

# Strategies of Resistance of Syrian Female Refugees in Şanlıurfa

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**Abstract:** The experiences of Syrian female refugees in Turkey are strongly characterized by a multifaceted quality of violence, which intersects with discrimination and other difficulties stemming from a lack of education, a lack of financial means, ethnicity, and the precarious situation of being a ›guest‹ in Turkey. In the scope of my master thesis research, I went to Şanlıurfa in order to find out more about their situation. I realized that the omnipresent violence certainly limits the field of possibilities that Syrian women in Şanlıurfa can move within. However, their narratives also showed that these limitations are not deterministic, they are breached and modified through *eigensinnige* (willful) interpretations that open up possibilities to act. They are active willful agents that develop strategies in their everyday life to circumvent violence, to protect themselves from it, and to resist.

**Keywords:** Syrian female refugees, violence, everyday resistance, willful agents

»Perhaps some accept to get married with you. For me, I prefer to stay alone all my life and I don't want to get married with someone of you,« Manon<sup>1</sup> says, looking disdainfully into her *çay* glass, as if talking directly to the Şanlıurfa men that want to take Syrian women as second wives, rather than to me.

For about an hour, we sit across from each other, talking, drinking ice tea in a lousy attempt to fight the heat. On this July afternoon, we met in an alternative café in the center of Şanlıurfa, one of the few places in the city where the presence of women is not unusual or eyed with suspicion. Manon is 25 years old. In 2013, together with her parents, she came to Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey, from Hasaka, a city in north-eastern Syria. She had started studying philosophy, but had to leave her studies when the war broke out. Recently, her brother and his three daughters moved in with them. Because of an illness for which he cannot afford the treatment, he is unable to work. Her parents are also well into old age, leaving her as the sole provider for the family. The seven of them live in a one-room apartment without a bathroom, which they can barely afford, since landlords charge exploitatively high rents to refugees. Of-

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1 | All names of my interlocutors were changed.

ten such dwellings, marketed as ›apartments,‹ are actually garages or old basements (MAZLUMDER 2014). Manon, who is responsible for the well-being of her family and refuses to beg for help from NGOs, never really thought about starting to study again since they arrived in Turkey.

This article is based on my master thesis research. I want to make the perspectives of female Syrian refugees visible, giving particular attention to their experiences of violence and modes of resistance. Despite the importance of their perspective in developing a comprehensive understanding of migration, refugeeness and border regimes, as well as the production of direct and structural violence by state and non-state actors (Gerard/Pickering 2013: 338; Freedman 2012: 38), the experiences of female migrants are still largely neglected in academic discourse. I explore Syrian women's strategies of resistance, and the way these strategies interact with a field of possibilities that is shaped by their experiences of violence. I see agency and resistance as interconnected with violence and vulnerability in complex ways (Gilson 2016). To think about these qualities as two extremes of one line, picturing women either as solely victims or invincible agents is a dangerous oversimplification.

## **REFUGEES, WOMEN, FEMALE REFUGEES IN ŞANLIURFA AND TURKEY**

With 2.8 million registered individuals, the world's largest community of displaced Syrians (as of January 2017) lives in Turkey (DGMM 2017), a country which is regarded as a ›safe third country‹ by the EU. A small amount (9%) lives inside camps, the other 91% in cities and villages in Turkey (IOM 2016). Women and children make up 77% of this population (UNHCR 2016 quoted according to Kivılcım 2016: 2). Turkey does not have an established asylum system, and until recently referred to Syrian refugees as ›guests.‹ There is still only an exceptional legal regime of temporary or subsidiary protection under which Syrian refugees cannot access international protection. This puts them in a position of limbo in which they have fewer rights and entitlements than refugee status holders (Kivılcım 2016: 2; Baban/İlcan/Rygiel 2016: 2).

Şanlıurfa is a province and city in southeastern Turkey, close to the Syrian border, with a population of about 1.9 million people. After Istanbul, Şanlıurfa has the second-largest population of Syrians in Turkey, with 428,838 registered Syrians, representing 21.38% of the total Şanlıurfa population (DGMM 2017).

