additional detailing. Since there are many intersections in this research, the factors are also many, including areas, powers in authority, age, work, marital status, and so on. These intersections appear in our analysis, meaning that when data is affected by the security or economic situation in an area (e.g., siege), the analysis is modified to focus on these factors.

. . . .
9   Please check Annex. 1 "Consent Form"

Research team

The research team consisted of the lead researcher, field researchers, and a psychologist. All team members are Syrian women. The lead researcher selected the 7 field researchers[10] in cooperation with Women Now for Development's team, then carried out trainings with them in the following areas:

- Inside Syria: Al-Hasakah, Ar-Raqqah, Idlib, Damascus.
- Outside Syria, in neighboring countries: Gaziantep, Turkey. Bekaa, Lebanon.
- European countries: Germany.

Working with field researchers has given a richness and depth to this research: Interviewing women directly, combined with the field researchers' wide knowledge of the area's context, has played the most important role in obtaining accurate information and in allowing interviewed women to narrate their opinions and stories comfortably.

Research Method

The researchers selected interviewees from the circles around them, taking into consideration the selection criteria that will be mentioned later in this paper. The reason behind that was to ensure that trust is truly established between interviewers and interviewees, and that women agree to participate in interviews because they want to talk and communicate their opinions.

The implementation was carried out as follows:

After the training and pilot interviews with the field researchers, each of them suggested a group of women for interviews, discussed the selection reasons with the lead researcher, and modified the lists when necessary in order to meet the selection criteria and cover diversities in areas.

10   Three of the field researchers are women whom we interviewed for the field research for "Gender Justice and Feminist Knowledge Production in Syria" Paper. We believe that working with women whom we interviewed and have demonstrated competency in field research can enrich this experience, and place some researchers in two different positions; former participants, and current researchers.

- In their respective areas, field researchers interviewed women who had agreed to participate in the research. Most interviews were carried out in places chosen by the participants. Before starting an interview, researchers read information about the research and its objectives, how information is used, stored, and shared at Women Now for Development, the rights of the participant, and the structure of the interview. When possible, participants signed a consent form[11], then interviews were recorded.

- After the interviews, researchers logged the information to files designed by the lead researcher to code and categorize data. Researchers were given liberty to add codes and topics as they emerged in interviews.

- Afterwards, each researcher wrote a report describing her experience, her personal opinion, what she found out and concluded, and the general context of the interviews.

- The lead researcher compiled and read the data thoroughly, and re-coded it based on the concluded themes and how they intersect, then wrote the final research in stages.

- **It's worth noting that our psychologist has played the biggest role in this research by maintaining the mental wellbeing of all the researchers. This was a result of her constant individual and collective communication with researchers, and encouraging all of them to attend psychological support sessions after each interview.**

Selection Criteria

In this research, we do not aim to provide a holistic view of the situation of Syrian women[12], but rather snapshots of the lives, experiences, thoughts, analyses, realities, and perspectives of a group of Syrian women who do not have access to publication, political, or media platforms to express themselves.

Hence the selection was of a group of Syrian women12 from different geopolitical areas inside and outside Syria, different living circumstances, age groups, marital status, and education backgrounds. In our opinion, the experience of every woman who lived in Syria before and after 2011, or was displaced or had to leave the country, is a valuable and rich experience. However, we tried to diversify our selection to cover several factors with direct impacts on experiences and opinions like the contexts of different areas during the revolution and war, age group, marital status, and some ethnicities that affected the circumstances of women (Kurdish women for example). Educational background, employment, and religion were not considered as main selection criteria, but factors to be taken into consideration by field researchers when they deemed it necessary.

Quantitative information

Below are sets of quantitative information to provide a clearer picture of the interviewed women. Other information will be provided for individual participants in the readings and analysis section as necessary.

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11   Some participants refused to sign the form for certain security concerns and personal reasons, and preferred verbal consent.

12   By "women" we mean all these who identify themselves as women. By "Syrians" we mean all those who have lived in Syria before and after 2011, not necessarily with Syrian nationality.

Age groups:

Age	20 - 30	30 - 40	40 - 50	50+
# of participants	11	28	10	8

Marital status

Below is the marital status distribution, as mentioned by the participants, noting that many participants are wives of disappeared, detained, or deceased husbands, yet some preferred to answer "Married" as their marital status.

Marital status	Single	Engaged	In a relationship	Widow	Divorced	Married
# of participants	20	1	3	2	3	28

Locations

The location map might be the most complex division, yet it highlights the reality of the Syrian society, especially women. The figure below shows where women used to live before displacement and their current locations. To avoid complication, we will not be mentioning the locations where participants spent time between their original localities and their locations of residence when interviewed.

- (1) Woman displaced from Damascus to Germany
- (3) Women displaced from Latakia to Germany
- (1) Woman displaced from as-Suayda to Germany
- (1) Woman displaced from Qamishli (Qamişlo) to Germany
- (1) Woman displaced from Darayya to Germany
- (1) Woman displaced from Damascus to France
- (1) Woman displaced from as-Suayda to Sweden
- (1) Woman displaced from Latakia to Norway
- (1) Woman displaced from Daraa to Netherlands

- (2) Women displaced from Dam. Suburbs to Turkey (Gaziantep)
- (3) Women displaced from Eastern Ghouta to Turkey (Gaziantep)
- (1) Woman displaced from Palmyra to Turkey (Gaziantep)
- (2) Women displaced from Aleppo to Turkey (Gaziantep)
- (1) Woman displaced from Damascus to Turkey (Gaziantep)
- (4) Women displaced from Darayya to Lebanon (Bikaa)
- (1) Woman displaced from az-Zabadani to Lebanon (Bikaa)
- (2) Women displaced from al-Qseir to Lebanon (Bikaa)
- (1) Woman displaced from Dam. Southern Suburbs to Lebanon (Bikaa)
- (1) Woman displaced from Damascus to Lebanon (Bikaa)

- (2) Women displaced from Damascus to al-Malikiya (Dêrik)/ al-Hassakah
- (3) Women are still in al-Malikiya al-Malikiya (Dêrik)/ al-Hassakah
- (1) Woman displaced from Afrin to al-Malikiya (Dêrik)/ al-Hassakah
- (1) Woman displaced from Raqqa to al-Malikiya (Dêrik)/ al-Hassakah
- (5) Women are still in Raqqa (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from al-Bukamal to Raqqa (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from Manbij/ Aleppo to Raqqa (City)
- (3) Women are still in Damascus (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from Jaramana to Damascus (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from Khan Shaykhun/ Idlib to Damascus (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from Darayya to Damascus (City)
- (1) Woman displaced from Zamalka to Damascus (City)
- (6) Women are still in Maarat an-Numan/ Idlib
- (1) Woman displaced from Jarjanaz to Maarat an-Numan/ Idlib

We have faced many challenges in the course of this research. Some of these challenges were related to the overall Syrian context, including war, displacement and migration, and an extremely difficult economic, security, and political situation. Other challenges were particular to the situation of all participants and circumstances in their areas. In addition to the challenges of feminist work in unstable circumstances and the difficulty of planning and implementation in times of war.

In this section, we focus on the direct challenges we faced during this research, as addressing the overall challenges related to conflict and war and the difficulties of feminist work under these circumstances in general and in Syria, in particular, requires an entire research designated for this purpose. However, these challenges are mentioned in general and in detail throughout this research.

Research challenges

Spatial challenges:

Choosing locations constituted the biggest challenge in this research due to the conflict. Working together as 8 researchers, we have worked, trained, and discussed in virtual spaces. Since it was impossible for researchers to meet both inside Syria and in countries of asylum, all the planning, training, discussions, and reviews were carried out virtually, including psychological support. This distance has a large impact on work where we need to see, interact with, and feel with each other, and to take the space necessary for discussions and work.

Moreover, it was difficult to reach out to field researchers in many areas in Syria, including Deir ez-Zur, Homs, Daraa, As Suwayda, Qunaitra, Aleppo, Qamishli, Al Bukamal, Lattakia, and Tartus. This was due to difficulties associated with locations, security situation, and logistical complications. The only alternative, which was not enough, was to interview women who used to live in some of these areas, then were displaced or migrated to different locations.

Security challenges:

Most researchers faced different security risks. Since conflict sensitivity was one of our main standards in every step of the research, we did our best to mitigate these risks, even when it meant the total suspension of the research in some incidents. However, such risks are associated with the context of the area where each researcher was working, and despite all the measures we collectively took to mitigate or prevent any risks on researchers and participants, some factors remained out of our control.

Our field researcher in Idlib faced difficult security circumstances due to the constant bombardment on her area and its surroundings, which resulted in the limitation of her ability to even communicate with us online. She carried out two interviews in shelters, and the rest in no better security conditions. Despite our direct request to suspend any interviews and for her to prioritize her personal safety, she refused and agreed only to postpone some interviews. Ever since the beginning of 2020, she has been moving between areas hoping to reach any place that is spared, even if temporarily, from the war.

Similarly, the researcher in Hasaka faced difficult circumstances as a result of the Turkish military operations in the area in October 2019. She moved from the risk of bombardment and battles to the horrors of displacement, all while witnessing the death and displacement of civilians. Yet, she ensured to finish her tasks and deliver all interviews, despite the requests by the whole team for her to stop.

Our researcher in Ar-Raqqah also faced difficulties, but in less intense circumstances. Anticipating the withdrawal of US forces from the area and its implications, and not knowing whether the Syrian Democratic Forces SFD would stay kept the researcher in a constant state of anxiety and anticipation. Like her colleagues, she finished and delivered all documents, then removed all information related to the research from her devices.

The researcher in Turkey lives in worry because of the Turkish government's laws and actions of deporting Syrians back to Syria, which had started a few months before the Turkish military operations in North East Syrian areas in October 2019.

Our researcher in Lebanon was also in fear and anxiety, as she is constantly in danger of deportation to Syria or subject to changing laws that could make her mobility even more difficult.

As for the researcher in Damascus, we were not even able to add her to our social media groups out of fear of monitoring by the Syrian regime's security forces. She received individual training and was unfortunately not able to meet her colleagues.

The researchers in Europe might be more fortunate in enjoying more safety and stability. However, security concerns transcend the geographic location, as some of them were not able to mention their real names to avoid any immediate or future consequences upon them or upon their families in Syria.

Psychological challenges

Carrying out the interviews with all the exhaustion, anger, sadness, and desperation has had a direct impact on the researchers, as they themselves are Syrian women who have experienced displacement, loss, suffering, and other war-related hardships, in addition to the aforementioned extraordinary circumstances during the research. Working with a psychologist had a great positive impact, and despite her also going through all the aforementioned challenges, she was capable of absorbing all the negative emotions. The direct and indirect support from Women Now for Development to the whole team also had positive impacts.

Challenges related to interviewees

The field researchers faced many difficulties in outreach and conducting interviews in all the areas. Some of these difficulties can be attributed to women's fear of mentioning or recording any personal information, despite the established trust with researchers and the consent form that explains confidentiality and which explicitly states that information is not to be shared with any other party than the researchers and the organization.

These fears are of course understandable, as the consequences of any information leak to authorities inside and outside of Syria can have severe consequences on the women themselves and/or on their family members, and of the deep-rooted Syrian fear surrounding any form of expression. Some of the researchers had to cancel interviews, as the husbands of some participants prevented them from conducting the interviews after they had agreed to do so. Therefore, we changed the names of all the interviewed women and covered some details that might expose their identities in their surrounding environments.

Other challenges emerged during the interviews associated with feelings and memories shared by the participants, which has affected some participants to the extent that they hesitated to complete the interviews, or researchers had to stop the interviews to ensure the mental wellbeing of participants.

Readings
and Analyses

Chapter One: Women's analysis of identities

The topic of identity might be one of the most controversial topics whether in academic, literature, and feminist work, or in discussions between groups and individuals, especially during and after conflicts.

Most of the controversy around the topic comes from the presumption that each individual has a clear rigid identity. Indeed, some people find comfort in a clear definition of identity, when someone for example says "My only identity is Arab", "Kurd", or "Syrian", their identity is limited to association with ethnic or national affiliation. Similarly, when someone says "I am a religious woman", her identity is associated with gender and religion. Identities can also be defined based on the internal dialogues of each person, in addition to the surrounding circumstances, structures, and policies. On the other hand, some people reject these categories and frames as they are not enough to express their identities. Others find the question about identity's definition itself strange, because of its irrelevance to their lived reality and daily life. Additionally, asking about identity might provoke internal dialogues not experienced before.

> **There is no doubt that individual definitions and questions about affiliations increase in conflict times due to the collapse and change of circles around individuals, and the interactions of each individual with these changes. However, these changes are deeper and more sensitive than the categories of "stable identity" and/or"identity crisis", which are recurrent terms in many academic and non-academic discourse on identities in times of conflict.**

Discussing identities carries many questions; is my personal identity similar to the ID card that has my date of birth, sex, possibly religion, and nationality? Am I only these traits? Or am I a whole combination of many variables, some of which might persist for a while, while other variables remain in constant change and interaction with life, people, and acquired knowledge and realizations throughout life?

Then more questions come; what does it mean to have an identity? Do I, as a person, have one or several identities? Where do these rigid definitions that only resulted in wars, inequalities, injustice, and discrimination based on ethnicity, sex, nationality, religion, or class come from? Who benefits from these definitions on the collective local or international levels? Do we have clear divisions of our identities similar to the academic, political, and sometimes social definitions? When I say, this is my sexual identity, and this my social identity, religious identity, etc. Do I have the capacity to draw clear lines dividing these identities? Don't these identities intersect within each person and regenerate new versions in every moment or every phase in life?
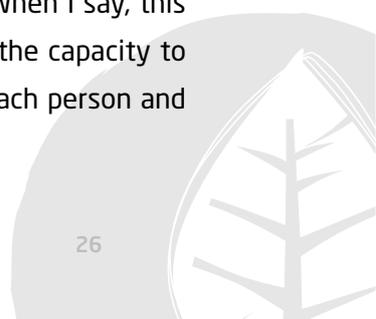
There are many questions to be asked about the definitions, meanings, and politics of identities, and this research might not be the proper space to include all these questions and discuss them in detail, as such a discussion requires elaborate separate research that focuses on identities and relevant topics. However, we wanted to pose some of these questions before analyzing women's own readings of their identities to reemphasize that **we do not endorse rigid definitions of identities nor the framing of identities and limiting them to irrelevant positions and goals. We believe women change and cause change in their surroundings in every detail of their daily lives, every shred of memory, emotion, thought, place, and time.** Moreover, the concepts of self and identity are more complicated than frames and written scripts, as proven by the interviewed women's readings of their selves and identities in their diverse words and expressions.

Perhaps feminist intersectional analyses are the proper spaces to discuss identities in a manner closer to individuals and their lived realities, as it focuses on studying and analyzing the influence of a situation, a system, a society, or any other space or factor on some people, and how some or all these factors intersect in shaping individual and collective identities in a particular context. Moreover, the discussions about identities must come from the source itself, not without it, and should open horizons to understand identity as well as review existing definitions. For instance, such a process is necessary when we study or discuss gender identity[13] and how it affects and is affected by social constructs.

Such analyses, when appropriate to the context, and when participants are considered the main source of information, can have a great role in understanding and deconstructing identities, in order to explore the aspects that are imposed and inherited, and the parts that can be changed in line with the desires and individuality of each person, especially women. It is also crucial to increasing the subjectivity of information and description, and emphasizing that women are the most capable of describing and analyzing what concerns them when it comes to gender identities. Hence, these academic concepts are used as a supporting frame to express this information, and the role of research methods is to connect the information to its context and source and analyze it.

Asking questions about identity in such a constructive manner, and without presumptions and biases, can help find a common ground between women themselves or contribute in regaining some lost consensus in war times or in establishing new ones.

The Syrian revolution in 2011 provoked internal dialogues in most of those who participated in it and/or were affected by it. These dialogues had not existed before or at least had been oppressed. Later on, these dialogues transcended one's self and were shared with partners and friends.

. . . .

13   We recommend the following article in Arabic for a better idea about gender identity:
      https://transatsite.com/2017/11/17/%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%87%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/

Many started to wonder what brings Syrians together and what sets them apart. The revolution in Syria reinitiated interaction between people in ways different than the preexisting communication and separation structures: Men and women from different economic classes, areas, social circles, religions, ages, and so on began to interact; many agreed on common broad goals, even if they disagreed on the specifics; women and men started taking on new roles after the revolution and during the war; and many adopted concerns and causes that had not been widespread before pertaining to issues such as the need for change at the national level, the future of the country and the issue of free political expression.