Upon arriving in the city, people from the first NGO I visited told me early on how I should not behave (›Don't smoke on the street!‹) and how I should not dress

(»I know it's hot already, but better not wear short things, for your own good.«). Several people advised me to say that I have a husband, since I was constantly going to be asked if I am married, and would be eyed with suspicion — and pity — if I answered that I was not. Despite my generally defiant attitude, I acquiesced to some of these conditions, wore only long pants and blouses and went to the back balcony to be minimally visible when I wanted to smoke. Nevertheless, I did not lie about being married and also walked around the city by myself. I often found myself being the only woman sitting in a *çay* garden otherwise packed with men. I was told several times that I should not roam around by myself, or at all, and was stopped and questioned several times by plain-clothed police officers. Of course, not everyone shared this conservatism. I also got to know some very open-minded people, and they themselves shared my impression of Şanlıurfa. I experienced the city's conservatism moving within it myself — conservatism which not only influences the people living there, but also my interactions with them, dictating the possibilities of my movement as a researcher. I have lived in Turkey for a year and a half now, traveling around the country, observing these momentous political and social changes, and seeing and experiencing the masculinization and militarization of public spaces in Istanbul. Yet after all this, my experiences and perception of Şanlıurfa concerning masculinity, social control and conservatism are still unique to me.

Discrimination, oppression, and the violation of women are global issues. Miriam Ticktin emphasizes that oftentimes when women in the Middle East are written about, their narrative »resonates with Orientalist fantasies that turn on the idea that non-Western and particularly Muslim cultures are more patriarchal than Western ones. These fantasies have clear plotlines, with Muslim men as villains, and they conclude with Westerners coming to the rescue of oppressed, veiled women« (Ticktin 2011: 145). I do not have any intention to perpetuate such a representation. I cannot go into detail about the situation of women in Turkey more generally in the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the »dominant patriarchal and heterosexist societal culture,« as Özgül Kaptan (2015) from the Women's Solidarity Foundation (KADAV) puts it, provides necessary context for the situation of Syrian women in the country. In 2010, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that he did not believe in the equality of men and women (ibid.). One-third of all marriages in Turkey are early marriages and one-third of women get married under the age of 18 (Akyol 2014). According to Gaziantep University research from 2013, the proportion of early marriages in Şanlıurfa is around 60% (Haberler 2013). In 2016, the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) sought to introduce legislation which would have made child rape no longer punishable in caspanses where the perpetrator would offer to marry his victim; this was withdrawn after a public outcry against what was widely seen as an

attempt at »legitimising rape and encouraging child marriage« (Cookman 2016). The Gender Inequality Index, a composite measure reflecting inequality between women and men in the dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation, ranks Turkey 71st out of 152 countries (UNDP 2015). Within the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2016), which benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria, the country ranks 130th out of 145. Currently, only 27% of Turkish women have a paid job, and the illiteracy among women is about 10% (Schick 2016). Since 2002, the rate of femicide rose by 1400% (ibid.). According to reports that Bianet compiled from national and local newspapers, news websites, and press agencies, men killed 261 women and girls, raped 75 women, harassed 119 women, sexually abused 417 girls, and injured 348 women in 2016 (Tahaoğlu/Baki 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

Before I started my research, I considered only conducting expert interviews with NGO employees. I gave Szczepanikova's (2010) argument about NGOs' power to shape societies' impression of refugees a lot of thought. NGOs are almost always the first contact for state authorities, media, and researchers. They are therefore influential on knowledge production concerning refugees. However, I was deeply concerned about talking to women about violent experiences while having nothing to offer as support, being neither a psychologist nor a social worker. I was sure that the risk of re-traumatization was not worth the potential benefits of my master thesis research, and so I entered the field initially by approaching NGO employees. I spent time in organizations' offices and social centers to observe how they work. My presence there raised curiosity and led to brief conversations with Syrian women, who worked at or frequented the places, who would inevitably ask about my reasons for being there. After several such conversations, someone who would later become one of my interlocutors asked me why I was not talking to them for my research. I remember her partially confused, partially skeptical facial expression asking: »So you want to write about our situation here but not talk to us?« What followed was a long conversation, another reflection process, and my final decision to include in my research those women that had of their own accord decided to talk to me. This did not avoid possible trauma, but my interlocutors had decided to talk to me, and the risk of pressuring people was minimized.