These groups lost communication with the escalating events, and the increasing violence, militarization, death, detainment, displacement, and disappearance. The simplest forms of communication that had been available before the revolution, like mobility between areas and cities, became completely unavailable, and many areas were even besieged and entire populations lost all contact with the outside world. The dreams, goals, roles, beliefs, affiliations, and self-perception of many women has changed, in addition to their definitions of family, home, safety, politics, militarization, violence, etc. These changes were affected by women's personal experiences, the circumstances they faced, and the contexts in which they lived.

> **One of the main goals behind asking a group of women about identities is to listen to each other again and understand the changes on the individual and collective levels, especially from the perspective of women, as they are often assigned identities and roles without listening to their views and analyses most of the time. While asking about identities, questions were not only direct. We gave the women space to express themselves and their own thoughts. For example, talking about identities intersected in many interviews with women's discussion of the changes in gender roles in particular contexts. What the participants have been and still go through has shaken and changed many ideas inside them, and made many of them question themselves and reconsider their dreams, goals, fears, affiliations, and roles.**

After reading and analyzing the interviews, our plan was to merge the chapters of identities and gender roles in one, as they intersect on many levels. However, we decided to present them in separate chapters due to the condense information they both contain.

Women's definitions of identities

"I" is my identity

This was the bold statement of most of the women we interviewed in Lebanon, they answered this question with more certainty than other participants. These women have a lot in common: they fled to Lebanon relatively early, between 2012 and 2014; they are in their 30s and 40s; they were displaced from rural rebellious areas (Darayya, Al Zabadani, Al Qusayr, rural Daraa); they participated in revolutionary and aid efforts in their localities to different extents; they all have a medium to good education attainment; all of them work on a voluntarily or paid basis with civil society organizations in the Bekaa area; they are pursuing their education or teaching; and they live in difficult financial circumstances. On the other hand, they differ on many levels related to the personality and experience of every woman, and in their analysis and discussions.

> "I am Maha, that's it. I do not belong to anyone. I am Maha, a free human only. My concept of identity has changed, before it was traditional; Maha is a Sunni Muslim. Now I do not belong to anyone. Had it been up to me, I would have removed all of these and kept my name; I would've removed my last name, Sunni, and Syrian, I don't want these, I am just Maha. Identity is the actions that show the person's character and translate her/ his ideas. Now I identify as Maha only, a woman who loves freedom and dignity, and is against any kind of violence or terrorizing under any label including education and upbringing." (Maha, Darayya, 44)

Maha speaks with clear determination and strength. While describing her life before 2011, she recalls experiencing many traumas and shocks resulting from her husband's tyranny, how she had to let go of achieving herself for years, and then how she was able to realize her dream in higher education with determination. She also mentions her participation in the revolution, and that after 2011 she endured social bullying and mistreatment from the closest people, especially after losing her husband and son. Najma, a woman from the same area, shares Maha's opinion; she mentioned that her definition of identity has changed, and she wants to identify as a human rights defender only. Both Maha and Najma, like several other interviewees, live in Lebanon currently. **Before 2011, these women had great ambitions of self-fulfillment, and of expanding their knowledge. Yet, these ambitions were buried under layers of social and family pressures that ask women to stay within stereotypes.**

Syrian Women's Readings of the Present, Future, and Associated Concepts.

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They have expressed that women's freedom to choose what they aspire for is a right, and it does not contradict any law or religion. With the beginning of the revolution, they participated in the revolution with all their energy and witnessed the worst massacres, bombardment, and displacement. They did not find equity when it came to their revolutionary ambitions, nor their positions in society afterwards. Then they had to move to the worst country to be displaced to in terms of the hosting environment, rules and regulations, and the rights of displaced Syrians: Lebanon.[14] They see no alternative but to carry on what they do, trying to improve their living situation one step at a time.

Amani from Al Zabadani lost many of her family members at an early age during the revolution and war. She was able to survive the difficult life situation in Lebanon and to complete her higher education after she had to drop out during the war when she was no longer able to get to Damascus. Amani decided to put longing aside and to live up to "reality" after her beautiful childhood and teenage memories were overwritten by more recent painful, and bloody ones.

> **"If I want to speak in an abstract way: identity is your affiliation with the place that holds your memories, childhood, school, and the beautiful life you had lived at home, where you were born. Now what identity means to me is the human being; your identity is your humanity regardless of your nationality. I am an ambassador of peace; I have abundance of peace inside." (Amani, Al Zabadani, 25)**

It is hard to describe the meaning of being displaced in Lebanon, where every displaced woman lives in the temporary and the unknown. On one hand, a political settlement has not been reached in Syria, and a safe return is unlikely in the near future.[15] On the other hand, there are no aspirations of staying in Lebanon.

> **It seems like the Syrian women we interviewed fight this temporary and unknown through continuing to review and develop definitions of identity in relation to their revolutionary, knowledge, educational, and personal efforts as women, after many disappointments on the levels of goals, dreams, people, and governments. It seems like they have chosen the harder path; they chose to build themselves, take on responsibilities, and attempt to cope. Their identities were fought in their country and in their current location, and the preexisting definitions became too narrow for them after their many experiences, hence they chose their own definitions in light of their dreams and potential.**

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14   For a better understanding of asylum in countries like Lebanon and Jordan, we recommend the paper " Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disorder" By Maha Yahya for Carnegie Middle East Center
        https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Paper_Maha_Yahya_Arab_Refuge_Final__ARA.pdf

15   We will be elaborating on the concept of safe and voluntarily return in the fourth section of this paper.

I will never belong to this country

The women we interviewed in Turkey expressed anger concerning the country's policies towards Syrians. This anger was at the center of the conversations while discussing identities, whether with women who had been recently displaced (displaced in 2018 by the Syrian regime from Eastern Ghouta in Damascus, or fled Idlib and its surrounding in 2019) or with women who had been displaced earlier in 2014. Some even expressed the same anger despite holding Turkish nationalities, as they were perceived in Gaziantep as migrant women only. It was the only characteristic they were described with despite their experiences, thoughts, and work. This was particularly difficult for women who had endured long periods of siege (Eastern Ghouta), and those who remained longer in their localities before being forced to leave to Turkey (from Aleppo, or Daraa), as they had not dealt with being called refugees/displaced/migrants, under the circumstances of siege or bombardment by the Syrian regime and its allies, or by the invasion of their areas by radical groups. After all these struggles, and after they were displaced from Syria carrying the pain of displacement, siege, bombardment, loss, and all the associated traumas and crises on most levels, they are identified as refugees/displaced/migrants in a degrading manner, which has added to their psychological exhaustion and anger.

> **"My identity in Turkey is a refugee despite having the nationality, since I have Turkish origins. These origins mean nothing to me. I do not feel I belong to this country. I belong to liberated Aleppo, where stones are sacred for me." (Majida, 33)**

> **"My old identity is a Syrian from Daraa, residing in Damascus, I spent my entire life there. My current identity is displaced from Syria; this word kills me." (Samar, 43)**

Since Syrian women face discrimination and racism in Turkey, people sometimes advise them to change their attire or external looks to fit more into the general, conservative Muslim, appearance of Turkish women. Indeed, these patterns are not exclusive to Turkey, and are recurrent in many countries where women from other countries seek asylum, especially when it comes to external appearances. For example, many veiled women in Germany are often advised by others to remove their hijab, and non-veiled are advised to dye their hair blond to protect themselves from potential racism. One of the women, Warda, 32 years, whom we interviewed in the initial research lives in Sweden, and mentioned that she had changed her hair color one summer into blond out of pure personal motives, and how she was later surprised by the positive change in interaction by some
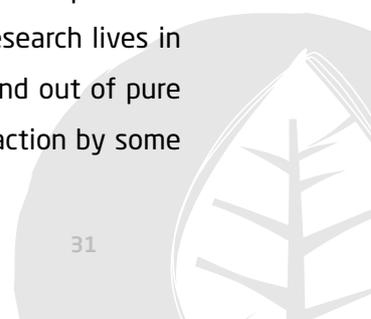
local citizens, and how people in her close circle described her new appearance as a positive step to protect herself from racism. She says: "I was surprised how some people in Sweden changed the way they interact with me after I changed my hair. I felt that they started to treat me with more respect. They even started smiling at me."

Such a discourse is similar to the patriarchal discriminatory discourse on rape or harassment, when women are asked to not stay out late or wear exposing clothes in order to avoid rape. The use of such discourse to address racism, sexual violence, and gender-based discrimination demands behavioral change from victims instead of holding the individuals or groups perpetrating discriminatory, and sometimes criminal, acts accountable, or instead of finding prevention measures and solutions to protect women from such acts.

Rand repeatedly heard such demands in Syria and Turkey to the extent that she had to change her attire in Syria in compliance with the radical groups in power.

> **"Identity... someone once asked me why I didn't wear the Turkish attire or hijab to prevent risks. I am an ambassador of my country even in my attire, which I had to change at a certain point in Ghouta when we were forced to. My freedom there was restrained because everyone had their eyes on me, but here I will not change for anyone." (Rand, Eastern Ghouta, 39)**

I am searching for myself

Syrian women in Europe shared different definitions of identity. It was obvious that they were greatly affected by living in new societies that impose integration policies from one end, the state, with no consideration in most cases to women's experiences.[16] In addition to the degrading treatment, they receive from some institutions and individuals in host countries on different levels, which made them hold on to aspects of their former identities and change the aspects they reject as women.

Many women lost their self-appreciation and were in a bad emotional state. Despite that, the situation in some European countries is more stable than other countries like Turkey and Lebanon when it comes to asylum. Yet, the exile of place, language, and social relations, and the marginalization of experiences are essential to the emotional state. Nadia, who has been living in Germany for 3 years, said:

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16   We recommend reading the discussion paper "Gender Role Changes and their Impacts on Syrian Women Refugees in Berlin in Light of the Syrian Crisis" by Nisren Habib, published by WZB Berlin Social Science Center. https://bibliothek.wzb.eu/pdf/2018/vi18-101.pdf

> **"I lost everything when I came to Germany. I started feeling like I am nobody. Here, I am just a number, nothing else. I tried hard and did not give up; I participated in workshops and applied to many jobs, but it was all in vain. I worked for a short period and was satisfied with myself. Then, I finished working and went back to my bad emotional state. I do not appreciate nor respect myself anymore, and I constantly blame myself."**

Some of the women we interviewed in Europe affirmed that they experienced what they called "Europe shock", as the myth of security in European societies that they had always imagined vanished. There's no harmony with society, no social circles, and no ability of self-realization through work or active participation, in addition to the constant fear of any mistake in any paperwork, especially with the lack of knowledge of the new language and systems, and the lack of employment that might add a sort of financial security and stability.

On the other hand, other participants in Europe had started to feel they belonged to the new country more than to Syria. This can be attributed to several reasons, some of which are associated with the long term safety the new country offers on the personal and family levels, especially education and future opportunities for children, and the existent and granted legal protections to women and children, as the women mentioned being constantly afraid of what came next in Syria even before the 2011 revolution and subsequent war. Other reasons are associated with gender-based violence and discrimination these women had seen and experienced in Syria, and the social violence they and their families had faced based on their political views. Some women mentioned the intensity of these kinds of violence they had experienced in Syria and their impact on their daily lives even before the revolution, and how they completely refuse to live in such situations again.

However, some interviewees said that they had no interest in associating their identities to a certain country or nationality, and that they benefit from all experiences and are free to choose definitions for their identities; neither the European nor Syrian identity are theirs.

We can see the difficulties and challenges these women face as strangers in three contexts of asylum, Lebanon, Turkey, and Europe, despite the many differences between these contexts. We also see the impact of these difficult experiences on women's definitions of their identities, and how they fight against what they do not want, and dream of achieving their ambitions even if they come late. In their words, we can feel the weariness that some might express and others might conceal as a defense mechanism to avoid losing hope. Life in Syria, witnessing and partaking in the revolution, the high expectations met with disappointments, then having to move from all these struggles to harder struggles of exile are all factors that made women question the tiniest former details, definitions, and affiliations.

Each woman constructed her own version of her identity. Some women were capable of translating their conclusions into action in the professional sphere, others are still in the thinking and analysis phase, while some unfortunately did not have the chance or did not allow themselves to question, analyze, and conclude.

Despite the differences in the details of the aforementioned experiences and in the personalities and circumstances of those women, they are all experiences of women who have left Syria and lived in an exile unknown to them before. What about women who were displaced tens of times inside Syria, and those who had to remain in their place? How do they read their identities? And how do they analyze and describe the internal exile they experience?

Who am I amidst all this destruction?

Women in Ar-Raqqah have likely seen more changes since 2011 than the others. The city witnessed peaceful protests at the beginning of the 2011 revolution, was taken over by the FSA[17] in 2013, and then occupied by ISIS[18] in 2014. This led to constant NATO strikes until the withdrawal of ISIS and the arrival of the SDF[19] and their claim to power in 2017, until US threats in 2019 to suspend their support for SDF with the possibility of the city going back to regime control or under Turkish military rule.

The impacts of these struggles and subsequent traumas are reflected in how Syrian women from Ar-Raqqah express themselves: with disappointment, frustration, and fear of the future. All these past and current experiences have left women in a constant state of shock, and a daily reminder of this shock is the mass Destruction in the city, which was mainly caused by NATO operations. There were several mentions of "Destruction" in all interviews, as Destruction has become a part of the daily life of some women; Rouba is 46 years old and a homemaker. She spends most of her day cleaning the rubble from the partially destroyed walls of her house. Salam is 27 years old, she was displaced from Al Bukamal to Ar-Raqqah with her husband in 2017. She was at high school at the beginning of the revolution, now she collects rubble from the destroyed houses with her husband for their daily income. Most of the women we interviewed in Ar-Raqqah used to be employees, engineers, teachers, or homemakers, and now they have lost all professional and social roles they had, and they have expressed their extreme concern about forgetting the skills they possess like fluency in English or engineering and technical skills.

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17   All women we interviewed in Ar-Raqqah called the factions that fought the regime and took over the city as Free Syrian Army, hence we used the same expression. For more information on that period, please read the following article at Syria Untold. https://syriauntold.com/2014/01/08/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8% AA%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89- %D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9%D8%9F/

18   ISIS: common acronym for the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and Sham

19   Syrian Democratic Forces SDF define themselves as "A unified national military force for all Syrians of Arabs, Kurds, and all other elements"
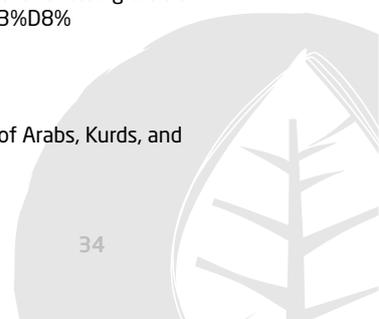
Their loss of everything was obvious in their feelings and expressions. They have lost their jobs, education, family members, social relations, their city, and their dream of getting to a better country. Rouba said,

> **"The moment I wake up in the morning, I think of which wall to rebuild or which rubble to remove. I don't visit anyone; all my neighbors left or died, and my family lost their house and moved to the countryside, so now it's difficult to visit them. My daughters got married, and I have no one to visit. I spend my day thinking, and cooking for my sons who work in manufacturing. That's it."**

Hanan is 34 years old. She was an employee, and now lives with her mother, who has a difficult health condition. Hanan says that she was free before, but now she is locked in a keyless cage. She has become alone, with no job and a lot of heavy responsibilities.

Identity, affiliation, and the fear of cancellation

The period in which the research has been conducted to date (April 2020) is a time of fear of the unknown, warning of the constant bombardment and expulsion of millions of people from the Idlib and those who have been driven there in recent years.. Most interviews were conducted in shelters and under bombardment, due to the constant Russian and Syrian air strikes in the area since March 2019. Since 2012, women have been repeatedly displaced to different locations in Idlib, always seeking a "safer place". They have lost many family members and neighbors. They were banned from leaving Idlib. They were not able to go to the regime nor SDF-controlled areas, and they refused to go to ISIS-controlled areas.

Most of the women we interviewed in Idlib spoke about their identities with anger and despair in a manner similar to how they described their daily lives; anxiety, fear, destruction, loss, fractions of safety, and bits of hope, nostalgia, and anticipation. Despite all of that, most of them have been trying to continue working in the last seven years, especially in civil work, one of them even works at the local councils. They have not stopped their quest for self-improvement and a source of income to get by in a difficult life. However, worrying of belonging to this besieged area and the cancellation of their affiliation with the whole country has and will never leave their minds and hearts.

We will start talking about identity in association with ID cards. When we asked about identity, the first thing that came to mind for some participants was the ID card. Some might wonder about the reason behind this association, so we will mention the views and analyses of women on the issue. They have not used their Syrian ID cards for years. They do not need them in a besieged area where mobility is limited between certain villages. **They have all kept their IDs, yet their relation to these cards is similar to their relation to themselves in their current context, and ever since 2012 in Idlib, where belonging to a Syria larger than Idlib remains the goal and the dream.** Since this dream is not currently available, they keep their hope inside like they keep their ID cards in safe places. They have a yearning for carrying and using these cards, but where? If they go to regime territories, these cards will be the reason they get stopped at checkpoints for hours as if they are not Syrians, and in their own areas, these cards are not even recognized.

> **"Identity has changed now; we have not carried our IDs for eight years except when we would go to regime areas. Nobody carries it around here in the 'liberated' areas, everyone is free to go around as they please. If I want to go to regime areas, I would have to spend a day, two, or even three on the road, too many checkpoints, and they all want to verify your ID through the checking system." (Ibtissam, Ma`arat al-Nu`man, 52)**

Moreover, ID cards differed for some Syrian areas, and it was not enough for someone to have a Syrian ID to be able to reside in Syrian areas of displacement. Lina from Ma`arat al-Nu`man describes her sadness and anger when she was displaced to Afrin and the authorities there, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, did not acknowledge her family civil record as documentation for her daughter. She had to issue a new card for her daughter to enroll her in elementary school. Lina was shocked when she read "displaced" on the card, she said **"We are still in the same country; Afrin is in Syria. It kills me that the word displaced or refugee will be written next to my daughter's name at school. Is it possible that they cancelled us? That simply?"**[20]

On the other hand, most of the women we interviewed in Idlib said that they do not feel like they belong to Syria, even though they want to, and that all they see when they look at the map of Syria is division and the presence of strange identities like the Russians, Iranians, and others, while other women affirmed they belonged to the "Syrian Arab Republic".[21] There was a clear yearning to belong to a bigger country, under one law, a wider geography, and an entire population. These women are suffocating in Idlib; they love their city, but they never wanted their identities, mobility, and affiliations to be limited to this space.

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20   We weren't able to access more accurate information on the procedures followed by authorities in Afrin concerning identity papers in that period. We could not find references or documentations about that period.

21   "Arab" in "Syrian Arab Republic" was mentioned as some women said it. It does not represent the opinion of all participants, researchers, nor Women Now for Development.
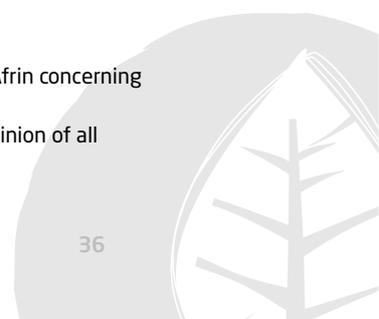
> **"Identity is to feel existent; that I am a person with rights and duties, a Syrian citizen valued and respected in her country. If I want to talk about our situation here, especially in this period, I would call it a period of no belonging to any country; I don't feel that I'm Syrian. My identity has not changed; I am still Arab, Syrian, and Muslim, this is definitely my identity, and I'm proud of it wherever I go. What has changed is my sense of belonging." (Rajaa, Ma`arat al-Nu`man, 27)**

Additionally, the participants in Idlib discussed issues associated with the inability to issue official documents for many teenagers and newborns to prove their identities, as most parents cannot access the relevant offices in regime-controlled areas. Most women have clearly expressed their concern about the issue, and that the issues of birth and marriage registration will affect many youth and children in the near future.[22] This is not a new issue, of course, as it was brought up repeatedly by many media groups, activists, and social initiatives to highlight the risk of loss of citizenship for many Syrian children, especially in Northern Syria, in addition to many other implications related to education, certification, and ownership. However, there was no actual response to this issue by international organizations nor Syrian regime institutions, and most solutions were and are still humble and temporary and are carried out by local initiatives.[23] And here, we want to highlight the almost complete absence of anything related to birth registration and official documentation from Syrian feminist initiatives and projects.

Less belonging, more questions

When we read about the situation of women in Northern Syria and especially in SDF-controlled areas, we see elaborate categorization, conclusions, and propaganda on what has happened and will happen in the area, and about belonging, separation, rights, and duties, while the image of those living there, especially women, is missing. Hence, we want to talk about women in Al-Hasakah; what do they say? How do they describe and analyze their situation, and the situation of the area? And what are their positions in this situation?

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22   For more information on the issue of identity papers for Syrians, we recommend the following link
      https://www.noonpost.com/content/21220
23   We recommend the following link: https://syriastories.net/الهوية-السورية-للنازحين-في-وطنهم

All of our interviews in Al-Hasakah were with Syrian Kurdish women, both who come from Al-Hasakah and thos e displaced there from other areas, except for one woman whom the field researcher wanted to interview due to the uniqueness of her experience. She is an Arab Christian woman who used to live in Ar-Raqqah. We wanted to meet Kurdish women to understand how they analyze their experiences, and what they say about Kurdish identity after all the battles and change of authorities and policies, especially as the only local and international discussion more common now than the religious minorities in Syria is the discussion of division of identities based on race.

The voices of Syrian men are often dominant in discussions about race and separation or unity, which is why we read and hear allegations, generalizations, and rumors about the mentality of all the residents of the Kurd-majority areas as if entire populations share this mentality. Hence, interviewing women from these areas can bring back parts of reality and the experience of residents, and might break the rigid generalizations and discussions of identities and affiliation by men in the public sphere. In one way or another, much of the women's analyses are a result of individual impressions and observations based on the lived realities, rather than rigid decisive analyses. Accordingly, the main goal here is not to prove or disprove issues, but to offer an alternative way to read identities, a way that some women are more capable of than others.

This is one of the reasons for the necessity of feminist research to create a space for the interviewees to speak from their own perspectives about the issues that concern them without being limited to presumptions. We do not claim that the interviews represent the views of all women in Al-Hasakah, but merely that they shed light on some of these views. It is worth noting that we interviewed Kurdish women in other Syrian areas as well.

All participants identified themselves as Syrians, and did not directly mention the Kurdish identity except when speaking about the 2004 incidents[24] and about the revolution, the war, and the military and political events that took place.

They spoke about losing the social bonds of family and friendship, and about the changes in the interaction dynamics in Al-Hasakah. Interaction between people varied for different affiliations, including people's position from the policies of SDF, YPG, the revolution in Syria, and so on. This has affected their sense of belonging to a group, and some women emphasized that their sense of belonging and identity are the products of close circles like family, friends, and neighbors rather than of general definitions. We want to highlight that for most interviewees, identity was associated with a location and its dynamics more than anything else.

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24   We recommend reading the report "Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria" Human Rights Watch, 2009.
        https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2009/11/26/256004

Most of these women have lost contact with their families because of the war and its repercussions; some of them settled in cities while their families settled in the rural areas, others were left alone after all their family members left the country, in addition to the loss of loved ones, especially young men, to death and disappearance.

Jaylan, from Al-Malikiyah in Al-Hasakah, said,

> **"Identity is belonging to a group of people, family, and friends, and from them, my identity is shaped. My parents and siblings have left the country, so did my cousins, meaning all those who used to be close to me have left. I feel like my identity is changing every year with the change of those around me."**

Daylan, also from Al-Malikiyah, says her new life is scattered. Social relations have changed, parents have no authority over their children, and people have stopped helping one another. She feels lost because she lost her job after 20 years of teaching. She says the reason was the replacement of the Arabic curriculum with Kurdish curriculum in Rojava, and that teaching that curriculum will transfer her as an employee to the authority of Rojava, which she and her husband refused as they do not want to be affiliated with any party. Hence, Daylan preferred to stay home, which has affected her personality and her definition of herself as a woman, since her work was an important part of her identity. And now she refuses to define herself as a homemaker as this was not her choice.

On the other hand, women who were displaced to Al-Malikiyah spoke about difficulties in adapting to the new environment, despite sharing the same ethnic or religious background. Avin, who was displaced from Afrin to Al-Malikiyah after Operation Euphrates Shield,[25] says that she does not feel comfortable in Al-Malikiyah because of the differences in traditions and dialect, she does not understand the Kurdish dialect in Al-Malikiyah well, which is making her feel embarrassed and different. Rita, who was displaced from Ar-Raqqah after she had seen all kinds of religion-based social violence and military violence following ISIS' invasion of area, feels more comfortable in Al-Malikiyah and says that SDF has treated her and her son with no discrimination. However, she has faced discrimination from some of the Christian families in the area, who repeatedly treated her and family like strangers, especially when her son proposed to several Christian women and was turned down for the same reason and for his financial situation. This discrimination is draining for Rita and her family and makes them feel that they don't belong anywhere. Avin and Rita stressed, like all the women we interviewed in Al-Hasakah, that identity and affiliation are closely related to social relations, dynamics of daily life, and integrating into the one group.

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25   Operation Euphrates Shield: A military operation led by the Turkish army with some opposition fractions on northern Syria, initiated on August 24, 2016.
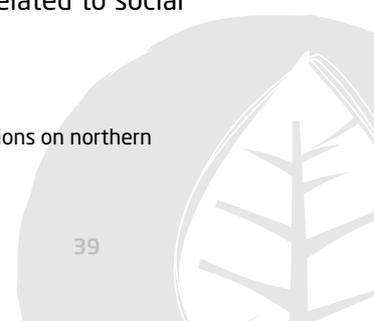
Additionally, the field researcher and one of the Kurdish women we interviewed in Turkey mentioned that they were deeply affected by the reactions of many Syrians towards the Turkish military operation in Northern Syria in October 2019.[26] **They felt a huge gap between Syrians on the basis of ethnicity; some celebrated the operation, some supported it, some remained silent, and of course some stood strongly against it.** Seeing such attitudes from close people raised many questions in both their minds about definitions related to Syria, the Syrian people, and the Syrian future. These questions were further provoked by the actions of the military forces in the area that mainly consisted, according to our field researcher Sulnar, of Syrians recruited in Turkish-backed factions, who have repeatedly abused civilians in Al-Hasakah.

26　　We recommend reading the article "Turkish military incursion in Northern Syria – Old greed threatening the future of Kurds", Published by DW.
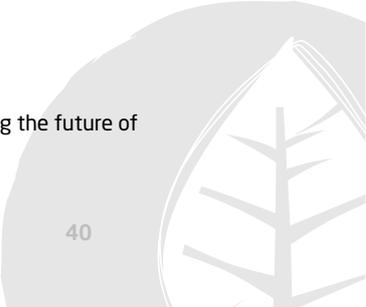
Chapter Two: Women's approaches to changes in gender roles

The change in gender roles of the women we interviewed can be seen in nearly every part of their discussions. However, we wanted to designate a chapter for women's approaches to these changes in order to reflect on the most important ideas and analyses they shared. The next chapters will include indicators and causality of changes in gender roles.

The question about changes in gender roles in Syria has been often asked and studied through different methods since 2011. Some of these methods focused on the difficult and deteriorating circumstances that affected women on all levels. These studies provide general (and mostly quantitative) information about the situation of Syrian women and address the deteriorating circumstances on the psychological, health, economic, and social levels. However, women in these studies are perceived as victims only, and these changes are not sensitively addressed from women's perspectives.[27] On the other hand, many local and international civil society organizations have studied these changes from different perspectives where women were present as responders, and not just as victims or recipients. For example, the coping mechanisms displaced women utilize to get by the difficult extreme situations they experience were presented and analyzed.[28] But these studies too remain limited to women's struggles in times of war and do not identify nor mention women's own views of these changes. However, some feminist civil organizations carried out studies to measure the changes in gender roles from women's perspectives with a sensitive approach to gender and conflict in order to guide donors and active civil entities to carry out projects and responses relevant to women's own realities and needs.29[29] In addition to many studies measuring the changes in women's roles based on specific indicators like employment, decision making, initiative, and freedom of expression and speech, where the change in gender roles was categorized as negative or positive based on these indicators.

It would take many research, books, and studies with different goals and methods to approach changes in gender roles and the relation of these roles to the structured powers established before and during the war. We also need many more readings on the relation of women or individuals in general to gender, and the gender-based hierarchical structures and power relations.[30] **We need to dive deeper into the term "gender" to realize its importance in relation with our contexts and aspirations. We must also translate this importance into realities through the examples, experiences, and analyses of Syrian women of themselves, the circles they live within, and the life they aspire.**

. . . .

27   Including "The Fate of Syrian Women During War in Regime Territories" Talal, Mustafa. Social Research Unit, Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies.

28   Including " WOMAN ALONE: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women" UNHCR, 2014.

29   Including " SHIFTING SANDS Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon" ABAAD and OXFAM, 2014.

30   "Women and War", Carol Cohn, 2017.
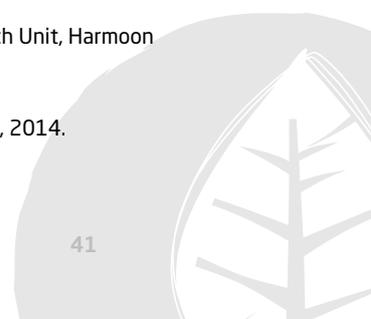
Hence, the purpose of our interviews with Syrian women was based on two open questions about the changes that women experienced and the way these changes happened. In other words, how do Syrian women describe the changes in their roles? What words do they use to describe it? Do they see this change as a mere shift between traditional gender roles of men and women? Do they consider this change, or parts of it, needed? Has this change created new definitions of women and their position in society? Has this change added to, taken away from women, or both? What was the role of women in this change? Did they enforce it, receive it, or both? Additionally, we wanted to see how some Syrian women read and analyze the sustainability of this change: do they want to consolidate it, change it, or revoke it, and why? The overall goal was to listen to what these women have to say, read their responses deeply, work with them to reach wider and more sustainable spaces where women can express themselves and their personal and social goals, and be actively involved in achieving those.

We will begin by presenting what the women said about the changes in their lives after 2011. For this part, we did not ask the women directly about the changes in the social roles based on gender nor assumed these changes, but we wanted the women to describe this change if existing and analyze it their own way. Hence, we asked questions about a description of a normal day in their lives before 2011 compared to a normal day after 2011, about the change in trust circles around women, spaces of mobility, changes in position in society and its power dynamics, about social, political, and security circumstances, and changes in social relationships, in addition to questions about their goals, hopes, and fears. Then nearly at the end of interviews, or in the middle (depending on the context), we asked a direct question about each participant's views on the change of women's roles during the conflict in Syria, and whether they categorize the impacts of this change on them as positive, negative, or both, and their views on the sustainability of this change.

In the absence of my husband, father, brother, or him

Many of the women we interviewed have lost the presence of men in their lives for different reasons. Some of them lost their husbands, sons, fathers, and/or brothers to death, detainment, disappearance, or distance like women who have left alone to Europe, Lebanon, or Turkey. The participants agree on the pain and difficulty of such loss but vary in their reaction and response towards it and how it affects them as women, their daily lives, and the way they read the present and the future and analyze the past.

Syrian Women's Readings of the Present, Future, and Associated Concepts.

42

Faten from Damascus struggles with life pressures and the increasing roles she needs to take on her own. After her husband was detained many years ago, and she received his ID as an announcement of his death from a security branch two years ago, and after all her brothers left the country, she now needs to work to provide the bare minimum for her children. Her daily life and her capacities have changed, but what she expressed the most was her exhaustion of all that is happening. She says that being in a difficult, non-supportive, and unsafe environment has both worn her out and strengthened her.

> "Like every homemaker, I used to spend my day taking care of my house, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Now in addition to these, I have to worry about work, formal paperwork, and children's schools and their issues inside and outside the house. I do not have work shifts; I work from home, I go to the city twice at least to get things for my work or to issue paperwork, and this is how the day goes in securing the basic necessities of daily life." (Faten, 32)

Faten adds that because of all that mental and physical exhaustion, she can't find joy in anything anymore. However, the circumstances she has been and still is going thorough have made her a stronger person and changed the way she perceives many things. She realizes now that she is alone, and might be alone for a long time facing all of these concerns, and that she has no choice but to go on and overlook her exhaustion.

Daylan from Al-Hasakah shares Faten's opinion. Her husband was detained in Southern Syria, and she had to return to Al-Hasakah with her children, and to take care of all the responsibilities of the house, the children, and to work to secure the basic necessities of life.

> "I used to depend on my husband for everything. He used to bring everything right to me. Even when we wanted to buy clothes for the children for Eid, I didn't know how to go to the market alone. Now, I know the carpenter, the plumber, all of these. But do you know why I toughened up and held on to life? For my children, so that I can raise them. Now you can see that I am strong and a lot in me has changed, but not when it comes to my health and emotions, many times I feel weak and go cry in my room, I don't complain to anyone."

Faten and Daylan, and some of the women living in similar circumstances to an extent, do not see what is happening as a change in their roles as women, but rather a shift of men's roles towards women[31] as a result of men's absence. This shift is not supported by work opportunities nor social support for women or their children, and it makes women responsible for everything, which constantly drains them. They do not refuse to work or to have many responsibilities. Yet, they have not asked for this change nor want it in its current shape. It was imposed on them.