The women I had conversations with were between 19 and 35 and were from different parts of Syria, but mostly from urban areas. They all had at least completed

high school, some had started studying before leaving Syria, one was carrying on with her studies in Turkey, and three held a degree. Those who I met in one-on-one situations could all speak English. I met with my interlocutors in the café mentioned above. I had certain questions in mind, but we had slightly structured conversations rather than structured interviews. Rana, one of my interlocutors, asked if she could bring other women along, which led to a group conversation. At this occasion, non-English speakers were present, but they could still take part in the discussion thanks to the women supporting each other with translation. Both methods give more control to the interlocutors over the interview situation (Oakley 1981; Wilkinson 1999). In this article, I include the insights of two NGO employees: Ece, from Turkey, a Gender-Based Violence Officer and Liha, from Syria, who coordinates workshops and vocational training for women. Of the fifteen Syrian women I spoke to, I refer to Manon, with whose narrative this article begins as well as Rana, Tara and Basma, who took part in the group conversation. Though I focus and largely rely on the narratives of my interlocutors, I contextualize those within the broader discussion about Syrian female refugees in Turkey.

## VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION

»Beyond stories of victimhood, yet being informed by them.« (Kwapisz Williams 2014: 437)

Left as the sole provider, Manon took the jobs she could find — »often blatantly underpaid and where she was being mistreated.« She started out working as nurse in a hospital full-time with the promise of earning 700 Turkish lira a month. After a month they let her go, explaining there had been too many complaints about her, only giving her 300 TL. The rest of the money found its way to the Turkish men who had ›helped‹ her find the job. Finding work as a ›guest‹ from Syria, and especially as a woman, is rather difficult (Kıvılcım 2016: 19). After the hospital, Manon found a job at a small factory. After staring at her for a couple of days, the factory owner called her to his office:

»So, I went there, he just came and closed the door. I remember I was wearing a dress, it was a long dress, and he just tried to take it off like this and he put his hand on my ass and I pushed him and I started to scream, to shout, shout at him, ›don't do that! Just let me go or I will call the other staff.«

She left and did not tell anyone. She later explained that there would not be any reason to go to the police as they would not help anyway. So, Manon stopped working at the factory, and again started to worry about how to manage her family's financial situation. She even begged her parents to go back to Syria, which they refused. After a while, she found a job with a humanitarian aid organization, where she worked for about a year before transitioning to another. She was jobless when we met. She quit both NGOs because of similar reasons. She explained to me: »There is a line, you are Syrian refugee and they are [nationality], so they are like a manager [...] and I am a refugee, I cannot ask for anything. So really, I'm stuck. I said, »It's enough, I cannot continue like this.«

Manon's personal insights shed light on the multifaceted quality of violence in Şanlıurfa that Syrian women deal with, both from other Syrians and from Turkish society. This violence intersects with discrimination and other difficulties stemming from a lack of education, a lack of financial means, ethnicity, and the precarious situation of being a ›guest‹ in Turkey (Baban/Ilcan/Rygiel 2016). My interlocutors spoke about domestic violence, harassment and assault as major issues, and called out the lack of support from state authorities. They also described forced, polygynous, and early marriage as very problematic, but at the same time acknowledged it as a strategy for survival. Though polygynous marriages are largely socially accepted in Şanlıurfa, often justified on cultural grounds, my interlocutors explained that Turkish women see ›the potential Syrian second wives‹ as a threat, creating another field of tension. Considering this violence, discrimination, and insecurity, one should avoid an oversimplified impression of women as passive victims without any strategies or resources.