Maha was displaced from Damascus to Lebanon. She lost her husband and other family members in Syria. Maha describes her current life as a life of freedom. Now she doesn't fear anyone, nor fears punishment for the choices she makes. She is capable of taking care of all issues related to her and her children, with a lot of effort but with freedom and independence. She can now establish relations with the surrounding environment in the way she sees proper. She feels like a complete human who does not need the guardianship of anyone, especially a man. Moreover, she proposed partnership between men and women in the family without the superiority of either partner as an alternative to the traditional relationship, given that participation is by choice; when the woman chooses to work, study, or look after her children, her partner must support her. Every action of each partner must be discussed and all responsibilities must be equally and fairly shared by the woman and the man, in a way that does not limit the woman's options.

> **"I used to be really annoyed by phrases like "he let you study", or "you should be grateful I let you study". These differences between men and women have always irritated me, despite not having much awareness, but I have always asked myself why is that just allowed for men? If a man studies can I say the same to him? So they can do that because I am a woman? It's my right, and at my own expenses, I've been through a lot for this. Coming back to these differences, I really hate the superiority of men looking down upon women, I hate the superiority of either. Life is sharing, it's give and take."**

Hadeer is 35 years old, she was displaced to Lebanon as well and has lost her father and husband in Syria. She stresses that the revolution in Syria should have risen against the patriarchal system in the first place, against men not allowing their wives and daughters to have any opinion, and against considering that no matter how old or experienced women are, they remain weak and need protection from a male, even when that male is a woman's 12 year old brother.

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31   Parts of the following paper address the views of some refugee women in Jordan on stereotypical roles of men and women. " We are women and men now": Intimate spaces and coping labor for Syrian women refugees in Jordan" Karen Culcasi, 2019.
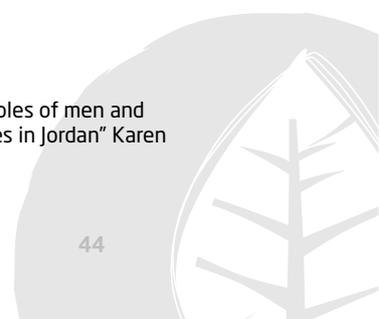
Hadeer and some other participants associated the concept of revolution to the patriarchal society. After all, they had done in the revolution, and the repercussions they faced, and after seeing their unlimited potential and creating their own spaces, they have reconsidered the power relations in society and families that define the relation between men and women, and they rejected it unless men and women treat each other equally and fairly.

> **"I will say it again, if you do not revolt against yourself and become just with others, then do not revolt against anyone. My husband has revolted and demanded freedom, while no one in the house dared to ask him how or why, and he wants to revolt against the rulers? And demands to sit at negotiation tables? At least allow negotiation in your house first."**

Inana is 41 years old, she was displaced to many areas inside and outside Syria until she arrived in a European country, and now is trying to reunite with her family. Inana wishes she had been a man in Syria to enjoy some of the rights she could not have as a woman. She even says that she was sexist, in the sense that she used to idolize men in her life because she was protected by the social position of her father, brothers, and husband. Currently, she is very proud of her femininity and sees it a source of strength, not weakness. She is capable of deciding and doing everything in her life. She does not prefer direct conflict with people and does not at all aim at cancelling men from her life. All she wants is to take and create her personal space as a woman, worker, and influencer in society, and she found out that this should not contradict with the presence and individuality of men, but that men must be happy with this change because it calls for participation, not exclusion, and mitigates the burdens assigned to them and to their role as men.

Naida, who is a refugee in Germany, shares Inana's opinion. Despite missing her family and brothers in Syria a lot, and despite her yearning and exhaustion in exile, she does not at all miss the authoritarian role her brother played in the family, and she resents the moments when men in her profession treated her solely on the basis of being a young beautiful woman, and not as an experienced colleague.

Haifa is 37 years old, and she is from Al-Hasakah. She shared her feeling of independence after all her family members left the country. She now lives with her colleagues, practices her job, and is exploring life her own way. Yet, she misses her family a lot, and she is constant fear of changes in the area's situation.[32]

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32   This interview was conducted before the Turkish Peace Spring military operation in October 2019 on Al-Hasakah and Northern Syria. Haifa's fears were from a similar scenario in particular. During the operation, she and her female friends in the media covered the situation and showed the struggle of civilians.

Clearly, different Syrian women have received and processed the absence of men and their roles in different ways. These ways differed with the difference of women's characters, the context they lived in during the war, and the role of the men in the picture; **not all men are authoritarian, nor all men partners, but the patriarchal system impose women's subordination to men, and it's left for men to decide how far they want to be involved in this role, and for women to revolt against this domination and subordination.**

However, what is certain is that the women's roles and personalities have changed not only due to the absence of men but also because of the war's multi-layered impact. Yet, from the perspective of these women who have lived the revolution and war, men's absence is the main reason for the change in their roles.

My roles have changed during the siege and war

The place and social dynamics in besieged areas differ from any other pre-existing dynamics: A lack of food, money, heating and medical materials, and everything else you could think of happening during a siege, including restricted movement to a few meters radius. In addition to a siege in the skies from continuous and arbitrary shelling. A temporary siege on the future, dreams, hopes, and fears. People's relations with themselves, their place, and those around them change. In addition to social changes that were not previously accepted nor widely demanded in the region, such as changes in the roles of women, sometimes led by women themselves and sometimes forced upon them.

Most women who have lived this siege in Damascus for over 5 years, said that the revolution, the war, and the siege allowed some women freedom that they never experienced before. Most of the women focus on the importance of the economic factor; women have become obliged to take on tasks that generate income after the absence and unemployment of men after the siege. Opinions differed on whether these new roles were imposed or whether women have asserted themselves, or both. "Rand, 39", who has been through the scourge of blockade, and has participated in several civil acts and events during that period, said that the main cause behind the change in the roles of women in Ghouta is the family's need for a new income after men lost their businesses. She added that women had plenty of potential suppressed, waiting for an opportunity to be released.

> **"When some men lost their jobs and reached the poverty line, the role of women started to change, and the uneducated woman started baking. The woman with a certificate went out to teach and support her family. In such a period, men believed in women's presence because they stood by them shoulder to shoulder, they participated in decision making, and the women in general became an important agent in society in Ghouta. She became entrusted with more responsibilities than her marital ones. Her voice is now heard. Any thought always has two sides, the state I was in did not empower nor break me, it made me feel that I was absent from plenty of things."**

She also adds that civil centers had a significant role during the siege in providing the opportunity of participation for women. The trainings they received with their feeling of contribution and efficiency boosted their self confidence in their ability to take on more roles outside their homes that they wouldn't have taken on before.

> **"When a woman attends a vocational or information-related course, she comes back dreaming. The centers were a vent of life to the trainees and the team. I was delighted with the psycho-social support that was added to the center that came late but was very positive."**

"Samar, Daraa'" agrees and affirms the change of her role during the siege and war as well as the role of her daughters. She admired the younger generation of women for being active and for wanting to acquire the greatest amount of knowledge and involvement in social events. She adds on what Samar stated and said that "women asserted themselves".

As for "Hiba" and "Majida" from Aleppo and eastern Ghouta in Damascus, they declared a revolution on the conventional female image. According to their description, they realized they were capable of decision-making inside and outside the household. From their perspective, the conventional female is who only cares about food, clothing, and house chores, burying her dreams and conforming to society in undermining her abilities. They also notably expressed that all they've been through heightened their femininity; they expanded the typical definition of feminine to include the active woman inside and outside the house, in public spaces, and every aspect affecting her life from political to economic and social. "Majida", who's been detained by one of the regime's security branches for almost a year, asserts that what she's been through and done did not eliminate her femininity but deepened her love for it and broadened her prospects of her femininity.
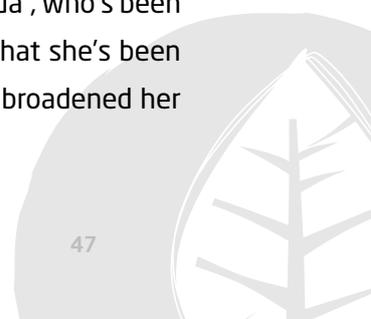
> **"It raised my responsibility and made me annihilate the image of a female that has nothing on her mind but food and drink. It's weird. In my prison, I'd cut a piece of cloth and wrap my hair with it, in order to go to the investigation while looking elegant. I didn't want to cancel my femininity even there."**

However, the circumstances of siege and war differ between different areas and different women, and all factors surrounding each woman react in a certain way which makes the generalization of these factors inapplicable even to groups of women with similar circumstances. However, generalization sometimes applies to certain areas. In Idlib and its suburbs, for example, where they have and still are witnessing all forms of warfare, from displacement to forced migration to and from Idlib, armed factions, local assemblies, civil society organizations, and fabricated or actual ceasefire, in addition to economic blockade, and warlords. To this day, while we write these words, Idlib is subject to international war by the regime and its allies in the region on one hand, and Turkey with the international community on the other. Furthermore, its people, women, men, youth, and children are forcibly migrating into the unknown.[33]

Women described their role changes in several ways. Former working women lost their jobs that were mostly with governmental institutions, universities and schools, and other departments. Yet after the revolution, the war, and the blockade, all these women embarked into new domains provided by civil organizations and initiatives. They decided to learn new skills and succeeded. In doing this, they had two goals: the first was a sense of compensation for their loss and exclusion, since their work or education, before 2011, were part of their identities and a source of pride that guarantees particular social status. After 2011, they lost their jobs along with their roles as providers as well as their income, regardless of how little it may have been. They feared elimination and exclusion because their roles were reduced to just homemakers, which was hard for them, especially after their active participation, in different roles, in the uprising calling for change in 2011. The second goal was confronting cruel economic circumstances in the region during war that made a significant number of men unemployed or subject to payroll cuts adding to the burdens of life, bombings, and internal displacement, high cost of basic materials, and elementary education.

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33   In an unpublished research by the lead researcher with SAWA for Development and Aid on the changes in gender roles for Syrian women in refugee camps in Bekaa, women talked about an increase in domestic violence against women by men after they lost their roles, especially as providers, and because civil society organizations focus on recruiting women. It's worth nothing that SAWA has responded to this research through providing job opportunities for men and through entertainment activities to break the cycle of violence generated by war and migration. However, the role of civil society organizations remains limited under the lack of resources and the unstable social and legal attitudes towards refugees. http://www.sdaid.org/
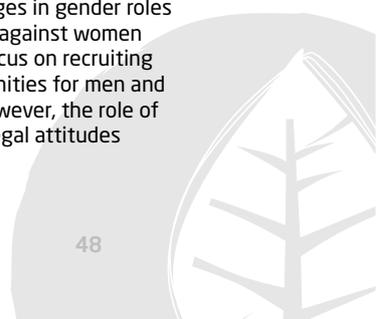
Lina's experience, in Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, highlights an important part in the rapid changes that occurred to people and areas during the war. Lina left Ma'arrat al-Nu'man in 2012 for a few months to finalize some official papers in Idlib concerning her job that she lost. Upon her return she enrolled with an organization providing long-term trainings in technology for a year to empower the youth. She was shocked by a group of young women and men from her area being able to assemble laptop parts professionally, which motivated her to overcome the technical challenges and participate in the training.

> **"I was gone for only four months, I never expected to see such progress. Everybody in the class was speaking technical terms in English and assembling laptops, while we used to dream of seeing one. We had no technical studies nor institutes. I felt oblivious as if I was living in a cave. A few months ago, I barely figured out WhatsApp messages. Honestly, I was shocked with this sudden knowledge, how our internet was strong, and everyone was speaking about Wi-Fi… After a year and a half, I'm now an employee, a trainer, and a competition to our tutors… Your strong personality is what facilitates your work, with a strong personality, you will excel in any domain you choose."**

"Rajaa" was able to find a job opportunity with a local organization that fits her experience as a teacher, where she found a fit solution to protect her from forgetting her knowledge while also guaranteeing a decent income even if it is a temporary one due to the uncertainties within the organization itself.

As for homemakers, their situation was very much worsening without them finding an opportunity to join any initiative or civil organization. **It is safe to say that the circumstances of women without professional experience are the worst.** They also suffer the loss of the social support system that forms a significant part of their lives, like parents, children, friends, neighbors and social connections and courtesies, even the simple family gathering over lunch. For some reason, these women are the ones who objected to the reverse of gender roles to the men's advantage, referring to the reliance of the man on the working woman. Now, the man stays home, and the woman looks for a job.

> **"I speak to walls. I have no neighbors left, you wouldn't find anyone, it's empty, and everyone left. What is life without my parents and neighbors? It's worthless. They all left, and I'm not hopeful that they'll return. Who would come back home if these circumstances persist? I'm looking for jobs here and there, but I didn't receive any education, so it is hard for me… It is unfair that the man can stay home with his son and women should work".**
> **(Ibtissam, Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, 52)**

"Jouri" from Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, also adds that "civil organizations and initiatives are embedding discrimination between men and women of different ages as they provide women with job opportunities, they leave men who lost their jobs behind. This reflects negatively on the woman who is now responsible for everything, while the man stays at home doing nothing." She continues, "This can have a negative and positive effect on the role of women, but it doesn't have a comprehensive reading of what is good or useless to the woman." Jouri also notes that this change in gender roles is negative especially between young girls and boys. "Why give English courses exclusively to girls? What about the boys. Shouldn't they be learning too?"

In conversations about gender roles change, women referral to civil organizations and initiatives reflects the significant impact of civil work during war. The perspectives of women varied between supportive and critical of the role and intervention of these organizations and initiatives. All participants affirmed that civil work plays a major role in capacity building and job creation. However, they criticized the discontinuity of projects and their deviation from meeting a context's needs, which might be the reason most women interviewed, specifically in Idlib, are eager to launch their own projects instead of working between organizations. Moreover, their denunciation focused on the exclusive support to women, that benefits yet burdens the woman who is already responsible for indoor and outdoor chores while the man stays home doing nothing. This input on organizations' work is not new and has been recurrent in different contexts experienced by Syrian.

Syrian Women's Readings of the Present, Future, and Associated Concepts.

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We changed, for the worse

According to women in Ar-Raqqah, their roles have worsened. Despite the diverse backgrounds of women and social, educational, and economic status, they unanimously agree on the poor condition of women in Ar-Raqqah, some of them even said that women were in a better condition under the Syrian regime's rule before 2011. Some of the participants believed that a woman in Ar-Raqqah was inequitably treated before and after the revolution, specifically during ISIS control between 2014 and 2017, as well as during the Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) control that is still in place.

Women believed that they were the main victims of ISIS. They were robbed of every right, dependent on men as a normalized or religious duty, prohibited from working except in women's clothing shops, and every woman was obliged to wear black. In addition, all women were prohibited from moving without a male relative, it did not matter whether they were teachers, engineers, or students - they had to forget about it all. Furthermore, no woman could even consider visiting her neighbor as she pleased without a male relative, all in the name of religion and the power of arm with no escape. Women were drafted to oppress other women represented by the Hisbah[34] group to monitor women in Ar-Raqqah. Analyzing women's conditions under the rule of ISIS is a separate issue that requires deep analysis from a gender perspective to understand the impact of radical principles and ideology on all walks of life, how it impacts men and women, their relationships, and the relationship of community with authority, while this research aims at focusing on analyzing lived realities based on the interviewed participants' perspectives.

> **"A car for the Hisbah used to roam the streets monitoring detaining women who were wearing black. The car carried women, and a male driver, some of these women were from Ar-Raqqah, and others were Tunisian or Moroccan migrants. While foreign women did not interfere, Arab women were threatening and taking actions. Sometimes there was flogging and battery. I tried to avoid them most of the time, I wore black, so I don't get detained or fined. To this day, we're frightened by white cars thinking it's the Hisbah. A significant number kept their face cover after the evacuation of ISIS, we didn't have that before in Ar-Raqqah. Not everyone is convinced - some of them are obliged while others find it easier than the Hijab."**
> **(Sahhab, 35)**

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34   Hisbah: Police to enforce Sharia

Limiting the role of a woman and undermining her to the point of exclusion during ISIS control continues to have the highest impact on many women. Engaging women recruited by ISIS in power and in its military force had its particular impact on women. From their perspective, the oppression of women was only perpetuated by radical men. They never expected that women in power could also oppress other women.[35]

Subsequently, the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) provided women with margins of liberty and mobility. Yet, interviewed participants unanimously denounced arming women. They did not find SDF's policies on women's freedom coming from a fundamental change in women's roles, describing it as a false representation or a misconception of freedom.

> **"I think women were objectified under ISIS, oppressed and labelled as "Awrahs" and later used as a weapon later by the SDF calling for the need to liberate women. As for the Syrian regime, it framed the roles of women away from both freedom and oppression, women were never in the spotlight neither negatively nor positively. Not one authority could give women their rights or direct them properly." (Lareen, 30)**

The statements of women, in addition to Lareen's, reflect a demand for change established by authorities. This may be attributed to various succession of authorities in the area, which smothered some women who were deprived of the freedom to express or take action, especially within ISIS period of control and the psychological traumatic and emotional impact it left on women. In addition to the great destruction and bombardment accompanying this period. As for the SDF, it was clear that most women were sometimes critical of its practices. According to them, the SDF's laws in Ar-Raqqah that are supposed to favor the interests of women, were exaggerated, a facade of freedom - especially women militarization. Women's criticism of arming a woman might be attributed to the stereotype of arms being exclusively for men, which was actually shared by a woman saying that empowering women is not training them to use arms rather developing education and vocational skills.

Women reject militarization as a bearer of any real change. Furthermore, their criticism of the current women's situation is partially related to the racial perception of some women on the current margin in Ar-Raqqah as favoring Kurdish women over Arab women. Women generally described their conditions as being in continuous aggravation, as they are the biggest victims of this manmade war.

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35   For a better understanding of women's relation to terrorism from a gender persperctive, we recommend "Women and Terrorism, a gender study" Book by Dr. Amal Krami, and Munia Arfawi, 2017.

The roles of some of us have changed

Under current SDF control, women in AL Hasakah approached their different roles in various ways. Some of them believed they were personally harmed as women, for losing their jobs and taking on more responsibilities. They consider these appearances of women's freedom in Al-Hasakah are only formalities imposed by men, not as radical change by women.

> **"Losing my job was the major change I went through. I felt like I have wasted 20 years of my life, I feel like a different person. It isn't really a failure, but deep down, I do feel like a basic conventional homemaker, and my career has ended…" (Sheilan, 47)**
> **When asked in general about the changes of women's roles in her region, she said:**
> **"this question cracks me up by the way, do you know why? Because you see on TVs that a woman accomplished, or conducted, or led something, but believe me, that woman president is a prop handled by the man himself. There is no real equality between men and women here, these are only appearances to show the world that we're civilized."**

"Sheilan" agrees with most women interviewed, saying that the change isn't fundamental nor conscious and can be revoked at any minute. Most women described it as "ostensible and fabricated". Some participants believed that the change came without planning and without gradual progress, which left many feeling like they did not gain sufficient awareness to properly receive and interact with such changes. Others believe it to be mostly unhealthy due to its association with current military authority, and how it is permitted to the ones who proved their loyalty to authorities over others. For instance, a woman was denied registration of her feminist organization due to her total rejection of its politicization.

Nonetheless, changes in Al-Hasakah cannot be projected on Syrian women in other areas. Women find it unfortunate that the breakthrough of the Syrian woman that they took pride in at the beginning of the revolution did not survive warfare and marginalization. They believe real change should be inclusive of all women in Syria.

"Shleir, 44" refers to the detachment of the Syrian feminist movement abroad as impeding this holistic change.

> **"Feminist movements outside Syria have excluded Syrian women inside the country from their endeavors. The conferences were exclusive, and participating Syrian women were assigned research tasks but excluded from decision making."**

They added that there is indeed a real change because Kurdish women in the region joined the political, military, and civil scenes. Moreover, some women referred to some new laws related to women rights, such as those criminalizing polygamy.[36] Jane, 27, shared her joy in the different reception she's receiving as a media activist, according to her, this role was not acceptable for women before, and now people genuinely refer to her as a journalist actively covering events.

It is, to a great extent, safe to say that most women in these areas have found the occurring change in their roles as both positive and negative. On the positive side, they believe that both revolution and war opened their eyes to their potentials in various public and private spheres. Women are now capable of participating in decision making and leadership roles in civil and political discourses. They also have more freedom to move even if it is limited within their area because of a siege. As for the negative side, there are additional burdens on many women due to the difficult war conditions. There is a lack of participation from men who currently tolerate this change while believing they will reclaim their position of authority when the war ends. This reality has consumed women on every level, especially the emotional level, due to the lack of support. We may note here, based on the women's approach to their realities, identities, and role change, that warfare forces social change, and measuring it on a positive or negative scale is insensitive to time and the differing experiences of women. **Furthermore, a positive utilization of the occurring social change is needed to anchor its elements with exclusive access to women on the basis of a continuous methodological process that guarantees its sustainability, which is also open to negotiation presently and when the war ends.[37]**

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36   We recommend the following publication https://snpsyria.org/?p=7391

37   For an elaborate discussion on social change in the particular context of gender migration to Lebanon and the sustain ability of this change, we recommend the research " Empowering women in Syrian refugee families in Lebanon" By Streit Aurelia, included in the paper "Women's Involvement in Peace, Security, and Transitional Practices in The Arab Word" by Friedrich Ibert and Musawa Women's Studies Center, November 2017.
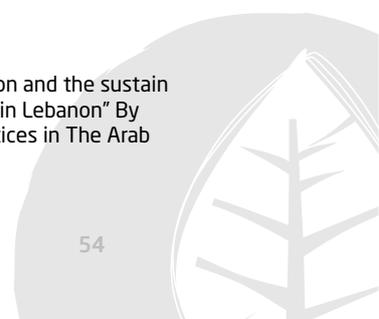
Chapter Three: Women's analses of violence, and their views on militarization and its impacts.

Kinds and categories of violence according to women

Sexual and gender based violence is a very common theme when researching women in warfare, conflict, and violence, which are significantly important topics in environments that reek with violence. When it comes to the Syrian context, we find violence rooted in every corner of everyday life even before the war. In a country that had its fair share of colonialism, and a political, social, and economic life influenced by post-colonial policies that sponsor the violence of new state governments, especially dictatorships, women fall stuck in a loop of violence tangible in everyday life.[38] However, wars and conflicts create new margins for new forms of violence like bombings, migration, loss, displacement, and famine. These cycles multiply and influence all those living within it.

The violence women endure under relatively normal circumstances - before revolutions and wars- differs in details from the one endured by men; there is violence against women from hidden and clear power structures in society and authority where women are positioned to receive and interact with different forms and levels of violence, including but not limited to; family violence, restriction to movement, societal violence, violence within associations, the lack of choice, and subordination to men; in addition to sexual, physical, verbal, economic and political violence. The list goes on the deeper we dive into every circle and relation, including women.

In times of revolution and war, violence grows in all its forms. Men suffer new forms of violence as well as women, yet the different forms exerted on women come from the way they're perceived by society and militarization for being women, and sometimes their own perceptions of themselves as women.

Violent strategies employed by regimes and authorities during war are gender biased, including threats and torture inside or outside prison, and the community's double standards towards women detainees.[39] Additional examples from the interviews will be provided later.

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38   For more information on the impact of colonial and postcolonial studies on populations and on consolidating violence, we recommend the book "Wretched of the Earth" By the psychologist and political philosopher Ibrahim Frantz Fanon.

39   We recommend reading "Words against violence" Research by Joumana Seif and Wejdan Nassif, 2020.

Despite dedicating a section in the interviews for women to elaborate on the violence they have been subject to, it was present in every word in most other sections of the interviews. In speaking of lost dreams and goals, and unattained hopes in change, in their stories of detention and torture, and the physical and emotional pain they have endured; we can also find it in their stories on migration, displacement, in their despair and anticipation to leave Syria and the scenarios of return. It is present when they describe their broken safe circles of friends and family, and the sounds of planes bombings and the regime's raids; it's in the fear that stayed with them after surviving ISIS.

It is seen in their description of their daily lives and survival tailored around the breaks and bathroom schedule of the sniper. In the second shot the sniper fired at the woman whom he had shot 15 minutes earlier with his first bullet, then she died. "I felt him hiding in the pages and words and in the voices of the interviewed women." (Nisren.H)

In the detailed stories of their detainment, there is every woman's hell. They shared emotions of fear, horror, and resilience. Their stories about the body that can't take it any more pain when the monthly period coincides with the day of their detainment. To be a woman is to be labeled as another number in the prisons and investigations, in addition to the physical, emotional, and sexual torture as if you were a machine. It is having to endure the loss of a son, a father, or a brother. It is the last moments with a loved one, the last touch, the last took, and the inability to keep your souvenirs together.

They describe forced displacement as coming from the roots of their body and soul, from a place with memories older than them; not being able to get that last look due to the airstrikes and their terror; people exploiting women's circumstances; homelessness; moving into the unknown. They also describe the ability to get back up with all the weight on their shoulders and complete the journey to being called a refugee and displaced at every step.

What was notable in the women's analysis and definitions of violence is how they uncovered each detail about their lives as women and Syrians, and the lives of men and children around them. **As various as their personalities, experiences, and contexts, they provided new definitions and impacts of violence using new uncommon lexicon.** Silence was dominant, and the conversation with women on violence was subtle, and if shared, it could have serious social consequences, especially conversations on sexual, physical, and domestic abuse.[40]

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40   We recommend reading: "The loop of violence" by Syrian Females Journalists Network. at https://www.aljumhuriya.net/

We asked the participants to share as women their definitions of violence, its forms, and its impact on every level, avoiding to direct them towards anything, nor interfere with any terminologies that could affect their personal analysis.

However, the gender based discrimination and violence of local legislations such as the personal status law, the penal code, and even some articles in the constitution,[41] and international laws was absent from the input of most women interviewed in this research. This absence may be attributed to the limited access to information since these topics were not discussed neither publicly nor under the supervision of civil agents prior 2011, and its incomprehensive introduction post 2011. This limited access to information may be due to the insignificance of these laws in the midst of chaos women are facing in Syria, whether under the rule of Syrian regime or other authorities, especially local laws, in addition to their lack of trust and hope in international laws targeted to support women.

Women's definitions of violence

The following definitions of violence were given by women. These definitions might differ or coincide in some details but reported as follows in their own words.

> **"Violence is the fear of someone. Fearing anyone is a form of violence, it is very common in our families. Giving orders and forcing someone to commit to them is violence, people should have a margin of options. Like telling a kid (I'll kill you, I will torture you), and that's me starting with a minor issue in society, not mentioning the daunting violence." (Maha, Daraya, Lebanon)**

> **"It is an assault, psychological or physical or moral harm, not necessarily physical violence or battery. Why is it when we talk about domestic violence, we only mention the beating, what about silencing the woman, oppressing her opinion and forcing her to do things against her will, isn't that also violence?" (Inana, Southern Syria, Europe)**

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41   We recommend reading "Syrian women's political participation between the core and the margin", research by Lama Kanout, published by the Syrian Feminist Lobby, 2017. In particular the violence section that elaborates on discrimination in local Syrian laws based on gender and specifically against women.

"Violence is the harm or any behavior that results in damage or negative emotions with the other person or the person him/herself as well. There are certain behaviors that are endorsed by the parties involved and sometimes even by legal contracts, specifically women's sexual matters. My idea of violence has been broadened. I now consider prejudice as a form of violence; prejudging people is violence." (Ghaytha', Damascus)

"It is difficult to define violence, I think it's basically harm. When a person hurts another person. Assaulting someone with beating, words, or threat. The entitlement of a person towards others is violence, it is a part of this system called violence." (Nassim, Damascus, Europe)

"It depends, I define violence as someone hitting or hurting another person. But there is also verbal violence, sometimes a 'word could kill a camel' as they say. Violence exists differently everywhere, a married woman might tell you that she goes against her husband's orders saying he'll slap her once or twice and get over it, it's like people have become numb. To me, violence is the abuse of power, if I'm the head of a family, I would use beating to discipline someone rather than dialogue. We see a girl abused by her family and the man her whole life and her family might even kill and bury her. I don't think there is a law that protects women, all the women in the Arab world are abused since the day they're born." (Hoor, Al Kussair, Lebanon)

"Violence is everything we're experiencing, it's the cruel words targeting us, the fear of everything, and the difficult everyday life. The violence I experience has made me careless, everything around us is violence on every level, and I don't find myself in general affected as before, it toughened me up, but I'm still shaken by some situations. Violence is anything that frightens and torments a person." (Dahab, Damascus)

> "The thing we're most accustomed to in Syria is violence. Starting with the teacher at school and transcending to wider contexts. The Syrian people are so adapted to violence that they would exert it on themselves if no one did, it's just the way we are." (Nisreen, Eastern Ghouta, Turkey)

> "There is no greater violence than the one we're suffering, the landlord foremost thinks he can cross his lines just because I'm a woman, everybody allows themselves to gossip about you when you're a working woman. The worst violence is not appreciating what you do and taking advantage of you when you're in need, I live with all forms and shades of violence, from unfaithfulness to physical and verbal abuse but I tolerate it for the kids." (Yara, Damascus)

> "Violence is the bombs, airstrikes, aircrafts, and missiles raining on us for four years. It was all fear and death under the hold of ISIS, if you survive the aircraft, it's unlikely to survive ISIS shooting you." (Rouba, Ar-Raqqah)

> "Violence is anything you fear. When sounds, illness, lack of services frightens you, it is when someone alienates you or dislikes you immediately when meeting you, or when you're forced to do something against your will." (Amal, Damascus)

> "It is any violation of your femininity, your liberty, and your basic rights." (Majida, Aleppo, Turkey)

> "Violence is a broad term. Anything you tolerate against your will is violence, any imposed detail, and forced change are an act of violence. Not choosing where you live is abuse, forcing me to leave my home is abuse. Certainly, there are other forms of violence against both women and children, but that violence that emerged in Syria affected everyone physically and psychologically; not to mention that the loss of lives and homes, and physical injuries are no longer violence they're war crimes. I personally believe that being forced to do anything is violence." (Jen, Damascus, Al-Hasakah)
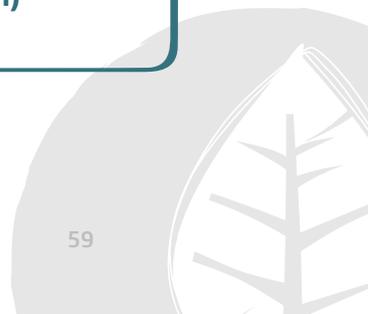
> "The early form of violence was the beating at school, and the scolding by my parents later at home for speaking Kurdish." (Heaven, Afrin, Turkey)

> "Violence is what we endured from ISIS, they stoned people and cut off a woman's breast for breastfeeding her baby in public. Women with ISIS were all large, carrying a baton to beat women who weren't abiding by Sharia' dress norms or even showing their eyes, they would also drag them to buy religiously-licit wear. Violence is when we can't afford bread, we have to make our daily living otherwise, we starve. Violence is when the regime, after being humiliated out of our town, returns to avenge." (Salam, Ar-Raqqah)

> "Violence is all of this repression we're experiencing, we are all on edge and waiting on a word to raise our voice because of all the stress repressed inside, you can't speak up in public neither negatively nor positively, you're not allowed to interfere in politics. You only watch and read, opinions are not for you, which highly affects your psyche, no one can speak up on the political, social and economic situation that is causing it, we would have all gone to therapists if we had access." (Sheilan. AL Hasakah)

> "We endure violence on a daily basis that isn't always physical, violence can also be verbal, like when someone is being offensive to you. As a girl working in the media industry, I was subject to verbal violence to the extent of harassment, in a supposedly open-minded society that respects women and their rights, which shows that some things are just not right for you." (Jaylan, Al-Hasakah)

In their definitions of violence, women analyzed its structures in the family, the community, war, and politics, as well as highlighted forms of violence generated by war, their impacts, and how they received them. In most Syrian communities, terms such as "abused' and "abuse" were not part of daily conversations before 2011 between men or women. It was unlikely to debate and analyze violence like the women did in these interviews, which is certainly attributed to the war and the oppression they face as women, and also proof of new dialogues and reasoning developing within many Syrian women about their views on violence cycles surrounding them. Aside from the direct violence of war, the women frequently mentioned emotional violence and other forms they particularly experience as women, such as controlling their actions and silencing their voices, verbal and non-verbal harassment, ethnic violence and repression, the inability to express and the violence of a life filled with responsibilities and scarce resources.
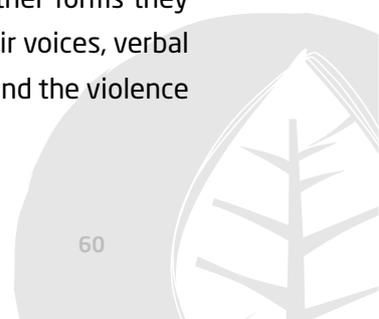
On a different level, these women categorized this violence and dedicated their conversations to specific forms of violence, using terms like "violence of nostalgia". Over 10 women from different contexts and experiences, differing in countless details, all mention the term "violence of nostalgia", they created this term and defined it adding a new vocabulary to our knowledge; in addition to categories of violence, they projected from their memories.