## RESISTANCE: STRATEGIES OF WILLFUL AGENTS

»Where there is power there is resistance.« (Foucault 1978: 95)

Certainly, the omnipresent violence limits the field of possibilities (Foucault 1987) that Syrian women in Şanlıurfa can move within. However, their narratives also showed that these limitations are not deterministic, they are breached and modified through *eigensinnige* (willful) interpretations that open up possibilities to act. *Eigensinn* (willfulness) (Lüdtke 1989) describes practices with a certain dissidence: Subjects are not detached from history, structures, and the ›practiced‹ ways connected to them; however, they are able to create something new, something willful (Benz/Schwenken 2005: 374). They are active willful agents that develop strategies

in their everyday life to circumvent violence, to protect themselves from it, and to resist.

The word ›resistance‹ may call to mind highly visible actions such as demonstrations, strikes, or riots. I follow the invitation of the concept of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) (Lüdkte 1989) to examine everyday life for evidence of resistance. *Alltagsgeschichte* considers continuously shifting historical structures, processes, and relationships of power. I combine these concepts with Scott's (1985) idea about small moments of resistance in the practice of everyday life, which he calls the weapons of the weak, and connect these to de Certeau's (1984) thoughts about everyday practices as political resistance. Opposing Scott's characterization of everyday resistance as necessarily deliberate and his assumption of a self-determining subject, de Certeau argues that agents build upon strategies and tactics that do not necessarily seek success. Nor do they have to be the result of planning, but depend on the given situations and opportunities. Resistance by people and groups and their awareness of it varies. Some may actively seek to resist the dominant ideology, while others are content with their position in society, yet subvert it unknowingly. Resistance can thus take many different forms, including ones as subtle as contesting public transcripts (established ways of behaving and speaking) through rumor, gossip, disguises, metaphors, euphemisms, sarcasm, and humor (Scott 1985: 137).

»Every joke is a tiny revolution.« (George Orwell 1945: 484)

A fleeting grimace, the raise of an eyebrow, or the derogatory looks and sounds of my interlocutors made it, even without their verbal explanations, more than obvious that they not only do not agree with the situation as it is, but oppose it. Those very small acts, sometimes subconscious and uncontrollable, render emotions of inner resistance visible. I was not really surprised to observe these expressions of disagreement. What surprised and further impressed me was the laughter, the irony, and the jokes they made concerning the violent situation they live in. To my question during the group conversation of whether they feel like getting treated differently because they are Syrian women, Rana laughingly explained: »Of course, because Turkish men like Syrian women, that's the case.« Despite the harassment they experience daily, they make fun of and ridicule the ones who inflict violence on them. Billingsley (2013) argues »that humor is a promising method of feminist resistance, allowing women to shift oppressive scripts of discourse that discourage women from speaking to a context where women can speak on their own terms.« Even under extreme circumstances, people creatively use humor and comedy to cope and resist. Humor can provide relief, it can change the »social dynamics of the speaker, and the audience [...] which amounts to a change of context« (Weaver 2010: 31), and is a way of fighting back. Indeed, »The

›Other‹ Laughs Back« (ibid.). It may have to be hidden, only to be released under guarded circumstances, with those one can trust, but it is there. It symbolically cuts the oppressor down to size, while supporting the spirits of the oppressed, »serving as a true ›weapon of the weak« (T'Hart 2007: 1). Humor was and is used by oppressed peoples as one form that Hewitt (1986: 237) describes as »reverse-humor.« It picks up an attached stereotype, mocks the oppressor, and transforms racism »into a play-thing, in an attempt to acknowledge its social presence while rendering it meaningless« (ibid.). Illustrating this, when I posed a question during the group conversation about whether most of them had been accused of stealing husbands or flirting openly, the whole group laughed out loud, and one of them imitated a Turkish woman by squinting her eyes and shouting »Thiefs!« before herself bursting into fits of laughter.