Categories of violence according to women

Nostalgia:

"The greatest violence I endure is the violence of nostalgia of my uncle whom we lost to shelling." (Sanaa, Ar-Raqqah)

"What can I say about the violence of nostalgia, it's fatal, it was extremely tough losing my son I still mourn and cry a lot, he was a young boy gone in a cruel way." (Maha, Daraya, Lebanon)

"I am subject to violence here in Germany, this violent nostalgia of people who were once around me. I face it and its detrimental effect every hour of everyday, sometimes I fall sick, and my husband and I wouldn't be able to cook dinner, but if we were in Syria, my mother or sister would be there. I could go to my mother's or find a cooked meal ready. When I wake up early with my son, I'd wish my mom was here to babysit him so I can go back to sleep or study, etc... There were times where I was seriously considering returning to Syria, I felt exhausted, I couldn't go on." (Rose, Lattakia, Europe)

"Honestly, you need philosophers to define violence not me. Sometimes violence can be a word or a look, my mom used to say that looking at someone with a problem is violence, and longing for people is nostalgic violence." (Noor, Daraya, Lebanon)
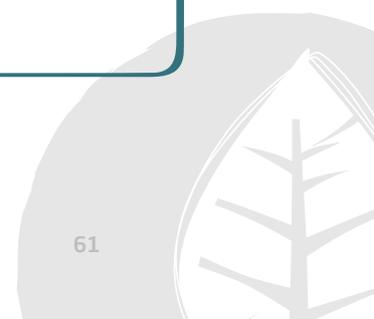
Displacement and Forced Migration:

"If my brother was not there for me, I would've been in trouble, especially when we thought back then that the regime was over, people would say now that we're migrants we need someone to preserve our honor. We were displaced, and that has become a stigma. We were 8 girls with six of us unmarried and still living with our parents, people would tell our father because he lost his house and job, he should marry us off." (Kinda, Idlib)

"Violence is not only beating the other, there is far bigger violence we exert, but it's not visible nor tangible, it's emotional. I currently consider myself in a state of abuse, I am emotionally abused. Leaving your country and being displaced is abuse, changing your goals and aspirations, being exploited are all forms of violence; Violence doesn't necessarily mean you get physically beaten by someone which might hurt you for a day or two, but emotional abuse lingers." (Rayhana, Idlib)

"I am someone who always exerts violence on myself, I overburden myself, and that's abuse. This current life in Lebanon is full of violence, taking the bus and having to hear racist conversations on Syrians is abuse and utmost racism, it stays with you because of the weakness of your position, you can't speak up and it is hard not being able to stand up for this stereotype on Syria and its people, your heart aches when you're unable to stand up for yourself and your right." (Noor, Daraya, Lebanon)

Post-Revolution and Mid-War Relationships:

"Because of our different views on the revolution, although I tried to hide it but she felt my opposition to the regime, and her being pro regime she would send us messages gloating saying that we brought it upon ourselves. Our relationship changed, even when I lost four cousins for a landmine in besieged Minbij, she was offensive in her condolences, at the end our relationship just ended." (Sarab, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqah)

"During my stay in Lattakia, I enrolled my son in school, we were all subject to bullying for coming from Ar-Raqqah. One day one of the students told my son: "You're from Ar-Raqqah, my father will put you and both your parents in jail," and it haunted him. All of these disturbing things we had to hear "you brought ISIS and foreigners into this country, if it wasn't for you they wouldn't find their way around here", apart from the violence we witnessed from ISIS, there's displacement and social class shift." (Rouba, Ar-Raqqah)

"Before the revolution, abuse was domestic and social, after the revolution violence based on political views emerged. Especially with the increasing disagreements, I had with society which used to be over traditions, but after the revolution, it became over principles, it stopped being controversial and became more intense, and I was rejected from the closest people to me." (Narjes, Lattakia, Europe)

"The forms of abuse I witnessed in public were shocking, the faces of the people naked and beaten by the whole neighborhood when incarcerated. The smoke coming from surrounding areas meant that people were burning, to witness militarization is to witness everything. On the other side was family, they would threaten to pull me out of school if they knew I was involved. I used to envy people whose families shared their opposing views of the regime, and I would envy rich people with no financial concerns because I was unable to move out to live on my own. My mom once had me sleep over at my aunt's for 3 months fearing the possibility of me being raped by ISIS, despite her being also a woman, she'd insist that I don't have to live with these details." (Itab, Southern Damascus, Europe)

"At first, I noticed a change in family ties, teenagers wouldn't listen to their parents anymore, and they would threaten to join the SDF. Even modern Kurdish songs on Kurdistan encourages murder and bloodshed, Kurdistan is a right, and I wish for a country where we can speak and write our language but not with this violence." (Sawsan, Qamishli, Europe)

Social and Domestic Violence against Women

"Violence: The first thing I could think of is when I was a little kid coming back home after a long day playing in the neighborhood, my big brother would give me a nudge, it wasn't anything serious, but I remember how frightened it made me, he was 12 years older, and I was still too young, I wasn't even in school." (Nadia, Southern Syria, Europe)

"Social violence directly affected me, I used to wish I was a boy to get over it. I'm a girl who dictated when to come and go and how to dress." (Inana, Southern Syria, Europe)

"The first thing that comes to mind on violence is the silencing, I wasn't subject to physical abuse, I wasn't beaten or cursed, but my brothers and later my husband used to say "stay out of matters that are bigger than you. So, if you're an engineer you're still a woman, you still wouldn't understand" this is the worst violence I tolerated. I don't like being silenced, I love sharing my opinion and arguing even if it was wrong." (Lareen, Ar-Raqqah)

"Violence is horrid, although we're at a time where physical abuse against women is denounced, we keep seeing men beating their women. Everything is abuse, sometimes abuse is social, when my husband prevents me from speaking in front of guests because he's the man with the right to express his opinion, that's bigger than being beaten." (Aveen, Afrin)

"It's the violence my family and community exerted on me for loving a guy from a different religion, which made me leave my parents' house. Why can't I be with the person I chose and my family at the same time?" (Rose, Europe)
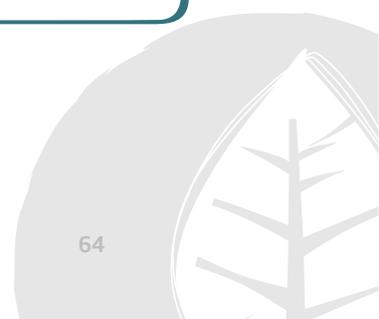
"Maybe the one that I carry in me that affected me the most is my mother's abuse; she was very violent. It negatively affected me, I still can't hold or kiss my mother, and I have trouble hugging anyone. There was social violence as well because of my father's detainment, people used to look down on us, and we felt rejected; I believe my mother was abusive because she was taking out her feeling of oppression and frustration on me, my father's detainment the heavy burden and society's view frustrated her, and I was the punching bag… After my divorce, I was subject to all forms of violence you could think of, from society and my divorcee constantly threatening me to take my daughter from me, as well as the law that deprived me from my rights. All forms of violence against women exist in Syria that shape their lives from birth to death, there is a price to everything we do, and we are always the ones fighting for nothing because at the end of the day, we're the bad guys to society and we have to pay the price." (Rawan, Lattakia, Lattakia)

Warfare: Militarization, Siege, and bombardment

"Bombings paralyzed me, I used to dream of getting to the other side of Eastern Ghouta, and I never could. I might return to either the rubble of our old house or to one of my parents' dead… I'm traumatized, and it affected my parents because I wouldn't let them leave the house and insist on buying essentials myself since I'm not responsible for anyone (I have no kids). I wouldn't let my mother take my nieces to school and would rush and bring back my niece if I even hear the sound of an aircraft far away. My niece would say that I'm denying her education, they don't understand what I'm going through." (Rand, Eastern Ghouta, Turkey)

"My son opened the fridge at midnight for water and got hit with a DShK that blew up the fridge and freezer, and they kept shooting everywhere. We fled the house at 2 am, isn't that also violence?" (Samar, Southern Damascus, Turkey)

"People have lost mercy, sometimes I'd have to borrow water or sugar, but no one would lend me, which to me is violence because they know they could die at any moment but refuse to give. I used to cry sometimes while eating because I know there are people starving. At the same time, some people had it all, chicken, gas… Factions used to hide food, one time, people discovered a stash and raided it. We had everything, but they hid it, claiming it for the orphans but actually took it to their own families, they would give us barley and damaged food and take the rest. I wasn't sure who was holding us, the regime, or the factions?" (Lama, Eastern Ghouta, Turkey)

"Airstrike is violence, it used to break me. When a missile used to hit, I'd hide in the corner of our living room, shaking uncontrollably, feeling like any house was safer than ours. The person responsible for helping us out of ISIS and SDF's territories used embezzlement and took too much money on each person to get us out." (Sanaa, Ar-Raqqah)

"All these aircrafts are violence. We were treated like terrorists despite us dissociated from both parties. Children are frightened, and all they talk about is aircrafts and missiles, this is violence and harm. Kids now are complaining like adults, dealing with back pain, headache, and nervous issues. Children wouldn't hurt so much back in the day, but now they're all getting sick or disabled at a very young age which is because of the violence we're experiencing, we can't sleep without worrying about airstrikes or dreaming of one, same goes for the kids. Life has become challenging and terrifying, we're not safe anymore." (Ibtissam, Idlib)

> "Children witnessing murder and missiles became more violent, their games focus on attacking aircrafts or each other, and the market is filled with violent toys: tanks, guns, and rifles. During Eid, the boys would ask for harmful toy guns. Kids imitate what they see, and they're watching massacres on mobiles, we don't want our kids to become violent, we want them busy with school and mosques; they're still attending school but not learning anything, and they take their tests literally under aircrafts leaving us worried sick every time they leave." (Lina, Idlib)

> "I wouldn't say violence on women because men also were subject to it, a checkpoint once took a man's daughter at a checkpoint and another one's wife was harassed and he couldn't do anything about it, that violence was heavy on men. I was once wanted at a checkpoint but my family helped me escape. The famine I witnessed in Madaya was painful, I once asked a woman why she would have her daughter gather twigs to boil water when there's no food, "I'm distracting her so she falls asleep" she replied. Not to mention airstrikes and living in the ruble." (Amani, Zabadani, Lebanon)

Women's views on militarization

When speaking of militarization, the women shared views and analysis from the core of their own experiences, they elaborated on their views on militarization and the reasons behind them avoiding typical views of women being always against militarization or that they are receivers who don't get involved or victimized by militarization. Surely women are always affected by militarization and violence, and they have reflected on it in several interviews; clearly each woman witnessed the beginning of militarization, shaped her view on it, and dealt with its repercussions. They explained the way it affected them, their social connections, the place and the children. They replaced the rigidity of labels with the flexibility of analysis that describes reality concluding, critiquing and complementing its different aspects. There are several personal reevaluations of views in endorsing and opposing militarization, in addition to a critical eye that analyzed reasons behind militarizing the revolution in particular and its repercussions. Some believe in the inevitable militarization of the revolution and others are convinced that the revolution was killed by the use of arms.
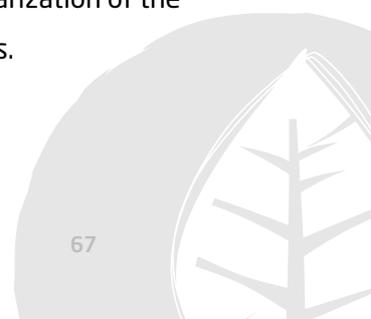
Interviewed women shared different reasons behind militarizing the revolution after its peaceful start. Some of them stressed that it was only the result of the regime's violence that pushed a peaceful revolution into using arms, others added links to foreign endorsements and some areas' firsthand use of arms against the regime. In addition to reasons, they shared controversy, debates and views on the rebels' use of arms at the time and the impact of this militarization on youths, women and children.

Nadia, from southern Damascus, stated that the Syrian regime utilized all its means to push the revolution into militarization. The inevitable outcome of the regime's violence from live ammo to shelling, bombing, detainments, slaughter and assassinations, is people using arms to defend themselves. Nour partially shares her view on the regime pushing people and youth to use arms, adding the mistake of young men responding to that instigation. Nour recalls an argument with her younger brother when he decided to join the FSA in defending Daraya, she asked him not to get carried away with uneducated guys who only find defense in guns, to which her brother responds questioning the source of influence on these young men if she refuses that college graduates join them, "shall we leave them on their own using arms and later hold them accountable?" to which she couldn't respond. There is much controversy on the youth's use of arms in the face of the regime's military machine, and various unanswered questions that violate the various principles of people in times of peace. **With the interviewees' input we return to these controversial existential questions that are hard to explain or justify and now summed up in statements such "I'm against or with the use of arms", ignoring crucial details widely endured by the people. Militarizing the revolution was not a direct decision but a step taken by men and not women, hence, what are the views of women? And how did they handle it with its repercussions?**

Nasseem from Damascus, in her personal re-evaluation of her past positions on the use of arm and militarizing the revolution, sees the regime as an instigator to the youth's use of arm but also blames herself and those around her for their abstinence from using arms, and their silence on the rebels' violations.

> **"We used to condemn the regime for what we are doing now, justifying violations as individual misconduct, that the rebels are defending themselves. I don't mind self-defense, but it wasn't the case, sometimes they would initiate strikes but that didn't stop us and now we live with the consequences of militarization."**
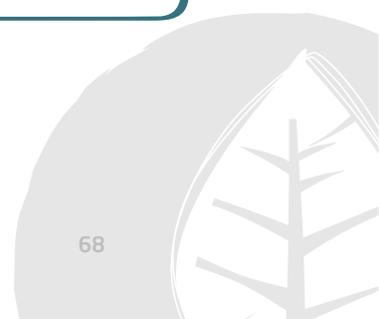
In another introspection, Ghaythaa from Damascus says she wavered between opposing and supporting militarizing the revolution in the beginning. Generally, she is against the use of arm, but the violence, tyranny and degradation of the regime left her no choice but to reconsider the use of arm and actually contemplate personally engaging in it. With a regime that is using shelling and airstrikes she found relief and media work useless, she adds that the greater violence that resulted from the counter use of arms against the regime changed her mind.

While some interviewees describe their opposition of militarization in the beginning was due to their awareness of the greater violence that will result, certain details at certain phases convinced them of the crucial need to use arms. Houre from Qussair, initially refused the use of arms, but the invasion of neighboring villages by militias[42] and what followed from slaughter and torture, frightened her and convinced her that militarization was inevitable and crucial. However, the use of arm doesn't stop at self-defense, deaths will fall on both sides even if disproportionately, and it makes a great argument for airstrikes and shelling.

Several women shared unyielding views opposing militarization of both parties since the beginning, and the organization of rebels into funded armed factions was more shocking than the regime's army. They stressed that militarization only generates destruction, and that there is deep resentment towards it because it cost them loved ones, husbands, brothers and sons.

Initially some women fully supported the FSA considering the use of arms was only ostensibly a voluntary decision but in reality, it was enforced. However, with the rise of extreme Islamic discourse, Al-Nusra Front, and finally ISIS, their position changed radically against militarization and the use of arms. On another note, some participants attribute militarization to foreign political funding that controlled the ideologies of the factions and divided them, considering the increasing number of victims on a daily basis, they don't see the regime's violence as the main instigator rather the international and regional intervention that endorsed the use of arms whether subtly or publicly.

In Contrast, some women changed from refusing militarization to supporting it due to the unprecedented violence by the regime and its allies. A peaceful revolution resisting against an oppressive regime like the Syrian one is too romantic, according to them.

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42   The participant is talking about National Defense Forces affiliated with the Syrian regime, who as she said are the ones who broke into houses and did horrors to the residents, and that it wasn't the Syrian army soldiers.

Nevertheless, shaping a view on militarization was challenging for some women. Although they believe that militarization took a more bloody direction weighing down civilians, the struggle lies in the particularity of the situation. On one hand, they're against the use of arms in general, but the violence that was exerted particularly by the regime has pushed people to militarize, it seems out of context to blame the rebels alone for the militarization of the revolution. This paradox appears in the position of women in Damascus from the Syrian army's soldiers, while these soldiers might be victims who were forced to join the army, they are capable of killing civilians on command.

These various analyses thoroughly describe internal and external dispute over militarizing the revolution and document its milestones and evolution. Yet as predicted in most revolutions and wars, the militarization in Syria was the men's decision, which highlights the rooted tailored gender roles in times of war and peace; Men protect honor and land, their women and country, while women support the men and endure the implications of war that will persist for years. Simultaneously, we find men who were forced into taking this role otherwise they would be labeled as traitors or cowards by a patriarchal society where manhood is conditioned to patriotism which essence is bearing arms to defend the country and justice.

How did militarization affect women?

All women were negatively affected by militarization, it limited their mobility access and actions, it cost them loved ones, families, homes, and memories; in addition to eradicating their demands for freedom, justice and dignity.