## PASSING AS RESISTANCE

»Without *hijab*, they cannot figure out if you are Syrian or Turkish until you start speaking, but for us they immediately, they just recognize that girl is Syrian. [...] They just focus on the Syrian girl and try to bother her, or any other kinds of abuse that you can imagine. Even the ones that are just saying, you are Syrian ›Suri, Suri,‹ this is very awful. OK, I'm Syrian, what's the problem? But they feel that they want to bother you, so they say that just kind of as a humiliation or something.« (Rana)

Basma tries to handle both working and studying at the local university. She had to learn Turkish well to be able to follow her classes. She found out that with her language skills and by changing her *hijab*-style, she can easily blend into Turkish society. Syrian women who wear the *hijab* do so differently than Turkish women, which makes them more easily recognizable, and thus an easier target for harassment. My interlocutors pointed out that Turkish men feel less restricted about their behavior when they realize that a woman is Syrian. Basma often had to work late, and even with Turkish women still on the street she felt not only unsafe, but targeted. Blending in gives her a sense of security and makes it possible for her to study more easily. She counters othering and harassment with a strategy of »passing,« »a performance in which one presents [one]self as what one is not, a performance commonly imagined along the axis of race, class, gender or sexuality« (Rohy 1996: 219, quoted according to Kanuha 1999: 28). Some judge this as surrender, but it helps her to reach her goal: to feel safer, continuing with education and graduating. This narrative does not fit in the general (widespread) idea of agency. But through her performance as a



Turkish woman at some points in her daily life, passing partially, she avoids the risks that come with being a Syrian refugee woman. Her friends also do not see this as surrender, but admire her for her fast language comprehension and her diligence, and they gleefully enjoy that »they [Turkish people] cannot figure out that she is Syrian.«

This strategy, its reasons, as well as its negotiation, also reminded me of Bhabha's (1994) idea about mimicry (and mockery). He describes upper-class African women who would use wigs in order not to show their curly hair. They imitated the colonizer to blend in, yet also made fun of them.

»The effect of mimicry is camouflage. [...] It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled.« (Lacan 1978: 99)

Basma's way of dealing with the situation is one individual example. For all women with a *hijab*, with a changed *hijab* or without one, language can be revealing. This is why, some of my interlocutors explained, in certain situations they would avoid talking at all so not to »blow their cover.« In her study on lesbian and gay men of color, Kanuha (1999) says »the maintenance of a false performance [is] for the purpose of opposing those forces that would threaten or harm them in specific encounters,« again describing passing as a form of resistance.

## THE AMBIGUITY OF POLYGYNOUS MARRIAGE

»Strategies, subtle ›combination‹ (›action is tortuous‹), ›navigate‹ among the rules, ›play with all the possibilities offered by traditions,‹ make use of one tradition rather than another, compensate for one by means for another. Taking advantage of the flexible surface which covers up the hard core, they create their own relevance within this network.« (de Certeau 1984: 54)

Polygynous marriages<sup>2</sup> are one of the biggest problems for Syrian women in Urfa. Such weddings are socially accepted and often justified as part of the culture; however, they »are based upon imbalances concerning gender and sexuality rather than simply being a reflection of culture« (Dauvergne/Millbank 2010: 57 quoted according to Kivilcim 2016: 14). All my interlocutors opposed the practice, arguing against

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2 | I clearly cannot speak for all, yet an argument that denies agency within this context cannot either.

it in terms resembling Kıvılcım, who says that these women get »exploited as sexual and house workers at the service of Turkey's men« (2016: 14). Kıvılcım, further, uses a framework of legal violence to explain what kind of disadvantages women face, since such marriages are not legal in Turkey, and they do not obtain any rights from a religious marriage.

However, my interlocutors also acknowledged this kind of marriage as a strategy for survival. They described it as a kind of trade, because the possible husbands offer a lot of money and often will support the woman's family. Freedman (2012: 47) points out a similar ambiguity, referring to sexual »transactions« or »survival sex« being reported »as part of women's strategies for survival [in return for safe passage at the border], and thus in some ways as a reclaiming of agency and a move away from passive victimhood.« Considering the highly unequal power relations and extreme insecurity, she claims there is an absence of choice, which precludes agency. These situations are far from identical, but I would like to draw on Freedman's example to propose the use of the term »agency« in the sense of a strategy for survival. I reject a romanticized understanding of agency that assumes that an agent's actions must have a good outcome and if not, they are to be held accountable for it. Some women use those marriages to secure their own and their families' situations, but also to shield themselves against harassment from random men, who only see a woman as »off-limits« when she belongs to another man. Liha argued that many women are well aware what they are getting into. Annoyed, she explained, »If they say it's not good, they have to give other solutions! Of course, it's not good. [...] It's still better than being a single and jobless mother.« She not only points out the possibility of decision making within a field of possible action, but also calls for a change of that field itself.

I would like to suggest that we should not simplify the decision to enter a religious polygynous marriage by always labeling it »forced,« thereby leaving no room for agency or resistance. This simplification diminishes the actions that some women take to secure the welfare of their family and improve their situation. Especially here, the complexity of women's lived realities and the possible simultaneity of victimhood and agency is rendered visible. Although some women enter very consciously in a polygynous marriage to support themselves and their family or to be less targeted by other men, one should not hold them responsible for the possible negative consequences: an agent can be a victim; a victim can be an agent.

## THE EXPANSE OF RESISTANCE

»With a Turkish woman, I was sitting in a garden and she was with her husband and she came to me and she said, ›Why are you looking at my husband?‹ I said, ›No, I'm not looking at your husband, your husband is looking at me. This is very different.‹ She said, ›no, you are looking at my husband, and I saw you, why are you sitting here alone.‹ I told her that I was waiting for my friend: ›This is not your place, this is not your house, this is a local place for everyone, you cannot say that to me and I'm not looking at your husband and if you want your husband to stop looking at other women, please take care of it yourself.‹ It was very rude, I know, but she was also, she came to me, said, ›why are you sitting here?‹ like I was sitting in her house. This is not your house, this is a local place, this is a garden for everyone.« (Rana)

During all my conversations, I recognized nothing like acceptance, but outright disagreement with the current circumstances. Scott (1985) argues that oppression and resistance are in constant flux, and that by focusing on visible historic »events« like rebellions or collective action, subtle but powerful forms of »everyday resistance« are easily neglected. Rana took a stand for herself speaking up against the woman in the *çay* garden; she claimed public space and shifted the responsibility for the situation to the gazing man. Yet, what is also revealed here is the ambiguity of such resistance. By saying »take care of it yourself,« Rana not only shifted responsibility back to the staring man but also to his wife, as if she was responsible for his behavior:

»What appears to be resistance from one point of view becomes a form of co-operation from another. [...] [The oppressed] adopt the language of the oppressor and use it for their own ends, and in so doing are themselves implicated in reproducing the structures of domination.« (Howe 1998: 532)

The other women taking part in the conversation were congratulating Rana under laughter for being that bold. They were supporting each other. A couple of them during the conversation had frequently mentioned »their net.« Within this group, as is often the case for women's personal networks, similar experiences and challenges can be talked about more freely. These are even used as a source of strength. Although they were not built on purpose, those groups or networks are a form of self-organization. Such informality is not unusual, as the division of labor in both public and private realms make community networks more accessible to women. Additionally, under authoritarian conditions, »dissent is likely to take the form of small,

personalistic groups based on informal ties and loyalties« (Denouex, quoted according to Kuumba 2001: 54). For the national/racial liberation movements in the US and South Africa, informal women's self-organization played a key role (ibid.). Kaplan (1990 quoted according to Kuumba 2001: 54) calls those neglected layers of social struggle »communities of resistance.«

## **NAMING, SHAMING, DISMANTLING**

»Naming the harm gives all women the tools with which [it] can be dismantled and gives them the strength to speak out, up, loud, and in response to [it].« (Davis 1994: 223)

My interlocutors were not only aware about the violence that is happening, but they also point it out, name it, shame it, and call for change. Living in a situation in which one cannot be certain if speaking up brings improvement or worsens the situation, because of possible reprimand or worse, makes the very act of naming violence crucial. It is the first step of making it visible, stating that something we are used to, that is perceived or acted out as ›normal‹ as ›custom,‹ is in fact not. Naming violence *is* resistance.