In Damascus, women described the ominous life with intensive military presence in public spaces, and the verbal abuse and harassment they face at checkpoints. However, they believed they experience attenuated forms of violence compared to men's limited mobility to avoid detainment or conscription at these same checkpoints.

> **"This intensive presence of military costume makes you feel and adapt to a dull life, the feeling of instability, checkpoints, and someone from a brick room bossing you based on your privileges, appearance, or destination."**
> **(Ghaythaa)**

Ghaythaa here refers to sectarian affiliations or connections to high status officials and families who have strong relationships with the government. As for appearance, specifically the veil (hijab),

she believes that scrutiny on veiled women is attributed to the religious affiliation of the hijab to opposition, especially if they come from areas that revolted against the regime. This highlights the religious and geographical discrimination against particular women.

> **"Check points and weapons made me reroute several times due to the harassment and chase in narrow allies, how I once had to shout at one of them after he managed to corner me; or when I was waiting for the bus, and they would raise their arms in my face for no reason just to prevent me from carrying on what I was doing, I also had to change my route several times while delivering medication between regime or opposition checkpoints, and shelling. I was terrified." (Nadia, Damascus)**

Meanwhile, in besieged areas, the militarization of the regime and allies, and blockade in besieged areas directly affected women, many have lost loved ones or friends. Additionally, military siege prevented them from education, especially college education, due to the inability to attend a university that is usually in the city. It prevented them from any daily activity that demanded mobility such as work, shopping, and family or friends' visits, in addition to certain hospitals and clinics that offer specific medical services.

Furthermore, armed factions, specifically Islamic, interfered in the details of civil work in certain besieged areas like eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus, especially when it's led by women. The factions would meddle with the content of some workshop materials to the extent of cancelling a workshop on the reproductive health of women that was ruled immoral.

Women's sufferings continue in other areas. Women in Ar-Raqqah endured all forms of land and air militarization, marginalization, loss and insecurity.

> **"I couldn't pursue my college degree because of conflicts, bombings and siege in Deir ez-Zur. I was once sitting for an exam at school when the bombing started, I got locked up there for two hours. We also suffered from ISIS, my brother and cousin were checking my uncle's house where a landmine was planted at the entrance by ISIS, it killed my cousin while my brother lost his leg, he's 13 years old, my mom takes care of him." (Salam)**

Participants from Ar-Raqqah also mention the way women were deprived from any action or social contribution, especially during ISIS control. Moreover, women were forced to marry men of the organization, sometimes with the family's consent.

As for Al Qamishli and Al-Hasakah regions, the impact of militarization was on the freedom of movement of women and girls in particular, which generally affected their lifestyle, depriving them of past acceptable rights. Previously rare cases such as early marriage increased in these areas,[43] according to participants, mainly due to the parents' concerns of the future security and economic situation of the region.

> "Women were more affected than men, from the way they dress to scheduled movement, parents became concerned that some of them took their daughters out of school. Early marriage witnessed an increase in Turkey and Kurdistan of girls between the ages of 15 and 16 out of fear and economic deterioration. In the last three years, parents were afraid they would die and leave their daughters uncared for." (Sawsan)

Correspondingly, concerns of early and forced marriage appeared, one participant referred to the abuse of military power by high ranking wealthy faction members who would force fathers into marrying off their daughters. In addition to cases of insecurity and deteriorating economy of many families.

Women from Hasakah and Ar-Raqqah revealed the adversity of life under military authorization. Militarizing women made it more challenging, some participants even stressed that women shouldn't bear arms to avoid affecting her femininity. Others found that militarized women were crueler than supportive of other women. Some of the women interviewed noted that young women and men were using the military membership authority when in dispute with their parents to impose their positions and views.

Some women, from different areas, especially the diaspora, shared the shift in their perception of a soldier who is killing the country and its people whom he was supposed to protect. They used to have respect for the army, unlike security agents whom they dreaded, but now they carry the resentment of any sign of military into their countries of migration, seeing even a police officer would terrify them to the extent of physically abandoning the scene.

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43   We do not mean here that early marriage is a phenomenon in Al-Hasakah and Qamishli only. But it was particularly mentioned by women in these areas and in Idlib, while it was not brought up by women in other areas.

Thus, wherever militarization rules, social relations reach an epitome of violence that becomes the norm of daily life. Women interviewed painted a picture of the impacts of violence on women in particular. Surely with another research that focuses on one context with less intersections, aiming to study the infiltration of militarization and violence into the depth of life and their impact on the present and future of women, we will find deeper analyses reflecting the subtle and visible repercussions of militarization on women, their environments and everyday lives.

Although in our research that aims at hearing the voices and views of Syrian women from different contexts, experiences, and perceptions to create a deep overview of the differences and similarities, in the hopes of creating a foundation to a starting point for us Syrian women who were more divided and excluded during war. **The concern of the impact of militarization on children was shared among all women from all areas.** Psychological and physical illnesses will invade children, due to fear and insecurity, the sounds of war machines everywhere around them, and the violent scenes they were and continue to be exposed to. In addition to a violent language that is now rooted in them, and the boys playing murder and abduction and torture games, as well as the early desire to bear arms with the absence of proper education and entertainment activities. A life where children have no source of joy, color, or childhood. A fear from and for adolescent boys was born since some of them were given military authority and weapons over other people under different ruling parties. In a horizon lacking a future with education, profession, or teenage love stories, with no aspirations or goals, bearing arms is the only money and power generator.

Chapter Four: The concepts of justice and peace, and women's readings of return scenarios to Syria.

What is the meaning of justice and peace?

Interviewed women argued for different concepts of justice and peace that they applied to Syria's future based on the current complexities and their various contexts, as well as the sheer scale of the calamities that continue to occur on an individual and collective level, such as the destruction of entire sectors like education health and other services. And based on their personal experiences as women that they still endure in the current war.

Their views aligned on the timeline needed to set sustainable discourse for justice and peace in Syria, which, according to them, requires at least 20 years if we act now. There is a comprehensive understanding of the size of social gaps between proponents and opponents of the regime, the loss and detainment, and sometimes demographic shifts. This adds to the grudges and vengeance and fear of history repeating itself, as well as the growing gaps between ethnicities and races, especially between Arabs and Kurds. Not to mention the total destruction of infrastructure, homes, and government departments, and the challenging economic circumstances, lack of stable employment opportunities, and generations without primary education, boys and young men were militarized, underage girls were married off, and women and youth experiences and businesses were lost.

Additionally, areas were divided into different governments (areas under the regime's rule, areas dominated by armed opposition forces, and others under the rule of the SDF). The women interviewed don't see one whole Syria, but rather Syrian areas divided into local authorities due to international interventions from Russia, the United States, Iran, and Turkey, and other concealed endorsements from other states. Correspondingly, the ongoing displacement and migration, affect 920,000 Syrians inside Syria, and 6.5 million abroad, according to the Human Rights Watch's 2018 report.[44] These numbers have certainly been exacerbated in 2019, because of the continuous bombing by the regime and its allies on certain areas like Idlib (persisting to this day) and the Turkish strike in November of the same year on the northern east Syria (Al-Hasakah and Al Qamishli) that coincided with the United States' administration decision to withdraw its troops from respective cities in addition to Ar-Raqqah and Deir El Zor.

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44   https://www.hrw.org/ar/world-report/2019/country-chapters/325524

> **The interviewees unanimously agreed that the first crucial step to any real action on justice and peace is to end the war in a military sense, to have ceasefires, blockades, and bombings. Perceptions and views varied on the justice and peace discourse for Syria, and future practical steps.**

Some women look at justice and peace as two theoretical concepts invented by western policy makers to distract and dominate nations in conflict. These women even went further, saying that after all that has happened in Syria, notions such as human rights, justice, and peace that are regularly part of international debates are a joke, describing them as "loose, rhetoric, romantic and delusional". Some argued that justice is only "divine, God-given and heavenly" while others recommended avoiding these terms, not waiting for external powers to implement them, instead, start making "small victories" with local initiatives that alleviate tension, grudge, and violence in small communities. Such activities can include the family, neighborhood, and province, and involve forming discussion groups for women and youth, in addition to finding kids-oriented activities on coexistence and peace to treat post war psychological effects, while simultaneously waiting for international decisions and justice scenarios predicted in Syria.

Some women believe that justice and peace begin with disarming all conflicting parties, including dismantling the current Syrian state departments and institutions, i.e. security, army, and the head of the system, while also starting a political transition phase out of the existing regime and authorities. Others find the process towards an inclusive ruling system of all Syrian areas post military war as currently improbable and unrealistic. Areas have been divided, and they think it best that at the early stages after the war that self-governance and economic development of people are supported while working towards eliminating the effects of war, establishing security and peace, and working on the repatriation of the displaced and refugees who desire to return to Syria. This would be in addition to providing housing and services to people while simultaneously negotiating strategies to a wholesome system between these independent governorates within Syria.

In spite of the diverse and differing mechanisms of practice towards justice and peace, we find compatibility in two parallel courses - a local Syrian one and another international one - since the international presence in Syria and military interventions should be taken into consideration.

On another note, women have discussed transitional justice finding some of its principles, demonstrated in other countries, applicable to the Syrian context.[45]First, they underlined accountability of decision makers who committed war crimes. Believing that accountability of the regime's soldiers or opposition factions is implausible, they argue that it should be done publicly with access to public monitoring. Second, they shared suggestions that national judicial associations manage these trials with international agencies monitoring the collection of evidence and trials, and others with hybrid national-international trials.

It is noteworthy to refer here to one of the women's recommendation in details:

> **"There should be a judicial body overseeing impartial trials, following international laws standards with international supervision similar to Rwanda, where perpetrators confront the victims asking for forgiveness or jail. I am against execution. Changing the head of the system won't change a thing. Militias should be dismantled from the national defense forces to the opposition to later unite under one national army, in addition to separating militarization from civil spheres and restricting intelligence to foreign threats while internal issues are managed by the police.A temporary transitional body should be founded to draft a constitution that will be voted on by the people, it could include international agencies for a limited period. Some people say that the situation is better in areas under the Russian military police hold, personally as an anti-globalization person I question the work of the UN and the Security Council. Finally, a law prevents the transitional body from holding any position for at least 10 years after they accomplish their mission. Their sole purpose would be saving the country." (Rabiah, Damascus)**

Other views highlighted forgiveness and confessions of perpetrators and reparation for the Syrian people. They believe that starting with the before mentioned steps would significantly contribute in the de-escalation and in avoiding individual or collective vengeance. This, they argue, would create a foundation for fair trials that in their opinion will take a long time. As for reparation, it will help create a temporary margin of particular stability and economic empowerment.

Participants clarified that justice and peace should start with individuals and their families, focusing on gender justice in rights and obligations within one family. It also starts with initiatives working on alleviating the repressed violence that grew within the family and area during warfare. In addition to amending several articles in the constitution and local laws that discriminates in rights and obligations for men over women, aiming at founding a supportive legal environment to achieve justice.

....
45   We recommend reading "Transitional Justice in Syria" A book by Dawlay and No Peace Without Justice.
        Can be found online at www.dawlaty.org
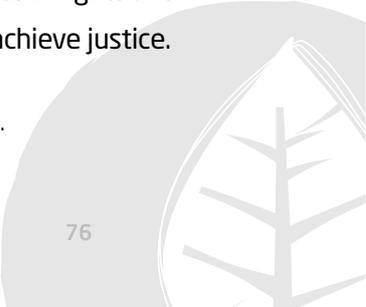
The importance of separating religion from state was addressed by some interviewees, believing in its contribution towards finding a comprehensive law over everyone from different religions and sects. They add that such a change is impossible without providing job opportunities, ending corruption and patronage - to take qualifications into consideration instead of political, religious, regional and other affiliations. To do so, there has to be strict local laws that penalize all forms of corruption.

What comes first: justice, peace, or something else?

The women's views and approaches varied on which courses of justice or peace should be applied first and were divided into three categories:

The first category believes in the course of peace first followed by justice, given that justice in an absolute sense doesn't exist prior to or post war. By peace they meant the end of war, missiles and conflict, the retreat of foreign troops outside of Syria and the disarming of all conflicting parties. Accordingly, there is a need to focus on alleviating psychological post war effects, eliminate destruction and re-activate education and healthcare while also solving poverty and unemployment. Justice starts afterwards – as mentioned – including accountability, forgiveness, confessions and political transition. The women stressed that peace comes first to guarantee an efficient foundation to any later measures of justice.

The second category finds justice preceding gradual peace. The most important points on justice were: the release of detainees, and clarification on the fate of the disappeared, as well as the accountability of decision makers from all parties. They believe in the importance of justice to reassure the Syrian people that these events won't happen again, that justice, even the bare minimum of it, that has been gone for several years will be served. In the words of one of the women: "Martyrs won't comeback, the detainees will never forget the pain and suffering, but achieving some form of justice can alleviate psychological and social effects on a significant number of Syrians."

Lastly, the third category believes in theoretically separating between justice and peace as concepts. Who decides what is justice or what is peace? In their opinion, the concepts are interdependent and complementary, and the greater goal is to establish security, guaranteeing non-recurrence as well as solving economic instability far from corruption. Some women said that all we need is a state that protects us and a fair system of laws. People are not responsible to achieve justice and peace, but agencies, bodies and leaders representing these people should solve it instead and establish peace and justice with the public's monitoring through civil associations.
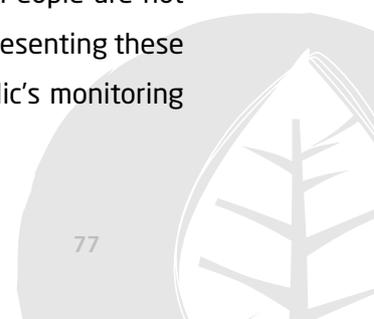
The obstacles towards justice and peace

Interviewed women agreed on the fact that several obstacles prevent the establishment of actual peace and justice in Syria, that there are substantial files open that don't end with ending war in its military sense. These obstacles are what keeps them from initiating any actual resolution to peace in Syria.

The following are the highlights of the women's inputs:

1. The transition of the Syrian case to an international context several years ago. There is absolute belief by these women that the solution to the Syrian dilemma is now clearly up to the states that sustained this war through military and political interventions. This war will not end unless there are concealed or public agreements primarily between the United States and Russia, then Turkey with Iran, over power areas, domination and resources in Syria.

2. The formality of negotiations and international policies founded several years ago to resolve the Syrian crisis. Women mentioned the Geneva negotiations, finding it unsuccessful, unfinished and rigid. Rigidity that is inconsistent with the contexts of war. These negotiations did not reach a conclusion relevant to Syria, such as a political decision to stop the shelling or declare certain no arms areas, or even solving the issue of detention and forced disappearance and displacement inside Syria. The women also highlighted the inefficiency of all international laws, concerning conflicts, and its tools including the International Criminal Court in the course of justice, and the Security Council where Russia and China use the veto right in most of its resolutions that push towards reducing the repercussions of war.

3. Some women drew attention to the problematic concept of justice in Syria. They described conversations about justice as one-sided; voicing those who oppose the regime, concerned about other parties' perceptions on justice. The perception of justice of the parents of Syrian army soldiers who died or were wounded differs from those who oppose the regime and who lost homes, lands, lives, children and future. The amount of loss and persistence differ to each party, even neutral ones. One woman shared her fear that justice would be to the victor (Nasseem, 28, Europe) "Speaking on Syria, justice is unattainable because when someone wins, they will lead with their own definition of justice, and that is far from justice." Indeed, if circumstances persist the next is certainly military, and justice might be served by the military victorious.

4. The demographic change in Syria due to forced displacement by the regime and its allies in several areas (Daraa, Idlib, certain areas of rural Damascus and Aleppo), for the past few years with the presence of other armed groups in Syrian territories. In addition to internal and external displacement and asylum to several countries, the destruction or occupation of homes and freezing assets of publicly opposing Syrians, and complicating the process of ownership proof with laws such as the 10th article implemented in 2018 that mandates the creation of organized areas all over Syria specialized for reconstruction.[46] This currently complicates the establishment of justice or peace in the Syrian community.

5. The repatriation of displaced and refugee Syrians elaborated later in the research, and definitions of safe and voluntary return to Syria. Many women stressed that international, especially political, bodies are well aware that the return of most displaced Syrians depends, for the most part, on the situation of the current Syrian regime and its agencies and laws, particularly conscription and detainment of opposite political views. The lack of resolution is an international effort to serve political agendas.

The return to Syria

We asked women living in Syria and others who were forced to leave on their perceptions of conditions that need to be provided for the people desiring to return to Syria, the time of return and the obstacles preventing it.

Since the interviewed women come from different contexts inside and outside Syria, the answers were as various as their experiences and hopes. Hence our division to their input on return between the women living in Syria and those abroad.