Not everyone perceives simply naming as a form of resistance, since it can be born out of desperate situations. As Ece, the NGO officer who worked on GBV that I talked to, pointed out: »One good thing about the state of crisis seems to be that women talk more about their experiences, they don't have a lot to lose so they also can talk about those things.« Yet whatever its cause is, naming shows disagreement and can set a cornerstone for opening a discussion and change.

Different acts, like Rana standing up to the woman in the *çay* garden, ridiculing Turkish women that call Syrian women ›stealers,‹ or Manon quitting her jobs at the NGOs because she refused to be treated as a second-class person just because she was a refugee, are all forms of resistance against an assigned identity. These women resist »the application of representations which casts them as« (Howe 1998: 532) unaware of the violations they are affected by, as ›easy to get,‹ as potential second wives, (men) stealers, or second-class persons. Other times, they may refuse to work with an NGO due to the NGOs' perpetuation of power imbalances, as Manon did, or on account of the generally patriarchal assumptions often at the basis of humanitarian aid.

»But the point is that we are not looking for providing jobs at home for females. We are aiming, or as much as we can, to create a safe environment or safe jobs outside of our houses. It's not possible to stay at home all the time if you are not safe.« (Tara)

Explicitly, they criticize the NGOs' approach to distributing sewing machines to enable women to work at home, since it is often an unsafe environment, either because of dangerous housing conditions or the risk of domestic violence. They oppose the still widespread assumption that women are generally safe in the private sphere, and claim a place in public for women.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I shed light on the ambiguity and violence that characterize Syrian women's life in Şanlıurfa and the strategies of resistance they develop. The narratives of my interlocutors rendered visible two categories often understood as strictly opposed to each other, that of victimhood and vulnerability, and that of agency and resistance, are in fact interconnected and can trigger each other. I oppose a »perpetual retelling of uncontextualized stories of victimhood and necessity of saviour« (Miller 2004:31) because it in fact reproduces violence by propagating the narrative of refugee women's homogenous passive victimhood. However, we must speak about such experiences of violence, to contextualize it, and to call out the structures that not only enable but even foster violence in different forms. It is important to me to talk about the acts of resistance of my interlocutors and other Syrian women in Şanlıurfa. Scott argues that »everyday forms of resistance make no headlines« (1985: 8), which we should take as an imperative to acknowledge them. Being put in a position of high vulnerability, Syrian women in Şanlıurfa create space for awareness and recognition of injustice. As willful agents, they act in resistance despite their limited field of possibilities. Strategies of resistance, in contrast to strategies of resilience, do not have to prove effective (Butler et al. 2016: 6). They can reproduce the very power imbalances that oppress the agent herself, and they can even worsen the situation. In many cases, to resist means to expose oneself to the possibility of more violence. This is the case when speaking up against violence to those who are inflicting it, or when wearing the Syrian-style *hijab* in the male-dominated public sphere. Of course, I was impressed by how my interlocutors and other Syrian women in Şanlıurfa cope, manage their lives, and find strategies to resist. But none of this can substitute for governments and organizations defending human rights. The vacuousness of the idea of a savior from above is manifest in this connivance. Manon, Rana, Basma, Liha, Tara, my interlocutors, are aware of this, they name the violence it acquiesces, and above all, they resist. As a feminist and anti-racist activist and researcher, I call out others to name this violence, to demand change and to act in solidarity.

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