It is noteworthy that the issue of return, from our perspective, is one of the most contentious ones, particularly due to the political security and livelihood conditions preventing Syrians from coming back. In addition to illegal forced deportation cases that happened in Turkey, who did not abide to the conditions of safe and voluntary return[47] in 2019 of Syrians from Idlib; and the continuous deportation of Syrians displaced in Lebanon, and the propaganda of safe zones promoting the ability of some families to return that was instigated by official agencies in Lebanon and aided by Syrian official agencies of the regime. These deportations were certainly forced and far from safe, voluntary, or legal.[48]

Not to mention changes in European countries' decisions, and some discourses prevailing in the media concerning Syrian refugees and "war zones" in Syria, specifically adopted by right-wing European parties.

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46   For details on the law and its procedures, you can find it at HRW website https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2018/05/29/318466

47   English version of IRC report on the issue https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR4411022019ENGLISH.pdf

48   We recommend reading "Return and the concerns of Syrian refugees", a report by SAWA for Development and Aid, 2019.
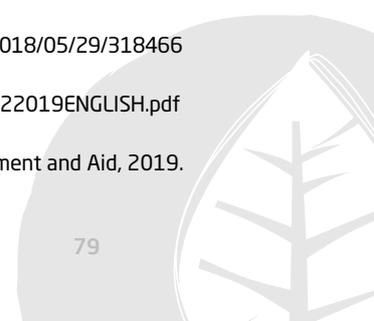
The views of women residing in Syria on return

Perceptions of most women living in Idlib, Damascus, Ar-Raqqah and AL Hasakah is that most migrating Syrians, especially in Europe, have no desire to return for the next ten years. They built these expectations on the reality of Syrian areas that includes destruction and poverty, challenging access to job opportunities, in Ar-Raqqah for example. Many Syrians who took refuge in Europe several years ago planned for a stable life there.

For example, young women and men studying abroad, families giving birth and enrolling children in schools and others who found a job opportunity will never consider coming back. Women don't even recommend them to return.

> **"No one is coming back with this current situation. No one will return. The problem is that the longer this crisis persists, the tighter they'll be attached to the countries abroad. We always say that if it was a year or two, most people would return, but it's been 8 and 9 years, people have built lives and adapted to certain lifestyles. They feel human (because they have rights there)." (Shaylan, AL Hasakah)**

Adding other reasons preventing the return of Syrians, including security. There are concerns of political shift in the region (which occurred during this research: the American troops' partial retreat and the Turkish strikes in November 2019), in addition to laws imposed by the SDF of conscripting youth in areas under their hold.

> **"My brothers are currently in Turkey and I never advise them to return under these circumstances. They are providers for their families and there are no job opportunities, but there is a conscription imposed by the SDF." (Lareen, Ar-Raqqah)**

Some participants added that the freedom, democracy and stability found in European countries compared to the current situation in Syria will make it challenging to return in the near future, except for visits or "tourism" or to invest in projects in the country. As for a total sense of stability, it is particularly hard for the youth to reach it. People contacting their relatives abroad note that the latter's wishes of stability and return is restricted to nostalgia and wishes far from reality.
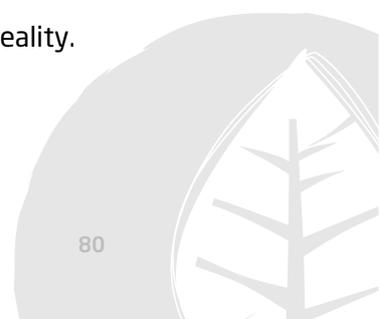
In Idlib, most women believe that Syrians returning is improbable. They argued so because of bombings and insecurity, and the unstable political scene in the region.

> **"Of course, I'm not hopeful of Syrians returning, especially now with the current situation. They definitely won't return. We don't even feel like we have a land to call home. Despite our wish for a reunion, there is nothing for them to return to after the stability and safety provided there."**
> **(Kinda, Idleb)**

On the other hand, some women were optimistic that most Syrians who left will return because no one left voluntarily, that this country means so much to Syrians, that war shall end, and that political resolution shall start for anyone to consider returning to Syria.

The views of women residing outside Syria on return

Participants in Lebanon addressed return from different angles, and each woman's opinion covered many issues and details. Hence, we will present their opinions in their own words and discuss the most important points in return.

Currently, return is not an option. To not return is a political statement, justice must be achieved before return.

> **"Return for me is not an option at all currently. Some people say that those with no security issues should return. This in my opinion is renormalization with the regime. Should we just forget everything that happened and all those who died and simply build a house over the rubble? I believe that all the pressure towards refugees is driven by the regime so that it can say that the war is over, people have returned, and the regime defeated terrorism. If we stay abroad, the least we can do is keep the host communities aware that there are mistakes in Syria that need to be corrected and a regime that must be removed. I have no intention of returning. A while ago they asked me if I would return and settle my situation if I was forced to. I said no. I would never think of that, I always say that there is blood between me and the regime, and that is not easy to forget. Not only the blood of the people I have lost, but of the thousands of martyrs and detainees."**
> **(Noor, Lebanon)**

Return is our right, but it must be safe, voluntarily, and for everyone

"It's our right to return, but there are many conditions; return is conditioned on the security, political, and economic situation - most importantly security. There must be no more conscription and constant violations, the violators themselves must no longer exist. Without that, a safe return is difficult. I looked briefly at the file of return, and most returnees are women, children, and elderly. Hence, I don't think there's an actual return, the actual return is the return of Syrian youth who will rebuild Syria, and I don't think this return is feasible in the current situation. The war must be over before opening the files of return, a safe return is the bare minimum." (Amani, Lebanon)

If I return now, I will die, and the future of my children will be gone

"I don't think of returning at all. When my parents ask me to return to Syria, I would say not until the regime is gone. I do not want to return until the regime is gone. It's hard to revolt against injustice and then surrender to it again. I know that if I return, I would die, because I will not remain silent, and if I speak up, I'm dead. And above all of that, I would be destroying the future of my children, I have seen what happens to the youth who are returning." (Mahar, Lebanon)

Where to stay, and where to return to?

"No one is willingly returning, believe me. Had it been up to people, no one would have returned. We all dream to return, but not to this situation. I am completely against returning. I see how people who are returning are sad, but the life of Syrians has become difficult here in Lebanon with all the harassment happening. I wish I could return, but how can I return without my son? And if I return, where and to whom? To the street? My house is destroyed beyond fixing, and there is no one to help me fix it. And I wouldn't return even if there were a house for me there. I don't want to return and see those who killed my eldest son. I don't want my second son to go to university or a government office and see the pictures of Bashar and Hafez Assaad. I would never let them force my son to chant "we sacrifice our blood for the leader". This is absolute humiliation. Here we are living in dignity, not in humiliation." (Ward, Lebanon)

As for the women we interviewed in Turkey, they shared several views on return that included demands on the political and social levels, in addition to their readings of the reality they would return to, how it would affect them, and their positions in it.

Political and social change, then I return

"When the rule of dictatorship, army, and sectarianism in Syria is over. When detainees are released. Martyrs cannot be returned. When children enjoy their right to education. When women enjoy their rights as humans. Most importantly, when there is no more ignorance - ignorance is spreading in Syria. A 12 years old girl in Ghouta was married and her mother is happy about it. She sent pictures of her daughter celebrating that she became a woman. When there is no more unemployment, job opportunities become available for the youth. I wish to return so that I can have it all. When we started the revolution, we did not leave and lose our loved ones to accept half solutions." (Rand, Turkey)

After the regime and the opposition factions are gone

"I would never think of returning to Syria as long as there is anything affiliated with the regime and its associates, or the current opposition and its associates. I would never return if anyone who had led an armed faction rises to power, I don't acknowledge either side. Both have committed offenses." (Nisreen, Turkey)

There is no place for me in Syria now

"I see an impossible reality. I can't stay in FSA territories nor endure Al-Nusra Front or anyone telling me how to wear, or question what I do and say. I can't bear to stay in regime territories. When I went to Lebanon, I felt pain in my chest and remembered the regime every time I saw soldiers. I can't and never could stand seeing people in military uniforms. And I can't go to SDF territories as they might detain me." (Hiveen, Turkey)
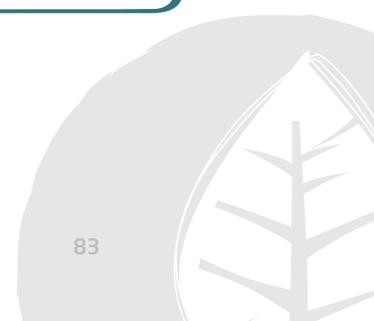
When it comes to women who are currently residing in European countries, they have developed views based on the current and past circumstances of society and daily life in Syria and their position in both, in addition to important details that relate to them and to their children.

I will not return to violence

"No, I never think of returning to Syria, and I don't think that Syria will be a good place again. But of course, I might be wrong. We are violent and angry communities, we don't have respect for humans, nor the concept of freedom. We were missing a lot and it worsened after 2011. The memory of an entire generation of childrsen is full of war and death. We have lived in Syria and there was no war before 2011. The violence that emerged after 2011 is the result of the time before it. How about these people who were born and raised in war? What do you expect of them?" (Rawan, Europe)

I will return, but it will be different if I become a mother

"I will definitely return to Syria, and I think university is my way to be qualified to help my people. This is why I surely want to return. I think that everyone would love to return, but those who have established a life or have children and enrolled them in schools and can provide everything for them in a democratic country wouldn't return of course. If I have children, I will not return because I want them to learn here. They have the best education here. I will think of the best interest of my children" (Naida, Europe)

"I will not return to Syria. It's about my family and child now. It's difficult for me to say but this is the truth. I want my child to live in safety. Despite that we owe Syria to return and rebuild it and work there, but Syria still has a long way towards safety or sufficient services for children. I might return when my son grows old, but it would be unfair to him now. I think the youth will not return unfortunately, especially those who have started a life. Maybe the elderly will return." (Narjes, Europe)

Syrian Women's Readings of the Present, Future, and Associated Concepts.

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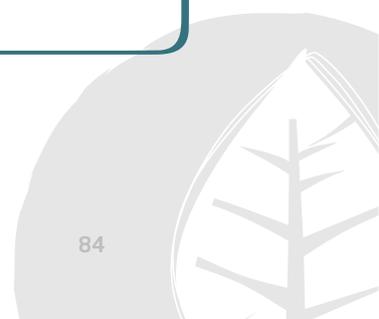
I might return, but I will protect myself first

> **"I might try to settle in Syria in the future. But first I want to obtain nationality and be under the protection of a European country in case anything happens to me. I don't know whether I will get married in Syria or here. I want my children to have rights, decent education, and excellent language level. This is why I honestly prefer that my children grow up in a European country - not in Syria. I don't think I can live with my parents again, I got used to independence, and I fear that what is normal for me is considered wrong in the society in Syria." (Sabah, Europe)**

Women's suggestions to improve their situation

- There is great fear and concern about the deterioration of education in most Syrian areas. Many women suggested prioritizing the education sector to avoid raising an entirely illiterate generation and the negative repercussions on individuals and society in the present and the future.

- Reading the needs must be from the inside outwards, not the opposite. Meaning not to impose projects and initiatives based on the perspectives of donors or organizations not working in Syria, and to consider the actual participation of women in these projects through for example securing spaces for child care so that parents can participate in training and projects, or through carrying out sustainable projects relevant to the needs and demands of women.

- Many women in different areas suggested that civil society organizations should support sustainable economic empowerment projects for both women and men. Some also suggested increasing educational and professional empowerment projects for women to support them and help them secure job opportunities, and that initiatives and projects should not be exclusive for women, as some women see that empowering men especially in war times supports balance on the individual and social levels.

- A group of women focused on economic and knowledge empowerment then on promoting women's rights, and on not limiting women's rights to the idea of hating and excluding men. They have also mentioned the importance of raising men's awareness on women's rights and holding dialogue events including both men and women.

- The importance of civil society organizations to provide services for victims of social violence for divorced women, in contrast to limiting services for those who have lost their husbands and limiting the decision to military authorities. In addition to the importance of holistic support so that women are not left behind.

- Many women requested academic training that is not limited to exclusive circles based on connections. In addition to elaborate training on transitional justice, civil peace, and gender.

- Many women suggested initiatives for dialogue and accepting the other, and expressed that most communities in Syria need similar initiatives that have not been applied for years, and the positive resulting impact on communication and harmony.

- The importance of psychological suppo   rt projects and initiatives for women. Women suggested psychological support through communication, meetings, training, and entertainment activities.

- Implementing and supporting local initiatives to counter early marriage in all Syrian areas through raising awareness, enforcement of strict laws, and monitoring the implementation process.

- Supporting healthcare in general, and for women in particular. Women mentioned the lack of healthcare services for women with cancer or Alzheimer's in some Syrian areas.

The period in which the research was carried out is difficult for the establishment of a basis for collective or sustainable Syrian feminist action, but remains an attempt to document the experiences of some Syrian women and analyze their surrounding circumstances in a given period. We have addressed several sensitive issues and concepts, each of which requires designated research, initiatives, and action to study all its details in depth. Hence, we ask ourselves at Women Now for Development and ask all interested individuals and groups to use this paper as a comprehensive initial reference for intersectional feminist research work to study each topic and analyze its intersections with the context and the existing and generated structures from a conflict and gender sensitive perspective.

Applications of this research

Additionally, the active civil society organizations in the areas of the interviews can draw upon many of the points and suggestions provided by women to transform it into action that meet the aspirations and needs of women on the individual and social levels in these areas. They can also develop the conversations about the concepts and issues covered in the four chapters of this research into strategic local dialogues between interested women groups inside and outside Syria, and establish a cross geographic communication network between these groups to exchange ideas and experience, and to develop the skills of dialogue and sharing. All of this can contribute to creating bridges between us as Syrian women and might add some structure to our women and feminist solidarity, which is poor to an extent.

Annex 1: Consent form for interviews

Annexes
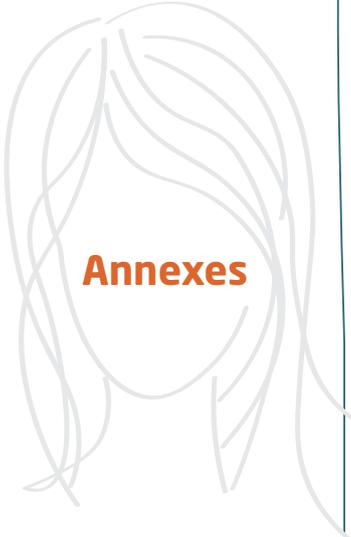
Consent form

Research Title: Syrian women's readings of the present, future, and associated concepts.

Name, or nickname, or researcher: . . . .

Before the interview, you should read an introduction to this research, its objectives, the structure of the interview, and your rights as a participant.

Objectives of research and participation

We are conducting this interview that will be a rich resource for our research on Syrian women's reading of the present and the future. All the information mentioned will contribute to enriching the research. The goal of this research is to create a platform or space for Syrian women from different contexts to talk about their personal and social experiences, and to express their views, feelings, and readings of relations and circumstances on all levels. We want through this research to help raise the voices of women that have always been marginalized, and to read the personal and political issues from their perspectives. There might not be a tangible outcome for this research, as it's apart from a long term change process. However, the notes and suggestions of women will be taken into consideration as a main reference for all future projects of the sponsoring organization.

The sponsoring organization for this research is Women Now for Development, a Syrian organization working in the Syrian civil society with a focus on women as the main source for knowledge production and change in society. We will interview Syrian women in different areas, including this interview with you. This interview is not based on Yes/No questions, but on narration, listening, and discussing. Hence, the duration of this interview is between one and two hours.

Participation risks

There are no expected risks or consequences of your participation in the research. However, the interview might include some emotional moments or narrating sensitive experiences. Please feel free to stop the interview if you feel any of these emotions, or skip any question you deem inappropriate for any reason.

Confidentiality: The information collected in these interviews shall remain confidential. Names of the participants and any identifying information will be held back from any individuals or entities. We will keep the audio records until the end of writing this research, then we will eliminate the records. You can provide a name of your choice if you don't want your real name in the audio record.

Recording: We will record this interview for data entry and analysis purposes. The audio record helps me transfer the details of the interview with integrity as a researcher. We can cancel the recording or change your voice if you choose so.

Data protection: Information will be stored digitally in a cyber-secured space that can be accessed by researchers and the sponsoring organization only. We will not share this information in its raw form with any third party. The research will be published after its completion to reach the outputs to the widest audience possible. We guarantee not to mention any real names or identifying information. The objective of this research is to analyze the themes and intersections of women's experiences, and not to focus on individual details.

Type of participation

This is a voluntary participation. It must be based on your consent and desire, and can be cancelled before initiation for any reason you find important.

Please sign here as a prof that you read and agree to all of the above.

Researcher's signature: . . . .   Participant's signature: . . . .